Thirty Seven
Practices of Bodhisattvas
Commentary by His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa
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“The Buddha Dharma needs to be understood as a living philosophy, a philosophy that must be put into practice.” This is a constant reminder from my enlightened master, the Gyalwang Drukpa. Indeed, without experiential knowledge, it is almost impossible to grasp the truth; and without proper guidance and experiential understanding, it is hopeless to progress on a spiritual path. Therefore, compassion, suffering and enlightenment would become only an idle talk, because we would not be able to understand the meaning of compassion, the essence of suffering and the need for enlightenment.

As Buddhist practitioners, we do not believe in an Almighty Creator who controls our life or a saviour who makes judgement based on our actions, virtues and vices. Lord Buddha, our universal teacher, encourages us to find the truth within ourselves by understanding our own innate nature. Although the Buddha is not a creator nor a saviour, his teachings offer a spiritual road map to show us the way to transform our inner self, so that we would be both a guiding light and a refuge. As a result, the path to attaining enlightenment would become clearer and therefore with less hindrances.

A path is a method and a tool leading us from one place to another. In this case, a spiritual path based on the Buddha Dharma leads us out of ignorance to the absence of ignorance. When we speak of the practice of the Buddha Dharma, we are referring to following the authentic Dharma. We use the word “holy” or “venerable” because the supreme wisdom of the Dharma can release us from fear and suffering, and lead us to the understanding that our sufferings are actually based on illusions.

The challenge for you is to discover your own world and then with all your
heart give yourself to it, so as to live life to the fullest. This requires courage, honour and discipline. Whatever we do and whatever we say must come out of compassion and love, without selfish attitude. This is the authentic Buddhist approach.

Although we use words such as “achieving”, “wishing” and “praying” for enlightenment, it is also very important to understand that ultimately we do not acquire enlightenment from external sources. A more honest way to put it is to discover that enlightenment has always been a part of our true nature. It is not an exclusive club. It is within us all. This is both heartening and challenging.

Even though the Buddha could not remove suffering by waving a magical wand with his divine power, he skilfully lit the lamp within us by laying out many methods for us to discover the universal truth, such as offering incense, sitting straight, watching our breaths and engaging in complex visualisation and meditation techniques.

In fact, there are 84,000 different teachings enabling the transformation of one’s own mind. The path of Mahayana (meaning “Greater Vehicle”) concentrates on Bodhicitta (Tib. *jangchub sem*), which is the wish to liberate all sentient beings (who have at least once been our mother in our past lives) from the state of suffering to the state of enlightenment. This is considered to be the highest form of mental attitude (Tib. *sem kyed*) that can be developed and is the only way to become a fully enlightened Buddha.

Among the many teachings of Mahayana currently available, the “Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas” by Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo, one of the greatest Tibetan Bodhisattvas of the 12th century, is considered to be the most comprehensive and yet easy to understand among many other similar teachings.
Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo is universally accepted as a prime example of a great Bodhisattva, and his teaching on the “Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas”, also known as the “Thirty-Seven Practices of the Heart Sons of Buddha” (Tib. Gyalsey Laglen), is highly respected and widely practised by all different Buddhist schools to this day.

To me, Gyalsey Laglen and its commentary are of immense benefit, especially in its Mahayana outlook of becoming a Bodhisattva. It explains the different experiences on the path to one’s own enlightenment. Within its 37 stanzas, the entire journey of becoming a Bodhisattva is illustrated in a short yet complete manner. Due to its compact nature, many might fail to understand its deeper and more profound meaning. Hence, for ordinary beings like us, commentaries by great masters are extremely helpful in enabling us to practise with wisdom and understanding.

With this in mind, I have decided to publish this commentary on the “Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas” by His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa, for the purpose of illuminating those who would like to gain a deeper understanding and a thorough knowledge of the meaning of the text, as originally intended by the great Bodhisattva Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo.

However insignificant this effort may be, like a small drop in the vast ocean of virtuous activities, I dedicate it for the long life of His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa, His Holiness the Je Khenpo and all the Enlightened Masters. May this effort help to preserve the spiritual heritage of the Drukpa Lineage and bless all of us with wisdom and compassion.
To read through the “Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattva” or the “Thirty-Seven Practices of the Heart Sons of Buddha” is to embark on a journey of discovery because each practice acts like a beacon along the path to eventual enlightenment.

In essence, it is a map of liberation from suffering, embracing the necessary practices to achieve it. The 37 stanzas, beautifully and concisely explained, often with a sense of humour by the Gyalwang Drukpa, concentrate on eradicating our ignorance, while at the same time guide us to understand why we suffer, to help us abandon the causes of suffering, to apply the path to the cessation of suffering and to realise that suffering really can end.

The text was composed by the Tibetan Bodhisattva Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo (1245–1369), a teacher of scripture and logic who had a profound realisation of genuine compassion and genuine love. It is a text from his heart; an instruction on the activities of the Bodhisattva, the dos and don’ts.

For the reader, a true delight would be the discovery that these instructions are not only both elegant and clear, but also meant for all of us, not just for advanced Bodhisattvas. In reality, we all are Bodhisattvas, however ignorant we may be at this moment.

Although nothing is really bestowed upon either us or those who have achieved enlightenment, these teachings give us hope that by following the genuine path, we will be like the enlightened sages one day. Buddhahood is not reserved for some and not others. It is for everyone, except those who do not practise the path of Dharma.

From these stanzas we also learn that enlightenment is not something spontaneous. It comes from a cause and the cause is diligent practice. All the Buddhas in the past became enlightened because of diligent practice. That is why
these instructions were given. It is therefore important to understand that all Buddhhas reached attainment by following the path firmly and correctly.

The first of the 37 practices is especially important as it speaks of the human body like a boat “in which to cross the waters of ignorance.” All we need to do is climb aboard and learn how to navigate. This takes skill, so we need to practise day and night without wasting a moment of our life. To achieve enlightenment, there is literally no time to lose. Every moment of this life counts.

The purpose of these teachings is not to tell people what they want to hear, but to release them from their misconceptions and endless misunderstandings of the universal truth. And this is done with insight, clarity and beauty. Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo explains that our freedom does not depend on the grace of others. It depends on us. Equipped with this knowledge, all beings have the power to free themselves and the entire purpose of practising the Buddhadharma is to be free from suffering, egoism, defilements, everything. Ultimately, we will be enlightened. The doors are closed to no one.

Throughout these stanzas, Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo emphasises the importance of practising, listening, cultivating and meditating, with the motivation of liberating all sentient beings. This is the key point. While practising we need generosity, ethics, patience, diligence and concentration to achieve wisdom. We learn how every activity — even sleeping, walking into a room, or talking — has to be dedicated to all sentient beings and to understand how to take every movement, every change, every thought and every appearance as a genuine teaching.

We also learn that if we are attached to someone or something, it becomes a chain which ties us down. This is a typical characteristic of samsara. You chain yourself: nobody chains you. When we release ourselves from attachment, our understanding and perspective improve. If your practice comes from the depth
of your heart, even when you encounter big problems in life, you are in a state where there is no problem. You are prepared and have the ability to stay calm. Everything is much more peaceful and life will be much better if we can manage to practise this.

The text also focuses on the importance of understanding the universal law of karma. Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo asks, “Should we give importance to this life and accumulate a lot of bad karma or should we think of the hundreds of lives to come and strictly abandon accumulating bad karma through negative deeds?”

Indeed, to free ourselves from karmic influence, we must try to abandon our bad karma and negative accumulations. Not only should they be abandoned, but they should not be practised or committed. To understand this, we must genuinely and diligently engaged in the Bodhisattva practices and choose the long-term rather than the short-term goals.

A snapshot of the entire text is reflected in the 36th stanza: “Whatever we do in whatever condition or circumstance we may confront, should be done with the force of complete self-awareness.” If everything is done with awareness, we will be ready to serve all beings and to practise. Indeed, these practices are not rigid or even conservative. The Buddhadharma is extremely flexible. It can be practised by anybody in any condition. We are allowed to entertain, to smile and to laugh as long as it does not harm anyone and as long as one remains aware.

Ultimately, the Gyalwang Drukpa urges us to use our human energy correctly and intelligently in order to achieve enlightenment within this life. To dedicate ourselves to the genuine practice of the Bodhisattva path is to journey down a beautiful path, which is clean and precise. All journeys start with a decision. From then on, it takes effort, diligence, true faith in your goal and constant awareness.

The great joy in reading the “Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas” and their explanations is that these are practices which are accessible, doable, achievable,
and more importantly, they can be referred to again and again. The text becomes a close friend, a support and a refuge. It is a starting point and a turning point.

The message is simple. We are taught to realise that every being by nature is pure. Every being has the possibility to achieve liberation, and the whole practice of the Bodhisattva path is to keep you in shape, to keep your mind in shape. It always comes down to the fact that everything depends on us, on our mind. Everything, both negative and positive, is within yourself. It is up to you to progress and no one is stopping you, except you yourself.

As His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa explains: “We have reasons to be optimistic. The potential is already there: we are lucky enough to be human beings.”
I pay heartfelt homage to you, Lokeshvara; you have the true compassion extending to all.

To those who in every coming and going have seen that each thing is inherently void, and thus can devote both their time and their efforts with one aim in mind – “Let me benefit all!”
To such foremost Gurus and you, Lokeshvara, All-Seeing Protector, with utmost respect I bow down before you in constant obeisance, and turn to your service my thoughts, Words and deeds.
The Fully Enlightened Victorious Buddhas from all true pleasure and benefits derive, have reached their attainment by following Dharma and leading their lives through this noblest of paths. To live by the Dharma depends on full knowledge of how we must practice and what we must do, thus I’ll attempt now a brief explanation of what is the practice of all Buddhas Sons.

The first sentence is for paying homage to Guru Avalokiteshvara. Why do we pay homage to Avalokiteshvara and not Buddha Shakyamuni nor the other Bodhisattvas? This is because Avalokiteshvara is the embodiment of great compassion and great love. His very essence is compassion, which is also true of every Buddha. There is no Buddha without loving kindness and compassion, nor is there a way of attaining Buddhahood without these great and essential qualities. Therefore, we are paying respect and homage to the form of great compassion rather than the form of the other Buddhas.

Nagarguna says, “Compassion is like ‘water needed for harvesting’.” Compassion is needed while working the fields, while the crops are growing and even when they are grown. In the same way, compassion is very important for a beginner starting the spiritual path and later, while progressing through the ten *bhumis*. Even when Buddhahood is attained, great compassion functions for all sentient beings. Therefore compassion is needed in the beginning, in the middle and at the end. Because of its importance, we pay home to compassion.
As common ignorant beings, we are not yet qualified to realise genuine compassion directly. Therefore, the external forms of Avalokiteshvara seen in thangkas or pictures help us in the visualisation. The appearance of a compassionate deity or “goddess of mercy” or whatever you may call the deity is an expression or form of great compassion.

This particular text is an instruction on the activities of the Bodhisattva, what they are supposed to do and what they are not supposed to do. The instructions are very clear. The text was composed by Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo, an enlightened teacher of scripture and logic. He himself has realised genuine compassion and genuine love, not superficially but profoundly. The text, which he has kindly given to us, is a text from his heart. It describes the 37 practices of all great Bodhisattvas. It may sound as if they are meant only for Bodhisattvas but that is not true.

We are all Bodhisattvas. Unfortunately, because of our ignorance, we are not good Bodhisattvas though many of us have taken the Bodhisattva vows. We are also in the Mahayana* school and tradition. We even claim to be Vajrayana* practitioners but without understanding the Mahayana, how can we attain the Vajrayana? It is impossible. Since we are already Bodhisattvas, no matter how good or bad, we must practise this text. To live by the Dharma depends on full knowledge of how we must practise and what we must do, thus I will attempt now a brief explanation of what is the practice of all Buddhas’ Sons.

These four sentences contain a promise to achieve Buddhahood and realisation, but it is a promise needed to be practiced. It is not something spontaneous. It comes from a cause and the cause is the practice. None of the Buddhas have become realised without practicing. That is why these instructions were given. It is important to understand that all Buddhas attained perfect enlightenment by following the path firmly and correctly. By possessing the innate Buddha nature, we also have that potential. Though we practise and try to attain Buddhahood, without developing certain skills, we lose many chances.

These instructions are important and desperately needed. The Bodhisattva path, or following in the Bodhisattva’s footsteps, is the key practice for becoming an enlightened being. The Bodhisattva path is the compassionate path. Whatever we do and whatever we say must come out of compassion and love, which means not being involved with selfish attitudes. We have to avoid this.
Once, someone asked me, “What is the connection between the God and the Buddha?” Speaking of Buddhas, we are referring to Buddha nature, but to those beings who have achieved Buddhahood. We are referring to a person like you or me, an ordinary human being, who eventually reached the state of enlightenment by practising the path of the Buddha. Millions of beings, through their own practice and by following the path correctly, became enlightened as Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. To achieve that, we must do the same. None of the Buddhas were bestowed Buddhahood by a God. None of them were primordially developed or already enlightened. None of them came from up there and fell down here without practising and following the path. We have to understand, it is not that way.

There are two categories of Buddha. Buddha nature is totally different from what I am talking about now. Buddha nature is the true nature or Dharmakaya, the essence of all dharmas or all phenomena. But the Buddhas who have become enlightened like Buddha Shakyamuni or Amitabha and so on, and also Bodhisattvas like Milarepa, many great Bodhisattvas of India like Padmasambhava, they all have practised and through practising diligently, reached enlightenment. None of them came from somewhere else without practising. This should give us hope that by following the genuine path, we will be like them one day. And there is no reason why not. It can be accomplished in this life or even in one or two years. But we must know these instructions well.

When we talk about the qualities of the Buddhas, there are many qualities; but there are also two great accomplishments. The first is their own development of compassion, love, understanding, wisdom and etc. The second is their ability to help all beings through their compassion with teachings and other skillful means. Without their own development, they would not be able to genuinely help others. We must acknowledge these two accomplishments. They are the greatest qualifications of a Buddha. Thus I shall attempt now a brief explanation of what is the practice of all Buddhas’ Sons.

Bodhisattvas are called Buddhas’ Sons. A Buddha has body sons, speech sons and mind sons so the Bodhisattvas are the sons of the mind of Buddha. The speech sons are the Arhats, the great practitioners of the Hinayana* path. Buddha had one biological son in India: such a son is a body son. When we say the practice of the Bodhisattva, it actually means Dharma. Dharma is the practice of Bodhisattvas. The Bodhisattvas are the Sangha and Buddha is the Buddha.
Buddha is the one who taught the Dharma. When we refer to the practice of the Buddha, we are referring to following the genuine Dharma, not the colourful or fabricated dharma. The genuine Dharma has to be cultivated and practised from different angles. The three yanas*: Hinayana, Mahayana and Vajrayana are based purely on the inner capacity of each person’s understanding. It may sound similar to first, second and third class compartments on a train but it’s not like that.

Vajrayana, the highest level or the bullet train, is the quickest vehicle. The Mahayana is great but not as quick and the Hinayana, the slowest vehicle, is like walking. It all depends on what sort of category you are inwardly inclined towards. If you are Vajrayana then you are in Vajrayana. If you are Hinayana, then you are in Hinayana. And if you are Mahayana, then you are in Mahayana. But you have to be that path. The path and you are inseparable, so you can turn yourself into that reality. You literally have to be Hinayana, Mahayana or Vajrayana. This is how it works. According to your development, you will automatically be there when you practise.

The development I am talking about is your own development, for instance, your development of compassion, which is the essence of the Buddha’s path. If you develop a strong and genuine compassion, nothing can prevent you from going into a higher vehicle. You are already there. The vehicle is not the issue. As you develop, you become that vehicle. So the way of reaching Buddhahood is by developing your compassion, love and kindness etc. Buddhahood is not reserved for some and not for others. No, Buddhahood is free for all. It is available to all of us - all nationalities, men, women, everyone. But it is not available to those who are not practising.

I say this is because when people talk about great realised beings such as Milarepa or others, they never seem to think they themselves can be that way. I always expect them to ask, “How do we follow this path in order to make ourselves like that person?” This is the kind of concerns they should have but they do not seem to be having that. They talk as if great masters suddenly just appeared from somewhere. “We aren’t great, so how can we be like them? We can’t hope to be like them.” Lacking confidence, they are already discouraged.

It is wrong to think that we cannot be like them. “We are full of defilements, desire, anger, jealousy; how can we possibly be like that great person? It’s impossible.” We will never be able to develop ourselves by putting ourselves
down. We have to encourage ourselves. Why shouldn’t we? Why can’t we do it? This is the attitude we have to have. It is very important that we really follow the genuine Dharma. This is what the text will explain. If we don’t have the potential to be enlightened, why do we need to practise? Why do we need to go through these kinds of instructions? And why, if we are not potentially great, was this text given to us?

First of all, if nothing will happen, this is a bunch of rubbish we don’t need to know. Why do we need to know about Buddha, Dharma and Sangha? It would be better for us to go into town and do something else. If there is no hope to be a Buddha, to be a great being, if the potential for enlightenment is not there, why bother?

These instructions were given because we have the great potential to be enlightened within this lifetime. Why not? We need these instructions and we need to follow them. By following the genuine Dharma, we can be like those great beings we were talking about, so now there is hope. Not only hope, but you will be like them for sure – 100%. We have reasons to be optimistic. The potential is already there: we are lucky enough to be human beings.

(1)

This sound human body endowed with full leisure – an excellent vessel rare to be found, since now we’ve obtained one in no way deficient, let’s work night and day without veering off course to take cross the ocean and free from samsara not only ourselves but all others as well. First listen, think hard, and then do much meditation – the sons of the Buddha all practise this way.
The first of the 37 practices mentions the importance of obtaining a human life. We have that so we are in good shape. It then speaks of the human body like a boat and we have that boat. Samsara is like an ocean or a big dangerous river that has to be crossed. So the river is there and we have a boat. If we did not have one, it would be quite hopeless. The only thing we need to do is get inside and learn how to navigate. This takes skill so we need to practise day and night without wasting a moment of our life.

We also need to have some intellectual knowledge as well as experiential knowledge. Intellectual knowledge comes first. Listening to the teaching and contemplating it is necessary. If you do not listen to or approach a master, it is a bit difficult. The master is very important. You should be listening to a genuine master who is giving a genuine teaching. After listening, you should contemplate on it. Think hard, think strong, and think over and over again about the teachings. Before gaining experiential knowledge, this step is essential.

Almost every Buddha, every Bodhisattva, every great saint and master has attained Buddhahood and enlightenment through listening to the teaching of a genuine master. Without guidance, there is no way for attainment because when we talk about compassion, we do not really know what compassion means or what suffering is or what enlightenment is. We are totally ignorant. Therefore, listening to a master is necessary to wake us up. The Mahayana followers or the Bodhisattvas, meaning us, are of course bound to do everything: practising, listening, cultivating and meditating, with the motivation of liberating all sentient beings. This is a very important key point.

Those who do not believe in any religion still go to school and hear what the master says. But their motivation for doing it is incorrect. They are not doing it for all sentient beings. As Mahayana practitioners, we listen to a teaching – for example, today you are listening to my gossip. I am gossiping but even this has to be done with genuine motivation. I have to be gossiping, not for myself, not for selfish reasons but for all sentient beings. I am supposed to be thinking that this teaching will steer you in the right direction, so that you, even one person, can help millions of countless beings. While listening, you should also have the correct motivation.
On the Bodhisattva path, this not only applies to listening and cultivating teachings in meditation, but even while doing things like going to the toilet and spitting. All these things have to be dedicated for the sake of all sentient beings. Spitting is a very tiny thing, and has little respect, but it can be very beneficial for many beings such as hungry ghosts and spirits who have nothing to eat and because of their own karma, possess nothing. But with the correct motivation, if you spit and dedicate for those beings, it can help them. Whether they get it or not depends again on their karma. Everything you do has to be done for their sake even something as simple as entering a room. You have to remember, “I am stepping into this room for all sentient beings. May someone, at least, benefit by my stepping in or stepping out.” Every activity, even sleeping and talking, has to be dedicated to all sentient beings in this way. This is very important.

Everything can be meditation. There are different stages: analytical meditation, then calm-abiding meditation. When we start to analyse compassion or something about the world, such as the guru, devotion, genuine love and the like, this is analytical meditation. It is not only sitting and keeping silent. That is one type of meditation, but not the only one. In order not to waste any precious time in this human rebirth, we can use our energy for contemplating through analytical meditation. It can be done in an informal way, at work and in your daily life. At these so called informal times, you can check yourself; you can think about the teaching, you can think about impermanence and other aspects of the teaching. For example, the day before yesterday I was talking about impermanence. Impermanence is always there. When you see the sun rising, it is rising because of impermanence, not because of something else. The sun set last night and came up this morning. Why is this so? Because the sun is moving and it is impermanent. The world is moving and so the sun rises. Time is moving. Its movement indicates the movement of time or impermanence. This is a great teaching. If you know how to take it as a teaching, then this is analytical meditation. You think and then you see – you literally see a sunset and that is all. You are not doing anything but you utilise it very meaningfully as a meditation. This is what we have to do.
There is formal and informal meditation. I think, for our level, the informal meditation is more beneficial but first you have to listen. If you don’t, you won’t know how to do informal meditation. It is very valuable so listening is the preliminary thing. But after that, when you start thinking about it, that’s when you start meditating. This is obvious. In many cases, when we do a formal meditation like sitting down in silence, we tend to lose ourselves. We do not really know what is happening around us. And we waste a lot of time pretending to be meditating and claiming to be a meditator or practitioner. But we are not really meditating. We are lost, nowhere. This happens quite often and this is not good. In that respect, informal meditation, looking at the sun rising and thinking about impermanence, or looking at people talking about their suffering and thinking about the suffering of samsara and how it arises and how it functions, may seem simple but now you are utilising your energy and your brain in the correct way. This is more meaningful and beneficial than losing your way in formal meditation.

It is very important to understand how to take every movement, every change, every thought and every appearance as a genuine teaching. That kind of teaching is a hundred or maybe a thousand times better than an oral teaching. Of course to start with, the teaching is essential but to accelerate that knowledge, I think it is much better to find teachings from what is occurring around us. If one is able to do that, it is the key for beginning the Bodhisattva’s path and an important part of the Bodhisattva’s practice. The foundation or essence of the Bodhisattva’s practice is to meditate all the time, night and day; this is the reason why this practice is given first. Let us work night and day without wasting a minute! But how can we meditate every minute without wasting a moment? It is not possible with formal meditation. Nonetheless, you can constantly improve your efforts throughout the day with informal meditation. The longest formal meditation is a few hours a day, maybe three or four hours. And then, the rest of the time is wasted. That is not good.

In order to liberate all sentient beings to nirvana, one needs to work diligently. To start the Bodhisattva’s work, you have to listen to the teaching and think about it. That’s when meditation begins. This is the message of the first practice.
Remaining too long in one place builds our attraction to loved ones and upsets us, we’re tossed in its wake. The flames of our anger towards those who annoy us consume what good merit we’ve gained in the past. The darkness of closed-minded thought dims our outlook; we lose vivid sight of what is right and wrong. We must give up our home and set forth from our country – the Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

One of the most important parts of the Bodhisattva practice is non-attachment. If you are attached to someone or something, some belonging or some country or anything, then it becomes a chain which ties you down and you aren’t free. This is a typical characteristic of samsara. You chain yourself: nobody chains you. This is what we really experience. At first we enjoy it because we don’t know, but later when we want to move on, we realise that we can’t. The chain is so tight, moving is almost impossible. This is typical of samsara.

There is a kind of insect – I don’t know what it is called in English – that has some kind of spit, a very sticky substance coming out of its mouth. It is their strong karma to be like this. As they move around, the spit covers their entire body and kills them – their own spit kills them. They do it to themselves. I do not know why it happens, but it is their karma. We always give this as an example because it is similar to what we do. We chain ourselves until we no longer know how to move. Not only that, we no longer have the choice. Whether we are burning with anger, soaked in desires or full of hatred, we are always in pain. And afterwards, maybe we will realise it but by then it is almost impossible to move out of it.
To speak about renunciation is not very easy: it is a very subtle and profound teaching. To renounce, you have to be extremely wise or stupid. People in-between cannot do it. Most of the stupid people who try are beginners, usually from the West – from modernised, civilised countries like Japan and others. Anyway, when they hear that renunciation is important, they just leave everything and go away. They pretend to be practising or renouncing but they have not really renounced.

They are only being dumb. For example, they may try it by going to India or Nepal, considered to be the best place for them because it is inexpensive. You do not have to spend any money. With just USD100, you could live very well and happily for six months. So they think, “Great!” They think they have renounced by doing this. It is not the way to renounce. Renunciation has to come from an understanding of the heart: from wisdom.

Genuine renunciation must come from genuine understanding, not what I was just talking about. And this has to come from non-attachment. Non attachment also has to be inner renunciation, inner non-attachment – a deep understanding of renunciation and non-attachment. The inner renunciation has to be practised first. This is very important. The external renunciation is not very important. Inner renunciation and inner non-attachment are more important. This is what we lack. As practitioners, no matter what we do, we need this. It is like those who go to Nepal and think they are practising, but they are living there because it is easy and cheap. I would not say that all of them are rubbish, though it is a big question whether they have totally renounced or they go for other reasons. Such questions should not even arise. It has to be genuine non-attachment, genuine renunciation. Inner renunciation must be developed first, and then, whether external renunciation is developed or not depends on circumstances.

Inner renunciation has to be developed through the understanding of non-existence. For example, understanding the phenomena of a home. In the text it says that in order to be free, a Bodhisattva practitioner should leave his own home and go to places where there are no emotional attachments. The home is supposed to create a lot of desires, lots of hatred and lots of upsetting emotions. But if you do not have inner renunciation, leaving Japan and going to America, for example, could cause you even more trouble and even more emotions. Though you would be economically better off in America, what is the point of leaving Kyoto to buy another home in San Francisco? You would then buy a house, look for a wife or husband, create a family and buy a car and it would be exactly the same as when you were in Kyoto. So what I am trying to say is that before leaving home, you
must first go through the inner disillusionment and renounce inwardly. We have
to know this whether we are in Japan, America or India – wherever. Then we
will slowly be able to minimise our strong attachment. This is the way to develop
renunciation.

Okay, you might say, “I agree about San Francisco, but what about Nepal? It’s
in the Himalayas and much holier with lots of spiritual things such as monasteries
and masters. There are no nice roads, cars or nice buildings and other materialistic
things to get attached to. It is not the same.” Is it better? This is questionable. You
can go to Nepal or anywhere in the Himalayas and live in a cave – it is good to
do that. You leave a very developed civilised country like Japan and stay in a cave
in the Himalayas with no electricity, no roads for cars, no roads even for walking,
no good food etc. But if you do not have inner renunciation, imagine what will
happen.

It is my own experience that you can be attached to many things. I was in a
cave many times for long periods trying to meditate, but I was still attached. It
could be a natural rock with a flat part on it where I could place some candles.
Since the other rocks had crooked or round top, I ended up being attached to
that rock. I can still remember it. I was really attached to it! It does not make
sense. And not only the rock, I was attached to the entire cave. I might have
thought that this was my cave. I spent so many months there and it was now my
cave – I had such a beautiful cave. And I thought, “What a beautiful time I had
in that cave” and so on so forth. I have a lot of stories I can share with you.

This shows that I was attached to the cave. Then in this case, it would be
better for me to be in Tokyo or San Francisco. Why should I stay in a cave if the
inner attachment is there?

Also, while you are in a cave or another remote place, your mind could be
travelling to Kyoto, to town, or even maybe to a discotheque or bar. It makes
no sense. You may be doing some recitations or meditation with your body but
the essential thing is your mind. Your body is just a piece of meat: where it is
does not matter; the question is the mind, the consciousness, the continuation
of consciousness that goes on to nirvana. The body may be burned or buried
in a few years, so this is not the issue. But if the body is in one place, the mind
another, this is not the renunciation we are talking about or what the instruction
explains. When it says you have to leave your home, it means both mentally and
physically. And you have to be in a place with no emotional involvement: no anger, no desire, full of peace. This is what we have to be practicing.

Then it says, “Hatred towards enemies and desire towards friends.” These are the two main things that disturb us. Desire towards friends also includes family and partners and hatred towards enemies. These come from your inner attachment, not from the home. If you could manage to destroy or diminish that attachment, you could live at home and it would not matter. The home is not the one causing the problem. But if you cannot minimise the attachment, often changing places will help. This is also my experience. Even though the attachment is there, changing lessens the chance of a full commitment with someone or something. It prevents it from becoming too strong, though you may still have some attachment here and there. Experientially speaking, that is quite helpful.

While practising non-attachment at home or in a place where there are lots of attachments or enemies, those beings who provoke your emotions, it is difficult to proceed with the practice. Remaining too long in one place, with one person, with one sort of condition can be disturbing, so Bodhisattva practitioners should refrain from building up relationships that chain them down.

It is interesting, in terms of spiritual practice, to say that frequently changing places is recommendable and suitable for the practice. This is the opposite of the mundane way of speaking or thinking. As I said before, we enjoy the idea of settling down. Parents want their son or daughter to settle down and the son and daughter look forward to it. “Settling” in the sense that they look for a wife or husband and then look forward to having a baby, a house and a job. This is the way they chain themselves. They do not know it, but they are putting a chain around their neck, and then putting a lock on the chain. Not knowing it, they enjoy it.

This is the typical samsaric way of doing things. That is why, when people marry, the wedding ceremony is the biggest event in their lives. It is the biggest because it is considered the best. “We are getting married and then expecting a baby.” From the point of view of samsara, this is great. From the spiritual point of view, this is nonsense. Perhaps I should not say “nonsense”, it might make trouble for you, but all this is a chain. I am speaking from my personal experience. You have the right to check whether it is true or not. You do not have to believe what I believe, that is not what I am saying. But it works that way. It is not something
that we have to change right away. It is not urgent or an emergency, but it is an interesting thing to think and talk about.

In order to be genuinely a great practitioner, for no other reason than to practise the Buddhadharma, we must avoid putting a chain around our necks. We must avoid any environment where there is a chance of that happening. This is really important. Once the chain is around your neck, it is almost impossible to get it off. However, after settling down, it is possible – the possibility is always there – that inner renunciation can still be developed and inner non-attachment and all these things can be practised. The Buddhadharma is extremely flexible. It can be practised by anybody in any condition.

Let us look at the third phase of practice. The first sentence uses the word yulngen which actually means that which causes defilements or that which causes emotion. Yul means “object” and ngen means “bad”, so yulngen means “bad object”. To gradually reduce your own emotions, without any obstacles, this bad object has to be abandoned.
And then, in the second sentence, namyeng is “directionless wandering”, referring to the wild wandering mind. That has to be reduced or withdrawn so you can spontaneously place your awareness where you choose. If you can manage to put yourself into a full state of awareness, then the virtue of good actions or positive merits or accumulations will surely increase. Wild, wandering thoughts should be discarded and our consciousness, our minds, should be kept free of distraction. We should keep our minds clear, without obstructions so that we can focus very firmly on the Dharma and Dharma practice. Through that kind of focus, keeping the mind clear and free of distractions, you can gain confidence in the practice within yourself.

There are three things to abandon: the first is abandoning bad objects. What we call bad is bad in the sense they provoke your emotions. It could be a friend, an enemy or other phenomena. Second is abandoning the wild, wandering mind and the third is abandoning the distractions in our mind. These three things can be abandoned by being in a remote and isolated area. It is very difficult to do it in a crowd, in a town or with many people because these three things are always spontaneously there. In a crowd, you can never abandon them, unless you have the strength and wisdom to do it. But normal people like us, unable to control our emotions, can never abandon these things in a crowd, definitely not. The emotions are so wild, so out of control, we need the external support of meditating and contemplating alone; otherwise, the mind goes crazy.

There is nothing wrong with being with friends but a friend could cause problems for me. Problems, in the sense that we cannot practise and we waste a lot of time. If we spend one week together, we waste one week; two days together, and we waste two days or one day, then one day is wasted. This is because we are not in control, therefore any kind of circumstance distracts us right away. We need to follow this instruction very carefully.

Those who have reached a very high level, who are in full control, do not need to isolate themselves. One of my gurus told us that he preferred living in the middle of a crowd because noise, the crowd and all that gave him a lot of support. Support in the sense that he can control everything and develop his own understanding. Also, in terms of meditation, it sharpens his wisdom; so he always stays in a very noisy and crowded place. He loves living in the centre of town.
where there are lots of activities. But that is not true for us because we are unable to control ourselves very well, we need to be in an isolated area. We need it badly.

Next it says, “Live all alone.” Again there are two interpretations: living alone physically and living alone mentally. So this environment is now some sort of quiet, isolated place. But first you need to know how to be isolated mentally. And then the external isolated area is important. So if you physically go on retreat in the mountains and the mind remains in town, it is the wrong way. As a follower of the Bodhisattva path, you should understand that wherever you live, there is no sense, value or reason to be attached to this life.

Regardless of how long spent living together, good friends and relations must someday depart. Our wealth and possessions collected with effort are left far behind at the end of our life. Our mind, but a guest in our body’s great guest house, must vacate one day and travel beyond. Cast away thoughts that concern but this lifetime – the Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

Why is there no sense in this life? Though it sounds depressing, it should not make you feel bad or cause suffering. Logically, as mentioned here, regardless of how long good friends and relatives live together, they must someday depart. In the same way, whatever you build, be it walls or buildings, they will collapse one day. All harmonious relationships, sooner or later, come to an end. Therefore, there is not much sense in being strongly attached. It does not mean you should
not take care of things or destroy them; but it refers to our attachment, thinking they will remain forever. Nothing does, whether it is friendship or the hatred and anger felt for an enemy. According to that anger, you and that enemy can never be friends. But this, like everything else, is also impermanent. He may be an enemy this year, a friend the next or maybe I will be a friend with him this year, bad with him the next. Who knows? Anything can happen.

Even after a couple has lived harmoniously together for 40 or 50 years, never arguing or speaking a cross word, which is good, but in the end they would still die. The same is true for wealth and possessions, collected with a lot of effort and energy. These too are left behind and not necessarily at the end of one’s life. Maybe something will happen, our things will be burned or stolen or the bank will collapse or whatever. You may have accomplished great things by collecting all this wealth and all these things, but it may not be there tomorrow or in a few years. If you are lucky, maybe you can keep it for many years but in the end you still have to say goodbye. Though I think it is good to have wealth, good relationship with friends, couples, parent and child and so forth, there is no way to keep them forever.

This is also true of your body. It is one of the things we are most attached to; but we must leave it as well. No matter how much you love your wealth, parents or friends, you love your body more. Without it, you cannot survive - but it too is left behind. The body is like a guest house and you, the human mind, are only a guest. When you die, you have no choice: the guest room cannot go with you. For this reason we should be decent. The way we treat friends, enemies, accumulated wealth, your body, yourself, your possessions and everything is not really decent. It is because we are too attached, blindly attached. It is better not to be that way.

It does not mean that you should not have friends or good relationships with your parents. It does not mean that you should not value your life or value your health. Taking care of your health, taking medicine and exercise, all these are very important. And wealth is also important; otherwise you cannot survive in this world. But it is much more recommendable, in terms of how you treat them or utilise them, try to be decent. So, it says “tshe di löe tang” – tshe di means “this life”, löe “the mind” and tang “release”.
This life should be released by the mind, meaning we should not be strongly attached to this life. This is what I am trying to say. If a person manages to release this attachment, such a person, in many respects, is the luckiest person in the world. I can say this with 100% certainty. In terms of happiness, this type of person can bring much happiness to his or her own life. He or she can do it by impartially helping people because of having overcome the barriers of attachment. And of course in terms of practising the Buddhadharma, without barriers, no obstacles exist.

Attachment is literally a barrier between you and what you are trying to reach. A big wall that limits you in every aspect and every action. Attachment keeps you limited, so you cannot stretch that much. Releasing attachment will definitely help your understanding. When you face a big problem, it would not seem as big. It would already be released within the self. It prepares you. Like a computer that has already been programmed, there is no emergency. When the time comes, it goes according to the program. Everything is much more peaceful. Life will be much better if you can manage to do this practice.

I have a friend who is a money broker. I do not know exactly what he does, but he is my student and has been practising a lot for many years. Several years ago, he and his partners faced tremendous business problems. For some reasons, their bank collapsed and they lost all their money. Everyone suffered. The bank manager jumped from the building and died. Many of his partners had heart attacks and some died in hospital. Others went crazy and are still in hospital. Even now, he is the only one among them still in good shape. I saw him a couple of weeks after it happened and he was okay, laughing and quite comfortable. He was not stupid. He was concerned about his family and his business; but he did not need hospitalisation or counseling because he was psychologically undisturbed.

What I am trying to say is that he has been practising meditation and non-attachment for 20 years. He was quite old then, but still I did not know what level he had reached until this happened. It indicated the differences between a non-practitioner, a practitioner and a good practitioner: the attached one and the non-attached one. It was amazing. Frankly, I was shocked when it happened. I was even a bit hesitant to see him because I thought he might collapse or cry or
something like that. But no, he was smiling and laughing as usual. He drove me around and everything was okay.

If your practice comes from the depth of your heart, even when big problems arise, you are in a state where there is no problem. Other people suffer because they do not know. Though the conditions are the same, the suffering is different and the feeling towards these conditions are totally different. Therefore, I am saying that those who manage to practise non-attachment towards their belongings, their bodies etc., are the luckiest people in the world.

There is no good reason for attachment because everything, including your body has to go. People say many things as an excuse: I need this for that, that for this, and I like that because of this. There are many things to talk about which is okay, but this kind of reasoning is never correct. We do not need to be attached. We can do our business, look after the family and survive without it. Therefore, be decent.

From staying together with friends who misguide us, our hatred, desires and ignorance grow. With little time left to continue our studies, we don’t think of Dharma; we meditate less. Our love and compassion for sentient beings are lost and forgotten under their sway. Sever such ties with misleading companions - the Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.
Not only non-attachment, but the need to abandon negative friends is especially important. In the fifth practice, it refers to negative friends, bad company or misleading companions. It is quite urgent that we abandon friendships with those who misguide us by creating much hatred, desire, ignorance, misunderstanding and other things. This kind of company is considered bad or negative. We call them *drog ngen*. *Drog* means “friend” and *ngen* means “bad” or “negative”, so “negative friend”. Negative friends must be abandoned so their bad vibrations and orientation would not influence you.

Actually, bad company, enemies and other external things are projections of your own negativities. Rather than pointing to this person or that enemy, the main target is oneself. We have to fight and destroy the inner enemy and the inner bad company. This is very important.

Because we are materialistic, we are too reliant on others and external things. We have to learn to deal with them. “This person is causing me anger, causing me desire, making me ignorant. Maybe I should leave him silently, without saying anything.” But even if you leave, you should still think, “I must develop my own strength so I can fight my negativities; otherwise, I will find someone else like him again. Or meet the same type for a second, third or fourth time. There will be no end of enemies and bad company.”

It is important for a practitioner to stay away from bad company. This can be very tricky because we often enjoy it. If it came with frightening eyes and a fierce appearance, we would know it was bad and go away but unfortunately, it can be very charming and attractive with loving vibrations and a romantic way. You can be easily deceived and fail to discern that this person or company is bad.

If you are a practitioner, perhaps years later you may notice, but it will be too late. This can be tricky. The only way to check is whether your defilements are increasing or decreasing through the contact with this person; or whether your loving kindness and compassion for all sentient beings increase or decrease through this contact. By checking these things, you would know. If wisdom and compassion go down because of this connection, something is wrong. If anger, desire, pride or jealousy increases, something is not right. These are two checks to see if the person you live with is negative or not.
When placing ourselves in the hands of a Guru, we’re turning sincerely for guidance to someone whose competence both in the scriptures and practice expands like a moon growing full. We’ll then solve all our problems, dispel our delusion, if we place our full confidence in him. We must cherish our Guru far more than our body – the Sons of the Buddha all practice this way.

What is badly needed is the opposite of bad company. Good company increases compassion, loving kindness, wisdom and peace of mind. It decreases your desire, jealousy, hatred and pride. These will definitely diminish if you approach the right person, the positive friend. In this English text, it says guru, when placing ourselves in the hands of a guru. In Tibetan it does not say guru, it says šé nyen dampa, šé nyen means “leader”, dampa means “holy”.

Of course, a holy leader can be a guru but a common friend can also be one. A friend also gives you qualities such as decreasing anger and other defilements and increasing compassion, loving kindness and wisdom. This person appears to be an ordinary being, but can be considered a holy leader or guide. Once you have found a šé nyen dampa or a holy guide, you have to value him or her very highly and treat him or her much better than yourself, because holy guidance or positive friend, is equivalent to a great master, a great guru or a Buddha. This friend gives support in spiritual strength so you must value them from the depth of your heart.
As practitioners and followers of the Bodhisattva path, we need to be watchful in many aspects. We have to examine the friend and even the guru to see if he or she is correct or not. There are lots of fake gurus who will mislead you. Even though he or she has the name of a guru, under that name he or she will deceive you or let you down. In this instance, this “guru” is a bad company.

You also have to be careful whether a guru or a friend is helpful or not for your practice, such as when you meditate; again it is very inner, very secret and hidden. You have to watch out. In some meditations you will feel great but that experience can also deceive you. It seems great but it is not necessarily great. Sometimes it is really bad. That kind of feeling will put you in a completely wrong meditation and let you down. From many angles, you must be careful and practise properly. That is most important.

Another thing you have to check is yourself – within yourself, whether you are progressing or not, whether the defilements are decreasing or not, whether the wisdom and compassion are developing or not. Then you can say if something is wrong or right. You have to go through your own experience first so that you can tell what is going on. You cannot tell from the appearances of others: appearances tell you very little. It is because everything has to be coming from within yourself.

Compassion and loving kindness are aspects of the wisdom within yourself. And the defilements such as anger, jealousy, hatred and fright are also a part of your mind – everything, both negative and positive, is within yourself.

Outer beings like the gurus and friends, good or bad, genuine or fake – everything needs to become a support. A good master and a genuine master, a good friend and a genuine friend should be giving some kind of support for you to make changes within yourself. And the bad ones give some kind of vibration that brings you down and keeps you down. That is the only thing they can do. This should be used to help you realise what can happen. What we expect to happen is within ourselves. The whole practice of the Bodhisattva path is to keep you in shape. To keep your mind in shape. It always comes down to the fact that everything depends on ourselves, on our minds. The mind is the key point.
The gods of this world are not free from sorrow,
   For caught in samsara, some day they must fall.
If they are bound as we are, how can they protect us?
   How can someone in prison free anyone else?
But Buddha, his teachings and those who live by them
   are free to give comfort - they will not let us down.
   Go to the three jewels of Refuge for shelter –
   the Sons of the Buddha all practise this way.

These teachings and the blessings of Vajrayana and Mahayana, all spiritual introductions, have to be done through the support of a lineage. It is very important to have the transmission of a lineage because one must have the lineage of teaching. It is not important what language to be used. For example, I am giving the transmission today so that by transmitting it, the lineage is there.

Of course, if you do not practise, it would be like throwing a stone in the ocean. If you can manage to practise, you will be keeping the lineage, you will be a lineage keeper or holder and you will be important to our lineage. Not only that, since lineage means blessing, you will benefit by this blessing. The same is true of Japanese Zen Buddhism, Chinese Buddhism and other forms of Buddhism.

Practices such as chi-kung and yoga also have a lineage. Things have to be done by lineage. It is not only intellectual knowledge that is in the head that is important, but it is the heart that is most important.
We need to understand suffering. What is its cause, what actually is it? When we reach a state that we know and realise what it is and what causes it, we will want to get rid of suffering. We will then want to gain enlightenment. The process works this way; one step after another. With the desire for enlightenment, the search or strong wish will be there, then this is the time to take refuge. If you take it at the right time, it will lead you onto the path, the genuine path. Otherwise, even if you take refuge, it would not be genuine. Refuge cannot be superficial. It has to come from the heart.

In whom do you take Refuge? In those who have no suffering, who are in a state of no suffering, someone who is enlightened or who is the enlightenment. Otherwise, if you take refuge in a thing or a person that is still trapped in samsara and suffering, how can they save you? How can they protect you? How can someone in prison free other prisoners? It is not possible, they cannot. Similarly, if the object of refuge is not free from samsara and suffering, he or she cannot protect us. Then who is the right person, right being or right object of refuge? Actually, saying it this way is incorrect. It is correct to say what is the right object in which to take refuge? The thing in which to take refuge is enlightenment.

In many cases, holy beings and holy persons, realised and enlightened persons, can help us. Even the samsaric gods, the highest among the three upper realms of gods, demi-gods and humans beings, have tremendous power and facilities to help other beings and to help themselves. But they are still in samsara and though they can help you, it is impossible that they can liberate you.

I think you have the same belief in Japan as in Tibet and China, that a tree can protect you or a tradition that certain trees have certain deities that can protect you and your family and other people. Or sometimes people believe that water, a spring, can help them so they put a shrine there and bow down, pay respect and really believe that this can protect them. Of course this works through their belief and maybe there is a spirit there who has the power to help us temporarily. But these things should not be considered as the ultimate or genuine object of refuge.

Buddha, Dharma and Sangha are the Three Jewels and the three objects of refuge. When we say Buddha, in relation to refuge, we are always referring to
enlightenment. That has to be understood. Otherwise, if you refer to Buddha as a historical person who had an enormous realisation in India and was so kind to give teachings and *etc.* – in a way this is good but it is not the genuine way of taking refuge. Buddha always refers to enlightenment.

Of course, Buddha Shakyamuni, Buddha Amitabha, Buddha Vairochana, and the other Buddhas, being realised, are included because they have already attained enlightenment. In other words, they are the enlightenment. You can refer to Buddha Shakyamuni, Buddha Amitabha and Guru Padmasambava and all of them, but you have to truly understand that they are enlightenment. It is not the form who is sitting there cross-legged or standing with two hands or four hands or one thousand hands that you are taking refuge in. That is of secondary importance. What is of primary importance is enlightenment itself.

Dharma has two aspects. One is the doctrine that has been given by the Buddha and the masters – the holy doctrine. The second, the essential Dharma, is the realisation. Again it is similar to when we talked about the Buddha. The doctrine is very important because it gives you direct instructions. It is also important in terms of the Dharma and in terms of the refuge object. But essentially, realisation is the same as enlightenment. Realisation, when referring to Dharma is the ultimate Dharma. When we take refuge in the Dharma, the actual way to take refuge is to practise. The moment you start practising the Dharma, that is the genuine way of taking refuge; until then you are not taking refuge.

Next is the Sangha. Sangha is the person who is realised. The person who can liberate other beings is also Sangha. These are the two aspects of Sangha. We must know that the person we are taking refuge in already has realisation. This person might not yet be a Buddha, but he or she has realised some state of understanding and can lead you and liberate you, but only to their state of realisation. For example, if I am on this roof I can throw you some rope and lead you here. But if I want to take you to a higher roof, I may not have the strength because I am not there yet. There is only hope to come on to this roof because I am here and a rope, ladder or something similar can be used. Solutions can be found, therefore, it is Sangha.

Again, the realised person refers to his realisation. We are not referring to the
form of the person or who he is. Is he Japanese? Or Tibetan? Chinese? American? Or European? Is it a he or she? We are not interested in that. We are interested in the realisation of that person. When we say “person”, it always refers to his or her realisation – the mind, the thing inside. If you say so-and-so is a bad person, it automatically refers to his or her mental state. You would call someone full of anger, jealousy, cheating, all these things a bad person. His mind is bad and you call that a bad person. So this means “person” always refers to the mind. The same is true for a good person.

“Sangha” refers to a realised person. It does not matter if it is a he or she, what country they are from, how tall or short, what they look like or their colour. It is the person who has some realisation that matters. Perhaps not full realisation – there are ten blumis or stages of realisation – but some degree of realisation has been attained. The Sangha always refers to the realisation, not the body or the form. That is the reason why Bodhisattvas or followers of the Bodhisattva path should think very seriously of taking refuge as the first step of the path. Refuge has to be taken very precisely, perfectly and correctly, not in the wrong way.

As I mentioned, “refuge” always refers to the enlightenment. We need to take refuge in enlightenment, which covers the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. We need the support of Dharma in order to have inner realisation. In order to realise, you have to go through some skills or the path; otherwise there is no way to get enlightenment, which is primordially and fundamentally already there. We are already enlightened. I am already Buddha, you are already Buddha. There are many Buddhas in this hall: what a luxury!

Among us, there are also many Buddhas who are not enlightened. We are the ones who are not yet realised, but we are Buddhas. Buddhahood is there primordially; by not realising it, we need a path or skills, i.e. Dharma. Taking refuge in the Dharma is very important. It is the key point of realisation, more important than Buddha or the Sangha. It is the central issue.
Buddha has said that the grief past endurance of creatures whose lives contain nothing but pain. Is the unfortunate fruit of the wrongs they’ve committed against other beings in lifetimes gone by not wishing to suffer from horrible torment, not flinching if even our life is at stake, turn from all actions that harm other beings – the Sons of the Buddha all practise this way.

Once you start practising Dharma, you are taking refuge. Until then, if you take the ceremonial refuge, you may start to think about it seriously but you are not really committed until you practise. The practice of Buddhadharma has many faces, but first we have to obey the law of karma, which is very strong and interesting and is the key point to follow.

The Buddha says that “grief passes the endurance of creatures whose lives contain nothing but pain.” The pain of suffering in samsara is created by our own bad accumulations, and it is the fruit or result of bad karma.

Actually, we do not want to follow anyone: we want to be free. There is really no one punishing you. No one wants to be punished or wants to be controlled, not even by the Buddha or one’s master. We all want freedom. And the purpose of practicing the Buddhadharma is to be free from everything – free from suffering, egoism, defilements and so on so forth. Ultimately, we will be enlightened, which is the state of total freedom. The target of spiritual practice is for us to free ourselves. Unfortunately, we are governed by our karma and we must follow that. The karmic rule is strong and vital, something essential for us to watch. We have to make ourselves free from the karma that keeps us busy and keeps us suffering. Therefore, in terms of Dharma practice, the first thing to follow is karma.
To free ourselves from karmic influence, we must try to abandon our bad karma and negative accumulations. This is the first step and one of the most important practices of Bodhisattvas and the followers of the Bodhisattva path. Not only should these be abandoned, but also should not be practiced or committed. Even if your life is in danger, you should avoid negative karma, because it is just one life and we have many future lives to consider.

In fact, to purify ourselves, we should be ready to sacrifice this life to avoid any bad karma. There will be many lives after this one. So, creating bad karma and getting bad accumulations will cause us problems for hundreds of thousands of future lives. This life is very short and can be sacrificed for that big purpose.

Saying this life is short and future lives long is true. How long are we going to stay here? By now, maybe one-half of our life is already wasted or already gone. Perhaps only one quarter of our life is left, that too is short. But the next life is long and how many lives will there be until enlightenment? It is endless. There will be no end of your taking rebirths. Rather than worrying about this short life, think about the impact of negative accumulations on future lives.

For the sake of the mundane comfort and successes in this life, we unfortunately engage in all sorts of negative deeds. To get a nicer home, to get more money, to have more pleasure or a more pleasant way of living, we normally do all sorts of bad things. But if we think about it clearly, we may realise this is very stupid. We are all looking for happiness and for this kind of short-term happiness, we accumulate so much of negative karma for us to suffer throughout many future lifetimes.

For example, we are making money so that we will be happy. We are keeping ourselves busy running around for happiness. Not only us, even the ants keep themselves busy going everywhere, looking endlessly for something. The same is true for butterflies and mosquitoes. All sentient beings, like us, are busy. Desiring happiness, we keep ourselves busy. Mosquitoes are busy because they want to be happy. They want to eat so they hang around and bite us just to survive. That is how we survive in this world. Though it is quite stupid from the point of view of the spiritual path, it makes sense from the mundane point of view. It is stupid, because this life is so short and the future lives are countless.
Happiness is like dew on the grass, it disappears in a few seconds. When the sun comes out, the dew disappears immediately. As soon as you get some sense of happiness, it is over. As soon as you get some sense of pleasure, it too disappears. This is our typical experience. We waste a lot of time and energy to gain what will soon pass. I do not know if this is true for you but this is my own experience.

I like good things and I like pleasure but they all seem over too soon. It is like chasing a rainbow, which is there for a few seconds then disappears, somewhere, somehow. It definitely cannot and does not remain forever. That is certain. We need to be intelligent about this life. To practise the Bodhisattva path, it is important to understand the universal law of karma. Should we give importance to this life and accumulate a lot of bad karma or should we think of the hundreds of lives to come and strictly abandon accumulating it? To understand this, we must genuinely and sincerely practise the spiritual path.

Like the dew that remains for a moment or two on the tips of the grass and then melts with the dawn, the pleasures we find in the course of our lives last only an instant, they cannot endure; while the freedom we gain when becoming a Buddha is a blissful attainment not subject to change. Aim every effort to this wondrous achievement— the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

It says in the above stanza, “Like the dew that remains for a moment or two on the tips of the grass and then melts with the dawn, the pleasures we find in
the course of our lives last only an instant, they cannot endure.” I have already mentioned this so we must look for the permanent and enduring solution for being happy, choose the long-term rather than the short-term.

We have to understand that “Buddhahood” is a Buddhist terminology for “unchangeable enlightenment”. When we attain enlightenment, the bliss and happiness as a result of this spiritual realisation are unchangeable. This sort of happiness would never decrease nor disappear, and it would never be affected by anything else. It is permanent happiness.

As a result, we have to aim for enlightenment. An interest in it indicates that a person is already on the Bodhisattva path. Even if you seem to be a great practitioner – devoting a lot of time, learning a lot of texts and doing spiritual activities – but if you lack an interest in genuine enlightenment, you are not really following the Bodhisattva path.

The Buddhadharma can be practised with different types of motivation. Among those practising Tibetan Buddhism, many are interested in Tibetan culture, the Tibetan way of living and the scenery in the Himalayas because they consider it as a Shangri-La or a mythical pureland. No one knows why; but they make a big fuss out of Tibet.

People have a great picture of Tibet so their approach is nothing more than that. Of course through their interest in Tibet, they approach Buddhism, which is good. However, it does not mean that they are following the Bodhisattva path.

Some people practise Buddhadharma for a doctorate degree. It is not wrong but that is also not a genuine Bodhisattva path. Not only in Europe and the West or foreign countries, but also in Tibet, many people have the wrong motivation. They study Buddhadharma for 10 or 18 years because they want to become a Geshe* or abbot. They are not really interested in spiritual practice or enlightenment. They are interested in having a degree. There are many people like that. But in following the Dharma, we should try our best to practise from an interest in enlightenment, not for anything else. This is very important.

Our aim or our main target and desire should be to reach enlightenment. Supposedly we have a strong interest in enlightenment but we do not know how
to achieve it. It is like having an interest in going to Japan, but you do not know how to get there. You must first have a visa and find out who to talk to, and etc. You must have a lot of skills to get through various problems. In the same way, you must know how and what to practice in order to achieve enlightenment.

In each incarnation, through all our lives, we’ve been cared for by others with motherly love. While these mothers of ours are still lost in samsara, how cruel to ignore them and free but ourselves! To save other beings, though countless in number, to free from their sorrow these mothers of old, produce Bodhicitta—the wish to be Buddha— the Sons of the Buddha all practise this way.

Here it says that we sentient beings, by taking care of ourselves, remain in this kind of condition, while Buddhas and enlightened persons, by taking care of others, are in the state of enlightenment. The fruit of being egotistical and selfish is to stay in samsara. The fruit of taking care of others is enlightenment. This is clearly noted by the great Bodhisattva Shantideva.

If we check the attitude we now have, this is understandable. It is obvious that we are always taking care of ourselves while eating, sleeping, whatever we do— even while listening to teachings, even while we practise generosity. It appears as if we are giving something but inside there is some kind of expectation— “Oh yes, I gave this and I may get something in return”.
In fact, if we examine carefully, what we do every minute of the day or every minute of our life comes from selfishness. You may do something for your children, your parents or your friends but it is also for yourself – a seemingly selfless action, in reality not free from selfishness. Because you are not hurting others, it is also good, but because a selfish attitude is involved, it is not good enough. It is not something to cry over. It is just our weakness and a characteristic of samsara, of common ignorant beings. We are doing this because of our ignorance.

Now, as a Bodhisattva practice, we have to change this attitude towards Bodhicitta*. Bodhicitta means to extend the mind. Bodhi is “extend”, and citta is “mind”. Because of selfishness, the narrowness of your mind cannot stretch to include more than a few people. We now need to extend our mind.

In Tibetan we say semkyed. Sem means “mind”, kyed means “extend”. The room in our mind is sometimes so small that even we ourselves cannot even be there. It is difficult and also pitiful, so we must expand our mind by understanding how important happiness is for all sentient beings. By knowing that happiness is important for you, this is the key point of your life.

Everyone, like you, desires happiness and does not want sorrow. It is an equal desire even for ants and mosquitoes. So all of us are equal. We must know and experience this, and then slowly we have to practise the Bodhicitta to extend or expand our mind. But before practising, we must really know how important happiness is for all sentient beings, not only for oneself.

There are many things in our lives that we do not remember. Because of time differences, changes in the body, changes of country or place and various conditions, we forget who did what. That is quite understandable. Sometimes we cannot even remember what we had for breakfast today. So how can we remember our past lives?

There is every reason to take care of others. Using “I don’t remember” as an excuse is not good. Every being has been a part of your family: your father, mother, friend, beloved one, brother and sister and now they are suffering. It is selfish to take care of yourself and not them. It is not only unfair to let them suffer, but it is illogical.
The idea that “If I alone survive, then let them suffer” would not work. It is a karmic program that brings negative fruit: bad karma, bad results and finally remaining in samsara, suffering endlessly.

I was giving a talk in Europe and one of my students asked me, “If I take care of others, who will take care of me?” He was starting to worry about himself. It is an interesting question. But, actually the best way to take care of you yourself, is to take care of others. Due to ignorance, we have not managed to do it or even accept this approach. We only want to take care of ourselves. This is how we develop our ego, and how we survive in a materialistic way. But that is not the way we should be leading our lives in terms of spiritual practice.

In the *Bodhicittacharyavatara*, it says, “The Buddhas became Buddhas by taking care of others.” That is clearly how it is and this hints that taking care of others is also the best way of taking care of you yourself. It is the way of becoming a Buddha. Bodhicitta is the mind of enlightenment – the mind interested in enlightenment. This is what we need.

All of our sufferings, without an exception, derive from the wish to please but ourselves; while the thoughts and the actions that benefit others conceive and give birth to supreme Buddha-hood.

Thus in exchange for our selfish desires and shameful neglect of our suffering kin, replace thoughts of self with concern for others – the Sons of the Buddha all practise this Way.
One needs to develop the mind of enlightenment for all sentient beings who are our mothers. Of course, mother is just one expression. Why not father, sister or children? You can even visualise that all sentient beings are your children. You have been their father and mother for an immeasurable number of times and they, as well as their present fathers and mothers, are suffering. For their sake and for their liberation, you need an enlightened mind. That is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

This mind has two aspects: the aspirational mind and the practical mind of enlightenment. The aspirational mind is the wish to get enlightenment, not only for you but for all sentient beings. The concentration and focus should be – “For all sentient beings may I be able to attain enlightenment.” The practical mind is actual practice, action with the aspirational mind of enlightenment.

In *Bodhicaryavatara*, it is said that the aspirational mind is like someone who wants to go somewhere. Though he or she may wish to go, not having gone, it is only an aspiration. Similarly, a practitioner who strongly desires enlightenment but has not done anything about it only has an aspiration. But when action is taken, it is equivalent to the practical mind of enlightenment, *i.e.* working towards the enlightenment of all sentient beings. In this case, action means the Six Paramitas* or Six Perfections – generosity, ethics, patience, diligence, concentration and wisdom.

While practising, you remain in this mind of enlightenment; otherwise you cannot practise effectively. Even if you do, it is definitely not the Mahayana path. It may not even be Hinayana. So you should first develop a strong aspirational mind and supported by that, you should practise the Six Paramitas.

There are three different ways to approach enlightenment for all sentient beings. To have the skill and power to liberate them, one must first be enlightened. That is why one should think, “May I be enlightened for the sake of all beings.” This is the first way to cultivate Bodhicitta.

In terms of skillful means, the Bodhisattva who wishes for the enlightenment of all sentient beings is the most skillful. Without enlightenment, you will not be able to do anything. Even practising the Paramitas with an aspirational mind and a practical mind, it is impossible without being enlightened.
The second unique way of thinking and practising for some Bodhisattvas is, “I will never achieve enlightenment until all sentient beings become enlightened.” Their attitude is, “Why should I get enlightened if beings are still suffering? Why should I think of being enlightened myself?” Through their strong compassion and love for all sentient beings, they make a promise, “May I not be enlightened until all sentient beings are enlightened.” We call this the motivation of the shepherd who finds a good safe place for their sheep, and then they relax.

This kind of Bodhisattva has a uniquely great degree of compassion and loving kindness. The shepherd attitude or motivation is like Avalokiteshvara. His compassion is so strong and so deep that he cannot think about being enlightened before we achieve enlightenment; therefore, he is still a Bodhisattva, not yet a Buddha.

The third motivation is that some Bodhisattvas want to be enlightened at the same time as all sentient beings. They think, “I want to be enlightened with them, not before them. May we all be enlightened at the same time.” This is called the navigator attitude, like those who navigate a boat.

They see a typhoon or some danger, they would try their best to cross the river with their passengers. They would never think that they should go first and then lead the others, or that they should put all the passengers first and then go without them. They want to cross the river together with the passengers. This navigator motivation is like that of the Bodhisattva Manjushri which is also very great.

Bodhisattva attitudes are always based on the concern for all sentient beings, not for oneself. We must understand that our attitude does not conform with theirs, which is concentrated on liberating all sentient beings.

Our common samsaric attitude is wrong because we always think of ourselves. Whatever we do, we do for ourselves. Materialistically, in business, it is understandable; but it is totally incorrect that even when we do spiritual practice, we do it for ourselves rather than for others. We must acknowledge this incorrect attitude in order to follow the Bodhisattva path.
If under the sway of compulsive desire and longing for things that he does not possess, some unfortunate person has stolen our riches or lets others rob us and idly stands by; then out of compassion and with no attachment, To him we must dedicate all our prayers: may he have wealth, our body and merits – the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

We need to have the motivation of exchanging our happiness for the suffering of others. It is a kind of sharing, not by sharing something we do not like, but by sharing something we really appreciate. Wanting to keep things for ourselves is a weakness, so we need to know how to exchange ourselves for others. This is a deep practice and must be practised gradually. We cannot suddenly do it in a day or two. Bodhisattva training is very difficult and takes a long time to complete.

First, without practising, you have to imagine and visualise certain things. For example, when exhaling, your bliss and happiness, health and wealth go out to all sentient beings. Receiving it, they are satisfied with your gift. Then, when inhaling, their suffering, mentally and physically, comes into you. To train yourself, visualise through your exhalation and inhalation.

There is also a practice for generosity. You have something in your right hand and as you give it to your left hand, imagine you are giving your wealth and belongings – everything – to your beloved parents or friends or someone else.
Actually, nothing is given: it is just a form of training. Even though it seems kind of childish, it is a way to train because in terms of spiritual practice, we are still in kindergarten, maybe even lower than kindergarten.

Such kind of training has to be started gently, and then slowly we can practise with bigger and greater things. Through this practice, we minimise our attachment to self, belongings and happiness until we become capable of sharing and exchanging with others. Gradually, one will be able to practise equal rights. Why not?

Let us share. This is what I have: happiness, the cause of happiness. You can have half and I can have half: 50/50. This is the first indication that you are developing this attitude.

To have 100% for ourselves is a typical samsaric attitude. We cannot blame it on anyone else; it is just a characteristic of samsara. If you practise, you will slowly be able to share 50% of what you have.

I need happiness, you need happiness too and since I have it, so why can I not share it with you? This kind of attitude is the first step. By practising this training continuously, you will gradually be able to give your entire happiness and entire cause of happiness to others selflessly – without a sense of regret. That is the great Bodhisattva level.

When you reach that state, you will never have any expectation for yourself. With a great Bodhisattva, everything is always for others.

The motivation of great Bodhisattvas would then be very strong. People can ask, “Can I have your eyes?” and you would say, “Oh, yes, definitely, certainly. There would not be any question such as: “Why do you want my eyes? They are my eyes not yours?” There would not be any argument at all. “Can I have your eyes?” Yes, certainly.” This is the way of a great Bodhisattva. Since this person needs eyes, I will give them mine. And not only my eyes, but also my life, if he or she needs it.
“If I am a great Bodhisattva and you want my life, then take my life. It is my pleasure. I will give it unconditionally.” We can now see the big difference between samsaric people like us and Bodhisattvas or people at a high bhumi. Our attitudes are so selfish and theirs so selfless. They also would not suffer by giving themselves to others. They would simply give away their eyes. Though it is physically unpleasant to see, they are mentally free of suffering and sorrow about doing it. Even if it could be bloody and painful – especially in those olden days, we did not have anesthesia – they would be unbelievably delighted because they would be 100% mentally prepared for it.

It is different if someone who is still suffering forces himself or herself to do it, or if someone else forces him or her to do it. According to the Bodhisattva vow, it is not allowed to force this to make it happen. Unless one is prepared, it does not permit giving eyes, fingers or any of those things. It is prohibited. Both doctrine and instructions for the Bodhisattva path regard it as a very big crime. One has to be genuinely prepared through mental practice by developing Bodhicitta or the mind of enlightenment, for many lives or at least for many years.

For example, one of the gurus of my lineage at the end of the 19th century, concentrated on practising the mind of enlightenment diligently day and night for 13 years and reached the state of a great Bodhisattva in his lifetime. Actually, 13 years is not a long time by many measures, but for us it is quite a long time because we are always thinking of the fastest and most comfortable path!

Before Buddha Shakyamuni got enlightened, he was a great Bodhisattva. In many lifetimes he offered his life and his body to others. Once, in Nepal, he offered his entire body to a tigress and we can still see the spot where it occurred. The hungry tigress was going to eat her own baby and out of compassion, and knowing what was going to happen, the Buddha offered his own body. Because the tigress was too weak to eat, he cut a vein so that she could lick the blood and finally she devoured him. Nagarjuna also offered his body. From beginningless time until today, many Bodhisattvas have been offering their bodies, eyes, belongings and etc.
One of Nagarjuna’s main disciples was a king. He gave him the blessing of longevity, and of course, we know that Nagarjuna had the ability live forever. The king’s son had the evil idea of being enthroned in a great golden brocaded shirt and waited for his father, now old, to die. His mother the queen told him, “Your father has been blessed by Nagarjuna so he will never die unless Nagarjuna dies. But Nagarjuna will never die so this is bad news for you.” This upset the son.

The queen saw that her son was suffering a lot and said, “Nagarjuna is a great Bodhisattva. Simply go and ask him for his head. Just say, ‘If it is possible, I need your head,’ and he will definitely give it to you. This means he will die and your father will immediately die. This is the only solution.” So he did it and that is how Nagarjuna was sacrificed.

There is also a karmic element to this story. When the prince asked for his head, Nagarjuna said, “It is my pleasure. Please take it.” The prince had a big knife and tried to cut Nagarjuna’s head off but it did not work. He tried many times.

Nagarjuna did a deep meditation and told him, “You cannot cut my neck with your knife because I have no karma to have it cut that way. If you really must do it, there is a solution. Many eons ago, I was a little girl in a nomadic home and was sent to cut grass for the cattle. While cutting the grass, a blade of grass accidentally cut the neck of a small ant and killed it. This is the only karma left today, so if you really want to cut my neck, get a piece of grass. It will cut me.”

The prince got a blade of grass, did what Nagarjuna said and his head fell off. The story not only tells us how the great Bodhisattva gives everything to all beings, but describes the strong working of karma. Even for Nagarjuna, the karma was there. He was very kind. If it were me, I would have kept it a secret and said, “You cannot kill me.” But he knew the prince was desperately seeking his head. As a great Bodhisattva, he even told the prince how to cut it off. Can you imagine that? This is the difference between Nagarjuna and us.

Maybe I would have said, “Okay, go ahead,” but if he couldn’t cut me with his knife, I would be delighted to keep quiet. But Nagarjuna was genuinely very
kind and as there was still an interesting karma remaining, only a blade of grass could cut off his neck not a knife.

Anything can kill you today: a gun, a knife, even a needle. You can be killed by a light punch or you can hit a door and die or fall off a low chair and die. There are so many strong karmas out there. You are very fragile and it is just because of karma.

Nagarjuna’s attitude is a result of selfless motivation and non-attachment. When you reach a complete state or peak state of non-attachment, the training is accomplished. Forget about belongings or money.

Through the practice of being non-attached, if someone comes to rob you, you can give your head or eyes. Someone comes to you in total ignorance with desire, anger and a gun and says, “I need your money, your jewelry or your credit card.” If I am a great Bodhisattva – not even great – but a small genuine Bodhisattva, then okay, I would say, “Here is my credit card or cash.” But that hardly happens. Of course people, out of fear, might give because of the gun.

Giving with love and kindness and a selfless attitude and motivation is one of the main practices. But if someone steals something we are really attached to in our condition, maybe our jewelry or purse containing hundreds or thousands of dollars, we might curse and say “Shit!” Out of anger, we would definitely say something bad. It should not be that way.

Though we are Bodhisattvas, we are really beginners. Starting from today, we are supposed to refrain from bad language. What can we do? If something is stolen, let us get it over and done with. Better to say, “May this person, whoever he or she is, benefit from my purse. May this person be able to enjoy my money, may they gain whatever they desire.” This has to be practised. So the text says, “To him we must dedicate all our prayers: May he have wealth, our body and merits.”

When these things happen, you must have love and kindness towards them not anger and through that love and kindness, you must dedicate all the virtues to those beings who stole your belongings.
Although we’re not guilty of any offence
and have never harmed anyone in our life,
If someone deluded should threaten to kill us
because he is crazed with a tormented mind
then mercifully wishing for him not to suffer
further misfortune because of his state,
selflessly take on the effects of his actions –
the Sons of the Buddha all practise this way.

This is similar to the previous stanza where someone comes to steal your belongings or asks someone else to rob you or something, and you kindly dedicate the virtues to them. Now it says that someone is coming to harm you. Though you have not done anything to them, in their ignorance and anger, they are doing something bad to you. You have to be compassionate and happily accept their bad accumulations. The great practice of a Bodhisattva is to gladly take the bad karma that they have accumulated. This is what is meant by exchanging: you exchange.

Though bad things are being done to you, you return with virtues, merits and the like with compassion and loving kindness. Obviously, by doing bad things, creating all sorts of bad gossip, they are accumulating a lot of bad karma. But again, you do not want them to have this karma so you take it. This is the meaning of exchanging: exchanging your happiness for their sorrow or the cause of their sorrow.

In this stanza, it says if someone cuts off your head, you should not be angry with them. Compassionately, you should take on their bad karma and negative
accumulations. That is exhibiting the practice and the activity of the great Bodhisattva, but as I mentioned before, though we may try to do something similar, we are not yet prepared to do these things.

If someone insulting should spread ugly rumors about us with cruel words unpleasant to hear, and even if what he has said spreads to others and gains wide acceptance as being the truth; yet out of our wish for the one who’s maligned us to conquer his troubles and gain peace of mind, praise all his virtue and treat him with kindness – the Sons of the Buddha all practise this way.

If people are saying, “This person is a bad, he did this and that, said this or that,” perhaps half is true or and the other half is untrue. Though people are gossiping, they are not really doing anything terrible like cutting off your head. Gossip is just like wind, breath and air. But as ordinary human beings, we get angry and want revenge even to the point of killing that person. We are frequently in this type of situation. Not only is this bad, it is really unfair. Therefore, for us, this practice is a wonderful reminder and support on our spiritual path.

Though it is not in this text, this reminds me of a mosquito. At times it can cause malaria and other diseases but usually, a mosquito does not carry anything. It might make you a little itchy, that is all. But we get angry and kill them. Think about whether this is right or not. I do not think so. To protect ourselves
we can blow them away or burn something so they would not bite us; these are acceptable.

According to the universal law of karma, killing anything, even a mosquito, is wrong. When we practise, we must think this way. We are supposed to be followers of the Bodhisattva path so have to start from that sort of tiny thing.

Of course, having one’s head cut off and not getting angry is beyond us. But these little things are similar and meet our standard. We can practise something that really requires our attention. It is very important that we try to make an effort. If someone says something negative about you, as an acknowledgement, reply by saying something good about them. If you cannot do that, just keep silent.

If in the midst of a large crowd of people someone should single us out for abuse, exposing our faults before all within hearing and pointing out clearly the flaws that we still have; then not getting angry nor being defensive, just listening in silence and heeding his words, bow in respect to this man as our teacher – the Sons of the Buddha all practise this way.

If someone says something bad about you in front of a crowd of hundreds of people, maybe at an important party or event, something to shame or embarrass you, instead of getting angry or saying something bad in reply, realise that this
person is a great master. By making you angry, he has given you the chance of conquering that anger.

Through that kind of situation, there is a possibility for you to develop patience, understanding and to sharpen your wisdom. Rather than regard him as evil or an enemy, identify him as a great master.

If someone we love and have cared for with kindness, as an unselfish mother would cherish her child should shun our devotion with thankless resentment and treat us as if we’re his most hated foe, then seeing these acts as a terrible sickness befallen our child and affecting his mind, treat him with even more love and affection – the Sons of the Buddha all practis this way.

Without practising love and compassion, there is no way to get through the Bodhisattva path. One must pay attention to this, because it is an essential part of the practice.

For example, if you have always protected someone kindly and he or she, without any reason, suddenly becomes nasty and starts acting like an enemy, it must be due to karma: like a mushroom that springs up.

It happens often and many people cannot understand why. They get upset and angry, thinking, “I have been taking care of him for years, giving money, food,
accommodation etc. And suddenly he wants to fight with me or abuse me”. So it can be very upsetting.

However, as Bodhisattva practitioners, we are not supposed to be upset. We are supposed to treat that particular person with a hundred times more love and a hundred times more compassion than usual. The main reason to practise this is to logically understand it and logically follow it.

There are reasons why you should show respect and compassion to people who are nasty to you. As mentioned before, the main one is that they are great masters for you. Why should we treat them with compassion? This is because they are totally under the influence of their ignorance and they do not even know it. Because they feel superior, they beat, abuse or even kill you, thinking they are privileged to act this way.

These things happen because they are influenced by anger, influenced by jealousy, influenced by ignorance, influenced by ego and an egotistical mind and other nonsense. This nonsense totally blinds them so they talk nonsense about you.

At this juncture, you have to remind yourself that you are supposed to be the enlightened one, not yet fully enlightened but reasonably and comparatively enlightened. Having received so many Bodhisattva teachings, we are supposed to be practising the Bodhisattva path. At least we are supposed to know something more than those non-practitioners, and therefore we are bound to treat them compassionately, with the understanding that they are under the influence of ignorance.

Otherwise, if we act like them, what is so special about us? There would be no difference between the person who does not know about Buddhadhharma and the person who knows and who is supposed to be a Bodhisattva or on the path of Bodhisattva. That would be unfortunate for us. So it is only logical that we practise in this way.
If by our own equals or those who are lower in intellect, spiritual level, or wealth, we’re insulted and treated as if we were nothing by the force of their pride and their jealous contempt, then seeing that they are like Gurus to teach us to be always humble and conquer our pride, treat them with honour and place them above us — the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

While practising non-attachment, humility is the very key practice. It is very important. In many of the teachings on Bodhisattva practices, it is emphasised to first lessen pride and then become humble. Humility can only be developed through non-attachment. If you are still attached to your body, your looks, your youth, wealth or whatever, there is no way to be humble. If someone on your level or lower, in terms of knowledge, class, caste or anything, insults you because of ignorance, pride or jealousy, you should not think, “How can he or she say those things? I am higher than him.” That is wrong. Instead, you have to respect them as your guru, as your master and place them on the crown of your head.

In order to receive blessings or knowledge, or any other “goodie”, it is necessary to be humble. If you lack humility and your pride is like a big round balloon, everything would slide off the surface. And because there is no substance, even a little needle can pop it.

Pride is the same in every sense. It is big, sometimes huge, but without any solidity. It is always boasting, “I am this and I am that”, always enlarging its self-image. If someone says something that “pride” does not want to hear, the
response would usually be: “I’m the best” and “Who’s that person to tell me what to do? I am the knowledgeable one, the intelligent one, the richest one and the smartest one. I don’t need anything from anyone” and so on. It literally will stop all the good things that could come to you.

Because of pride, you close the chance of ever receiving, which is bad. Humility makes you open to everything. Whatever you want to know, whatever people say, you listen and accept it. If you are open, you receive everything. In this way, you develop much faster than someone with pride. That is why it is important to practise humility. For example, you might be very good at computers, maybe even better than good, you might be an expert, but you should not be proud, because you might sing poorly. When it is time to sing, you cannot boast that you are a computer whiz. We must know there are times when we are nobody. With that kind of understanding, pride quickly goes down. There are different people with hundreds of different skills in hundreds of different subjects. I am good at some things, but not good at other things. There are times I am nothing, and nobody. I have to accept it. It is something for us to understand and think about again and again.

If we are but men of most meager subsistence
and always receive a great deal of abuse,
if we find ourselves constantly gripped by much sickness
and experience harm, interruptions and pain,
then accepting ourselves all these hardships which others
would surely have suffered from the wrongs they had done,
never lose courage to take pain from others –
the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.
This is the way of the Bodhisattva and we have to say it over and over again that pride is discouraged. However, it should not cause any discouragement in practising humility, love and compassion. If it does, it is not good. Some people have the kind of humility that discourages practising. They lack self-confidence, so they say, “I'm nothing, and I'm nobody.” Without encouragement to practise, they say, “I'm nobody so I can't practice” or “I'm not a good practitioner. The Bodhisattva path is great but I am not great human being.” This is a type of thinking that is full of pessimism. In terms of practice, humility should not be the cause of any kind of discouragement.

If you receive abusive treatment because you are poor or if you are sick, physically or mentally, experience harm, interruption and pain, these things can cause humility. You feel humble because you are poor or sick, but this too is wrong. This type of humility only causes discouragement. A good reason for having humility is to fight pride. Genuine humility can come when pride is put down. It does not come when you have any sort of discouragement.

Though praised and well-known, admired by many who act most respectful by bowing their head? Though having obtained a vast treasure of riches which equals the store of the great God of Wealth? Yet seeing full well that this fruit of samsara though fortunate has no essence at all, cast out what pride we might have in these glories – the Sons of the Buddha all practise this way.
For the Bodhisattva and for the Bodhisattva followers, it is very bad to have pride. Therefore, pride based on possessions, on the body, on one’s name, on wealth etc., have to be destroyed. The 19th stanza is focused on wealth, which has to be controlled.

If your reputation is praised throughout the world and you do not have to worry about wealth, you are respected in the way as we say “as a god of wealth”, it might make you feel that being rich makes one the best. Your pride may be boosted like an inflated balloon.

I am not saying that Bodhisattvas or Bodhisattva followers are not allowed to be wealthy or materially well-off. A Bodhisattva is allowed to have money or any form of wealth, but he or she is not allowed to have attachment, so that pride, due to wealth, is also not permitted.

If there is no attachment, there is no pride. The Bodhisattva can be the richest person in the world because he is allowed to have everything.

When people do not understand, they often ask, “How can this be possible?” It comes about by practising non-attachment; especially the non-attachment connected with the genuine understanding of non-existence of things. For most people and for non-practitioners of the spiritual path, saying that the worldly phenomena do not have any real essence, substance or meaning doesn’t make sense.

When you are fortunate to have wealth, it means that your positive karma has ripened accordingly. Still, it is senseless to have attachment to it. How long it will last depends on how well you handle it. If you have understood non-attachment or have reached a level of non-attachment, you may not even have attachment towards your worldly fortune.

In the Bodhisattva practice, even if you are wealthy, there should not be any pride. It is an indication that external things are unimportant for a Bodhisattva practitioner. External wealth is allowed, external enemies accepted, as long as you have patience rather than anger. And for external friends, as long as you have no attachment and if inner control is there, everything is accepted.
If anger that dwells in our hearts lies neglected and turning instead to our external foes, we try to destroy them and even kill thousands, then thousands of others will plague us still more. So seeing this action is not the solution, let’s muster the forces of mercy and love; turn inward and tame the wild flow of our mind-stream – the Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

Even if you tried to destroy external enemies a hundred times or a thousand times, you would not be able to eliminate all of them. You have to destroy the essence of your enemies, which is the anger within yourself.

We need to understand that anger is something created by yourself. We often think that anger is caused by something outside ourselves, such as other people or frustrating events.

If your anger is under control, it is likely that there will be no outer enemy. Anger must be controlled by compassion and loving kindness. Acting like a battalion, it should control your anger.

In this way, outer enemies should not be a problem. Even if they are there, right in front of you, they would not be able to hurt or harm you, at least they would not be able to hurt you mentally. This is the important way to control ours anger.
Indulging in objects our senses run after
and drinking salt water is one and the same:
the more we partake for our own satisfaction,
the more our desire and thirst for them grow.
Thus when we conceive a compulsive attraction towards
whatever object our senses desire,
abandon it quickly without hesitation –
the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

Though the effect or fruit of desire differs from anger, it functions in the same way and needs to be controlled. But how? For people like us it is best to avoid the thing that is desirable, otherwise it’s impossible to control it.

In America, there is a candy similar to popcorn, which illustrates this point. If you start eating it, you want to eat more and more. At least that is true for me. Desire functions in the same way.

At our level, we have to reject it a little bit at a time. Drinking salty water is the same like our endless desire, the more we drink, the thirstier we become. I would never drink salty water, because I know it would make me extremely thirsty. Similarly, it is advisable, in order not to lose control, to abandon desirable things.

Hatred is also very bad. It brings a lot of pain to you and to others. Though it lacks the appearance of a devil, its danger is obvious. Karmically, it causes the worst fruit, because anger is the cause of the “hell realm”, the worst of the three lower realms.
Desire is equally bad. Though not obvious, it is tricky, so people do not understand it. Most believers or non-believers can accept that anger is bad. But to accept that desire is bad is difficult. It’s like a wet cloth. Dragging it on the street does not look wrong, but because it is wet, it collects dust and dirt, and at the end, the cloth gets filthy.

Desire is something similar. Imperceptibly, it can cause thousands of different problems connected directly or indirectly with desire. Just check if it causes anger. It does and it also causes jealousy, ignorance and a whole lot of different negative accumulations.

For example, eating meat causes many animals to be slaughtered. And we eat meat out of our desire for delicious food, not because we are hungry and we need food. We have many choices of delicious vegetarian food and vegetables, so eating meat is only an excuse to satisfy our desire.

Out of jealousy, anger, misunderstanding and etc., people are killed. Not only that, but desire causes samsara. It is the main thing that causes rebirth. To get off this circling wheel of existence, we must know that desire is not only the cause of very big problems, but many big problems.

It is the reason the text says, precisely and urgently, “Abandon it quickly without hesitation.” “Quickly” sounds like an emergency. This makes sense because we always hesitate to abandon objects of desire, not understanding that desire is really bad for us.

We feel there is nothing wrong with desiring for different things, so why give up desire? For example, we like water, so why should we abandon drinking water? This is only a small example. There are a lot of other things that we would not want to give up.

“Why should I abandon this? Or that? Or him? Or her? Why should I abandon money? My job?” There are many things around us that we hesitate to abandon. This is why it says in this particular stanza, “Abandon it (desire) quickly without hesitation” because in the long run, it is very harmful.
Again, whether desire is really harmful for us or not, depends on our level of spiritual attainment. If it is not harmful, it means that your level of spiritual practice is very high, so these mundane desirable things are beneath you. By not affecting you, desirable things are allowed. In this case, they do not need to be abandoned. You are allowed external things like being the richest person in the world. There’s nothing wrong with that, if you are on a high level on the spiritual path; otherwise it can be a bit difficult.

(22)

Whatever appears to be truly existent is merely what mind in delusion creates; this mind of ours is also from the beginning devoid of any existence inherently real. Then realising Truth is beyond conceptions we have of the known and the knower as well, dispel the belief in external existence – the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

Above all, the great practice of the Bodhisattva is to have wisdom. This is very important. Every practice especially that of non-attachment encompasses wisdom. And with it, through non-attachment, almost everything can be accomplished. If compassion and loving-kindness are guiding you, there will be no obstacle.

To have wisdom, one must understand the 22nd stanza as above, “Whatever appears to be truly existent, is merely what mind in delusion creates; this mind of ours is also from the beginning devoid of any existence inherently real.”
Whatever appears to be truly existent is just an appearance. But the essence or the reality of the thing is something else. Reality is not the way things appear to be. Therefore, one need not be attached to things.

“We” means our mind. I always say “we” because it is the easiest way to express our mind; otherwise we can say “our mind”. So we or our mind, label different kinds of things; for example beautiful flowers. We label this flower as beautiful; I label things, my mind labels. But, in this respect, it is not necessarily true.

Some might say, “This flower isn’t beautiful; it’s very ordinary.” Others, “It’s terrible, they’re horrible flowers.” That is definitely possible.

In my case, I label the flowers as, “They’re very beautiful.” Then I become attached to the idea of the flowers being beautiful. I create my own world by saying this or that is beautiful, this is ugly, I like this, I do not like that; this is good or that is bad; tall or short; thin or fat; whatever.

I am attached to this world, I live with it. That is the mind in delusion. Delusion in the sense it is not there.

For example, beauty is not in that flower, because someone else has the delusion that it is very ugly. He or she is 100% convinced this flower should be thrown away. But I disagree. It has to stay on my table because I think it is very nice. Now we argue over this.

Actually, why should we be arguing? In reality, the flower does not really exist as beautiful or ugly. It does not exist either way. If it exists as only beautiful, everyone should agree that the flower should be placed on the table as a decoration. There would be no argument.

Both would agree that, “This flower is beautiful.” Millions and countless of beings would also say, “This is beautiful,” and there wouldn’t be any disagreement.

Mind is the projector, and these things are the projection of your mind. Instead of looking at external things, we should turn inside and look at our own mind. We should investigate whether the things labelled by the mind have any sort of substance, and whether the mind also has any ultimate substance.
In other words, does my mind exist? That is the question. These things are non-existent, but my mind may exist. Is this true or not? This is what we have to check.

Mind has no inherent existence: mind has no shape, no colour, mind has nothing, and mind is even more of a delusion than the things we see in front of us.

Therefore, the main practice of the Bodhisattva is to dispel the belief in inherent existence. Through this kind of understanding, you would have the wisdom to distinguish the actual reality of things: those desirable and those you do not like.

Whenever we meet with a beautiful object, or something attractive which pleases our mind, do not be deceived in thinking it differs in fact from a summertime rainbow: though both of them have such a lovely appearance, nothing substantial lies behind their facade. Abandon the drives of compulsive attraction – the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

If you dispel the belief in inherent existence, whenever you see a beautiful object, you will realise that it appears colourful and attractive but like a rainbow, it has no real essence.
Your wisdom will know this spontaneously. There will be no attachment, desire or anything because all beautiful things lack an inherent existence. Abandoning attachment is very important.

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The various ills in our life that we suffer resemble the death of our son in a dream; to hold as truth what is merely illusion is needless exhaustion of body and mind. For this very reason, when faced with unpleasant conditions that normally cause us much grief, approach them as if they were only illusion – the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

We were talking about attractive things. Now we will talk about things that cause you lots of problems and suffering, and also suffering itself which is not very attractive. If you have great wisdom, such as the wisdom of Mahamudra* or the wisdom of Dzogchen* or the Great Perfection, these can be understood. You will be able to distinguish or know the reality of suffering.

Therefore, even if you suffer, the suffering will be like the death of your son in a dream. It appears, but it has no existence, so when you wake up, the dream ends.

We are actually now dreaming. We call it the “big dream”. The sleeping dream is the “small dream”. Because of the way we create things, what is happening in
this world is the “big dream”. “Big” means a bit more solid but it is still a dream and we definitely must wake up from it. After awakening, we will realise it was a dream.

For example, by this time tomorrow, this hall will be empty. You and I will be gone. There will be neither meeting nor gathering. Again, it is a tiny awakening, but we will wake up. The dream of being here will only be a memory. And if we dreamt of the death of our son last night, the memory may still be there but it does not exist. These two are similar so whenever we meet conditions that normally cause problems, we must approach them as if they were only a dream. That is the practice of the Bodhisattva.

In that way, we make our life gentle and happier; otherwise there seems to be no end of suffering. If we do not have any idea of non-inherent existence, desire and excitement can cause us an endless amount of pain and trouble.

Like a dream, we have seen and we know everything to be an illusion. The death of your son or as it says in some of our texts, “A young girl may have the dream of having a son.” It means great excitement of having a son. I have not gone through this experience, but young girls are supposed to be very anxious and excited about having a baby. It is the opposite, according to this teaching, of dreaming about your son’s death, which is a negative dream. When we talk about a positive dream, we say “a young girl dreaming of having a son”. Anyway, both of them are just dreams. The same thing happens in this world. Knowing this, life is better.

In this stanza, everything has to be treated as a dream. In terms of suffering, things are not that important because it is a dream. We cannot say “it is a dream” unless we genuinely realise that it really is a dream.

For example, while sleeping, we have a lot of different dreams and nightmares, and often suffer a lot. Sometimes we cry so much the pillow gets wet. You suffer while you dream, but it does not really exist. Everything has to be seen like that.
The beings who strive to be fully enlightened,
would give up their body pursuing this aim;
with this peerless example, what need is the mention
of gifts we should make of the objects we own.
Without any hope of return for our kindness,
not considering even the merit to be gained,
engage in the practice of generous giving –
the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

The above stanzas stresses on striving to be fully enlightened. The wish for
enlightenment should always be the target, so small things should be given away,
since everything is a dream. As long as it helps someone else, it does not matter if
it belongs to me or not. There is no reason to keep it or to be miserly.

Since our main purpose is enlightenment, the practice of generosity is
very important. As mentioned before, the main obstacle to enlightenment is
attachment. It chains you down so we need to be non-attached. Generosity is the
best way to put non-attachment into action.

At a certain level, you are bound to give your body, eyes etc. but if that level
has not been reached, practice according to your own standard.

You can give away small things or small amounts such as ten cents or even
five cents. When you give this, make sure that you are not expecting something
in return. The main practice of generosity, the first perfection, is giving without expectation.
Of course, many people give a lot of money away. There are many charities, foundations and the like. But the reason it is not considered a genuine practice of generosity is because there is always an expectation. We should practise non-expectation even if we only give away five cents. This is very important for the practice of non-attachment. For people like us, it is best to practise the first and second perfections. The First Perfection – generosity – is the most practical, because all of us can do it. That is why it is so important and why it is first.

If lacking strict moral control of our conduct we haven’t been able to reach our own goals, how can we fulfill all the wishes of others? Undisciplined effort is surely absurd! We first must renounce our attachment to pleasure which binds us so tightly to samsara’s wheel then protect all our vows of sworn moral behaviour – the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

Ethics, the Second Perfection, is also important. We are wild and without ethics, we would not have any control. We must have some sort of morality, a moral base or foundation to depend on. Controlling our moral conduct must be practised diligently. It is the main lane of the spiritual path. Without lanes on a highway, it would be quite chaotic to know who goes first, where to drive, what are the speed limits etc.

For the vehicles on the highway to go smoothly, fast, slow and very slow lanes are essential. In the same way, our moral conduct clarifies where we are supposed
to go, not only on the spiritual path but also on the material and mundane level. This support avoids chaos. Leading others requires it. Without ethical conduct, you will not be able to guide people to the right place or right circumstance. Since we always need the motivation to help all beings, we ourselves must have moral conduct. The correct lane is morality.

You may sometimes feel that ethics, the Vinaya*, all these things you can and cannot do are a kind of punishment. You want to drink something; it is not allowed. You want to eat something; it is also not allowed. It seems like a nuisance. I sometimes feel that way too, but if we do not have the barrier of discipline, there is no end to desire. Desire does not end by itself. If you do everything, you gain nothing. But if you have discipline, somehow it gives you tremendous joy and satisfaction. This is very funny and interesting. To start with it is a nuisance but as you get on with it, it would become rewarding.

For all Bodhisattvas with minds set on merit who wish to amass a great store of good deeds, Encounters with those causing harm and destruction which tests their commitment are mines of great wealth.

For this reason, abandon resentment and anger directed towards those who do harm; perfect meditation on patient endurance – the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

The Third Perfection – patience – is also an important practice for Bodhisattvas and followers of the Bodhisattva way. Constantly getting angry and irritated is a difficult way to live. In the beginning, practising patience is not easy, but there are
many ways to start. For instance, you may start from development wisdom through the correct view of Mahamudra or the Great Perfection. It is the best way to begin, but it needs a deep level of understanding, which usually comes later in the Sixth Paramita, whereas patience is the Third Paramita. Unless we can make a big jump, it is almost impossible to get to the Sixth Paramita without practising the Third though if you can, it is the preferred way. If you get angry and look at the anger, it turns into Mirror-like Wisdom.

By seeing wisdom, anger is no longer there. The reason for being angry is gone. It is the greatest method but if you cannot do that, think correctly so that if someone provokes you, remembers “By giving me a chance to show patience, he is a great master for me.” You have to be strong – strong in the sense of your determination to develop the practice of patience.

The teachers and masters, who give us these teachings, give some instruction but they are not the ones provoking your emotions and make you angry. They are like me, telling you how important patience is and so on so forth. I can spend days and nights, weeks and months talking about this but it may be of no use. We are here all smiling, we all are having a good time. So, the actual practice is not there; it is missing. But if someone comes and provokes you and make you angry, or does something nasty to you, that person becomes the real master, I would call him or her the greatest master.

We do not realise that so we take him or her as an enemy and do nasty things to this person. After getting these teachings, this should not be done any more. We should be doing actual practice. This person is giving you a real chance to get into the practice but you are missing it. You are not grabbing the chance: you are just losing control. That is characteristic of samsara.

One of the great masters early in this century in Tibet had a lot of disciples and a new disciple came and asked to be accepted. The master asked, “Yes, of course but do you have any qualification?” And the disciple said, “No, I don’t have any.” The master asked him many questions. “Do you know this? Have you studied that?” The answer was always no. He was very humble, not very well educated but very devoted. He kept answering, “No, no, no, I don’t have anything. I just want to be your disciple.” So the master said, “Then you do
not have any qualification.” The new disciple felt embarrassed, so he had to say something, “I have almost no anger. I have never gotten angry in my life,” which was true. It was well known that he was kind and gentle and never got angry. In his village, he had the reputation of someone who had no anger. He said to the guru. “I don’t know if this is a good qualification or not, but I have a reputation of being a person without anger. That’s all I have.”

“Oh,” said the guru, “that’s the greatest qualification you can have. Of course I will accept you as my disciple. Please join me tomorrow to hear my teachings and become a member of my Sangha.”

The guru gave one day of teaching a week. For the rest of the time, hundreds of his students practised meditation in caves. They also dug holes in the ground, slept and meditated in them. I think one whole mountain was filled with his disciples and himself. Once a week they all came together and he would join the group.

At the next gathering, the guru said, “Until today, we have had such a nice time here without any problem, but from now on we have to be very careful. There is a thief in our group. Though none of us have anything to steal, we may still have a little bit to eat and a few things to wear. We don’t want them stolen so we must be watchful because one of us is a thief and that’s him over there.” The guru pointed to the person who said he had no anger.

“I was told he is a great thief. We must all be attentive. That’s the bad news I have for you.” The guru said that in front of thousands of disciples while pointing to him. The new disciple was very embarrassed and turned red, started sweating and of course, he could not say anything. This went on for several months. The master kept asking the other students, “Did you lose anything? Oh, it’s good that you haven’t because he’s really a great thief. I worry day and night about all of you.”

Finally, after a very long time, the disciple became very angry. He could no longer control himself. “Who said I’m a thief?” he screamed in front of everyone. The guru looked at him and said, “Didn’t you say that you never got angry? I thought you didn’t have any anger but you really do, don’t you?” The disciple
replied, “Oh yes, if you say such nasty things, of course I will be angry.” The guru said, “Naturally no one would get angry if such things were never said but that’s not the case is it?”

This is a very good argument because the disciple reasoned that if nasty things were said about him, he would get angry. But the master argued that if nasty things were not said, no one had reason to have anger. In a peaceful environment, who or what would we get angry at? So the guru gave a great teaching and the student became a great disciple through this teaching. This was a very direct type of teaching straight from the master himself. He did not want anyone else to teach this disciple. In that way, the disciple realised that anger was there and it was very much an awakening.

Patience is a much hidden practice, I would say, in the sense that we do not really know how strongly we practise it. Sometimes we feel we are okay but actually we are not. So whenever a crucial time comes, we should use that moment as an opportunity to practise. It is important that you do not lose that chance.

If Sravakas as well as Pratyekabuddhas, who work towards Nirvana for merely themselves, exert so much effort fulfilling their purpose that were they in flames they’d not stray from their goal, then how much more energy must be expended by those of us working for everyone’s sake; lightenment calls for the most perseverance – the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.
The above stanza talks about diligence, the Fourth Paramita or Perfection, which is very important for all of the other Paramitas: generosity, ethics, patience, meditation and wisdom. Sravakas* and Pratyeka* Buddhas have the motivation of self-realisation or self-liberation. They seldom have the motivation to liberate all sentient beings so their goal is rather selfish. But they work tremendously hard to liberate themselves and to realise something within themselves. We, as Bodhisattvas working for the purpose of liberating all sentient beings, should always be diligent on the Bodhisattva path. Even if you have a sharp intelligence, if you lack diligence it will never help you. Intelligence is like fire on dry grass. It catches fire easily but it does not last long so it cannot give you anything. But if you have diligence, it will give you a solid understanding even if you lack intelligence.

The great Indian master Asanga* (also known as Thogme in Tibetan), was practising on Maitreya*. It is a long story but to make it short, after practising for three years, he had not gained anything. As he came down from his retreat, he saw a householder rubbing a big iron rod with a piece of cotton. Seeing how hard he was working, Asanga asked him, “What are you doing?” He answered, “I want to make a needle out of this giant iron rod to sew my clothes.” Asanga thought, “Oh, I’ve been practising on Maitreya for three years and felt it was something special. But now I realise it was nothing compared to what he’s doing, just for a needle!” So Asanga went back to his cave for three more years but again failed to achieve anything. He concluded, “I’ve done six years of practice with no results. I don’t think I have the luck or good fortune to gain any realisation.”

Leaving his retreat, Asanga saw a man brushing the mountain with a feather and asked him why? He replied, “My house is down below and because of this mountain, I get very little sunshine. I’m trying to make the mountain smaller so my house would get more sun.” Asanga thought, “If he’s prepared to do that for the sake of a little extra sunshine, why shouldn’t I go back to my retreat and practice some more? Compared to that, six years is nothing.”

Anyway, many things happened to Asanga. Every three years, he saw something which confirmed the importance of diligence. At the end of twelve years, he left his retreat again and on the road saw a dog suffering a lot. The lower part of its body was rotten, filled with maggots, but the upper part was still
functioning, barking and such. Seeing the mangy old dog, he felt very deep compassion— a totally different subject from diligence. Though Asanga really could not do anything, he thought he should get rid of the maggots and the dirt. But if he touched the maggots with his hands, they would die. And if he did not do it, the dog would continue to suffer. So he decided to clean the dog with his tongue, which was softer than his hands and would not kill the maggots. But the dog was so dirty, he could not bear to look at it so he closed his eyes as he licked the dirt and maggots off.

As Asanga was doing this, his tongue touched the ground and suddenly, opening his eyes, the dog had disappeared. “Where’s that dog?” he asked. It was lying here and I was trying to clean it but now it’s gone.” Then he looked up and sitting on a rock in front of him was Maitreya. He was very excited and hugged Maitreya. “Where were you?” he cried, “I practised your way for twelve years and you never showed yourself.” Actually, he was complaining. Maitreya answered, “I was there many times but you were not diligent enough. Each time you came out of the cave, I was there to help you.”

So the householder making the needle and the others were emanations of Maitreya but Asanga did not realise that. These ordinary people that Asanga met were indirect teachings from Maitreya. During twelve years of practice, Maitreya had made him more diligent.

Diligence, just as compassion, is always important. Then Maitreya said, “The dog was also me. You didn’t have enough compassion. I appeared as a dirty, suffering dog so that your compassion would ripen. That is the reason you can see me now; otherwise, because of your ignorance, it would be impossible. If you don’t believe me, carry me on your shoulder and go into the town. Show me to people and see if anyone can see me.”

Asanga did as he was told. He stood on a big street and asked everyone, “Look, look. Do you see anything on my shoulder?” No one could see anything! He finally met an old lady who was less ignorant. She saw a very dirty diseased dog and said, “Why don’t you throw it away? Why are you carrying it?” She could see the dog, but not Maitreya. Asanga then realised that people cannot
see because of ignorance and defilements. In order to eliminate obstacles and obscurations, he understood the importance of diligence and compassion. No one had enough compassion to see Maitreya. Then he flew with Maitreya to his pure land where he received many teachings. When he later returned to earth, he wrote many books on what Maitreya taught him. We are still studying those books today.

We practise but very little, and then we get tired. Sometimes we practise for a few years and say, “Okay, I’ve practised for three years, that’s enough. I spent so much time in retreat and that’s it.” It shows that we do not have enough diligence, which is not good. Our diligence must be strong.

Higher insight that penetrates right to the essence revealing the true way in which things exist, can only root out our emotional problems if mental quiescence is laid as its base. Thus surpassing the four formless states of absorption, we must work to achieve single-minded control and the full concentration of deep meditation – the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

This stanza affirms the importance of developing spiritual insight* through calm-abiding meditation. That special insight can only be achieved with a peaceful mind. Here, insight is wisdom. And that wisdom is really the sharp knife that
destroys or cuts through the ego, defilements – everything. Without that special insight, it is difficult to cut through the ego and without wisdom, impossible. Special insight and ego are two things that must fight each other. Insight is the special antidote for the ego. Therefore, it is highly recommended that we concentrate fully and practise deep meditation.

The states of mind states concerning the four formless meditations are also forms of peace and forms of meditation. But they are types of samsaric peace, which means they are still very much involved with attachment. So we need to have something peaceful beyond those states of mind. If you cannot cut through the ego, there is no way to eliminate defilements because the source or the cause is still there. If seeds have already been planted and you cut down a tree or cut grass, in time, everything will grow again. If you try to minimise your defilements through different kinds of meditation, analysis and concentration, they may be minimised but you will never remove them completely because the ego is still there. One needs to cut through the ego; it needs to be taken out and thrown away. That is why wisdom and insight are so important. Without that special insight, ego cannot be destroyed. For that reason one-pointed concentrated meditation is indispensable.

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Perfection of charity, patience and morals, absorption and effort alone won’t suffice; without the Perfection of Wisdom these five are unable to bring us to full Buddha-hood. With the methods of pure Bodhicitta to develop the wisdom to see that the actor, the act and the acted upon lack inherent existence – the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.
Because the root of samsara simply cannot be eliminated, you can never be enlightened without the help of special insight and wisdom. So how can we be enlightened?

If wisdom is lacking, it is impossible. Even though you practise and study the five perfections — generosity, ethics, patience, diligence and concentration, they do not really bring enlightenment. Full enlightenment depends on wisdom.

So practically speaking, in order to develop special insight, as already mentioned, it should be based on calm-abiding meditation. One cannot practise special insight or wisdom without it. Therefore, the one-pointed mind, the mind of deep concentration is essential.

After developing a foundation of calm-abiding meditation, you can build the special insight free of concepts; of subject, object and action. For example, if I give something, I am the person who is giving and he or she is the person who is receiving and there is an action of giving between us. We should be without any concept of these so-called “three wheels” (khorsum). We should be free of it. That is how we develop wisdom.

Wisdom itself is totally free from these fabrications. When one starts to meditate on wisdom, try not to get involved in these “three wheels” — I, other and the action.

Overall, the most important thing is to check and to investigate our own faults every minute of our lives. In terms of practising the Bodhisattva path, this is the greatest practice and requires the greatest effort. The first step is to begin to realise what we are doing. This transformation in our awareness will help to replace ignorance with wisdom in our actions.

Meditation gives us insight and it gives us wisdom, which is the antidote to ego. The insight that comes through meditation, with practice, can be totally free from the usual fabrications with which we view ourselves and our lives. We can begin to let go of all the conditions we usually place on our words or actions, realising that action is the thing, not the result.
Without making efforts to analyse clearly delusions we have and mistake we commit, then even though outwardly practicing Dharma, we still may perform many non-Dharmic deeds. For this very reason, let’s try to examine mistakes and delusions, the faults we possess, then afterwards try to remove them completely – the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

Though calm-abiding meditation, special insight and wisdom are important, practically speaking, it is much more helpful for us to check ourselves, investigate our faults and try to minimise them by developing good qualities and positive motivations. It will certainly be more effective because the delusions we have and the wildness of samsara, continuing from beginningless time till today, are now so familiar, we have grown accustomed to them. Their influence is very strong. We commit mistakes almost every minute of our life. It only seems normal because we are used to it.

Even if we are outwardly practising Dharma, we may still commit a lot of bad deeds and accumulate a lot of negative karma. Not only that, one can also accumulate negative deeds through Dharma. Therefore, even while doing Dharmic activities, one has to constantly examine oneself, checking whether we are doing genuine Dharma or not. You know Dharma can be turned into many different dramas too! It is very tricky. So after examining ourselves, we must try to abandon all negative deeds of body, speech and mind.
While speaking of others, the force of delusion may cause us to dwell on the flaws they possess; should those we find fault with be Bodhisattvas, our own reputation will suffer instead. So avoid the mistake of disparaging others who’ve entered upon Mahayana’s great path; only the faults that we have should we mention the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.

Since learning not to criticise others is a great part of practising the Bodhisattva path, let us look at it. We are definitely fond of criticising others. Whenever we talk about something, within four or five, even three, minutes we would start to criticise someone else. We cannot help it. We cannot stop it. That is a samsaric characteristic and a very bad accumulation. Even while criticising a common being, how do we know who he or she really is? Maybe this person is a hidden Bodhisattva or yogi, a hidden practitioner or even a hidden Buddha, fully enlightened. So we, as Mahayana practitioners, should not be criticising anyone. It is very bad and destroys our own understanding and the state of our own realisation. The great deed of the Bodhisattva is to abandon doing it.

I enjoy speaking of others myself; sometimes speaking badly about them. That is not a good deed. I always remind myself that what others do is none of my business. It is their business, so let them do it as they wish. There is no reason to talk about it. We are not employed to talk or gossip. Even without reason, we have this strong and bad tendency.
There is no point talking about something good either. The best way is not to talk about anything. In the Sutra, Buddha Shakyamuni said that if you happen to be criticising a Bodhisattva, this kind of bad accumulation is equivalent to killing all the beings in the world. It would result in the same sort of bad karma. We would not know where the Bodhisattvas are, so we had better shut up!

 Domestic disputes with our friends and relations, to gain their respect or the things we feel due will leave us unable to listen to Dharma, unable to study or meditate well. Since danger is found in the homes of our patrons, as well as in those of our family and friends, abandon attachment we have to these households – the Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

As already mentioned, this stanza again tells us not to be attached. It especially speaks of domestic problems. If you are strongly attached to your reputation or position and someone is disrespectful, it upsets you. These sorts of ups and downs and dirty games are created solely by your attachment to friends or sponsors, those who truly respect you and give you financial support. You should not be attached to people who are good to you. This does not mean that you should be bad to them, but as a Bodhisattva, attachment is not recommended. There is no reason to have an extraordinary attachment to those who respect you or an extraordinary detachment or hatred to those who do not. That is not the Bodhisattva way.
You will never be able to have a peaceful mind if you have that kind of strong emotion or attachment. It would be quite impossible to have any peace. Instead, you would be full of jealousy, have a wandering mind and the like. If I had that problem, I would be upset if someone has a better reputation than me. I would be anxious and worried, unable to meditate. I would be wondering what this person is doing, how many followers he or she is getting, something like that. And also how much money this person is making. “I’m making so little money, yet he’s making so much, how come? It is not fair.” All sorts of things unsettling for my mind would be running in my head. How would I be able to practise? If I am busy thinking about that person getting more than me, I would not have time. Not only that, I would be quarreling, fighting and creating lots of social problems. So it is not good for you or for others and not good for the society. It is not good for anyone.

Of course, we are not yet great Bodhisattvas. We are only followers of the great Bodhisattvas which mean we are small Bodhisattvas. Nevertheless, we must act as they do. The activity of Bodhisattvas is to practise for all sentient beings in a peaceful manner every minute, every day and every moment of their life.

The words of abuse that we utter in anger cause others much pain by disturbing their mind; and we who are striving to be Bodhisattvas will find that our practice will surely decline so seeing the faults that arise from harsh language, which those who must hear find unpleasant and rude, abandon abuse directed towards others – the Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.
We should not criticise others or be jealous and angry at them. Everything that we should refrain from doing is connected with our attachment, which must be minimised.

The life of a Bodhisattva must be peaceful; therefore they are not supposed to speak harshly. Even though this is not really bad, speaking unkindly can be hurtful. In order to make others happy, we should speak gently and quietly. With a pure and right motivation, you are bound to bring happiness. The Bodhisattva way should not cause suffering or make anyone suffer for any reason; because Bodhisattva activity is peaceful, kind words are important.

Defiled types of actions will soon become habits as we grow accustomed to base states of mind; strenuous effort will then be required for the force of opponents to counter these stains. So armed with weapons alertness and memory, attack such defilements as lust at first sight; remove these obstructions that hinder our progress the sons of the Buddha all practise this way.

To make others peaceful, you must keep your own appearance peaceful. This means that you must first be aware of yourself. It is important for any helpful activity. If awareness is lacking, you might be able to make an effort once or twice, but one day you would be lost and forget what you are supposed to be doing.
Furthermore, awareness is essential not only for continuing your efforts to reduce your defilements, but also to limit the functioning of your defilements. Otherwise, the ego is very wild. We are so used to our defilements; they come out spontaneously like a flood that wipes out everything. This is exactly what is happening in our life. Therefore, if awareness is there, it is like a dam that stops the flood.

Awareness is important, not only for meditation and practising, but for everything. The above stanza emphasises this strongly because every aspect of your practice needs it. Defilements will definitely come; they are like those game machines where things pop-up and you quickly have to knock them down.

Whenever I play this game, I feel they are my defilements. I do not have enough arms to hit them all. This is typical of what is happening with our emotions. But if you have awareness, you can try to strike back. If not, it is an impossible mess. You are carried away by them and you really lose all control. What do you call this machine? Mogura Tataki?

In short then, whatever we do in whatever condition or circumstance we may confront, should be done with the force of complete self-awareness which comprehends fully the state of our mind. Then always possessing alertness and memory, which keeps us in focus and ready to serve, we must work for the welfare of all sentient being – the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.
As a kind of summary, this stanza says, “whatever we do in whatever condition or circumstance we may confront, should be done with the force of complete self-awareness,” which is what I have been talking about. Whether drinking tea, talking, playing games, or doing all sorts of things, one should always have this type of awareness.

As I mentioned before, a Bodhisattva does not have to be rigid or conservative. Entertainment is allowed, smiling and laughing are allowed as long as it does not harm anyone and as long as one remains aware. If everything is done with awareness, we will be ready to serve all beings and to practise.

Because the road is there and the path is there, the practice will flourish. We must work very hard for this purpose. The focus of Bodhisattva’s activities is to help other sentient beings and not be selfish. So dedicate the virtues of whatever you do, whatever positive thoughts you have to all sentient beings without condition.

All merits we gain from the efforts we’re making to put into practice these virtuous ways, which we do for the sake of removing the suffering endured by the limitless mothers we’ve had, we must dedicate purely for them to be Buddhas, with wisdom which sees that both they and ourselves as well as this merit all lack true existence – the Sons of the Buddhas all practise this way.
By carefully following all the teachings
my most holy Gurus have imparted to me
concerning the meaning of sutra and tantra
explained by the Buddhas and masters of old
I have written this work on the practices numbering
thirty seven of all Buddhas’ sons
to benefit those who desire to follow
the path that all sons of the Buddhas must treat.

Because of my poor intellectual powers
and the meager amount of training I have had,
I have not been able to write polished verse
in metre and style which would please those with skill;
but as I have relied on the words of Sutras
and all that my most holy Gurus have taught,
I am certain that this is without any errors;
this truly is what Buddhas’ Sons have all done.
However, because the extend and the depth of the great waves of conduct of all Buddhas’ sons are hard to be fathomed by someone of limited powers of intellect as is myself there are bound to be faults, contradictions in meaning, disjointed connections and many such flaws; so most holy Gurus, I beg your indulgence, be patient with the all the shortcomings I have.

With pure Bodhichitta of ultimate voidness yet relative nature of mercy and love, devoid of extremes of this worldly existence and passive absorption in blissful release, may all sentient beings receiving the merit passed by the effort I have made in this work soon reach the attainment, o Great Lokeshvara All-Seeing Protector with love for us all.
Only a few people, lucky enough to receive the teachings of the Bodhisattvas, have the slightest interest in understanding and practising them. Therefore, we have a responsibility to help those ignorant beings who lack the desire to know anything about enlightenment.

No matter what circumstances or conditions there are, we must share the virtues of what we have done. We have to unconditionally dedicate the merits of our actions for the liberation of all sentient beings, regardless if they feel they do not need it, or do not want it, or they are not interested in it. That is their choice. But it is your responsibility to share with them without letting them know.

You do not have to say “I’m dedicating something for you, so sit down and look at me!” That would be foolish, but a dedication must be done as part of your practice, your compassion and loving-kindness and care for others.

Thogme Zangpo, also known as Gyalse Ngulchu Thogme, a great Bodhisattva, wrote these thirty-seven aspects of the Bodhisattva practice for people who want to follow the Bodhisattva path. Hopefully, this means us. He wrote this according to the sutras and the tantras, following the doctrines of all the holy masters: He confesses to all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas regarding any mistakes in his text or in these teachings. But he thinks, in terms of the Bodhisattva path, there are hardly any mistake and he urges us to practise accordingly.

In order to use our human energy correctly in order to achieve enlightenment within this life, we all have to dedicate ourselves to the genuine practice of the Bodhisattva path, which is a beautiful path. It is not dirty or difficult. It is nothing but a clean and neat practice. There are many practices but most of them we cannot do. Some are too high, some too complicated, some too fanatical. We do not want those. We want to practise the Mahayana Bodhisattva practice.

This is an abridged commentary. I sincerely hope this teaching will help everyone – including myself – to generate our compassion and loving kindness, and sincerity towards all sentient beings and make our life fruitful.
GLOSSARY

ASANGA:
(Tib. Thogme) A fourth century Indian monk who founded the Yogacara school of Mahayana Buddhism. Author of a number of important philosophical works. He is said to have received his teachings directly from the future Buddha, Maitreya.

BODHICITTA:
The Mind of Enlightenment. This is the key word in the Mahayana. On the relative level, it is the wish to attain Buddha-hood for the sake of all beings, as well as the practice necessary to do this. On the absolute level, it is the direct insight into the ultimate nature of self and phenomena.

BODHICARYAVATARA:
“A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life”, written by Shantideva, an eighth century Buddhist master at the monastic university of Nalanda in northern India.

BODHISATTVA VOW:
Aspiration to attain enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings and bring them to Buddhahood.

BHUMI:
The ten levels or stages of a noble Bodhisattva’s development into a fully enlightened Buddha. On each stage more subtle defilements are purified and a further degree of enlightened qualities are manifested.

CALM ABIDING:
(Skt. Shamatha) A state of concentration in which the mind can abide one-pointedly and effortlessly on the object of meditation.

DZOGCHEN:
(Skt. Mahasandhi, Atiyoga) The Great Perfection, the highest view according to the Nyingmapa tradition.
GESHE: 1) A spiritual teacher according to the Mahayana teachings. 2) A learned teacher according to the Kadam and Gelug traditions.

MAHAMUDRA: Literally “The Great Seal”, the most direct practice for realizing one’s buddha nature. A system of teachings which is the basic view of Vajrayana practice according to the Sarma schools.

MAITREYA: The “Loving One”. The Bodhisattva regent of Buddha Shakyamuni, presently residing in the Tushita heaven until becoming the fifth Buddha of this kalpa.

PAAAMITA: Literally means “reaching the other shore”. Six Transcendent Perfections: 1) dana or generosity 2) shila or morality 3) kshanti or patience 4) virya or or diligence 5) dhyana or meditation 6) prajna or wisdom.

PRATYEKABUDDHA: “Solitarily Enlightened One.” One who has reached perfection in the second Hinayana vehicle chiefly through contemplating the twelve links of dependent origination in reverse. Noted for living in isolation. They seek enlightenment relying only on themselves. The goal of the Pratyekabuddhas and Shravakas is nirvana, conceived of as definitive liberation from the sufferings of samsara.

SHRAVAKA: “Hearer” or “listener.” The practitioners of the First Turning of the Wheel of the Dharma on the “Four Noble Truths.” Followers of the Hinayana or Root Vehicle noted for living in communities.

SPECIAL INSIGHT: (Skt. Vipaśhyanā) The heightened analytical faculty of mind that cognizes subtle impermanence and emptiness.