

THE THIRTY-SEVEN PRACTICES OF BODHISATTVAS

NAMO LOKEŚVARĀYA!

With respectful three doors I always pay homage to you, supreme guru and Guardian Avalokita who, though seeing that all phenomena neither come nor go, strive solely for wayfarers' purpose.

The complete buddhas, source of benefit and ease, have emerged from having accomplished the true Dharma. Furthermore, since that depends on knowing what actions to take up, the practices of the buddhas' children should be explained.

- 1) At this time when the hard-won ship of leisure and fortune has been gained, to listen, ponder and meditate day and night without neglect in order to deliver self and others from the ocean of samsara is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 2) Passions for kith and kin are stirred up like water. Aggressions towards enemies blaze like fire. Dark are the delusions of forgetting what to adopt and discard. To abandon one's fatherland is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 3) When one has abandoned evil lands, afflictions gradually wane. When one is without distraction, virtuous practice waxes on its own. When one is clear-sighted, certainty in Dharma is born. Keeping to solitude is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 4) Longtime companions will part from each other. Possessions obtained through effort will be left behind. Consciousness, the guest, will cast aside the guesthouse of the body. Letting go of this life is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 5) When one accompanies base friends, the three poisons increase, the work of hearing, pondering and meditating gets corrupted and love and compassion are made absent. To abandon base friends is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 6) When one attends a true spiritual friend, faults are consumed and good qualities grow full like the waxing moon. To hold that one even dearer than one's own body is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 7) What worldly god, himself also bound in samsara's prison, is able to give protection? When refuge [is sought], taking refuge in the undeceiving three jewels is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 8) The Able One taught that the evil states' miseries, which are extremely hard to bear, are the fruit of wrongdoing. Therefore, never committing misdeeds, even at the cost of life, is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 9) Like a dewdrop on a blade of grass, well-being in the three [planes of] existence perishes in but an instant. Seeking the supreme status of never-changing release is the bodhisattvas' practice.

- 10) When my mothers, affectionate to me since beginningless time, are in distress, what use is my own well-being? Arousing *bodhicitta* in order to deliver infinite sentient ones is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 11) All ill-being without exception has come from wanting my own welfare. The complete buddhas have been born from the altruistic mind. Therefore, truly exchanging my pleasure for others' ill-being is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 12) Even if, driven by great desire, others steal all my wealth or have it stolen, dedicating to them my body, resources and three-times' virtues is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 13) Even if others cut off my head when I haven't done the slightest wrong, taking upon myself their misdeeds through the power of compassion is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 14) Even if some broadcast throughout the billionfold [universe] all sorts of things to disgrace me, in return to speak of their good qualities with a loving mind is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 15) Even if some dig out my hidden faults and insult me in the midst of a crowd, to bow respectfully, perceiving them as spiritual friends, is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 16) Even if a person I've dearly nurtured like my own child should view me as an enemy, to love him even more, as a mother does a child stricken with illness, is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 17) Even if, driven by pride, an equal or inferior being tries to demean me, placing him with respect like a guru at my crown is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 18) Though I may lack sustenance, be constantly abused, stricken by grave illness and evil spirits, in return to be undaunted and to take upon myself all wayfarers' misdeeds and ill-being is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 19) Though I may be renowned, with many bowing to me, and may gain wealth like Vaiśravaṇa's, having seen that the glory and riches of existence are meaningless, not to be puffed up with pride is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 20) When the enemy of one's own aggression has not been tamed, subduing outer enemies will only make them multiply. Therefore, to conquer one's own continuum with the army of love and compassion is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 21) Desirables are like salt water; however much one consumes, it only makes craving increase. Thus, immediately abandoning whatever things produce clinging attachment is the bodhisattvas' practice.
- 22) The ways things appear are one's own mind. From the beginning that very mind has been free from elaborated extremes. Knowing just that, not to create in the mind the signs of grasped-at and grasping is the bodhisattvas' practice.

23) When encountering pleasing objects, though they appear beautiful like rainbows in summertime, not to view them as real and to abandon clinging attachment is the bodhisattvas' practice.

24) Diverse sufferings are like a child's death in a dream. How exhausting it is to apprehend confused appearances as real! Therefore, when encountering unfavorable conditions, viewing them as delusion is the bodhisattvas' practice.

25) If one must give up even one's body when wanting enlightenment, what need is there to mention outer, material things? To be generous without hope of return or karmic ripening is the bodhisattvas' practice.

26) If, lacking discipline, one's own purpose is not yet achieved, wanting to accomplish others' purpose is laughable. Therefore, observing discipline without interest in existence is the bodhisattvas' practice.

27) To bodhisattvas who want virtues' wealth and resources, every harmdoer equals a precious treasure. Therefore, cultivating patience without animosity for anyone is the bodhisattvas' practice.

28) Even hearers and self-made ones, who accomplish only their own purpose, strive as if putting out fires on their heads. Seeing this, to take up diligence, the source of good qualities, for all wayfarers' sake is the bodhisattvas' practice.

29) Afflictions are completely overcome by calm abiding that has insight. Having understood this, to cultivate concentration that has truly transcended the four formless [equilibria] is the bodhisattvas' practice.

30) Without discerning awareness, one cannot attain complete enlightenment through the other five perfections. Thus, to cultivate, together with method, awareness that does not distinguish the three spheres is the bodhisattvas' practice.

31) If one has not examined one's own confusion, one might look like a practitioner but act otherwise. Therefore, continually examining and abandoning one's own confusion is the bodhisattvas' practice.

32) If, driven by afflictions, one tells of another bodhisattva's faults, oneself gets corrupted. Thus, not expressing the faults of those who have entered the great vehicle is the bodhisattvas' practice.

33) Because being driven by gain and respect brings mutual dispute and corrupts the work of hearing, pondering and meditating, to abandon attachment to the households of close ones and patrons is the bodhisattvas' practice.

34) Because harsh words disturb others' minds and corrupt the bodhisattvas' conduct, abandoning coarse language unpleasant to others is the bodhisattvas' practice.

35) Afflictions, once habituated, are hard to reverse with antidotes. Thus, having seized the antidotal weapon, for the mindful and vigilant person to level afflictions like attachment the moment they first arise is the bodhisattvas' practice.

36) In brief, whatever course of action one takes, one should ask, "What is the state of my mind?" Accomplishing others' purpose through continually being mindful and vigilant is the bodhisattvas' practice.

37) In order to dispel infinite wayfarers' ill-being, to dedicate for enlightenment—through awareness of the three spheres' purity—the virtues accomplished by having made such effort is the bodhisattvas' practice.

Having followed the speech of the holy ones, the meaning expressed in the sutras, tantras and treatises, I have written down *The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* for those who wish to train on the path of the buddhas' children.

Due to my inferior intellect and meager study, this is not a composition that will delight the learned. Yet, because I have relied on the sutras and the holy ones' speech, I think these bodhisattva practices are not mistaken.

However, because it is difficult for one of lesser intelligence like me to fathom the great waves of bodhisattvas' conduct, I beseech the holy ones to forbear the mass of faults such as contradictions and disjunctions.

By the virtues that have come from this, may all wayfarers become, through excellent ultimate and fictional *bodhicitta*, equal to the Guardian Avalokita, who dwells not in the extremes of existence or peace.

For the purpose of benefitting myself and others, this was composed by Reverend Thogmé, an exponent of scripture and reasoning, in the Precious Cave of Ngülchu.

The Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas was composed by Gyalsé Thogmé Zangpo (1295-1369). At the request of Drigung Kyabjé Garchen Triptrül Rinpoché and with his clarifying commentary, it was translated into English by the disciple Ari-ma in 2002 and again in 2014.

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