

37 Practices of a Bodhisattva by Togmay Sangpo

Verse 1.

Having gained this rare ship of
freedom and fortune,
Hear, think and meditate unwaveringly
night and day,
In order to free yourself and others from the ocean
of cyclic existence,
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

- 1st practice is to extract the essence of precious human rebirth- to listen, contemplate and meditate and apply them until one attains enlightenment . Through consistent meditation we will be able to overcome the disturbed mind , understand and practice the teachings and the extract the essence of this precious human rebirth for the benefit of others.

Verse 2.

Attached to your loved ones you are stirred
up like water,
Hating your enemies you burn like fire,
In the darkness of confusion, you forget what to
adopt and discard,
Give up your homeland. This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

-2nd practice is letting go of any object which triggers more attachment, anger, delusions. 'Homeland' here is referring to objects of ignorance , anger or attachment – objects that hinders us from benefiting others.

Verse 3.

By avoiding bad objects, disturbing emotions
gradually decrease,
Without distraction, virtuous activities
naturally increase,
With clarity of mind, conviction in teaching arises,
Cultivate seclusion. This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

-3rd practice is about finding a conducive place to cultivate so that we can meditate , contemplate and actualize bodhicitta like going for retreats where we can contemplate without disturbance, subdue our mind to gain mental stability.

Verse 4.

Loved ones who have long kept
company will part,
Wealth created with difficulty will be left behind,
Consciousness, the guest, will leave the
guesthouse of the body,
Let go of this life. This is the practice
of Bodhisattvas.

-4th practice is to reflect on impermanence, the fragility of this life and the practice Dharma now , not only for this life but for the next and start cultivating good causes for a next rebirth. Giving up the clinging to samsaric pleasures and use the precious rebirth to practice Dharma for higher purpose. By always remembering death and impermanence, one will strengthen our Dharma practice.

Verse 5

When you keep their company your three
poisons increase,
Your activities of hearing, thinking and
meditating decline,
And they make you lose your love
and compassion, Give up bad friends. This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

-5th practice is about giving up bad and negative friends. Those who distract you from learning or practising Dharma are negative friends. Surround yourself with positivity and people who will encourage you further on your path.

Verse 6.

When you rely on them your faults come
to an end,
And your good qualities grow like the
waxing moon,
Cherish spiritual teachers even more than your
own body, This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

-6th practice speaks of the need to rely on the spiritual master as stated in ‘Foundation of all Good qualities ‘ by Lama Tsongkhapa . Relying on a spiritual master inspires and nurtures our mind and guides us on the correct path.

Verse 7.

Bound himself in the jail of cyclic existence,
What worldly god can give you protection?
Therefore when you seek refuge, take refuge in
The Three Jewels which will not betray you. This
is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

- 7th practice is taking refuge in enlightening beings , Shakayamuni Buddha or 35 Buddhas are object of refuge. Relying on the triple gem protects and liberates us from falling into lower realms. After taking refuge we must observe and practice Dharma purely.

Verse 8.

The Subduer said that all the unbearable suffering
of bad rebirths,
Is the fruit of wrong doing,
Therefore, even at the cost of your life,
never do wrong,
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

-8th practice is to reflect on the suffering of the lower realms with negative actions as the cause. If we wish to avoid lower rebirths, we need to abandon no virtuous actions, purify negativity and apply the 4 opponent powers.

Verse 9.

Like dew on the tip of a blade of grass, pleasures
of the three worlds,
Last only a while and then vanish,
Aspire to the never-changing supreme state
of liberation,
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

-9th practice is to understand the overall suffering of samsara (not only the suffering of the lower realms as discussed under verse 8) and aspire for liberation. Frequent recitation of mantra (mind protection) is so useful -to the mind from ordinariness and keeping the divine state will all the qualities of compassion, and wisdom.

Verse 10.

When your mothers who have loved you since
time without beginning
Are suffering, what use is your own happiness?
Therefore, to free limitless beings
Develop the Altruistic intention
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas

-10th practice is to cultivate bodhicitta by remembering the kindness of mother sentient beings and generate the determination to repay their kindness otherwise life would be hollow and meaningless.

Verse 11.

All suffering comes from the wish for
your own happiness.
Perfect Buddhas are born from the thought
to help others.
Therefore, exchange your own happiness for the
suffering of others
This is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

-11th practice is the practice of the exchanging of self for others, the second method of cultivating bodhicitta. The source of everlasting happiness comes through cherishing others. Practice tong len – exchanging self with others where one visualize taking the suffering of others and mentally transferring our virtues to them.

Verse 12.

Even if someone out of strong desire
Steals all your wealth or has it stolen
Dedicate to him your body, possessions,
And your virtues past, present and future
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

-12th practice is to transform one's mind in order to see that all harms received are opportunities to cultivate virtue. Whenever one receive harm from another , we transform our mind and see it as one's past negative karma and as an opportunity to clear past karmic debts.

Verse 13.

If someone tries to cut off your head
When you have not done the slightest wrong,
Out of compassion take all his misdeeds upon yourself
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

-13th practice is about transforming suffering into one's spiritual practice. When a harm giver have caused you any harm , contemplate on karma and see that person with compassion. This practice of compassion transformation is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

Verse 14

Even if someone broadcasts all kind of unpleasant
remarks about you throughout the three thousand worlds
In return with a loving mind speak his good qualities
This is the practice of a Bodhisattva.
Nothing hurts our ego more than criticism.

-14th practice is to return sincere praise in the face of slander. Any form of criticism or gossip affects us. As an antidote, express praise on your criticisers as stated in 'Precious Garland' as they are from our past karmic actions.

Verse 15

Though someone may deride and speak bad words
About you in a public gathering
Looking on him as a spiritual teacher
Bow to him with respect
This is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

-15th practice is to view your critic as a spiritual teacher who will enable you to develop good qualities through adversity. Bow to him with respect. Bodhisattvas see these critics as spiritual masters who will strengthen the practice towards enlightenment.

Verse 16

If someone whom you dearly cherish like your
own child Takes you for an enemy,
Then, like a mother whose child is sick,
To love that person even more
Is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

16th practice requires a great heart of patience in the face of betrayal and disappointment. See the harm giver as a suffering being, trapped in delusions thus causing harm upon themselves. Eliminate the delusions and practice the antidotes and not swayed anger towards harm givers and practice compassion towards them .

Verse 17.

If an equal or inferior person disparages you out of pride .
Place him as you would your spiritual teacher with respect on the crown of your head .
This is the practice of a Bodhisattva.

17th practice is the instruction to regard those who harm you through ill-will and jealousy as one's spiritual master. This will compel us to train in a bodhisattva conduct. Receiving harm from others is due to one's past karma. By having a heart to benefit others we preserve the vows and samaya of the mind training teachings.

Verse 18.

Though you lack what you need and are
constantly disparaged
Afflicted by dangerous sickness and spirits
Without discouragement take on the misdeeds
And the pain of living beings
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas

18th practice has two aspects – it guides us on how to transform failures into the path and how to transform our conditions of prosperity into the Path. Shantideva said if there were no suffering there would be no renunciation , no Path. All suffering experiences are perfect for the practice of patience and to generate true renunciation.

Verse 19.

Though you become famous and many bow to you
And you gain riches to equal Vaishravana's
See that worldly fortune is without essence
And do not be conceited
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas

19th practice is about conquering pride and seeing ordinary fortune and fame as deceptive and unstable. Good karma will be exhausted if one don't practice Dharma. Follow the way of the Bodhisattvas , utilize and offer all our good fortunes to benefit others via our body , speech and mind.

Verse 20.

While the enemy of your own anger is not subdued
Though you conquer external foes, they will only increase
Therefore with the militia of love and compassion
Subdue your own mind
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas.

-20th practice focuses on taking the object of anger and of attachment into the Path. Subdue or 'extinguish' the fire in our mind in order to eradicate and bring cessation to our enemies . 'Great Compassion' here means taking full responsibility by oneself alone to 'protect' one own's compassion to eradicate the suffering of all beings.

Verse 21.

Sensual pleasures are like salt water
The more you indulge, the more the thirst
increases Abandon at once those things which breed
clinging attachment
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas

-21st practice is to abandon pleasures of the senses which give rise to attachment. As Shantideva expressed if one just thinks about this life's worldly achievement, it will harm one's spiritual development, this is not considered as Dharma actions.

Verse 22

Whatever appears is your own mind
Your mind from the start is free from fabricated extremes
Understanding this, do not take to mind inherent
signs of subject and object
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas

-22nd practice on how to train in ultimate bodhicitta i.e. bodhicitta with emptiness. To attain liberation and freedom free from samsara, it is sufficient to apply the antidote of wisdom realizing the emptiness of self. For full Buddhahood, one needs to realize the emptiness on phenomena.

Verse 23.

When you encounter attractive objects
Though they seem beautiful
Like a rainbow in summer, do not regard them as
real and give up attachment
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas.

-23rd practice advises us to view objects of attachment as like illusions. Bodhisattvas practice through reminding themselves that the objects which bring about attachment are illusory and that it would be pointless to strive to achieve satisfaction from them. All suffering comes from grasping and clinging to people and objects which will enhance the emotional, deluded mind.

Verse 24.

All forms of suffering are like a child's death in a
dream
Holding illusory appearances to be true makes
you weary
Therefore. When you meet with disagreeable
circumstances
See them as illusory
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas

-24th practice is to see all unpleasant situations as like a dream. See all problems as a stage-performance of karma. This allows you to gain a level of detachment from the situation. Shantideva therefore advised us that we need to understand that samsaric perceptions are false and therefore one must see them as illusory. This is where meditation comes into play through contemplation.

Verse 25.

When those who want enlightenment must give
even their body
There is no need to mention external things
Therefore without hope of return or any fruition
Give generously
This is the practice of the Bodhisattva

25th practice is to practice generosity. There are 3 types of generosity - generosity of giving material possessions, generosity of protection and generosity of dharma. Bodhisattvas live a life for a purpose of helping sentient beings – before they can arrive at the stage of being able to offer their limbs away, they must first practice the generosity of possessions.

Verse 26.

Without ethics, you cannot accomplish your own
well being
So wanting to accomplish others' is laughable
Therefore without worldly aspirations
Safeguard your ethical discipline
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas

-26th practice is about upholding morality. Living a life of morality, is a practice of generosity of Dharma towards living beings. There are 3 kinds of morality – the morality of abstaining from negativity; the morality of committing virtues and the morality of working for the welfare of all living sentient being. Living in any of these categories of the vows .plants the basis for us to close the door to the lower realms and helping others to follow this path is a generosity of Dharma.

Verse 27.

To Bodhisattvas who want a wealth of virtue
Those who harm are like a precious treasure
Therefore towards cultivate patience
Without hostility, this is the practice of the
Bodhisattva.

-27th practice is the practice of patience. One moment of anger will destroy an accumulation of 1000 eons of merit. This is why practicing patience is important to subdue our mind and replacing it with a mind of bodhichitta.

Verse 28

Since Hearers and Solitary Realisers who
accomplish only their own good
Strive as if to put out a fire on their head
For the sake of all beings make joyful effort
Toward the source of all good qualities
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas

-28th practice is all about joy - the delight in helping sentient beings. When Bodhisattvas engage in virtuous action, their involvement is absolute. Serving beings with a happy joyous heart is more meaningful and brings blessing to oneself.

Verse 29

Understanding that disturbing emotions are
destroyed
By special insight with calm abiding
Cultivate concentration which surpasses
The four formless absorptions
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas.

-29th practice is the need to develop the power of concentration. The purpose is be able to use it to gain realisations into the teachings which are the means to gain liberation and helping others achieve that.

Verse 30

Since the five perfections without wisdom
Cannot bring perfect enlightenment
Along with skilful means, cultivate the wisdom
that does not conceive three spheres (as real)
This is the practice of the bodhisattvas.

-30th practice is to strongly cultivate the wisdom realising emptiness. Completeness in cultivation is necessary which will bear the fruit of Buddhahood .If one cultivates the 5 perfections - generosity,morality,patience, joyous effort and concentration without cultivating wisdom perfection ,no enlightenment is possible.

Verse 31

If you do not examine your errors
You may look like a practitioner but not act as one
Therefore, always examining your own errors
Rid yourself of them
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas.

-31st practice is to examine one's own conduct for faults. This serves as a warning to all practitioners who lack mindfulness or who are proud about their so-called Mahayana practice. Such people may outwardly appear impressive as real practitioners, yet inwardly, they are filled with delusions and harmful intent.

Verse 32

If through the influence of disturbing emotions
You point out the faults of a Bodhisattva
You yourself are diminished, so do no mention the
faults
Of those who have entered the Great Vehicle
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas

- 32nd practice is about cautioning ordinary beings against criticising higher practitioners. There is a heavy negative karma in criticising Bodhisattvas, Buddhas and even heavier karma criticising one's Guru. This practice is about training our mind , applying the antidotes and familiarising our minds with these points through meditation.

Verse 33

Reward and respect cause us to quarrel
And make hearing, thinking and meditating
decline.

For this reason, give up attachment to the
households of friends, relations and benefactors
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

-33rd practice is to practice non-attachment. The Bodhisattva lives a life giving unconditional love to all yet they do so with non attachment. Non attachment means not having a grasping or clinging attitude , living with contentment with the mind of benefiting others. We cant bring anything at the time of death except our Dharma practice so create powerful imprints in one's mind which will help us now and in the next life.

Verse 34.

Harsh words disturb the minds of others
And the cause deterioration in a
Bodhisattva's conduct
Therefore give up harsh words
Which are unpleasant to others
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas

34th practice is never express harsh words. Be skilful and observant. If someone upsets you or does not need your help , no need to get angry . Speak with a mind of respect for others .

Verse 35.

Habitual disturbing emotions are hard to stop
through counter actions
Armed with antidotes, the guards of mindfulness
and mental alertness
Destroy disturbing emotions like attachment at
once, as soon as they arise
This is the practice of Bodhisattvas

35th practice advises applying antidotes to disturbing emotions. The purpose of these 37 practices like Lojong (mind training) teachings is to guard our mind against delusions which are the source of all suffering. Therefore we need to encourage ourselves in the cultivation of mindfulness and introspection through understanding and logic and habituating our minds through meditation.

Verse 36

In brief, whatever you are doing
Ask yourself, "What is the state of my mind?"
With constant mindfulness and mental alertness
Accomplish other's good
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas

36th practice is harnessing mindfulness and introspection for the welfare of all living beings. This verse speaks of the urgency to attain stable mindfulness and introspection, without these the practices of the bodhisattva cannot be actualised. Conjoining these two will the mind of bodhichitta will benefit others and make one's life more meaningful.

Verse 37

To remove the sufferings of limitless beings
Understanding the purity of the three spheres
Dedicate the virtue from making such effort
to enlightenment
This is the practice of the Bodhisattvas

37th practice is about dedicating all merits towards the enlightenment of all living beings. Doing dedications is to complete our cause to eradicate all sufferings of numberless beings and to liberate them and bring them to the state full enlightenment.

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