

THE 37 PRACTICES OF BODHISATTVAS

by Gyalse Tokme Zangpo

NAMO LOKEŚVARĀYA!

Continually I bow in respect with my three doors [body, speech and mind] to the supreme guru and to protector Avalokita who see that all phenomena neither come nor go and nevertheless strive solely to benefit beings.

The perfect buddhas, source of all benefit and joy, arise through the practice of the genuine dharma. Since this depends on knowing how to apply it, now the practices of the buddha's heirs will be explained.

1. Now, having obtained this great vessel of freedoms and resources, difficult to find, to free oneself and others from the ocean of saṃsāra, day and night without break to listen, reflect, and meditate—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
2. Toward friends, attachment surges like water; toward enemies, hatred burns like fire; dark with ignorance one forgets what to adopt and reject. To leave behind one's homeland—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
3. Abandoning negative places, emotional obscurations gradually decrease. With no distractions, virtuous activity naturally grows. Mind clearing up, certainty in the dharma rises. To rely on solitary places—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
4. Friends and relatives, long acquainted, must go their separate ways; our wealth, painstakingly acquired, will remain behind; and consciousness – a guest in this body, will have to leave its lodging. To give up the concerns of this life—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
5. If, in someone's company the three mind poisons grow stronger, while listening, reflecting, and meditating diminish, and this destroys our love and compassion, then to cast off bad friends—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
6. If, relying on someone, defects diminish and qualities increase like the waxing moon, then to cherish this noble spiritual friend more than one's own body—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
7. Bound themselves in the prison of saṃsāra, whom could worldly gods protect? Going to refuge to the Three Jewels, who do not deceive us if we seek their protection, is therefore the practice of bodhisattvas.
8. The suffering in the lower realms, so difficult to bear, results from harmful actions, the Buddha taught. Therefore, even at the risk of your life, never to commit harmful acts—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
9. The joys of the three realms are subject to perishing instantly, just like dewdrops on the tips of grasses. To strive for supreme liberation, which never changes—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
10. When my mothers, who have cared for me from beginningless time, suffer, what's the point of personal happiness? Therefore, engendering bodhicitta, to liberate beings, infinite in number—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
11. The source of all suffering is seeking happiness for oneself while perfect Buddhas are born from the intention to benefit others. Therefore, to exchange completely one's happiness for the suffering of others—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
12. Even if someone, in great desire, steals all my wealth or incites others do so, to dedicate body, resources, and all virtue of the three times to that person—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
13. Even if someone is about to cut off my head, whilst I have not done the slightest wrong, with the power of compassion to take upon myself all the negativity of that person—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

14. Even if someone spreads all sorts of disgraceful things about me in the whole world, to speak even then with a mind full of love of that person's good qualities—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
15. Even if someone, in front of many people, exposes my hidden faults and speaks badly of me, to regard that person as a spiritual friend and to bow with respect—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
16. Even if someone, whom I have cared for like a child of my own, treats me as an enemy, to regard that person with special love like a mother whose child has fallen ill—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
17. Even if someone, who is my equal or less, through pride treats me with disdain, with respect as for the guru to place that person on my crown—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
18. Without the necessities to live, continuously despised by all and plagued by grave illness and evil spirits: even then to take on oneself the negativity and suffering of all beings without ever losing heart—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
19. Although famous, with crowds bowing down to me, and affluent as the god of wealth: to see the futility of the glory and riches of the world and thus remain without arrogance—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
20. If we do not overcome the enemy of our own anger, as we fight them, the outer enemies will multiply. Therefore, with the armies of love and compassion to tame one's own mind stream—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
21. Desired objects are like salty water – as much as we might enjoy them, the thirst always increases. To give up at once the things that give rise to craving—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
22. Whatever appears, is one's own mind, and mind itself is from beginningless time free of fabricated limitations. Knowing this and not producing any features of subject and object—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
23. When meeting with pleasing objects, to regard them as a rainbow in summer – a beautiful, but unreal appearance – and to give up grasping—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
24. The multitude of sufferings is like the death of a child in a dream; how exhausting to take such delusions as real! Therefore, when we encounter difficult situations, to regard them as illusory—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
25. If those aspiring to enlightenment should give even their body away, what need to mention external objects? To be generous without hope of return or good karmic results—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
26. When lacking wholesome conduct, we cannot even benefit ourselves, and our wish to benefit others becomes absurd. Therefore, without saṃsāric aspirations, to maintain wholesome conduct—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
27. For bodhisattvas aspiring to a wealth of virtue, all those who do harm are a precious treasure. Therefore, without getting angry, to cultivate patience with everything—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
28. Seeing how śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, who practice for their benefit alone, toil as if extinguishing a fire on their head, to stir up, for the sake of all beings, the joyful perseverance which is the source of all qualities—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
29. Knowing that clear seeing, fully settled in mental calm, vanquishes all afflictions, to stay in meditative stability that goes truly beyond the four formless absorptions—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
30. With the five pāramitās without wisdom it is impossible to attain perfect enlightenment. To cultivate the wisdom endowed with skilful means that does not conceptualize the three circles—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.
31. Not examining one's own confusion, one may act contrary to dharma in dharma guise. Therefore, continuously observing one's own confusion and discarding it—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

32. Under the influence of afflictions, to speak of other bodhisattvas' faults, will harm oneself. Therefore, not to speak about the faults of those who have entered the great vehicle—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

33. Through wanting gain and honour, arguments arise and the activities of listening, reflecting, and meditating decline. Therefore, to give up attachment to the households of friends, relatives, and donors—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

34. Harsh words disturb the mind of others and mar a bodhisattva's conduct. Therefore, to give up harsh words not pleasing to others—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

35. Once habituated to afflictions, it is difficult to counter them with remedies. Mindful and alert practitioners will take up the weapon of the antidote and level out desire and the other afflictions as soon as they arise—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

36. In brief, wherever we are, whatever we do, staying continually mindful and alert to the state of our mind and accomplishing the benefit of others—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

37. So that the suffering of limitless sentient beings may be cleared away, to dedicate towards enlightenment all the wholesome gained by such perseverance with a wisdom permeated by three-fold purity—this is the practice of bodhisattvas.

Following the meaning of the sutras, tantras, and treatises and the teaching of genuine ones, I have given these thirty-seven verses of a bodhisattva's practice for the benefit of those who wish to train on the bodhisattva's path.

Since my intelligence is low and I am little trained, the art of this text will not delight the scholars. Yet since these practices of a bodhisattva are based on the sutras and the teachings of genuine ones, I believe they are free of confusion.

Since an inferior intellect such as mine has difficulty fathoming the great waves of a bodhisattva's activity, I pray that genuine masters will be patient with all the defects here – contradiction, incoherence, and so forth.

Through the virtue arising from these verses, may all beings through supreme bodhicitta, both relative and ultimate, become like the protector Chenrezig, who remains in neither the extreme of saṃsāric existence nor nirvanic peace.

For the benefit of myself and others, the monk Thogme (1295-1369), voicing teachings and interpretations, composed these verses at the Precious Cave of Ngulchu (Western Central Tibet).