

## 8. CULTIVATING A HEART OF WISDOM: ORAL INSTRUCTIONS ON THE MIND TRAINING IN SEVEN POINTS

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### INTRODUCTION

The Mahayana tradition comprises three classes of teachings: the sutras, the commentarial scriptures, and pith instructions. This teaching belongs to the class of pith instructions.

Generally speaking, the stages of the Mahayana path can be explained according to the scriptures or according to the pith instructions. Again, this teaching presents them according to explanations found in the pith instructions. The expression *stages of the path* refers to the stages or the sequence of practice of the Mahayana path.

In Tibet, the most renowned mind-training teachings are the instructions in *Parting from the Four Attachments*,<sup>1</sup> and in the *Mind Training in Seven Points*, which originated with Jowo Jé Palden Atiśa. He received the instructions on mind training from one of his seventy-two teachers, namely master Serlingpa. These teachings are of two types: the principal teachings, akin to the trunk of the body, and the supplementary teachings, akin to its limbs. These teachings are the main trunk-like teachings on mind training. The original words of these teachings were first pronounced by Atiśa and then grouped into seven points or sections.<sup>2</sup>

### PRELIMINARIES

The first section concerns the preliminaries, the teachings which are the support or the foundation of the entire path. This is expressed in the following line:

*First, train in the preliminaries.*

*First* here indicates the necessity of training in the preliminaries at the very outset of one's cultivation of bodhicitta. The preliminaries are the four reflections which change the mind to counteract our ordinary attitudes. We should reflect deeply on (1) the precious human life endowed with the freedoms and favorable conditions so difficult to achieve, (2) death and impermanence, (3) karma—cause and result, and (4) the faults of samsara.

For the practice of the Mahayana path, it is first of all necessary for the attitude of renunciation<sup>3</sup> to come into being. To this end, the teachings say one must reflect deeply on these four thoughts, that is, the faults of samsara and so forth.

The plural in the term *preliminaries* seems to refer to the fact that one further needs to train in generating the aspiration to supreme awakening or buddhahood. Once renunciation has been generated by reflecting deeply on the faults of samsara, one should generate the aspiration to supreme awakening, take the bodhisattva vows, and so forth.

## THE MAIN PRACTICE: THE CULTIVATION OF BODHICITTA

### *Ultimate Bodhicitta*

The second section concerns the actual practice, the cultivation of bodhicitta. This section has two parts: the cultivation of ultimate bodhicitta and the cultivation of relative bodhicitta. The cultivation of ultimate bodhicitta, in turn, has two divisions: the training in meditative equipoise, and the training in between sessions called *subsequent attainment*.

First, as a preliminary for the training in meditative equipoise, it says:

*For your thoughts, count the breath.*

The term *thoughts* here refers to coarse discursive thinking. As a method to make this thinking subside, we are advised to count the breath. The cycle of exhalation, inhalation, and resting of the breath is counted as one cycle. This cycle is to be counted about twenty-one times. In this way coarse discursive thinking will calm down. This method is mentioned in numerous practice manuals of the mantra vehicle, and Kamalaśīla also

repeatedly mentions the great importance of the breath in his *Stages of Meditation (Bhāvanākrama)*.<sup>4</sup>

The actual practice:

Consider all phenomena as a dream.  
 Analyze the fundamental nature of unborn awareness.  
 Even the antidote itself vanishes on its own ground.  
 The essence of the path is to place the mind in the ālaya.

*Consider all phenomena as a dream.*

All phenomena which appear as external are not separate from the mind. We should think that they are appearances of the mind, similar to a dream. Dreams are just mental appearances which are not separate from the mind. Similarly, phenomena which appear as external, such as forms, sounds, smells, tastes, and tactile objects, are not separate from the mind. If one reflects in this way, the objects which are appearing will be seen as non-existent. How, then, does mind exist?

The text advises us to

*Analyze the fundamental nature of unborn awareness.*

As this mind is from the beginning not born, it is unborn. Being unborn, it neither ceases, nor does it abide anywhere. Such awareness or mind is unborn, unceasing, it is emptiness. This, it is stated, is what needs to be analyzed. By analyzing in this way, the fundamental nature of mind is not established as truly existent. Therefore, one sees that the apprehending mind is equally not found to be truly existent.

What does *analysis* here refer to? In general, when cultivating the view in the context of the Pāramitā Vehicle, it is necessary to make use of conceptual analysis. By analyzing the nature of things using Madhyamaka reasonings, one comes to an understanding of the fundamental nature of all phenomena. This understanding is termed the *view*. Coming to know this view is the Pāramitā Vehicle's method for cultivating the uncontrived. That being so, analysis is definitely necessary in this context.

As, however, there are different methods of cultivating the view in the context of the Secret Mantra Vehicle, we cannot say that the use of conceptual analysis is always necessary. According to the Gelugpa tradition, it is necessary to analyze by means of logical reasoning even in the context of the Secret Mantra. Other traditions, however, claim that

there are different methods of arriving at the view in the Secret Mantra, and that analysis is therefore not always necessary. For the view in the Pāramitā Vehicle, on the other hand, it is definitely necessary to analyze by means of logical reasoning.

Having obtained conviction in the view through analysis, the mind is cultivated in such a way that without establishing an object in any way, it does not grasp anything whatsoever. This is the same as to say that the mind is resting in an uncontrived way. Therefore the text reads: *Analyze the fundamental nature of unborn awareness.*

The next line says:

*Even the antidote itself vanishes on its own ground.*

*The antidote* referred to here is the thought that “The fundamental nature of all phenomena is emptiness.” It is termed an *antidote* because it is in fact the antidote to apprehending a self, an apprehension which needs to be abandoned. This antidote *itself* abides in emptiness,<sup>5</sup> which is therefore given the name *ground*. Even the supreme knowledge, for instance, which analyzes the fundamental nature of the thought “It is emptiness,” needs to vanish in emptiness, the state free of all conceptual proliferations. How should this view be cultivated?

*The essence of the path is to place (the mind) in the ālaya.*

*Essence* here means the *actual condition* or *nature*.<sup>6</sup> The *ālaya* has therefore to be understood as mere clarity or the luminous aspect of the mind.

In general, one speaks of two aspects: mind and mental factors. The mind has many modes of apprehension. In particular, the main mind, which apprehends the entity or the general aspects of the objects, is of various types.<sup>7</sup> From these, we have to identify the *ālaya* as the mere luminous aspect of the mind. The *ālaya* is the luminous aspect of the mind which is about to reach out for an object,<sup>8</sup> and the essence of this *ālaya* is beyond all conceptual proliferation. It is in this state that the mind is to be placed. In this regard, the manner of cultivating the view is the same for the Sakya, the Kagyü and the Nyingma traditions.

Without clinging to any of the four extreme views with regard to apprehended objects,<sup>9</sup> and without clinging in any way to the mind which apprehends those objects, you should rest in the natural, self-settled state, without adjusting or altering, without rejecting or approving. This completes the explanation of the training in meditation sessions.

After the meditation on ultimate bodhicitta, the practice in between sessions consists in treating whoever appears to the mind, that is, oneself, others, everybody, as illusory persons. The text reads:

*In between sessions, treat everyone as an illusory person.*

This means that you should treat whoever may appear to your mind, yourself, or others, everyone, as an illusory person, which means a person who has been magically created—appearing, yet not real. Carrying out your practice in this way will certainly bring about an enhancement of your realization obtained in meditative equipoise.

### **RELATIVE BODHICITTA**

The cultivation of relative bodhicitta has three divisions: the preparation, the actual practice, and the activities in between sessions. With regard to the preparation, the root text reads:

*First, cultivate well loving-kindness (and compassion).*

The cultivation of both loving-kindness and compassion are the first steps in the cultivation of bodhicitta. According to the Kadampa tradition, the Mahayana path is cultivated by means of seven steps which are in a causal relationship.<sup>10</sup>

1. First, we should reflect on the fact that all beings have been our mother.
2. This leads to the acknowledgment that they all have been very kind to us. We should think that as they have been our mother, there is no way to repay all their kindness.
3. But because it is still necessary to repay it, we should repeatedly cultivate this wish to return their kindness.
4. Then, we cultivate loving-kindness. This means wishing that all beings will have happiness and the causes of happiness. It is the wish that they may temporarily obtain the happiness of the higher planes of existence, and ultimately the state of buddhahood. Because the wish that they obtain the state of buddhahood is the most important point here, it should be cultivated again and again. This can be done with the support of recitations as well. One should cultivate this thought at all times and as much as possible, for instance by thinking “May all beings attain

buddhahood,” or “I must place all beings on the stage of buddhahood.” This is called loving-kindness.

5. Compassion means wishing all beings to be free of suffering and the causes of suffering. We should cultivate the thoughts like “I shall liberate all beings from samsara! May they be liberated! May they be liberated from non-virtues, which are the causes for suffering.” To cultivate such thoughts again and again is called the practice of compassion.

For the cultivation of loving-kindness and compassion it is necessary to have cultivated renunciation well. It is therefore said that one should first of all train in the preliminaries, reflecting deeply on the faults of samsara and so forth. If one does not understand well the faults of samsara, genuine loving-kindness and compassion will not be born, and without them there is no way to bring about bodhicitta.<sup>11</sup>

Therefore, understanding that all the preceding stages are crucial, we should cultivate them well. One should never abandon loving-kindness and compassion. If those who have taken the bodhisattva vows abandon them, they break their commitments.

With regard to the main practice, the text reads

*Train by alternating sending and taking.*

In some mind-training teachings, Jowo Jé Palden Atiśa taught the practices of equalizing and exchanging self and others.<sup>12</sup> In the pith instructions which have been transmitted from Serlingpa, on the other hand, it is taught that only the exchange of self and others needs to be cultivated. According to Serlingpa, one should be taught to practice the exchange of self and others from the very beginning, and not the practice of equalizing self and others.

In the practice of exchange, *sending* means that one gives away everything, one’s body, along with one’s possessions and the virtues accumulated in the three times, with the wish that this will bring about the conducive conditions for all sentient beings to obtain buddhahood. By *taking*, one takes upon oneself the suffering and the causes of suffering of all sentient beings, wishing that in this way all beings may be free of suffering and the origin of suffering. Thus one trains by alternating both, which means that one practices sending and taking in turn.

*Let them both ride the wind.*

Occasionally, *let them both ride the wind*. This means that we should cultivate sending and taking by mounting them on the wind horse, which is the breath. While breathing in through the nose, think that you absorb into your heart the negative deeds and suffering of all beings in the form of black smoke. While breathing out through the nose, think that all your happiness and virtues take the form of white light which reaches all beings, and that this brings about all the conditions necessary for them to attain enlightenment.

For the time in between sessions, we are told:

Three objects, three poisons, three roots of virtue.  
 To remind yourself, train in all circumstances using verses.  
 For the sequence of taking, begin with yourself.

*Three objects, three poisons, three roots of virtue.*

*Three objects* refers to attractive, unattractive, and neutral objects. The *three poisons*, which are the mental afflictions, arise in dependence upon these three types of objects. Furthermore, the text explains that we need to transform these three poisonous mental afflictions into three roots of virtue by relying on the three objects.

When, for instance, desire and attachment are generated in relation to an attractive object, we ought to integrate this desire and attachment into the path by thinking “There is an inconceivable number of beings afflicted by desire just as I am. May their desire therefore ripen upon me. May all possess the root of virtue which consists of the absence of desire.” In the same way, think “May all beings possess the root of virtue which is the absence of hatred,” and “May they all possess the root of virtue which is the absence of delusion.”

By changing our attitude in this way, we transform the three poisons into the three roots of virtue. For this purpose we are advised to accept others’ afflictions on top of our own. In the vehicle of the perfections there are many means of discarding afflictions when they are already in an active state. There are, for instance, the method to overcome the afflictions by cultivating the view, and the method which gets rid of them by means of mind training. Thus, when hatred is active and you are unable to overcome it by other means, you should cultivate this mind training and

think “May the hatred of all beings ripen upon me, and may they possess the root of virtue which is the absence of hatred.”

*To remind yourself, train in all circumstances by applying verses.*

In order to remind oneself of bodhicitta, one is advised to train in all circumstances by means of words or verses. This is a very important point. One should also do this when cultivating a deity practice by pronouncing words like “The central eye is black in the center and whitish on the borders,” and so forth. If one trains in a similar way by means of words in this context, one's mind training will be greatly benefited.

There is a story of a Buddhist practitioner who lived in the south of India and who cultivated insight into the four noble truths by means of phrases. This means that we should meditate on the four noble truths while pronouncing words like “The noble truth of suffering, the noble truth of the origin,” and so forth. Similarly, it is very beneficial to train by means of verses in the context of mind training as well.

*May the suffering of mother sentient beings ripen upon me,  
And by my happiness, may they become happy.*

This is Nāgārjuna's aspiration prayer from his *Jewel Garland (Ratnāvalī)*. As the benefits of reciting only this verse even once are inconceivable, we should practice the recitation of the four immeasurables.<sup>13</sup> And if we are able to, we should also meditate on them in this way. If we are unable to carry out our practice in this way, we can remind ourselves of it by pronouncing verses like

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness.

There is also a story of a Kadampa master of the past who contemplated impermanence in such a way. Reflecting on the fact that the time of his death is uncertain, he thought that activities carried out for the sole purpose of this life are useless. Taking hold of his *mālā*<sup>14</sup> he repeated the word “useless” many times.

*For the sequence of taking, begin with yourself.*

This refers to the practice of taking from the practice of “sending and taking” called *tonglen* in Tibetan. One should begin the sequence of

taking negativity and suffering with oneself. When sickness and suffering occur, for instance, one begins by taking upon oneself one's own future suffering thinking "May I take on top of this suffering I'm experiencing right now, all the numerous sufferings which are to befall me in the future, up until I attain buddhahood, such as future births as a denizen of a hell realm, and the causes I accumulated for such births."

When you are able to practice in this way, you then train your mind in taking upon yourself the suffering and the origin of suffering of others. It is said that one will be able to train well in the two types of bodhicitta if one practices in this way.

So far, the main practice of mind training has been explained. This is the highest practice of the Mahayana. It is said that there is no practice superior to this. Jowo Jé Atiśa taught it in detail according to Śāntideva's *The Way of the Bodhisattva* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*). For the practice of the bodhisattva way, he said, mind training is indispensable. For all practitioners, this is the highest practice.

This completes the explanation of the first two points: the preliminaries and the main practice.

Next follows the explanation of the supplementary five points, beginning with the transformation of adversity into the path of awakening.

## TRANSFORMING ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES INTO THE PATH OF AWAKENING

*When the world and beings are filled with negativity,  
transform adversity into the path of awakening.*

Because of the force of the result of the negative deeds one has committed in the past, one does not experience a pleasant environment and home and so forth, and one lives with hostile beings. This is the result of negative deeds accumulated in the past. Therefore, the *adverse circumstances* mentioned in the root verses, consisting of a completely degenerated environment and beings, are conditions adverse to the practice of the Dharma. Instead of letting them become unfavorable conditions, we should transform them into the path of awakening.

Now, what method should you use to turn into the path the unfavorable conditions such as the harm inflicted upon you by the outer environment and beings? You can practice either through the cultivation of relative

bodhicitta or of ultimate bodhicitta, or you can turn such circumstances into the path by means of particular practices.

*a. Transforming adversity by means of relative bodhicitta*

*Drive all blame into one.*

We should not look for many things to blame for all the problems we face. We should look for only one, in fact. And what might that be? It is our self-cherishing. Whatever suffering we may experience, whether induced by outer conditions of our environment or due to some disease, it is not caused by others. All these problems arise due to our self-cherishing.

As it says in the *Introduction to the Middle Way (Madhyamakāvatāra* 6,120ab):

All afflictions, all faults without exception  
arise from the view of the perishing collection.<sup>15</sup>  
Having realised this [...].

All afflictions, all problems or sufferings arise from the view of the perishing collection, from apprehending a self. That being so, one should take all blame onto oneself as much as possible.

*The Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhicaryāvatāra* 8.134) reads:

Whatever harm there is in the world,  
however much fear and suffering there may be,  
if it all comes from clinging to a self,  
what good is this great demon to me?

In the *Explanation of the Means of Valid Cognition* (Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇavārttika* 2.219) we read:

When there is [the concept of] a self, [everything else is]  
perceived as other.  
Due to the aspects of self and other, clinging and hatred [arise],  
and due to being deeply entangled in those two,  
manifold faults [of existence] come about.

Accordingly, take all blame onto yourself. We might think it is other people who cause bad things to happen to us. This is the fault of holding on to a self. Take the Buddha, for example. Even if someone inflicted millions of sufferings upon him, the Buddha could not be harmed even in the slightest by them. This is because of the power of not clinging to a self. Therefore, we must abandon this tendency to hold to a self as much as we can.

*Contemplate the great kindness of all.*

This line tells us about the need to cultivate the view that all beings have been very kind to us. There is not a single being that has not been our father or mother. There is therefore simply no way we can repay all of their kindness. And with regard to our goal to eventually accomplish the state of buddhahood, there is no means for attaining this state without relying on sentient beings. That being so, all well-being and happiness comes about in dependence upon sentient beings. We therefore ought to cultivate great gratitude toward them all.

Actually, it is first of all necessary to understand what self-clinging means in this context. Self-clinging is the act of cherishing oneself, which means that one makes of oneself something of great importance. Self-clinging means, for instance, to think “It is *me* who must win,” “*I* must accomplish the highest,” or “*I* must obtain the best.” All faults come from this attitude. If we think about it, all afflictions and all the unwholesome actions we have accumulated come from this self-clinging. We must understand this point.

*b. Transforming adversity by means of ultimate bodhicitta*

*By meditating on appearances arising from confusion as the four kāyas<sup>16</sup>, you obtain the supreme protection of emptiness.*

If you regard adverse circumstances and obstacles arising from clinging to that which appears to a confused mind as the four kāyas, you will be protected by emptiness. This is said to be the supreme form of protection, the best protection to shield one from obstacles.

In general, many kinds of appearances arise from confusion. We must in particular consider those which appear as obstacles on our path. Seeing emptiness here means that one sees the essential nature of the four kāyas. We should view the non-arising as the dharmakāya, the non-ceasing as

the sambhogakāya, the non-abiding as the nirmāṇakāya, and the inseparability of these three aspects as the svabhāvikakāya.<sup>17</sup> We should view the essential nature of misfortunes as identical to the essential nature of the four kāyas. This means that one must place the mind in the state of emptiness.

When it says that we should meditate on the appearances of confusion as being the four kāyas, it means that they are of the nature of the four kāyas, not the actual four buddha-kāyas themselves. In the context of the Secret Mantra, saying that appearances arising from confusion are the four kāyas is an instruction concerning the view of the non-differentiation of samsara and nirvana. This is not what is meant here however.

In brief, the meditation on emptiness is an excellent means to protect oneself from obstacles. Whatever unfavorable circumstances may arise, one should reflect on the fact that [in essence, they are none other than] emptiness. The essential nature of emptiness is always the same—the Buddha cannot improve it and beings cannot spoil it.

It is furthermore said that if you reflect on the fact that appearances themselves are mind, those obstacles will not harm you.

*c. Turning adverse circumstances into the path by means of specific practices*

*The supreme method consists of four practices.*

When one practices the Dharma, one is bound to face many unfavorable circumstances. The way to deal with them is the practice of *dispelling hindrances*, which includes four practices: (1) gathering the accumulations, (2) disclosing one's negativities, (3) giving tormas to harmful beings, and (4) offering tormas to the Dharma protectors.

Giving tormas to harmful beings here means that one offers tormas when afflicted by disease or harmed by evil spirits and so forth. Experienced mind-training practitioners are thankful to the harm doers. Saying "Thank you so much for assisting me in subduing my self-clinging! Continue to do so as much as possible," they offer the torma. If you are unable to practice in this way, you should offer the tormas uttering these words: "Now, do not create obstacles for my Dharma practice. Be satisfied with this torma and leave."

And finally, you should offer tormas to the Dharma protectors while urging them to carry on their activities.

Those practices are called *the supreme method consisting of four practices*.

*Apply the practice to the unexpected as much as possible.*

*Applying the practice to the unexpected* means that we should practice with whatever suddenly occurs. When something bad happens, for instance, train yourself to take the suffering of all beings on top of your own by means of this misfortune. In the same way, when something good happens that makes you happy, use this as a support for your practice and cultivate the thought “May all beings be happy.”

### THE PRACTICE OF ONE LIFE CONDENSED

*To apply the five powers is, in brief, the heart of these pith instructions.*

The essence of the pith instructions for the Mahayana practice is subsumed in five powers:

1. The power of *impulsion*. This is the thought “From today onwards, until I reach enlightenment, I will cultivate bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment.” The Kadampas used to say, “In the future I must do good, I must do well.” This is the kind of firm resolution we should make. This is called the power of impulsion.
2. The power of *continual familiarization*. This means making oneself familiar with this mind training continuously.
3. The power of *white seeds*. This power is one’s exertion in making offerings, accumulating merit, and so forth, and formulating the intention to succeed in one’s mind training, such as “May I be successful in this mind training!”
4. The power of *rejection*. Consider all the problems that self-cherishing causes. It causes us to continue in the cycle of samsara since beginningless time, and in this life it is self-cherishing which prevents us from practicing the Dharma. And even if we do practice, it is again our self-cherishing which leads to flaws in our Dharma practice and causes obstacles. We can therefore consider self-cherishing to be the greatest of all enemies. When we come under the influence of self-cherishing, we should make the firm resolution not to surrender to it, just as it says in the *Way of the Bodhisattva* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra* 4.44):

Even if I am threatened with being beheaded,  
I shall not surrender to the afflictions!

5. The power of *aspiration*.

These five, then, should be our primary practice.  
For the practice at the time of death the text reads:

*The Mahayana instructions for transference are those very five powers.  
Your conduct is essential.*

There are numerous instructions for phowa, the transference of consciousness at the time of death. In this context, we speak of the instructions for transference according to the Pāramitā Tradition of the Mahayana. It is recommended to practice according to these instructions, as there is great benefit in dying while recollecting the Buddha. The phrase *your conduct is essential* means that one's posture at the time of death is a crucial factor. It is best if one can sit upright, fully cross-legged, and adopting the so-called seven-point posture of Vairocana. If this is not possible, it is also good to die while lying down in the Buddha's reclining posture.<sup>18</sup>

## EVALUATING ONE'S MIND TRAINING

Subsume the purpose of all Dharma into one.  
Hold to the main of the two witnesses.  
Continuously rely on a happy mind alone.  
If one is able to do it even when distracted, one is trained.

*Subsume the purpose of all Dharma into one.*

All Dharma here refers to the Buddha's teachings of the greater and smaller vehicles. To *subsume their purpose into one* means that they all serve the same purpose: the sole purpose of all teachings is to subdue self-clinging.

The Buddha taught two types of teachings, those of the greater and of the smaller vehicles. The teachings given for the purpose of subduing self-cherishing are called the Dharma of the Hinayana or Lesser Vehicle, and those taught to develop the attitude of cherishing others are termed the Dharma of the Mahayana or Greater Vehicle. Thus the teachings of both the greater and the smaller vehicles serve the single purpose of taming

self-cherishing. This is what is meant by *subsume the purpose of all Dharma into one*.

Now, how does one assess whether or not one is actually putting the teachings into practice? If one's self-cherishing diminishes, it means that the Dharma has been put into practice. If it doesn't decrease but instead increases one's self-cherishing, the Dharma has become pointless. If scholars, for instance, generate pride thinking "I am learned!" they commit a fundamental Dharma mistake. If practitioners think "I am a great meditator, there are no meditators greater than me!" they miss the whole point of the Dharma.

*Hold to the main of the two witnesses.*

There are two types of witnesses of our Dharma practice: other persons and one's own mind. Now, even though others can indeed function as witnesses, the main witness is one's own mind, as others cannot assess the quality of one's Dharma practice. It cannot be assessed on the basis of one's physical behavior and speech alone, but has to be evaluated mainly by one's own mind. This is mentioned in various treatises. If we think "Even if I died now and were reborn in the hell realm, I have done everything I had to do, there is nothing whatsoever left for me to do," it means that we have self-assurance in our practice. This is the sign that one has become a good, authentic practitioner.

*Continuously rely on a mind which is at ease alone.*

We should always strive to maintain our mind at ease and never allow ourselves to become unsettled. Whatever adverse circumstances we may encounter, we should always keep our mind at ease, reminding ourselves that the methods of mind training still allow us to practice. The greatest adversary for the Mahayana Dharma is hatred. Hatred originally stems from being irritated for some, possibly insignificant, reason. If, therefore, one is to stop anger, one must put an end to this irritated state of mind right from the beginning.

In the *Way of the Bodhisattva* (6.9) we read:

Whatever happens, I shall never let it disturb my joyful state of mind.

The Kadampa saying expresses it thus:

There is nothing wrong with saying, “This Geshe has a disease.”  
If, however, one were to say, “This Geshe’s mind is not at ease,”  
it is a sign of his lack of practice.

It is therefore very important to maintain a mind at ease.

If you can maintain your peace of mind in all circumstances, whether you are well or suffering, praised or disparaged, it shows that your mind training has been effective.

*If one is able to do it even when distracted, one is trained.*

An indication of the success of your training is your ability to stop afflictions by means of mind training, even when you are not intentionally applying mindfulness and awareness, when you are not reflecting on the Dharma, and are not being particularly careful.

## THE COMMITMENTS OF THE MIND TRAINING

*Train constantly in three basic principles.*

This means that one should train in the three following points:

*1. Don't go against the pledges of your mind training.*

You should keep to what you have promised. In the oral teachings of many Kadampa masters we find this proverb: “One Dharma must not discredit another.” For instance, if one considers oneself a scholar, one may think that one does not need to guard one’s discipline or engage in practice. Conversely, one may be a practitioner and think that this justifies not engaging in studies. Such attitudes are to be avoided. In the same way, meditators should not abstain from the practice of reciting prayers and so forth, nor should those who recite them avoid meditation practice. Therefore, if you consider yourself to be a mind-training practitioner, you should not allow your commitments to degenerate.

*2. Don't be reckless in your mind training.*

One should not go to places where there are ghosts or stay with people who have a contagious disease thinking one is protected because one is a mind-training practitioner. In general, we should not make our practice obvious in order that others think that we are mind-training practitioners.

*3. Do not let your mind training become one-sided.*

Instead of developing the ability to cultivate your mind training with certain objects alone, unable to work with others, you should make yourself able to cultivate it in all circumstances. If, for example, you are able to bear the harm inflicted by your dear ones, but not that caused by your enemy, or you can tolerate the harm caused by other beings, but are unable to cultivate tolerance with regard to disease, then your practice is one-sided. You should cultivate your practice in all circumstances as much as possible.

*Change your attitude, but stay natural.*

*Attitude* here refers to one's perception. It is our perception that needs to be changed. Our conduct, on the other hand, should not change, we should stay natural. When, for instance, you first start to practice and your mind has not really improved yet, you should not try to impress others with your physical behavior and speech. Therefore, you should inwardly cultivate the mind training, but remain the same in body and speech.

*Do not speak of impaired limbs.*

This simply means that one should not speak of others' defects in terms of physical disabilities, such as when someone is lacking an arm or a leg, nor talk about others' faults such as their lack of discipline and so forth.

*Never concern yourself with others' faults.*

Generally speaking, we shouldn't concern ourselves with anyone's faults, even those of animals. In particular we shouldn't concern ourselves with the faults of those who have entered the Dharma, and among them

particularly those we are living with. Furthermore, we should think thus, “If I see flaws in others, they are nothing but the projections of my own confused mind, not others’ faults. All appearances are mind.”

In general, to speak of others’ faults and to praise oneself is contrary to both the Dharma and to worldly conventions. Dza Patrul Rinpoche spoke often about this. Besides, the origin of a bodhisattva’s defeat<sup>19</sup> lies in praising oneself and disparaging others, which in turn comes from seeing faults in others. Hence, we should not mention others’ faults. It is therefore very important not to be preoccupied either with others’ faults, or with one’s own good qualities. In brief, be concerned about others’ good qualities and your own faults. As it is your own faults that you must abandon as much as possible, you should not speak of the faults of others.

*Discard the strongest affliction first.*

You should purify all afflictions by examining your own mind, and you ought to begin with the strongest one. Examining yourself, first check which of the afflictions is the strongest, be it pride or miserliness and so forth. If we are unable to identify it, we should ask our friends to examine us and then start by purifying whatever they feel is the strongest affliction in us.

*Give up all expectations.*

When practicing mind training, you should shun all hopes for results, all expectations. *Hopes* here refers to the wish for personal benefits that one could achieve with the practice of mind training, thoughts like “By practicing mind training, diseases and obstacles caused by spirits will be pacified,” or “Others will say I am a good Dharma practitioner, and they will make offerings and honor me,” or “It will help me to avoid being reborn in the hell realms in a future life,” or even “This is a means for achieving liberation.” In brief, any hope for personal benefits, all kinds of intentions to accomplish one’s personal benefit by the practice of mind training must be shunned.

*Abandon poisonous food.*

Food nourishes our body, but if it contains poison it will cause us harm. In the same way, the cultivation of bodhicitta is a means to obtain the bliss of buddhahood, which is its final result. If one clings to things as truly existent, however, one won't be able to cross the ocean of samsara. It is therefore necessary to meditate on emptiness, not clinging to the cultivation of bodhicitta as truly existent. For the practice of the Mahayana path we need both method and wisdom. The above explanations pertain to the method part and these practices have to be permeated with the view. All relative appearances need to be permeated with the view. When thinking "It is emptiness, it is like an illusion," method and wisdom are united. Without the view to cultivate this union of method and wisdom, one's practice of bodhicitta becomes like poisonous food. *Poisonous food* here means the four attachments.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, whatever virtue one accumulates, it should be done with a mind free of any of the four attachments.

*Do not maintain inappropriate loyalty.*

An inappropriately loyal person will, for instance, never forget the good they have received from others, but will also keep engraved in their mind the harm others have done to them, holding a grudge no matter how long it has been. This verse means that we should not keep such records for a long time.

*Do not engage in ugly fights.*

*Fights* here are quarrels or disputes. What are *ugly fights* then? When others reveal one's faults, fighting back attacking their weaknesses as much as possible is called revealing their faults or engaging in ugly fights. One shouldn't do that.

*Do not lie in ambush.*

This means that one should not look for opportunities to harm others. The following example illustrates this point. When people are harmed by an enemy but cannot retaliate immediately, they may wait in ambush to

take revenge. In the same way, when others do not comply with our wishes or harm us, we may think “I am unable to respond right away, but when the time comes for me to pay him back, I will get even with him.” Such thoughts should be abandoned.

If someone answers the good you do with harm, cultivate great compassion.

The sublime beings of this world advise us to answer harm with benefit.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, even when harmed, we should respond by helping others in whatever way we can.

*Do not target delicate points.*

We shouldn't do anything hurtful. We should not say in public something that would hurt others, like “You are a thief!” or “You have bad discipline!” Protecting others' feelings is a crucial point in the practice of a Dharma practitioner. We should be as concerned with all aspects of our conduct, even with the way we speak to others, as we are with the need to subdue the afflictions of our own mind.

*Don't put an ox's load on a cow.<sup>22</sup>*

This verse says that one should not put the heavy load of an ox on the back of a smaller animal like a cow, for example. It means that it is not right to load onto others the faults that you have committed. We should never accuse others, saying “Someone else did this!” if we ourselves have done something wrong.

In the *Way of the Bodhisattva* (8.162) we read:

Even if I have committed a minor fault

I shall announce it to all.

And even the tiniest faults of others

I shall proclaim to be my own.

Whatever faults others have committed, we should declare that we ourselves are responsible for them. And if we are not able to do that, we should at least abstain from blaming others for our faults.

*Do not turn the practice into a rite.*

There are special rituals, here called *rites*, which are used to cure diseases caused by spirits or to neutralize a curse. Such rituals are beneficial only in this life. This verse means that it is not appropriate to practice mind training as a method to merely cure a sickness or to remove obstacles caused by spirits, which affect only this present life. In the same way we should not practice in order to be called a good Dharma practitioner and to be applauded and eulogized. Such motives are not appropriate for mind training.

*Do not aim to be first in the race.*

This refers to the attitude of wanting to be first, as in a horse race, for instance. Such an attitude should be shunned. However learned or experienced a Dharma practitioner may be, it is never appropriate to think “I am the most renowned! I am the most respected! I received the greatest offerings and honor!”

*Do not bring a god down to the level of a demon.*

A *god* in this case is someone who benefits others, and a *demon* one who inflicts harm. If a god harms others, he descends to the level of a demon. Now what does that mean in this context? The cultivation of mind training is an antidote to self-grasping and the afflictions. That being so, if one practices mind training and then thinks “I am a mind training practitioner. I am a very good Dharma practitioner indeed. Others do not have this mind training of mine,” then one will be proud and look down on others. This is like bringing a god down to the level of a demon, and this Dharma (mind training) becomes a non-Dharma. We shouldn’t do that.

Concerning this, Patrul Rinpoche said that pride is a ghost that secretly follows our virtues. There will be an increase in pride with every single virtuous deed. That being the case, he says, we should be careful not to give rise to pride. Pride gives rise to great faults.

Like the lowest of servants,  
I shall exploit myself for every single task.<sup>23</sup>

With whomever we associate, we should think “I am the worst, I am the lowest. I am like the lowest of servants.” Instead of thinking “I am learned, I am superior to them,” we should think “I am the most ignorant of all.” Because pride will bring many afflictions with it, we should think that we are the worst, and make ourselves the lowest of servants.

*Do not seek out sorrow as a condition for happiness.*

This means that we should not hope for others’ sorrow or misery as a means for our own happiness. This includes the hope of obtaining someone’s possessions after they die, or renown when some famous person dies.

This concludes the explanation of the commitments of mind training. *Commitments* in this context are related to deeds and attitudes that are to be abandoned. *Precepts*, on the other hand, are those things we need to put into practice.

## THE PRECEPTS OF MIND TRAINING

*Carry out all yogas in a single way.*

In the context of the practice of the Secret Mantra, there are many kinds of yogas or practices, such as the yoga of eating, the yoga of sleeping, the yoga of rising, and so forth. In the context of mind training, there are not many such kinds of practices. Here, we are advised to carry out all yogas or activities in one manner, and that manner is the exchanging of self and others. When we eat good food for example, we should think “This food is excellent. May all beings enjoy food endowed with a hundred tastes!” and practice giving or sending this food to others. Conversely, when eating bad food we should think “May this bad food I am eating be all the

bad food of others, and may all others thereby not need to eat such bad food anymore!” and thus practice taking upon ourselves. Practicing in this way, we should carry out all yogas or activities in a single way.

*Carry out all countermeasures in one way.*

When one practices the Dharma, there will be many obstacles. The methods used to overcome those obstacles are called *dispelling hindrances*. All the practices to dispel hindrances are to be carried out by one method, which is the mind-training practice of sending and taking. How is this to be done? When you are practicing mind training and are struck by a disease, for instance, you may become disheartened with the cultivation of mind training. At this time, you should focus on the practice of taking, thinking “There are many in this world who have similar diseases and who are disheartened with the cultivation of mind training. May I be able to take upon myself all the circumstances adverse to the Dharma practice of all those beings, without exception.” This is the thought we should generate to dispel the hindrances. In this way we will be able to integrate adverse circumstances in the path.

In the same way, there are many unfavorable conditions for the Dharma practice. In each of these cases we should do as mentioned above, generating the thought “May all beings have favorable conditions for the Dharma practice.” This is the way we should practice.

*Two things to do: at the beginning and at the end.*

There are two things to do: one when waking up in the morning, and one before going to sleep. When we get up in the morning, we should think “Today, I shall cultivate bodhicitta very well.” If we generate this thought as we get up, there will be great benefit.

When going to sleep we should examine ourselves, asking “How did I spend my day?” We should analyze whether our actions were in accord with the cultivation of bodhicitta, or in conflict with it. If we did well, we should rejoice. If we committed faults, we should generate regret and promise not to repeat them. In this way, we should rejoice in the good we did and disclose the faults we committed.

*Whichever of the two occurs, bear it patiently.*

*The two* here refers to happiness and sorrow, or fortune and misfortune. Whichever of them occurs, we should be able to bear them equally. When one becomes very wealthy and rich, one may be led to think thoughts like “There is no one superior to me now! Whatever I do is right.” If such thoughts lead us to look down on others, it is called *not being able to bear happiness*.<sup>24</sup>

On the other hand, if your prosperity declines you may become discouraged, thinking “How could someone as helpless as me possibly succeed in Dharma practice?” When the situation becomes adverse to the practice of Dharma in this way, you will become *unable to bear destitution*.

That being so, we should cultivate our mind training whether we are fortunate and prosperous or destitute and helpless. When we are happy and fortunate, we should think “If I don’t practice now that I am happy and the material conditions are all present, when will I?” and cultivate our mind training.

And even when miserable, we should think “This is a good opportunity for me to practice the Dharma. If I do not practice now, when will I?” Thinking in this way, we should cultivate our mind training. In this way, we should turn both fortune and misfortune into favorable conditions for Dharma practice.

If we become very wealthy we should remain humble instead of becoming proud, and even if we become as wretched as a hungry ghost, we shouldn’t be discouraged. Whatever happens, we should turn all circumstances into favorable conditions for our mind training. This method should be applied in all circumstances. We should equally bear praise and disparagement, renown and insignificance, as well as gain and esteem and the lack thereof. In this way, we should not let any circumstances become unfavorable for the practice, but turn them all into favorable conditions.

*Guard the two at the risk of your life.*

The *two* referred to here are the trainings one has promised to carry out, and the commitments of mind training explained above. Those two should be guarded at the risk of one’s life, meaning that you should be willing to give up your life for them.<sup>25</sup>

*Train in the three challenges.*

When trying to overcome the afflictions, there will be challenges or difficulties. As those challenges will be there from the moment we start trying to overcome the afflictions right to the end, it is necessary to train in the methods of overcoming the afflictions. What are they?

1. The first difficulty lies in the fact that we are unable to recall the appropriate antidotes when the afflictions first arise, simply because they are so strong. When they are active in our minds, we might think that they are the cause of our being mentally at ease. When we get angry for instance, we think that we will become content or satisfied by speaking harshly. This is contrary to what the Buddha taught. He taught that the afflictions are the cause, the origin, of our suffering, and that suffering is precisely their outcome. Thus, even though we may think that acting out our afflictions will lead to happiness or satisfaction, we actually engage in actions that go against the Dharma. This is why it is said to be challenging to make use of the antidotes to those afflictions in the first place.
2. While we are trying to overcome the afflictions, it is challenging to reverse them. Even if we do remember the antidotes one or two times, it is difficult to reverse the afflictions, as we have been under their influence since beginningless time. For this reason it is said that while trying to overcome the afflictions it is challenging to reverse them.
3. In the end it is challenging to break their continuity, or to bring them to an end. Even if the afflictions are reversed, it is difficult to cut their continuity (that is, they will easily return). For these reasons we speak of three challenges in the abandonment of afflictions.

There is, however, no means to overcome the afflictions without relying on their antidotes. We must therefore bring great care to this enterprise. First of all, we must remember the antidotes for the afflictions. There is a great variety of antidotes. It is very beneficial for this purpose to memorize the verses of the *The Way of the Bodhisattva* (*Bodhicaryāvatāra*) as they mention the various antidotes to pride, anger, and so forth, which need to be applied directly on the spot, as soon as the afflictions arise. As there are many kinds of anger and many methods to stop the mental states which give rise to anger, we have to remind ourselves of these things time

and again. If we are able to reverse certain afflictions once, we should promise not to engage in them again from that time onward.

*Take hold of the three principle causes.*

Even though there are many conditions necessary for the Mahayana practices, we all should be able to obtain the three main ones. First of all, we need to rely on an excellent teacher: this is one condition. On top of that we need to have excellent faith: this is the second condition. And the third condition is having favorable conditions for the practice, such as food, money, and a place to live. At any rate, we should try to obtain these three conditions in order to practice the Dharma. If they are obtained, we should rejoice and think “May these conditions be obtained by other beings as well!” Joined with the practice of sending to others, we should definitely try our best to obtain these three favorable conditions.

*Cultivate the three things which must not deteriorate.*

1. You must not let your faith in the teacher deteriorate.

A Tibetan once addressed Jowo Jé Atiśa thus: “There are many meditators in Tibet, but there is no one who has given birth to the qualities of experience and realization. Why is that?” Atiśa replied: “This is true. Tibetans won’t achieve those qualities. All qualities arise in dependence on the teacher. As Tibetans do not have faith in their teachers, let alone seeing them as buddhas, those qualities will not arise. However good or bad our teachers may be, instead of making such distinctions, we should have faith in them, seeing them as real buddhas.” Sakya Paṇḍita said that even though the siddhas of India outwardly displayed coarse behavior, those who had faith attained liberation, while those who had no faith did not. These are very powerful words. Whether or not one has faith depends on oneself. Jetsün Doringpa quotes the following saying from Drogmi Lotsawa: “Even if a teacher is born in the lowest of hells where suffering is ceaseless, you will obtain the blessings of a buddha if you have faith in this teacher, regarding him as a buddha. How is this possible? It is because of the fact that in the realm of *dharmatā* (ultimate reality) there are no distinctions.”<sup>26</sup>

Thus our faith in the teacher must definitely not deteriorate.

2. Do not let your enthusiasm for mind training deteriorate.

This verse says that we should not let our enthusiasm for the cultivation of mind training, which is the heart of the Dharma, deteriorate.

3. Do not let the commitments you have accepted deteriorate.

Even though this mind training was one of the most excellent Dharma practices available in Tibet, some people used to say that one should not practice it until one has reached the bodhisattva bhūmis. This view was refuted repeatedly by Sakya Paṇḍita.

Furthermore, it has been claimed that the so-called *exchange of self and others* actually means that one exchanges self-cherishing for cherishing others, to reverse one's attitude of holding oneself most dear and not caring for others, but that it does not mean that one exchanges happiness for suffering, or virtue for negativity. Why? Simply because one cannot, according to this view, exchange one's own happiness and virtue for others' suffering and negativities. This has been refuted in detail in Gorampa's *Supplement to the Three Vows*.

The *Way of the Bodhisattva* (8.131) clearly teaches the meaning of this practice:

How is one to accomplish buddhahood without exchanging one's own happiness for the suffering of others? And even in samsara one won't find happiness.

If we analyze this ourselves, we will see that there is a need for there to be something to exchange.

The *Way of the Bodhisattva* (8.163ab) reads:

Overshadow your own renown, by talking about others' fame.

This is the meaning of exchanging happiness with suffering. Serving others, instead of making others serve us, is included in the meaning of *exchange*. Taking responsibility for others' faults, instead of blaming others for our own mistakes: this is the meaning of *exchanging self and others*. Even if one is unable to exchange everything, there are many ways to practice this.

*The Way of the Bodhisattva* (8.165) reads:

In brief, whatever harm I did to others for my own benefit,  
let that harm befall me for their good.

This is the true meaning of exchanging self and others.

*Maintain the three not separated.*

This means that our body, speech, and mind must never be separated from wholesome activities.

*Practice impartially.*

We should not be biased with regard to the objects of mind training that we practice with. We should not, for instance, cultivate our training toward our own mother and the like, while leaving aside other beings, or solely with the support of sentient beings, leaving aside the various elements of the container world.<sup>27</sup> We should train our mind with the support of beings and inanimate objects alike, without discrimination.

*It is essential to make your training pervasive and profound at all times.*

*Pervasive* means that we should practice with the support of all objects, as mentioned above. *Profound* means that it should not be mere lip service, but carried out sincerely, from the bottom of our hearts. We should apply these methods of mind training at all times.

*Practice at all times with particular cases.*

This means that we should practice with the support of particular cases we have singled out for the mind training. What does this mean? Birth in the lower realms and liberation are the results of unwholesome and wholesome deeds, respectively, which have been accumulated in relation to all those beings we associated with. Liberation and rebirth in the lower realms thus depend mainly on our constant association with others. That being so, we should cultivate our practice by treating others with great

care. In *The Great Mind Training Commentary*, five particular cases are mentioned.<sup>28</sup>

First of all, we should treat with great care those who have been very kind to us. Secondly, we should focus our practice particularly on those with whom we constantly associate. Some people disparage particular lamas saying, “Those lamas say that certain beings are the most important ones only because they are so far away: they do not help those who are right in front of their own eyes.” This shows how important it is to practice particularly with those who are in our immediate environment. Thirdly, we focus on those who compete with us. Fourthly, we practice with those who dislike us no matter how much good we have done to them. And finally, we focus our mind training on those who dislike us no matter what we do, due to the force of karma.

These are the five particular cases we should train with.

*Don't be dependent on other conditions.*

For other practices which make use of rituals we need to assemble all kinds of paraphernalia (that is, ritual articles and substances) such as tormas and so forth. This is not the case with the practice of mind training where we make use of anything and everything, good and bad conditions alike. Apart from that, there is no need to rely on other things.

*Now practice what matters most.*

This means that our priority should be the accomplishment of what is wholesome. *Now* refers to this time when we have obtained a human life, which is so difficult to obtain.

The *Way of the Bodhisattva* (4.19) reads:

For one who does not accomplish the wholesome,  
but instead keeps on heaping up unwholesome deeds,  
even the words “*a good rebirth*” will be unheard of  
for hundreds of millions of eons.

Generally speaking, every result arises in dependence on particular causes and conditions. Rebirth in the higher realms is the result of wholesome deeds, which are its cause. As only a few people accumulate

such wholesome deeds, it is said that such a rebirth is difficult to obtain. That being so, this is the time for us to practice well, now that we have obtained a human body endowed with all the necessary freedoms and favorable conditions, have come across the Buddha's teaching, have heard and studied the holy Dharma, and have understood what we have heard.

*What matters most* means that we should put into practice the most essential points. Comparing the Dharma and the worldly concerns, the Dharma is more important. Comparing the Dharma of the Mahayana or Greater Vehicle and that of the smaller vehicle, the Mahayana Dharma is more important. Of the numerous Mahayana practices, mind training is the most essential, and comparing the mind training which is taught and studied and the mind training which is actually put into practice, the latter is the most crucial. This is very important.

*Don't be misdirected.*

There are six kinds of misdirected factors:

1. Misdirected *tolerance* means that we cannot endure hardships for the sake of the Dharma, but bear patiently the hardships associated with unwholesome worldly activities.
2. Misdirected *interest* is the attitude of thinking of enjoyments in this present life instead of disclosing one's negative deeds and accumulating merit.
3. Misdirected *relish* means savoring the qualities of the objects of desire,<sup>29</sup> instead of the qualities of study, contemplation, and meditation.
4. Misdirected *compassion* means having no compassion for those who are engaged in unwholesome activities and thus deserve our compassion, while having compassion for those facing hardships while engaged in wholesome activities.
5. Misdirected *attention* refers to people who are independent and free and should focus their attention on practicing the Dharma, but instead focus their attention on the affairs of this life.
6. Misdirected *rejoicing*. We should rejoice when others are happy and not when they face difficulties. Rejoicing in others' problems and being displeased when they are well is called *misdirected rejoicing*.

Having thus abandoned these six misdirected factors, we should cultivate the corresponding correctly-directed ones.

*Don't be inconsistent.*

At times we may think that this mind training is very important and rush hastily into the practice. At other times, we may think that this practice won't bring us very far and that we should practice something else. By thinking in this way our practice will become very inconsistent. Discarding such inconsistency, we should stay focused and cultivate this training continuously.

*Train resolutely.*

We should practice free of doubts. What does this mean? In our practice we should be free of all kinds of doubts such as "Is this Dharma essential or not? Can I really do this? Should I do it now or later?" Having made a firm decision, we should cultivate this practice resolutely.

*Liberate yourself by means of investigation and analysis.*

Train your mind by means of both coarse investigation and fine analysis. We have to analyze ourselves to find out whether our practice is coarse or detailed. By applying both coarse investigation and fine analysis, we have to find out which afflictions are present in our mind. Having investigated this in detail, we should try to free our mind from the affliction of self-grasping.

*Do not boast.*

This means that we should not hold on to or nurture the thought that we have been kind to others. This is a very important point. Even if, for instance, one has helped others a lot, it is not appropriate to nurture this thought, thinking "I did this and that." In fact, the thought "I am so kind" should not even cross our minds. Furthermore, we are advised not to boast. We should never entertain thoughts like "I am learned. I am venerable. I am a VIP. I am very powerful." Such thoughts merely express our own self-concern. What is more, thinking like that will cause our

pride and arrogance to swell when we are praised and we will belittle and condemn others. But when we act in this way, we have no reason to boast. We should therefore not do it.

*Do not be irritable.*

This refers to our narrow-mindedness, being displeased or even ill-tempered. We should not react when encountering unpleasant situations, such as when others display physical and verbal behavior we do not approve of, including even the way they keep their things.

*Do not be volatile.*

This refers to bad behavior and instability. We should not be volatile as if ready to fight at any moment with others, whether they are our friends or not, behaving well one moment, for instance, and suddenly changing dramatically in the next. We should behave politely and be consistent. We should not irritate our friends, or be difficult.

*Do not expect gratitude.*

We may engage in Dharma activities, we may do a lot of good, we may benefit others and accumulate wholesome karma and so on, but we should not expect others to thank us for what we do, nor to say, “This is great, you are so kind!”

Each of those points of training is absolutely essential. They are the exceptional means which ensure that our mind training does not deteriorate, and improves continuously.

As Jowo Jé Atiśa puts it in brief:

You should develop confidence in the fact that your mind will be trained once you have cultivated well both aspects of bodhicitta by means of equalizing and exchanging self and others.

Exerting oneself according to these instructions is therefore the right thing to do.

*Now that the five degenerations are rampant, integrate them in the path of awakening.*

Due to the five rampant degenerations of time, beings, lifespan, afflictions, and views, the circumstances conducive to happiness are few, while unfavorable conditions are many. We should integrate those very circumstances, transforming them into the path of awakening which bestows ultimate happiness on all sentient beings.

*This essence of the elixir of pith instructions has been handed down from Serlingpa.*

This essence of the elixir of pith instructions which transforms all unfavorable conditions and afflictions into favorable ones for the path of awakening is the profound Dharma which was transmitted by Jowo Serlingpa to Atiśa. Serlingpa was one of his three main teachers and the greatest in terms of kindness to him.

Having awakened the karmic remnants of past training,  
my inspiration increased to the point that,  
completely disregarding suffering and disparagement,  
I sought out the oral instructions to tame self-grasping.  
Were I to die at this point, I would have no regrets.

Having awakened the remnants of wholesome karma accumulated in his previous lives, the great master Chékawa was greatly inspired by this profound Dharma which was taught by Jowo Jé Atiśa. With great determination, completely disregarding the physical and mental sufferings (those involved in acquiring the teachings), and the disparagement he would be subject to, he went to receive these core instructions to tame self-grasping from his teacher. Cutting all ties to selfish aims, he exerted himself with devotion and persistence in the practice of cherishing others more than himself, and therefore concludes saying: *Were I to die at this point, I would have no regrets.*

It is just as Chékawa says: those who really long for happiness should abandon unwholesome deeds and adopt the wholesome without error. It is advisable to exert yourself in this wholesome activity. I urge you to follow this advice.

Let us dedicate the root of virtue which arose from studying this text to great awakening.

Śubham! Virtue!

*These words are like nectar drops of oral instructions from the ocean of excellent discourses given by the supreme refuge, the late Khenchen Appey Rinpoche, our glorious and holy guru. The Tibetan text has been published with the hope that it will benefit beginners in particular, and distributed as a gift of Dharma by Khenpo Jamyang Kunga.*

*Translated by Christian Bernert.*

7. This refers to the three supports that should be present on shrines: a buddha image representing the enlightened body, a scripture representing enlightened speech, and a stupa representing enlightened mind.
8. This might refer to Lodrö Gyaltzen (*blo gros rgyal mtshan*), an abbot of Dzongsar who passed away in the 1960s.
9. These are: stream-enterer, once-returner, non-returner, and arhat.
10. While they do not teach the Dharma through speech, pratyekabuddhas are able to indicate impermanence and other fundamental tenets through their miraculous powers such as creating illusions in the sky.
11. Drogön Chögyal Phagpa (1235-1280) was one of the five founding figures of the Sakya tradition.

## 8. CULTIVATING A HEART OF WISDOM: ORAL INSTRUCTIONS ON THE MIND TRAINING IN SEVEN POINTS

1. Sachen Kunga Nyingpo, one of founding figures of the Sakya tradition, received these instructions in visions directly from the bodhisattva Mañjuśrī.
2. The seven are: 1. Preliminaries; 2. Main practice; 3. Turning negative circumstances into the path; 4. The practice of one life condensed; 5. Evaluating one's mind training; 6. The commitments of the mind training; 7. The precepts of mind training.
3. *Renunciation* renders the Tibetan *ngé-jung*, which literally translates as *definite emergence*. It is the positive state of mind of longing for liberation from suffering, resulting from disenchantment with the bondage of samsara and its suffering.
4. In his *Bhāvanākrama* 2 and 3, Kamalaśīla mentions the importance of correct breathing as a prerequisite for calm abiding meditation. See for instance Dalai Lama 2003:106.
5. This thought does not abide anywhere separately from emptiness. In other words, emptiness is the very nature of this thought too.
6. The Tibetan terms are *ngo bo* (essence), *gnas lugs* (actual condition) and *rang bzhin* (nature).
7. In general, one speaks of six types of main minds related to the six faculties. According to the tradition of the Cittamātra school, there are eight main minds, the previous six plus the afflicted mind (*kliṣṭāmanas*) and the all-base consciousness (*ālayavijñāna*).
8. In other words, it is the cognitive clarity of the mind which does not yet apprehend any object.
9. The four extreme views are the ways in which the mind apprehends its objects, conceiving them either as existent, as non-existent, as both existent and non-existent, or as being neither existent nor non-existent.
10. These seven steps subsume the practice of the entire Mahayana path. They are: 1. seeing all beings as one's dear mother; 2. recalling their kindness; 3. the wish to repay their kindness; 4. generating great love; 5. generating great compassion; 6.

- generating and practicing the two kinds of bodhicitta (aspiration and applied); and 7. the ultimate resultant state of buddhahood.
11. The cultivation of bodhicitta is the sixth step, which results in the seventh and final stage, the attainment of perfect buddhahood.
  12. This seems to have been the approach of Atiśa's other two main bodhicitta teachers. See Thubten Jinpa 2006:8.
  13. The *four immeasurables* are the boundless states of loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, expressed in these four wishes: *May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness. May they be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. May they never be parted from the happiness which is free from suffering. May they live in equanimity, free from attachment and aversion to all, whether distant or close.*
  14. Buddhist rosary commonly used to count mantras.
  15. According to Buddhism, the idea of a self is a superimposition based on the apprehension of the five aggregates, which are changing moment by moment and thus termed "a perishing collection." This view of the perishing collection is therefore a fundamental mistake.
  16. The term *appearances* renders the Tibetan term *nang-wa* (*snang ba*), which is also translated as *perception* as it denotes that which appears to a mind. It is important to understand, specifically in the present context, that whatever appears to the mind is nothing but the mind's perception and does not reflect an outer, objective reality.
  17. In other words, one sees the ultimate nature of the obstacles as non-arising, non-ceasing, and non-abiding emptiness. This view is applicable to all appearances in general, and in this context to the experience of obstacles.
  18. The Buddha's reclining posture is the posture he took when he passed into parinirvāṇa.
  19. A transgression of the root vow which results in losing the vow.
  20. The four attachments are attachment to this life, attachment to rebirth in the higher realms of samsara, attachment to personal benefit, and mental fixation or grasping.
  21. An almost identical quote is given in Chékawa's commentary to Langri Thangpa's *Eight Verses on Mind Training*. See Jinpa 2006:286.
  22. The Tibetan text literally reads: *Don't put a dzo's load on an ox.* A dzo is Tibetan a cross-breed between a yak and a cow, renowned for its strength.
  23. *Bodhicaryāvatāra* (8.163)
  24. This means that if you achieve a certain level of happiness due to becoming wealthy, you will not be able to remain happy if you become arrogant and start to disregard the needs of others.
  25. This refers to the great importance of mind training and bodhicitta, the effects of which greatly surpass the benefits of a single life.
  26. Literally the text reads, "This is the dependent arising of there being no distinctions in the realm of *dharmatā*."

27. *Container world* means the outer world excluding sentient beings.
28. This refers to the *Public Explication of Mind Training*. See Jinpa 2006:388.
29. This expression refers to the five types of objects perceived through our five sense faculties.

## 9. AN INTRODUCTION TO THE ABHIDHARMA

1. The Vaibhāṣika (lit. “followers of the explanation”) school has its name from the Abhidharma *Mahāvibhāṣā* literature believed to have been taught by the Buddha himself. Sautrāntika means “followers of the sutras.” They do not accept the Buddha as the author of the *Mahāvibhāṣā*, claiming that its teachings are contained in the sutras.
2. Asaṅga was the author of the *Compendium of Abhidharma (Abhidharmasamuccaya)*.
3. Dignāga was a great master of Buddhist logic and epistemology; Guṇaprabha was renowned for his knowledge of the Vinaya; Vimuktasena, for his expertise in the science of the Prajñāpāramitā; and Sthiramati for his learning in general and his numerous authoritative commentaries.
4. The Sanskrit term *abhidharma* is composed of the prefix *abhi-*, which can mean ‘special’ or ‘higher’, and *dharma*, which can mean ‘teaching’, ‘phenomenon’ or ‘property’.
5. An ancient Indian measurement unit corresponding roughly to between 10 and 15 km.
6. On the vehicle of the śrāvakas four successive levels of accomplishment are distinguished: stream-winner, once-returner, non-returner, and arhat. Each of these levels is further divided into two parts: *approach*, when the practitioner is about to enter the stage, and *abiding*, when that stage has been obtained. These are the four pairs of individuals on the śrāvakayāna.
7. These four pairs of individuals all have attained the path of seeing, which is tantamount to the direct realization of selflessness. This chapter discusses at length how non-returners and even certain types of arhats take birth within the conditioned realms of samsara.
8. See below for an explanation of mental factors.
9. The five types of common supernatural knowledge are: the divine eye, the divine ear, knowing others’ minds, recollecting previous lives, and the ability to perform miracles. The sixth type, the perfect knowledge of the exhaustion of afflictions, is exclusive to a buddha.
10. The four dhyānas are increasingly subtle states of meditative absorption. They are simply called first, second, third, and fourth dhyāna. The four samadhis related to the formless realm are: limitless space, limitless consciousness, perception of nothingness, and the state of neither perception nor non-perception.
11. Imperceptible form refers to a group of phenomena, including forms perceived in dreams or through samādhi as well as vows, which fulfill only the Vaibhāṣika school’s definition of the form skandha.