

CHAPTER TWO

Arousing bodhicitta, the root of the Great Vehicle

Through your great wisdom, you have realized nirvana.

Through your great compassion, you willingly embrace samsara.

Through your skill in methods you have realized that they are no different.

Peerless Teacher, at your feet I bow.

This chapter has three sections: training the mind in the four boundless qualities; arousing bodhicitta, the mind turned towards supreme enlightenment; and training in the precepts of bodhicitta in aspiration and bodhicitta in application.

I. TRAINING THE MIND IN THE FOUR BOUNDLESS QUALITIES

The four boundless qualities are boundless love, compassion, sympathetic joy and impartiality. Love is usually dealt with first. But when we practise the four one after the other as a training for the mind, we should start by developing impartiality. Otherwise, whatever love, compassion and sympathetic joy we generate will tend to be one-sided and not completely pure. In this case, therefore, we begin with the meditation on impartiality.

1. Meditation on impartiality

Impartiality (*tang nyom* in Tibetan) means giving up (*tang*) our hatred for enemies and infatuation with friends, and having an even-minded (*nyom*) attitude towards all beings, free of attachment to those close to us and aversion for those who are distant.

As things are now, we are very attached to those we think of as part of our own group—father and mother, relatives and so on—while we feel an intolerable aversion towards our enemies and those associated with them. This is a mistake, and comes from a lack of investigation.

In former lives, those whom we now consider our enemies have surely been close to us, ever lovingly at our side, looking after us with goodwill and giving us unimaginable help and support. Conversely, many of those whom we now call friends have certainly been against us and done us harm. As we saw in the chapter on impermanence, this is illustrated by the words of the sublime Katyayana:

He eats his father's flesh, he beats his mother off,
He dandles on his lap his own unfortunate enemy;
The wife is gnawing at her husband's bones.
I laugh to see what happens in samsara's show!

Another example is the story of Princess Pema Sel, daughter of the Dharma King Trisong Detsen. When she died at the age of seventeen, her father went to ask Guru Rinpoche how such a thing could happen.

“I would have thought that my daughter must have been someone with pure past actions,” said the king. “She was born as the daughter of King Trisong Detsen. She met all of you translators and panditas, who are like real Buddhas. So how can it be that her life was nevertheless so short?”

“It was not at all because of any pure past deeds that the princess was born as your daughter,” the Master replied. “Once I, Padma, you, the great Dharma King, and the great Bodhisattva Abbot had been born as three low-caste boys. We were building the Great Stupa of Jarung Khashor. At that time the princess had taken birth as an insect, which stung you on the neck. Brushing it off with your hand, you accidentally killed it. Because of the debt you incurred in taking that life, the insect was reborn as your daughter.”¹²⁹

If even the children of Dharma King Trisong Detsen, who was Manjusri in person,* could be born to him in that way as the result of his past actions, what can one say about other beings?

* *Trisong Detsen is considered to be an emanation of the Bodhisattva Manjusri*

At present we are closely linked with our parents and our children. We feel great affection for them and have incredible aspirations for them. When they suffer, or anything undesirable happens to them, we are more upset than we would be if such things had happened to us personally. All this is simply the repayment

of debts for the harm we have done each other in past lives.

Of all the people who are now our enemies, there is not one who has not been our father or mother in the course of all our previous lives. Even now, the fact that we consider them to be against us does not necessarily mean that they are actually doing us any harm. There are some we think of as opponents who, from their side, do not see us in that way at all. Others might feel that they are our enemies but are quite incapable of doing us any real harm. There are also people who at the moment seem to be harming us, but in the long term what they are doing to us might bring us recognition and appreciation in this life, or make us turn to the Dharma and thus bring us much benefit and happiness. Yet others, if we can skilfully adapt to their characters and win them over with gentle words until we reach some agreement, might quite easily turn into friends.

On the other hand there are all those whom we normally consider closest to us—our children, for example. But there are sons and daughters who have cheated or even murdered their parents. Sometimes children side with people who have a dispute with their parents, and join forces with them to quarrel with their own family and plunder their wealth. Even when we get along well with those who are dear to us, their sorrows and problems actually affect us even more strongly than our own difficulties. In order to help our friends, our children and our other relatives, we pile up great waves of negative actions which will sweep us into the hells in our next life. When we really want to practise the Dharma properly they hold us back. Unable to give up our obsession with parents, children, and family, we keep putting off Dharma practice until later, and so never find the time for it. In short, such people may harm us even more than our enemies.

What is more, there is no guarantee that those we consider adversaries today will not be our children in future lives, or that our present friends will not be reborn as our enemies, and so on. It is only because we take these fleeting perceptions of “friend” and “enemy” as real that we accumulate negative actions through attachment and hatred. Why do we hold on to this millstone which will drag us down into the lower realms?

Make a firm decision, therefore, to see all infinite beings as your own parents and children. Then, like the great beings of the past whose lives we can read about, consider all friends and enemies as the same.

First, toward all those you do not like at all—those who arouse anger and hatred in you—train your mind by various means so that the anger and hatred you feel for them no longer arise. Think of them as you would of someone neutral, who does you neither good nor harm. Then reflect that the innumerable beings to whom you feel neutral have been your father or mother sometime during your past lives throughout time without beginning. Meditate on this theme, training yourself until you feel the same love for them as you do for your present parents. Finally, meditate until you feel the same compassion toward all beings—whether you see them as friends, enemies or in between—as you do for your own parents.

Now, it is no substitute for boundless impartiality just to think of everybody, friends and enemies, as the same, without any particular feeling of compassion, hatred or whatever. That is mindless impartiality, and brings neither harm nor benefit. The image given for truly boundless impartiality is a banquet given by a great sage. When the great sages of old offered feasts they would invite everyone, high or low, powerful or weak, good or bad, exceptional or ordinary, without making any distinction whatsoever. Likewise, our attitude toward all beings throughout space should be a vast feeling of compassion, encompassing them all equally. Train your mind until you reach such a state of boundless impartiality.

2. Meditation on love

Through meditating on boundless impartiality as described, you come to regard all beings of the three worlds with the same great love. The love that you feel for all of them should be like that of parents taking care of their young children. They ignore all their children’s ingratitude and all the difficulties involved, devoting their every thought, word and deed entirely to making their little ones happy, comfortable and cosy. Likewise, in this life and in all your future lives, devote everything you do, say or think to the well-being and happiness of all beings.

All those beings are striving for happiness and comfort. They all want to be happy and comfortable; not one of them wants to be unhappy or to suffer. Yet they do not understand that the cause of happiness is positive actions, and instead give themselves over to the ten negative actions. Their deepest wishes and their actions are therefore at odds: in their attempts to find happiness, they only bring suffering upon themselves.

Over and over again, meditate on the thought of how wonderful it would be if each one of those beings could have all the happiness and comfort they wish. Meditate on it until you want others to be happy just as

intensely as you want to be happy yourself.

The sutras speak of “loving actions of body, loving actions of speech, loving actions of mind.” What this means is that everything you say with your mouth or do with your hands, instead of being harmful to others, should be straightforward and kind. As it says in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

Whenever catching sight of others,
Look on them with open, loving heart.

Even when you simply look at someone else, let that look be smiling and pleasant rather than an aggressive glare or some expression of anger. There are stories about this, like the one about the powerful ruler who glared at everyone with a very wrathful look. It is said that he was reborn as a preta living on left-overs under the stove of a house, and after that, because he had also looked at a holy being in that way, he was reborn in hell.

Whatever actions you do with your body, try to do them gently and pleasantly, endeavouring not to harm others but to help them. Your speech should not express such attitudes as contempt, criticism or jealousy. Make every single word you say pleasant and true. As for your mental attitude, when you help others do not wish for anything good in return. Do not be a hypocrite and try to make other people see you as a Bodhisattva because of your kind words and actions. Simply wish for others’ happiness from the bottom of your heart and only consider what would be most beneficial for them. Pray again and again with these words: “Throughout all my lives, may I never harm so much as a single hair on another being’s head, and may I always help each of them.”

It is particularly important to avoid making anyone under your authority suffer, by beating them, forcing them to work too hard and so on. This applies to your servants and also to your animals, right down to the humblest watchdog. Always, under all circumstances, be kind to them in thought, word and deed. To be reborn as a servant, or as a watchdog for that matter, and to be despised and looked down upon by everyone, is the maturation of the effects of past actions. It is the reciprocal effect of having despised and looked down on others while in a position of power in a past life. If you now despise others because of your own power and wealth, you will repay that debt in some future life by being reborn as their servants. So be especially kind to those in a lower position than yourself.

Anything you can do physically, verbally or mentally to help your own parents, especially, or those suffering from chronic ill health, will bring inconceivable benefits. Jowo Atisa says:

To be kind to those who have come from afar, to those who have been ill for a long time, or to our parents in their old age, is equivalent to meditating on emptiness of which compassion is the very essence.

Our parents have shown us such immense love and kindness that to upset them in their old age would be an extremely negative act. The Buddha himself, to repay his mother’s kindness, went to the Heaven of the Thirty-three to teach her the Dharma. It is said that even if we were to serve our parents by carrying them around the whole world on our shoulders, it would still not repay their kindness. However, we can repay that kindness by introducing them to the Buddha’s teaching. So always serve your parents in thought, word and deed, and try to find ways to bring them to the Dharma.

The Great Master of Oddiyana said,

Do not make old people distressed; look after them with care and respect.

In whatever you say and do, be kind to all those older than you. Take care of them and do whatever you can to please them.

Nowadays most people say that there is no way to get on in the samsaric world without harming others. But this is not true.

Long ago, in Khotan, two novices were meditating on the sublime Manjusri.

One day, he appeared to them and said, “There is no karmic link between you and me. The deity with whom you have had a connection in your past lives is the great Avalokitesvara. He is at present to be found in Tibet, over which he rules as the king.* You should go there to see him.

* *The king was Songtsen Gampo, the first Buddhist king of Tibet, who is considered to be an incarnation of Avalokitesvara.*

When the two novices arrived in Tibet and went within the walls of Lhasa, they could see that a large number of people had been executed or imprisoned. They asked what was going on.

“Those are punishments ordered by the king,” they were told.

“This king is most certainly not Avalokitesvara,” they said to themselves, and fearing that they might well be punished too, they decided to run away.

The king knew that they were leaving and sent a messenger after them summoning them to his presence.

“Do not be afraid,” he told them. “Tibet is a wild land, hard to subjugate. For that reason I have had to produce the illusion of prisoners being executed, dismembered, and so on. But in reality, I have not harmed a single hair on anyone’s head.”

That king was the ruler of all Tibet, the Land of Snows, and brought kings in all four directions under his power. He vanquished invading armies and kept peace along the frontiers. Although he was obliged to conquer enemies and defend his subjects on such a vast scale, he managed to do so without harming so much as a hair on a single being’s head. How could it not be possible for us, therefore, to avoid harming others as we look after our own tiny dwellings, which by comparison are no bigger than insects’ nests?

Harming others brings harm in return. It just creates endless suffering for this life and the next. No good can ever come of it, even in the things of this life. No-one ever gets rich from murder, theft, or whatever it might be. They only end up paying the penalty and losing all their money and possessions in the process.

The image given for boundless love is a mother bird taking care of her chicks. She starts by making a soft, comfortable nest. She shelters them with her wings, keeping them warm. She is always gentle with them and she protects them until they can flyaway. Like that mother bird, learn to be kind in thought, word and deed to all beings in the three worlds.

3. Meditation on compassion

The meditation on compassion is to imagine beings tormented by cruel suffering and to wish them free from it. As it is said:

Think of someone in immense torment—a person cast into the deepest dungeon awaiting execution, or an animal standing before the butcher about to be slaughtered. Feel love towards that being as if it were your own mother or child.

Imagine a prisoner condemned to death by the ruler and being led to the place of execution, or a sheep being caught and tied up by the butcher.

When you think of a condemned prisoner, instead of thinking of that suffering person as someone else, imagine that it is you. Ask yourself what you would do in that situation. What now? There is nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide. No refuge and no-one to protect you. You have no means of escape. You cannot flyaway. You have no strength, no army to defend you. Now, at this very moment, all the perceptions of this life are about to cease. You will even have to leave behind your own dear body that you have sustained with so much care, and set out for the next life. What anguish! Train your mind by taking the suffering of that condemned prisoner upon yourself.

And when you think of a sheep being led to the slaughter, do not think of it as just a sheep. Instead, feel sincerely that this is your own old mother that they are about to kill, and ask yourself what you would do in such a situation. What are you going to do now that they are going to kill your old mother, even though she has done no harm? Experience in the depth of your heart the kind of suffering that your mother must be going through. When your heart is bursting with the desire to do something right away to prevent your old mother from being butchered on the spot, reflect that although this suffering creature is not actually your father or mother in this present life, it is sure to have been your parent at some time in your past lives and to have brought you up with great kindness in just the same way. So there is no real difference. Alas for your poor parents who are suffering so much! If only they could be free from their distress right now, without delay—this very instant! With these thoughts in your heart, meditate with such unbearable compassion that your eyes fill with tears.

When your compassion is aroused, think how all this suffering is the effect of harmful actions committed in the past. All those poor beings now indulging in harmful actions will inevitably have to suffer too. With this in mind, meditate with compassion on all beings who are creating causes of suffering for themselves by killing and other harmful actions.

Then consider the suffering of all beings born in the hells, among the pretas and other realms of torment. Identify with them as if they were your parents, or yourself, and meditate on compassion with great energy.

Finally, reflect deeply upon all beings in the three worlds. Wherever there is space there are beings. Where-

ever there are beings, there are negative actions and the resulting suffering. Poor beings, involved only in all that negative action and suffering! How wonderful it would be if each individual being of the six realms could be free from all the perceptions brought about by past actions, all those sufferings and negative tendencies, and attain the everlasting happiness of perfect Buddhahood.

When you start meditating on, compassion, it is important to focus first on suffering beings individually, one at a time, and only then to train yourself step by step until you can meditate on all beings as a whole. Otherwise your compassion will be vague and intellectual. It will not be the real thing.

Reflect particularly on the sufferings and hardships of your own cattle, sheep, packhorses and other domestic animals. We inflict all sorts of barbarity on such creatures, comparable to the torments of hell. We pierce their noses, castrate them, pull out their hair and bleed them alive.* Not even for a moment do we consider that these animals might be suffering. If we think about it carefully, the trouble is that we have not cultivated compassion. Think about it carefully: right now, were someone to pull out a single strand of your hair you would cry out in pain—you would not put up with it at all. Yet we twist out all the long belly-hairs of our yaks, leaving a red weal of bare flesh behind, and from where each hair was growing a drop of blood begins to flow. Although the beast is grunting with pain, it never crosses our mind that it is suffering.

** The softer belly hair of the yak, used as wool, is pulled out rather than shorn. Blood from living yaks is used to make sausages .*

We cannot stand having a blister on our hand. Sometimes when our backsides hurt from travelling on horseback we can no longer sit in the saddle and have to ride sidesaddle instead. But it never occurs to us that the horse might be weary or suffering. When it can no longer go on and it stumbles, panting for breath, we still think that it is just being stubborn. We lose our temper and thrash it without a moment's sympathy.

Think of an individual animal—a sheep, for example—that is being slaughtered. First, as it is dragged from the flock, it is struck with paralyzing fear. A blood-blister comes up where it has been grabbed. It is thrown on its back; its feet are tied together with a leather thong and its muzzle bound till it suffocates.** If, in the throes of its agony, the animal is a little slow in dying, the butcher, that man of evil actions, just gets irritated.

*** In Tibet, it is common to slaughter animals by suffocation.*

“Here's one that doesn't want to die!” says he, and hits it.

Hardly is the sheep dead than it is already being skinned and gutted. At the same time another beast is being bled till it cannot walk straight. The blood of the dead animal is mixed with the blood of the living one and the mixture is cooked up as sausages in the entrails of the one already disembowelled.† Anyone who can eat such things afterwards must be a real cannibal.

† As blood-sausages. This follows a local belief that a mixture of the blood of a living animal and the blood of a dead one increases vitality.

Think carefully about the suffering of these animals. Imagine that you yourself are undergoing that suffering and see what it is like. Cover your mouth with your hands and stop yourself breathing. Stay like that for a while. Experience the pain and the panic. When you have really seen what it is like, think again and again how sad it is that all those beings are afflicted by such terrible sufferings without a moment's respite. If only you had the power to give them refuge from all these sufferings!

Lamas and monks are the people who are supposed to have the most compassion. But they have none at all. They are worse than householders when it comes to making beings suffer. This is a sign that the era of the Buddha's teaching is really approaching its end. We have reached a time when flesh-eating demons and ogres are given all the honours. In the past, our Teacher, Sakyamuni, rejected the kingdom of a universal monarch¹³⁰ as though it were so much spit in the dust, and became a renunciate. With his Arhat followers he went on foot, begging for alms, bowl and staff in hand. Not only did they do without packhorses and mules; but even the Buddha himself had no mount to ride. That was because he felt that to make another being suffer was not the way of the Buddhist teaching. Could the Buddha really not have been resourceful enough to find himself an old horse to ride?

Our own venerables, however, as they set out for a village ceremony, push a piece of rough twine through the ring-hole gouged in their yak's muzzle. Once they are hoisted into the saddle, they pull with both hands as hard as they can on the yak-hair cord, which digs into the animal's nostrils, causing unbearable pain and making the poor creature rear and plunge. So the rider, with all his strength, whacks it with his whip. Unable to stand this new pain on its flanks, the yak starts to run—but is pulled up again by the nose. The pain in its nostrils is now so unbearable that it stops in its tracks, and has to be whipped again. A tug in front, a whack

behind, until soon the animal is aching and exhausted. Sweat drips from every hair, its tongue hangs out, its breath rasps, and it can no longer go on.

“What’s the matter with him? He’s still not moving properly,” the rider thinks and, getting angry, digs the beast in the flanks with his whip handle, until in his rage he digs it in so hard that the handle breaks in two. He stuffs the pieces in his belt, picks up a sharp stone and, turning round in the saddle, slams it down hard on to the old yak’s rump ... all this because he feels not the slightest compassion for the animal.

Imagine yourself as an old yak, your back weighed down with a load far too heavy, a rope pulling you by the nostrils, your flanks whipped, your ribs bruised by the stirrups. In front, behind, and on both sides you feel only burning pain. Without a second’s rest, you go up long slopes, down steep descents, you cross wide rivers and broad plains. With no chance to swallow even a mouthful of food, you are driven on against your will from the early dawn until late in the evening when the last glimmers of the setting sun have disappeared. Reflect on how difficult and exhausting it would be, what pain, hunger and thirst you would experience, and then take that suffering upon yourself. You cannot but feel intense and unbearable compassion.

Normally, those we call lamas and monks ought to be a refuge and a help-impartial protectors and guides of all beings. But in fact, they favour their patrons, the ones who give them food and drink and make offerings to them. They pray that these particular individuals may be sheltered and protected. They give them empowerments and blessings. And all the while they are ganging up to cast out all the pretas and mischievous spirits whose evil rebirth is the result of their unfortunate karma. The lamas performing such ceremonies work themselves up into a fury and make beating gestures, intoning, “Kill, kill! Strike, strike!”

Now surely, if anyone takes harmful spirits as something to be killed or beaten, it must be because his mind is under the power of attachment and hatred and he has never given rise to vast, impartial compassion. When you think about it carefully, those malignant spirits are far more in need of compassion than any benefactors. They have become harmful spirits because of their evil karma. Reborn as pretas, with horrible bodies, their pain and fear is unimaginable. They experience nothing but endless hunger, thirst and exhaustion. They perceive everything as threatening. As their minds are full of hate and aggression, many go to hell as soon as they die. Who could deserve more pity? The patrons may be sick and suffering, but that will help them to exhaust their evil karma, not to create more. Those evil spirits, on the other hand, are harming others with their evil intentions, and will be hurled by those harmful actions to the depths of the lower realms.

If the Conqueror, skilled in means and full of compassion, taught the art of exorcising or intimidating these harmful spirits with violent methods, it was out of compassion for them, like a mother spanking a child who will not obey her. He also permitted the ritual of liberation to be practised by those who have the power to interrupt the flow of evil deeds of beings who only do harm, and to transfer their consciousness to a pure realm. But as for pandering to benefactors, monks and others that we consider to be on our own side, and rejecting demons and wrongdoers as hateful enemies—protecting the one and attacking the other out of attachment and hatred—were such attitudes what the Conqueror taught? As long as we are driven by such feelings of attachment and hatred, it would be futile to try to expel or attack any harmful spirits. Their bodies are only mental and they will not obey us. They will only do us harm in return. Indeed—not to speak of desire and hate—as long as we even believe that such gods and spirits really exist and want them to go away, we will never subdue them.

When Jetsun Mila was living in the Garuda Fortress Cave in the Chong valley, the king of obstacle-makers, Vinayaka, produced a supernatural illusion. In his cave, Jetsun Mila found five *atsaras** with eyes the size of saucers. He prayed to his teacher and to his yidam, but the demons did not go away. He meditated on the visualization of his deity and recited wrathful mantras, but still they would not go.

Finally, he thought, “Marpa of Lhodrak showed me that everything in the universe is mind, and that the nature of mind is empty and radiant. To believe in these demons and obstacle-makers as something external and to want them to go away has no meaning.”

* a *tsa ra* is a corruption of the Sanskrit *acarya*, and here means apparitions taking the form of Indian ascetics.

Feeling powerful confidence in the view that knows spirits and demons to be simply one’s own perceptions, he strode back into his cave. Terrified and rolling their eyes, the *atsaras* disappeared.

This is also what the Ogress of the Rock meant, when she sang to him:

This demon of your own tendencies arises from your mind;
If you don’t recognize the nature of your mind,
I’m not going to leave just because you tell me to go.

If you don't realize that your mind is void,
There are many more demons besides myself!
But if you recognize the nature of your own mind,
Adverse circumstances will serve only to sustain you
And even I, Ogress of the Rock, will be at your bidding.

How, then, instead of having confidence in the view that recognizes all spirits and demons as being one's own mind, could we subjugate them by getting angry?

When clerics visit their patrons, they happily eat all the sheep that have been killed and served to them, without the least hesitation. When they perform special rituals to make offerings to the protectors, they claim that clean meat is needed as an ingredient. For them, this means the still bleeding flesh and fat of a freshly killed animal, with which they decorate all the *tormas* and other offerings. Such fearful methods of intimidation can only be Bonpo or tirthika rites—they are certainly not Buddhist. In Buddhism, once we have taken refuge in the Dharma we have to give up harming others. How could having an animal killed everywhere we go, and enjoying its flesh and blood, not be a contravention of the precepts of taking refuge? More particularly, in the Bodhisattva tradition of the Great Vehicle, we are supposed to be the refuge and protector of all infinite beings. But for those very beings with unfortunate karma that we are supposed to be protecting we feel not the slightest shred of compassion. Instead, those beings under our protection are murdered, their boiled flesh and blood set before us, and their protectors—we Bodhisattvas—then gleefully gobble it all up, smacking our lips. Could anything be more vicious and cruel?

The texts of the Secret Mantra Vajrayana say:

For whatever we have done to upset the simha and tramen*
By not gathering offerings of flesh and blood according to the texts,
We beg the dakinis of the sacred places to forgive us.

* *Symbolic deities of the mandala.*

Now here, “gathering offerings of flesh and blood according to the texts” means to gather them as explained in the tantric texts of the Secret Mantrayana. What are the directives in those texts?

The five types of meat and five ambrosias
Are the food and drink of the outer feast gathering.

Offering a feast of flesh and blood according to the texts, therefore, means offering the five meats considered worthy samaya substances for, the Secret Mantrayana—namely, the flesh of humans, horses, dogs, elephants and cows. These five kinds of meat are undefiled by harmful action because these are all creatures which are not killed for food.¹³¹ This is quite the opposite of sticking to concepts of clean and unclean in which human flesh, the flesh of dogs and the like are seen as unclean and inferior, and the succulent, fatty meat of an animal that has just been killed for food is seen as clean. Such attitudes are referred to as:

Viewing the substances of the five samayas of relishing
As pure and impure, or consuming them heedlessly,

In other words, having ideas of pure and impure which transgress the samayas of relishing. Even those five acceptable kinds of meat may only be used if you have the power to transform the food you eat into ambrosia and if you are in the process of practising to attain particular accomplishments in a solitary place. To eat them casually in the village, just because you like the taste, is what is meant by “heedless consumption contrary to the samayas of relishing,” and is also a transgression.

“Pure meat,” therefore, does not mean the meat of an animal slaughtered for food, but “the meat of an animal that died because of its own past actions,” meaning meat from an animal that died of old age, sickness, or other natural causes that were the effect of its own past actions alone.

The incomparable Dagpo Rinpoche said that taking the still warm flesh and blood of a freshly slaughtered animal and placing it in the mandala would make all the wisdom deities faint. It is also said that offering to the wisdom deities the flesh and blood of a slaughtered animal is like murdering a child in front of its mother. If you invited a mother for a meal and then set before her the flesh of her own child, would she like it, or would she not like it? It is with the same love as a mother for her only child that the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas look on all beings of the three worlds. Slaughtering an innocent animal that has been the victim

of its own bad actions and offering its flesh and blood to them is therefore no way to please them. As the Bodhisattva Santideva says:

Just as no pleasures can bring delight
To someone whose body is ablaze with fire,
Nor can the great compassionate ones be pleased
When harm is done to sentient beings.

If you perform rituals like the offering prayer to the protectors using only the flesh and blood of slain animals, it goes without saying that the wisdom deities and the protectors of the Buddha's doctrine, who are all pure Bodhisattvas, will never accept those offerings of slaughtered beings laid out like meat on a butcher's counter. They will not even come anywhere near. Instead, powerful evil spirits who like warm flesh and blood and are ever eager to do harm will gather round the offering and feast on it.

For a short while after a practitioner of such "red offerings" has done his work, people may notice some minor benefits. But since the spirits involved are constantly harming others, they are liable to cause sudden problems and sicknesses. Again the practitioner of the "red" rituals will make his appearance and offer flesh and blood, and again that will help for a little while. This is how evil spirits and practitioners of the red rites become inseparable companions who always support each other. Like beasts of prey on the prowl, they roam around, obsessed solely by their urge to consume flesh, gnaw bones, and seek ever more victims. Possessed by evil spirits, practitioners of such rituals lose whatever disillusionment with samsara and thirst for liberation they may have had before. Whatever faith, purity of perception and interest in Dharma they once had, these qualities all fade away until the point comes when even the Buddha himself flying in the sky before them would arouse no faith in them, and even the sight of an animal with all its innards hanging out would arouse no compassion. They are always on the lookout for prey, like killer *rākṣasas* marching to war, their faces inflamed, shaking with rage and bristling with aggression. They pride themselves on the power and blessing of their speech, which comes from their intimacy with evil spirits. As soon as they die they are catapulted straight into hell—unless their negative actions are still not yet quite sufficient for that, in which case they are reborn in the entourage of some evil spirit preying on the life force of others, or as hawks, wolves and other predators.

During the reign of Dharma King Trisong Detsen, the Bonpos made offerings of blood and meat for the king's benefit. The Second Buddha from Oddiyana, the great pandita Vimalamitra, the great Bodhisattva Abbot and the other translators and panditas were all completely outraged at the sight of the Bonpos offerings. They said:

A single teaching cannot have two teachers;
A single religion cannot have two methods of practice. The Bon tradition is opposed to the law of Dharma;
Its evil is even worse than ordinary wrongdoing.
If you permit such practices, we shall go back home.

The panditas were all of the same opinion without even having to discuss the matter. When the king asked them to preach the Dharma, not one of them came forward. Even when he served them food, they refused to eat.

If we, claiming to walk in the footsteps of the panditas, siddhas and Bodhisattvas of the past, now perform the profound rites of the Secret Mantrayana in the manner of Bonpos and cause harm to beings, it will destroy the sublimity of the doctrine and dishonour the Three Jewels, and will cast both ourselves and others into the hells.

Always take the lowest place. Wear simple clothes. Help all other beings as much as you can. In everything you do, simply work at developing love and compassion until they have become a fundamental part of you. That will serve the purpose, even if you do not practise the more outward and conspicuous forms of Dharma such as prayers, virtuous activities and altruistic works. The *Sutra that Perfectly Encapsulates the Dharma* says:

Let those who desire Buddhahood not train in many Dharmas but only one.
Which one? Great compassion.
Those with great compassion possess all the Buddha's teaching as if it were in the palm of their hand.

Geshe Tönpa was visited once by a monk who was a disciple of the Three Brothers and Khampa Lungpa.*

“What is Potowa doing nowadays?” Tönpa asked the monk.

“He is teaching the Dharma to hundreds of members of the Sangha.” “Wonderful! And what about Geshe Puchungwa?”

“He spends all his time fashioning representations** of the body, speech and mind of the Buddha from materials that he and other people have offered.”

“Wonderful!” Geshe Tönpa repeated. “What about Gonpawa?” “He does nothing but meditate.”

“Wonderful! Tell me about Khampa Lungpa.”

“He stays in solitude, weeping continually, with his face hidden.”

At this Tönpa took off his hat, joined his hands before his heart and, shedding many tears, exclaimed, “Oh, that is really marvellous! That is really practising the Dharma. I could tell you a lot about how good he is, but I know he wouldn’t like it.”

The reason why Khampa Lungpa hid his face and cried all the time was that he was constantly thinking about beings tortured by the sufferings of samsara, and meditating on compassion for them.

One day Chengawa was explaining the numerous reasons why love and compassion were so important, when Langri Thangpa prostrated himself before him and said that thenceforth he would meditate on nothing but those two things. Chengawa bared his head and said three times, “What excellent news!”

* See glossary.

** *Lit. support. The representations of the Buddha’s body refer to statues and paintings, of his speech to sacred texts and other writings, and of his mind to stupas.*

Nothing could be more effective than compassion for purifying us of negative actions and obscurations. Once long ago, in India, the Abhidharma teaching had been challenged on three separate occasions and was about to disappear. But a brahmin nun named Prakasasila had the thought, “I have been born as a woman. Because of my low status I cannot myself make the Buddha’s doctrine shine forth. So I will couple with men and give birth to sons who can spread the teaching of the Abhidharma.”

With a ksatriya as the father she gave birth to the noble Asanga, and with a brahmin to Vasubandhu. As each of her two sons came of age, they asked what their fathers’ work had been.

Their mother told each of them, “I did not give birth to you to follow in your father’s footsteps. You were born to spread the Buddha’s teachings. You must study the Dharma, and become teachers of the Abhidharma.”

Vasubandhu went off to Kashmir to study Abhidharma with Sanghabhadra. Asanga went to Kukkutapada Mountain, where he started to do the practice of the Buddha Maitreya in the hopes that he might have a vision of him and ask him for instruction. Six years passed, and although he meditated hard he did not have as much as a single auspicious dream.

“Now it looks as if I will never succeed,” he thought, and departed, feeling discouraged. Along the way, he came across a man rubbing an enormous iron bar with a soft cotton cloth.

“What are you trying to do, rubbing like that?” he asked the man. The man replied, “I need a needle, so I’m making one ‘by rubbing away at this bar.’”

Asanga thought, “He’ll never make a needle by rubbing that huge bar with a soft piece of cotton. Even if it could be done in a hundred years, will he live that long? If ordinary people make such efforts for so little reason, I can see that I have never really practised the Dharma with any persistence. “

So he went back to his practice. He practised for three more years, still with no sign.¹³²

“This time I’m quite certain that I can never succeed,” he said, and he took to the road again. He came at last to a rock so high that it seemed to touch the heavens. At its foot, a man was stroking it with a feather dipped in water.

“What are you doing?” Asanga asked him.

“This rock is too tall,” the man said. “I don’t get any sun on my house, which is to the west of it. So I’m going to wear it away till it disappears.”

Asanga, with the same thoughts as three years before, went back and practised for another three years, still without so much as a single good dream.

Utterly discouraged, he said “Now whatever I do I can never succeed!” and set off once more.

Along the road, he came across a bitch with two crippled hind legs and her entire hind quarters crawling with maggots. Nevertheless, she was still full of aggression, and tried to bite him as she dragged herself along

on her forelegs, the rest of her body trailing along on the ground behind her. Asanga was swept by deep, unbearable compassion. Cutting off a piece of his own flesh, he gave it to the bitch to eat. Then he decided that he had to rid her of the worms on her hind quarters. Fearing that he might kill them if he removed them with his fingers, he realized that the only way to do it was with his tongue. But whenever he looked at the whole of the creature's body, so rotten and full of pus, he could not bring himself to do it. So he shut his eyes and stretched out his tongue ...

Instead of touching the body of the bitch, his tongue touched the ground.

He opened his eyes and found that the bitch had disappeared. In its place stood Lord Maitreya, surrounded by a halo of light.

"How unkind you are," Asanga cried, "not to have shown me your face all this time!"

"It is not that I have not shown myself. You and I have never been separate. But your own negative actions and obscurations were too intense for you to be able to see me. Because your twelve years of practice have diminished them a little, you were able to see the bitch. Just now, because of your great compassion, your obscurations have been completely purified and you can see me with your own eyes. If you do not believe me, carry me on your shoulder and show me to everyone around!"

So Asanga placed Maitreya on his right shoulder and went to the market, where he asked everyone, "What do you see on my shoulder?"

Everyone replied there was nothing on his shoulder—all except one old woman whose perception was slightly less clouded by habitual tendencies. She said, "You are carrying the rotting corpse of a dog."

Lord Maitreya then took Asanga to the Tushita heaven, where he gave him *The Five Teachings of Maitreya* and other instructions. When he came back to the realm of men, Asanga spread the doctrine of the Great Vehicle widely.

Since there is no practice like compassion to purify us of all our harmful past actions, and since it is compassion that never fails to make us develop the extraordinary bodhicitta, we should persevere in meditating upon it.

The image given for meditating on compassion is that of a mother with no arms, whose child is being swept away by a river. How unbearable the anguish of such a mother would be. Her love for her child is so intense, but as she cannot use her arms she cannot catch hold of him.

"What can I do now? What can I do?" she asks herself. Her only thought is to find some means of saving him. Her heart breaking, she runs along after him, weeping.

In exactly the same way, all beings of the three worlds are being carried away by the river of suffering to drown in the Ocean of samsara. However unbearable the compassion we feel, we have no means of saving them from their suffering. Meditate on this, thinking, "What can I do now?" and call on your teacher and the Three Jewels from the very depth of your heart.

4. Meditation on sympathetic joy

Imagine someone of noble birth, strong, prosperous and powerful, someone who lives in the higher realms experiencing comfort, happiness and a long life, surrounded by many attendants and in great wealth. Without any feeling of jealousy or rivalry, make the wish that they might become even more glorious, enjoy still more of the prosperity of the higher realms, be free of all danger, and develop ever more intelligence and other perfect talents. Then tell yourself again and again how wonderful it would be if all other beings could live at such a level too.

Begin your meditation by thinking about a person who easily arouses positive feelings—like a relative, a close friend or someone you love—who is successful, contented and at peace, and feel happy that this is so. When you have established that feeling of happiness, try to cultivate the same feeling toward those about whom you feel indifferent. Then focus on all kinds of enemies who have harmed you, and especially anybody of whom you feel jealous. Uproot the evil mentality that finds it unbearable that someone else should have such perfect plenty, and cultivate a particular feeling of delight for each kind of happiness that they might enjoy. Conclude by resting in the state without any conceptualization.

The meaning of sympathetic joy is to have a mind free of jealousy. You should therefore try to train your mind with all sorts of methods to prevent those harmful jealous thoughts from arising. Specifically, a Bodhisattva, who has given rise to bodhicitta for the benefit of all beings, should be trying to establish all those beings in the everlasting happiness of Buddhahood, and temporarily in the happiness of the realms of gods

and men. So how could such a Bodhisattva ever be displeased instead when some beings, through the force of their own past actions, possess some distinction or wealth?

Once people have been corrupted by jealousy, they no longer see the good in others, and their own negative actions increase alarmingly.

When the glory and activity of Jetsun Milarepa were spreading, a certain professor of logic named Tarlo became jealous and started to attack him. In spite of every example of clairvoyance and miraculous power that the Jetsun showed him, Tarlo had no faith in him, and only reacted with wrong views and criticism. He was later reborn as a great demon.

There are many other examples of what can happen under the power of jealousy, like how the logician, Geshe Tsakpuwa, tried to poison Jetsun Mila.

Even if the Buddha himself were present in person, there would be nothing he could do to guide a jealous person. A mind tainted with jealousy cannot see anything good in others. Being unable to see anything good in them, it cannot give rise to even the faintest glimmer of faith. Without faith one can receive neither compassion nor blessings. Devadatta and Sunaksatra were the Buddha's cousins. Both were tormented by jealousy and refused to have the slightest faith in him. Although they spent their entire lives in his company, he could not transform their minds at all.*

** See above.*

Moreover, even when evil thoughts about others do not materialize as actual physical harm, they still create prodigious negative effects for the person who has the thought. There were once two famous geshe who were rivals. One day, one of them learned that the other had a mistress.

The geshe told his servant, "Prepare some good tea, because I have some interesting news."

The servant made tea, and when he had served it he asked, "And what is the news?"

"They say," replied the geshe, "that our rival has a mistress!"

When Kunpang Trakgyal heard this tale, it is said that his face darkened and he asked, "Which of the two geshe committed the worse action?"

Constantly dwelling on such feelings as jealousy and competitiveness neither furthers one's own cause nor harms that of one's rivals. It leads to a pointless accumulation of negativity. Give up vile attitudes of this kind. Always sincerely rejoice in the achievements and favourable circumstances of others, whether it be their social position, physique, wealth, learning or whatever else. Think over and over again how truly glad you are that they are such excellent people, so successful and fortunate. Think how wonderful it would be if they became even better off than they are now, and acquired all the strength, wealth, learning and good qualities that they could possibly ever get. Meditate on this from the depth of your heart.

The image given for boundless sympathetic joy is that of a mother camel finding her lost calf. Of all animals, camels are considered the most affectionate mothers. If a mother camel loses her calf her sorrow is correspondingly intense. But should she find it again her joy knows no bounds. That is the kind of sympathetic joy that you should try to develop.

The four boundless qualities cannot fail to cause us to develop genuine bodhicitta. It is therefore vital to cultivate them until they have truly taken root in us.

To make things as easy as possible to understand, we can summarize the four boundless qualities in the single phrase "a kind heart." Just train yourself to have a kind heart always and in all situations.

One day, Lord Atisa's hand was hurting, and so he laid it in Drom Tönpa's lap and said, "You who are so kind-hearted, bless my hand!"* Atisa always placed a unique emphasis on the importance of a kind heart, and rather than ask people, "How are you?," he would say, "Has your heart been kind?"

Whenever he taught he would add, "Have a kind heart!"

** It is customary to ask realized lamas to blow on a wound in order to cure it.*

It is the power of kind or unkind intentions that makes an action positive or negative, strong or weak. When the intention behind them is good, all physical or verbal actions are positive, as was illustrated by the story of the man who put the leather sole over the *tsa-tsa*. When the intention behind it is bad, any action, however positive it looks, will in fact be negative. So learn to have kind intentions all the time, no matter what the circumstances. It is said:

If the intention is good, the levels and paths are good.

If the intention is bad, the levels and paths are bad.¹³³

Since everything depends on intentions,
Always make sure they are positive.

How is it that the paths and levels are good if the intentions are good?

Once an old woman was crossing a wide river with her daughter, holding her hand, when both of them were swept away by the current. The mother thought: "It's not that important if I am carried away by the water, as long as my daughter is saved!"

At the same time, the young girl was thinking, "It doesn't matter much if I get swept away, as long as my mother isn't drowned!"

They both perished in the water, and as a result of those positive thoughts for each other, they were both reborn in the celestial realm of Brahma.

On another occasion, six monks and a messenger boarded a ferryboat to cross the river Jasako. The boat set off from the bank.

About a quarter of the way across, the boatman said, "We're too heavy. If anybody knows how to swim, please jump in the water. If not, I'll jump in myself and one of you can take the oars."

None of them knew how to swim; but none of them knew how to row either.

So the messenger jumped out of the boat, crying, "It is better for me to die alone than for everybody to die!"

Immediately a rainbow appeared and a rain of flowers fell. Even though the messenger did not know how to swim, he was carried safely to the shore. He had never practised Dharma. This was the immediate benefit coming from a single good thought.

How is it that the paths and levels are bad if the thoughts are bad? There was once a beggar who, as he was lying in the gateway of the royal palace, was thinking, "I wish that the king would have his head cut off and I could take his place!"

This thought was continually going round in his mind all night long. Towards morning he fell asleep and while he was sleeping the king drove out in his carriage. One of the wheels rolled over the beggar's neck and cut off his head.

Unless you remember the purpose of your quest for Dharma with mindfulness and vigilance, and watch your mind all the time, violent feelings of attachment and hatred can easily lead to the accumulation of very serious negative effects. Although the old beggar's wishes could never come true, the result of his thoughts materialized right away. Was it likely that the king, sleeping comfortably on his jewelled bed in the palace, would lose his head? Even if he were to be beheaded, would it not be more plausible that the crown prince would take over the kingdom? Even if somehow he did not, was there any chance that in spite of all the ministers, who were like tigers, leopards and bears, a scabrous old beggar would take over the throne? Unless you check yourself carefully, however, even such ludicrous negative thoughts as this can arise. So, as Geshe Shawopa says:

Do not rule over imaginary kingdoms of endlessly proliferating possibilities!

One day the Buddha and his monks were invited to receive alms at the home of a benefactor. There were also two beggars there, one a young ksatriya and the other a young brahmin. The brahmin went in to beg before the Buddha and the monks had been served, and received nothing. The ksatriya waited until everybody else had been served, and received plenty of the good food left over from their begging bowls.¹³⁴ That afternoon, on the road, the two of them spoke their thoughts to each other.

"If I were rich," said the young ksatriya, "I would offer clothes and alms to the Buddha and his monks for the rest of my life. I would honour them by offering everything I had."

"And if I were a powerful king," said the young brahmin, "I'd have that shaven-headed bigot's head cut off, and his whole band executed with him!"

The ksatriya went to another country and installed himself in the shadow of a great tree. As the shadows of the other trees moved, the shadow of this particular tree stayed still. Now, the king of that country had just died, and since he had no heir the people had decided that the most meritorious and powerful person in the land would be installed as their king. Going off in search of their new sovereign, they came upon, the young ksatriya sleeping under his tree, still in the shade although midday had long since passed. They woke him up and made him king. Thereafter, he paid honour to the Buddha and his disciples as he had wished.

As for the young brahmin, the story goes that he lay down at a crossroads to rest and his head was cut off

by the wheel of a passing wagon.

If you learn to always have only kind thoughts, all your wishes for this lifetime will come true. The benevolent gods will protect you and you will receive the blessings of all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Everything you do will be positive, and at the moment of death you will not suffer. In future lives you will always be reborn in celestial or human realms until finally you attain the level of perfect Buddhahood.

Do not just rush off, without examining your thoughts and feelings, and perform a great show of virtuous activities-prostrations, circumambulations, prayers, recitation of mantras and so on. Instead, it is important to check your attitude all the time and to cultivate a kind heart.

II. AROUSING BODHICITTA¹³⁵

1. Classification based on the three degrees of courage

1.1 THE COURAGE OF A KING

A king's first priority is to overcome all his rivals, promote those who support him and proclaim himself sovereign. Only after that does his wish to take care of his subjects come into effect. Similarly, the wish first to attain Buddhahood for oneself and then to bring others to Buddhahood is called the king's way of arousing bodhicitta.

1.2 THE COURAGE OF A BOATMAN

A boatman aims to arrive on the other shore together with all his passengers. Likewise, the wish to achieve Buddhahood for oneself and all beings at the same time is called the boatman's way of arousing bodhicitta.

1.3 THE COURAGE OF A SHEPHERD

Shepherds drive their sheep in front of them, making sure that they find grass and water and are not attacked by wolves, jackals or other wild beasts. They themselves follow behind. In the same way, the attitude of those who wish to establish all beings of the three worlds in perfect Buddhahood before achieving it for themselves is called the shepherd's way of arousing bodhicitta.

The king's way, called "arousing bodhicitta with the great wish," is the least courageous of the three. The boatman's way, called "arousing bodhicitta with sacred wisdom," is more courageous. It is said that Lord Maitreya aroused bodhicitta in this way. The shepherd's way, called "the arousing of bodhicitta beyond compare," is the most courageous of all. It is said to be the way Lord Manjusri aroused bodhicitta.

2. Classification according to the Bodhisattva levels

On the paths of accumulating and joining, arousing bodhicitta is called "arousing bodhicitta by practising with aspiration." From the first to the seventh Bodhisattva level, it is called "arousing bodhicitta through excellent and perfectly pure intention." On the three pure levels, it is called "arousing fully matured bodhicitta," and at the level of Buddhahood, "arousing bodhicitta free from all obscurations."

3. Classification according to the nature of bodhicitta

There are two types of bodhicitta: relative and absolute.

3.1 RELATIVE BODHICITTA

Relative bodhicitta has two aspects: intention and application.

3.1.1 Intention

In *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, Santideva says of these two aspects of bodhicitta:

Wishing to depart and setting out upon the road,
This is how the difference is conceived.
The wise and learned thus should understand

This difference, which is ordered and progressive.

Take the example of a journey to Lhasa. The first step is the intention, “I am going to go to Lhasa.” The corresponding initial thought, “I am going to do whatever will ensure that all beings attain the state of total Buddhahood,” is the intention aspect of arousing bodhicitta.¹³⁶

3.1.2 Application

You then prepare the necessary supplies and horses, set out on the road and actually travel to Lhasa. Similarly, you decide to practise generosity, preserve discipline, cultivate tolerance, apply diligence, remain in meditative absorption, and train your mind in discriminating wisdom in order to establish all beings on the level of perfect Buddhahood, and you actually put this path of the six transcendent perfections into practice. This corresponds to the actual journey, and is the application aspect of bodhicitta.¹³⁷

3.2 ABSOLUTE BODHICITTA

Both the intention and application aspects are relative bodhicitta.¹³⁸ Through training for a long time in relative bodhicitta on the paths of accumulating and joining, you come at last to the path of seeing, where you have the real experience of thusness, the natural state of all things. This is the wisdom beyond all elaboration, the truth of emptiness. At that time you arouse absolute bodhicitta.¹³⁹

4. Taking the vow of bodhicitta¹⁴⁰

True absolute bodhicitta is attained by the power of meditation and does not depend on rituals. To generate relative bodhicitta, however, as beginners we need some procedure to follow, a ritual through which we can take the vow in the presence of a spiritual teacher. We then need to constantly renew that vow, in the same way, over and over again, so that the bodhicitta we have aroused does not decline but becomes more and more powerful.

Visualize all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and other deities in the sky before you, as for the refuge practice. Take them as witnesses of your, generating bodhicitta and think like this:

“Of all the countless living creatures throughout the vast reaches of the universe, there is not one who has not been my parent in the course of our succession of lives without beginning. I can be certain that, as my parents, they have all looked after me with every possible tenderness, given me the very best of their own food and clothing and nurtured me with all their love, just as my present parents have done. Now all these kind parents are foundering in the waves of samsara’s great ocean of suffering. They have been plunged into the deepest darkness of confusion. They have no idea of the true path to be practised, nor of the false path to be avoided. They have no authentic spiritual friend to guide them. They have no refuge or protection, no leader or companion, no hope and nobody to turn to, as lost as a blind man wandering friendless in the middle of a deserted plain. My old mothers, how could I ever liberate myself alone and leave you all behind here in samsara? For the sake of all beings, I shall awaken the sublime bodhicitta. Learning to emulate the mighty deeds of the Bodhisattvas of the past, I shall make whatever efforts are necessary, till there is not one being left in samsara!”

With this attitude, recite the following verse as many times as possible:

*Ho! Led astray by myriad appearances like reflections of the moon in water,
Beings wander in the endless chain of samsara;
To bring them rest in the radiant space of awareness,
With the four boundless qualities I arouse bodhicitta.¹⁴¹*

At the close of the session visualize that, by the power of your yearning devotion towards the deities of the field of merit, the whole assembly melts into light, starting from the outside, and finally dissolves into the teacher, union of all three refuges, in the centre. The teacher in turn melts into light and dissolves into you, causing the absolute bodhicitta present in the mind of the refuge deities to arise clearly in your own mind. Make this wishing prayer:

*May bodhicitta, precious and sublime,
Arise where it has not yet come to be;
And where it has arisen may it never fail*

But grow and flourish ever more and more.

Then dedicate the merit with the lines:

*Emulating the hero Manjusri,
Samantabhadra and all those with knowledge,
I too make a perfect dedication,
Of all actions that are positive.*

This arousing of bodhicitta is the quintessence of the eighty-four thousand methods taught by the Conqueror. It is the instruction to have which is enough by itself, but to lack which renders anything else futile. It is a panacea, the medicine for a hundred ills. All other Dharma paths, such as the two accumulations, the purification of defilements, meditation on deities and recitation of mantras, are simply methods to make this wish-granting gem, bodhicitta, take birth in the mind. Without bodhicitta, none of them can lead you to the level of perfect Buddhahood on their own.¹⁴² But once bodhicitta has been aroused in you, whatever Dharma practices you do will lead to the attainment of perfect Buddhahood. Learn always to use whatever means you can to make even the slightest spark of bodhicitta arise in you.¹⁴³

The teacher who gives you the pith instructions on arousing bodhicitta is setting you on the path of the Great Vehicle, so his kindness is greater than that of teachers who give you any other instructions. When Atisa mentioned the names of his teachers, he used to join his hands before his heart. But when he spoke of Lord Suvarnadvipa, he would join his hands above his head and his eyes would fill with tears. His disciples asked him why he made such a distinction.

“Is there really a difference in the spiritual qualities or kindness of these masters?” they asked.

“All my teachers were truly accomplished beings,” Atisa replied, “and in this their qualities are identical. But there is some difference in their kindness. The little bit of bodhicitta that I have comes from the kindness of Lord Suvarnadvipa. That is why I feel the greatest gratitude toward him.”

It is said that the most important thing about bodhicitta is not arousing it, but rather that it has actually arisen. The love and compassion of bodhicitta must really be alive in us. To recite the formula many hundreds of thousands of times without taking the meaning to heart, therefore, is utterly pointless. To take the bodhicitta vow in the presence of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and then not to keep it, would just be to swindle them. There is no worse fault than that. So do not cheat sentient beings either—try to cultivate bodhicitta all the time.

III. TRAINING IN THE BODHICITTA PRECEPTS

For the bodhicitta of intention, the training has three stages: considering others as equal to oneself, exchanging oneself and others and taking others as more important than oneself. For the bodhicitta of application, the training consists of practising the six transcendent perfections.

1. Training in the precepts of the bodhicitta of aspiration

1.1 CONSIDERING OTHERS AS EQUAL TO ONESELF

The reason we have been wandering in samsara’s ocean of suffering from time without beginning is that we believe in an “I” where there is no I, in a “self” where there is no self, and that we make that self the sole object of our affection. Instead, reflect as follows.

We want to be happy constantly and never to have any kind of suffering. The moment anything unpleasant happens to us we find it unbearable. Even a pinprick or the tiny burn of a spark makes us cry out in pain—we just cannot stand it. If a little louse should bite us on the back we fly into a rage. We catch that louse, put it on one of our thumbnails and crush it hard with the other, and long after we have already killed it we go on and on grinding our nails together in anger. Most people these days see no harm in killing a louse. But since it is invariably done out of anger, it is a sure cause for rebirth in the Rounding-Up and Crushing Hell. We should be ashamed to find such small discomforts so hard to bear and to react in a way that causes so much pain to another being.

Just like us, all beings of the three worlds want to be happy and to escape any kind of suffering, too. But although they want to be happy, they have no idea that happiness comes only from practising the ten posi-

tive actions. Although they do not want to suffer, they devote all their efforts to the ten harmful actions which bring about suffering. What they wish for and their attempts to attain it are therefore completely at odds, and they suffer all the time. Of all those beings, there is not a single one who has not, at some moment throughout time without beginning, been a parent to us. Now that we have been accepted as disciples by an authentic spiritual teacher, now that we have taken up the true Dharma and can distinguish what is profitable from what is detrimental, we ought to be caring lovingly for all our old mothers so enslaved by their own confusion, and should stop seeing any difference between them and ourselves. Putting up with their ingratitude and prejudices, we should meditate on the absence of any difference between friends and enemies.

Keeping all this in mind, meditate on it over and over again.

Whatever good or useful things you want for yourself, others want them just as much. So just as you work hard at bringing about your own happiness and comfort, always work hard for others' happiness and comfort, too. Just as you would try to avoid even the slightest suffering for yourself, strive too to prevent others having to suffer even the slightest harm. Just as you would feel pleased about your own well-being and prosperity, rejoice from your heart when others are well and prosperous, too. In short, seeing no distinction between yourself and all living creatures of the three worlds, make it your sole mission to find ways of making everyone of them happy, now and for all time.

When Trungpa Sinachen asked him for a complete instruction in a single sentence, Padampa Sangye replied, "Whatever you want, others all want as much; so act on that!"

Completely eradicate all those wrong attitudes based on attachment and aversion which make you reject others and care only about yourself, and think of yourself and others as being entirely equal.

1.2 EXCHANGING ONESELF AND OTHERS

Look at a person actually suffering from sickness, hunger, thirst or some other affliction. Or, if that is not possible, imagine that such a person is in front of you. As you breathe out, imagine that you are giving that person all your happiness and the best of everything you have, your body, your wealth and your sources of merit, just as if you were taking off your own clothes and dressing the other person in them. Then, as you breathe in, imagine that you are taking into yourself all the other person's sufferings and that, as a result, he or she becomes happy and free from every affliction. Start this meditation on giving happiness and taking suffering with one individual, and then gradually extend it to include all living creatures.

Whenever anything undesirable or painful happens to you, generate heartfelt, overwhelming pity for all the many beings in the three worlds of samsara who are now undergoing such pain as yours. Make the strong wish that all their suffering may ripen in you instead, and that they may all be freed from suffering and be happy. Whenever you are happy or feel good, generate the wish that your happiness might extend to bring happiness to all beings.

This bodhicitta practice of exchanging oneself and others is the ultimate and unfailing quintessential meditation for all those who have set out on the path of the Mahayana teachings. If you really experience that exchange happening even once, it will purify the negative actions and obscurations of many kalpas and create an immense accumulation of merit and wisdom. It will save you from the lower realms and from any rebirths that might lead to them.

In a previous life, the Buddha was born in a hell where the inhabitants were forced to pull wagons. He was harnessed to a wagon with another person called Kamarupa, but the two of them were too weak to get their vehicle to move. The guards goaded them on and beat them with red-hot weapons, causing them incredible suffering.

The future Buddha thought, "Even with two of us together we can't get the wagon to move, and each of us is suffering as much as the other. I'll pull it and suffer alone, so that Kamarupa can be relieved."

He said to the guards, "Put his harness over my shoulders, I'm going to pull the cart on my own."

But the guards just got angry. "Who can do anything to prevent others from experiencing the effects of their own actions?" they said, and beat him about the head with their clubs.

Because of this good thought, however, the Buddha immediately left that life in hell and was reborn in a celestial realm. It is said that this was how he first began to benefit others.

Another story tells how the Buddha, in a previous rebirth as the "daughter" of the sea-captain Vallabha, was once again freed from the lower realms as soon as he really experienced this exchanging of himself with others. There was once a householder called Vallabha, all of whose sons had died. So, when another son was

born, he decided to name him Daughter in the hope that this would keep him alive. Vallabha then went to sea in search of precious gems, but his ship sank and he perished.

When the son grew up, he asked his mother what his father's caste occupation had been. His mother, fearing that were she to tell him the truth he too might go to sea, told him that his father had belonged to the caste of grain merchants. So Daughter became a grain merchant and looked after his mother with the four coins of one *karsa* he earned each day. But soon the other grain merchants told him that he was not a member of their caste and that, consequently, it was not proper for him to practise their trade. He was forced to stop.

He went back to his mother and questioned her again. This time she told him that his father had been an incense seller. He started selling incense, and with the eight *karsa* he earned each day, he took care of his mother.

But Daughter was stopped once again, and this time his mother told him that his father had sold clothes. He set up as a clothing merchant, and was soon able to give his mother sixteen *karsa* a day. But yet again he was forced out of business by the other clothing merchants.

When he was told that he was of the jewellers' caste, he started to sell jewels and brought home thirty-two *karsa* a day to give to his mother. It was then that the other jewellers told him that he belonged to the caste of those who brought back jewels from ocean voyages and that this was the work he was born to do.

When he got home that day, he said to his mother, "I belong to the caste of those who search for jewels. So I'm going to sail across the great ocean to carry on my own trade!"

"It is true that you are of the jewel hunters' caste," said she, "but your father and all your ancestors have died at sea in their quest for jewels. If you go you'll die too. Please don't go! Stay at home and trade here."

But Daughter could not obey her. He prepared everything he needed for his journey. As he was setting out, his mother, unable to let him go, caught hold of the hem of his garment and wept. He was furious.

Crying, "Your tears will bring me bad luck on the journey across the ocean!" he kicked her in the head and left.

During the voyage, his ship was wrecked and almost the entire crew was drowned, but Daughter held fast to a plank and was washed ashore on an island. He came to a town called Joy. In a beautiful house made of precious metals and jewels, four beautiful goddesses piled up silken cushions for him to sit on and offered him the three white and three sweet foods.

As he prepared to leave, they warned him, "Do not travel toward the south. Great misfortune will befall you if you do!" But Daughter did not listen and took to the road.

He came to a town called Joyous, even more beautiful than the one before. Here eight beautiful women placed themselves at his service. As before, they warned him of great misfortune threatening him if he went towards the south, but he took no notice and set off yet again.

In a town called Intoxication, still more perfect than the others, he was welcomed by sixteen exquisite goddesses who also served him and warned him as before, but once again it was to no avail.

He continued on his journey and came upon a white fortress whose top touched the very skies. It was called Guru Brahma's Castle, and here thirty-two ravishingly beautiful goddesses invited him in. They prepared him a couch of silken cushions, served him with the three white and three sweet foods and begged him to stay. But he wanted to leave.

As he was setting off again, they said to him, "Wherever you are going, please avoid the south! Evil will befall you!" But he felt an urge to go south, and south he went.

Soon a fortress of iron rose before him, its towers soaring up to the skies. At the gate, he saw a black man with terrifying red eyes and a long iron bar in his fist. Daughter asked him what was inside the building, but the man remained silent. As he came closer, Daughter looked in and saw many more men like the first. A feeling of terror gripped his whole body, making his hair stand on end.

He said to himself, "The danger! This must be the danger they warned me about."

He went inside. There he saw a man whose brains were being pulverized by a steel wheel revolving on his head.

"What did you do to deserve this?" asked Daughter.

"I kicked my mother in the head and this is the fully ripened effect. But what about you? Why didn't you take advantage of the happiness they were offering you at Guru Brahma's Castle? Why did you come looking for suffering here?"

“I suppose I was pushed here by my karma, too,” thought Daughter. At that moment a voice from the sky called out, “Let those who are bound be freed, and those who are free be bound!”

The steel wheel was suddenly spinning on Daughter’s head. Like the other man’s, his brain was smashed to a pulp and he experienced the most unbearable pain and suffering. That pain awakened in him a feeling of intense compassion for all those in the same state as himself.

He thought, “In the realms of samsara there are other beings suffering like me for kicking their mothers in the head. May all their suffering ripen in me and may I alone bear it for all of them. May none of the others ever again experience such pain in any of their successive rebirths.”

Immediately, the wheel flew up into the air, his agony ceased and he soared up to the height of seven palm trees in a state of bliss.

The bodhicitta practice of exchanging oneself with others is the ultimate, indispensable method for attaining enlightenment. Indeed, the Kadampa Masters of the past used to make it their main practice. Once, Geshe Chekawa, who knew many teachings of both the New and the Ancient Traditions and who knew many texts on logic by heart, went to see Geshe Chakshingwa. On his pillow he saw a small text, and when he opened it he came across this sentence:

Offer gain and victory to others.
Take loss and defeat for yourself.

“What a wonderful teaching!” Chekawa thought, and he asked Chakshingwa what the teaching was called.

“It’s *The Eight Verses of Langri Thangpa*,” said Chakshingwa. “Who holds these instructions?”
“Geshe Langri Thangpa himself.”

Chekawa was determined to receive these teachings. First he went to Lhasa and spent some days circumambulating the sacred places. One evening, a leper from Langthang told him that Langri Thangpa had passed away. Chekawa asked who was the successor of the lineage and was told that there were two potential successors, Shangshungpa and Dodepa, but that they could not agree on the matter. However, they were not arguing out of competitiveness.

Shangshungpa would tell Dodepa, “You are the older; you take the succession. I will serve you as though you were Langri Thangpa himself.”

But Dodepa would answer, “You are more learned. You be the successor!”

In spite of the pure perception they both had of each other, Chekawa interpreted their failure to agree about the succession as a shortcoming and considered neither of them to be the holder of Langri Thangpa’s teaching. He tried to find out who was its best holder, and everybody told him that it was Sharawa.

Sharawa was giving a teaching of many volumes to some thousand members of the Sangha. Chekawa listened to him for a few days, but did not hear him say a word about the teaching he sought.

“He seems not to have it either,” he thought, “but I’ll ask him. If he has this teaching, I’ll stay. Otherwise I’d better move on.”

So Chekawa went to see Sharawa, who was circumambulating a stupa.

He spread out a cloth on the ground and invited Sharawa to sit down for a moment saying, “I have something to ask you.”

“Venerable Monk,” said Sharawa, “what is your problem? Personally, I’ve always found all my answers on my meditation cushion.”

“I read these words in a text: ‘Offer gain and victory to others. Take loss and defeat for yourself.’ I liked them very much. Is this a profound teaching or not?”

“Venerable monk,” Sharawa replied, “whether or not you like this teaching, it is one you can only dispense with if you don’t want to attain Buddhahood. “

“Do you hold this teaching?”

“Yes. It’s my main practice,” Sharawa replied. “Then I beg you, teach it to me,” said Chekawa.

“Can you stay with me for a long time?” Sharawa asked. “If you can, I will teach it to you.”

From him, Chekawa received guidance according to his experience¹⁴⁴ in a continuous course of mind training that lasted six years. Through practising it he was able to rid himself completely of every trace of selfishness.

There is no better instruction for dispelling the sickness and sufferings of this life and for subjugating spirits, negative forces and obstacle makers than this bodhicitta meditation of exchanging oneself and others.

Meditate on it with perseverance, always rejecting like poison the negative mentality which gives so much importance to yourself.

1.3 CONSIDERING OTHERS MORE IMPORTANT THAN ONESELF

“I may be in samsara, I may be reborn in hell, I may be ill, feverish, or suffering from any other misfortune, but I will bear it all. May the sufferings of others ripen in me! May other beings have all my happiness and all the effects of my good actions!”

Arouse this thought in the depth of your being and actually put it into practice, following the examples of Atisa’s teachers, Maitriyogi and Dharmaraksita, and of our Teacher Sakyamuni in his rebirths as King Padma, as a turtle and as King Manicuda.

Once, Maitriyogi, Atisa’s teacher, was expounding the Dharma, when a man nearby threw a stone at a dog. The Master yelled with pain and fell from his throne. The other people present, seeing nothing the matter with the dog, thought that Maitriyogi must be pretending. But, Maitriyogi, who knew what they were thinking, showed them his back on which the welt of the stone that had been thrown at the dog was clearly visible. Everyone there was convinced by the evidence: he had physically taken upon himself the pain caused by the stone hitting the dog.

The Master Dharmaraksita started out as a Sravaka pandita of the Vaibhasika school. Although in the earlier part of his life he had never heard the teachings of the Great Vehicle, his natural affinity was to the Great Vehicle tradition, and without any deliberate effort he was filled with great compassion.

Once, someone in the region where he lived was attacked by a violent illness which the doctor declared could only be healed with one medicine—the flesh of a live human being. If that could not be found, there would be no hope.

“If it helps, I’ll give him mine,” said Dharmaraksita and, cutting some flesh from his own thigh, he gave it to the sick person, who ate it and was cured.

Dharmaraksita, who had not yet realized emptiness, suffered enormous pain as a result of what he had done, but his great compassion prevented him from feeling any regret.

“Are you feeling better?” he asked the invalid.

“Yes, I am fine, but look at the difficulties I’ve brought upon you!”

“I would even bear death if it could bring you happiness,” said Dharmaraksita.

He was in such pain, however, that he could not sleep at all. Finally, at some time in the small hours, he dozed off and had a dream.

A man, all white, appeared to him and said, “Whoever wants to attain enlightenment must pass through such trials as yours. Well done! Well done!” The man spat on the wound and rubbed it with his hand. The wound disappeared, leaving no scar at all.

When Dharmaraksita awoke from his dream, he saw that his wound really had been healed. The white man had been the Great Compassionate One⁴⁵ himself. The authentic realization of the natural state then dawned in Dharmaraksita’s mind and the words of Nagarjuna’s *Five Treatises on the Middle Way* were ceaselessly on his lips.

In ancient times, when Sakyamuni in a previous life was a king called Padma, a serious epidemic broke out amongst his subjects and many of them died. The king called the doctors and asked how the disease should be treated.

“This sickness can be cured with the flesh of the *rohita* fish,” they said.

“But the disease has so obscured our minds that we can think of no other remedy.”

On the morning of an auspicious day the king bathed, donned new clothing and performed a ceremony of confession and purification. He made great offerings to the Three Jewels and prayed fervently, saying, “As soon as I die, may I immediately be reborn as a *rohita* fish in the Nivṛitta river!”

He then cast himself down from the heights of his palace—one thousand cubits—and was immediately reborn as a fish, crying out in human speech, “I am a *rohita* fish, take my flesh and eat it!”

Everyone came to eat it. As soon as one side was eaten, the fish turned over and offered them the other side. While they were cutting off the flesh, the first side became whole again. In this way, by eating each side alternately, everybody who was ill could be cured. Then the fish spoke to them all.

“I am Padma, your king. I gave up my life and took birth as a *rohita* fish to save you from the epidemic. As an expression of your gratitude, give up doing evil and do all the good you can.”

They all obeyed him and thenceforth never again fell into evil rebirths. Another time Sakyamuni had been reborn as a giant turtle, when a boat transporting five hundred merchants was wrecked at sea.

They were all about to drown, but the turtle called out to them in human speech: “Get up on my back! I will carry you all to safety!”

The turtle carried all the merchants to dry land, and then collapsed exhausted by the water’s edge, and fell asleep. But as it slept, a cloud of eighty thousand *ketaka* flies began to suck its blood. Waking up, it saw how many they were and realized that to go back into the water or roll on the ground would kill all the insects. So it just lay where it was, giving them its life.

Later, when the turtle became the Buddha, the flies were the eighty thousand gods who listened to his teachings and perceived the truth.

On another occasion, the Buddha was reborn in the land of *Sāketa* as the son of the king Golden Crest and the queen Joyous Beauty. On top of his head there was a protuberance¹⁴⁶ consisting of a precious jewel, from which came a nectar with the power to turn iron into gold. For this reason he was called *Manicuda*, “Jewel Crest.” At the moment of his birth there had been a rain of all kinds of precious substances. He had in his possession a magnificent elephant named Excellent Mountain. As king, he conducted his worldly affairs according to the Dharma, always distributing largesse to the poor, thus putting an end to poverty and begging.

A *risi* called *Brighu* gave him his daughter’s hand in marriage. She had been born from a lotus and possessed all the propitious signs. From their union, a son just like his father was born, and they called him Lotus Crest.

One day the king decided to organize a huge offering and invited many guests, among them, the *risi* *Brighu* and a king called *Dusyanta*, *Hard-to-Endure*. Now *Indra*, wishing to test the intentions of the king, took the form of a *raksasa*. He sprang out of the oblation fire and, marching up to the king, demanded food and drink. The king offered him all sorts of dishes and drinks, but he refused them all.

“All I need,” he said with the faintest of smiles, “is the warm flesh and blood of a freshly killed being!”

The king was somewhat shaken. “I can’t obtain such a thing without harming others,” he thought. “Even if he kills me, I will never hurt other beings. However, unless I give him what he needs, all his hopes will be dashed. What shall I do?”

He decided that the moment had come to make an offering of his own flesh and blood and said: “I will give you my own!”

Panic swept the assembly and they tried to dissuade him, but to no avail. The king opened his jugular vein and offered his blood to drink. The *raksasa* drank his fill. Then he cut off pieces of his flesh and the demon ate it to the bone. The retinue were smitten with grief. The queen fell unconscious to the ground. But the king remained in control of his faculties and *Indra* became extremely joyful.

“I am *Indra*,” he said. “I have no need of flesh and blood so you can stop your act of charity.” He applied divine nectar to the wounds on the king’s body, which was restored to its former condition again.

Later, *Jewel Crest* gave the elephant *Excellent Mountain* to his minister, *Chariot of Brahma*. At that time one of the *risi* *Marici*’s disciples, who was accomplished in concentration, arrived. The king received him with deep homage and asked him what he wanted.

“In gratitude to the teacher who taught me the Vedas, I would like to offer him a servant, since he is now old and has none. I have come to ask you for your wife and son.”

So the king let them go. The disciple left with them and offered them to his teacher.

King *Hard-to-Endure*, meanwhile, had been coveting the elephant.

Arriving back in his own kingdom, he sent a message demanding that the elephant be presented to him. He was duly informed that the elephant had already been given away to a brahmin. But he refused to listen and threatened war if the elephant was not handed over. As the enemy troops advanced, King *Jewel Crest* felt a profound sadness within him.

“How sad that greed can turn one’s closest friend into one’s most bitter enemy in an instant!” he thought. “If I were to prepare to fight, I could easily defeat him. But many beings would suffer, so I must flee!”

Four *pratyekabuddhas* appeared and said, “Great King, the time has come for you to go into the forest.”

So he left for the Forest of Others’ Enchantment, while his ministers went to *Marici* and asked for the young prince who had been given to him. *Marici* returned the prince, and the prince then took command of the army and did battle. *Hard-to-Endure* was defeated and forced to retreat, and his evil thoughts and activi-

ties brought disease and famine upon his own kingdom.

When Hard-to-Endure asked his brahmins what could bring these afflictions to an end, they said, “The remedy would be King Jewel Crest’s jewel. You should ask him for it.”

“But he will probably refuse,” said King Hard-to-Endure.

The brahmins insisted, however, that Jewel Crest would give it-for was he not famous for never having refused a request? One brahmin was sent to ask him.

King Jewel Crest was walking through the forest, looking around, and had arrived in the vicinity of Marici’s hermitage at the same moment that the queen-his wife-in search of roots and leaves in the woods not far away, was attacked by a hunter.

“King Jewel Crest, save me!” she cried.

Her distant wails came to the ears of Jewel Crest, who wondered what could be happening and went to investigate. The hunter, seeing him approach, thought it was the risi. Fearing a curse, he fled. The queen, who before had enjoyed the immense comfort of the royal court, was in such distress that when Jewel Crest saw her he was overwhelmed.

“How sad!” he thought. “All compounded things are unreliable.”

It was at that moment that the brahmin sent by Hard-to-Endure arrived.

He told the king his story and asked him for the protuberance on his head.

“Cut it off and take it,” said the king.

The brahmin did so and left. In Hard-to-Endure’s kingdom, all disease and famine came to an end.

As the king experienced the pain caused by his wound, it aroused in him great compassion for all the beings living in the hot hells. Then he fell unconscious.

Meanwhile, prompted by the good omens that had appeared, numerous members of the court arrived, as well as many gods. “O King,” they said, “what happened?”

The king sat up and wiped away some of the blood that stained his face. “Hard-to-Endure sent someone to ask me for the crest on my head, so I gave it to him,” he answered.

“What made you do that?” they asked.

“I wasn’t trying to get anything for myself. My only wish was that Hard-to-Endure’s kingdom should be saved from disease and famine. But there is still one thing that I want ... “

“What is that?” they asked

“To be able to protect all beings,” he replied “But don’t you feel any regret?” they asked. “No. None at all,” said the king.

“Seeing the pain in your face, it’s hard to believe what you say.” “Well,” said the king, “if I really have no regrets about having given my crown protuberance to Hard-to-Endure and his followers, may my body become exactly as it was before!”

And that is what happened. His followers then begged him to return to the palace, but he refused. At that point, the four pratyekabuddhas reappeared.

“Since you help your enemies so much, why not help your friends too?” they said. “Now you should go back to your palace.”

He returned to the palace, and brought benefit and happiness to his subjects.

2. Training in the precepts of the bodhicitta of application: the six transcendent perfections

The first five of the six transcendent perfections—generosity, discipline, patience, diligence and concentration—are all aspects of the practice of skilful means. The sixth, wisdom, belongs to the accumulation of primal wisdom.¹⁴⁷

2.1 TRANSCENDENT GENEROSITY

Generosity can take three forms: material giving, giving Dharma and giving protection from fear.

2.1.1 Material giving

There are three kinds of material giving: ordinary giving, great giving and exceptionally great giving.

Ordinary giving. This refers to the giving of anything material, even if it is no more than a pinch of tea-leaves or a bowl of barley. If it is given with a perfectly pure intention, the amount is not important. The

Confession of Downfalls speaks of “the positive effect, for the future of giving a mere mouthful of food to a being born in the animal realm.” The Conquerors, with their masterful skill in means and great compassion, are said to be able to help pretas as numerous as the sands of the Ganges with a single drop of water or grain of barley by using the power of dharanis,* mantras and other techniques.

* A type of long mantra found in the sutras.

The white and the red burnt offerings bring great benefit to pretas that move through space. Spirits that otherwise feed on the lives of others can be temporarily satisfied by the smell of the burnt food offering, and their minds are liberated by the gift of Dharma.** As a result they no longer harm others, and many beings are thus protected from the danger of death. This constitutes giving protection from fear, so the burnt offering practice includes all three kinds of generosity.

** During the ritual of a burnt offering (see glossary), the “giving of Dharma” is usually included in the form of the verse summarizing the Buddha’s teaching, “Abandon evil-doing ... ,” quoted below.

Since water tormas and burnt offerings are both easy to perform and very effective, try to practise them regularly and without interruption. It is good to offer a hundred thousand water tormas every year.

When people get hold of a few supplies or a little money, they hold tight to them with a dying man’s grip, and use them neither for this life nor for lives to come. No matter how much they have, they still think they have nothing, and moan as if they were on the point of starvation. Such behaviour can create right now an experience like that of the preta-realm, through the effect similar to the cause.†

† see pages 113-114.

Avoid such attitudes and try to be generous, through such activities as making offerings to the Three Jewels and giving to beggars. As Jetsun Mila says:

Dig out food from your own mouth and give it as alms.

Otherwise, if you let yourself be a slave to your selfish attachment, the point might come where even if you had all the wealth in the world it would still not seem enough for one person; and, not daring to break into what you already have, you will tell yourself that anything you are going to use for offerings or give to the needy will still have to be found, later or from somewhere else.

Generally speaking, the Buddha taught material giving and other practices involving material possessions mainly for lay Bodhisattvas. If you are a monk or nun, the important thing is simply to reduce your desires, to learn to be content with whatever you have, and to practise the threefold training of the higher path with determination in mountain hermitages and solitary places, gladly accepting all hardships.

Some practitioners abandon their spiritual practice to involve themselves in trade, agriculture or other means of livelihood, and pile up wealth through cunning and trickery. They maintain that they are practising Dharma through the offerings and charitable gifts they make with what they have gained. But it is of such people that it is said:

When Dharma is not practised according to Dharma, Dharma itself can cause evil rebirth.

Their approach is absolutely worthless. It is most important, therefore, to be always satisfied with what one has.

Great giving. This means to give to others something rare or very precious to you personally, such as your own horse or elephant, or even your own son or daughter.

Exceptionally great giving. This refers to making a gift of your own limbs, body or life. Examples are Prince Great Courage giving his body to a starving tigress, Nagarjuna giving his head to the son of King Surabhibhadra,* and Princess Mandabhadri also feeding a tigress with her own body. However this sort of generosity should be practised only by a being who has attained one of the Bodhisattva levels. Ordinary beings are incapable of it.¹⁴⁸ For the moment, mentally dedicate your body, life and wealth to the benefit of others without attachment, praying that one day you will be capable of actually giving them away.

* See page 122.

2.1.2 Giving Dharma

This means leading others to spiritual practice by giving empowerments, explaining the Dharma, transmitting texts and so forth. However, to work for the good of others when one’s own selfish desires have not yet

disappeared would be nothing but a show.

Atisa's disciples asked him when they might be able to teach others, work for others' benefit or perform the transference of consciousness for those who had just died. His reply was this:

You may guide others once you have realized emptiness and developed clairvoyance.
You may work for their benefit once for your own benefit¹⁴⁹ there is no more left to do.
You may perform the transference for the dead once you have entered the path of seeing.

He also said:

This degenerate time is no time for boasting;
It is a time for arousing determination.
This is no time for holding high positions;
It is a time for keeping to a humble place.
This is no time for having servants and disciples;
It is a time for living in solitude.
This is no time for taking care of disciples;
It is a time for taking care of yourself.
This is no time for analyzing the words;
It is a time for reflecting on the meaning.
This is no time for being out and about;
It is a time for staying in one place.

The Three Brothers asked Geshe Tönpa whether it was more important to practise in solitude or to help others through the Dharma. Geshe Tönpa replied:

It is useless for a beginner with neither experience nor realization to try to help others with the Dharma. No blessings can be obtained from him, just as nothing can be poured out of an empty vessel. His instructions are insipid and without substance, like beer brewed without pressing the grains. Someone at the aspiration stage who has the warmth¹⁵⁰ of the practice, but has not yet established a firm stability in it, cannot work for the benefit of beings. His blessings are like something poured from one vessel into another: he can only fill others by emptying himself. His instructions are like a lamp passed from hand to hand: if he gives light to others, he is left in the dark.

But someone who has attained one of the Bodhisattva levels is ready to work for others' benefit. His blessings are like the powers of a wish-granting vessel: he can bring all beings to maturity without ever running dry. His instructions are like a central lamp from which others can take light without it ever being dimmed.

This decadent age is therefore not a time for ordinary beings to help others externally, but rather a time for them to live in solitary places and train their own minds in the love and compassion of bodhicitta.

It is a time to keep away from negative emotions. While a precious medicinal tree¹⁵¹ is still just a shoot it is not yet time to pick it, it is the time to protect it.

For these reasons it is quite difficult to really make the gift of Dharma to others. To expound a teaching to others without having experienced it oneself will not help them at all. As for acquiring offerings and wealth by teaching Dharma, that is what Padampa Sangye called "using the Dharma as merchandise to get rich."

Until you have overcome wanting anything for yourself, it would be better not to rush into altruistic activities. Instead, pray that the minds of positively inclined spirits may be liberated when they hear you praying, reciting mantras or reading the scriptures. Consider it enough to recite the prayers for giving the Dharma that are found at the end of the ritual texts for water tormas or offering the body,¹⁵² such as:

Abandon evil-doing.
Practise virtue well.
Master your own mind.
This is the Buddha's teaching.

When your own selfish desires have been exhausted, the time will have come to devote yourself entirely to others, without concern for your own peace and happiness and without relaxing your efforts for an instant.

2.1.3 Giving protection from fear

This means actually doing whatever you can to help others in difficulty. It includes, for instance, providing a refuge for those without any place of safety, giving protection to those without any protector, and being with those who have no other companion. It refers particularly to such actions as forbidding hunting and fishing wherever you have the power to do so, buying back sheep on the way to slaughter, and saving the lives of dying fish, worms, flies and other creatures. For the Buddha taught that, of all relative good actions, saving beings' lives is the most beneficial.

Taken together, the different kinds of generosity constitute a most essential point of the Tantric samayas. In *The Vows of the Five Families* it says:

As the samaya of the Jewel Family,
Always practise the four kinds of generosity.

2.2 TRANSCENDENT DISCIPLINE

Transcendent discipline consists of avoiding negative actions, undertaking positive actions, and bringing benefit to others.

2.2.1 Avoiding negative actions

This means rejecting like poison all ten negative actions of body, speech and mind that are not directed towards the benefit of others.¹⁵³

2.2.2 Undertaking positive actions

This means always creating as many sources of good for the future as possible by always doing whatever positive actions you can, regardless of how insignificant they may seem.

As the common saying goes: “Positive actions just happen while our mouths or hands are free, negative actions while we move around or sit.” Only by always checking with great mindfulness, vigilance and care, and by trying hard to do good and refrain from evil, can you avoid committing many serious negative actions—even while simply amusing yourself.

Do not take lightly small misdeeds,
Believing they can do no harm:
Even a tiny spark of fire
Can set alight a mountain of hay.

Always put this advice into practice, applying constant mindfulness and vigilance, and you will eventually acquire an unimaginable store of positive actions in the course of your everyday activities. Simply showing respect when you come across a pile of *mani* stones by taking off your hat and walking round it, keeping it on your right, and applying the three supreme methods, can lead unerringly to perfect enlightenment. It is said:

Do not take lightly small good deeds,
Believing they can hardly help:
For drops of water one by one
In time can fill a giant pot.

There is the story of a pig that was chased around a stupa by a dog, and another of seven caterpillars who fell off their leaf into a stream and were carried around a stupa by the current: such occurrences were enough to bring those beings eventually to liberation.

Always, therefore, renounce the smallest harmful act; do whatever good you can and dedicate all the merit to the benefit of beings. This includes all the precepts of the Bodhisattva vows.

2.2.3 Bringing benefit to others

As we have already seen, when you are totally free of wanting anything for yourself, the time will have come for you to work directly for the benefit of others, using the four ways of attracting beings. But as a beginner, the way to bring benefit to others is to dedicate to the benefit of all beings all the practice you do while

training in undertaking positive actions and avoiding negative ones. All this is to be done applying the three supreme methods.

2.3 TRANSCENDENT PATIENCE

Patience includes three aspects: patience when wronged, patience to bear hardships for the Dharma, and patience to face the profound truth without fear.

2.3.1 Patience when wronged

This type of patience should apply whenever you are attacked, robbed or defeated, insulted to your face or slandered behind your back. Instead of getting annoyed and reacting angrily, you should respond positively, with loving kindness and compassion. If you lose patience and give way to anger, a single fit of rage can destroy the effects of the good actions you have accumulated over a thousand kalpas, as is mentioned in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*:

Good works gathered in a thousand ages,
Such as deeds of generosity,
Or offerings to those gone to bliss:
A single flash of anger shatters them.¹⁵⁴

And again:

No evil is there similar to hatred,
Nor austerity to be compared with patience.¹⁵⁵
Steep yourself, therefore, in patience—
In all ways, urgently, with zeal.

Remembering the ills that anger brings, strive to cultivate patience in all circumstances. Padampa Sangye says:

To hate enemies is a delusion caused by karma.
Transform your vicious thoughts of hatred, people of Tingri!

And Atisa says:

Do not get angry with those who harm you.
If you get angry with those who harm you,
When are you going to cultivate patience?

Whenever someone hurts you, insults you or accuses you unjustly, the effect—as long as you do not lose your temper with that person or bear a grudge—will be to exhaust many of your past negative actions and obscurations. By developing patience in such situations you can accumulate abundant merit. Consider all who wrong you, therefore, as your teachers. As it is said,

If there were no-one with whom to get angry, with whom could you cultivate patience?

Nowadays we often hear that someone is a really good lama or monk but has a terrible temper. But there is no worse fault in the world than anger—so how could anyone be so good and at the same time have a terrible temper? Padampa Sangye says:

You don't understand that a moment's action arising from anger is worse than a hundred actions arising from desire.

If you have really assimilated the teachings properly, everything you do, say and think should be as soft as stepping on cotton wool and as mild as *tsampa* soup laced with butter. But it may well be the contrary, and the slightest virtuous practice you do, or vow you keep, makes you feel very pleased with yourself and puffs you up with pride. Or every time anyone says a single word you are extremely sensitive to the way they speak, and boil with anger whenever you think you are being humiliated or criticized. That sort of touchiness is a sign that your mind and the Dharma have gone separate ways and that the Dharma has not changed your mind in the least. Geshe Chengawa says:

If, as we study, reflect and meditate, our ego grows bigger and bigger, our patience becomes more frag-

ile than a baby's skin, and we feel even more irritable than the demon Tsang Tsen, these are sure signs that our study, meditation and reflection have taken the wrong direction.

Always be humble, dress modestly, and treat everyone, whether good, bad or mediocre, with respect. Tame your mind with the Dharma, taking the love and compassion of bodhicitta as your basis. Without any doubt, this is the most essential point of all practices. It is better than a thousand "most sublime" views or "most profound" meditations which do no good to the mind.

2.3.2 Patience to bear hardships for the Dharma

For the sake of practising Dharma you should ignore heat, cold and all other difficulties. The tantras say:

Even through flaming infernos or seas of razor-sharp blades,
Search for the Dharma until you die.

The ancient Kadampas had these four goals:

Base your mind on the Dharma,
Base your Dharma on a humble life,
Base your humble life on the thought of death,
Base your death on an empty, barren hollow.

Nowadays we think we can practise Dharma alongside our worldly activities, without the slightest need for determination* or for hardship, all the while enjoying comfort, well-being and popularity. "Other people manage to do it," we insist, and say admiringly, "Now, that's a good lama, he knows how to combine Dharma and worldly life."

** snying rus, lit. "a bone in the heart," means a bold determination and courage which never gives up.*

But how could there be a way to marry Dharma with worldly life? Those who claim to be doing so are likely to be leading a good worldly life, but you may be sure that they are not practising pure Dharma. To claim that you can practise Dharma and worldly life at the same time is like saying that you can sew with a double-pointed needle, put fire and water in the same container or ride two horses in opposite directions. All these things are simply impossible.

Could any ordinary person ever surpass Buddha Sakyamuni? Yet even he found no way of practising the Dharma and worldly life side by side. Instead, he left his kingdom behind like spit in the dust, and went to live on the banks of the River Nairanjana, where he practised asceticism for six years, nourishing himself on only a single drop of water and a single grain of barley every year.

What about Jetsun Milarepa? While he was doing his practice, he had neither food nor clothing. He ate nothing but nettles, and his whole body became like a skeleton covered in greenish hair. Those who saw him had no idea whether he was a man or a demon. The fact that he practised Dharma to that point, so tenaciously and accepting hardship so willingly, surely proves that it is impossible to follow the Dharma and worldly life at the same time. Could Milarepa really have been too hopeless to know how to combine the two?

The great siddha Melong Dorje attained accomplishment after practising for nine years, eating nothing but the bark of the *lakhe* tree. Longchen Rabjam, the Omniscient Sovereign of the Dharma, lived only on twenty one pills of mercury* for many months. When it snowed, he used to get into a rough sack that served him as both bed and clothing.

** Mercury is used in the practice of bcud len (extracting the essence). Its toxicity is neutralized and pills are made from it on which meditators live without having to eat ordinary food.*

All the siddhas of the past attained accomplishment only by practising with determination, willingly accepting all hardships, having cast aside every worldly activity. Not one of them attained realization by practising alongside the usual activities of everyday life, enjoying comfort, well-being and fame. Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa says:

By the time you have set yourself up with a comfortable place to stay, plenty of food, warm clothes and a generous benefactor, you have completely cultivated the demon before even starting to cultivate the Dharma.

Geshe Shawopa says:

To practise Dharma with sincerity your ambition in life should be poverty. At the end of a life of poverty, you should be able to deal with your death. If you have this attitude, you can be sure that no god, demon or human being will ever be able to make difficulties for you.

Jetsun Mila sang:

No-one to ask me if I'm sick,
No-one to mourn me when I die:
To die here alone in this hermitage
Is everything a yogi could wish for.

No trace of feet outside my door,
No trace of blood within:**
To die here alone in this hermitage
Is everything a yogi could wish for.

No-one to wonder where I've gone,
No particular place to go.
To die here alone in this hermitage
Is everything a yogi could wish for.

My corpse can rot and be eaten by worms,
My gristle and bone be sucked dry by flies;
To die here alone in this hermitage
Is everything a yogi could wish for.

** *This may mean that there is no doctor to practise bloodletting or simply that there is no meat in Milarepa's frugal fare.*

It is therefore of fundamental importance to cast to the winds all the cravings of ordinary life and to practise without caring about heat, cold or any other difficulties.

2.3.3 Patience to face the profound truth without fear

Should you receive teachings on the natural state of profound emptiness or, more particularly, on the key points of the Natural Great Perfection beyond all activity and effort, or on the *Twelve Vajra Laughs* beyond the effects of good and bad actions, or on the *Eight Great Marvellous Verses*, try to grasp their true meaning without giving rise to negative views.

To have wrong views about these teachings or to criticize them is what is called “the harmful act of rejecting the Dharma.” It can cast one into the depths of hell for innumerable kalpas. As one confession text says:

I confess all the times I have committed an act even more pernicious
Than the five acts with immediate retribution: that of rejecting the Dharma.

One day, two Indian monks who had the twelve qualities of full training presented themselves before Atisa. When Atisa explained to them that the ego has no intrinsic existence, they were pleased.

But when he explained that phenomena have no intrinsic existence either,¹⁵⁶ they exclaimed, “That’s terrifying! Don’t say such things!” and when he read the Heart Sutra, they blocked their ears.

Atisa, sick at heart, told them, “Unless you train yourselves in the love and compassion of bodhicitta and then develop confidence in the profound teachings, your pure vows alone will lead you nowhere.”¹⁵⁷

There were said to be many grossly arrogant monks at the time of the Buddha who, when they heard him teach on profound emptiness, vomited blood and died, and were reborn in the hells. A number of other stories recount similar happenings.

It is important to have a heartfelt and respectful interest in the profound teachings and those who teach them. At the very least, even if the limitations of your own mind make you indifferent to them, never criticize them.

2.4 TRANSCENDENT DILIGENCE

There are three kinds of diligence: armour-like diligence, diligence in action and diligence that cannot be stopped.¹⁵⁵

2.4.1 Armour-like diligence

When you hear the stories of the lives of the great teachers, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, of the deeds they did and the trials they went through for the Dharma, do not be discouraged. Never think that they were only capable of achieving all they did because they were Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, and that you could never do the same. Instead, remember that it was simply by acting in this way that they all became so accomplished. Since you are their disciple, even though you might not do better, you have' no choice but to follow in their footsteps.

If so much perseverance and hardship was necessary for them, how could such things not be imperative for us, lacking as we do their continuous training in Dharma from time without beginning, and weighed down as we are by our past negative actions?

We have all the freedoms and advantages of a human existence, We have met an authentic spiritual teacher and are receiving the profound instructions. Now that we have this opportunity to practise the true Dharma properly, we should vow from the bottom of our hearts to do so, and be prepared to accept hardships, take on heavy burdens, and risk life and limb without a care for our flesh and our blood. That is what is meant by armour-like diligence.*

* *“The essence of diligence is to take joy in doing positive actions.” NT.*

2.4.2 Diligence in action

While having every intention of studying and practising Dharma, you may well keep putting it off until tomorrow or the next day, day by day all your life. You must avoid wasting a whole human lifetime forever planning to practise. Druk Pema Karpo said:

Human life is like being in the slaughterer's pen:
Death comes closer with every second.
If you unhurriedly put off today until tomorrow,
Beware of tears and regret upon your deathbed!

Do not wait another second to practise. Do something about it immediately, like a coward finding a snake in his lap or a dancing-girl whose hair has just caught fire. Totally abandon worldly activities and devote yourself to the practice of the Dharma right now. Otherwise you will never find the time—one worldly activity will follow another, endlessly like ripples on water. They will only stop when you decide once and for all to .put an end to them. As the Omniscient Longchenpa says:

Worldly preoccupations never end until the moment we die.
But they end when we drop them—such is their nature.

and:

Our activities are like children's games:
They go on as long as we continue, they stop as soon as we stop them.

Once you feel the wish to practise Dharma, do not let laziness or procrastination take over even for a moment. Set to work immediately, spurred on by the thought of impermanence. That is what is called diligence inaction.

2.4.3 Diligence that cannot be stopped

Do not feel satisfied just at having done a little retreat, or some approach and accomplishment practices, a few prayers or one or two good works. Vow to practise for as long as you live, and determine to keep your efforts going, with all the constant power of a great river, until you have attained perfect Buddhahood. .

The supreme beings of the past said that one should practise like a hungry yak grazing. As a yak tugs at one clump of grass, its eye is already fixed on the next. In the same way, before you finish one Dharma

practice, tell yourself that as soon as you have finished your present practice you will start this or that new practice.

Try to make greater and greater efforts each day, all the time, without ever letting your body, speech or mind slip into idleness or separate from the Dharma even for an instant. Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa says:

To practise with greater tenacity the closer one gets to death is the mark of a Dharma practitioner who has not been caught by the frost.*

** Frost, which destroys one's crop of fruit, symbolizes the obstacles which prevent us from attaining our goal.*

These days, those who are reputed to be great meditators or good lamas are often told by people, "Now you no longer need to do prostrations, recite prayers, accumulate merit and wisdom, purify obscurations, and all that."

They soon start to believe it themselves, and think of themselves as being very important and no longer in need of these things. But, as the peerless Dagpo Rinpoche said,

Thinking that one does not need such things proves that one needs them more than ever.

Every day the great Indian master Dipamkara** would set to work making *tsa-tsas*. His hands would soon be covered in clay.

*** Another name for Atisa.*

His followers said, "People are talking because a great teacher like you is handling mud. What's more, you're tiring yourself out. Why not let us do it for you?"

"What are you saying?" said Dipamkara. "Are you soon going to start eating my food for me, too?"

Until you attain perfect Buddhahood, you will still have past actions and tendencies to remove, and will still need to attain more and more spiritual qualities. So do not fall into indolent and sporadic practice. Practise Dharma with diligence from the depth of your heart, without ever feeling that you have done enough.

Generally speaking, whether you attain Buddhahood or not depends solely on your diligence. So make every effort to practise the three kinds of diligence. Someone with exceptional intelligence but only a little diligence will only be an inferior practitioner. But someone with little intelligence and extraordinary diligence will become a superior practitioner. With no diligence whatsoever, all other good qualities would be useless. The Omniscient Jigme Lingpa said:

No intelligence, no power,
No wealth or strength can help
Someone without diligence—
He is like a boatman whose boat
Has everything but oars.

Always moderate your eating. Arrive at a balanced amount of sleep. Make your efforts steady and constant. Make your mind like a good bowstring, neither too loose nor too tight. It will get you nowhere to practise sporadically, only when you have time.

2.5 TRANSCENDENT CONCENTRATION

It is impossible to develop concentration without first renouncing excitement and distracting preoccupations, and going to stay in a solitary place. So to start with, it is important to give up distractions.

2.5.1 Giving up distractions

Whatever is brought together will fall apart. Parents, brothers and sisters, spouses, friends and relatives—even the flesh and bones of the body that we received at birth—are all destined to separate. Understand the futility of becoming attached to ephemeral loved ones and friends, and always remain in solitude. Repa Shiwa Ö says:

Buddhahood is within ourselves alone.
Although spiritual companions support our practice,
Having more than three or four together brings up hatred and attachment.
So I for one shall stay alone.

Wanting things is what causes all of our troubles. We are never satisfied with what we' have, and the wealthier we get the more our avarice grows. As the saying goes, "Being rich means being miserly." Or again, "Like the rich, the more you get, the more you need," and, "To lose your enemies, lose your money." The more resources, money and property you own, the more danger you face from enemies, robbers and so on. You can spend your entire life acquiring, protecting and increasing your wealth. This can only lead to suffering and negative actions. The sublime Nagarjuna said:

Amassing wealth, guarding it and making it grow will wear you out;
Understand that riches bring unending ruin and destruction.

Even if one man were to own all the wealth and possessions in the whole world, it would not change the fact that he would still only need enough food and clothing for one person. But however rich they may be, people can still hardly bear to eat a mouthful of food themselves, or use enough clothing to cover their own backs. Heedless of wrongdoing or suffering, ignoring all criticism, they risk their present lives and throw future lives to the winds; for the most trifling material possession, they disregard any sense of shame and honesty, all prudence and wise forethought, and any consideration of Dharma or of their samayas. Spending all their time running after food, profit and social standing, like roving spirits hunting for tormas, they waste their whole lives without ever experiencing even a single day of freedom, well-being or happiness. Finally, having piled up all that wealth, they may well pay for it with their lives and get stabbed or shot just for their money. Then everything they have amassed over a whole lifetime gets spent by their enemies and other people. It is all squandered. But the pile of evil deeds as high as Mount Meru that they built up to get' rich remains exclusively theirs, and will cause them to wander in the unbearable depths of the lower realms, never to be free. So while you still have the chance, use the few possessions you may have in this life to provide for future lives. Be content with a meagre amount of food and just enough clothing to keep out the wind.

Those whose ambitions are limited to this present life are known in the texts as "childish friends." They are not at all grateful for any help you may extend to them, and in return may well do you harm. No matter what you do for them, it is never right. They are very hard to please. If you have more than they do, they are jealous; if you have less, they look down on you. The more time you spend with them, the more your negative actions multiply and your positive ones dwindle. Renounce such friends, and keep well away from them.

Occupations such as commerce, agriculture, industry and academia involve you in numerous activities and provide endless sources of distraction. These trivial pursuits keep you constantly busy for inconsequential goals. However much effort you make, none of it has any meaning. There is no end to the process of overcoming rivals and favouring friends.

Abandon all these endless activities and distractions like so much spit in the dust. Leave your homeland behind and head for unknown lands. Dwell at the foot of rocky cliffs with only wild animals for companions. Settle your body and mind down in a state of ease.¹⁵⁹ Stop caring about food, clothing or what people say. Live out your life in deserted places where there are no other human beings. Jetsun Milarepa said:

In a rocky cave in a deserted land
My sorrow is unrelenting.
My teacher, Buddha of the three times,
I yearn for you unceasingly.

If you do as he did, you will find that, as the saying goes, "in places where you feel lonely, concentration arises." There, all the good qualities of the path—disenchantment with samsara, determination to free oneself from it, faith, purity of perception, concentration and absorption—arise naturally. Do whatever you can to live like that.

In secluded forests, those places where the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the past found tranquillity, there is nothing to make you busy; no distractions, no commerce, no fields to be worked, no childish friends. Birds and wild deer are easy companions; spring water and leaves provide good ascetic fare. Awareness is naturally clear and concentration develops by itself. Without enemies, without friends, you can be free from the chains of attachment and hatred. Such places have every advantage. In *The Moon Lamp Sutra* and other sutras, Lord Buddha says that simply having the wish to go to solitary places and taking seven steps in their direction is worth more than making offerings to all the Buddhas in the ten directions for as many kalpas as there are grains of sand in the Ganges. How much more so if you actually go to live in such places. It is also said:

In the perfect secluded place, deep in the mountains,
Everything one does is good.

Even without your making any diligent efforts to practice, in such places disillusionment with samsara, determination to be free from it, love, compassion and all the other excellent qualities of the path will arise spontaneously. As a result, your whole way of life can only become wholesome. Attachment, hatred and all the negative emotions that you had tried in vain to control in places bustling with activity will diminish by themselves, simply because you are now in solitude. It will be easy to develop all the qualities of the path.

These points are the preliminaries for concentration, and are of vital importance. They cannot be dispensed with.

2.5.2 Actual concentration

Concentration is of three kinds: the concentration practised by ordinary beings, concentration which clearly discerns and the excellent concentration of the Tathagatas.

The concentration practised by ordinary beings. When you are attached to the experiences of bliss, clarity and absence of thought in meditation and intentionally seek them, or your practice is coloured by any affinity for experiences, that is called the concentration practised by ordinary beings.¹⁶⁰

Clearly discerning concentration. When you are free from any attachment to meditative experiences and are no longer fascinated by concentration, but still cling to emptiness as an antidote, that is called clearly discerning concentration.

The excellent concentration of the Tathagatas. When you no longer have any concept of emptiness as an antidote, but remain in a concept-free concentration on the nature of reality, that is called the excellent concentration of the Tathagatas.

Whenever you practise concentration, it is important to sit in the “seven point posture of Vairocana”¹⁶¹ with your eyes maintaining the appropriate gaze. It is said:

When the body is straight, the channels are straight;
When the channels are straight the energies are straight;
When the energies are straight the mind is straight.¹⁶²

Do not lie down or lean against anything, but sit straight upright, your mind free from any thought, and rest in equanimity in a state where there is no grasping to anything. That is the essence of transcendent concentration.

2.6 TRANSCENDENT WISDOM

Transcendent wisdom has three aspects: wisdom that comes through hearing, wisdom that comes through reflection and wisdom that comes through meditation.

2.6.1 Wisdom through hearing

This means listening to all the words and meaning of the Dharma spoken by a spiritual teacher, and understanding the meaning of those words as they are spoken.

2.6.2 Wisdom through reflection

This means not only listening to what the teacher has taught and understanding it, but subsequently reviewing it in your mind and clearly establishing the meaning through reflection, examination and analysis, and asking questions about what you do not understand. It is not enough just to suppose that you know or understand some particular subject. You should make absolutely sure that when the time comes to practise in solitude you will be able to manage on your own, without needing to ask anyone to clarify certain points.

2.6.3 Wisdom through meditation

Through meditation, as you gain practical experience of what you have understood intellectually, the true realization of the natural state develops in you without any mistake. Certainty is born from within. Liberated from confining doubts and hesitations, you see the very face of the natural state.

Having first eliminated all your doubts through hearing and reflection, you come to the practical experi-

ence of meditation, and see everything as empty forms without any substantiality, as in the eight similes of illusion:

As in a dream, all the external objects perceived with the five senses are not there, but appear through delusion.

As in a magic show, things are made to appear by a temporary conjunction of causes, circumstances and connections.

As in a visual aberration, things appear to be there, yet there is nothing. As in a mirage, things appear but are not real.

As in an echo, things can be perceived but there is nothing there, either outside or inside.

As in a city of gandharvas, there is neither a dwelling nor anyone to dwell.

As in a reflection, things appear but have no reality of their own.

As in a city created by magic, there are all sorts of appearances but they are not really there.

Seeing all the objects of your perception in this way, you come to understand that all these appearances are false by their very nature. When you look into the nature of the subject that perceives them—the mind—those objects that appear to it do not stop appearing, but the concepts that take them as having any true existence subside. To leave the mind in the realization of the nature of reality, empty yet clear like the sky, is transcendent wisdom.

To explain the six transcendent perfections in detail, each one is divided into three, making a total of eighteen sections. The category of material generosity has three sections of its own, making twenty sections altogether. If we add transcendent means, that makes twenty-one; transcendent strength, twenty-two; transcendent aspiration, twenty-three and transcendent primal wisdom, twenty-four.¹⁶³

Going into even more detail, each of the six transcendent perfections can be divided into six, making thirty-six sections. We can see how this works by examining the section on the giving of Dharma in transcendent generosity.

When the teacher who teaches, the Dharma to be taught and the disciple to whom the teaching is to be transmitted come together, explaining the teaching is transcendent *generosity*. That the teacher does not seek gain or honour for teaching the Dharma, and does not contaminate what he is doing either with self-aggrandizement, resentment of the position of others, or any other negative emotion, is transcendent *discipline*. That he repeats the meaning of a phrase over and over again and ignores all difficulty and fatigue is transcendent *patience*. That he teaches at the appointed time without giving way to laziness and procrastination is transcendent *diligence*. That he explains his subject without letting his mind get distracted from the words and their meaning, without making any errors and without adding or omitting anything is transcendent *concentration*. That while teaching he remains imbued with wisdom free of all concepts of subject, object and action is transcendent *wisdom*. All of the transcendent perfections are therefore present.

Now look at material giving-offering food or drink to a beggar, for example. When the gift, the giver and the recipient are all brought together and the action is actually accomplished, that is *generosity*. Giving from what you would eat or drink yourself, rather than giving bad or spoiled food, is *discipline*. Never getting irritated, even when asked over and over again for alms, is *patience*. Giving readily, without ever thinking how tiring or difficult it is, is *diligence*. Not letting yourself be distracted by other thoughts is *concentration*. Knowing that the three elements of subject, object and action have no intrinsic reality is *wisdom*. Here again all the six transcendent perfections are included. The same subdivisions can be defined for discipline, patience, and so on.

Summing up the essence of the transcendent perfections, Jetsun Mila says:

Perfectly give up belief in any true existence,
There is no other generosity than this.
Perfectly give up guile and deceit,
There is no other discipline.
Perfectly transcend all fear of the true meaning,
There is no other patience.
Perfectly remain inseparable from the practice,
There is no other diligence.
Perfectly stay in the natural flow,
There is no other concentration.

Perfectly realize the natural state,
There is no other wisdom.
Perfectly practise Dharma in everything you do,
There are no other means.
Perfectly conquer the four demons,
There is no other strength.
Perfectly accomplish the twofold goal,
There is no further aspiration.
Recognize the very source of negative emotions,
There is no other primal wisdom.

When Khu, Ngok and Drom* once asked him what were the best of all the elements of the path, Atisa replied:

The best scholar is one who has realized the meaning of the absence of any true existence.
The best monk is one who has tamed his own mind.
The best quality is a great desire to benefit others.
The best instruction is always to watch the mind.
The best remedy is to know that nothing has any inherent reality.
The best way of life is one that does not fit with worldly ways.
The best accomplishment is a steady lessening of negative emotions.
The best sign of practice is a steady decrease of desires.
The best generosity is non-attachment.
The best discipline is to pacify the mind.
The best patience is to keep a humble position.
The best diligence is to give up activities~
The best concentration is not to alter the mind.¹⁶⁴
The best wisdom is not to take anything at all as truly existing.

*Atisa's three main disciples (see glossary).

And Rigdzin Jigme Lingpa says:

Transcendent generosity is found in contentment;
Its essence is simply letting go.
Discipline is not to displease the Three Jewels.¹⁶⁵
The best patience is unfailing mindfulness and awareness.
Diligence is needed to sustain all the other perfections.
Concentration is to experience as deities all the appearances to which one clings.¹⁶⁶
Wisdom is the self-liberation of grasping and clinging;
In it there is neither thinking nor a thinker.
It is not ordinary. It is free from fixed convictions.¹⁶⁷
It is beyond suffering. It is supreme peace.
Do not tell this to everyone—
Keep it sacred within your own mind.

To put in a nutshell the whole vast path of the Bodhisattva teachings, including the six transcendent perfections, it could be summarized in its entirety as “emptiness of which compassion is the very essence.” Saraha says in his *Dohās*:

Without compassion, the view of emptiness
Will never lead you to the sublime path.
Yet meditating solely on compassion, you remain
Within samsara; so how could you be free?
But he who comes to possess both of these
Will neither in samsara nor in nirvana dwell.

To dwell neither in samsara nor in nirvana is the “non-dwelling nirvana” of the level of total Buddhahood.

As Lord Nagarjuna says:

Emptiness of which compassion is the very essence
Is only for those who want enlightenment.

Drom Tönpa once asked Atisa what was the ultimate of all teachings.

“Of all teachings, the ultimate is emptiness of which compassion is the very essence,” replied the Master. “It is like a very powerful medicine, a panacea which can cure every disease in the world. And just like that very powerful medicine, realization of the truth of emptiness, the nature of reality, is the remedy for all the different negative emotions.”

“Why is it, then,” Drom Tönpa went on, “that so many people who claim to have realized emptiness have no less attachment and hatred?”

“Because their realization is only words,” Atisa replied. “Had they really grasped the true meaning of emptiness, their thoughts, words and deeds would be as soft as stepping on cotton wool or as *tsampa* soup laced with butter. The Master Aryadeva said that even to wonder whether or not all things were empty by nature would make samsara fall apart.¹⁶⁸ True realization of emptiness, therefore, is the ultimate panacea which includes all the elements of the path.”

“How can every element of the path be included within the realization of emptiness?” Drom Tönpa asked.

“All the elements of the path are contained in the six transcendent perfections. Now, if you truly realize emptiness, you become free from attachment. As you feel no craving, grasping or desire for anything within or without, you always have transcendent generosity. Being free from grasping and attachment, you are never defiled by negative actions, so you always have transcendent discipline. Without any concepts of ‘I’ and ‘mine’ you have no anger, so you always have transcendent patience. Your mind made truly joyful by the realization of emptiness, you always have transcendent diligence. Being free from distraction, which comes from grasping at things as solid, you always have transcendent concentration. As you do not conceptualize anything whatsoever in terms of subject, object and action, you always have transcendent wisdom.”

“Do those who have realized the truth become Buddhas simply through the view of emptiness and meditation?” Drom Tönpa asked.

“Of all that we perceive as forms and sounds there is nothing that does not arise from the mind. To realize that the mind is awareness indivisible from emptiness is the *view*. Keeping this realization in mind at all times, and never being distracted from it, is *meditation*. To practise the two accumulations as a magical illusion from within that state is *action*. If you make a living experience of this practice, it will continue in your dreams. If it comes in the dream state, it will come at the moment of death. And if it comes at the moment of death it will come in the intermediate state. If it is present in the intermediate state you may be certain of attaining supreme accomplishment.”

The eighty-four thousand doors to the Dharma that the Conqueror taught are thus all skilful means to cause the bodhicitta-emptiness of which compassion is the very essence-to arise in us.

Without bodhicitta, teachings on the view and meditation, however profound they may seem, will be no use at all for attaining perfect Buddhahood. Tantric practices like the generation phase, the perfection phase and so on, practised within the context of bodhicitta, lead to complete Buddhahood in one lifetime. But without bodhicitta they are no different from the methods of the tirthikas. Tirthikas also have many practices involving meditating on deities, reciting mantras and working with the channels and energies; they too behave in accordance with the principle of cause and effect. But it is solely because they do not take refuge or arouse bodhicitta that they are unable to achieve liberation from the realms of samsara. This is why Geshe Kharak Gomchung said:

It is no use taking all the vows, from those of refuge up to the tantric samayas, unless you turn your mind away from the things of this world.

It is no use constantly preaching the Dharma to others unless you can pacify your own pride.

It is no use making progress if you relegate the refuge precepts to the last place.

It is no use practising day and night unless you combine this with bodhicitta.

Unless you first create the proper foundation with the refuge and bodhicitta, however intensively you might seem to be studying, reflecting and meditating, it will all be no more use than building a nine-storey mansion on a frozen lake in winter, and painting frescoes on its plastered walls. Ultimately it makes no sense at all.

Never undervalue the refuge and bodhicitta practices, assuming that they are inferior or just for beginners. Complete them in full, within the framework of preparation, main practice and conclusion that applies to any path. It is most important for everyone, good or bad, high or low, to concentrate their sincerest efforts on these practices.

In the particular case of lamas and monks who take donations from the faithful, who receive funds on behalf of the dead, or who do ceremonies to guide the dead, it is absolutely indispensable that they have sincere bodhicitta. Without it, none of their rituals and purifications will be of the slightest use to either the living or the dead. For others, they might appear to be helping, but deep down that help will always be mixed with selfish motives. For themselves, they will be defiled by accepting those offerings, and will engender endless faults that can only lead them to lower realms in their next life.

Even someone who can fly like a bird, travel under the earth like a mouse, pass through rocks unimpeded, leave imprints of his hands and feet on rocks, someone who has unlimited clairvoyance and can perform all kinds of miracles—if such a person has no bodhicitta, he can only be a tirthika or possessed by some powerful demon. He might, at first, attract some naive innocents who will be impressed and bring offerings. But in the long run he will only bring ruin upon himself and others. On the other hand, a person who possesses true bodhicitta, even without having any other quality, will benefit whoever comes into contact with him or her.

You never know where there might be a Bodhisattva. It is said that many Bodhisattvas, using their skilful methods, are to be found even among slaughterers of animals and prostitutes. It is difficult to tell whether someone has bodhicitta or not. The Buddha said:

Apart from myself and those like me, no one can judge another person.

So just consider anyone who arouses bodhicitta in you as being a real Buddha, whether a deity, teacher, spiritual companion or anyone else.

Whenever you feel that you have acquired certain qualities as signs of progress on the path, whatever they may be—realization of the natural state, clairvoyance, concentration, visions of the yidam and so on—you can be certain that they really are true qualities if, as a result, the love and compassion of bodhicitta steadily continue to increase. However, if the effect of such experiences is only to decrease the love and compassion of bodhicitta, you can be equally sure that what looks like a sign of success on the path is in fact either a demonic obstacle, or an indication that you are following the wrong path.

In particular, the authentic realization of the natural state cannot but be accompanied by extraordinary faith and pure perception toward those spiritually more mature than yourself, and extraordinary love and compassion for those who are less so.

The peerless Dagpo Rinpoche once asked Jetsun Mila, “When will I be ready to guide others?”

“One day,” the Jetsun replied, “you will have an extraordinarily clear vision of the nature of your mind, quite different from the one you have now, and free from any kind of doubt. At that time, in a way that is not at all ordinary, you will perceive me, your old father, as a real Buddha, and you will inevitably feel natural love and compassion for all beings. That is when you should start to teach.”

Study, reflect and meditate on the Dharma, therefore, without dissociating one from the other, on the firm basis of the love and compassion of bodhicitta. Without first eliminating doubts through study, you will never be able to practise. It is said:

To meditate without having studied
Is like climbing a rock when you have no arms.

Eliminating doubts through study does not mean that you have to know all the vast and innumerable subjects that there are to be known. In this degenerate era, that would never be possible within a short lifetime. What it does mean is that whatever teachings you are going to put into practice, you should know exactly how to do so from beginning to end without a single mistake. Any hesitations you might have, you should clear away by reflecting on those teachings.

When Atisa was at Nyethang, Nachung Tönpa of Shang, Kyung Tönpa, and Lhangtsang Tönpa asked him to teach them about the different systems of logic. -

Atisa replied, “The non-Buddhist tirthikas and the Buddhists themselves have many systems, but they are all just chains of discursive thought. There is no need for all those innumerable ideas: life is too short to go through them all. Now is the time to reduce these things to their essence.”

“How does one reduce them to their essence?” Nachung Tönpa of Shang asked.

“By training in bodhicitta with love and compassion for all living creatures throughout space. By making

strenuous efforts in the two accumulations for the benefit of all those beings. By dedicating all the sources of future good thus created to the perfect enlightenment of each and every being. And, finally, by recognizing that all these things are empty by nature, like dreams or magical illusions.”

If you do not know how to reduce any practice to its essence, no amount of information, knowledge and intellectual understanding will be of any use to you at all.

When Atisa came to Tibet, he was invited to visit the great translator Rinchen Zangpo. He questioned the translator about which teachings he knew, naming a long list, one after another. It turned out that there were none that Rinchen Zangpo did not know. Atisa was extremely pleased.

“Wonderful!” he said. “The fact that someone as learned as yourself already lives in Tibet means my visit is quite superfluous. And how do you combine all these teachings when you sit down to practise?”

“I practise each one as it is explained in its own text,” said Rinchen Zangpo.

“Rotten translator!” cried Atisa in disappointment. “Then my coming to Tibet was necessary after all!”

“But what should I do instead?” asked the translator.

“You should find the essential point common to all the teachings and practise that way,” Atisa told him.

It is indispensable to seek the vital point of the practice, based on the teacher’s pith instructions. Once you know the essential point, you must put it into practice, or it will be utterly useless. Jetsun Mila said:

The hungry are not satisfied by hearing about food; what they need is to eat. In the same way, just to know about Dharma is useless; it has to be practised.

The purpose of practice is to be an antidote for negative emotions and ego-clinging. Jetsun Mila again:

It is said that you can tell whether someone has just eaten by how red his face is. Similarly, you can tell whether people know and practise the Dharma by whether it works as a remedy for their negative emotions and ego-clinging.

Potowa asked Geshe Tönpa what was the dividing line between Dharma and non-Dharma. The geshe answered:

If it counteracts negative emotions it is Dharma. If it doesn’t, it is non-Dharma.

If it doesn’t fit with worldly ways it is Dharma. If it fits, it is non-Dharma.

If it fits with the scriptures and your instructions it is Dharma.

If it doesn’t fit, it is non-Dharma.

If it leaves a positive imprint it is Dharma. If it leaves a negative imprint it is non-Dharma.

Master Chegom says:

To believe in the effects of actions is the right view for those of ordinary faculties. To realize all inner and outer phenomena as the union both of appearance and emptiness, and of awareness and emptiness, is the right view for those of higher faculties. To realize that the view, the one who holds it and realization itself are indivisible¹⁶⁹ is the right view for those of the highest faculties.

To keep the mind totally concentrated on its object is the correct meditation for those of ordinary faculties. To rest concentrated on the four unions¹⁷⁰ is the right meditation for those of higher faculties. A state of non-conceptualization in which there is no object of meditation, no meditator and no meditative experience is the right meditation for those of the highest faculties.

To be as wary about the effects of actions as one is careful to protect one’s eyes is the right action for those of ordinary faculties. To act while experiencing everything as a dream and an illusion is the right action for those of higher faculties. Total non-action¹⁷¹ is the right action for those of the highest faculties.

The progressive diminution of ego-clinging, negative emotions and thoughts is the sign of “warmth”^{*} for all practitioners, be they of ordinary, higher or the highest faculties.

^{*} *drod* (see glossary).

Similar words are to be found in *The Precious Supreme Path* by the peerless Dagpo.

When studying Dharma, therefore, you should know how to get at the essence of it. The great Longchenpa says:

Knowledge is as infinite as the stars in the sky;

There is no end to all the subjects one could study.
It is better to grasp straight away their very essence—
The unchanging fortress of the dharmakaya.

Then, as you reflect on Dharma, you should rid yourself of any doubts. Padampa Sangye says:

Seek the teacher's instructions like a mother falcon seeking her prey.
Listen to the teachings like a deer listening to music;
Meditate on them like a dumb person savouring food;
Contemplate them like a northern nomad shearing sheep;
Reach their result, like the sun coming out from behind the clouds.

Hearing the Dharma, reflecting on it and meditating upon it should go hand in hand. The peerless Dagpo says:

To churn together study, reflection and meditation on the Dharma is an infallible essential point.

The result of study, reflection and meditation should be a steady and real increase in the love and compassion of bodhicitta, together with a steady and real diminution of ego-clinging and negative emotions.

This instruction on how to arouse bodhicitta is the quintessence of all Dharma teachings and the essential element of all paths. It is the indispensable teaching, to have which is definitely enough by itself but to lack which is sure to render everything else futile. Do not to be content just with hearing and understanding it. Put it into practice from the very depth of your heart!

*I claim to be arousing bodhicitta, but still it has not arisen in me.
I have trained in the path of the six perfections, but have remained selfish.
Bless me and small-minded beings like me,
That we may train in the sublime bodhicitta.*