

The Thirty-Seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva

Namo Avalokiteshvara

Who sees that in all phenomena there is no coming and going,
who strives solely for the sake of beings:
To the sublime teacher inseparable from Avalokiteshvara, the Protector of Beings,
I pay constant homage with respectful body, speech, and mind.

The perfect buddhas—source of happiness and ultimate peace—
Exist through having accomplished the sacred Dharma,
And that, in turn, depends on knowing how to practice it;
This practice of the bodhisattvas I shall therefore now explain.

1

Now that I have this great ship, a precious human life, so hard to obtain,
I must carry myself and others across the ocean of samsara.
To that end, to listen, reflect, and meditate
Day and night, without distraction, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

2

In my native land waves of attachment to friends and kin surge,
Hatred for enemies rages like fire,
The darkness of stupidity, not caring what to adopt or avoid, thickens—
To abandon my native land is the practice of a bodhisattva.

3

When unfavorable places are abandoned, disturbing emotions gradually fade;
When there are no distractions, positive activities naturally increase;
As awareness becomes clearer, confidence in the Dharma grows—
To rely on solitude is the practice of a bodhisattva.

4

Close friends who have long been together will separate,
Wealth and possessions gained with much effort will be left behind,
Consciousness, a guest, will leave the hotel of the body—
To give up the concerns of this life is the practice of a bodhisattva.

5

In bad company, the three poisons grow stronger,
Listening, reflection, and meditation decline,
And loving-kindness and compassion vanish—
To avoid unsuitable friends is the practice of a bodhisattva.

6

Through reliance on a true spiritual friend one's faults will fade
And good qualities will grow like a waxing moon –
To consider that person even more precious
Than one's own body is the practice of a bodhisattva.

7

Whom can worldly gods protect
Themselves imprisoned in samsara?
To take refuge in the Three Jewels
Who never fail those they protect is the practice of a bodhisattva.

8

The Buddha taught that the unendurable suffering of the lower realms
Is the fruit of unvirtuous actions.
Therefore, to never act unvirtuously,
Even at the cost of one's life, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

9

Like dew on grass, the delights of the three worlds
By their very nature evaporate in an instant.
To strive for the supreme level of liberation,
Which never changes, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

10

If all the mothers who have loved me since beginningless time are suffering,
What is the use of my own happiness?
So, with the aim of liberating limitless sentient beings,
To set my mind on enlightenment is the practice of a bodhisattva.

11

All suffering without exception arises from desiring happiness for oneself,
While perfect buddhahood is born from the thought of benefiting others.
Therefore, to really exchange
My own happiness for the suffering of others is the practice of a bodhisattva.

12

If someone driven by great desire
Seizes all my wealth, or induces others to do so,
To dedicate to them my body, possessions,
And past, present, and future merit is the practice of a bodhisattva.

13

If, in return for not the slightest wrong of mine,
Someone were to cut off even my very head,
Through the power of compassion to take all their negative actions
Upon myself is the practice of a bodhisattva.

14

Even if someone says all sorts of derogatory things about me
And proclaims them throughout the universe,
In return, out of loving-kindness,
To extol that person's qualities is the practice of a bodhisattva.

15

Even if in the midst of a large gathering
Someone exposes my hidden faults with insulting language,
To bow to them respectfully,
Regarding them as a spiritual friend, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

16

Even if one I've lovingly cared for like my own child
Regards me as an enemy,
To love them even more,
As a mother loves a sick child, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

17

Even if my peers or my inferiors
Out of pride do all they can to debase me,
To respectfully consider them like my teachers
On the crown of my head is the practice of a bodhisattva.

18

Even when utterly destitute and constantly maligned by others,
Afflicted by terrible illness and prey to evil forces,
To still draw upon myself the suffering and wrongdoing of all beings
And not lose heart is the practice of a bodhisattva.

19

Though I may be famous and revered by many,
And as rich as the God of Wealth himself,
To see that the wealth and glory of the world are without essence,
And to be free of arrogance, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

20

If one does not conquer one's own hatred,
The more one fights outer enemies, the more they will increase.
Therefore, with the armies of loving-kindness and compassion,
To tame one's own mind is the practice of a bodhisattva.

21

Sense pleasures and desirable things are like saltwater—
The more one tastes them, the more one's thirst increases.
To abandon promptly
All objects which arouse attachment is the practice of a bodhisattva.

22

All that appears is the work of one's own mind;
The nature of mind is primordially free from conceptual limitations.
To recognize this nature
And not entertain concepts of subject and object is the practice of a bodhisattva.

23

When encountering objects which pleasure us,
To view them like rainbows in summer,
Not ultimately real, however beautiful they appear,
And to relinquish craving and attachment, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

24

The various forms of suffering are like the death of one's child in a dream:
By clinging to deluded perceptions as real we exhaust ourselves.
Therefore, when encountering unfavorable circumstances,
To view them as illusions is the practice of a bodhisattva.

25

If those who wish for enlightenment must give away even their own bodies,
How much more should it be true of material objects?
Therefore, without expectation of result or reward,
To give with generosity is the practice of a bodhisattva.

26

If, lacking discipline, one cannot accomplish one's own good,
It is laughable to think of accomplishing the good of others.
Therefore, to observe discipline
Without samsaric motives is the practice of a bodhisattva.

27

For a bodhisattva who desires the joys of virtue,
All who harm them are like a precious treasure.
Therefore, to cultivate patience toward all,
Without resentment, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

28

Merely for their own sake, even shravakas and pratyekabuddhas
Make efforts like someone whose hair is on fire trying to put it out:
Seeing this, for the sake of all beings,
To practice diligence, the source of excellent qualities, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

29

Knowing that through profound insight thoroughly grounded in sustained calm
The disturbing emotions are completely conquered,
To practice the concentration which utterly transcends
The four formless states is the practice of a bodhisattva.

30

In the absence of wisdom, perfect enlightenment cannot be attained
Through the other five perfections alone.
Therefore, to cultivate wisdom combined with skillful means
And free from the three concepts is the practice of a bodhisattva.

31

If I do not examine my own defects,
Though outwardly a Dharma practitioners, I may act contrary to the Dharma.
Therefore, continuously to examine my own faults
And give them up is the practice of a bodhisattva.

32

If, impelled by negative emotions, I relate the faults
Of other bodhisattvas, I will myself degenerate.
Therefore, to not talk about the faults of anyone
Who has entered the Mahayana is the practice of a bodhisattva.

33

Offerings and respect may bring discord
And cause listening, reflection, and meditation to decline.
Therefore, to avoid attachment
To the homes of friends and benefactors is the practice of a bodhisattva.

34

Harsh words disturb the minds of others
And spoil our own bodhisattva practice.
Therefore, to give up rough speech,
Which others find unpleasant, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

35

When emotions become habitual, they are hard to get rid of with antidotes.
Therefore, with mindfulness and vigilance, to seize the weapon of the antidote
And crush attachment and other negative emotions
The moment they arise is the practice of a bodhisattva.

36

In short, wherever I am, whatever I do,
To be continually mindful and alert,
Asking, "What is the state of my mind?"
And accomplishing the good of others is the practice of a bodhisattva.

37

Dedicating to enlightenment
Through wisdom purified of the three concepts
All merit achieved by such endeavor,
To remove the suffering of numberless beings, is the practice of a bodhisattva.

Following the teachings of the holy beings,
I have arranged the points taught in the sutras, tantras, and shastras
As The Thirty-Seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva
For the benefit of those who wish to train on the bodhisattva path.

Since my understanding is poor, and I have little education,
This is no composition to delight the learned;
But as it is based on the sutras and teachings of holy beings
I think it is genuinely the practice of the bodhisattvas.

However, it is hard for someone unintelligent like me
To fathom the great waves of the bodhisattvas' activities,
So I beg the forgiveness of the holy ones
For my contradictions, irrelevances, and other mistakes.

Through the merit arising from this
And through the power of the sublime bodhichitta, relative and absolute,
May all beings become like the Lord Avalokiteshvara,
Who is beyond the extremes of samsara and nirvana.

For his own benefit and that of others, Thogme, a teacher of scripture and logic, composed this text at Rinchen Phug, in Ngulchu.