

THE THIRTY-SEVEN PRACTICES

by the Bodhisattva Tok-may-sang-bo [Tokmé Zangpo]
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Homage to Avalokiteshvara

Respectful homage always through the three doors of body, speech, and mind
To the supreme lamas and the protector Avalokiteshvara
Who though perceiving that all phenomena have no going or coming
Make effort single-pointedly for the welfare of transmigrators.

The perfect Buddhas, the sources of help and happiness,
Arise from having practiced the excellent doctrine.
That in turn depends on knowing its practices.
Therefore, I will explain the practices of Bodhisattvas.

1

It is a practice of Bodhisattvas –
For the sake of freeing themselves and others from the ocean of cyclic existence –
To hear, think, and meditate day and night without deviation
Here at this time of having attained the great ship of leisure and fortune hard to gain.

2

It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to give up their fatherland
That has, like water, the fluctuations of desire for the class of friends,
That like fire, has burning hatred for the class of enemies,
And that has the darkness of obscurations forgetting to
adopt [virtue] and discard [non-virtue].

3

It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to resort to isolation –
Through abandoning bad objects the afflictive emotions gradually diminish,
Through the absence of distraction application to virtue naturally increases,
Through clarity of mind ascertainment of doctrine is generated.

4

It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to renounce this life --
Close friends, who companied together for a long time separate,
The wealth and articles achieved with striving are left behind,
And the guesthouse of the body is left by the guest of consciousness.

5

It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to abandon bad friends
Who, when accompanied, increase the three poisons [of desire, hatred and ignorance],
Cause the activities of hearing, thinking, and meditating to deteriorate,
And make love and compassion non-existent.

6

It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to hold more dearly
Than their own body the excellent spiritual guide
Who when relied upon causes faults to be removed
And good qualities to increase like a waxing moon.

7

Who could be protected by a worldly deity
Himself also bound in the prison of cyclic existence?
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas to go for refuge
To the Three Jewels, which are undecieving when refuge is sought.

8

The Subduer said that the sufferings of bad transmigrations
Very difficult to bear are the fruits of ill deeds.
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas never to do
Ill-deeds though it comes down to their life.

9

The happiness of the three realms of cyclic existence,
Like dew on the tip of a blade of grass, disintegrates after a brief time.
[Therefore] it is a practice of Bodhisattvas to seek
The supreme state of immutable liberation.

10

What is the use of one's own happiness if mothers
Who were kind to oneself since beginningless time suffer?
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas to generate the
altruistic intention to become enlightened
In order to free limitless sentient beings.

11

All suffering arises from wanting happiness for oneself
Whereas the perfect Buddhas are born from altruism.
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas to switch completely
Their own happiness for others' suffering.

12

Even if someone out of great desire steals all their wealth
Or sends another to steal it away,
It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to dedicate to that person
Their body, resources, and virtues of the three times.

13

Even if someone hacks away at their head
When they do not have the slightest fault
It is a practice of Bodhisattvas out of compassion
To take to themselves the ill deeds of that person.

14

Even if someone proclaims throughout the billion worlds
Various types of ill-repute about them,
It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to speak with a mind of love
Of the good qualities of that person.

15

Even if someone crowds into the middle of a gathering of many beings
And accusingly speaks bad words about them,
It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to bow respectfully
With a discrimination of that person as a spiritual guide.

16

Even if a person sustained dearly like their own child
Views them as an enemy,
It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to be greatly merciful
Like a mother to her child stricken with illness.

17

Even if a being equal with or below them
Derides them out of pride,
It is a practice of Bodhisattvas respectfully to take
That person to the crown of their head like a guru.

18

Though they are bereft of livelihood, always despised by people,
And afflicted by awful illness and demons,
It is a practice of Bodhisattvas without discouragement
To take all beings' ill deeds and sufferings to themselves.

19

Though they are famous, respected by many beings,
And have attained the likes of the wealth of Vaishravana,
It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to be uninflated,
Seeing the essencelessness of the glory and wealth of cyclic existence.

20

If the internal enemy of hatred is not tamed,
When one tries to tame external enemies they increase.
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas to tame their own continuum
By means of the soldiers of love and compassion.

21

The attributes of the Desire Realm, like salt water,
Increase attachment no matter how much they are used.
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas to abandon immediately
Things generating attachment and desire.

22

Whatever appears is one's own mind; the mind itself
Is free from the start from the extremes of elaborations.
It is a practice of Bodhisattvas through knowing just that
Not to take to mind the signs of object and subject.

23

When they meet with attractive objects,
It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to view them as untrue –
Even though appearing to be beautiful like a summer rainbow –
And to abandon attachment and desire.

24

Like the death of a child in a dream, through holding the erroneous appearances
Of the varieties of suffering to be true one makes oneself so tired.
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas when meeting
With unfavorable conditions to view them as erroneous.

25

If it is necessary for those who want enlightenment to give up even their body,
What need to say anything about external things?
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas to give gifts
Without hope for reward or fruition for themselves.

26

If without proper ethics one's own welfare cannot be achieved,
To assert that others' welfare could be achieved is a source of laughter.
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas to keep ethics
Without aspirations involved in cyclic existence.

27

For a Bodhisattva wanting the resources [arising] from virtues
All harmers are like a treasure of jewels.
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas to cultivate patience
Without anger or resentment for anyone.

28

In that even Hearers and Solitary Realizers achieving only their own welfare
Are seen to make effort as one would to stop a fire on one's own head,
It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to make effort,
A source of good qualities for the sake of all transmigrators.

29

Understanding that the afflictive emotions are completely conquered
Through special insight thoroughly endowed with calm abiding,
It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to cultivate concentration
That exceeds even the four formless absorptions.

30

Since one cannot attain perfect enlightenment
Through the [other] five perfections without wisdom,
It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to cultivate the wisdom
Possessing method and not conceptualizing the spheres
[of object, agent, and action as inherently existent].

31

If one does not analyze one's mistakes,
One can perform non-practices with the form of a practitioner.
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas continually to examine
Their own mistakes and abandon them.

32

If due to afflictive emotions Bodhisattvas speak fault
Of another Bodhisattva, they themselves degenerate.
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas not to speak of the faults
Of persons who have entered into the Great Vehicle.

33

To dispute back and forth out of [wanting] goods and services
Causes the activities of hearing, thinking, and meditating to deteriorate.
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas to abandon attachment
To the households of friends and patrons.

34

Harsh words disturb others' minds and cause the mode
Of a Bodhisattva's behavior to deteriorate.
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas to abandon
Harsh words about the unpleasantness of others.

35

If one becomes accustomed to the afflictive emotions,
They are hard to overcome through their antidotes.
Therefore, it is a practice of Bodhisattvas to overcome
The afflictive emotions of desire and so forth immediately
upon their first being produced.

36

In brief, it is the practice of Bodhisattvas to achieve
Others' welfare through continually possessing mindfulness and introspection,
[Knowing] the state of their mind
In each and every form of behavior.

37

It is a practice of Bodhisattvas to dedicate to enlightenment
With the wisdom of the purity of the three spheres [of object, agent, and action]
The virtues achieved with effort in this way
In order to remove the suffering of limitless transmigrators.

For the sake of those wishing to train in the Bodhisattva path
I have written down these thirty-seven practices of Bodhisattvas,
Meanings related in the sutras, tantras, and treatises,
Drawing on the speech of the excellent.

Because my intelligence is low and training slight,
This is not poetry to delight scholars.
However, because it relies on sūtras and the words of the excellent,
I think it is the unmistakable practice of Bodhisattvas.

Still, it is difficult for one with a low mind such as mine
To penetrate the depths of the great waves of the Bodhisattva deeds.
Therefore, the excellent are asked to bear with
The groups of faults – contradictions, unrelatedness, and so forth.

Through the virtue arising from this may all transmigrators
Become the same as the protector Avalokiteshvara,
Not abiding in the extremes of cyclic existence and [solitary] peace
Through the supreme minds of enlightenment, ultimate and conventional.

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