



## Chapter 5

# THE SEVEN POINTS OF MIND TRAINING

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**N**OW I WILL TEACH ON THE *Lojong Ton Dunma*, which has been translated into English as the “Seven Points of Mind Training.” “Mind training” sounds a little strange. It is a translation of the Tibetan word *Lojong*. *Lo* means thought or perception and *jong* means purifying. It is not brainwashing, or any of those kinds of mind training. It is trying to see clearly by putting ourselves in other people’s shoes. In this way we come to understand why others behave in certain ways. We come to understand that, just like us, nobody else wants to suffer. We come to understand that it is not only we who suffer, it is not only we who would like to be happy – everybody wants to be happy. This is a simple thing, a very simple thing that we can find out through practice. The Seven Points of Mind Training is a text with seven chapters; each of these chapters is on a particular subject but they are all related to each other. It is focused on the practices of bodhichitta, compassion, loving-kindness, impartiality and joy.

The lineage of this teaching was taken to Tibet by the great Indian master Atisha Dipankara who received it from his master Jowo Serlingpa. Many historians think Serlingpa was responsible for, or

involved in, the building of the great stupa at Borobudur in Indonesia. This teaching is Serlingpa's. He gave it to Atisha Dipankara, who then took it to Tibet where it was passed down through the Kadampa lineage. Within the Kadampa tradition, Atisha's disciple Geshe Dromtonpa held this lineage and passed it on to three of his great disciples, especially Geshe Potowa. In our lineage the first Jamgon Kongtrul Lodro Thaye made commentaries on this text, but it had been one of our main practices even earlier than that.

We can look at the "Seven Points" of this text's title as its seven chapters, and they all describe the practice of bodhichitta. They describe how our mind – which at the moment is stained and defiled by ignorance, attachment, anger, jealousy and so on – can become pure. How our mind is essentially stainless and through practicing Lojong its temporary stains or obscurations are purified and its essential stainlessness is revealed. In order to purify something, there has to be an essence that remains after the process of purification. When we purify our minds the pure essence that remains is "ultimate bodhichitta." It is revealed, through the purification methods and practices that in this case we call "relative bodhichitta." Relative bodhichitta is our method of purification and that which becomes pure and stainless through this practice is ultimate bodhichitta. Ultimate bodhichitta is the goal of our relative bodhichitta practice as well as its foundation, its ground.

The process is similar to cleaning dirty clothes. The clothes may have stains – ink, ketchup, dirt – but they are on or in clothes that can be cleaned. The clothes are not the stains. If we use soap, water or other substances we can clean them, revealing the clothes' cleanliness. If the clothes were made of dirt, you could not clean them. If you cleaned ink itself, for example, when you finished there would be nothing left, nothing would be revealed. If the ink had a diamond in it though, when you cleaned away the ink it would reveal the diamond.

At the moment we have so much dirt, grease and ink surrounding us we don't even look like ourselves, but with a strong hose, soap and a brush we can reveal ourselves. This is what Lojong does. It doesn't mean altering our thinking. Altering our thinking is like

brainwashing. It is not that. Instead we are purifying our perception so that our true essence can be revealed. In this way it is not really “mind training.” “Mind training” is a literally correct translation of Lojong, but it may confuse us. We cannot train ourselves to be Buddhas, or bodhisattvas. We cannot take a crash course in talking, acting, looking and thinking like a bodhisattva. We can train to become a soldier and become very efficient at performing certain physical activities for a short period of time, but afterwards, through the stress of these activities, our knees, elbows and necks will be worse than everybody else’s. Soldiers may have been trained to perform a specific purpose, but old soldiers need a lot of physiotherapy. They need their oversized muscles and sprained joints fixed, they need to be loosened so everything works. If there are lots of old soldiers around, physiotherapists do a good trade.

Saying “mind training” for Lojong is okay, but it makes me feel a little uncomfortable. I have even noticed that people introduce me by describing the monasteries I have “trained” in and the masters I have “trained” under. Somebody also once sincerely and politely asked me, “How many years of training does it take to become a Rinpoche?” It does not happen like this. I wasn’t “trained.” I learnt, received transmissions, practiced and purified myself. Even though I have voiced my worries about using this word “training,” as so many people have translated the Tibetan term “Lojong” as “mind training” I will continue to use it. I just wanted to make it clear that you cannot train somebody to be a Buddha.

The Seven Points are briefly:

1. A bodhisattva’s preliminary practices.
2. A bodhisattva’s main practice.
3. How a bodhisattva should transform negative circumstances into positive circumstances.
4. A summary of an entire life’s practice.
5. Assessing how well your practice is progressing.
6. What bodhisattva practitioners shouldn’t do.
7. What bodhisattva practitioners should do.

These last two points end up being the same thing; if you do one thing, you don’t do another and if you don’t do something you do

something else. They are similar instructions, but in this text they are taught separately so their points can be described clearly. This makes the “Seven Points of Mind Training” as a whole a simple, clear, complete work.

I will not go into great detail on these seven points because I am only going to teach them for a day but I will not, hopefully, have to leave out any important, crucial points.

### 1: THE PRELIMINARIES, WHICH ARE A BASIS FOR DHARMA PRACTICE<sup>28</sup>

*First, train in the preliminaries.*

**Bodhichitta:** The first of these seven points is the preliminaries. The first of these preliminaries is the development of aspiring bodhichitta and the taking of the aspiring bodhisattva vow. Aspiring bodhichitta is the wish to practice the bodhisattva’s way and as a result reach Buddhahood. The second part of the development of bodhichitta, the actual bodhichitta and the actual bodhisattva vow, involves engaging in the activities of a bodhisattva, dedicating ourselves to their practices. Aspiring bodhichitta is like thinking, “I would like to go to the moon.” Actual bodhichitta is like putting on a space suit, getting inside a space shuttle, pushing the start button and traveling to the moon.

In the *Bodhisattvacharyavatara*, Shantideva says, “Wishing to depart and setting out upon the road, this is how the difference is conceived.” That is to say that aspiring bodhichitta is like wishing to go somewhere and actual bodhichitta is like taking off on your first steps, actually moving in that direction. When you go to the moon you cannot walk there, you have to strap yourself tightly to a seat, but it is the same process. Likewise, as a preliminary practice, a person should take both the aspiring and actual bodhisattva vows. In our lineage these vows are sometimes taken separately and sometimes together.

There are many aspiring and actual bodhisattva vows, but the basic aspiring vow is “Not to exclude any sentient being from your bodhichitta.” This means, for example, that even if somebody tried to chop us into pieces, we might be very upset and angry, but if we had the chance to make that person a Buddha right then we would do so without hesitation. We should not tell someone we would not lead him or her to Buddhahood because they cut us into pieces: this would be breaking the aspiring bodhichitta vow. We are not vowing not to shout, scream, kick, push and try to run away from them, we are vowing not to exclude them from our sacred vow to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of *all* sentient beings.

The people who have been most kind to us and those who have hurt us the most are all included within this commitment. If someone who has been horrible to us has a chance to become a Buddha right now, and a person who has been most kind to us does not, we need to help the person who has been horrible to us. When we have the aspiring bodhichitta vow we cannot say, “He could become a Buddha right now but I am not going to help him do that because he was nasty to me. Instead I will find a way to make my dear friend a Buddha first.” We cannot engage in divine corruption.

This is the main aspiring bodhisattva vow. The actual bodhisattva vows are many, but I think that the practice of the six paramitas somehow covers them.

The next set of preliminaries is the four contemplations. These are:

1. The Precious Human Life.
2. Death and Impermanence.
3. Karma, Cause and Result.
4. The Suffering of Samsara.

**Precious human life:** The first of these contemplations, the precious human life, is very important. We all have a precious human life but we take it for granted. We overlook or dismiss our basic privileges and potentials. Appreciating what we are and what we have should be the first thing we concentrate on. Someone once asked me, “How can you say ‘a precious human life’? Every day the human population

increases. There are over five billion human beings on Earth, how can they all have a precious human life?” I replied that I had said “precious human life,” not “general human life.” A human life is defined as “precious” when it has eighteen specific qualities.<sup>29</sup>

In contemplating the precious human life, you contemplate each of these eighteen qualities. If I were to explain them all to you now it would take too long, but you can read about them in books such as the *Torch of Certainty*, where each of them is explained very clearly. Having read this you can contemplate each of them, one by one. If you find you have all eighteen qualities then your human life is precious. If one, two or three of them are missing you should contemplate these points until you acquire them. Through this practice your life will be made precious.

From another point of view, not only human but every life is precious and everyone should be allowed to live happily. From this perspective we do not separate out one type of life from another. When we talk about a precious human birth we are saying it is precious in the sense that if you utilize it you have all the conditions you need to attain Buddhahood. Those that don't have all of these qualities still have a precious opportunity, they are not “less” than those with them, they just need to develop, one way or another, the qualities that they are missing.

When we discover we actually have a precious human life we should appreciate it, we should be very grateful for it. We may even become euphoric about it, but as being euphoric does not help us very much we should move on to the next contemplation – death and impermanence.

**Death and Impermanence:** This thing we have, this precious human birth is so great, so precious but we could lose it in the snap of a finger. All the doctors, physicists and scientists in the world could check us from head to toe but they still could not sign a piece of paper saying they were one hundred percent sure we will be alive tomorrow. They may be certain we will not die from naturally occurring lung or heart failure but if we pressed them they would stop short of signing a legal document guaranteeing we will still be alive tomorrow, especially if signing this form made them vulnerable

to large fines and the like. Anything can happen to any one of us at any time. We could lose our precious human life in the snap of a finger – it is impermanent. Everything is impermanent. I cannot even be sure that I will walk out of this room alive. I cannot be sure that I will wake up tomorrow morning, I just don't know. I presume I will walk out of this room because I walked into it but death and impermanence are with us all the time. Death is like life's shadow – they are always together.

**Karma, Cause and Result:** Once we understand death and impermanence we need to understand cause and result. People commit suicide when they do not understand the process of cause and result. They think they have a big problem, which is really a little problem, and jump out of a window or under a subway train. They think they have a big problem and hang themselves or take an overdose of sleeping pills. In these ways many people don't seem to mind dying, they seem to have recognized that everybody will die, but to cause their own deaths they must not have thought about karma. People take their own lives all over the world in every society because they do not understand that dying is not the end, it is the beginning. Our past karma brought us here and it and our present karma will bring us our future. Someone may be fifty million dollars in debt and try and avoid this by jumping out of a window but this will only make their problem worse. They may not have to pay off that life's fifty million dollar debt but in future lives they will have to pay off a one hundred and fifty million or a two hundred million dollar debt. In this way they are worse off than if they had not killed themselves.

When we look at karma, cause and result, we also realize that when something wonderful happens to us we should be grateful to everybody. Why? Because if it was not for everybody else how would we have accumulated the good karma that caused this wonderful thing? If there were only one person floating in space how would they accumulate good karma? There would be no one else towards whom they could have compassion, devotion, patience or generosity. Floating in space they may be able to accumulate some merit by developing a meditative state, but really their accumulation of merit

– including the positive things they must have done to have a precious human life – depend on everybody else.

Karma, cause and result, also continues into our future lives. Doctors and scientists are constantly trying to develop medicines that will make us live longer, and their ultimate goal, of course, is immortality. They are trying to develop new knees, eyes, brains, hearts, lungs, kidneys and the most difficult organ to make – livers. They have already made a heart but they cannot find a way to make a new liver yet. When they do manage this it will be a great achievement. Thousands and thousands of researchers and scientists take years and years, spending millions of millions of dollars trying to make our lives a year longer, ten years longer or even a hundred years longer. Some people even have their heads cut off when they die, then immersed in special preserving chemicals and put inside head banks so that they can be revived when the technology becomes available. Even more interestingly, they have their pets' heads, their cats' and dogs' heads, put into these banks and pay for the service yearly, hoping they or their pets will be revived in the future.

People make such a big deal about immortality, but if you look at karma closely we are all immortal; only our bodies are mortal. Our minds are immortal, they have never died, they were never born, they were never children, teenagers, grown-ups or elderly. They are beyond these limitations, they are immortal and so are we. We do not have to worry about living for ten more years, we are countless eons old and we will go on forever. The problem is that we want to be here forever in the same form as we appear in now. We will continue but as what we are, not how we appear. What we are are Buddhas, we have limitless potential, freedom and liberation. Wouldn't it be better to forever manifest this full potential? We don't really want to go around forever in this limited way – searching and struggling, having ups and downs – we don't really want to continue this way. Once we know this then the next thing to look at, after karma, is the suffering of samsara.

**Suffering of Samsara:** In samsara, even if we create good karma it does not mean we will be free from suffering. Good karma makes us rich, powerful and famous but do you think being rich, powerful

and famous necessarily makes us happy, comfortable, joyful and nice? If you have ten elephants you have to feed ten elephants. If it takes six hours to clean them, then immediately after you have finished cleaning them you would have to start feeding them again. In the same way, being rich does not mean we are necessarily enjoying ourselves. It does not necessarily mean we don't suffer. The more we have, the more we are at risk of losing. Being rich means you have more things you have to worry about losing. If I was a multi-billionaire, for example, and I made one small mistake – I didn't keep track of my financial flow or something – it could cost me millions of dollars. On paper some people are worth thirty or fifty billion, and when they make one small mistake – even if they oversleep, do not pick up the telephone or give a wrong instruction – they can lose two or three million dollars.

Imagine how disciplined and hard working very wealthy people have to be. Imagine how much stress and pressure they experience. I have some friends who are multi-millionaires and often they do not have access to very much of their own money. It is as if they have less than no money because all they have is tied up in debts and new projects. If you have \$10,000 in your pocket, that is yours, you can spend it, but these people cannot behave like this. Before they spend anything they have to look at their whole financial system and see if their budget can handle it. They have to find a place they can take the money from so that their cash flow will be okay, their accountants will know where the money went and that they are not breaking the law, so they won't get locked up. Being rich is an enormous job that causes a lot of stress for those involved. In this way even those who are very rich suffer intensely.

Being powerful is even worse. However much power you have, you also have that much responsibility. You cannot have power without responsibility. People respect you only as long as you fulfill your responsibilities. What happens when you don't fulfill your responsibilities? We can't count on our ten fingers how many people either lose or gain positions of power in a week. There are only seven days in a week, but there are more than ten people every week who lose their positions of power. The higher they climb the harder they

fall. The more powerful you are the more pressured and responsible you have to be.

Another problem with having power is that many people will be nice to you for their own benefit. They are not really being nice, they are only trying to get something from you. If you are not mature enough to recognize this you may think they are really being nice to you, only to fall flat on your face when you find out the truth. In these ways being powerful also involves a lot of suffering.

Then there is fame: when you are famous people who have nothing to do with you have opinions about you. You do not know them, but they know you. You have enemies you have never met, friends you have never met. It must be very confusing. Famous people suffer because of this all the time. Then there is the problem of staying famous. Being famous is one thing, but staying famous is incredibly difficult. Famous people may become infamous, or un-famous. Very few people manage to stay famous and die famous.

In these ways the result of good karma – health, money, power and fame – still bring suffering, as of course does bad karma. When people have nothing to eat or wear, when they have no friends or they are abused like a doormat with everyone cleaning their shoes on them, this is all the result of bad karma. As long as we are in samsara – no matter where we are, whether we are rich or poor, famous or a nobody, powerful or powerless – none of us are exempt from suffering. We have a saying in Tibetan, “The king cries on the golden throne in the palace, the beggar cries under the tree on a bed of stone, the tears are the same.”

The suffering of samsara is the same for everybody. This is why we need to look at samsara after we have examined karma, cause and result, otherwise we will carry on trying to create good karma and end up a slave to it. If we constantly try to create good karma but only so we can be luckier, richer, more famous and more powerful there will be no end to our suffering in samsara. If, on the other hand, we understand the suffering of samsara, we will seek to become free from all its aspects.

After contemplating these four thoughts, we realize that no matter how much we improve our external conditions we will not overcome

the suffering of samsara unless we cultivate and mature our inner being. We have all kinds of gadgets, but they can't help us overcome the suffering of samsara. The way we used to boil water was quite hard work, nowadays we just plug in an electric kettle and it boils the water. The water is clean and our hands are not covered in ash and soot from making a fire and carrying blackened pots. Has it helped us overcome the suffering of samsara though? There are even stories of people taking overdoses of pills and dying on very beautiful beds in big mansions with all kinds of gadgets around them. At the same time another person who lives in a slum with ten kids, cooks on an open fire and always has dirty feet, hands and clothes, is still laughing. The gadgets haven't made a difference to the rich person's happiness. You may also find the opposite, a happy person in a mansion and an unhappy person in a slum, but you cannot point at the gadgets and say they are what made the difference. If we look at these types of situations we will come to know that it is the development and maturity of our inner being that is most important.

It is not that I am against gadgets. I use a microphone when I teach because it saves me from having to shout. To be honest though, I still tend to shout because I have been giving speeches since I was a teenager and when I began I did not have microphones. Unless I am teaching a large audience it doesn't really matter whether I have a microphone or not, I am used to speaking without them. Still, outer developments like microphones help us. Cars help us. If I had to walk from my home to the places I teach I would not arrive until the day after I was supposed to begin teaching. If I were to ride a horse, myself and my five or six helpers would each need a horse, with a few extra pack horses to carry the food we would have to stop and cook, and the tent that we would have to set up and sleep in. There might even be robbers waiting in the bushes so we would need guards with weapons to protect us. Traveling from one place to another would be very complicated. Now that we have cars all we have to do is drive and the traffic police take care of us. Perhaps someone will honk their horn occasionally but that is a bit like music anyway, and we get where we want to on time, well almost on time.

For all these reasons contemplating the four thoughts is a very important aspect of Buddhism, especially Vajrayana practices. They are also important here in these Mahayana Lojong practices. They form the second part of the preliminary practices. After contemplating all these things properly we will come to the conclusion that the most important thing is our inner development. This is what mind training is all about.

**Shamatha:** Shamatha (Shinay in Tibetan) is another preliminary practice. In layman's language, Shamatha means calming down. At present our minds are totally under the influence of everything that happens to us, but through methods such as breathing meditation we are able to calm our minds down. We are able to temporarily calm the emotions and memories that mix us up. This means we are temporarily able to remain in peace and harmony. It is a very important part of the preliminary practice. Without good Shamatha it is very hard to practice anything efficiently.

There are many Shamatha methods but the one most commonly used is breathing meditation. Concentrating on our breath when it is even and quiet is a very convenient and efficient method. We breathe anyway, and when we are calm we breathe calmly. When we are not calm we do not breathe calmly. An angry person's breathing is so short they can hardly talk. They cannot finish a sentence without it becoming distorted – their whole system is distorted. An angry person may try to hide their anger but if you watch for these signs you can tell. When we are jealous our faces and our breathing change, so that no matter how hard we try to hide it, people will still know we are jealous. When we are proud, no matter how we try to hide it the curl of our lips will give us away. Complexes, whether they are inferiority or superiority complexes, also show in our voice, in our face, we can't hide them. All our emotions are the same: when we are influenced by them we change and our breathing changes.

If we are able to practice Shamatha in any of these states though, we will calm down immediately. We may not act on our anger, jealousy or pride but still it in itself is a defilement that Shamatha can help us get rid of temporarily. Shamatha cannot help us get rid of them

permanently but getting rid of them temporarily is a good start. If you are able to pacify your smaller defilements in this way, gradually you will be able to pacify your larger and larger defilements until you are able to pacify your greatest defilements. At the same time you will be strengthening your qualities, they will go from being weak to quite significant to great. In this way we can see how important Shamatha is as a foundation practice.

How this works is, for example, if you are a businessman or woman and you oversleep, forget to call somebody back or give the wrong instruction, you could have a big problem and therefore start to worry. If you drive yourself crazy by worrying and try to fix the problem in that state it will not work. If I try to find something in my notes while I am hurriedly mixing them up, I will not find anything. If on the other hand I put them all down on the table, relax and calmly look through them, I will find it. If we calm down and relax we will be much more able to handle our mistakes.

## 2: THE MAIN PRACTICE, WHICH IS TRAINING IN BODHICHITTA

[Ultimate and Relative Bodhichitta]

### **Ultimate Bodhichitta**

*Regard all dharma as dreams.  
Examine the nature of unborn awareness.  
Self-liberate even the antidote.  
Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence.  
In post-meditation, be a child of illusion.*

### **Relative Bodhichitta**

*Sending and taking should be practiced alternately.  
These two should ride the breath.  
Three objects, three poisons, and three seeds of virtue.  
In all activities, train with slogans.*

*Begin the sequence of sending and taking with yourself.*

The second point has two parts, relative and ultimate bodhichitta, which comprise the main practice of this Lojong text.

### **Relative Bodhichitta**

The main practice of relative bodhichitta is known as *Tonglen* (giving and taking). *Tonglen* is a term that is used in other practices but is mostly associated with the Seven Points of Mind Training. *Tong* means “give, send or let go.” *Len* means “take or receive.”

This practice itself can also be done in many ways. One of the best ways is first to sit comfortably, do a good Shamatha practice – perhaps breathing meditation – then when your body and mind are calm visualize your dear parents in front of you. They are surrounded by all other sentient beings, your enemies as well as your friends and relatives. Another way is to first practice *Tonglen* with you dear ones then gradually progress to including more and more beings. Whoever you visualize, you see yourself giving them all your good karma as you breathe out and breathing in all their suffering, pain and bad karma – everything they don’t want. When you breathe it in you then dissolve it. By doing this you see that you are making them free from suffering, you are making them happy and this makes the idea of giving away your wisdom and positivity easier. Accompanying our out and in breath with these ideas is one form of *Tonglen*.

Using breathing to practice *Tonglen* is a simple, basic, beginning practice but *Tonglen* does not always have to be practiced with breathing meditation. It can also be about simply giving things away, sending them away, and dedicating all our goodness and positivity to the purification of sentient beings’ negativity and the relief of their suffering. This is also *Tonglen*. Yet another way to practice *Tonglen* is when we are sick. When we have a cold or some other illness we can view this as the suffering of other sentient beings and see ourselves taking on this suffering. We can think, “May my suffering take away the suffering of others. May my suffering purify others’ suffering.” Likewise when something wonderful and joyful

happens to us we can dedicate this to others. We can send this out to others.

In India we have a custom of giving out sweets (*mithai*) when there are holidays or something nice happens. We at least try and make other peoples' mouths sweet when something sweet has happened to us. We say please take some, don't refuse because we want to share our happiness with passers-by and strangers. On these special holidays people will stop me as I drive to my monastery, and not only me but anyone else who passes by. They have put up tents with food inside and they give away all kinds of food, juice and water, even the very poor ones at least have water, and they want you to stop there and have a meal. If you were to be polite and stop every time you were asked to, you would end up eating twenty meals in one day! This does not always happen, but on special holidays and during special seasons it does, especially in the Punjab. I am not saying that they are necessarily practicing Tonglen, I don't know if they are or not, I am just saying that Tonglen practice is a little like this tradition. When something good happens to us, sharing it with others is Tonglen.

Relative bodhichitta practices also include seeing ourselves, in our visualizations and dedications, as a wish-fulfilling gem, a medicinal plant, or a river that quenches the thirst of everybody on its banks and cleans their clothes. A river provides so much; it is the home to so many fish, frogs and all kind of life-forms. It provides electricity for big cities and becomes a place for picnics and holidays for those seeking to relax after working hard during the week. They may even work harder during the week so they can get away on their boats at the weekend. Bringing all this happiness is like being a manifestation of the Buddha. So seeing ourselves manifesting as a river, a light or medicine is another aspect of relative bodhichitta practice.

We could also envision ourselves as a vehicle that fulfills the wishes of great bodhisattvas. This is a sacred practice because it also involves devotion and therefore less of our ego. If we pray, "May I be the vehicle for White, Green and the Twenty-one Taras to liberate sentient beings from samsara," this is another way to practice relative

bodhichitta. Or maybe we could pray to be a vehicle for Manjushri to provide wisdom, Avalokiteshvara to provide compassion, Medicine Buddha to provide health.

Relative bodhichitta in our day-to-day life when we are not on our meditation cushions means trying to maintain the perception and presence of inner compassion, joy, impartiality and loving-kindness as we walk around carrying out our daily activities. It means, for example, not thinking, “How dare he say such a thing,” when someone insults us. It means thinking instead, “May this insult purify any negative karma I have with this person. I have definitely said something nasty to them, perhaps a long time ago, so may them saying this resolve any residue from my previous actions.” When somebody does something nice to us on the other hand, then we can think, “This is the result of something good I did for this person and now they are returning the favor. I appreciate it, and may they also accumulate good karma by being nice to me.” This means that this positive experience is not wasted either. It stops being about payback and becomes a sacred exchange, a sacred relationship in itself. These are all post-meditative relative bodhichitta practices.

### **Ultimate Bodhichitta**

The definitions of relative and ultimate bodhichitta are simple. Ultimate bodhichitta is non-dualistic; relative bodhichitta is dualistic. It is dualistic in that we do something for others: we take on others’ suffering and give them our happiness. This view is dualistic. It is relative bodhichitta. Ultimate bodhichitta is non-dualistic.

Ultimate bodhichitta practices are usually meditation, but in the Seven Points of Mind Training they are taught in two stages: meditation and post-meditation. The meditation stage is also taught in three stages:

1. Preparation.
2. Actual meditation.
3. The Conclusion.

**Preparation:** We begin meditation by sitting down nicely in front of our shrine, or wherever we feel is a proper space to meditate. We say

refuge and bodhichitta prayers while envisaging all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas above and around us. This is just something we do for our own sake because the Buddhas and bodhisattvas are above and around us all the time whether we envisage them or not. Everything is part of the limitless manifestation of Buddha, everything! Nothing is a secret to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, but as we are dualistic, un-enlightened people we purposefully envisage and invoke them.

After this we do whichever Shamatha practice we usually do, breathing meditation or whatever. Then we think about and appreciate bodhichitta. It is like the sun which shows everything, a cleansing river that quenches everyone's thirst, the sky that provides space for all and the medicine that heals all suffering and pain. Thinking on bodhichitta in detail involves contemplating compassion, loving-kindness, joy and impartiality. It means wishing that all beings attain the limitless freedom, happiness, joy and harmony that they seek in the same way we do. If we searched we could not find one sentient being in the universe that likes to suffer or does not want to be happy: these are universal quests. Bodhichitta is the greatest provider for these quests, it is a limitless resource. When we sit down to meditate we need to appreciate and recognize this.

Then if we know it we should say the Seven Branch Prayer, The *Yenlag Dün*.

CHAK TSEL WA TANG CHÖ SHING SHAK PA  
TANG

Prostrating, offering, confessing,

JE SU YI RANG KÜL ZHING SOL WA YI

Rejoicing, beseeching and praying,

GE WA CHUNG ZE DAG GI CHI SAG PA

Whatever little virtue I have accumulated from these,

THAM CHE DZOG PE JANG CHUB CHIR NGÖ

WO

I dedicate to the perfect enlightenment.

These seven branches are:

1. Prostration, which is easy to understand. It means bowing to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

2. Offerings are also easy to understand: we make offerings to all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

3. Confession is confessing all our wrong doings, whether we remember them or not.

4. Rejoicing. We rejoice when we appreciate the wisdom and compassion of all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, as well as the happiness of sentient beings. It is the opposite of jealousy. Jealousy is an evil thing, it is appreciating other peoples' suffering and disliking their happiness. This joy is its opposite.

5. Requesting the Buddhas to turn the wheel of dharma. This needs some explanation. The Buddha Shakyamuni said that the enlightenment of a Buddha is rare indeed but still countless sentient beings attain Buddhahood in every moment. He said that the number of sentient beings who attain enlightenment in one moment could not be counted by the grains of sand in the river Ganges. From its source to the ocean, how many grains of sand would there be on the banks and bottom of the Ganges? There are countless grains of sand and this number of beings become enlightened in every moment. A moment is the shortest measure of time, less than a snap of the fingers. If this many beings attain enlightenment in every moment and enlightenment is still seen as rare, this shows us how many sentient beings there are. Beings are so numerous, universes are so numerous, that even if one sentient being from every million galaxies attained Buddhahood once in a million years the number of beings becoming enlightened in each moment would still be uncountable. Space is endless and filled with countless sentient beings of all kinds.

Buddhahood is the full maturation, the full development of the ultimate, limitless potential that manifests as limitless freedom, harmony and liberation. It is natural for sentient beings to achieve Buddhahood because they have the potential to. This term we use, "Buddha," came about because Prince Siddhartha attained Buddhahood in India and therefore we use a Sanskrit word for this state. Tibetans use the word *Sangye* but I think everybody uses a word that is at least related to the original Sanskrit word "Buddha."

Our idea of enlightenment should not be limited to this name though, it should not be limited to the image we have of Prince Siddhartha. All Buddhas do not look like Prince Siddhartha. Prince Siddhartha was a human being on planet Earth, in this solar system, in this galaxy. On Earth, where he attained enlightenment, humans have two hands, one head, two eyes, one nose with two holes, two ears, hair on top, hands with five fingers, five toes on two feet, two legs and one central part of their bodies. In other universes humans may look totally different to Buddha Shakyamuni, they may attain enlightenment and not look a thing like Prince Siddhartha. They will manifest in whatever way they consider perfect, the most majestic way for them to look in those circumstances. “Buddha” does not only refer to Prince Siddhartha the Buddha, it also includes those who have reached the same level of ultimate liberation elsewhere and at other times.

When we sincerely request “Every Buddha achieving enlightenment right now” to turn the wheel of dharma, we are performing almost the same role as the gods who asked Shakyamuni Buddha to teach. The king of the gods came down from heaven, sat in front of the Buddha and offered him a conch shell while another of the gods offered him a dharmachakra – a golden wheel with a thousand spokes. This wheel, along with the two deer that came out of the forest to sit near him, are where we get the emblem of Buddhism from. Buddha Shakyamuni then went on to turn the wheel of dharma in Varanasi when he taught the Four Noble Truths. If we sincerely request the countless Buddhas who are attaining enlightenment right now to turn the wheel of dharma, we are doing the same action as the king of the gods.

Ultimately the distance between the Buddhas who are achieving enlightenment and us does not matter, but our request will not be exactly the same as that of the king of the gods because we are dualistic and from a dualistic perspective here is not there – we don’t see any Buddhas in front of us. If we visualize these Buddhas though, ask them sincerely to please turn the wheel of dharma, it will be a similar action.

6. Asking Buddhas not to enter into paranirvana for the benefit of sentient beings. Many Buddhas are also about to enter into paranirvana, or to use simple language they are about to die. When the karma for beings to see a Buddha's nirmanakaya has finished, Buddhas enter into paranirvana, this is the death of a Buddha. Buddha Shakyamuni died at the age of eighty-one. There are as many Buddhas dying now as there are Buddhas becoming enlightened. Here we request them to live longer so they can benefit sentient beings by giving them the opportunity to meet a living Buddha.

7. Dedicating the merit of the other six branches. This is the last of the seven branches. Here we dedicate the merit of the first, second, third, fourth, fifth and sixth branches. Along with this merit we also dedicate all our other merit and wisdom to the Buddhahood of all sentient beings.

This was the seven branch prayer and completes the beginning section of the ultimate bodhichitta practice.

### **Practice of Ultimate Bodhichitta**

With the completion of the preliminaries you are supposed to have reached a quiet, calmly abiding state of mind. In this state you then dissolve everything into emptiness by viewing all objects outside yourself as if they were a dream. They are nothing more than how our mind perceives them and the mind that perceives them does not have any solid, tangible reality either. Neither external objects nor our mind, which is internal, exist. They do not exist but they are there. In this way they can only exist beyond dualism.

Dualistically we can never find anything that is truly substantial. External objects are atoms in some kind of combination but even these smallest objects are made up of their parts. Even atoms need to have seven parts: four sides, a top, a bottom and a center. When other similar atoms are attached to it the object may become bigger and bigger, but if something has seven parts it cannot be the smallest object in existence, its seven parts have to be smaller than the object and again each of these parts must have seven sections. In this way objects can get smaller and smaller and smaller forever. There is nothing in any of these parts that really exists.

The mind, for its part, is superficially like a river. You may be able to bathe in the river Ganges today but if you went to the same spot tomorrow the “river” you bathed in yesterday will have flowed out to sea. You cannot bathe in the same river Ganges twice. Another example is a butter lamp. It looks the same but it doesn’t stay the same even for a split second, it keeps on burning. Time, is also like this. What is the present? If we try to find the present moment it is just like searching for the “real” atom. “Now” has to have three parts: one closer to the previous shortest moment of time, another closer to the future shortest moment of time and another in the middle of the two. So really this middle part of the smallest moment of time is “now.” But this also could be divided into three, again and again, which means we cannot find “now.” We cannot find a moment of mind in a dualistic context. Time, mind and all realities are baseless in this way, absolutely baseless, but they are here.

As practitioners of the Mahayana, as practitioners of Lojong, we are also seeking to remain in the non-dualistic state when we practice ultimate bodhichitta. Philosophically and scientifically we can prove that nothing exists, but that does not necessarily help us. Even if we know nothing is here we are still happy when something nice happens and upset when something not so nice happens. Just proving philosophically that “nothing is here” doesn’t help us. At the core of all of this is a non-dualistic state of mind above and beyond something or nothing. You cannot point at something and say it is your mind, you cannot grasp at anything, but you cannot say your mind is nothing either. If the mind is nothing, who or what is asking questions about the mind? Who could come to the conclusion that the mind is nothing? It cannot be nothing and it cannot be something, it has to be above and beyond “nothing” and “something.”

This core that is beyond “nothing” and “something” is the ultimate bodhichitta. We say it is *khor sum nampar mi-tokpa* in Tibetan, “free from the three circles.” These three circles are the object, subject, and the interaction between the subject and object. For example, a paramita by definition means to reach beyond, but what does “to reach beyond” mean? What, for instance, does the generosity paramita mean? Does it mean we need to make everybody rich? Or

does it mean we have to spend everything we have? The generosity paramita actually means reaching beyond the idea of a giver, a recipient and the act of giving. Seeing the giver, recipient and action non-dualistically, without these three circles, is the definition of the generosity paramita. This is true not only for the generosity paramita but also the morality, diligence, patience, meditation and wisdom paramitas. Ultimate bodhichitta and ultimate emptiness are the same thing. In Tibetan “ultimate emptiness” is called *dondam thong nyi*: *dondam* means ultimate, *thong nyi* means emptiness. Ultimate bodhichitta is *dondam jang chup chi sem* or *dondam jang chup sem*, the ultimate mind of enlightenment; they mean the same thing.

When we do the practice of ultimate bodhichitta, or ultimate emptiness, we first dissolve reality, then ourselves into emptiness. What remains is the limitless non-dualistic state of being and we stay in this state for as long as we can.

To do this, first relax, physically and mentally relax. Don't try to stop your thoughts but don't follow them either, just let them come and let them go. When you reach a relatively calmly abiding state, then maintain that state with awareness. In that state everything is in absolute harmony. Sounds are just like echoes and images just like dreams. Then remain in a continuous state of awareness of the present.

Meditating for even a short time in this way you may get a glimpse or a taste of this ultimate, non-dualistic state. You may not want to come out of it, but you have to.

This ultimate bodhichitta is the ultimate essence of bodhi, enlightenment, within each one of us. In this very brief, simple meditation we somehow feel comfortable, relaxed and in harmony. It is as if there aren't any problems anywhere, as if everything is perfect and in harmony. It is a very good feeling. We are still dualistic of course. We are only glimpsing a little piece of limitless. It is like we see the space in a glass, but not the limitless space outside the glass. Limitless space, like our mind, has no center, no edge, no beginning, no end – it is all-pervading.

When practicing these meditations it is much better for beginners to do more, shorter sessions rather than one long session. If you practice this way you will actually progress. Once you have progressed

then you can do fewer, longer sessions. Of course it depends on the individual, but many times beginners treat calm abiding merely as a relaxant. There are many relaxants available these days but some people like calm abiding meditation better than pills. They may even become so involved in being relaxed that they are not really doing an ultimate bodhichitta practice, just stress management. We are not doing calm abiding meditation to manage our stress. We are practicing calm abiding and ultimate bodhichitta meditation to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings. We need to be truly and sincerely progressing, not just trying to feel good. We may feel good, but that is a bonus. We are allowed to feel good, there is nothing wrong with it, but if we are doing our meditation in order to feel comfortable then we are doing it for the wrong reason.

I can describe this feeling that we may become attached to. From head to toe we feel as though there is no sickness, no disease, no discomfort – everything feels absolutely perfect. Even if I have a cold, in meditation it is as if I am swimming in an ocean of honey – perfect. If we get attached to this state though, we are back to square one. It is as if our meditation fulfills no greater purpose than a daily dose of relaxants, and this should not be the case. In order to stop this happening shorter sessions are recommended for beginners, as is taking refuge and developing relative bodhichitta at the beginning of each session and dedicating merit at its conclusion. These things remind us exactly why we are meditating. We can get lost in bad things, we can also get lost in good things, but we should try not to get lost anywhere.

We also need to be aware that usually, when we begin to meditate, we fall into one of two categories: those that tend to fall asleep or those that cannot calm down. I am not worried about those who fall asleep. If you fall asleep when you try to meditate it means you know how to relax. I do worry about those who cannot calm down though. If someone cannot calm down when they meditate it shows they don't know how to relax and meditation can have an adverse affect on them. If people fall asleep when they meditate they are not likely to go crazy through meditating, but those who cannot relax need to be guided carefully otherwise they can develop mental problems.

The most important thing to learn about meditation in the beginning is how to relax. Usually meditation is not done vigorously. When we meditate we should be relaxed.

There are some exceptions, tantric meditations that should be done vigorously and involve specific breathing and exercise techniques, but these should not be attempted by beginners. Calm abiding meditation, which we should do in the beginning, is not vigorous, it is calming. We concentrate in these meditations but not like a fighter pilot flying through mountains. They have to concentrate intensely or they will hit something and die. This is not the kind of concentration we need in meditation. The concentration we need in meditation is like looking at the vastness of the sky. If we are able to concentrate in this way, we will succeed in this kind of meditation. I feel it is necessary to explain this because I know lots of people who meditate and some of them have been, to put it politely, affected. It is important to remember to first relax, have a calmly abiding mind and then base our ultimate bodhichitta meditation on this.

For those of you who fall asleep easily there is a simple remedy – keep your eyes open! It is a very ancient, original, skillful technique for not falling asleep. Another thing that may help is looking up. If you are looking up with your eyes open it is hard to fall asleep. If you start thinking too much and becoming agitated you can close your eyes and bend your head down a little. These techniques help because our body functions on many levels and the subtle functions that make us think one way or feel another are affected by our posture.

Our diet also affects these subtle functions. Those of you who have lots of thoughts and no peace of mind should really consult your doctor. I don't want to be responsible for anything happening to you. These days I have to be very careful. I might be liable! Still generally speaking, eating food that is a little heavier may make us feel a little bit more substantial and grounded. Those of you who tend toward sleep, on the other hand, may want to cut down on substantial foods. Eating lighter foods and less of them will help you feel a bit lighter.

There is also a connection between these two types of people and high and low blood pressure: those with high blood pressure

find it harder to relax and those with low blood pressure fall asleep easier. Blood pressure does not necessarily connect to what you eat: thin fit people can have both high and low blood pressure as can unfit, fat people. They do not necessarily correlate with our diet.

Hopefully, through knowing all of this you will be able to figure out when something is wrong with you when you are meditating. If you fall asleep each time you meditate you do not have to think, “Something is wrong with me!” You will know it is just a physical or environmental condition. Actually nothing is wrong with you, you are ultimately perfect but due to some environmental conditions things are sometimes good and sometimes not so good. Things are sometimes conducive to meditation and sometimes less conducive to meditation. Knowing these things is very helpful.

The other thing to remember is that there are no ghosts disturbing you! Having ghosts disturb you is very convenient, isn't it? Anything that does not work out we can blame on the ghosts. Anything that is wonderful we can say is the work of an almighty god and anything unbecoming are the ghosts. Then it is all good, it has nothing to do with our ego. The only problem is that it is not true. Our ego is very tricky, its games are impeccable. We always have to be aware of ego's games. We are experts at playing games with ourselves, we need to try to do this less.

**Dedication:** The third part of the meditation is its conclusion, the dedication. Here we dedicate the merit from our meditation on ultimate bodhichitta to the realization of ultimate bodhichitta, which is Buddhahood, by all sentient beings. This conclusion is always the same. The conclusion of every Buddhist practice is a dedication.

**Post-Meditation:** In post-meditation, in our activities, we should try to retain some aspects of whatever state we reached in our meditation on ultimate bodhichitta. If, for example, we did this meditation in the morning, when we finish it and start doing regular things – going to the office and so on – we should try to retain the perfectly harmonious state of our meditation. This will automatically affect the way we do things. Normally most of us do things in a

stressful manner, but if we are in this calm abiding state we can do the same things without causing ourselves stress. If I were to calmly put my glasses down on the table and then pick them up again I could do so without any stress. If, on the other hand, I were to do the same action hurriedly because I was worrying about something it could make things more difficult. I might even put my glasses on incorrectly and not be able to see.

In this way, if we try to maintain this calmness, if we try to do things clearly with awareness, we will achieve much more, less stressfully. Our daily activities will become a practice for us. We can do this when we are driving, talking, eating – doing anything. We eat breakfast every morning but many times we do not even remember what we ate. We eat lunch and do not remember what or how much we ate – was it too much or too little? If we manage to maintain our calm abiding state we will taste every sip of our tea and orange juice and taste every slice of our bread. We will know what we are eating and we will enjoy eating it. It will make eating a harmonious and healthy thing, a practice even. Nobody can even drink a glass of water perfectly until they reach Buddhahood. I may drink a glass of water every day but I am not going to do it perfectly until I become a Buddha.

Instead of actually trying to retain this state we could pretend to be calm. We could act very holy, sacred and reserved even though our minds are chaotic. We could do this, but it would not help. It is not easy to maintain this state during our ordinary activities; I did not mean to suggest it was, but we should know how important it is. If we try to do it and sometimes manage and sometimes don't, that is okay. We have been in samsara for countless lifetimes and to get where we are we have done okay – we all have a precious human life. There is no reason for me to think that in my past life I, or all of you, did something unbelievable, unimaginable or impossible in order to have a human birth now. We have done okay, so we are okay.

We need to remember that everything we experience, the good and the bad, is a result of what we have done in the past. This means we could experience all sorts of things. The rain that fell in the ocean

a million years ago and the rain that fell in the ocean yesterday are both still in the ocean. Our karma is the same, it is not lined up like an army – “Right, left, right, left” – with one piece of karma finishing and another starting. Karma’s results manifest through the force of karma. Which results will manifest now or later and in which way depends on the force of the karma that caused them. The outcome of our past lives is what we experience now. My past lives are like an ocean of milk and I am its butter. It is the same for all of you, you are the butter of the ocean of milk that is your past lives.

### 3: TRANSFORMATION OF BAD CIRCUMSTANCES INTO THE PATH OF ENLIGHTENMENT

The Paramita of Patience

*When the world is filled with evil, transform all  
mishaps into the path of bodhi.*

*Drive all blames into one.*

*Be grateful to everyone.*

*Seeing confusion as the four kayas*

*Is unsurpassable shunyata protection.*

*Four practices are the best of methods.*

*Whatever you meet unexpectedly, join with meditation.*

This third point of the Seven Points of Mind Training is taught in two parts: thought and action.

**Thought:** When we are practicing relative bodhichitta we need to know that every negative circumstance we experience has everything to do with us. If something has nothing to do with me it will not happen to me. If something happens to me it has everything to do with me. Someone else may do something to me that causes me to suffer but it still has everything to do with me. This does not mean we should blame ourselves for everything, it means we should

recognize the core of the problem. If I have a problem then it has everything to do with me and I have everything to do with it.

We should not blame ourselves for what happens but we definitely should not blame only others. Blaming others may make us feel good, but please do not do it seriously or wholeheartedly. It is not okay. If I had never hurt anyone, ever before, there is no way anyone would ever hurt me. I have everything to do with what that person does to me. Although this is also true for any positive situations we may experience, here we are learning how to deal with negative circumstances. Understanding that any negative experience we have has everything to do with us is the first step in developing the right “thought” for this practice.

If we know this we can stop negative experiences from becoming a cause or condition for us to experience more negativity. Instead of reacting to these situations badly, and thereby creating the causes of more suffering, we can do our best to find a solution to these situations or just endure them, depending on what kind of problem it is and how easy it is to solve. We may have no choice but to solve it because we may not be able to endure it. It is like catching a cold. If I have the capacity to endure it all I need do is sit there, drink lots of hot water and take no medicine. I can get rid of the cold that way. If I do not have the capacity to endure the cold though – if I have to give a series of teachings for example – I can take a lot of pills so I can talk without sneezing, coughing or having my nose run. There are different ways to handle things in different situations.

The next step is to recognize that the source of all our suffering is ego. When we say circumstances have everything to do with us, we mean they have everything to do with our egos. Through my ego I indulge in desire, anger, jealousy, pride and so on and their result is my suffering. When we reflect on our experiences in this way our “thoughts” of relative bodhichitta become more detailed.

The “thought,” as it relates to ultimate bodhichitta, means knowing that ultimately nothing is happening. Even the worst thing that could happen to us is only happening relatively – ultimately, nothing is happening. I will give you a very stupid example. Let’s say I was in a helicopter in Hawaii and I wanted to take photos of a

volcanic eruption so I told the pilot to go closer to the lava. The pilot would tell me it was too hot and too dangerous, but let's say that I ignored this and asked him to take me closer anyway. Finally, let's say, I lost consciousness and fell into the volcano. My pilot would not be able to do anything. As I have fallen into molten lava there is no way medics could come and treat me. My mortal body would be completely consumed by Madam Peli (the Hawaiian goddess of the volcano). Hopefully the pilot will have made a video-recording of the incident, otherwise he might get into trouble but apart from that there would be nothing else for him to do except go home, relax and tell the story.

Relatively all these things have happened but from the point of view of ultimate bodhichitta nothing has happened. My mortal flesh, blood and bones might have been completely consumed by Madam Peli but my mind cannot be burned by anything. Even if it was 10,000 degrees nothing could happen to my mind and therefore from the perspective of ultimate bodhichitta nothing has happened to me. Even the worst possible thing that could happen does not happen ultimately. We cannot experience this view right now because even a pinprick hurts us. Even the New Delhi winter weather makes us sneeze and shiver. We may not be able to do much with this understanding technically but deep inside it can make a big difference. When something terrible happens to us, knowing that nothing is happening to us ultimately can make a big difference.

Without this perspective, falling into the mouth of an active volcano on the big island of Hawaii would be a big problem. At only fifty years old I would be completely, ultimately finished. If I know that ultimately nothing has happened, though, this makes a very big difference. We can avoid pinpricks and other problems but when they do happen knowing ultimately that nothing is happening, that ultimately everything is above and beyond this, is very healthy. It gives us perspective and with perspective we can transform negative circumstances into a positive condition for the path.

To summarize, we can transform all situations into the path by relating our experiences to relative and ultimate bodhichitta. Everything we experience has relatively everything to do with us and

is ultimately not happening. These two truths are essential to understanding this chapter.

**Action:** There are also actions that transform negative circumstances into the path to liberation. Tonglen is obviously something that transforms negative situations. When something bad happens to us Tonglen becomes easier to practice. If we are sick and lying in hospital, for example, somebody near us may be screaming, somebody over there may be crying and somebody over somewhere else may be struggling to breathe. We will most probably be surrounded by suffering and may even be in pain ourselves or be attached to tubes and undergoing different types of treatment. In these situations Tonglen is no longer a joke or a game. It is not just our imagination, it is reality. This makes it easier to pray with sincerity. If we can see others suffering and we are suffering ourselves then we can pray that our illness consumes the illnesses of everybody else in the room sincerely and vividly.

When other negative situations happen to us, if we lose money or face a lawsuit for example, generating compassion towards our tormentors can turn them into great opportunities to practice Tonglen. That is if we are still able to do this. This does not mean, though, that we should just sit there when these things happen and do nothing. It means that deep inside our hearts, as practitioners of bodhichitta, we should have compassion for our tormentors. He or she is committing bad karma, so we should have compassion for them. The way we deal with individual situations can vary: sometimes we may endure them, other times we may solve them and in yet other situations it may be best to challenge our persecutors. In all these situations though, as practitioners of bodhichitta, we should be thinking, "I don't want them to be a persecutor," instead of thinking, "I don't want to be victimized." Bodhisattvas challenge destructive activity because they think they can stop people from becoming a killer, thief or liar instead of worrying what is happening to them personally. Depending on the situation they may stop perpetrators from acting with malice towards them for this reason or try to stop them but not be able to.

If we are going to endure these situations we should endure them in a healthy way. That is, we should endure them thinking, “May this suffering I am experiencing be the suffering of all sentient beings including that of my tormentor. May I suffer on behalf of all of them.” In any of these situations, how well we respond to them depends on how genuine, how pure our motivation is. We cannot generalize about what to do in these situations but we can say that whether our actions are effective or ineffective, appropriate or inappropriate depends on our intention at the time.

Another type of action we can engage in is accumulating merit. Normally we would do this by being generous towards the Buddha, dharma and sangha and by doing charity work for the needy, but there are other ways to accumulate merit. In the Vajrayana and in these Mahayana teachings they mention the offering of mandalas. When we offer mandalas we offer the whole universe – including the sun and the moon – to all the Buddhas and bodhisattvas so that the merit we generate from this can be a cause for all sentient beings to attain Buddhahood. I read somewhere once that one of the Kadampa master Tsongkapa’s main practices was offering mandalas. Tsongkapa was the master who built Ganden monastery, and after he did this the Kadampa lineage became the Gelug lineage. Tsongkapa himself was a yogi so he did not have any gold or silver to offer in his mandala. Instead he used stones and a stone plate and he is supposed to have worn out thirteen stone plates by making mandala offerings. I don’t know if this is an historical fact or his disciples’ devotional exaggeration, but it is very inspiring.

Offering mandalas like this is a very pure way to accumulate merit. With a pure practice lineage and the right visualization it is almost as if you are offering the whole universe to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas. It is a tremendous way to accumulate merit. As sentient beings we have the right to every piece of the universe, it belongs to each one of us equally, so we are not offering something that does not belong to us and this is the only way we can do this. We cannot put the whole universe in an envelope and give it to Buddha, offering a mandala is the only way to do it. It is a very sacred way to accumulate merit.

Confession is another very important action. When we experience negative circumstances we have an insight into the similar types of negative karma we must have committed in the past and can confess them. If, for example, we get sick and experience pain all over our body this roughly speaking means we have previously beaten up lots of people. If we lose a lot of money and become poor this means we have stolen others' property. If people misunderstand us and do not respect us this means we have lied and slandered others a lot. Through the result we can see the cause and then we can confess our previous negative deeds by saying something like, "I confess all my bad karma from all my past lives. Whatever it was that I did to others that caused them to suffer like this I confess it along with all my other negative deeds."

Confession is not just saying we are sorry though. We also have to promise never to perform this kind of deed again and engage in positive actions that we will then dedicate to all sentient beings attaining Buddhahood. If our confession has all these different elements within it, it is complete. We should not confess in the same way a little child begs their father, "Please, please don't beat me with the newspaper, I will never do it again." It is not like the Buddha is beating us and therefore we are afraid of the Buddha. Confession means having genuine regret for what we have done and hoping that we will never conduct ourselves in this way again. We should also hope that others will not conduct themselves in this way again; that is, they will not create the causes and conditions for suffering. When we add these other aspects we have a more complete definition of remorse and confession.<sup>30</sup>

Interestingly, this text then talks about making offerings to spirits. Sometimes people can be problematic for us and sometimes spirits can be. I find people from all over the world very receptive to the idea of spirits and ghosts so I try not to talk about them too much. All this talk of ghosts and spirits is only half true and half superstitious paranoia so I will not go into this section in too much detail. There are, however, certain problems that are caused by spirits and we can appease them by making special offerings to them. These offerings are not made with devotion but with respect, appreciation and

compassion. We are not bribing them, we are more acknowledging that we have done negative things to them in the past, that we have intruded into their space, and because of this they have become annoyed and have done something similar to us. We are saying to them, “Now I have done something for you please leave me alone.”

Whether we should make offerings to spirits or not depends on our specific situation. Not every headache is caused by spirits. Every time we trip and fall down the stairs it was not necessarily spirits, but sometimes things that happen are caused by spirits, and this text is referring to these instances.

It also talks about requesting the dharma protectors to protect us by making offerings to them. This is important. There are wisdom protectors like Mahakala that manifest from the Buddha’s wisdom, but there are also worldly protectors. Many of these worldly protectors are just powerful gods and spirits who have taken vows from Buddhas and bodhisattvas to protect people who practice dharma or are just generally in harm’s way. When we make offerings to them, usually cups of tea, we remind them of their vows. We say, “Hey! You took a vow from Buddha remember. It is your job to protect me now that I am in trouble. Please have this cup of tea and do your job, protect me. I am sincerely trying to practice dharma and have encountered a problem here.”

These activities are ways we can transform negative circumstances into positive circumstances, but their most important part is to have the motivation of ultimate and relative bodhichitta. The key to this chapter is to remember that every bad thing that happens to us has everything to do with us, and that whatever is happening is only happening relatively, not ultimately.

#### 4: SHOWING THE UTILIZATION OF PRACTICE IN ONE’S WHOLE LIFE

##### The Paramita of Diligence

*Practice the five strengths,  
The condensed heart instructions.  
The Mahayana instruction for ejection of consciousness at death  
Is the five strengths: how you conduct yourself is important.*

This is explained as the five strengths in two different situations: while we are living and when we are dying.

**Living:** The first strength is bodhichitta itself. Its strength is similar to the force with which we hit a golf ball: the first drive sends the ball where we want it to go. In Tibetan it is called the *penpä tob*: *penpä* means throwing, *tob* means strength. The strength with which you throw something is what makes it reach its destination. If we wish to end up as Buddhas, we have to have the strength to project ourselves in that direction right from the beginning. This strength is bodhichitta. It is the thought, “I wish to become a Buddha so I can lead all sentient beings to Buddhahood.” This is our driving force, our first strength.

The second strength is our constant practice of relative and ultimate bodhichitta. In Tibetan we call it the *kom bä tob*. *Kom bä* means to acquaint ourselves with something, to get used to it, so this refers to practice itself. It refers to getting used to bodhichitta.

The third strength is the *kar bö sabön tob*. A *sabön* is a flower’s seed and *kar bö* means white. This means we should always do our best to encourage relative and ultimate bodhichitta, to let them manifest from us and continue to grow like a planted seed. Our bodhichitta should progress from a shoot to a bush, to a flower and finally to fruit. If relative and ultimate bodhichitta are constantly cultivated and practiced they will flourish like this and come to fruition.

The fourth strength is the *sunjinpä tob*. *Sunjinpä* means to defeat. We do not have to defeat anyone outside ourselves though, just our egos. It is our ego that harms us so we have to do our best to achieve victory over it. Our ego manifests, as I have said many times, as attachment, greed, anger, jealousy, pride and so on. If we cut the supplies to our attachment, jealousy, anger, then we can defeat our ego. After all, the essence of our ego is primordial wisdom, so when

our ego is defeated it will transform into primordial wisdom. It is not as if our ego is our number one enemy, because it is actually the other side of our perfect essence, but when we do not know this, that is ignorance, and a by-product of this ignorance is the ego.

Ignorance, ego, the “I,” duality are all different names for the same thing. Doing our best to minimize its negative aspects is the fourth strength. We need to do this to the best of our capabilities even when we are just beginning to practice. We need confidence at the beginning though, and if we desperately do away with our entire ego we may also lose our confidence. We don’t want to throw the baby out with the bath-water. We need to get rid of the water, but we want to keep the baby in the bath. That is, we need to keep our confidence and get rid of our ego. If we were to get rid of our confidence at the beginning as well this would not be very good, so we need to take things step by step. Eventually even our ego’s more positive forms, like our confidence, have to be transformed, but we should not worry about this right now. We have to overcome the bad, negative parts of the ego before we start on the nice, good, friendly parts. For now we need a little bit of the positive, friendly ego to overcome the negative, bad ego.

The fifth strength is the strength of aspiration, *mön lam kyi tob* in Tibetan. Finishing our positive actions with a dedication of merit covers this strength.

**Dying:** Another way to look at the five strengths is how they relate to death. All of us will die one day, there is no question about it. Each one of us would like to live as long as possible. I don’t know about this living for 10,000 years business, but we would like to live for a long time. Sooner or later, though, we will die, and when that time comes we need to know how to handle it. In this text, it shows Lojong practitioners how to use these same five strengths at the time of their death.

The first strength we need to focus on at this time is the strength of white seeds. In relation to living it was explained as the third strength, but when we are dying it should be the first strength we concentrate on. In this context it means, first, overcoming the fear

of death. These days doctors do not usually say, "We have tried everything but there is no hope, you are going to die," but if a doctor told me this I would appreciate it greatly. If a doctor says that to you, you should appreciate it. These days they are much more likely to say, "You will be okay, we are trying hard. This can be done, that can be done, take this pill, go to sleep." Still, when we know ourselves that we are dying, the first thing we need to do is overcome our fear of death. The simplest way to overcome this fear is by knowing the truth about death. Death is merely the separation of our mortal body from our immortal mind; the mind never dies, only the body does. Our body may be broken, sick or ruined and therefore not a conducive environment for our mind, so it has to separate from our body. When our mind can no longer function in our body and leaves it, this is death.

If we know this we will not have any strange ideas about what death is, we will know it is not a frightening and unspeakable thing. Naturally we should do our best to stay alive, we should go to the best doctors, the best hospital and do everything we can to stay alive, but when nothing works we should be able to say, "Okay, now I am going to die." We should be able to overcome our fear of death by knowing exactly what death is. We have died and been born countless times in the past. This life is only one of many lives we have led, and our death will be just one more death. Of course we should try to live as long as we can, but when our doctors tell us we are going to die we should remember what death is and not be afraid.

The next thing we should do, which is still part of the first strength, is to take care of unfinished business. This is also very important. We have to let go of all our sentimental things. Any dolls from childhood, anything we do not feel we can part from we should part from. We should write a will, call all our friends and make it very clear who gets what so that after our death the living will not fight with each other over our stuff. Instead of being busy being frightened we should be busy taking care of unfinished business. If we are in a coma, that is a different story, we cannot take care of unfinished business when we are in a coma, but really we should be ready for death at all times. Otherwise, when we die problems

may come up, and we should try and stop this from happening. This is our responsibility. If we do not deal with this unfinished business, the suffering people endure because we did not will be our responsibility.

The second strength is the strength of aspiration; in the order of strengths we should develop in life, this was number five. Here we should collect our energy and use it to take refuge and develop bodhichitta sincerely. We should practice *dana* (generosity) by performing charitable acts, every positive thing we can do we should. If people follow this instruction it enables them to die in a positive, happy, healthy, meritorious environment.

The third strength to practice at the time of death, which was the fourth strength when it was described as a practice for life, is the strength of being victorious over the ego. How you want to practice this at the time of death depends on you. If you wish to be born again for the benefit of all sentient beings then you can wish for that. If you wish to be born in a pure land, attain greater realization and then benefit sentient beings in a greater way then you can wish for that. Whatever aspiration you have should be an antidote to your ego and ignorance, though, and this can only happen with the limitless intention of working for the benefit of all sentient beings.

The fourth strength, which in the previous section was the first strength, is the strength of projection. In this case we need to make sure that our intention is strong enough to carry us to wherever we wish to be reborn. This means we should strongly aspire that after our natural death we will be able to pass through the in-between state and birth accompanied by relative and ultimate bodhichitta.

At the time of death the fifth strength is the strength of habit – practice. According to these teachings, this means that we need to start engaging in the fifth strength now. We need to start practicing relative and ultimate bodhichitta now. When the doctor tells us that we are going to die we may not have the time to practice relative and ultimate bodhichitta, so we need to start practicing it right now and keep practicing it as long as we live.

This is a very specific teaching on dying that was given by Atisha Dipankara and is presented here as the fourth point of the Seven

Points of Mind Training. It describes how practitioners of mind training should behave when they experience the last moments of life, when the doctor tells them they are about to die. These guidelines were given to Atisha by his guru Jowo Serlingpa in relation to the five strengths.

At the same time as doing these practices, if we are able to remain in the state of meditation on ultimate bodhichitta that we have discussed, this would of course be enormously beneficial. When the doctor has told us we are going to die, when we have written our will and taken care of everything, there really isn't anything else to do. We can sit there, relax and meditate on the nature of our mind. We can enter into the state of ultimate harmony and peace that we call samadhi. Many great masters, including those I have seen die with my own eyes, have remained in this state for many days after they were clinically dead, looking just as if they were alive. Then when they were really ready to leave their bodies they became like a corpse. Some of them even died in the meditation posture and stayed sitting in it for two or three days. They were able to do this because they died in samadhi; that is to say when the separation of body and mind took place they were able to recognize the nature of their mind. We should also try to practice this at the time of death.

The last thing I should mention with regard to dying is that if you cannot die doing any of these things at least try to die with a positive thought. Do not lie there thinking, "Why me! Why me!" Instead try to focus on how you have done your best, the doctors have done their best and your relatives have done their best so now you can relax and die peacefully without any uneasy feelings towards anybody. Relax and go. Of course if you can do the Lojong practices or the ultimate bodhichitta meditation this would be better, but if you cannot it is better to die with a positive thought than a negative one.

## 5: ASSESSING HOW WELL YOUR PRACTICE IS PROGRESSING

### The Paramita of Meditation

*All dharmas agree at one point.  
Of the two witnesses, hold the principal one.  
Always maintain only a joyful mind.  
If you can practice even when distracted  
You are well trained.*

There are many ways to assess how well our mind training practice is going but the simplest is to check and see if we are less jealous, angry, greedy and hateful. If we are less like this our practice is going well. In other words, if we have less ego our practice is progressing well. If these negative states are decreasing we should also have more positive states like compassion and devotion. If we have more clarity and less confusion and neurosis our practice is going well. If we have more of the negative things and less of the positive things we are not doing so well. This method of assessment is very simple but its details are numerous. I don't think we should go into these details very much though because I don't think assessing ourselves too much at this stage is very helpful. Most of us are still so influenced by our egos that when we assess ourselves we only see what we want to see.

## 6: DISCIPLINES OF MIND TRAINING

### The Prajna Paramita

*Always abide by the three basic principles.  
Change your attitude, but remain natural.  
Don't talk about injured limbs.  
Don't ponder others.  
Work with the greatest defilements first.*

*Abandon any hope of fruition.*

*Abandon poisonous food.*

*Don't be so predictable.*

*Don't malign others.*

*Don't wait in ambush.*

*Don't bring things to a painful point.*

*Don't transfer the ox's load to the cow.*

*Don't try to be the fastest.*

*Don't act with a twist.*

*Don't make gods into demons.*

*Don't seek others' pain as the limbs of your own happiness.*

This point talks about the samaya of mind training, the *Lojong gi damtsik*. This means it describes what we should not do. The next chapter talks about the *Lojong gi labcha*, advice for mind training. This means it describes what we should do. But these two approaches are so closely connected that it is difficult to completely separate them.

Their basis is the maintenance of the bodhisattva vows. Taking the bodhisattva vow is the beginning of Lojong practice; after this we primarily need to maintain its main precept: to never exclude any sentient being from our motivation to attain Buddhahood. On top of this we should also respect, appreciate, cherish and uphold the lineage of the bodhisattva and its teachings without contaminating it.

The second important thing is that no matter what state we think we may have realized through Lojong practice, we should always behave properly. "Behaving properly" means that we should do our best to make sure that our actions do not harm or confuse others. In order to stop ourselves doing this we need to be mindful and aware of our actions.

Another objective of our practice should be to stop favoring certain sentient beings over others; our Lojong practice should be equally on behalf of all beings. Our motivation should not have any bias. These are the three main parts of the Lojong samaya.

The text gives lots of other helpful advice too. It tells us, for example, to “Finish what you start.” This means developing the good habit of continuing with what we have started until it is finished before we start something else. We should adopt this approach rather than starting many things, shifting from one to another and not completing any of them. Clarity and consistency is very important for a Lojong practitioner, for any practitioner actually, but especially for a Lojong practitioner.

Another thing it mentions we should avoid doing is exhibiting our practice to others. If we have to teach dharma, we have to teach dharma, but apart from that nobody needs to know whether we are a good practitioner or not. This should not be important to us. We should do our best but nobody needs to know that we are doing our best. It is not something we need to exhibit to others, they do not need to know how much we practice, or how great a practitioner we are.

It also advises against “looking for other people’s faults.” Everybody, including ourselves, has lots of potential and good qualities. We also have a lot of faults. Digging into others’ faults, however, does not benefit us in any way. As we always look for others’ faults through our own negative perceptions, it could also harm us. A thief, for example, will always worry about his things being stolen. He thinks others will steal because he steals. Liars do not trust anybody’s word. They lie all the time so they think everybody else lies. In this way we can see that looking into others’ problems and shortcomings is not helpful.

Then there is the advice not to have “too many expectations,” even with your practice. If we expect too much from our practice, this in itself can become an obstacle. If we wish or expect to accomplish this or that then even things that may have been relatively easy will become difficult. Expecting too much of ourselves may even stop us making small gains.

Yet another piece of advice is to “be less sentimental.” This means having fewer gentle attachments, fewer things we are sentimental about. I will tell you one of my secrets. I have a teddy bear! It is very small and filled with sand. I have had it since I was eight or nine.

Everyone must have something like this that they are gently attached to. It is not only my teddy bear that I feel this way about, I have many other pieces of memorabilia that I feel sentimental about. We can still have these things, we can still appreciate them but we should not be too attached to them because it makes us neurotic. We all have defilements but the last thing we want to be is neurotic. Being gently attached to our fame or fortune may also cause us to be neurotic. We really need to grow up and overcome our neurotic aspects. We can keep sentiment's healthy aspects but we need to try to overcome its neurotic ones.

I told you a story of how destructive this kind of sentiment can be earlier. It was the story in which two lamas were practicing Vajrayogini and when the stairs of light leading to Akanishta descended one of them went straight up but the other forgot his beautiful mala and only made it halfway up before he came back to collect it. By the time he had collected his mala the stairs had gone. My teddy bear could become my mala! We really need to overcome the neurotic aspects of our attachment to sentimental things. We can be easy on ourselves while we do it but we should be mindful of these things.

We should also refrain from holding grudges. If somebody did something nasty to us we could remember this and make ourselves feel bitter about it by thinking about it again and again. As a result of this we may say bad things about that person, drop damaging hints about them or wish them ill. This kind of behavior is something that Lojong practitioners should try to overcome. No matter who did bad things to us or what these were, we should not hold a grudge that may cause us to experience resentment or try to extract revenge.

Lojong practitioners should never wish anybody suffering no matter what they have done. Lojong practitioners should not blame other people for their mistakes. We should not do something bad and then say it was someone else. Nor should Lojong practitioners go against the law of karma, cause and result, *le-ju-dre* in Tibetan. They should never be deceitful. I will give you a stupid example. Let's say you are selling butter brought from 100 kilometers away. If people know that when you bought the butter it cost five rupees but

now you are selling it for ten that is okay. Your customers will probably understand that you had to transport the butter and need to make a profit so they will happily pay the extra five rupees instead of traveling 100 kilometers to get it themselves. If, on the other hand, you secretly mix bananas into the butter to deceive your customers and give yourself larger profits, that is very bad. Practitioners of Lojong should not ever do this kind of thing.

These kinds of ethics are extremely important in Mahayana and Vajrayana practices. They should become our day-to-day life principles. We should never cross their boundaries. We should never pretend untrue things are true, or that true things are untrue. This is very important. To what extent we can keep these ethics depends on our individual capacities, but we should do our best.

One of the last things the sixth point says we should refrain from is becoming proud. We should do our best not to become proud. Having a little bit of positive pride is okay, but we should never become so proud that we look down on others. No matter how successful or celebrated we become we should do our best not to look down on or be disrespectful of others. Even if we become the highest of the high we should respect the lowest of the low.

## 7: GUIDELINES OF MIND TRAINING

### Post-meditation

*All activities should be done with one intention.*

*Correct all wrongs with one intention.*

*Two activities: one at the beginning, one at the end.*

*Whichever of the two occurs, be patient.*

*Observe these two, even at the risk of your life.*

*Train in the three difficulties.*

*Take on the three principal causes.*

*Pay heed that the three never wane.*

*Keep the three inseparable.*

*Train without bias in all areas.*

*It is crucial to do this pervasively and wholeheartedly.*

*Always meditate on whatever provokes resentment.*

*Don't be swayed by external circumstances.*

*This time, practice the main points.*

*Don't misinterpret.*

*Don't vacillate.*

*Train wholeheartedly.*

*Liberate yourself by examining and analyzing.*

*Don't wallow in self-pity.*

*Don't be jealous.*

*Don't be frivolous.*

*Don't expect applause.*

The last, the seventh point of the Seven Points of Mind Training, is similar to the previous point but deals with what we should cultivate, as opposed to what we should abandon. We should start by trying to have Lojong as the background for everything we do. When we are eating food we can practice Lojong by thinking that we are eating food to maintain our health and strength so that we can continue to benefit others and eventually attain Buddhahood. When we take medicine, when we talk to others, when we go shopping, when we do business, when we are employed by someone, in every situation the backdrop – our purpose – should be bodhichitta.

If you are an employee, for example, you can bring bodhichitta into your work by reminding yourself that you are working to earn a living so that you can make the best of your life and you want to make the best out of your life so you can progress towards enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings and eventually become a Buddha. As Lojong practitioners bodhichitta should always be present in whatever we do. That is the first thing.

The second thing it advises us to do is remember that all the negative things that happen to us have everything to do with us. I have explained this already. The third piece of advice is to remember others when we do something selfish. If, for example, we have a nice meal in front of us, we should not forget to offer it to the Buddha, or

the beings that were involved in bringing the vegetables or meat to our table. The meat was once a sentient being's hand, shoulder or ribs. Bugs were killed to stop them devouring the growing vegetables. We should remember these things. When we are enjoying something we should remember what was involved in bringing this enjoyment to us and sincerely pray for all those who helped make it happen.

Some people may think this way of thinking is hypocritical, but I don't. If we don't eat we die and we don't want to die, we want to live as long as possible. Looking at our situation clearly and doing the best we can is not hypocrisy. If we had a spiritual realization that meant we did not have to eat or drink, and we still ate and drank, then maybe that would be hypocritical but none of us has reached this state. There are practices in our lineage that enable people to live on stones. I have read texts on this but have never done it. I would not know how to digest them. Apparently one pebble takes many days to digest and it is very healthy. There are descriptions on the different types of pebbles and the individual properties the yellow, red, black and green pebbles have. The texts describe how to eat them and the exercises and herbs that will make you able to digest them. There is a whole practice describing how to digest pebbles, but I will not take you on a long ride through it. That may become a trip for you, a pebble trip.

Instead what we should remember is not to get lost in whatever kind of happiness or suffering we experience by looking at the big picture. However happy, fortunate, rich and comfortable we may be, we cannot be limitlessly comfortably and happy. When we look at the bigger picture it will stop us becoming proud about our experience or lost in it. Whatever suffering we experience cannot be the worst kind of suffering so we should not get lost or overwhelmed by our little problems. We should know that the kind of problems other sentient beings encounter, the kind of problems we ourselves might encounter, can be a hundred times worse than what we are encountering now. That is the fourth thing.

The fifth piece of advice is to "be aware of all the advice that has already been given." The sixth is to "always remember the antidotes to each of the obstacles." This has also been mentioned earlier. The

seventh is to “appreciate the three things that we already have.” The first of these three things we need to appreciate is having and being part of a lineage. The second is the teachings of the Mahayana, the bodhichitta. The third is having the conditions to implement the teachings we receive. If we really wanted to implement all the Mahayana teachings, then we really do have the time and ability to do it.

It goes on to say that we should use our body, speech and mind in whichever ways we can for our own and others’ betterment. Our mind is the boss and our speech and body are its attendants. We need to use these attendants, make use of their abilities, for good and beneficial purposes.

The next piece of advice is specifically to be positive to those who are negative to us. Being positive to those who are positive to us is easy but being positive to those who are negative towards us is very difficult. This is why it advises us specifically to be compassionate, respectful and understanding to those who are not nice to us.

It also advises us to be positive with ourselves. Instead of getting frustrated with our faults we should appreciate the fact that we have recognized them. If we find a particular weakness, instead of thinking, “Oh my goodness, how terrible I have this weakness,” we should think, “How wonderful I have recognized my weakness.” We should try to appreciate the recognition of our weaknesses rather than being disappointed in finding them.

We should also “always try to be patient, diligent and mindful.” This means being mindful, aware, diligent, patient and tolerant in positive as well as negative situations. Never be impatient. If you are waiting in a line and somebody pushes in front of you, even if saying, “Hey man, the end of the line is over there” comes to the tip of your tongue, do not say it. You may move a little closer to the person in front of you, or make yourself look bigger or smaller so that people are aware of you and no one else will push in, but the person in front of you is already there, so don’t make a big scene that makes them feel uncomfortable. Being tolerant is very important but we need to be mindful when we practice tolerance, otherwise it can become selfish by encouraging others to persecute us. We need to find a

balance but still we should always be diligent about practicing patience, tolerance, compassion and appreciation.

The text goes on to advise us not to be *sandrog* [fickle]. When someone abandons an old friend for a new friend we call this *sandrog*. Or when someone buys a new cup and never drinks out of their old cup, this is also *sandrog*. Being unstable in this way, always looking for new things, is not very good. We should try to be as stable as possible. Maybe there isn't a word that means exactly *sandrog* in English; if there were it would be similar to advertising. Advertising always appeals to our appetite, always suggests new things, new things, new things, new things. It does not encourage us to be stable at all. Instead it makes us constantly want new things. This is not very good for our progress. It will disperse our efforts and make us greedier. We should really try to remain more stable.

We should also "check ourselves from time to time" to assess our progress. If we do check ourselves in this way, then when we see our progress it will be encouraging and we will know we need to work on our shortcomings. The text then adds that nobody can check up on ourselves better than we can.

The last piece of advice it gives is that we should not expect appreciation. Whatever we achieve in our practice, we should not expect any praise or appreciation for it. In Tibetan we call this *yu*. If I did many things for you and you never showed your appreciation for my help, I might develop *yu* against you. It is not so much resentment as a feeling that we deserve appreciation. A feeling that whoever it was we helped really should at least say thank you. We should not do this. We should not look for gratitude for our practice. If we wish to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings, no matter what we have achieved we do not need gratitude. If people appreciate what we have done that is fine, it is good for them to generate merit in this way. As Mahayana practitioners, however, we should never look for gratitude from others. We should not even be thinking about it, or complaining about its absence. We are working to attain Buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings – we are not working for gratitude. Looking for gratitude is totally contrary to our goals.

This has only been an overview of the seventh point; I have not gone into it in detail but I have covered its essential points thoroughly.

### CONCLUDING VERSES

*When the five dark ages occur,  
This is the way to transform them into the path of bodhi.  
This is the essence of the amrita of the oral instructions,  
Which were handed down from the tradition of the sage  
of Suvarnadvipa.*

*Having awakened the karma of previous training  
And being urged on by my intense dedication,  
I disregarded misfortune and slander  
And received oral instruction on taming ego-fixation.  
Now, even at death, I will have no regrets.*

The Seven Points of Mind Training concludes by saying bodhichitta is a simple but very profound practice. It is compared to a lotus. A lotus is the most beautiful, clean flower but it grows in ugly, dirty mud. In the same way bodhichitta can be practiced by anybody, it is the simplest, most efficient and most profound practice. In Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* he describes how the moment before you develop bodhichitta you could be the cruelest person in the whole universe, but the moment after you are a son or daughter of the Buddha. You are transformed in the snap of a finger, from the worst there can be to the best, by the simple wish to "become free like Buddha so you can lead all sentient beings to the freedom of a Buddha."

This simple, sincere decision has the capacity to change the worst into the best. You do not need a crystal-clear pond to grow the most beautiful flower. The transformation of a sentient being from defiled and negative to sacred and positive can take place with the development of bodhichitta, with this simple decision. Many eons ago the Buddha Shakyamuni himself was just an ordinary, everyday

beggar with a bowl full of food when he saw the Buddha of that time and became inspired enough to offer his food. He sincerely prayed to become like this Buddha and make all sentient beings like him. This was the beginning of Prince Siddhartha's lineage of enlightenment. Until he attained Buddhahood that seed kept growing and finally it developed into fruit at Bodhgaya under the Bodhi tree more than 2500 years ago. The greatest change comes about with the transformation of attitude. Attitude transformation doesn't cost anything, doesn't take any time, you just have to know because when you know you are no longer ignorant.

I am very happy that I have been able to share a little bit of Atisha Dipamkara's teachings on the practice of bodhisattvas that he received from his master and which is continued in our lineage. I sincerely hope and pray that it will be beneficial to you.