# WESTCHESTER BUDDHIST CENTER
# 2016 RETREAT

# LOJONG
# Atisha's Mind Training System
# The Seven Points & 59 Slogans

## Source Book

*First Edition - 2016*

## *Preface to the WBC 2016 Lojong Retreat Sourcebook*

Welcome!

In preparing for the retreat, the three of us decided it would be helpful if the lojong slogans were presented from various perspectives by drawing upon different commentarial sources. We chose four sources that we felt were both excellent in themselves and also provided a diverse perspective. We pulled all of these together into one place to facilitate our own study.

When we saw what a great resource this created, we decided to share this with everyone doing the retreat. We then added some additional materials specifically geared towards the participants – such as practice instructions – and packaged everything into this sourcebook.

During the retreat we will cover one point and a selection of its slogans each day. Please read some or all of the readings on the day's topic and slogans in this sourcebook. There will be a half hour reading period each day in the shrine room dedicated to this purpose. In addition, of course, you are welcome to use the open periods after meals and nighttime for reading as well.

The commentaries on the Lojong points and slogans were chosen because they lent the following qualities:

- The commentaries by Pema Chodron (*Start Where You Are*) and Norman Fischer (*Training in Compassion*) are the most accessible;
- Traleg Rinpoche's commentary (*The Practice of Lojong*) is the most traditional;
- And Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche's version (*Training the Mind*) represents the middle of the road.

Thank you for both providing us the opportunity to immerse ourselves in this wonderfully profound and challenging material, and for joining us in the process!

In the dharma of the exchange of self and other,
John, Jane and Derek

# WESTCHESTER BUDDHIST CENTER 2016 LOJONG RETREAT
# THE SEVEN POINTS & 59 SLOGANS OF MIND TRAINING OF ATISHA

## SOURCEBOOK TABLE OF CONTENTS

**Root Sources Abbreviations:**

1. **PTOD2:** *The Profound Treasury of the Ocean of Dharma Vol. 2, The Bodhisattva Path of Wisdom and Compassion*, Chogyam Trungpa
2. **TM:** *Training the Mind and Cultivating Loving-Kindness*, Chogyam Trungpa
3. **SWYA:** *Start Where You Are*, Pema Chodron
4. **TPL:** *The Practice of Lojong: Cultivating Compassion through Training the Mind*, Traleg Kyabgon
5. **TIC:** *Training in Compassion: Zen Teachings on the Practice of Lojong*, Norman Fischer

### REFERENCE MATERIALS



### INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

## POINT ONE: THE PRELIMINARIES, WHICH ARE A BASIS FOR DHARMA PRACTICE

**Slogan 1. First, train in the preliminaries**

- **TM:** Point One, pp. 9-10, **SB pp. 39**

## POINT TWO - THE MAIN PRACTICE, TRAINING IN BODHICITTA ABSOLUTE BODHICITTA – GENEROSITY & RELATIVE BODHICITTA - DISCIPLINE

**Slogan 2. Regard all dharmas as dreams.**
**Slogan 3. Examine the nature of unborn awareness.**
**Slogan 4. Self-liberate even the antidote.**
**Slogan 7. Sending and taking should be practiced alternately. These two should ride the breath.**

1. **TM: Ultimate and Relative Bodhicitta**
    a. Ultimate Bodhicitta and the Paramita of Generosity, pp. 11-21, **SB pp. 40-45**
    b. Relative Bodhicitta and the Paramita of Discipline, pp. 21-28, **SB pp. 45-49**
    c. Ultimate Bodhicitta Slogans 2-4, pp. 29-36, **SB pp. 49-52**
    d. Relative Bodhicitta Slogans, pp. 46-64, **SB pp. 53-61**
2. **TPL: The Actual Practice**
    a. The Cultivation of Bodhicitta, pp. 29-31, **SB pp. 62-63**
    b. Absolute Bodhicitta, pp. 31-34 and 39-41, **SB pp. 63-66**
    c. Relative Bodhicitta, pp. 59-65, **SB pp. 67-70**
    d. Relative Bodhicitta Slogan 7, pp. 65-71, **SB pp. 70-72**
3. **TIC: Train in Empathy and Compassion**
    a. Part 1 - Absolute Bodhicitta, pp. 9-16, **SB pp. 73-77**
    b. Part 2 – Relative Bodhicitta, pp. 29-31, **SB pp. 78-79**
4. **SWYA:**
    a. Slogan 2, No Big Deal pp. 12-19, **SB pp. 80-84**
    b. Slogan 2, Pulling out the Rug, pp. 20-26, **SB pp. 84-87**
    c. Slogan 7, Start Where You Are, pp. 44-59, **SB pp. 88-95**

## POINT THREE - TRANSFORMATION OF BAD CIRCUMSTANCES INTO THE PATH OF ENLIGHTENMENT - PATIENCE

**Point Three:**

- TM: pp. 71-72, **SB pp. 96**
- TPL: Transforming Adversity into the Path of Awakening, pp. 82-86, **SB pp. 97-99**
- TIC: Transform Bad Circumstances into the Path, pp. 45-47, **SB pp. 100-101**

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

- SWYA: Bringing all that we Meet to the Path, pp. 60-64, **SB pp. 101-103**

**12. Drive all blames into one.**

- SWYA: Drive all blames into one, pp. 69-76, **SB pp. 104-107**
- TIC, pp. 50-53, **SB pp. 108-109**

**16. Whatever you meet unexpectedly, join with meditation.**

- TM: pp. 125-129, **SB pp. 110-112**
- SWYA: Empty Boat, pp. 109-114, **SB pp. 112-115**

## POINT FOUR - SHOWING THE UTILIZATION OF PRACTICE IN ONE'S WHOLE LIFE - EXERTION

**Point Four**

**17. Practice the five strengths, the condensed heart instructions**

- TM: pp. 131-139, **SB pp. 115-119**
- TIC: Make Practice Your Whole Life, pp. 63-76, **SB pp. 120-126**
- SWYA: Teachings for Life and Death, pp. 115-123, **SB pp. 127-131**

## POINT FIVE – EVALUATION OF MIND TRAINING - MEDITATION

**Point Five:**

- TIC: Assess and Extend, pp. 80-82, **SB pp. 131-132**
- TM: p. 147, **SB p. 132**

**19. All dharma agrees at one point.**

- TM: pp. 148-151, **SB pp. 133-134**
- SWYA: Loving-kindness and Compassion, pp. 124-129, **SB pp. 135-137**

**21. Always maintain only a joyful mind.**

**22. If you can practice even when distracted, you are well trained.**

- TM: pp. 155-159, **SB pp. 138-140**
- TPL: pp. 157-164, **SB pp. 140-144**
- TIC: pp. 91-93, **SB pp. 144-145**
- SWYA: Lighten Up, pp. 130-135, **SB pp. 146-148**

## Point Six - Disciplines or Commitments of Mind Training - Prajna

**Point Six:**

- TM: p. 167-168, **SB p. 149**

- TPL: The Commitments of Mind Training, pp. 165-166, **SB pp. 150**
- TIC: The Discipline of Relationship, pp. 95-99, **SB pp. 151-153**

**24. Change your attitude, but remain natural.**
- TPL: pp. 169-170, **SB pp. 153-154**

**27. Work with the greatest defilement's first.**
**28. Abandon any hope of fruition.**
- SWYA: Excerpt from Compassionate Action, pp. 153-5, **SB pp. 154-155**
- TPL: pp. 174-178, **SB pp. 156-158**
- TIC: pp. 106-111, **SB pp. 158-161**
- SWYA: Abandon any hope of fruition, pp. 136-143, **SB pp. 161-165**

## Point Seven - Guidelines of Mind Training – Prajna

**Point Seven:**
- TIC: Living with Ease in a Crazy World, pp. 125-128, **SB pp. 165-167**

**49. Always meditate on whatever provokes resentment.**
**50. Don't be swayed by external circumstances.**
**51. This time, practice the main points.**
- TPL: pp. 216-2220, **SB pp. 167-169**
- TIC: pp. 137-139, **SB pp. 170-171**


**MEDITATION INSTRUCTION**
**FOR SHAMATHA PRACTICE**

Choose a quiet and uplifted place to do your meditation practice. Sit cross-legged on a meditation cushion, or if that's difficult, sit on a straight-backed chair with your feet flat on the floor without leaning against the back of the chair.

Place your hands palms down on your thighs and take an upright posture with a straight back, relaxed yet dignified. With your eyes open, let your gaze rest comfortably as you look slightly downward about six feet in front of you.

Place your attention lightly on your out breath, while remaining aware of the environment around you. Be with each breath as the air goes out through your mouth and nostrils and dissolves into the space around you. At the end of each out-breath, simply rest until the next breath goes out. For a more focused meditation you can follow both out breaths and in breaths.

Whenever you notice that a thought has taken your attention away from the breath, just say to yourself, "thinking," and return to following the breath. In this context, any thought, feeling, or perception that distracts you is labeled "thinking."

Alternatively, it is not necessary to say "thinking" to yourself. When a thought arises, you may just gently note it and return your attention to your breath and posture.

Thoughts are not judged as good or bad.

At the end of your meditation session, bring calm, mindfulness, and openness into the rest of your day.

*Adapted by Westchester Buddhist Center from instructions written by James Ishmael Ford and printed in the Shambhala Sun.*

## The Four Limitless Qualities

*May all sentient beings enjoy happiness and the root of happiness*
*Be free from suffering and the root of suffering*
*May they not be separated from the great happiness devoid of suffering*
*May they dwell in the great equanimity free from passion aggression and ignorance.*

## Contemplative Meditation for the Four Limitless Qualities

*In contemplation, we change the order such that equanimity is first…*

### Equanimity

Equanimity is to know that the temporary notions of "friend," "enemy," and so forth are illusory and cannot be relied on, and to accomplish the benefit of sentient beings without any bias. Chant 3x; contemplate 5-10 minutes; chant 3x to conclude. *May all sentient beings dwell in the great equanimity free from passion, aggression, and prejudice.*

### Loving Kindness

Loving-kindness is to think, may all sentient beings always have what I find desirable. Chant 3x; contemplate 5-10 minutes; chant 3x to conclude. *May all sentient beings enjoy happiness and the root of happiness.*

### Compassion

Compassion is like the unbearable anguish that would arise when a very dear relative of mine was being burned in a fire, but it is directed toward all sentient beings. Chant 3x; contemplate 5-10 minutes; chant 3x to conclude. *May all sentient beings be free from suffering and the root of suffering.*

### Joy

Joy is like the feeling that would arise in a mother when her only son who had gone off to war returns home. Chant 3x; contemplate 5-10 minutes; chant 3x to conclude. *May all sentient beings not be separated from the great happiness devoid of suffering.*

## Alternate Elaborate Version in Seven Stages

One can also do a more elaborate version using seven steps for each Immeasurable -

1. Oneself (this is the most important!)
2. Someone easy to love
3. For a specific friend
4. Fr someone neutral
5. For someone offensive
6. For everyone above (dissolve all boundaries)
7. For all beings in the universe

**TONGLEN INSTRUCTION**
**BY PEMA CHODRON**

In order to have compassion for others, we have to have compassion for ourselves. In particular, to care about people who are fearful, angry, jealous, overpowered by addictions of all kinds, arrogant, proud, miserly, selfish, mean--you name it--to have compassion and to care for these people, means not to run from the pain of finding these things in ourselves. In fact, one's whole attitude toward pain can change. Instead of fending it off and hiding from it, one could open one's heart and allow oneself to feel that pain, feel it as something that will soften and purify us and make us far more loving and kind.

The Tonglen practice is a method for connecting with suffering--ours and that which is all around us--everywhere we go. It is a method for overcoming our fear of suffering and for dissolving the tightness of our heart. Primarily it is a method for awakening the compassion that is inherent in all of us, no matter how cruel or cold we might seem to be.

We begin the practice by taking on the suffering of a person we know to be hurting and whom we wish to help. For instance, if you know of a child who is being hurt, you breathe in with the wish to take away all the pain and fear of that child. Then, as you breathe out, you send the child happiness, joy or whatever would relieve their pain. This is the core of the practice: breathing in other's pain so they can be well and have more space to relax and open, and breathing out, sending them relaxation or whatever you feel would bring them relief and happiness. However, we often cannot do this practice because we come face to face with our own fear, our own resistance, anger, or whatever our personal pain, our personal stuckness happens to be at that moment.

At that point you can change the focus and begin to do tonglen for what you are feeling and for millions of others just like you who at that very moment of time are feeling exactly the same stuckness and misery. Maybe you are able to name your pain. You recognize it clearly as terror or revulsion or anger or wanting to get revenge. So you breathe in for all the people who are caught with that same emotion and you send out relief or whatever opens up the space for yourself and all those countless others. Maybe you can't name what you're feeling but you can feel it--a tightness in the stomach, a heavy darkness or whatever. Just contact what you are feeling and breathe in, take it in--for all of us and send out relief to all of us.

People often say that this practice goes against the grain of how we usually hold ourselves together. Truthfully, this practice does go against the grain of wanting things on our own terms, of wanting it to work out for ourselves no matter what happens to the others. The practice dissolves the walls we've built around our heart. It dissolves the armour of self protection we've tried so hard to create around ourselves. In Buddhist language one would say that it dissolves the fixation and clinging of ego.

Tonglen reverses the usual logic of avoiding suffering and seeking pleasure and, in the process, we become liberated from a very ancient prison of selfishness. We begin to feel love both for ourselves and others and also we begin to take care of ourselves and others. It awakens our compassion and it also introduces us to a far larger view of reality. It introduces us to the unlimited spaciousness that Buddhists call *shunyata.* By doing the practice, we begin to connect with the open dimension of our being. At first we experience this as things not being such a big deal or so solid as they seemed before.

Tonglen can be done for those who are ill, those who are dying or have just died, or for those that are in pain of any kind. It can be done either as a formal meditation practice or right on the spot at any time. For example, if you are out walking and you see someone in pain-right on the spot you can begin to breathe in their pain and send out some relief. Or, more likely, you might see someone in pain and look away because it brings up your fear or anger; it brings up your resistance and confusion. So "on the spot" you can do tonglen for all the people who are just like you, for everyone who wishes to be compassionate but instead is afraid, for everyone who wishes to be brave but instead is a coward. Rather than beating yourself up, use your own stuckness as a stepping stone to understanding what people are up against all over the world. Breathe in for all of us and breathe out for all of us. Use what seems like poison as medicine. Use your personal suffering as the path to compassion for all beings.

When you do tonglen "on the spot", simply breathe in and breathe out, taking in pain and sending out spaciousness and relief.

When you do tonglen as a formal meditation practice it has four stages.

1. First rest your mind briefly, for a second or two, in a state of openness or stillness. This stage is traditionally called "flashing on Absolute bodhicitta" or suddenly opening to basic spaciousness and clarity.

2. Second, work with texture. You breathe in a feeling of hot, dark and heavy--a sense of claustrophobia, and you breathe out a feeling of cool, bright and light--a sense of freshness. You breathe in completely through all the pores of your body and you breathe out, radiate out, completely through all the pores of your body. You do this until it feels synchronized with your in and outbreath.

3. Third, you work with a personal situation--any painful situation which is real to you. Traditionally you begin by doing tonglen for someone you care about and wish to help. However, as I described, if you are stuck, do the practice for the pain you are feeling and simultaneously for all those just like you who feel that kind of suffering. For instance if you are feeling inadequate--you breathe that in for yourself and all the others in the same boat--and you send out confidence or relief in any form you wish.

4. Finally make the taking in and sending out larger. If you are doing tong!en for someone you love, extend it out to everyone who is in the same situation. If you are doing tonglen for someone you see on television or on the street, do it for all the others in the same boat-make it larger than just that one person. If you are doing tonglen for all those who are feeling the anger or fear that you are caught with, maybe that is big enough. But you could go further in all these cases. You could do tonglen for people you consider to be your enemies- those that hurt you or hurt others. Do tonglen for them, thinking of them as having the same confusion and stuckness as your friend or yourself. Breathe in their pain and send them relief.

This is to say that tonglen can extend infinitely. As you do the practice, gradually over time, your compassion naturally expands and so does your realization that things are not as solid as you thought. As you do this practice, gradually at your own pace, you will be surprised to find yourself more and more able to be there for others even in what used to seem like impossible situations.

# INSTRUCTIONS ON TONGLEN PRACTICE

1979 Vajradhatu Seminary
May 5, 1979
Mrs. Judy Lief

I'd like to give some brief instructions on the practice of tonglen, sending and taking, which will be introduced as regular practice during this sitting period. It will be practiced for one-half hour every day at approximately five o'clock. It probably will be introduced as well in dharmadhatus and centers as part of an intensive sitting practice.

I'm sure all of you are familiar at this point with the basic slogan on tonglen. "Sending and taking should be practiced alternately. This alternation should be placed on the medium of the breath." This is a very brief description of the entire practice. The practice will be initiated with one gong, a large gong. At this point, the first step is to check your posture, straighten yourself, and basically just prepare yourself to shift from shamatha into tonglen practice. Since this practice is for a relatively brief period of time, you should take special care to have good posture throughout.

The next step, which is very brief, a momentary thing, is to have a sudden reminder or flash, a sense of clarity, goodness, basic stillness of mind. This is very abrupt and very rapid, a matter of a few seconds, just a sense of quality of mind at rest.

The practice itself begins with the inbreath since the practice begins with yourself. What you breathe in is the quality of blackness, hotness and heaviness. The beginning of the practice--for the first 10 minutes or so--should be developing a general feeling, which is visually expressed as black and white or, in terms of temperature, hot and cool, or a basic feeling of heaviness and lightness. These are what we're working with.

So with your inbreath, you begin to breathe in--in a very thorough manner--the qualities of black, hot, and heavy. With the outbreath, you breathe out what is white, cool, and light. This is very important in terms of setting up the environment and the atmosphere of the practice. So when you breathe in, you should breathe in thoroughly and actually have a sense of receiving all of this into your system. When you breathe out, you should have a sense of giving away, thoroughly and completely, and even have a sense that this whiteness that you are giving out is being received by somebody or other out there.

One point about this practice is that you should actually have a sense of total body. It's not just sort of going out on the breath in a very narrow way, but it's a sense of the whole body giving out its lightness and taking on blackness--from top to bottom--through all the pores, in and out. The image of an air conditioning system has been used; you're air conditioning the room by taking in the room's hotness. So it's very deliberate, very heavy.

After you've set up this general quality of feeling, then you can go on to particular themes--ideas of someone you particularly hate, for instance. You might breathe that hatred in and breathe out some attachment to this or that. Make use of particular themes or situations that are close at hand, something that happened today or some particularly inspiring or irksome fact of your existence. The point about this section, which is drawing on situations and ideas and concepts, is that the particular self-involved situation you begin with should be very quickly expanded to include other people around you and other sentient beings. For instance, you might start out with an aggressive sense of something; you might begin with your own aggression, breathing in the quality of your aggression. Then you expand that to the other people involved in the situation, and then, very rapidly there should be a sense of taking on the aggression generally of all sentient beings. Then you breathe out gentleness and whatever seems good--any kindness you could grasp on to. So you breathe in and out, and you expand very quickly. Don't just fixate on one particular situation for the whole practice.

If the practice starts to get confusing or slightly conceptual, or if some difficulty comes up, you can use the fresh start approach that you are now familiar with in your shamatha practice. You can just return again to that flash of clarity or stillness, and then reestablish the feeling in terms of the more abstract qualities of black and heavy, light and fresh. Then you build up to the next particular detailed situation.

So the whole quality of this practice is developing a general feeling and maintaining that feeling throughout any particular thoughts that come up. It should be balanced--with a sense of breathing in thoroughly and also letting go, giving away thoroughly, a quality of balance--not clinging to either end of the practice.

This practice of tonglen should be done every day. It should only be done in formal group practice during the specific periods set aside for it. It shouldn't be something you just casually go in and out of at whim. You should confine it to this period. Thirty minutes a day (here at seminary). In

terms of postmeditation, the advice that the Vajracarya gave was to memorize the slogans and to apply them as situations--cause them to arise in your mind.

So let me just review the main steps, and then we can try it out. It's somewhat an historic occasion actually, the first formal mahayana practice introduced to the sangha anywhere. When you hear the gong, there's a brief flash; then you begin with the inbreath and the general feeling tone for the first ten minutes or so. The rest of the time, it's much looser: you deal with situations and relationships and whatever comes up. It's fine to be somewhat deliberate and heavy about it.

Basically, the practice has an almost relentless quality. There's no particular gap in the process; you just keep on with it. When you start losing it, you just take a fresh start and build it up again. So let's give it a try.

At the very end, there will be a series of gongs. When you hear the first gong, you should stop the practice at that point. Basically, it's just a period of transition back to shamatha. So the main thing is that at the very first gong at the end of the practice, you just drop tonglen and allow a brief transition into straight shamatha.

**The Seven Points and 59 Lojong Slogans of Atisha**

*As presented by Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche*

## POINT ONE – *The Preliminaries, Which Are a Basis for Dharma Practice*

1. First, train in the preliminaries.

## POINT TWO - *The Main Practice, Which Is Training in Bodhicitta*

**Absolute Bodhicitta slogans - The Paramita of Generosity**

2. Regard all dharmas as dreams.
3. Examine the nature of unborn awareness.
4. Self-liberate even the antidote.
5. Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence.
6. In post-meditation, be a child of illusion.

**Relative Bodhicitta slogans - The Paramita of Discipline**

7. Sending and taking should be practiced alternately. These two should ride the breath.
8. Three objects, three poisons, and three seeds of virtue.
9. In all activities, train with slogans.
10. Begin the sequence of sending and taking with yourself.

## POINT THREE - *Transformation of Bad Circumstances into the Path of Enlightenment*

**Relative Bodhicitta slogans - The Paramita of Patience**

11. When the world is filled with evil, Transform all mishaps into the path of bodhi.
12. Drive all blames into one.
13. Be grateful to everyone.
14. Seeing confusion as the four kayas Is unsurpassable shunyata protection.
15. Four practices are the best of methods.
16. Whatever you meet unexpectedly, join with meditation.

## POINT FOUR - *Showing the Utilization of Practice in One's Whole Life*

**Relative Bodhicitta slogans - The Paramita of Exertion**

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

## POINT FIVE – *Evaluation of Mind Training*

**Relative Bodhicitta slogans - The Paramita of Meditation**

19. All dharma agrees at one point.
20. Of the two witnesses, hold the principal one.

21. Always maintain only a joyful mind.
22. If you can practice even when distracted, you are well trained.

## POINT SIX - *Disciplines of Mind Training*

**Relative Bodhicitta slogans - The Paramita of Prajna**

23. Always abide by the three basic principles.
24. Change your attitude, but remain natural.
25. Don't talk about injured limbs.
26. Don't ponder others.
27. Work with the greatest defilement's first.
28. Abandon any hope of fruition.
29. Abandon poisonous food.
30. Don't be so predictable.
31. Don't malign others.
32. Don't wait in ambush.
33. Don't bring things to a painful point.
34. Don't transfer the ox's load to the cow.
35. Don't try to be the fastest.
36. Don't act with a twist.
37. Don't make gods into demons.
38. Don't seek others' pain as the limbs of your own happiness.

## POINT SEVEN - *Guidelines of Mind Training*

**Relative Bodhicitta slogans - The Paramita of Prajna (Cont'd)**

39. All activities should be done with one intention.
40. Correct all wrongs with one intention.
41. Two activities: one at the beginning, one at the end.
42. Whichever of the two occurs, be patient.
43. Observe these two, even at the risk of your life.
44. Train in the three difficulties.
45. Take on the three principle causes.
46. Pay heed that the three never wane.
47. Keep the three inseparable.
48. Train without bias in all areas. It is crucial always to do this pervasively and wholeheartedly.
49. Always meditate on whatever provokes resentment.
50. Don't be swayed by external circumstances.
51. This time, practice the main points.
52. Don't misinterpret.
53. Don't vacillate.
54. Train wholeheartedly.
55. Liberate yourself by examining and analyzing.
56. Don't wallow in self-pity.
57. Don't be jealous.
58. Don't be frivolous.
59. Don't expect applause.

# The Root Text on the Mind Training in Seven Points

**By Atisha and as Recorded by Geshe Chekawa**

***Organized as Presented by Ken McLeod on Unfettered Mind***

***http://www.unfetteredmind.org/mindtraining/about.php***

## I) Groundwork

1) First, do the groundwork.

## II) Practices

### A) Awakening to what is ultimately true

1) Look at all experience as a dream.
2) Examine the nature of unborn awareness.
3) Let even the remedy release naturally.
4) The essence of the path: rest in the basis of all experience.
5) In daily life, be a child of illusion.

### B) Awakening to what is apparently true

1) Train in taking and sending alternately. Put them on the breath.
2) Three objects, three poisons, three seeds of virtue.
3) Use reminders in everything you do.
4) Begin the sequence of taking with you.

## III) Applications

### A) General

1) When misfortune fills the world and its inhabitants
2) Make adversity the path of awakening.

### B) Awakening to what is apparently true

1) Drive all blame into one.
2) Be grateful to everyone.

### C) Awakening to what is ultimately true

1) The ultimate protection is emptiness;
2) Know what arises as confusion to be the four aspects of being.

### D) Special Methods

1) The best way is to use the four practices.
2) Work with whatever you encounter, immediately.

## IV) Summaries

### A) What to do while living

1) A summary of the essential instructions:
2) Train in the five forces.

### B) What to do while dying

1) The five forces are the mahayana instructions for dying. Posture is important.

## V) Measures of proficiency

1) All instructions have one aim.
2) Two witnesses: rely on the important one.
3) A joyous state of mind is a constant support.
4) Proficiency means you do it even when distracted.

## VI) Commitments

### A) General

1) Always train in three basic principles.

### B) Body, speech, mind

1) Change your intention but behave naturally.
2) Don't talk about others' shortcomings.
3) Don't dwell on others' problems.

### C) General reactivity

1) Work on your strongest reactions first.
2) Give up any hope for results.
3) Give up poisoned food.

### D) Anger

1) Don't rely on a sense of duty.
2) Don't lash out.
3) Don't lie in ambush.
4) Don't go for the throat.

### E) Envy

1) Don't put an ox's load on a cow.
2) Don't be competitive.
3) Don't make practice a sham.

### F) Pride

1) Don't turn a god into a demon.
2) Don't look to profit from sorrow.

## VII) Guidelines

### A) General

1) Use one practice for everything.
2) Use one remedy for everything.

### B) Reminders

1) Two things to do: one at the beginning, one at the end.
2) Whatever happens, good or bad, be patient.
3) Keep these two, even if your life is at risk.

### C) Maintenance

1) Learn to meet three challenges.
2) Foster three key elements.
3) Take care to prevent three kinds of damage.
4) Engage all three faculties.

### D) Extension

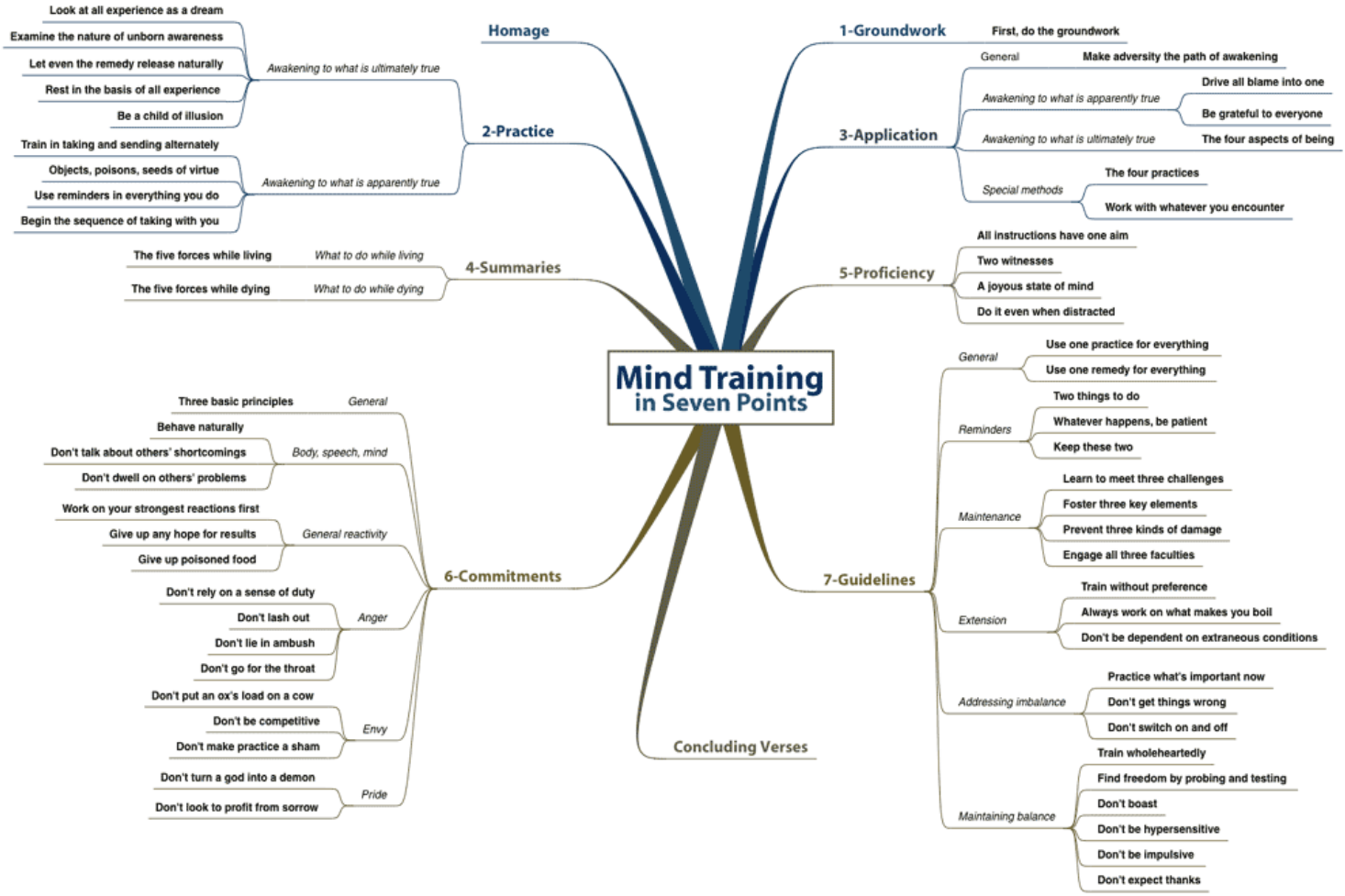
1) Train on every object without preference.
2) Training must be broad and deep.
3) Always work on what makes you boil.
4) Don't be dependent on extraneous conditions.

### E) Addressing imbalance

1) Practice what's important now.
2) Don't get things wrong.
3) Don't switch on and off.

### F) Maintaining balance

1) Train wholeheartedly.
2) Find freedom by probing and testing.
3) Don't boast.
4) Don't be hypersensitive.
5) Don't be impulsive.
6) Don't expect thanks.


Mind Training
in Seven Points
Homage
2-Practice
Awakening to what is ultimately true
Look at all experience as a dream
Examine the nature of unborn awareness
Let even the remedy release naturally
Rest in the basis of all experience
Be a child of illusion
Awakening to what is apparently true
Train in taking and sending alternately
Objects, poisons, seeds of virtue
Use reminders in everything you do
Begin the sequence of taking with you
4-Summaries
What to do while living
The five forces while living
What to do while dying
The five forces while dying
6-Commitments
General
Three basic principles
Behave naturally
Body, speech, mind
Don't talk about others' shortcomings
Don't dwell on others' problems
General reactivity
Work on your strongest reactions first
Give up any hope for results
Give up poisoned food
Anger
Don't rely on a sense of duty
Don't lash out
Don't lie in ambush
Don't go for the throat
Envy
Don't put an ox's load on a cow
Don't be competitive
Don't make practice a sham
Pride
Don't turn a god into a demon
Don't look to profit from sorrow
Concluding Verses
1-Groundwork
First, do the groundwork
3-Application
General
Make adversity the path of awakening
Awakening to what is apparently true
Drive all blame into one
Be grateful to everyone
Awakening to what is ultimately true
The four aspects of being
Special methods
The four practices
Work with whatever you encounter
5-Proficiency
All instructions have one aim
Two witnesses
A joyous state of mind
Do it even when distracted
7-Guidelines
General
Use one practice for everything
Use one remedy for everything
Reminders
Two things to do
Whatever happens, be patient
Keep these two
Maintenance
Learn to meet three challenges
Foster three key elements
Prevent three kinds of damage
Engage all three faculties
Extension
Train without preference
Always work on what makes you boil
Don't be dependent on extraneous conditions
Addressing imbalance
Practice what's important now
Don't get things wrong
Don't switch on and off
Maintaining balance
Train wholeheartedly
Find freedom by probing and testing
Don't boast
Don't be hypersensitive
Don't be impulsive
Don't expect thanks

# Selections from the Lojong Slogans of Atisha
# For WBC Annual Winter Retreat 2016

**DAY TWO: POINT 1 – *The Preliminaries, Which Are a Basis for Dharma Practice***

**Pre-requisites for Shamatha and the four thoughts that turn the mind**

1. First, train in the preliminaries

**DAY THREE: POINT 2 - *The Main Practice, Which Is Training in Bodhicitta***

**Absolute Bodhicitta slogans – Vipashyana & The Paramita of Generosity**

2. Regard all dharmas as dreams.
3. Examine the nature of unborn awareness.
4. Self-liberate even the antidote.

**Relative Bodhicitta slogans - The Paramita of Discipline**

7. Sending and taking should be practiced alternately. These two should ride the breath.

**DAY FOUR: POINT 3 - *Transformation of Bad Circumstances into the Path of Enlightenment***

**Relative Bodhicitta slogans - The Paramita of Patience**

11. When the world is filled with evil, transform all mishaps into the path of bodhi.
12. Drive all blames into one.
16. Whatever you meet unexpectedly, join with meditation.

**DAY FIVE: POINT 4 - *Showing the Utilization of Practice in One's Whole Life***

**Relative Bodhicitta slogans - The Paramita of Exertion**

17. Practice the five strengths, the condensed heart instructions.

**DAY SIX: POINT 5 – *Evaluation of Mind Training***

**Relative Bodhicitta slogans - The Paramita of Meditation**

19. All dharma agrees at one point.
21. Always maintain only a joyful mind.
22. If you can practice even when distracted, you are well trained.

**DAY SEVEN: POINT 6 - *Disciplines or Commitments of Mind Training***

**Relative Bodhicitta slogans - The Paramita of Prajna**

24. Change your attitude, but remain natural.
27. Work with the greatest defilement's first.
28. Abandon any hope of fruition.

**DAY EIGHT: POINT 7 - *Guidelines of Mind Training***

**Relative Bodhicitta slogans - The Paramita of Prajna (Cont'd)**

49. Always meditate on whatever provokes resentment.
50. Don't be swayed by external circumstances.
51. This time, practice the main points.

VOLUME TWO

THE PROFOUND TREASURY
OF THE OCEAN OF DHARMA

# The Bodhisattva Path of Wisdom and Compassion

CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA

COMPILED AND EDITED BY

*Judith L. Lief*

SHAMBHALA • BOSTON & LONDON • 2013



33

## *Introduction to Mind Training*

*The lojong, or mind-training, slogans are very simple, and not particularly philosophical. They are purely what one of the great Kagyü teachers referred to as a "grandmother's finger pointing." When a grandmother says, "This is the place where I used to go and pick corn or collect wild vegetables," she uses her finger rather than writing on paper or using a map.*

So far, our approach to the mahayana has been a philosophical one. But to experience reality properly, we very much need an application or working basis. We need to change to a slightly more contemplative approach. This comes in very handy. We may have begun to understand the shunyata principle or the teachings on relative and absolute truth, but what are we going to do then? What are we going to do with those two truths? It is like we have eaten an immense amount of birthday cake: we are completely bloated and do not know what to do next. So at this point we need to shift our emphasis from the theory of the bodhisattva path to the practice and experience of it.

What is the difference between theory and practice? Theory is an understanding of the possibility of egolessness, and practice is actually shedding your ego. The effect is relating with reality according to the bodhisattva path. At the theoretical level, you can understand how the realization of the egolessness of individuality and the egolessness of dharmas can be achieved simultaneously and properly. And at the practical level, how you are going to do that is largely based on your practice and personal discipline.

In the mahayana, our main concern is how to awaken ourselves. The mahayana takes quite a lot of effort because it is a big job. That is why it is called the mahayana, the great vehicle: it is a big deal. The mahayana is no joke, and you had better not fall asleep at the wheel when you are driving on such a big highway. But you can't go wrong with mahayana heavy-handedness; it is the best kind.

With mahayana practice, there is no cultivation—you just do it. It's like taking medication: the pills you take might taste terribly bitter, but you take them anyway. The mahayana is very harsh, but it is also very gentle. The intention is gentle, but the practice is harsh. By combining the intention and the practice, you are being both "harshed" and "gentled." That process turns you into a bodhisattva. It is like jumping into a blender: you begin to feel that you are swimming in the blender, and you might even enjoy it a little bit after you have been processed.

The technique of shamatha-vipashyana does not change very much in the mahayana; it is pretty standard. The only difference is the idea of an enlightened attitude, or bodhichitta. When you take the bodhisattva vow, you are actually transplanting bodhichitta in yourself. So bodhichitta is not purely conceptual; it is pragmatic. Out of bodhichitta comes the idea of working with a spiritual friend, or kalyanamitra, as the guide for your practice. You begin to be willing to commit yourself to working with all sentient beings. But before you launch yourself into such a project, you first need lots of training. In that way, the mahayana approach is similar to the hinayana logic of soso tharpa, or self-liberation.

## Atisha and the Transmission of the Lojong Teachings

*Lojong* is one of the mahayana contemplative practices taught in Tibet by Atisha Dipankara. *Lo* means "intelligence," or "mind"; it is that which can perceive things. *Jong* means "training" or "processing"; so *lojong* means "mind training." It is similar to the concept of shinjang, which means "thoroughly processed."

Atisha Dipankara visited Tibet at the beginning of the eleventh century, during the second revival of Buddhism in Tibet, after the time of Padmasambhava and after the period of persecution of Buddhists. When Atisha came to Tibet, he presented teachings in what was to become known as the Kadam school. *Ka* means "command," or "teaching." It is





like the word *Logos,* or "Word," in the Christian tradition, as in "In the beginning was the Word." Ka is a fundamental sacred command. It refers both to absolute truth and to a quality of practicality or workability from the individual's point of view. *Dam* means "instruction." It is oral teaching, personal teaching, a manual on how to handle your life properly. So *Kadam* means "sacred command teaching." The Kadam tradition developed around the time of Marpa and Milarepa, when Tibetan monasticism was beginning to take place and become deeply rooted. The Kagyü teacher Gampopa also belonged to the Kadam order, and incorporated this practice into the Kagyü tradition.

Within the Kadam tradition, there is a contemplative school and an intellectual school. In the contemplative school, the teachings are seen as instructions for practice rather than as an intellectual system. All the commands and messages are regarded as practical and workable for students, and there is an emphasis on contemplative and meditative disciplines. Since the Kagyüpas received instructions on the proper practice of mahayana through Gampopa, who studied with Kadam teachers as well as with Milarepa, we practice lojong based on the contemplative school of the Kadam tradition.

The Geluk tradition developed from the intellectual, or *pandita,* school of the Kadam tradition. *Ge* means "virtue," and *luk* means "system"; so the *Geluk* tradition is the "study of virtue." Gelukpas take a dialectical approach to understanding the mahayana and are philosophically oriented. They study logic, and analyze and intellectualize the teachings, whereas the Kagyü and Nyingma schools, which are my traditions, are referred to as practice lineages.

Atisha's lojong teachings were later summarized in a text by Geshe Chekawa Yeshe Dorje entitled *The Root Text of the Seven Points of Training the Mind.* My discussion of lojong is based on this text and on Jamgön Kongtrül's commentary, called *Changchup Shunglam,* which means "the main path to enlightenment."* *Changchup* means "enlightenment," *shung* means "main," and *lam* is "path"; so *Changchup Shunglam* means "main path to enlightenment." *Shung* is also the word used for "government." For instance, we could call the Tibetan government *pö shung: pö* meaning

* Geshe Chekawa's text, along with Jamgön Kongtrül's commentary, were translated by Ken McLeod and published as *The Great Path of Awakening: A Commentary on the Mahayana Teachings of the Seven Points of Mind Training* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1987).

Tibet, and *shung* meaning government. The government running the country is supposed to be a wide administration rather than a narrow one. It takes care of the psychology of the country as well as the economics, politics, and domestic situations. *Shunglam* can also mean "highway," or "boulevard," like a road in the middle of a city. It is extraordinarily wide and open, the main path on which everybody travels, the way any good old Buddhist should travel.

In the *Changchup Shunglam,* Atisha Dipankara's teachings on lojong are presented as a sevenfold cleaning or processing of one's mind, based on fifty-nine slogans designed to teach people how to become good mahayanists. These instructions were given to very simple people as well as to educated people. When the mahayana was first presented in Tibet, people were quite savage. So basic teachings, such as trying to be kind to your neighbors instead of destroying them, were revolutionary. In Tibet—or India for that matter—there was not much law and order, and so at first the mahayana teachers were simply trying to establish basic social norms. It took a long time for them to convince people that they could actually trust their next-door neighbors.

We may have gone a bit beyond teachings such as trying to be kind or not gossiping about people we dislike. Social norms about those types of things already exist. In modern society, we have been bombarded with all kinds of moralities and behavioral norms. We also have the police to protect us from doing terrible things to one another. We are told to try to be good citizens, and if we are not, we will get in trouble and end up in jail. But on the way toward trying to be good and kind, our approach has somewhat degenerated. It does not have enough psychological depth or real gut-level compassion. So at this point, although we may be more civilized, we constantly miss the point of *why* we are civilized. We miss the heart of the matter. Apart from being kind and good and keeping out of trouble, there is no greater vision. So it is important to emphasize the psychological aspect of lojong.

## The Power and Practicality of Lojong

Lojong is a way of switching allegiance from your ego to buddha nature. It is a process of indoctrination in which your previous preconceptions are wiped out. Quite simply, you indoctrinate yourself into the bodhisattva path and the bodhisattva's way of thinking by realizing that you have in





your mind this monolithic principle called buddha nature, bodhichitta, or tathagatagarbha. You indoctrinate yourself so that you cannot get away from that.

The lojong, or mind-training, slogans are very simple, and not particularly philosophical. They are purely what one of the great Kagyü teachers referred to as a "grandmother's finger pointing." When a grandmother says, "This is the place where I used to go and pick corn or collect wild vegetables," she uses her finger rather than writing on paper or using a map. In earlier times, quite possibly students were illiterate or not particularly versed in philosophy, so slogans were used. Jamgön Kongtrül's writing on this practice also very much reflects that approach.

In my own training, I studied a lot of philosophy. So when Jamgön Kongtrül first suggested that I study the seven points of mind training, I was relieved to discover that Buddhism was so simple and practical. You can actually practice it; you can just follow the book and do as it says, which is extraordinarily powerful and such a relief. In my childhood, I enjoyed immensely reading and memorizing the slogans. The simplicity of this text and Jamgön Kongtrül's commentary on it is so precious and direct; it is almost as if it were written for peasants. One of the characteristics of Jamgön Kongtrül's writing is that he can change his tone completely, depending on the subject, as if he were a different author altogether—and in doing so, his relationship with the audience becomes entirely different.

The *Changchup Shunglam* is one of the best books I studied in the early stages of my monastic life. Each time I read this book, I get benefit from it. It is somewhat rugged, but at the same time it is soothing. I was planning to become a simple monk. I was going to study these things and become a good Buddhist, a contemplative person—and such a thread still holds throughout my life. In spite of the complications in my life, I still feel that I am basically a simple, romantic Buddhist who has immense feeling toward the teachers and the teaching.

Lojong teachings are very powerful, particularly when you are facing difficulties. You should realize the importance of these slogans, understand as much as you can, and memorize them. What has been said is like a drop of golden liquid. There is a hard-edged quality of cutting down preconceptions and other ego battles, but at the same time, there is always a soft spot of devotion and simplicity that you can never forget. I am not particularly trying to be dramatic, but I really do feel extraordinarily positive about Jamgön Kongtrül and his approach to this teaching.

The lojong teachings include several points of mahayana discipline, but the foremost discipline is to develop ultimate bodhichitta. Compassion comes from the level of ultimate bodhichitta, an unconditioned state where you begin to realize that you and others do not exist. Therefore, you are able to extend yourself, which gives you joy and further joy. It makes you smile and appreciate the world. But it is important to begin at the beginning, almost at the kitchen-sink level. It may not be all that entertaining, but once you understand the basics, you could play and dance and appreciate the phenomenal world.

In order to practice lojong, you need hinayana training, and you also need to develop compassion and gentleness. At the hinayana level, you disown your arrogance and competitiveness. Beyond that, the mahayana touch is acknowledging your basic goodness, so you don't feel you are completely cut off and hopeless. In the mahayana, you are developing an attitude of strength and energy. You are beginning to trust yourself. You trust that your mind is always workable, that you can actually train yourself. You trust that you are not as bad as you thought, but you can apply yourself by means of discipline and meditation. By witnessing the spiritual friend and their relationship to the lineage, you see that you too can do it. So an overall feeling of positive atmosphere and positive logic is created. Because you have developed such gentleness and sympathy for yourself, you begin to feel frustrated with those who cannot click into this possibility. You feel sorry for them, and out of that frustration you develop compassion.



## Getting a Feel for the Slogans

It is important to understand the structure of the Atisha slogans. Each of them fits into a certain section of your practice. That is why we have seven different groups of slogans, or seven points of mind training. Some slogans apply to your sitting practice on the cushion, and others apply to what happens before, during, and after that. The first slogan is about preliminaries to mind training. The second set of slogans is about bodhichitta, beginning with ultimate bodhichitta and followed by relative bodhichitta. These slogans have to do with simplifying your practice into the ultimate bodhichitta level, and then applying bodhichitta and making it workable, starting with very simple things. Then there are the postmeditation slogans, which are connected with cultivating bodhichitta in your everyday





life. These slogans are guidelines for transforming difficulties, working with both living and dying, evaluating your mind training, and developing discipline. They are general rules for how to conduct yourself.

The teaching on the seven points of mind training is like being presented with a fish. You have the head of the fish, the body of the fish, and the tail of the fish—and you need to know which part you should cook, which one you should throw away, and which one you should debone, so that you can have a good meal.

Slogan practice is based on the six paramitas: generosity, discipline, patience, exertion, meditation, and prajna. Bodhisattvas, or would-be bodhisattvas, are like the knights of the medieval tradition. They are wealthy with generosity and they wear excellent perfumes, so they feel good. Then they put on their armor, get on their horses, and ride: and as they do so, they have their weapons around them, their swords and so forth. That seems to be the basic point of the six paramitas—to become a really good warrior.

In order to practice the slogans, your mind has to mix much more with the dharma. Rather than studying these teachings as a scholarly exercise, you have to learn how to listen to the dharma—how to study properly and apply what you have learned. It does not matter if you can come up with a bright idea. What counts is actually knowing how to apply the teachings. If you keep working with the slogans, you will begin to understand the geography of the whole thing. It is like driving into a town: once you understand the layout, you have no problem knowing which way to turn. You will know when to turn left and when to turn right. You begin to get a feeling for the town. If you had just memorized the names of the streets, you probably wouldn't get very far. But once you learn the geography of the town, you even know how to take backstreets to avoid traffic.

You can practice the slogans with the people you work with at your job, the clerk at the shop where you buy your groceries or your clothes, the driver who cuts in front of you—anyone you relate with. The slogans are always applicable, so you have lots of opportunities. People might have mistaken beliefs about what is true. They might disagree about whether human beings came about from karmic formations or were created by God, but that doesn't matter. What matters is the personal level, how we relate with people. What matters is whether we complain or we don't complain. When we cash our check at the bank, how do we relate with that situation? When we eat in a restaurant, how do we relate with that?

Slogan practice is universal. The idea is to use the slogans in dealing with anybody who is around us, anybody within our radius, anybody who has some connection with us.

You can actually sharpen your prajna by relating with people in this way, and they begin to respond to it. They begin to feel that something very precious is taking place. From a practical point of view, if you adopt these principles, things actually work out much more efficiently for you. Waitresses become more friendly, taxicab drivers become joyful, and shopkeepers more accommodating. If you are projecting something that is good and decent, people always pick up on that. It's great!

You can practice the slogans on the spot, whenever a situation presents itself to you. But you don't just say, "Now I'm going to practice slogan number four." That would be absurd, because the situation may not exist to do number four. The idea is that slogans arise in response to a particular situation. The actual words of these slogans bounce in my mind always, even in my dreams. They are very powerful and significant to me. Likewise, they could bounce around in your mind—in your dreams, before dreams, and in relationships with people. They should always be in the back of your mind. When your mind is tuned in to such simple and beautiful words, these slogans arise naturally. It happens that way, rather than actually having to recall them like the Declaration of Independence. They are so innocent and absurd, in a sense, but their absurdity is so insightful.

Slogan practice is delightful. It is very direct and personal, and everything is spelled out. It is much better than the moralistic approach of thinking that you need to stop doing something wrong. The slogans are not particularly traffic signs, they are reminders. And each time a certain slogan occurs to you, the slogans as a whole become more meaningful.

## Cause, Effect, and Essence

It is worthwhile to realize and understand these slogans, to study and memorize them. They are direct and simple, no big deal, and at the same time they are quite insightful. If I give you too many details, it is not going to help; your mind is going to be further crumpled and crippled. It is better to exercise your own intelligence and understanding of the depth of these slogans. In discussing the slogans and presenting the dharma altogether, I would like to provide you with possibilities of playing with your own





intelligence, rather than giving everything to you and having you repeat it back like an idiot.

One way to work with the slogans is to look at them in terms of cause, effect, and essence. It is very simple, once you know how to do it. You could apply this approach to anything. For instance, if you are drinking a cup of coffee, you could ask, what is the cause of drinking a cup of coffee, what is the effect, and what happens in essence? You could also begin with the essence, and work your way back. According to this logic, in looking at a statement, first you determine the basic nature of what it is conveying. For instance, you could say that the basic nature or essence of water is wetness. You could then say that providing water to people or to plants is the cause that gives rise to the effect of quenching thirst or irrigating the land to make things grow. And as a totality, you could say that water provides fundamental wetness, so that plants can grow and people can survive. That is how the whole thing works, and that is how I was trained in my own discipline. I was never told what a particular subject actually does—for instance, what nirvana does. But I was told exactly what water does and what fire does, and I was taught how to work with the logic of cause, effect, and essence.

Page 23

# 34
# *Undermining Aggression*

*When you begin to realize aggression as it is, there is a sudden flash of spaciousness, and the aggression is completely cleared out. It is like living in a stuffy room, and suddenly the window is wide open and fresh air is coming in. You are crammed in with the aggression and the resentment, but then you begin to see an entirely different approach, a completely new sense of things, a flash.*

In the style of the practicing lineage, we are viewing the bodhisattva path in terms of meditation instruction, with a meditative approach rather than a purely theoretical one. We have already discussed the inspiration that comes from tathagatagarbha, or buddha nature, and how ordinary states can be transformed into tathagatagarbha. Realizing that you possess buddha nature gives you a sense of gratification and honor, but at the same time it is like a poor person finding a diamond: you are uncertain how to handle it or approach it. That uncertainty and bewilderment become encouragement to seek further discipline on the bodhisattva path. The bodhisattva path is by no means theoretical; it is experiential.

Once you have taken the bodhisattva vow and committed yourself to the bodhisattva's way, you have the idea that you should be compassionate to all sentient beings, but where to begin is uncertain. Surprisingly, the way to start on the bodhisattva path is not by meditating on shunyata alone, but by training the mind, or lojong. There are various ways of training the mind, but the starting point is developing an absence of aggression. In lojong practice, you adopt an attitude of seeing yourself and your aggression clearly and properly. In order to see your own aggression, you have to





become open to yourself and be willing to face your self-conceit and self-deception. You have to be willing to see through it. Nobody is as close to you as you yourself are, so you have to become your own teacher—with the help of a spiritual friend, of course.

## Three Types of Aggression

In the hinayana, the emphasis is on nonpassion, and in the mahayana, the emphasis is on nonaggression. There are various types of aggression. Deep-rooted aggression is constant. Whenever there is a gap, there is always aggression shining through. With deep-rooted aggression, you are perpetually hungry and fundamentally unhappy. Deep-rooted aggression is an underlying and ongoing experience. It is basic negativity.

Analytical aggression is developing your own logic in order to prove that your particular aggression or anger is valid. Because such and such a situation happened and you don't like that, you would like to reshape your opponent, your friend, or your environment. You are trying to create reinforcement for your aggression. Analytical aggression is also referred to as negative negativity.

Then there is the sudden wind of aggression, which is totally illogical. It is aggression without logic. You don't know where it came from, it just hits you, and you become a ball of cast-iron. Sometimes you can't even talk. The sudden wind of aggression jumps between the other two, taking advantage of the deep-rooted aggression or the analytical one.

All types of aggression are predominantly based on not giving. They are related with a sense of meanness and an ungenerous attitude that goes directly against the idea of karuna, or compassion. Aggression is based on shifting and moving. It is like the analogy of the moon reflecting on moving water: the water is disturbed, so when the moon shines on it, the picture of the moon is broken up into fragmented patterns. You do see some fragments of the moon, but you have no clear and undistorted picture of the moon as a whole.

Aggression covers a large area; it is more than anger alone. Sometimes it has the element of duty, of trying to live up to what you are supposed to be. It can manifest as a combination of guilt and righteousness. It may manifest as the fear of losing your ground, or the fear that you might have made a mistake but you still have to be righteous. Aggression may show in people's cowardly little smiles in the midst of arguments, which are not

genuine smiles, but signs of hesitation or guilt. When such people reassert themselves, their faces become red.

Aggression seems to be related with the realm of hell. At this point, the bodhisattva has not yet transcended that realm. You have begun to prevent the cause, to shake up the possibility of it, but you still have to wipe it out completely. You may discover that you have the potential of buddha nature, but if you use that discovery to strengthen your ego, you are re-sowing the seeds of the hell realm. This does not mean that you are going to be literally thrown into hell, but rather that you are creating hell on the spot. Because the hell realm is the manifestation of aggression, you could create the hell realm anywhere. It has been said that the bodhisattva exterminates the realm of hell completely. In fact, all six realms should be completely wiped out.

## Lojong Practice: Deliberate Compassion

With lojong, you are developing what is called *mik-che kyi nying-je. Nying-je* is "compassion," *kyi* is "of," *mik* is "deliberateness," *che* is "with"; so *mik-che kyi nying-je* is "deliberate compassion." It is the manual practice of deliberately manufacturing compassion. In order to develop compassion, you have to go beyond aggression, to be without anger. It seems to be absolutely necessary to tame oneself and train oneself.

Often people do not want to do contemplative practice when they are really enraged. When you are resentful about everything, it is very difficult to practice. It feels like a tremendous insult. But it is particularly at such times that the bodhisattva path begins to dawn on you. These times are highly opportune moments to practice the bodhisattva's type of awareness of breathing.*

Deliberate compassion is the first development of compassion: you are developing compassion by means of the awareness of your breathing. On the bodhisattva path, you are not so much trying to suppress aggression, but rather to get over the hypocrisy of failing to see the aggression. The practice of training one's mind, or lojong, consists of various mental exercises in which you recognize and deliberately let go of the tenseness of the aggression in your sitting meditation practice. To do so, you work

* A reference to sending and taking practice, or tonglen. See chapter 37, "Point Two: Training in Relative Bodhichitta."





with the awareness of breathing as in shamatha-vipashyana, but as you breathe out, you give away whatever desire you have, and as you breathe in, you take in anything you do not want or that you try to avoid. That is the deliberate technique of the lojong method, which is a type of *anapana-sati,* or mindfulness-of-breath practice.

When you practice lojong, there is a general awareness of your total being, as in vipashyana practice, but there is more to it than that: there is a quality of deliberateness. For example, if you want to borrow something from somebody and that person refuses to lend it to you, you may get rather angry and upset about that. The subject of your practice of contemplation in that case would be to feel the pleasure and gratification you would have gotten out of that object, and also to feel your immense irritation because the person would not lend it to you. You breathe in that which you did not want, and you breathe out that which you did want. A person has to have a real understanding of what aggression is before doing such a practice, but it is a very powerful exercise and very necessary.

You should have already developed shamatha and vipashyana before practicing any new techniques. Once you are able to deal with basic sitting practice, you will also be able to do the bodhisattva type of breathing practice. If you were to begin with lojong practice immediately, without the grounding of shamatha and vipashyana, it might feel like punishment, so it is important to first work with the basic meditation technique and develop some discipline and patience. The sitting practice begins to do something to your psychological state. Whether you become more and more neurotic, or less and less neurotic, something is still beginning to work.

It may seem hypocritical to deliberately cultivate compassion, but there is the possibility of hypocrisy with everything you do. So it is recommended that no matter what you feel, even if you feel hypocritical at the beginning, you continue to cultivate compassion. You particularly do that in situations in your life where aggression is very vivid, for then you will have some kind of experience. When Atisha Dipankara, a well-known teacher of lojong, was invited to Tibet, he had heard that the Tibetans were very kind and gentle people, so he thought he should bring somebody along to remind him of his compassion practice. He brought a very short-tempered Bengali tea-boy with him. Later, he said that he need not have brought the Bengali boy because there were enough Tibetans who

were equally as bad. So you need constant reminders in your life, not only on the bodhisattva path, but in Buddhism in general.

The path consists in taking advantage of whatever is happening to you at the moment. You take advantage of aggression, or passion, or whatever occurs in your life, and work with it. If you apply compassion practice when you are in a really bad mood, if you sit and do it, you will have a very real experience of it. This does not mean that when you get angry, you have to dash out to your meditation cushion and practice compassion, but you can recall that instant or something like it and work with that. You will definitely have enough memories to work with—they can last for weeks, if not years.

## Nondeliberate Compassion

The next development of compassion is *mikme nying-je*. *Mik* is "deliberate," *me* is "not"; so *mikme nying-je* is "compassion without deliberate practice." It is the second stage of compassion, which follows the first stage, like meditation and postmeditation. In meditation, you sit and practice the awareness of breathing; in postmeditation, the experience of awareness comes to you in daily life situations. First you sit, then you get up and do other things, but the impression of the meditation, or the awareness, flashes on you. Likewise, the second stage of compassion is unformed, not manufactured.

At first, you need some kind of deliberate practice or direction. If there is no direction, there is no way to proceed along the path. There is just hypothetical shunyata, which does not lead you anywhere. You need effort, but that effort has a watcher-less quality. You just practice, rather than watching yourself practice. You work with what comes up in your life. Life presents you with things, and you just work with them as you go along. That is the very idea of taking refuge in the dharma as path.

## Removing Resentment

With lojong, you are acknowledging and facing that which is rather insulting to you. You let yourself be the lowest of the low. Later, you begin to realize that aggression is somewhat workable, that it does not seem to be as painful as before. It is not so much that you are destroying the aggression itself, but you are removing the resentment caused by that aggression.





Resentment has the quality of a spoiled infant's angry cry. You resent that you didn't get what you wanted, and underlying that is the basic resentment that you have been trapped and you feel helpless. Resentment ties you inward, and there is no communication, no openness.

Aggression causes tremendous resentment and tightness, but just getting angry is not particularly problematic. With lojong, you are not giving in to the aggression, but you are accentuating the reality of the aggression. You are being accommodating to the aggression. If you can get used to aggression, that is a tremendous achievement. You have solved the rest of the world's problems as well as your own. Through vipashyana practice, you notice when the mind is filled with resentment, and because you notice it, it evaporates. Lojong is an extension of that approach.

Basically, in order to become spontaneous, you have to be deliberate. Since you are in the samsaric world already, you cannot start from the top. The attainment of enlightenment is not sudden; it is always gradual. It is like exercise: if your body is very stiff, getting more exercise might be very painful in the beginning, but you need to exercise in order to move more smoothly. In this case, you are training to loosen up your psychological body, to loosen that very stiff aggression through the practice of the six paramitas.

There is a certain true-believer quality in the teachings. Practice-lineage people are not scholarly or analytical; they just do what they are told. You are given certain things to do that sound very simpleminded. Such practices are designed to manufacture something, to twist your mind a certain way, to steer you in a certain direction. You can't believe it will work, but once you begin to do it and to actually get into it, it does work.

You might think lojong practice is a very benevolent and somewhat love-and-light approach of trying to be good to everybody and remain pure and humble, but that is not the case. In fact, it is one of the bravest practices you can ever do, if you can actually let go. It is not so much that when you give, you lose. The problem is the resistance. With lojong, your aggression becomes workable; a spacious and a refreshing quality begins to arise. As you become more advanced, the anger itself begins to produce spaciousness. But even if you are not so advanced, the afterthought of looking back on your aggression and resentment can bring a sense of spaciousness.

Spaciousness is totally free of logic, totally free of reasoning mind. It is threefold purity. At the hinayana level, sudden, abstract, nonverbal,

nonconceptualized flashes begin to dawn on you, so that the meditation comes to you. Similarly, at the mahayana level, when you begin to realize aggression as it is, there is a sudden flash of spaciousness, and the aggression is completely cleared out. It is like living in a stuffy room, and suddenly the window is wide open and fresh air is coming in. You are crammed in with the aggression and the resentment, but then you begin to see an entirely different approach, a completely new sense of things, a flash.

With threefold purity, there is automatically a letting-go process. When aggression comes up, you begin to realize that aggression has no root; it is just a phantom. When you, your actions, and the object of your actions have become open, almost nonexistent, the second type of compassion, nondeliberate compassion, begins to develop. You may begin to feel relief that, after all, you are on the right path and something is happening to you. That sense of gratification and appreciation is not a problem.

Compassion at this point is infant compassion, on the level of trying to crawl. It is not the full warmth and love of a bodhisattva's compassion, but the state of nonaggression as the result of a consciously developed process. Such compassion becomes very personal. You are building compassion within yourself in order to remove your own pain and aggression, so it is more like relief or medicine than acting out of compassion for others. Having done that, the shifting reflections finally begin to settle down, and you can see the clear moon on the water without any distortion.





# THE PRACTICE OF LOJONG

*Cultivating Compassion through Training the Mind*

Traleg Kyabgon

Foreword by Ken Wilber

Shambhala
Boston & London
2007

# *Introduction*

Anyone even vaguely familiar with Buddhism will understand that it places greater emphasis on the mind as the principal means for salvation than it does on an external deity. While this general assumption is certainly correct, the Buddhist canon, as preserved in several Asian languages, contributes a vast literature on the purification, discipline, and transformation of the mind. The *lojong* teachings have been extracted from the most essential and fundamental aspects of these teachings and practices.

The teachings of the Buddha are contained in a body of texts called the Kangyur (Tib. *bKa' 'gyur*) in Tibetan. *Ka* means "the spoken word of the Buddha," and *gyur* means "translation." The Kangyur consists of 103 volumes (some traditions count it as 101), containing the Indian Buddhist canon, or "three baskets" (Skt. *Tripitaka;* Tib. *de snod gsum*), comprising three different types of teachings: the *sutra-pitaka* (basket of Buddha's discourses), the *vinaya-pitaka* (basket of monastic rules and regulations), and the *abhidharma-pitaka* (basket of psychology and metaphysics).[1] The Kangyur also contains the more esoteric Buddhist teachings, called tantras. While these tantras were not taught directly by the Buddha, they are







nonetheless attributed to him indirectly, and are therefore part of the accepted literature of Indian Buddhism.

Tibetan Buddhists do not rely on the Kangyur alone. There is also a collection of commentaries known as the Tengyur (Tib. *bsTan 'gyur*). *Ten* is short for *tenchoe,* which means "commentarial material," while *gyur* again means "translation." The Tengyur contains roughly 213 volumes and consists mainly of Indian commentaries translated from Sanskrit, although there are also texts from China and other Asian countries. Sometimes Buddha said one thing in one context and something completely different in another, or gave a different answer to the same question at different times, so the commentaries are meant to help us classify the different discourses and interpret their contextual meaning. The commentaries are an extensive body of literature in their own right and encompass both exoteric and esoteric teachings as well as treatises on logic, metaphysics, epistemology, composition, grammar, and literature.

Not many people have the time to go through the prodigious amount of literature contained in the Kangyur and Tengyur. We have to rely instead on the great masters who were able to devote themselves to this monumental task and extract the essential points for subsequent generations. These distillations of the teachings are known as the "pith instructions" (Skt. *upadesha;* Tib. *man ngag sde*) and can be clearly distinguished from the strictly logical or metaphysical approaches of Buddhist doctrine. They are "the essence of the essence" (Tib. *snying poe snying po*) of the Buddhist teachings, because they go to the heart of what we need to cultivate in our everyday lives. They can be practiced directly, without having to absorb the subtleties of Buddhist philosophy and logic, and will have an immediate effect on our spiritual development.

According to the Buddhist tradition, these pith instructions must be transmitted by someone who has genuinely engaged with them in total sincerity, without tiring or being distracted from assimilating their subtle meanings, even though the corpus of lojong material may seem at first glance to be very simple and straightforward. We cannot simply practice by perusing a book or two about lojong or about any other of the Buddhist methods. The concept of lineage is therefore of vital importance in the lojong tradition, as it is in all other Buddhist contexts, for this guarantees both the authenticity and the authority that has been imbued in the practices themselves. The notion of pith instructions is really based upon this harmonious blend of transmission, lineage, and spiritual instructions.

The lojong teachings therefore represent this genre of upadesha, or corpus of meditation instructions—a set of teachings that are clearly distinguishable from the exegetical or expository corpus. In the Tibetan Buddhist context, individual practitioners need to be instructed through one of these two methods, but preferably both. It is through upadesha that we become great meditators, and through attention to the teachings that we receive a comprehensive scholastic training in Buddhist metaphysics, epistemology, and logic.

We owe the lojong teachings to the great kindness of the early masters of the Kadampa tradition. *Ka*, again, means "the canonical literature spoken by the Buddha," while *dam* is an abbreviation of *dam ngag*, which means "upadesha instructions." As such, extracting the essence of the essence of Buddha's own words and using that as upadesha is the meaning of the term *Kadam*. The principal Kadampa master was Atisha Dipamkara Shrijnana (982–1054), who was invited to Tibet to restore some semblance





of order in the midst of the cacophony of partial Indic and native interpretations of Buddhist practices and teachings that mushroomed in the aftermath of the assassination of Langdharma, Tibet's last dynastic ruler. Langdharma's death ushered in a long period of political unrest and social disarray. Some historians claim that Atisha in fact wanted to teach some of the unorthodox tantric methods of the time as well as propagate the *doha* teachings, or realized songs of the Indian mahasiddhas, but his Tibetan hosts actively discouraged him, insisting that he strictly adhere to the sober Mahayana teachings of the bodhisattva path. Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* (*Bodhipathapradipa*) and Shantideva's *The Way of the Bodhisattva* (*Bodhicharyavatara*) became the exemplary paradigmatic texts for all future followers of the Kadampa tradition.[2]

While the Kadampa tradition and teachings are undoubtedly rooted in original Indian Mahayana Buddhism, they nevertheless have a distinctly native Tibetan flavor, as reflected in the teaching style of the great lojong masters. One good example is Potawa Rinchen Sel, who employed local stories and examples taken from the everyday life of eleventh-century Tibet to make the teachings accessible to a large popular audience.

Atisha is credited as the initiator of what might be described as the Kadampa lojong movement. He received the lojong teachings from Serlingpa (tenth century) and passed them on to Dromtonpa Gyalwey Jungney (1005–64), who put them into a rudimentary and systematic format, which was, in turn, transmitted to the so-called three Kadampa brothers: Potowa Rinchen Sel (1031–1105), Chengawa Tsultrim Bar (1038–1103), and Puchung-wa Shonu Gyaltsen (1031–1106). The lojong teachings were traditionally passed from teacher to student in secret, rather than through public discourse. The Kadampa luminaries Langri

Thangpa (1054–1123), Sharawa Yonten Trak (1070–1141), and Chekawa Yeshe Dorje (1101–75) further propagated these teachings, especially in the central Tibetan areas of U and Tsang. Chekawa was to have an enduring influence on the future lineage of lojong practice, as the growing numbers of Kadampa practitioners found his seven points of mind training both profound and practical. This influence appears to have continued in the West, with a growing number of people following his formulations of lojong practice. It is his text, the *Seven Points of Mind Training*, that we are following here. Two important training centers of Kadampa lojong practice were established at Retring and Narthang, the latter having become famous for its Kangyur edition bearing the same name.

The Kagyu tradition has been greatly affected by the Kadampa teachings, as have the other three major lineages of Tibetan Buddhism. Preeminent among lineage holders was Je Gampopa Sonam Rinchen (1079–1153), whose training in Kadampa monasteries enabled him to skillfully blend the stream of Mahamudra that he had received through Milarepa with the monastic discipline of the Kadampa.

Closer to our own time, Jamgön Kongtrül Lodro Thaye (1813–99) wrote a commentary on the seven points of mind training, which, while very short itself, included a huge collection of Indo-Tibetan lojong material, in his *Dam ngag dzo*, or *Treasury of Meditation Instructions*. The real inspiration for the lojong teachings came from Mahayana sources, especially from Shantideva and Atisha, each of whom contributed to the concept of generating *bodhichitta* through "exchanging self for others" (*paratmaparivartana*) and "equalizing self with other" (*paratmasamata*).

In my humble opinion, these teachings present a profound antidote to the rampant victim mentality that has become so



prevalent in our times. Blaming others without taking any responsibility for our own actions has almost become a socially acceptable behavior. As all the great Mahayana masters, particularly the Kadampa ones, have emphasized, blaming others for our unhappiness only exacerbates our own misery. Such compulsive blaming is a form of entrapment that is not only self-perpetuating but that robs us of our power and free will. As I explain throughout this book, the practice of lojong is a kind of strength training for the mind, a practice that will make us feel less like a victim and more like the author or architect of our own life. By identifying ourselves as the victim, we give power to others, but when we refuse that role, we take the power back.

Lojong is not an old-fashioned or inappropriate way of looking at life's difficulties; on the contrary, the insights it provides have become more acutely relevant, mostly due to the rapid increase of "victims." A person who feels like a victim sometimes wants others to inhibit or repress their behavior. The point is, however, that we are not omnipotent and therefore cannot prevent suffering by stopping others from behaving in ways that displease us and we cannot introduce all kinds of laws that prescribe how people should behave. The personal belief that we have been victimized not only does not empower us, it generates apathy, resentment, and anger. These regressive attitudes are based on the assumption that we should never experience any discomfort, especially at the hands of someone else. However, this way of viewing the world, if not broken or interrupted, can lead to a vicious cycle, that in turn generates even more problems.

This agonizing cycle occurs because we basically have a distorted expectation of the world: We want samsara to be nirvana—but samsara is not nirvana. When we find out that samsara really is samsara, we become angry. For example, if we become

personally involved with somebody and they leave us, our response may be anger. As the Buddha taught, we are doing everything wrong in terms of how we handle life's problems. We first have to accept samsara if we are to make any real progress. If we expect samsara to be nirvana, we will never be able to embark on the spiritual path.

The word *lojong* literally means "training the mind"—*lo* meaning "mind" and *jong* meaning "to train." Tibetan Buddhism has many different words for "mind," each of which distinguishes a different aspect and function of consciousness. The most common words are *sem, namshey,* and *lo*. *Sem* literally means "that which is intent upon an object," or the aspect of intentionality, for when we are conscious, we must be conscious of something, whether it is an external or an internal object. *Namshey* simply means "consciousness." This is the simple state of being conscious as opposed to the developed state of consciousness in a fully evolved, rational human being. All living creatures have *namshey;* it is the state of being that distinguishes sentient things from inanimate objects. *Lo* emphasizes the mind's cognitive nature, its ability to discriminate, distinguish, and so forth, while *jong* emphasizes the need to train that mind to fully realize its nature. *Lo*-jong is about training the mind to be intelligent in a very fundamental way. That is why Trungpa Rinpoche translates *lojong* as "basic intelligence."

Buddhism does not accept cognition as a purely intellectual activity, but instead as something that also has an emotional aspect. We should think of "intelligence" as the mind's capacity to feel and experience emotions as much as its ability to think more clearly. In other words, the purpose of lojong is to learn to make intelligent use of our emotional nature as well as to think in a correct and beneficial fashion. From a purely Mahayana perspective, this intelligence comes about through switching our perspective, thereby learning to





see things in a different way. The unintelligent way of seeing things has its basis in egoistic obsession, which leads to a completely unhealthy emotional repertoire. We are definitely not using our intelligence if our egoistic tendencies have the upper hand. It is when we try to move away from that egocentric perspective that we are thinking intelligently. The seven points of mind training make us more intelligent by reorienting the way we think, what we think about, and how we utilize our emotions. From the Mahayana perspective, we can gradually move from an unintelligent to an intelligent approach.

The seven points of mind training, and bodhisattva training in general, are about recognizing where we are on a scale whose ideal is "perfection," and then gradually improving upon this. These lojong points are based on an intelligent interpretation of our experiences and the way we use our thoughts and emotions, for it is always up to us whether we use them for our and others' betterment or for our peril. Perfection can be attained, but we have to aim toward it through mind training. This implies that we will have to take our time and adopt a graduated approach. It is not a question of being either totally selfish, egoistic, and self-absorbed or being completely selfless, altruistic, and concerned about others. The point is to slowly and thoroughly turn our imperfections into perfections so that we will be able to travel the path of the *Aryas,* or elevated beings.

Whatever perfections we are supposed to attain from practices such as the seven points of mind training can only be attained through the recognition of our imperfections. If we did not have egoistic obsessions, there would be no mind training, because there would be no need for perfection. That is why the Mahayana teachings say that instead of being ashamed of our imperfections and regarding them as something terrible, we should see them as "manure in the *bodhi*-field." *Bodhi* means "enlightenment," while

*manure* refers to all the things we constantly have to grapple with as well as the afflictions we have to suffer.

All worldly activities are utilized in the lojong practices by using our intelligence. To put it another way, it is important not to deprive our emotions of nourishment by suppressing them, either through meditative training or by excessive intellectualization and rationalization. Intelligence occurs when we clearly distinguish negative emotions from positive ones, and obsessive thinking from those thoughts that are helpful to us and others.

We develop that kind of intelligence through training in nonegoistic ways of understanding our world and evaluating ourselves. Self-evaluation is not rejected in Buddhism, as some Western Buddhists seem to think. Self-evaluation born out of intelligence is regarded as useful, while self-evaluation born from egoistic obsession is not.



The lojong approach boils down to a fundamental question: why do we suffer? Why do we have so many negative emotions and delusory mental states? From the Buddhist point of view, the cause of these problems is our egoistic perception, a deluded condition that inevitably leads to the distorted thinking and disturbed emotions that keep us from a clear approach to anything, including ourselves.

The value of mind training does not lie in learning how to adopt a different point of view that will utilize our willpower without using our intelligence. We may bring about changes in our lives that way, but if we fail to use an intelligence that transcends egoism, those changes will be superficial. Real change doesn't originate from a worldly or intellectual decision that says, "I will stop doing this and begin to do that," or "I will try to see things in this or that way." It comes from a transcendental view or knowledge (Skt. *prajna;* Tib. *sherab*) that allows us to sustain a



panoramic perspective of our predicament. Only then will we be able to experience lasting relief from the vicious cycles that entrap us.

Lojong really means training the mind to see things from a mountaintop rather than from the valley below. Through practicing lojong meditations we will be able to attain enough distance to make us understand the kind of mess we have gotten ourselves into and the torments these confusions inevitably bring. According to the Kadampa masters, our real problem is that we always blame other people for our misery and never tire of the abuse we suffer from subjecting ourselves to our own self-obsessed egoistic minds. Lojong practices will give us the opportunity not to blame others and, for a moment, to look at ourselves and vow not to continue with this kind of predictable foolishness.

One way to stop this behavior is to say, "I shall look into myself and see what sort of self-destructive acts I engage in and then try to stop them." However, Mahayana practices such as lojong do not recommend that approach, advising us instead to strike at the heart of the matter. Their rationale is that if we try to confront our emotions, behaviors, and beliefs directly, the result will only be superficial, because we are dealing with symptoms rather than with the causes of our problems. The Mahayana teachings point out that if we want to eradicate a noxious plant, we have to cut it out at the root; amputating the branches will never destroy the plant completely. In a similar fashion, dissecting our minds in order to identify the malignant and isolating aspects of ourselves that we might manage and improve upon will never be enough to return our lives to some semblance of normalcy. By striking directly at our self-obsessions instead of worrying about them, we will be able to adopt the transcendental perspective of lojong. That is the only way to deliver a deathblow to the whole mechanism of

self-centeredness, an act that will cure our other problems naturally, without needing to address them directly.

This approach to our shortcomings is another important facet of the Mahayana known as skillful means (Skt. *upāya*; Tib. *thabs*). When our minds are fully engaged in a positive attitude through the practice of lojong, our old negative habits will gradually dissipate without our having to do anything directly. That is the lojong way of effecting a transformation that will truly give us relief from our torment. By recognizing that we put ourselves through more unnecessary turmoil and suffering than anybody else could ever possibly inflict on us, we will respond to whatever other people subject us to in a more relaxed and effective fashion.

The basic premise of this whole argument rests on the simple presumption that our sphere of influence regarding how others treat us is very limited. We are not omnipotent and have no control over how external circumstances and situations unfold. All kinds of occurrences can and do happen. Natural calamities, such as earthquakes and floods, can bring devastations and misery to our lives. While we have no control over external events, we can have complete control over ourselves. We can gain some kind of self-mastery, not in the obsessive sense of a martial art but in the sense of rising above our inner conflicts.

Our ability to deal with adverse circumstances and situations will also change as a result, because one of the central practices of lojong involves turning adverse circumstances and situations to our own advantage. If we can develop self-mastery, even external adversity can be used for our spiritual growth. If we are only getting more mired in our delusional thoughts, then not only will we be unable to utilize what can go wrong externally, but we will have no way of dealing with our internal sufferings, which will only result in an exponentially greater impact. The suffering generated





from within is always far worse than the suffering we experience at the hands of other people or external situations.

Many great Mahayana teachers have said that while we can use all kinds of avoidance techniques to escape dealing with others, we cannot escape ourselves. They say that our inner demons are our own shadows—they come up while we are sleeping as dreams and nightmares, and they give shape, form, and color to everything we see, hear, smell, taste, and touch in our waking hours. These subtle inner thoughts have a huge impact on how we respond to others, how we conduct ourselves, and how we evaluate ourselves. By understanding that the real source of our pain and suffering comes from within rather than without, we develop the kind of intelligence the lojong practices are emphasizing. That is not to say that other people or events cannot cause problems for us, but there are many different ways of handling them.

In the end, it is only through mind training that we can expect to find relief from our suffering. The ultimate reason we do any of the practices of wisdom and compassion is that they are a way of enriching our life, a way of ending our suffering. Compassion is not only the answer to other people's suffering, it is also the answer to our own. Without it, we cannot adopt the transcendental perspective; we will always be looking up from the valley rather than understanding the vista from the mountaintop. Without that view, we can never free ourselves from egoistic obsessions, and if we cannot do that, our suffering will continue.

When we generate compassion toward others as part of lojong practice, we are showing compassion for ourselves as well. Our wish to free others from suffering has to go hand in hand with the wish to free ourselves from suffering. To think that we can put an end to our own suffering without thinking about others is the biggest misconception we can have. It is also a misconception

we have inculcated in ourselves from time immemorial. As the Kadampa masters say, we actually need others in order to develop ourselves as human beings. It is not true that we only develop when we feel loved, cared for, appreciated, respected, and admired; we also grow when we are despised, belittled, held back, and denigrated. If we use our own intelligence—the Mahayana type of intelligence—we will find a way to grow through those situations.



# *Training the Mind*

## *& CULTIVATING LOVING-KINDNESS*

*Chögyam Trungpa*

*Edited by Judith L. Lief*

*Shambhala • Boston & London • 1993*

# *Editor's Foreword*

This book is a translation by the Nālandā Translation Committee of *The Root Text of the Seven Points of Training the Mind* by Chekawa Yeshe Dorje, with a commentary based on oral teachings presented by Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche. In his teaching on this subject, Trungpa Rinpoche utilized as a central reference the commentary by Jamgön Kongtrül the Great, entitled in Tibetan *Changchup Shunglam* (The Basic Path toward Enlightenment), which was included in the collection of the principal teachings of Tibetan Buddhism that the latter compiled, known as *The Five Treasuries*. (Trungpa Rinpoche's own teacher, Jamgön Kongtrül of Sechen, was an incarnation of this leading nineteenth-century teacher.)

The seven points of mind training are attributed to the great Indian Buddhist teacher Atisha Dipankara Shrijnana, who was born of royal heritage in Bengal in 982 C.E. Thus, the list of mind training slogans compiled by Chekawa is often referred to as the Atisha Slogans. Having renounced palace life as a teenager, Atisha studied and practiced extensively in India and later in



Sumatra, with his principal teacher, Dharmakirti (also known as Serlingpa in Tibetan), from whom he received the instructions on bodhichitta and mind training. Upon his return to India, he began to reestablish these once-lost teachings and took a post at Vikramashila, a famous Buddhist monastic university. Invited to bring the teachings on mind training to Tibet, he taught there for about thirteen years, until his death in approximately 1054, having transmitted this body of wisdom to his closest Tibetan disciple, Dromtönpa, the founder of the Kadam lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.[1]

For some time, the Atisha slogans were kept secret and transmitted only to close disciples. The first to write them down was the Kadampa teacher Lang-ri Thangpa (1054–1123). They became more widely known after they were summarized by Geshe Chekawa Yeshe Dorje (1101–1175) in *The Root Text of the Seven Points of Training the Mind*. Geshe Chekawa encountered many lepers in the course of his teaching and instructed them in mind training. It is said that several of them were thereby cured of their disease. His teachings were thus sometimes referred to by the Tibetans as "the dharma for leprosy." When Chekawa noticed that these teachings even seemed to benefit his unruly brother, who had no

interest in the dharma, he decided that it would be appropriate to make them more widely available. Atisha's teachings on mind training are thus now practiced by all the major lineages of Tibetan Buddhism, and have been for centuries.[2]

*The Root Text of the Seven Points of Training the Mind* is a list of fifty-nine slogans, which form a pithy summary instruction on the view and practical application of mahayana Buddhism. The study and practice of these slogans is a very practical and earthy way of reversing our ego-clinging and of cultivating tenderness and compassion. They provide a method of training our minds through both formal meditation practice and using the events of everyday life as a means of awakening.

This volume is not based on a single seminar, as are many other books in the Dharma Ocean Series, but rather is a compilation of teachings and remarks given over a period of years. The Vidyadhara[3] first presented the mahayana teachings of the Kadampa slogans in 1975, at the third annual Vajradhatu[4] Seminary, one of thirteen three-month advanced teaching programs he taught between 1973 and 1986. In subsequent seminaries he further elaborated upon the theory and practice of mind training.

Mind training, or slogan practice, has two



aspects: meditation and postmeditation practice. In Tibetan, the meditation practice is called *tonglen*, or sending and taking, and is based upon the seventh slogan: "Sending and taking should be practiced alternately. / These two should ride the breath." Trungpa Rinpoche introduced the formal meditation practice of tonglen to his students at the 1979 Seminary and he encouraged them to incorporate tonglen into their daily meditation practice. He also encouraged them to work with the postmeditation practice of joining every aspect of their lives with meditative discipline through the application of the slogans.

In working with his own students, Trungpa Rinpoche placed great emphasis on the practice of formless meditation, the development of mindfulness and awareness, as the foundation. He initially transmitted tonglen practice only to senior students who already had extensive experience in sitting meditation and the study of Buddhist teachings. When the study and practice of mind training are presented in such a context, the danger of interpreting these teachings in a moralistic or conceptual fashion is reduced.

Later the practice of tonglen began to be introduced to students upon the occasion of taking the bodhisattva vow, a formal statement of their aspiration to dedicate their lives to the benefit of

others. Over time, tonglen practice was introduced in a variety of contexts. The Naropa Institute, a Buddhist-inspired university in Boulder, Colorado, includes tonglen training in its clinical psychology program. This training has also been offered as an aspect of the Buddhist-Christian dialogues offered at the Naropa Institute. Participants in one-month-long meditation intensives, called *dathüns* in Tibetan, are now regularly introduced to tonglen practice, and if they desire more intensive training, they may take part in specialized tonglen dathüns. Tonglen is included in a monthly practice for the sick as well as in Vajradhatu funeral ceremonies.

Through slogan practice, we begin to realize that our habitual tendency, even in our smallest gestures, is one of self-centeredness. That tendency is quite entrenched and affects all of our activities, even our so-called benevolent behavior The practice of tonglen is a direct reversal of such a habit pattern and is based on the practice of putting others before self. Starting with our friends, and then extending to our acquaintances and eventually even our enemies, we expand our field of awareness to accept others and be of benefit to them. We do this not because we are martyrs or have suppressed our self-concern, but because we have begun to accept ourselves and





our world. Slogan practice opens up a greater field of tenderness and strength, so that our actions are based on appreciation rather than the ongoing cycle of hope and fear.

Coming face to face with this most basic contrast of altruism and self-centeredness takes considerable courage and daring. It gets right to the heart of the spiritual path and allows no room for even the slightest deception or holding back. It is a very basic, nitty-gritty practice.

Tonglen is a particularly powerful way of dealing with pain and loss. In relating to illness or death—our own or another's—tonglen helps us overcome our struggle with and rejection of such experiences and relate more simply and directly.

The formal practice of tonglen, like mindfulness-awareness practice, works with the medium of the breath. In order to begin, it is essential first to ground oneself by means of mindfulness and awareness training. That is the foundation upon which tonglen is based. Tonglen practice itself has three stages. To begin with, you rest your mind briefly, for a second or two, in a state of openness. This stage is somewhat abrupt and has a quality of "flashing" on basic stillness and clarity. Next, you work with texture. You breathe in a feeling of heat, darkness, and heaviness, a sense of claustrophobia, and you breathe out a

feeling of coolness, brightness, and lightness—a sense of freshness. You feel these qualities going in and out, through all your pores. Having established the general feeling or tone of tonglen, you begin to work with mental contents. Whatever arises in your experience, you simply breathe in what is not desirable and breathe out what is desirable. Starting with your immediate experience, you expand that to include people around you and other sentient beings who are suffering in the same way as you. For instance, if you are feeling inadequate, you begin by breathing that in and breathing out your personal sense of competence and adequacy. Then you extend the practice, broadening it beyond your personal concerns to connect with the poignancy of those feelings in your immediate surroundings and throughout the world. The essential quality of this practice is one of opening your heart—wholeheartedly taking in and wholeheartedly letting go. In tonglen nothing is rejected: whatever arises is further fuel for the practice.

Trungpa Rinpoche stressed the importance of the oral tradition, in which practices are transmitted personally and directly from teacher to student. In that way students participate directly in an unbroken wisdom tradition, going back many generations to the time of the Buddha





himself. The essential living quality of practice being conveyed is a very human one and cannot be acquired simply from books. Therefore, it is recommended that before embarking on the formal practice of sending and taking, if at all possible, one should meet with an experienced practitioner to discuss the practice and receive formal instruction.

The postmeditation practice is based upon the spontaneous recall of appropriate slogans in the thick of daily life. Rather than making a heavy-handed or deliberate effort to guide your actions in accordance with the slogans, a quality of spontaneous reminder is evoked through the study of these traditional aphorisms. If you study these seven points of mind training and memorize the slogans, you will find that they arise effortlessly in your mind at the oddest times. They have a haunting quality, and in their recurrence they can lead you gradually to a more and more subtle understanding of the nature of kindness and compassion.

The slogans have a way of continually turning in on themselves, so that any attempt to rely on these sayings as crutches to support a particular moral view is undermined. The approach to moral action here is one of removing obstacles of limited vision, fear and self-clinging, so that one's

actions are not burdened by the weight of self-concern, projections and expectations. The slogans are meant to be "practiced." That is, they need to be studied and memorized. At the same time, they need to be "let go." They are merely conceptual tools pointing to nonconceptual realization.

As is usual in Buddhist teachings, there is an element of playfulness and irony in the way one slogan often undermines its predecessor and thereby enlarges one's view. They form a loop in which nothing is excluded. Whatever arises in one's mind or experience is let go into the greater space of awareness that slogan practice generates. It is this openness of mind that becomes the basis for the cultivation of compassion.

The view of morality presented through the Kadampa slogans is similar to that of Shakespeare's famous lines, "The quality of mercy is not strained, it falleth as the gentle rain from heaven." There is no notion of moral battlefield in which we ward off evil and fight for the right. The traditional Buddhist image for compassion is that of the sun, which shines beneficently and equally on all. It is the sun's nature to shine; there is no struggle. Likewise, compassion is a natural human activity, once the veils and obstacles to its expression are removed.



The Vidyadhara encouraged his students to include tonglen in their daily meditation practice and to memorize the slogans. He would have individual slogans beautifully calligraphed and posted at Vajradhatu seminaries. You never knew when you might come across one. For instance, you might find "Be grateful to everyone" posted in the kitchen, or "Drive all blames into one" hanging from a tree. The slogans are meant to be contemplated—one by one. For that reason the Vidyadhara encouraged students to use printed slogan cards as daily reminders and provocateurs.*

In their earthiness and simplicity, may these teachings inspire us to cultivate kindness and compassion, and not to give up on ourselves or others. May they provoke fearlessness in overcoming the tenacious grip of ego. May they enable us to put into practice our most heartfelt aspirations to benefit all sentient beings on the path of awakening.

*For information on obtaining slogan cards, see page 230.

self the atmosphere of sanity inspired by his or her example, and vowing to cut the roots of further ignorance and suffering. This ties in very closely with the notion of *maitri*, or loving-kindness. In the traditional analogy of one's spiritual path, the only pure loving object seems to be somebody who can show you the path. You could have a loving relationship with your parents, relatives, and so forth, but there are still problems with that: your neurosis goes along with it. A pure love affair can only take place with one's teacher. So that ideal sympathetic object is used as a starting point, a way of developing a relationship beyond your own neurosis. Particularly in the mahayana, you relate to the teacher as someone who cheers you up from depression and brings you down from excitement, a kind of moderator principle. The teacher is regarded as important from that point of view.

This slogan establishes the contrast between samsara—the epitome of pain, imprisonment, and insanity—and the root guru—the embodiment of openness, freedom, and sanity—as the fundamental basis for all practice. As such, it is heavily influenced by the vajrayana tradition.

∴

*POINT ONE*

# THE PRELIMINARIES, WHICH ARE A BASIS FOR DHARMA PRACTICE

1

*First, train in the preliminaries.*

∴

In practicing the slogans and in your daily life, you should maintain an awareness of [1] the preciousness of human life and the particular good fortune of life in an environment in which you can hear the teachings of buddhadharma; [2] the reality of death, that it comes suddenly and without warning; [3] the entrapment of karma—that whatever you do, whether virtuous or not, only further entraps you in the chain of cause and effect; and [4] the intensity and inevitability of suffering for yourself and for all sentient beings. This is called "taking an attitude of the four reminders."

With that attitude as a base, you should call upon your guru with devotion, inviting into your-

*POINT TWO*

# The Main Practice, Which Is Training in Bodhichitta

## Ultimate and Relative Bodhichitta

### *Ultimate Bodhichitta and the Paramita of Generosity*



The ultimate or absolute bodhichitta principle is based on developing the paramita of generosity, which is symbolized by a wish-fulfilling jewel. The Tibetan word for generosity, *jinpa*, means "giving," "opening," or "parting." So the notion of generosity means not holding back but giving constantly. Generosity is self-existing openness, complete openness. You are no longer subject to cultivating your own scheme or project. And the best way to open yourself up is to make friends with yourself and with others.

Traditionally, there are three types of generosity. The first one is ordinary generosity, giving material goods or providing comfortable situations for others. The second one is the gift of fearlessness. You reassure others and teach them that they don't have to feel completely tormented and freaked out about their existence. You help them to see that there is basic goodness and spiritual practice, that there is a way for them to sustain their lives. That is the gift of fearlessness. The third type of generosity is the gift of dharma. You show others that there is a path that consists of discipline, meditation, and intellect or knowledge. Through all three types of generosity, you can open up other people's minds. In that way their closedness, wretchedness, and small thinking can be turned into a larger vision.

That is the basic vision of mahayana altogether: to let people think bigger, think greater. We can afford to open ourselves and join the rest of the world with a sense of tremendous generosity, tremendous goodness, and tremendous richness. The more we give, the more we gain—although what we might gain should not particularly be our reason for giving. Rather, the more we give, the more we are inspired to give constantly. And the gaining process happens naturally, automatically, always.

The opposite of generosity is stinginess, holding back—having a poverty mentality, basically speaking. The basic principle of the ultimate bodhichitta slogans is to rest in the eighth conscious-

ness, or *alaya*, and not follow our discursive thoughts. *Alaya* is a Sanskrit word meaning "basis," or sometimes "abode" or "home," as in *Himalaya*, "abode of snow." So it has that idea of a vast range. It is the fundamental state of consciousness, before it is divided into "I" and "other," or into the various emotions. It is the basic ground where things are processed, where things exist. In order to rest in the nature of alaya, you need to go beyond your poverty attitude and realize that your alaya is as good as anybody else's alaya. You have a sense of richness and self-sufficiency. You can do it, and you can afford to give out as well. And the ultimate bodhichitta slogans [slogans 2–6] are the basic points of reference through which we are going to familiarize ourselves with ultimate bodhichitta.

Ultimate bodhichitta is similar to the absolute *shunyata* principle. And whenever there is the absolute shunyata principle, we have to have a basic understanding of absolute compassion at the same time. *Shunyata* literally means "openness" or "emptiness." Shunyata is basically understanding nonexistence. When you begin realizing nonexistence, then you can afford to be more compassionate, more giving. A problem is that usually we would like to hold on to our



territory and fixate on that particular ground. Once we begin to fixate on that ground, we have no way to give. Understanding shunyata means that we begin to realize that there is no ground to get, that we are ultimately free, nonaggressive, open. We realize that we are actually nonexistent ourselves. We are not—*no*, rather.[1] Then we can give. We have lots to gain and nothing to lose at that point. It is very basic.

Compassion is based on some sense of "soft spot" in us. It is as if we had a pimple on our body that was very sore—so sore that we do not want to rub it or scratch it. During our shower we do not want to rub too much soap over it because it hurts. There is a sore point or soft spot which happens to be painful to rub, painful to put hot or cold water over.

That sore spot on our body is an analogy for compassion. Why? Because even in the midst of immense aggression, insensitivity in our life, or laziness, we always have a soft spot, some point we can cultivate—or at least not bruise. Every human being has that kind of basic sore spot, including animals. Whether we are crazy, dull, aggressive, ego-tripping, whatever we might be, there is still that sore spot taking place in us. An open wound, which might be a more vivid analogy, is always there. That open wound is usually

very inconvenient and problematic. We don't like it. We would like to be tough. We would like to fight, to come out strong, so we do not have to defend any aspect of ourselves. We would like to attack our enemy on the spot, single-handedly. We would like to lay our trips on everybody completely and properly, so that we have nothing to hide. That way, if somebody decides to hit us back, we are not wounded. And hopefully, nobody will hit us on that sore spot, that wound that exists in us. Our basic makeup, the basic constituents of our mind, are based on passion and compassion at the same time. But however confused we might be, however much of a cosmic monster we might be, still there is an open wound or sore spot in us always. There always will be a sore spot.

Sometimes people translate that sore spot or open wound as "religious conviction" or "mystical experience." But let us give that up. It has nothing to do with Buddhism, nothing to do with Christianity, and moreover, nothing to do with anything else at all. It is just an open wound, a very simple open wound. That is very nice—at least we are accessible somewhere. We are not completely covered with a suit of armor all the time. We have a sore spot somewhere, some open wound somewhere. Such a relief! Thank earth!





Because of that particular sore spot, even if we are a cosmic monster—Mussolini, Mao Tse-tung, or Hitler—we can still fall in love. We can still appreciate beauty, art, poetry, or music. The rest of us could be covered with iron cast shields, but some sore spot always exists in us, which is fantastic. That sore spot is known as embryonic compassion, potential compassion. At least we have some kind of gap, some discrepancy in our state of being which allows basic sanity to shine through.

Our level of sanity could be very primitive. Our sore spot could be just purely the love of tortillas or the love of curries. But that's good enough. We have some kind of opening. It doesn't matter what it is love *of* as long as there is a sore spot, an open wound. That's good. That is where all the germs could get in and begin to impregnate and take possession of us and influence our system. And that is precisely how the compassionate attitude supposedly takes place.

Not only that, but there is also an inner wound, which is called *tathagatagarbha*, or buddha nature. Tathagatagarbha is like a heart that is sliced and bruised by wisdom and compassion. When the external wound and the internal wound begin to meet and to communicate, then we begin to realize that our whole being is made out of one

complete sore spot altogether, which is called "bodhisattva fever." That vulnerability is compassion. We really have no way to defend ourselves anymore at all. A gigantic cosmic wound is all over the place—an inward wound and an external wound at the same time. Both are sensitive to cold air, hot air, and little disturbances of atmosphere which begin to affect us both inwardly and outwardly. It is the living flame of love, if you would like to call it that. But we should be very careful what we say about love. What is love? Do we know love? It is a vague word. In this case we are not even calling it love. Nobody before puberty would have any sense of sexuality or of love affairs. Likewise, since we haven't broken through to understand what our soft spot is all about, we cannot talk about love, we can only talk about passion. It might sound too grandiose to talk about compassion. It sounds fantastic, but it actually doesn't say as much as love, which is very heavy. Compassion is a kind of passion, com-passion, which is easy to work with.

There is a slit in our skin, a wound. It's very harsh treatment, in some sense; but on the other hand, it's very gentle. The intention is gentle, but the practice is very harsh. By combining the intention and the practice, you are being "harshed,"





and also you are being "gentled," so to speak—both together. That makes you into a bodhisattva. You have to go through that kind of process. You have to jump into the blender. It is necessary for you to do that. Just jump into the blender and work with it. Then you will begin to feel that you are swimming in the blender. You might even enjoy it a little bit, after you have been processed. So an actual understanding of ultimate bodhichitta only comes from compassion. In other words, a purely logical, professional, or scientific conclusion doesn't bring you to that. The five ultimate bodhichitta slogans are steps toward a compassionate approach.

A lot of you seemingly, very shockingly, are not particularly compassionate. You are not saving your grandma from drowning and you are not saving your pet dog from getting killed. Therefore, we have to go through this subject of compassion. Compassion is a very, very large subject, an extraordinarily large subject, which includes how to *be* compassionate. And actually, ultimate bodhichitta is preparation for relative bodhichitta. Before we cultivate compassion, we first need to understand how to *be* properly. How to love your grandma and how to love your flea or your mosquito—that comes later. The relative aspect of compassion comes much later. If we do

not have an understanding of ultimate bodhichitta, then we do not have any understanding of the actual working basis of being compassionate and kind to somebody. We might just join the Red Cross and make nuisances of ourselves and create further garbage.

According to the mahayana tradition, we are told that we can actually arouse twofold bodhichitta: relative bodhichitta and ultimate bodhichitta. We could arouse both of them. Then, having aroused bodhichitta, we can continue further and practice according to the bodhisattva's example. We can be active bodhisattvas.

In order to arouse absolute or ultimate bodhichitta, we have to join shamatha and vipashyana together. Having developed the basic precision of shamatha and the total awareness of vipashyana, we put them together so that they cover the whole of our existence—our behavior patterns and our daily life—everything. In that way, in both meditation and postmeditation practice, mindfulness and awareness are happening simultaneously, all the time. Whether we are sleeping or awake, eating or wandering, precision and awareness are taking place all the time. That is quite a delightful experience.

Beyond that delight, we also tend to develop a sense of friendliness to everything. The early level





of irritation and aggression has been processed through, so to speak, by mindfulness and awareness. There is instead a notion of basic goodness, which is described in the Kadam texts as the natural virtue of alaya. This is an important point for us to understand. Alaya is the fundamental state of existence, or consciousness, before it is divided into "I" and "other," or into the various emotions. It is the basic ground where things are processed, where things exist. And its basic state, or natural style, is goodness. It is very benevolent. There is a basic state of existence that is fundamentally good and that we can rely on. There is room to relax, room to open ourselves up. We can make friends with ourselves and with others. That is fundamental virtue or basic goodness, and it is the basis of the possibility of absolute bodhichitta.

Once we have been inspired by the precision of shamatha and the wakefulness of vipashyana, we find that there is room, which gives us the possibility of total naiveté, in the positive sense. The Tibetan for naiveté is *pak-yang*, which means "carefree" or "let loose." We can be carefree with our basic goodness. We do not have to scrutinize or investigate wholeheartedly to make sure that there are no mosquitoes or eggs inside our alaya. The basic goodness of alaya can be

cultivated and connected with quite naturally and freely, in a pak-yang way. We can develop a sense of relaxation and release from torment—from this-and-that altogether.

### *Relative Bodhichitta and the Paramita of Discipline*

That brings us to the next stage. Again, instead of remaining at a theoretical, conceptual level alone, we return to the most practical level. In the mahayana our main concern is how to awaken ourselves. We begin to realize that we are not as dangerous as we had thought. We develop some notion of kindness, or maitri, and having developed maitri we begin to switch into *karuna*, or compassion.

The development of relative bodhichitta is connected with the paramita of discipline. It has been said that if you don't have discipline, it is like trying to walk without any legs. You cannot attain liberation without discipline. Discipline in Tibetan is *tsültrim*: *tsül* means "proper," and *trim* means "discipline" or "obeying the rules," literally speaking. So *trim* could be translated as "rule" or "justice." The basic notion of *tsültrim* goes beyond giving alone; it means having good conduct. It also means having some sense of



passionlessness and nonterritoriality. All of that is very much connected with relative bodhichitta.

Relative bodhichitta comes from the simple and basic experience of realizing that you could have a tender heart in any situation. Even the most vicious animals have a tender heart in taking care of their young, or for that matter, in taking care of themselves. From our basic training in shamatha-vipashyana, we begin to realize our basic goodness and to let go with that. We begin to rest in the nature of alaya—not caring and being very naive and ordinary, casual, in some sense. When we let ourselves go, we begin to have a feeling of good existence in ourselves. That could be regarded as the very ordinary and trivial concept of having a good time. Nonetheless, when we have good intentions toward ourselves, it is not because we are trying to achieve anything—we are just trying to be ourselves. As they say, we could come as we are. At that point we have a natural sense that we can afford to give ourselves freedom. We can afford to relax. We can afford to treat ourselves better, trust ourselves more, and let ourselves feel good. The basic goodness of alaya is always there. It is that sense of healthiness and cheerfulness and naiveté that brings us to the realization of relative bodhichitta.

Relative bodhichitta is related with how we start to learn to love each other and ourselves. That seems to be the basic point. It's very difficult for us to learn to love. It would be possible for us to love if an object of fascination were presented to us or if there were some kind of dream or promise presented. Maybe then we could learn to love. But it is very hard for us to learn to love if it means purely giving love without expecting anything in return. It is very difficult to do that. When we decide to love somebody, we usually expect that person to fulfill our desires and conform to our hero worship. If our expectations can be fulfilled, we can fall in love, ideally. So in most of our love affairs, what usually happens is that our love is absolutely conditional. It is more of a business deal than actual love. We have no idea how to communicate a sense of warmth. When we do begin to communicate a sense of warmth to somebody, it makes us very uptight. And when our object of love tries to cheer us up, it becomes an insult.

That is a very aggression-oriented approach. In the mahayana, particularly in the contemplative tradition, love and affection are largely based on free love, open love which does not ask anything in return. It is a mutual dance. Even if during the dance you step on each other's toes, it is not



regarded as problematic or an insult. We do not have to get on our high horse or be touchy about that. To learn to love, to learn to open, is one of the hardest things of all for us. Yet we are conditioned by passion all the time. Since we are in the human realm, our main focus or characteristic is passion and lust, all the time. So what the mahayana teachings are based on is the idea of communication, openness, and being without expectations.

When we begin to realize that the nature of phenomena is free from concept, empty by itself, that the chairs and tables and rugs and curtains and walls are no longer in the way, then we can expand our notion of love infinitely. There is nothing in the way. The very purpose of discussing the nature of shunyata is to provide us that emptiness, so that we could fill the whole of space with a sense of affection—love without expectation, without demand, without possession. That is one of the most powerful things that the mahayana has to contribute.

In contrast, hinayana practitioners are very keen on the path of individual salvation, not causing harm to others. They are reasonable and good-thinking and very polite people. But how can you be really polite and keep smiling twenty-four hours a day on the basis of individual salva-

tion alone, without doing anything for others? You are doing everything for yourself all the time, even if you are being kind and nice and polite. That's very hard to do. At the mahayana level, the sense of affection and love has a lot of room—immense room, openness, and daring. There is no time to come out clean, particularly, as long as you generate affection.

The relationship between a mother and child is the foremost analogy used in developing relative bodhichitta practice. According to the medieval Indian and Tibetan traditions, the traditional way of cultivating relative bodhichitta is to choose your mother as the first example of someone you feel soft toward. Traditionally, you feel warm and kindly toward your mother. In modern society, there might be a problem with that. However, you could go back to the medieval idea of the mother principle. You could appreciate her way of sacrificing her own comfort for you. You could remember how she used to wake up in the middle of the night if you cried, how she used to feed you and change your diapers, and all the rest of it. You could remember how you acted as the ruler in your little household, how your mother became your slave. Whenever you cried, she would jump up whether she liked it or not in order to see what was going on with you. Your mother actually did





that. And when you were older, she was very concerned about your security and your education and so forth. So in order to develop relative bodhichitta, relative wakeful gentleness, we use our mother as an example, as our pilot light, so to speak. We think about her and realize how much she sacrificed for us. Her kindness is the perfect example of making others more important than yourself.

Reflecting on your own mother is the preliminary to relative bodhichitta practice. You should regard that as your starting point. You might be a completely angry person and have a grudge against the entire universe. You might be a completely frustrated person. But you could still reflect back on your childhood and think of how nice your mother was to you. You could think of that, in spite of your aggression and your resentment. You could remember that there was a time when somebody sacrificed her life for your life, and brought you up to be the person you are now.

The idea of relative bodhichitta in this case is very primitive, in some sense. On the other hand, it is also very enlightening, as bodhichitta should be. Although you might be a completely angry person, you cannot say that in your entire life nobody helped you. Somebody has been kind to

you and sacrificed himself or herself for you. Otherwise, if somebody hadn't brought you up, you wouldn't be here as an adult. You could realize that it wasn't just out of obligation but out of her genuineness that your mother brought you up and took care of you when you were helpless. And because of that you are here. That kind of compassion is very literal and very straightforward.

With that understanding, we can begin to extend our sense of nonaggression and nonfrustration and nonanger and nonresentment beyond simply appreciating our mother. This is connected with the paramita of discipline, which is free from passion and has to do with giving in. Traditionally, we use our mother as an example, and then we extend beyond that to our friends and to other people generally. Finally, we even try to feel better toward our enemies, toward people we don't like. So we try to extend that sense of gentleness, softness, and gratitude. We are not particularly talking about the Christian concept of charity, we are talking about how to make ourselves soft and reasonable. We are talking about how we can experience a sense of gratitude toward anybody at all, starting with our mother and going beyond that to include our father as well—and so forth until we include the





rest of the world. So in the end we can begin to feel sympathy even toward our bedbugs and mosquitoes.

The starting point of relative bodhichitta practice is realizing that others could actually be more important than ourselves. Other people might provide us with constant problems, but we could still be kind to them. According to the logic of relative bodhichitta, we should feel that we are less important and others are more important—*any* others are more important! Doing so, we begin to feel as though a tremendous burden has been taken off our shoulders. Finally, we realize that there is room to give love and affection elsewhere, to more than just this thing called "me" all the time. "I am this, I am that, I am hungry, I am tired, I am blah-blah-blah." We could consider others. From that point of view, the relative bodhichitta principle is quite simple and ordinary. We could take care of others. We could actually be patient enough to develop selfless service to others. And the relative bodhichitta slogans [slogans 7–10] are directions as to how to develop relative bodhichitta in a very simple manner, a grandmother's approach to reality, so to speak.

## 2

*Regard all dharmas as dreams.*

This slogan is an expression of compassion and openness. It means that whatever you experience in your life—pain, pleasure, happiness, sadness, grossness, refinement, sophistication, crudeness, heat, cold, or whatever—is purely memory. The actual discipline or practice of the bodhisattva tradition is to regard whatever occurs as a phantom. Nothing ever happens. But because nothing happens, everything happens. When we want to be entertained, nothing seems to happen. But in this case, although everything is just a thought in your mind, a lot of underlying percolation takes place. That "nothing happening" is the experience of openness, and that percolation is the experience of compassion.

You can experience that dreamlike quality by relating with sitting meditation practice. When you are reflecting on your breath, suddenly discursive thoughts begin to arise: you begin to see things, to hear things, and to feel things. But all those perceptions are none other than your own





mental creation. In the same way, you can see that your hate for your enemy, your love for your friends, and your attitudes toward money, food, and wealth are all a part of discursive thought.

Regarding things as dreams does not mean that you become fuzzy and woolly, that everything has an edge of sleepiness about it. You might actually have a good dream, vivid and graphic. Regarding dharmas as dreams means that although you might think that things are very solid, the way you perceive them is soft and dreamlike. For instance, if you have participated in group meditation practice, your memory of your meditation cushion and the person who sat in front of you is very vivid, as is your memory of your food and the sound of the gong and the bed that you sleep in. But none of those situations is regarded as completely invincible and solid and tough. Everything is shifty.

Things have a dreamlike quality. But at the same time the production of your mind is quite vivid. If you didn't have a mind, you wouldn't be able to perceive anything at all. Because you have a mind, you perceive things. Therefore, what you perceive is a product of your mind, using your sense organs as channels for the sense perceptions.

## 3

## *Examine the nature of unborn awareness*

∴

Look at your basic mind, just simple awareness which is not divided into sections, the thinking process that exists within you. Just look at that, see that. Examining does not mean analyzing. It is just viewing things as they are, in the ordinary sense.

The reason our mind is known as *unborn* awareness is that we have no idea of its history. We have no idea where this mind, our crazy mind, began in the beginning. It has no shape, no color, no particular portrait or characteristics. It usually flickers on and off, off and on, all the time. Sometimes it is hibernating, sometimes it is all over the place. Look at your mind. That is a part of ultimate bodhichitta training or discipline. Our mind fluctuates constantly, back and forth, forth and back. Look at that, just *look at that!*

You could get caught up in the fascination of regarding all dharmas as dreams and perpetuate unnecessary visions and fantasies of all kinds. Therefore it is very important to get to this next slogan, "Examine the nature of unborn awareness." When you look beyond the perceptual level





alone, when you look at your own mind (which you cannot actually do, but you pretend to do), you find that there is nothing there. You begin to realize that there is nothing to hold on to. Mind is *unborn*. But at the same time, it is *awareness*, because you still perceive things. There is awareness and clarity. Therefore, you should contemplate that by seeing *who* is actually perceiving dharmas as dreams.

If you look further and further, at your mind's root, its base, you will find that it has no color and no shape. Your mind is, basically speaking, somewhat blank. There is nothing to it. We are beginning to cultivate a kind of shunyata possibility; although in this case that possibility is quite primitive, in the sense of simplicity and workability. When we look at the root, when we try to find out why we see things, why we hear sounds, why we feel, and why we smell—if we look beyond that and beyond that—we find a kind of blankness.

That blankness is connected with mindfulness. To begin with, you are mindful of some *thing*: you are mindful of yourself, you are mindful of your atmosphere, and you are mindful of your breath. But if you look at *why* you are mindful, beyond *what* you are mindful of, you begin to find that there is no root. Everything begins to

dissolve. That is the idea of examining the nature of unborn awareness.

## 4

## *Self-liberate even the antidote.*

∴

Looking at our basic mind, we begin to develop a twist of logic. We say, "Well, if nothing has any root, why bother? What's the point of doing this at all? Why don't we just believe that there is no root behind the whole thing?" At that point the next slogan, "Self-liberate even the antidote," is very helpful. The antidote is the realization that our discursive thoughts have no origin. That realization helps a lot; it becomes an antidote or a helpful suggestion. But we need to go beyond that antidote. We should not hang on to the so-whatness of it, the naiveté of it.

The idea of antidote is that everything is empty, so you have nothing to care about. You have an occasional glimpse in your mind that nothing is existent. And because of the nature of that shunyata experience, whether anything great or small comes up, nothing really matters very much. It is





like a backslapping joke in which everything is going to be hoo-ha, yuk-yuk-yuk. Nothing is going to matter very much, so let it go. All is shunyata, so who cares? You can murder, you can meditate, you can perform art, you can do all kinds of things—everything is meditation, whatever you do. But there is something very tricky about the whole approach. That dwelling on emptiness is a misinterpretation, called the "poison of shunyata."

Some people say that they do not have to sit and meditate, because they always "understood." But that is very tricky. I have been trying very hard to fight such people. I never trust them at all—unless they actually sit and practice. You cannot split hairs by saying that you might be fishing in a Rocky Mountain spring and still meditating away; you might be driving your Porsche and meditating away; you might be washing dishes (which is more legitimate in some sense) and meditating away. That may be a genuine way of doing things, but it still feels very suspicious.

Antidotes are any notion that we can do what we want and that as long as we are meditative, everything is going to be fine. The text says to self-liberate even the antidote, the seeming antidote. We may regard going to the movies every

minute, every day, every evening as our meditation, or watching television, or grooming our horse, feeding our dog, taking a long walk in the woods. There are endless possibilities like that in the Occidental tradition, or for that matter in the theistic tradition.

The theistic tradition talks about meditation and contemplation as a fantastic thing to do. The popular notion of God is that he created the world: the woods were made by God, the castle ruins were created by God, and the ocean was made by God. So we could swim and meditate or we could lie on the beach made by God and have a fantastic time. Such theistic nature worship has become a problem. We have so many holiday makers, nature worshipers, so many hunters.

In Scotland, at the Samye Ling meditation center, where I was teaching, there was a very friendly neighbor from Birmingham, an industrial town, who always came up there on weekends to have a nice time. Occasionally he would drop into our meditation hall and sit with us, and he would say: "Well, it's nice you people are meditating, but I feel much better if I walk out in the woods with my gun and shoot animals. I feel very meditative walking through the woods and listening to the sharp, subtle sounds of animals jumping forth, and I can shoot at them. I feel I



am doing something worthwhile at the same time. I can bring back venison, cook it, and feed my family. I feel good about that."

The whole point of this slogan is that antidotes of any kind, or for that matter occupational therapies of any kind, are not regarded as appropriate things to do. We are not particularly seeking enlightenment or the simple experience of tranquillity—we are trying to get over our deception.

## 5

*Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence.*

∴

The idea of this slogan is that in the sitting practice of meditation and with an understanding of ultimate bodhichitta, you actually transcend the seven types of consciousness, and rest in the eighth consciousness, alaya. The first six types of consciousness are the sensory perceptions: [1] visual consciousness, [2] hearing consciousness, [3] smelling consciousness, [4] taste consciousness, [5] feeling or touch consciousness, and [6] mind consciousness, or the basic coordinating

## «Relative Bodhichitta Slogans»

### 7

*Sending and taking should be practiced alternately.*
*These two should ride the breath.*

∴

Sending and taking is a very important practice of the bodhisattva path. It is called *tonglen* in Tibetan: *tong* means "sending out" or "letting go," and *len* means "receiving," or "accepting." *Tonglen* is a very important term; you should remember it. It is the main practice in the development of relative bodhichitta.

The slogan says: "These two should ride the breath." We have been using the breath as a technique all along because it is constant and because it is something very natural to us. Therefore, we also use it here, in exactly the same way as we have been doing in shamatha discipline.

The practice of tonglen is quite straightforward; it is an actual sitting meditation practice. You give away your happiness, your pleasure, anything that feels good. All of that goes out with the outbreath. As you breathe in, you breathe in



any resentments and problems, anything that feels bad. The whole point is to remove territoriality altogether.

The practice of tonglen is very simple. We do not first have to sort out our doctrinal definitions of goodness and evil. We simply breathe out any old good and breathe in any old bad. At first we may seem to be relating primarily to our *ideas* of good and bad. But as we go on, it becomes more real. On the one hand, you can't expect a friendly letter from your grandmother with whom you have been engaged in warfare for the past five years. She probably will not write you a kind letter after three days of tonglen. On the other hand, sending and taking will definitely have a good effect, quite naturally. I think it is a question of your general decorum and attitude.

Sometimes we feel terrible that we are breathing in poison which might kill us and at the same time breathing out whatever little goodness we have. It seems to be completely impractical. But once we begin to break through, we realize that we have even more goodness and we also have more things to breathe in. So the whole process becomes somewhat balanced. That always happens, but it takes long training. Sending and taking are interdependent. The more negativity we take in with a sense of openness and compassion, the more goodness there is to breathe out

on the other side. So there is nothing to lose. It is all one process.

In tonglen we are aspiring to take on the suffering of other sentient beings. We mean that literally: we are actually willing to take that on. As such, it can have real effects, both on the practitioner himself and on others. There is a story about a great Kadampa teacher who was practicing tonglen and who actually did take another's pain on himself: when somebody stoned a dog outside his house, the teacher himself was bruised. And the same kind of thing could happen to us. But tonglen should not be used as any kind of antidote. You do not do it and then wait for the effect—you just do it and drop it. It doesn't matter whether it works or not: if it works, you breathe that out; if it does not work, you breathe that in. So you do not possess anything. That is the point.

Usually you would like to hold on to your goodness. You would like to make a fence around yourself and put everything bad outside it: foreigners, your neighbors, or what have you. You don't want them to come in. You don't even want your neighbors to walk their dogs on your property because they might make a mess on your lawn. So in ordinary samsaric life, you don't send and receive at all. You try as much as possible to



guard those pleasant little situations you have created for yourself. You try to put them in a vacuum, like fruit in a tin, completely purified and clean. You try to hold on to as much as you can, and anything outside of your territory is regarded as altogether problematic. You don't want to catch the local influenza or the local diarrhea attack that is going around. You are constantly trying to ward off as much as you can. You may not have enough money to build a castle or a wall around you, but your front door is very reliable. You are always putting double locks on it. Even when you check into a hotel, the management always tells you to double-lock your door and not to let anybody come in unless you check them out first. You can read that in the Innkeepers Act posted on the back of hotel doors. That will probably tell you the whole thing. Aren't we crazy?

Basically speaking, the mahayana path is trying to show us that we don't have to secure ourselves. We can afford to extend out a little bit—quite a bit. The basic idea of practicing sending and taking is almost a rehearsal, a discipline of passionlessness, a way of overcoming territory. Overcoming territory consists of going out with the out-breath, giving away and sending out, and bringing in with your in-breath as much as you

Page 54

can of other people's pain and misery. You would like to become the object of that pain and misery. You want to experience it fully and thoroughly.

You practice putting others first by means of a very literal discipline, called tonglen. How are you going to do that in the ordinary sense? Should you just run up to somebody in the street and say, "Hey, take my candy and give me the Kleenex in your pocket?" Of course, you could do that if you like, and if you were versatile enough, you could probably do it without offending anybody. But that is experimenting with others on a very crude level. What we are doing is different. We have a way of practicing putting others first—by placing letting go and receiving on the medium of the breath. The first stage of tonglen consists of the practice of sending and taking mentally, psychologically, slowly and slowly. Then at the end one might actually *do* such a thing. It has been said in the scriptures that one can even practice tonglen by taking a piece of fruit in one hand and giving it to the other hand.

There are obviously a lot of obstacles to practicing tonglen, particularly since we are involved in modern industrial society. But you can do it step by step, which actually makes you grow up and become the ultimate adult. The main point is

Page 55



to develop the psychological attitude of exchanging oneself for others: instead of being John Doe, you could become Joe Schmidt. You might have a lot of pride and reservations, but nonetheless you can begin to do that. Obviously, to begin with, tonglen is more of a psychological state than anything else. If everybody began to give things away to each other, there would be tremendous conflict. But if you develop the attitude of being willing to part with your precious things, to give away your precious things to others, that can help begin to create a good reality.

How do we actually practice tonglen? First we think about our parents, or our friends, or anybody who has sacrificed his or her life for our benefit. In many cases, we have never even said thank you to them. It is very important to think about that, not in order to develop guilt but just to realize how mean we have been. We always said, "I want," and they did so much for us, without any complaint.

I'm sure you have a lot of stories about how badly you treated your parents and friends, who helped you so much. They dedicated their entire being for your sake, and you never even bothered to say thank you or write them a letter. You should think of the people who cared for you so much that they didn't even look for confirmation.

There are many people like that. Sometimes somebody comes along out of the blue and tries to help you completely. Such people do everything for you—they serve you, they sacrifice themselves, and then they go away without even leaving an address or a number to call. All along there have been people who have done things for you. You should think of those situations and work them into your tonglen practice. As your breath goes out, you give them the best of what is yours, in order to repay their kindness. In order to promote goodness in the world, you give out everything good, the best that you have, and you breathe in other people's problems, their misery, their torment. You take in their pain on their behalf.

That is the basic idea of relative bodhichitta practice. It is a very action-oriented practice We give as much as we can give, we expand as much as we can expand. We have a lot to expand because we have basic goodness, which is an inexhaustible treasure. Therefore we have nothing at all to lose and we can receive more, also. We can be shock absorbers of other people's pain all the time. It is a very moving practice—not that I'm saying we are all in a train, particularly. The more we give our best, the more we are able to receive other people's worst. Isn't that great?



Tonglen seems to be one of the best measures we could take to solve our problems of ecology and pollution. Since everything is incuded, tonglen is the fundamental way to solve the pollution problem—it is the only way. Quite possibly it will have the physical effect of cleaning up pollution in big cities, maybe even in the entire world. That possibility is quite powerful.

Sending and taking is not regarded as proof of our personal bravery. It is not that we are the best people because we do tonglen. Sending and taking is regarded as a natural course of exchange; it just takes place. We might have difficulty taking in pollution, taking in what is bad, but we should take it in wholeheartedly—completely in. We should begin to feel that our lungs are altogether filled with bad air, that we have actually cleaned out the world out there and taken it into our selves. Then some switch takes place, and as we breathe out, we find that we still have an enormous treasure of good breath which goes out all the time.

We start by thinking of our own mother or parents, of somebody we really love so much, care for so much, like our mother, who nursed us, took care of us, paid attention to us, and brought us up to this level of grown-upness. Such affection and kindness was radiated to us by that

person that we think of her first. The analogy of our mother is not necessarily the only way. The idea is that of a motherly person who was kind and gentle and patient to us. We must have somebody who is gentle, somebody who has been kind to us in our life and who shared his or her goodness with us. If we do not have that, then we are somewhat in trouble, we begin to hate the world—but there is also a measure for that, which is to breathe in our hatred and resentment of the world. If we do not have good parents, a good mother, or a good person who reflected such a kind attitude toward us to think about, then we can think of ourselves.

When you begin to do tonglen practice, you begin to think of the goodness that you can give out, what you can give to others. You have lots of good things to give, to breathe out to others. You have lots of goodness, lots of sanity, lots of healthiness. All of that comes straight from the basic awakened and enlightened attitude, which is alive and strong and powerful. So what you give out is no longer just imagination, or something that you have to crank up; you actually have something good to give out to somebody. In turn, you can breathe in something that is painful and negative. The suffering that other people are experiencing can be brought in because, in contrast



to that, you have basic healthiness and wakefulness, which can certainly absorb anything that comes to it. You can absorb more suffering because you have a lot more to give.

The idea of warmth is a basic principle of tonglen practice. What we are doing is also called maitri practice, or in Sanskrit, *maitri bhavana*. *Maitri* means "friendliness," "warmth," or "sympathy," and *bhavana* means "meditation" or "practice." In tonglen, or maitri bhavana, we breathe out anything gentle and kind, feeling good about anything at all—even feeling good about eating a chocolate cake or drinking cool water or warming ourselves by the fire. Whatever goodness exists in us, whatever we feel good about, we breathe out to others. We must feel good sometimes—whether it lasts a minute or a second or whatever. And then we breathe in the opposite situation, whatever is bad and terrible, gross and obnoxious. We try to breathe that into ourselves.

I would like to say quite bluntly that it is very important for you to take tonglen practice quite seriously. I doubt that you will freak out. The main point is actually to do it properly and thoroughly. Beyond that, it is important to take delight that you are in a position to do something which most other humans never do at all. The

problem with most people is that they are always trying to give out the bad and take in the good. That has been the problem of society in general and the world altogether. But now we are on the mahayana path and the logic is reversed. That is fantastic, extraordinary! We are actually getting the inner "scoop," so to speak, on Buddha's mind, directly and at its best. Please think of that. This practice will be extremely helpful to you, so please take it seriously.

Tonglen practice is not purely mind training. What you are doing might be real! When you practice, you have to be very literal: when you breathe out, you really breathe out good; when you breathe in, you really breathe in bad. We can't be faking.

Start with what is immediate. Just this. *This*. You should feel that the whole thing is loose. Nothing is really attached to you or anchored to you; everything is detachable. When you let go, it is all gone. When things come back to you, they too are unanchored, from an outsiders point of view. They come to you, and you go out to them. It is a very exciting experience, actually. You feel a tremendous sense of space.

When you let go it is like cutting a kite from its cord. But even without its cord, the kite still comes back, like a parachute landing on you. You



feel a sense of fluidity and things begin to circulate so wonderfully. Nothing is being dealt with in any form of innuendo, or in undercurrents. There is no sense of someone working the politics behind the scenes. Everything is completely free-flowing. It is so wonderful—and you can do it. That is precisely what we mean when we talk about genuineness. You can be so absolutely blatantly good at giving, and so good at taking. It is interesting.

In tonglen practice, we replace the mindfulness of the breath that doesn't have any contents with the mindfulness of the breath that does. The contents are the emotional, discursive thoughts which are being given the reference point of people's pain and pleasure So you are supposed to actually be working hard for the sake of other people. You are supposed to be helping people. If somebody is bleeding in front of you, you can't just stand there holding the bandages—you are supposed to run over and put bandages on him, for goodness' sake! You just do it. And then you come back and sit down and watch to see who else might need bandages. It is as simple as that. It is the first-aid approach.

People need help. So we have to wake up a little bit more. We have to be careful that we don't just regard this as another daydream or concept. We

have to make it very literal and very ordinary. Just breathe out and in. It is very literal, very straightforward. Discursiveness doesn't take over—unless you are possessed by a demon or the ghost of Julius Caesar or something like that. Just make it very direct, very literal and regimented. Your breathing goes out for *that*, your breathing comes in for *this—that, this, that, this.* You breathe out good and breathe in bad. It is very simple and very literal.

You don't practice tonglen and then wait for the effect. You just do it and then drop it. You don't look for results. Whether it works or not, you just do it and drop it, do it and drop it. If it doesn't work, you take in, and if it works, you give out. So you do not possess anything. That is the whole idea. When anything comes out well, you give it away; if anything does not work out, you take it in.

Tonglen practice is not a very subtle thing. It is not philosophical, it is not even psychological. It is a very, very simple-minded approach. The practice is very primitive, in fact, the most primitive of all Buddhist practices. When you think of Buddhism and all the sophisticated wisdom, philosophies, and techniques that have been developed, it is amazing that they came up with this practice, that we do such a simple and primitive



thing. But we do it and it works. It seems to have been fine for several centuries, and those centuries have produced a lot of bodhisattvas, including Buddha himself.

Just relate with the technique; the discursiveness of it doesn't matter. When you go out, you are out; when you come in, you are in. When you are hot, you are hot; when you are cool, you are cool. Just cut into that situation and be very precise. Make it very literal and very simple. We don't want to make this into a revolutionary sort of imaginary, mind-oriented social work approach or psychological approach. Let's do it properly.

We have to be honest to begin with. That is a very important point. And we have to be very literal with the technique. It has already been worked on by generations of people in the past, and it has proven to be true. So we can afford to be literal. We don't have to research it any further. Instead we could be quite faithful to the practice as it is and just do it for a while. Then we might discover the impact of that and we could go on from there. Suddenly, we might find that we could attain enlightenment.

Sending and taking is just like field training, actually. It is like soldiers learning how to puncture a bag full of sand: regarding that as the

enemy, they yell, "Hooooh!" [Vidyadhara makes slashing motion with fan], as they pierce that bag of sand with their bayonets. A lot of soldiers might have a hard time being involved with nature because they come from cities where people have no idea how to work with snow or the heat of summer; they don't know how to ford rivers or how to dry their clothes or how to work with dirt and cleanliness, so soldiers have to be trained in the field. In a similar way, warriors who follow the bodhisattva path go through the same kind of field training.

If we begin to get hurt by being genuine, that is good. That is the level at which we are capable of exchanging ourselves for others. We begin to feel that because we are doing such genuine, honest work we would like to invite others. It is not so much that we only want to give out our pleasure to others and bring in their pain. There is more to it than that. We want to give our genuineness out to others and we want to invite their hypocrisy into us. That is much more than just exchanging pain for pleasure. It is the greatest way of exchanging ourselves for others, and it is needed in the world very, very badly. Exchanging pain for pleasure is very simple and easy to do. For instance, someone across the street would like to take a hot bath, but when he jumps into





the water, it is cold. So you might say, "Come over here and jump into my hot bath with me. You jump into my hot bath and I'll jump into your cold bath." That is fine, there is no problem with that—but jumping into each other's hypocrisy is more interesting. That is what we are trying to do.

Our genuineness has to be shared with someone. It has to be given up. Genuineness shouldn't be regarded as our one and only family jewel that we want to hang on to. We have to give our genuineness away to someone. We don't particularly lose it that way; instead, we bring other people's deception into us, and we work on our own genuineness along with that. So exchanging ourselves for others is something more than we might have thought. It is more than just jumping from a hot bath to a cold bath.

Beyond that, you begin to develop a sense of joy. You are actually doing something very useful and workable and fundamentally wonderful. You are not only teaching yourself how to be unselfish, in the conventional sense, but you are also teaching the world how to overcome hypocrisy, which is becoming thicker and thicker lately as the world gets more and more sophisticated, so to speak—more and more into the dark ages, in other words.

Sending and taking is an extension of shamatha discipline. In shamatha discipline, we do not dwell on anything, but we are processed by working with movement. We don't just try to hold our mind completely steady, completely settled, but we try to use the fickleness of our mental process by following our breath and by looking at our subconscious thoughts. We develop bodhichitta in exactly the same way that we practice shamatha, only our practice in this case is much more highlighted because, instead of working with subconscious mind or discursive thoughts alone, we are looking much further, to the *content* of our thoughts, which is either anger or lust or stupidity. So we are going slightly beyond shamatha technique, to include the contents of these thoughts.

The whole thing is that for a long time we have wanted to inflict pain on others and cultivate pleasure for ourselves. That has been the problem all along. In this case, we are reversing the logic altogether to see what happens. Instead of inflicting pain on others, we take on the pain ourselves; instead of sucking out others' pleasure, we give our pleasure to them. We have been doing the usual samsaric thing all the time, so we are just trying to reverse samsaric logic a little bit to see what happens. And what usually happens is that



you become a gentle person. You don't become demonic, you become workable. You see, you have been so unreasonable all along that now, in order to make yourself a reasonable person, you have to overdo the whole thing slightly. By doing so, you begin to realize how to be a decent person. That is called relative bodhichitta. At this point, it is important to have that particular kind of experience, it is important to understand your unreasonability.

Tonglen is also very important in terms of vajrayana practice. Therefore, vajrayana practitioners should also pay heed to this practice. They should do it very carefully. Without tonglen, you cannot practice the vajrayana disciplines of *utpattikrama* [developing stage] and *sampannakrama* [completion stage] at all. You become a deity without a heart, just a papier-mâché deity.[2] There is a story about two vajrayana masters who were exchanging notes on their students. One said, "My students can perform miracles, but somehow after that they seem to lose heart. They become ordinary people." The other one said, "Strangely enough, my vajrayana students cannot perform miracles, but they always remain healthy." The two teachers discussed that question on and on. Then somebody said, "Well, how about having all of them practice tonglen?" Both

teachers laughed and said, "Ha! That must be it." From that point of view, it is very important for us to have a basic core of reality taking place, so that when we do vajrayana practice, we don't just dress up as deities, with masks and costumes.

Even in hinayana practice, we could just wear our monks' robes and shave our heads, and all the rest of it. Without tonglen practice, both hinayana and vajrayana become like the lion's corpse. [Because the lion is the king of beasts, when he dies, it is said that his corpse is not attacked by other animals, but is left to be eaten by maggots from within.] As the Buddha said, his teaching will not be destroyed by outsiders but by insiders who do not practice the true dharma. At that point the Buddha was definitely referring to the bodhisattva path. It is the mahayana tradition and discipline that hold the hinayana and vajrayana together. Please think of that.



## 8

### *Three objects, three poisons, and three seeds of virtue.*

∴

This slogan is connected with the postmeditation experience, which comes after the main practice.



POINT TWO

# *The Actual Practice: The Cultivation of Bodhichitta*

This point contains the actual practice (Tib. *gngos gzhi*) of the cultivation of bodhichitta in formal meditation. This is the core of the lojong teachings and the theme that runs through all its contemplations and practices. The Tibetan term for bodhichitta is *bbang chub kyi sems'*. We can translate this as "enlightened heart," for *bbang chub* means "enlightened," and *sems* in this particular case means "mind" or "heart." *Bbang chub* carries two connotations: *chub* means "possessing the attributes and qualities of enlightenment," and *bbang* means "freedom from defiling tendencies." While we generally understand bodhichitta to be the benevolent concern for living beings, anyone who genuinely gives rise to it will possess both compassion (Skt. *karuna;* Tib. *snying rje*) and wisdom (Skt. *prajna;* Tib. *shes rab*).

The cultivation of bodhichitta, or an enlightened heart, has two aspects and two associated practices: absolute and relative. The traditional Mahayana analogy for the spiritual path is that it requires two wings to accomplish, just as a bird needs two wings to fly: the wings of wisdom and compassion. You could define absolute bodhichitta as the wisdom mind, and relative bodhichitta as the cultivation of a compassionate heart. While relative

and absolute bodhichitta are ultimately inseparable, it's important that we first learn to distinguish them. The lojong teachings are predominantly concerned with the cultivation of relative bodhichitta, but we should never forget that absolute bodhichitta is the main frame of reference and therefore the basis of our training.

The cultivation of compassion is the veritable heart of the lojong teachings. Compassion is not just about alleviating the suffering of others; it is also a powerful tool for effecting our own spiritual transformation. We must learn to be compassionately concerned about others, because that concern is what enables us to go beyond our discursive thoughts (Skt. *vikalpa;* Tib. *rnam rtog*), conflicting emotions (Skt. *klesha;* Tib. *nyon mongs*), and self-obsessions (Skt. *atmagrha;* Tib. *bdag 'dzin*) and break down the barriers created by ignorance, prejudice, fear, uncertainty, and doubt.

Absolute bodhichitta, on the other hand, is our authentic and original state of being, and therefore relates to the wisdom aspect of enlightenment. Despite the fact that sentient beings experience a multitude of delusions and obscurations, an element of the mind remains uncorrupted. There is an open, empty, clear, spacious, and luminous clarity of mind that is beyond concepts, ideas, or sensations. It does not come and go because it never enters the stream of time and is beyond both experience and intellectualism. Alternative terms for this supreme aspect of bodhichitta are *emptiness, the natural state, buddha-nature, the nature of the mind, the ground of being, ultimate reality,* and *the primordial state,* depending on the context. They all refer to an innate wakefulness that is present even when the delusions and obscurations of the mind are at work.

While the main practice of lojong is the cultivation of relative bodhichitta, the ultimate aim is to realize a transcendental or absolute state. We are not simply trying to effect a psychological





change in how we see and experience the world. While it is quite possible to have a direct, immediate glimpse of absolute bodhichitta, our compulsive and overwhelming tendency to indulge in virulent thoughts and emotions makes it very difficult for us to stabilize that into a permanent realization when we are starting out on the spiritual path. We need to convert our temporary glimpses into a stable realization of the natural state, for the ability to permanently rest in the natural state is the same as realization of absolute bodhichitta, or wisdom mind. It is the practice of compassion that leads to the actualization of the wisdom mind, for while the practice of relative bodhichitta does not cause enlightenment, it does help to lift the veils and remove the conflicting emotions that create obstacles to permanently actualizing the ever-present condition of absolute bodhichitta. Realizing the state of innate wakefulness also gives rise to the understanding that relative bodhichitra and absolute bodhichitta are really two aspects of the same thing.

## Absolute Bodhichitta

Before we try to realize absolute bodhichitta by cultivating compassion in our meditation (Skt. *bbavana;* Tib. *sgom*), we need to establish ourselves in our own natural state (Skt. *bbutata;* Tib. *gnas lugs*). While this may seem paradoxical, it is not so difficult to learn to meditate on absolute bodhichitta, even if we cannot easily stabilize that state, for while resting and stabilization are by no means the same, they are intimately connected in the context of spiritual practice. We must learn to temporarily rest in our natural state through the contemplative method of tranquillity meditation (Skt. *shamatha;* Tib. *zhi gnas*) before we can practice relative

bodhichitta. It is essential to understand this point, for even though we can't permanently access absolute bodhichitta, we *can* learn to temporarily rest in it during meditation. If we were to begin the lojong practices of relative bodhichitta before learning to rest in this open, empty, free, spacious, luminous clarity of mind, we would only increase our mental agitation, because our minds would not be sufficiently calmed to attempt any genuine assimilation of the practices.

This emphasis on remaining in the natural state is one of the hallmarks of our Kagyu tradition. Commentaries on lojong practice from other Tibetan traditions discuss absolute bodhichitta predominantly in terms of emptiness (Skt. *sbunyata;* Tib. *stong pa nyid*). However, the Kagyu approach discusses absolute bodhichitta in terms of resting in the vast openness of wisdom mind, or the natural state, rather than emptiness, for ultimately we can't make any conceptual statements about emptiness. Consider B. Alan Wallace's explanation of absolute bodhichitta:

> The teachings on sunyata, or emptiness, are called a mystery because they are not evident to the senses. We cannot experience this view of reality by simply gazing about us and observing appearances, because the ultimate mode of our existence—of ourselves, our bodies, our environment—is contrary to how it appears. Although it is mysterious in this sense, nevertheless it can be experienced, and this experience radically transforms the mind.[1]

This distinction is quite significant, because it reflects the subjective emphasis of the Kagyupas on the luminous clarity (Skt. *prabhasvara;* Tib. *'od gsal*) of the mind as ultimate reality (Skt. *dharmata;* Tib. *chos nyid*) rather than the more objective emphasis of other schools that emphasize emptiness. For while emptiness is an objective reality, the natural state is part of our very being.[2] In the Kagyu tradition, "resting in the natural state" means that the mind should have mental spaciousness, luminous clarity, and stability. Resting in a state where these three qualities are present is equivalent to having a temporary realization of absolute bodhichitta.

Another way of understanding meditation on absolute bodhichitta involves the Buddhist idea of view, meditation, and action. These three should complement one another, for we can't meditate without the view, and we won't be able to transform our actions without the support of meditation. In the lojong context, we develop the view by meditating on absolute bodhichitta, we practice meditation by doing the relative bodhichitta contemplations, and we translate that into everyday action with the support of the other lojong slogans.



### *Tranquillity Meditation*

Tranquillity meditation is a fundamental technique for calming the mind. After taking refuge in the Triple Gem and contemplating the four preliminaries, you sit cross-legged with a straight spine, your head tilted forward, eyes slightly open, and settle into the meditation posture. Your mouth should be slightly open, with the tip of your tongue lightly touching your upper palate. Rest your right hand over your left in your lap, with your thumbs slightly touching, and breathe evenly. It is important not to slouch or stretch your shoulders too much. Your chest should stick out slightly, and it is advisable to have a cushion beneath your buttocks to support your spine, because a straight spine is the most crucial aspect of the whole posture.

Our tendency to proliferate thoughts is so persistent that if we haven't first settled our mind by meditating on absolute

bodhichitta, we will never succeed with the imaginative exercises that follow. We shouldn't manufacture mental calm by eliminating our thoughts and emotions, but should simply refrain from following or elaborating upon them. This technique involves paying attention to whatever thoughts arise, rather than investing time and energy in trying to suppress them. It is practically impossible, in any case, to force your thoughts to dissipate, and all attempts to do so will result in even more mental agitation. The proper technique is simply to focus your awareness on whatever is taking place in the mind, without trying to subjugate it to your will. The most common technique is to focus your attention on the breath or a visual object, a technique that has been described at length in numerous meditation manuals.[3]

We have essentially two options: we can relinquish our awareness and chase after thoughts or we can maintain an awareness of thoughts while they are occurring. When we remain aware of our thoughts, we are in our natural state of being, which is the state of absolute bodhichitta.

When we begin to practice tranquillity meditation, it may be difficult to maintain this awareness. That's why we focus on the exhalation and inhalation of the breath rather than on what is going on in the mind, because focusing on our thoughts and emotions is much more difficult. We can formalize this technique by counting the incoming and outgoing breaths, in whatever rhythm is natural for us. In the beginning, you count an exhalation and inhalation as one breath and continue counting until you reach seven breaths, before returning to the count of one again.

When we breathe out, we should know that we are breathing out, and when we breathe in, we should know that we are breathing in. When you're comfortable counting seven breaths, you increase the number to fifteen and then to twenty-one. When you



9. Meditative Equipoise

At this final stage, even the notion of one-pointedness is no longer relevant, for that still implies a sense of deliberation in our mindfulness and awareness. Meditative equipoise (Skt. *samahita;* Tib. *mnyam gzhag*) is a sign of spontaneously resting in the meditative state, without any deliberate application or effort, a state where we don't have to be consciously aware of anything in particular in order to engage in cognitive awareness.

*Mindfulness and Awareness*

Mindfulness (Skt. *smrti;* Tib. *dran pa*) and awareness (Skt. *jneya;* Tib. *shes bzhin*) are distinct but related features of the mind. Mindfulness is something we apply more or less deliberately in order to become more cognizant, while awareness is a gentle way of simply being present. The meditation literature describes mindfulness as the opposite of forgetfulness. The Tibetan term *dran pa* means "remembrance," as in the ability to focus and pay attention to the object of meditation in an unwavering fashion. As the *Abhidharmasamuccaya* states, "The function is not to be distracted from letting what one knows slip away from one's mind."[5] Awareness, on the other hand, according to the *Abhidharmasamuccaya,* is a state of mental and physical pliability that gradually develops as we remove mental sluggishness and clear away all obscurations, drawing the mind toward a state of integration.[6] The Tibetan term *shes bzhin* is actually a verb rather than a noun, meaning "being in a state of awareness." The basic difference between mindfulness and awareness is simply that the former is deliberate and the latter spontaneous. According to Buddhism, being aware is not something we habitually tend toward; it is something we have to learn through meditation.

It is significant that the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions regard awareness as an innate (Skt. *sahaja;* Tib. *lhan skyes*) component of the mind, because the mind is aware by nature. They say that the nature of the mind is inseparable from intrinsic awareness (Skt. *vidya;* Tib. *rigpa*), but it is buried under the plethora of conflicting emotions and discursive thoughts that dominate our mind stream. These are the obstacles that the practice of relative bodhichitta helps to diminish so that we can perceive the awake, ever-present, innate, luminous clarity of the mind. This wakefulness is something that we have to retrieve, because if we were able to permanently rest in the luminous clarity of mind, we would already be enlightened. In one sense, we are already enlightened, we simply do not recognize this fact because of the obscuring veils (Skt. *avarana;* Tib. *sgrib pa*) of our conceptual confusion and conflicting emotions.



### *Insight Meditation*

We can perform wholesome actions from a worldly perspective as well as from a transcendentally spiritual perspective. This is a very important distinction in Mahayana Buddhism, because it highlights the importance of always trying to convert our worldly spiritual actions into transcendentally spiritual ones. It is only possible to achieve that transformation by cultivating the perspective of insight meditation (Skt. *vipashyana;* Tib. *lhag mthong*).

The difference between worldly spirituality and transcendental spirituality lies in the distinction between simply doing good and engaging in transcendental actions that arise from having insight into the reality of things. Worldly spiritual actions involve the accumulation of merit (Skt. *punya;* Tib. *bsod nams*) through good acts, and as such help to improve our lives and make us less



afflicted and happier people. Transcendentally spiritual actions demand more of us. Real spirituality is not just a matter of cultivating wholesome traits and positive thoughts and emotions; it is about learning to distinguish between things as they are and our present confusion about them, and thus gaining insight into the nature of our own minds.

Our Buddhist practices have two aims: the immediate goal (Tib. *ngon tho*) of personal eminence and the distant goal (Tib. *nge legs*) of enlightenment. A life based on the stability of inner growth rather than the contingent happiness of fortuitous circumstances will lead to a more fulfilling existence in both this life and the next. Enlightenment is the summum bonum of existence, an ambitious aim that can only be reached by degrees, through a combination of practice and learning. These two goals are closely linked to help us attain transcendental awakening, as it isn't enough to operate solely on the level of worldly spirituality. Unless we cultivate the really penetrating wisdom that comes from insight meditation, we will never manage to transcend our worldly preoccupations and realize the full potential of our being.

The following five slogans are vipashyana meditations that will allow a glimpse of absolute bodhichitta as we contemplate them from the perspective of the natural state. These glimpses are what provide the integrity for the practices of relative bodhichitta that follow.

## 2 • *Regard all phenomena as dreams*

This slogan is another contemplation on absolute bodhichitta, our innate, ongoing wakeful state that is an expression of emptiness—the central Buddhist doctrine that reveals the phenomenal

understanding of absolute bodhichitta. This view will protect us from our tendency to pollute our altruistic attitudes with unsavory emotions. This is called "adopting the right view." We are learning to think in a different way rather than trying to stop thoughts from arising. Right view and compassion are the two main practices of lojong. If we can maintain the perspective of absolute bodhichitta in meditation, even artificially, we will add a profound resonance to our relative bodhichitta practices.

## Relative Bodhichitta

Relative bodhichitta is the cultivation of compassion. Compassion is like the moisture that allows for the growth of other virtues, so it follows that if we behave in a self-centered and uncaring way toward others, these other virtues will never take root in our being. The practice of compassion is about cultivating a nonegoistic understanding of the world and learning to evaluate ourselves from that perspective. Egoistic perception is always deluded perception and the cause of our emotional afflictions and deluded mental states.

Practicing relative bodhichitta trains us to develop the intelligence that is capable of transcending egoism. The panoramic perspective required for this transformation comes from the practice of absolute bodhichitta, which is why it is so important to remember that relative bodhichitta is based on the insights of vipashyana meditation. Just being a good person or having a good heart is not enough to become a spiritual person. We must distinguish between mundane acts of goodwill and transcendental states of consciousness that imbue our compassionate acts with intelligence and impartiality.





The authoritative works of the great Mahayana masters, such as Nagarjuna, Aryadeva (second century) and Chandrakirti (seventh century), the founders of the Madhyamaka school and Asanga (fourth century), and Vasubandhu (330–400), the founders of the other major Mahayana school known as Yogachara, profoundly affected the development of Buddhism. It is significant that Chandrakirti doesn't begin his *Entry to the Middle Way* (*Madhyamakavatara*) by paying homage to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, as was the convention of his time, but by singing praises to compassion:

> The Shravakas and those halfway to buddhahood are
> born from the Mighty Sage,
> And Buddhas take their birth from Bodhisattva heroes.
> Compassion, nonduality, the wish for buddhahood for
> others' sake
> Are causes of the children of the Conqueror.
>
> Of buddhahood's abundant crop, compassion is the seed.
> It is like moisture bringing increase and is said
> To ripen in the state of lasting happiness.
> Therefore to begin, I celebrate compassion![24]

Meditating on love and compassion is equivalent to making the preparations for a journey, and practicing the paramitas of generosity (Skt. *dana;* Tib. *sbyin pa*), patience (Skt. *ksanti;* Tib. *bzod pa*), vigor (Skt. *virya;* Tib. *brston 'grus*), and moral precepts (Skt. *shila;* Tib. *tsbul khrims*) is equivalent to actually taking that journey. As the preliminary practices point out, if we haven't really thought the journey through and prepared ourselves properly, we may well be unsuccessful in our endeavors and meet with insurmountable

obstacles. We need to train ourselves to think in a certain way before we can implement the bodhisattva principles in everyday life. When Tibetan Buddhists want to emphasize the thinking mind, we use the word *lo,* so we could say that lo-*jong* practice is designed to train the mind to think in a different way. *Lodro* (Tib. *blo gros*) means "intelligence," and a very fine intelligence is called *lodro chenpo,* which means "great intelligence." Lojong practice is not just a method of contemplation but a means for changing the whole way we see, think, feel, perceive, and so on.

That's why relative bodhichitta has two aspects: the intention to work for the benefit of others and the actions themselves. The former, contemplative aspect is related to the thought of compassion in meditation, and the active aspect is related to the demonstration of compassion in everyday life. Buddhism does not make a sharp distinction between contemplative compassion and active demonstration because our actions can only be truly compassionate if we have first generated bodhichitta in our thoughts. Intention has to take precedence over action, because the cultivation of relative bodhichitta relies upon pure intention. Shantideva draws the following analogy to making a journey:

> Bodhichitta, the awakening mind,
> In brief is said to have two aspects:
> First, aspiring, *bodhichitta in intention;*
> Then, *active bodhichitta,* practical engagement.
>
> Wishing to depart and setting out upon the road,
> This is how the difference is conceived.
> The wise and learned thus should understand
> This difference, which is ordered and progressive.[25]





We cultivate a compassion that encompasses all beings, not just the ones that are suffering in a visible way. No one is free from the troubles of living, so we must direct compassion toward everyone, taking care that the nature of our compassion remains impartial, without degenerating into the type of blind emotions that compel us to act. Compassion has to be imbued with intelligence. Just caring for others is no guarantee that our intentions will be expressed wisely. We therefore make a distinction between ordinary forms of compassion and that one that is motivated by bodhichitta, the latter being called "great compassion" (Skt. *maha-karuna;* Tib. *snying rje chen po*).

The necessary condition for this transformation is the recognition that it's just as important to think about love and compassion as it is to do loving and compassionate acts. We shouldn't underestimate the importance of this thought of love and compassion. We will never be able to engage in compassionate acts until we accustom ourselves to a radically different way of thinking. We generally understand the word *compassion* to mean something like "suffering with others," but that is definitely not the Buddhist understanding. Buddhism defines compassion as wishing that others "may be free from suffering and the cause of suffering," and we generate compassion by imagining that people are in fact free of their physical ailments and mental torments. As Shantideva so eloquently describes:

> May I be a guard for those who are protectorless,
> A guide for those who journey on the road.
> For those who wish to go across the water,
> May I be a boat, a raft, a bridge.
>
> May I be an isle for those who yearn for landfall,
> And a lamp for those who long for light;

For those who need a resting place, a bed;
For all who need a servant, may I be their slave.[26]

Simply thinking in an imaginative way with love and compassion can have a transformative effect, even if those wishes for all intents and purposes are unrealizable. The fact that you can't be transformed into a bridge and so forth is not important; it is the wish that you could be of benefit to others that is the key. If we make wishes of that nature, love and compassion for people will arise naturally within us. This is very different from the way we normally approach things, where we assume that if something is unrealizable, there is no point in thinking about it. The point here is that compassionate action will arise from having compassionate thoughts.

The cultivation of relative bodhichitta is first and foremost a method for reversing our self-centered attitude and changing it to one that regards "the other" as equal. Once we generate this attitude, which is the very foundation of lojong practice, we won't need to reduce our egoism deliberately, because our narcissistic tendencies will naturally diminish. The Kadampa masters claim that the real problem is that we continually blame other people for our misery. By selfishly pursuing our own needs we manage to be completely indulgent of our egoistic minds and never tire of the abuse we subject ourselves to. Rather than improving our sense of self-worth and happiness, this tendency to be obsessively concerned with our own welfare only magnifies our feelings of loneliness and disconnection. The issue isn't about desiring happiness or not, it is about gaining it at the expense of others.

The understanding that hurting others to protect ourselves is quite destructive to ourselves is the fulcrum of mind training practice. The only way to change the emotional impoverishment





of our own lives into something more fulfilling is to reverse our attitude and to focus instead on wishing for the happiness of others. As Yangonpa, a great Tibetan master, says in his *Instruction on Training the Mind:*

Train your thoughts to ponder others' well-being; this
essential point
Ensures that everything you do becomes Dharma practice.[27]

Once we understand the significance of this point, we will see that lojong practice is also a means of lessening our own misery. Harboring negative attitudes about others is a self-destructive habit, and obsessing over our own needs will only ensure we are discontented, which is why we need to reflect on our experiences and be quite clear about the motivation (Tib. *kun slong*) behind our actions. Understanding relative bodhichitta teaches us how wrong it is to think, "I will sometimes be required to harm others for the sake of my self-preservation." If we can learn to reverse this attitude, it will not only be beneficial for others, it will also result in a vastly improved quality of life for ourselves as well.

Westerners tend to value action over everything else, but Buddhism sees the motives behind an action as being far more important. Our motives can essentially be broken down into the desire to help and the desire to harm. However, these two motivations often run parallel to each other and can easily become confused, so that even when we mean well, there is always some dubious agenda shadowing our good intentions. All our motives come about as a result of discriminatory judgments and always involve whatever we think will promote our own happiness and reduce our suffering. Even the actions we commit with a bad intention have this as their goal. We need to become fully conscious of the different intentions and

motives that are at work in our minds if we wish to penetrate the self-deceptions that lurk behind our actions.

## 7 • *Train in sending and taking alternatively, these two should ride the breath*

Sending and taking (Tib. *tong len*) is the contemplative practice of relative bodhichitta. This practice is counterintuitive to the way we normally understand our experiences, which is to reject everything we don't want and cling to everything we do want. We undertake *tonglen* because our physical actions are a direct result of our mental habits. Unless we transform these negative mental habits, we'll never be able to manifest compassion, either in our actions or in our thoughts. Shantideva gives a series of examples for developing an attitude that encourages recognition of the other:

> May those who lose their way and stray
> In misery, find fellow travelers,
> And safe from threat of thieves and savage beasts,
> Be tireless, and their journey light.[28]

In tonglen, we are trying to adopt a radically new way of looking at things. Tonglen is called "exchanging oneself for others" because it involves giving away everything that is good in our lives and taking on everything that is bad in the lives of others. It is a training in courage, because the whole point of doing it is to train ourselves to be less fearful and anxious. Our capacity to feel love and compassion for others, and our courage to take on their suffering, will increase if our tonglen practice is working. This practice is so extremely beneficial because we're training ourselves





to stop thinking about everything from a defensive posture. The more selfish and egocentric we are, the more defensive we become. If we think about sharing our happiness, we will become less self-obsessed, and our conflicting emotions will naturally subside. In *The Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas,* Gyalsay Togme Sangpo (1295–1369) advises:

> All suffering comes from the wish for your own happiness.
> Perfect Buddhas are born from the thought to help others.
> Therefore exchange your own happiness
> For the suffering of others—
> This is the practice of bodhisattvas.[29]

Self-obsession is not just about overevaluating our own worth, it also includes our feelings of inadequacy and self-criticism. Contrary to our fears, mentally taking on the suffering of others does not compound our pain; it enriches our lives, releases us from the nagging problems that normally plague us, and has a transformative effect on our psyche. Whereas self-obsession diminishes our being and keeps us trapped in inner turmoil, tonglen—an antidote to all forms of self-obsession—enables our mind to become elevated and expansive (Skt. *arya;* Tib. *'phags pa*). As Shantideva says:

> Do not be downcast, but marshal all your strength;
> Take heart and be the master of yourself!
> Practice the equality of self and other;
> Practice the exchange of self and other.[30]

When we do the actual practice, we begin by taking refuge, contemplating the preliminaries, and resting in the natural state.

This is followed by the vipashyana exercises of the previous slogans and returning again to rest in the natural state. We then do tonglen from within that state. We think of others purely in terms of their suffering and undesirable experiences, imagining the distress of illness, the pain and suffering of loss, the deprivation and affliction of poverty, the confusion and torment of mental illness, and the disabling distress of emotional conflicts. Then we inhale all that suffering into ourselves. We think of ourselves purely in terms of our own happiness, imagining everything that we hold dear, the special moments we cherish when we experienced love or intimacy or moments when we were at ease with ourselves, and we breathe that out to others.

We also breathe in the causes and conditions of all the suffering in others' lives and breathe out the causes and conditions for their happiness. There is the actual experience of suffering and then there are the debilitating effects that we suffer due to our conflicting emotions, which strangely, are the causes of the same suffering and pain. These conflicting emotions are both the cause and the effect of our suffering, and thereby are what create the vicious cycle that is samsara. We include all of this within our tonglen practice, breathing in everything that is debilitating for others and breathing out everything that would be the cause of joy.

Lojong practices train the mind, just as we would train the body. The way we try to maintain our health can be quite erroneous. We think we have to constantly feed ourselves and get plenty of rest, but that is not necessarily a healthy solution. If the body is pampered and unconditioned, it will become more and more sensitive to discomfort until the least irritation becomes a great privation. When our body is fit, we can walk for miles with ease, but when it is not fit, just getting out of the house becomes a difficult task. The more we fear discomfort and sickness, the





greater that discomfort becomes and the more extreme the effects of our ill health will seem. For example, if we get the flu and our mental conditioning is weak, it can be very draining and painful, and we may even pick up more life-threatening forms of illness. In the same way, if our mind is not trained, it becomes lethargic and lazy, and any little unpleasantness is perceived as a dangerous affront. Again, Shantideva makes this point in the following verse:

> To the extent this human form
> Is cosseted and saved from hurt,
> Just so, just so, to that degree,
> It grows so sensitive and peevish.[31]

Just like people who undergo physical endurance tests in their training to climb Mount Everest, the mental training of tonglen practice is meant to instill courage and determination. If we are psychologically prepared to take on difficulties, our trials and pains might not be so troubling. The samsaric mind is very weak and easily provoked, but when the mind is strong, its capacities are greatly enhanced. In lojong practice, everything else is supplementary.

People new to tonglen have many trepidations and doubts. Some people think, "If I do tonglen, I'll be totally miserable, because I'll always be thinking about the suffering of others." Others think that when things go wrong, it's a direct result of tonglen practice. Both these fears are completely misplaced. It is impossible to invite misfortune and disruption into our lives through tonglen. We have to remind ourselves that we do not engage in the practice of sending and taking in order to share the suffering

of others. For example, if someone is suffering from cancer and we take on his or her suffering in tonglen practice, we should not think, "Now I will get cancer." Once we have visualized taking on others' suffering, it immediately dissipates within us.

Other people think they just don't have a lot of love to give. I often hear people say, "I feel so empty; it's like I have nothing inside." This is a common experience for most of us, because we have been self-obsessed since the day we were born. If we have siblings, we may remember that when we were children, we not only wanted to eat our share of the food but theirs as well. We wanted our sister or brother's toys, and if we did not get them, we threw a tantrum. The emptiness we feel is a lack of love and compassion for others. If we had those wholesome emotions, we would not experience this existential crisis of nothingness. We feel nurtured when we are nurturing. Only a nurturing person can nurture, and a nurturing person is nurtured by his or her own caring attitudes. If you can develop these qualities, you will no longer have to go around like a sponge, soaking up the drops of love others leave behind.

Buddhas have gone beyond suffering, so how can they share in the suffering of others? There is no such thing as a Buddha that suffers with us or shares in our suffering. Having been human beings, they know what it means to suffer, which is why their compassion is endless and infinite. It is not because Buddhas are enlightened that they know about suffering, even though they no longer experience suffering. This transcendence of suffering is the key point in Buddhism. Suffering is the combination of pain and attempting to avoid that pain. Once we rid ourselves of grasping and avoidance, we are only left with our pain, which is not the same as suffering. If you were still suffering after attaining

Page 72



enlightenment, all the mind training and arduous spiritual practices would have been for nothing.

Nothing is literally given away and nothing is literally being taken on when we do tonglen. When we breathe in, we are not afraid to take on the illness, grief, distress, physical ailments, or mental torment of others. When we breathe out, we are not afraid to send out loving thoughts and caring attitudes to others, or to imagine that we are strong enough to be of help to them.

Some people assume that tonglen can't possibly have an impact on anybody else's life because it's only a mental exercise. From a Buddhist point of view, the interconnected nature of everything suggests there will be some impact on others. Just as our selfishness and neediness has an adverse impact on others, our positive attitudes will also impact on others in a tangible way. Lojong practice is ultimately for oneself, however; it is not a method for solving the world's problems. Even if we diligently breathe out affirmations with the wish to solve the world's problems, these will have no actual effect on the world. However, breathing out wonderful virtues and breathing in terrible sufferings will have an actual and very powerful effect on our own transformation. All the difficulties and painful experiences that we have in life come from our fixation on the notion of self and other. When we exchange ourselves for others, we experience self-transcendence, because we have gone beyond the parameters of our own egoistic mind. We experience a release from the imprisonment of our conventional egoism and become something greater than ourselves. If we have the lojong attitude, many of the problems that once seemed so overwhelming will cease to matter. When we are grateful to other people for providing us the opportunity to develop these transformative abilities, we realize that we are the real beneficiaries of tonglen practice.

## Postmeditation

After practicing tonglen, we return to shamatha meditation and rest in the natural state. The life we return to at the end of our session is called "postmeditation," because our everyday activities must be ancillary to our meditation practice. We bring the mindfulness and awareness of our meditation and the other-regarding attitude of tonglen into everyday life. People often mistake awareness for self-consciousness. They wonder, "How am I responding to this situation, person, or interaction?" and focus on what is going on in their heads. Self-consciousness just means becoming conscious of our perception of other people's responses to us and is simply another form of self-obsession, because we are still the center of our own attention. In postmeditation, lojong advises us to notice our responses to other people and situations so that we understand our own actions within the context of their needs and expectations. When we integrate these experiences within our meditations and prayers and make aspirations about the well-being of others, we transform our own attitudes.

In postmeditation, this is called *monlam* (Skt. *pranidhana;* Tib. *smon lam*), or an "act of aspiration." The concept of aspiration is an unusual one for Westerners, but it's very important to understand this very powerful psychological and spiritual technique. *Monlam* is sometimes translated as "prayer," but this interpretation is possibly misleading, for Buddhist prayers are not directed toward anyone. Their power doesn't come from outside our own thoughts but through an accumulation of positive intentions and practices. By directing that psychic energy through an act of aspiration, we draw whatever we want to realize in the future closer to us.[32]

There are three more slogans that directly help us maintain our awareness in postmeditation activities.



# Training in Compassion

## *Zen Teachings on the Practice of Lojong*

NORMAN FISCHER

Shambhala
*Boston & London*
2013

Page 74

# 2

# Train in Empathy and Compassion

## PART I: *Absolute Compassion*

ASSUMING THAT WE HAVE now spent some time reflecting on our lives and have realized that the time has come to be serious, and maybe have established a meditation practice or some other form of spiritual cultivation, we are ready to go on to the second point of mind training, **Training in empathy and compassion.**

Before we launch into this deep and moving study, let me offer a word of caution: this material is not easy to appreciate. It amounts to a contemplation of Buddhism's most profound teachings, the teachings on emptiness, which more or less correspond, in Western thought, to theology: reflections on the nature of God, not necessarily everyone's cup of tea. Although in general, mind training is very practical and down-to-earth, this particular part of it (unlike the parts that follow) seems not to offer much specific and useful advice on how to extend compassion in the world. Instead it asks, in effect, "What is the world? What is self? What is other?" It engages metaphysical questions.

In considering how to organize this book, I wondered whether this more philosophical section might not be better at the end



rather than at the beginning. And I wondered why the sages of old had put it first. Was it just a habit, a tradition, that had gotten started someplace and then just continued? Was there a good reason for it?

I have concluded that there is a good reason for it. If the basis on which we establish compassion is shaky, all of our efforts to change our way of thinking and behaving will also be shaky. If our basic sense of what we and others and the world are isn't clear and accurate, if our fundamental assumptions are false, we won't be able to proceed successfully to change our deeply ingrained habits. So it does turn out that we do need to begin by contemplating the profound nature of self and other. Because if you change the leaves and branches but leave the roots intact, you run the risk of reverting to type.

So it is important to contemplate these difficult teachings at this point, with this caveat: Though I am trying my best to make what follows understandable, don't worry if it leaves you wondering. It is not necessary at this point that you fully embrace these ideas. You only need to have a preliminary sense of them for now. You can come back to them later. You could even, if you want, skip them entirely for now and go on to chapter 4.

Let's begin with considering what *empathy* and *compassion* actually mean.

In English there are at least three words that describe the capacity to feel the feelings of others. *Empathy* is the capacity to feel another's feelings. It requires that we not be so self-absorbed that we're tone-deaf to the experience of others. Most of us, unfortunately and without realizing it, are living the old joke, "Okay, enough about me; let's talk about what *you* think about me." In other words, we are able to feel the feelings of others only insofar as we imagine those feelings have to do with us. Does she like me? Was he offended by what I just said? Is she jeal-

ous of me, out to get me, in love with me? This is not empathy at all. Real empathy requires that we develop the capacity to put our own concerns aside long enough to notice what someone else is going through internally, without reference to ourselves.

But empathy doesn't necessarily mean we care. We can be good at sensing what people are feeling just enough to be able to control or manipulate them. Sociopaths and con artists are quite empathetic, uncanny in their ability to feel the feelings of others. Sympathy, on the other hand, is empathy plus caring. When we're sympathetic to others, we want them to be happy and well, we don't want them to be upset or unhappy. We actually care about them. Compassion is sympathy for others specifically in the case of their suffering. Although it is uncomfortable, we are willing to feel the suffering of others and to do something about it when we can, even if all we can do is be with them.

The training suggested in this second point of mind training is the cultivation of all three of these capacities: empathy, sympathy, and compassion. The technical term for this training in Mahayana Buddhism is development of *bodhicitta*, which means, literally, the impulse or desire for spiritual awakening. This doesn't sound much like compassion or sympathy. Yet implicit in the Mahayana Buddhist understanding of spiritual awakening is the thought that spiritual awakening *means* awakening to a heartfelt concern for others, since any selfish effort, even with a goal of wisdom or enlightenment for one's self, would never lead to real awakening; it would always lead to more narrowness. Spiritual awakening is exactly dropping the sense of one's narrow separateness; it is essentially and profoundly altruistic. So cultivating bodhicitta means cultivating true and heartfelt concern for others in a way that is not clingy or arrogant but is based on the accurate wisdom that none of us is alone, we all need each other and are closely related to each other. As they say in Japanese Zen, "We all belong to the same nose hole society."







In our culture, intelligence and caring seem to be quite different from each other. A highly intelligent person may often be a little arrogant or abstract; a deeply feeling person may appear to be a fuzzy thinker. But in Buddhist thought true intelligence and real caring always go together. They are like the two wings of a noble bird that must be activated together in flight, in perfect harmony and rhythm. Buddhism assumes that true intelligence and true altruism always merge.

To be sure, Western culture and religion also value empathy, sympathy, and compassion, as all human beings do, but we do not link these feelings to intelligence and we have no concept that one could train in them. We take it for granted that we will be capable of caring or we won't, depending on our personal character and upbringing, and that if we are not capable of it now, perhaps we will at some point in our lives be inspired or turned around by something that happens to us, or by a person who influences us, and will suddenly see the light. While Buddhism certainly appreciates such possibilities, it adds to them the sense that the impulse to altruism if absent can be encouraged to appear, and if present, can be extended and strengthened with training.

The essence of bodhicitta is, as I have said, love and concern for others. Because of the preliminary reflections that we talked about, we recognize that we really do have to awaken and change our lives. We realize how dangerous and painful life is if we don't open up. We know we have to do it. And as soon as we start to try, we realize immediately that there is no way that we could ever do this alone, because opening up means opening to what's around us, to others, to the world, and to our radical connectedness. Bodhicitta is the feeling of love based on the deep recognition that what we call "self" and what we call "others" are designations, concepts, habits of mind, not realities of the world.

Real altruism isn't self-sacrifice for the benefit of others, a guilt-driven sense that we *should* be good, we *should* be nice, we *should* be kind. It is the profound recognition that self and other are not fundamentally different, only apparently different. Because of this the range of activity and feeling of bodhicitta is much wider than we would expect. A whole world of altruism and its effects opens up before us. We now see that the only way that we could love ourselves is by loving others, and the only way that we could truly love others is to love ourselves. The difference between self-love and love of others is very small, once we really understand. Taking this truth into our hearts and actions is truly life changing. And once we open to it, it becomes impossible to go back. It becomes impossible to fool ourselves anymore with selfishness and resentment. To be sure, we will probably still have plenty of selfish and resentful feelings, but now we know them for what they are, and they are far less compelling, because we have seen for ourselves how stupid, how childish and blind such feelings actually are. And they wouldn't be so bad if they weren't also so painful. But they are. Self-centeredness and all the emotions that flow from it—envy, anger, greed, and so on—are painful. And we no longer feel compelled to go on feeling pain for stupid reasons. We have seen through those reasons. So it becomes almost impossible to be willfully, intentionally aggressive, almost impossible to be willfully, intentionally disrespectful of others, because we can simply see with our eyes, just as we can see the sky above and the sun when it sets, that all of life is one sky warmed by one sun. To separate self from other is simply not in accord with what we see. So there is no way to be resentful, hateful, or self-centered, favoring ourself over others. Even though, because of long habit, we may still be resentful and so on, we know better in our heart of hearts. We see that love isn't an emotional option, it's a fact of life—a fact we know we desperately need to conform to for our own good and happiness. This







is a far deeper change of heart than the conventional resolution to be "good" or "nice," though of course it will probably cause us to be better, nicer people. It's a much more raw, visceral, and intimate response.

This gives some notion of how bodhicitta is understood and prized in Mahayana Buddhism. It is considered the most valuable of all insights and is discussed and taught extensively. Of all the schools of Buddhism that have been transmitted to the West, none surpasses the Tibetan Buddhist schools in their immense lexicon of teachings on bodhicitta.

There are nine mind-training slogans under this important second point. The nine are divided into two categories, *absolute bodhicitta* and *relative bodhicitta*.

Absolute bodhicitta is absolute love, love that's bigger than any emotion, bigger than any object, so big that there is no lover and no beloved (the two merge into one under absolute love's force). Love that amounts to a total vision of life as love itself. Within such love there can be no loss, because this love is so big it includes everything—even absence—so that nothing can ever be lost. Absolute bodhicitta is the empty, perfect, expansive, joyful, spacious nature of existence itself. Nor is it something that we have added on to existence. It's always been there in life, as life; it's always been the nature of how things are. Love has been there all along, but we've been so convinced by our smallness that we have failed to look around and notice it. Maybe we could say that absolute bodhicitta is like God, who is always present everywhere, even in absence, and that our awakening to absolute bodhicitta is our coming to know that there is nothing but God and there never was anything but God and there never will be anything but God, and that everything is always held and always has been held, and that we are always loved and have

always been loved and so has everything and everyone always been loved.

In contrast to this exalted state and exalted view, *relative bodhicitta* involves our doing a bit of work. Relative bodhicitta is when I roll up my sleeves and get on with the business of actually loving somebody. Relative bodhicitta is when I try to do something, to help somehow, to offer encouragement, support, food, clothing, better laws, improved political systems, and so on. With relative bodhicitta we make efforts that we are successful at or unsuccessful at, we suffer losses and cry over those losses, our hearts are broken and we grieve, or we take delight in our own delight and the delight of others. With relative bodhicitta we try to defend our friends and help people in need. There is no end to the work demanded by relative bodhicitta. Sometimes we take on very big projects that cause us to make a big effort for years, maybe decades or a lifetime. But relative bodhicitta is a project without end, so that when we are successful at one small part of the job, we are happy but don't have unrealistic expectations: tomorrow we will have to start all over again with the business of helping, of righting wrongs, of healing the sick, mending broken hearts.

You may be feeling exhausted just hearing about relative bodhicitta, but actually relative bodhicitta is the antidote to fatigue because it is built on a foundation of absolute bodhicitta. If relative bodhicitta is an endless task, absolute bodhicitta is the endless peace that underlies that endless task. So it's okay. In Zen we frequently chant four vows, the first of which is "Beings are numberless, I vow to save them." What a commitment! Who in their right mind would make such a vow? And yet people who come to Zen centers routinely chant this vow after every lecture, even the first lecture they attend. Maybe they do not notice what they are saying. On one hand, the vow seems





like another extravagant and paradoxical Zen expression. Not really. The vow is quite sensible when you think about it: endless need matched perfectly by endless love, endless caring—and this is not something we have to somehow laboriously produce: it is already what we are and how the world works.

Relative bodhicitta: we try hard to help in a practical way, with real feeling.

Absolute bodhicitta: but we don't really need to worry about it, because even if our helping doesn't do any good, it's still okay because of the big love that's everywhere and that heals anyway, no matter what we do, so we can drop the desperate idea that everything is up to us. Everything *is* up to us, but the big us, not the little us, and the big us can take care of it all because it is already taken care of. And because of this, we can love, and we can do our best to help, and we can work really hard, but without having to be burned up by our concern.

So absolute and relative bodhicitta depend on each other as two sides of a coin. Without absolute bodhicitta, relative bodhicitta will become forced and we will become angry and worn out with all of our caring and all of our helping; we can even become furious with the very people we are helping. "Look at all the help I've given you, how come you haven't improved one bit? What's the matter with you? How come you are not grateful? Where is my reward, my prize? At least the smile I was expecting, where's that?" So, helping can become really exhausting and disappointing. That's why we need absolute bodhicitta to sustain us.

And without relative bodhicitta, absolute bodhicitta becomes a kind of grand abstraction, a big, lofty religious idea with no substance to it. What good is a really big love if it never gets applied in the world? What good is a big love if we never love anyone, if we never support anyone? And when we do love someone, when we do support someone, we become awakened,

thanks to that person or those people. We become liberated from the dream of self-clinging. We become truly and lastingly happy.

The first slogan for developing absolute bodhicitta (and the second of the fifty-nine slogans) is:

**2. See everything as a dream.**

Everything is always passing away. That's just how it is in this world. As soon as something appears, in that same moment, it's already gone. Everything that exists in time is like this, appearing and disappearing in a flash. That's what we mean when we say "time is passing." Things do certainly seem to be here, I am here, you are here, what you see outside your window is there—but the closer you look, the less clear this is. The me of today must be slightly different from the me of yesterday and the me of tomorrow because I know for certain that the me of fifty years ago is quite different from the me of today, almost completely different. The me of fifty years ago is completely gone, and no trace of him can be found anywhere. He must have disappeared decade by decade, year by year, day by day, and moment by moment. But how? It really doesn't make sense. Now it is today. Where did yesterday go, and where is tomorrow now? You can't say. Nor is it really clear where today—where now—is. As soon as you try to figure it out, it is already gone. Since this is so, you have to wonder whether it was ever really here to begin with, in any hard-and-fast way. Things are always slipping gradually away. If we thought about it even for a moment, we would have to agree. But this is more than a thought. It is also a feeling. If we stop for a moment our busy activity and actually take stock of ourselves as we really are right now, feel our life at this instant, we can note a wistful sense of unease at time passing; we can actually feel this as an underlying mood or sense about life. It is quite unmistakable.





3

# Train in Empathy and Compassion

## PART 2: *Relative Compassion*

WE HAVE JUST CONTEMPLATED the slogans that teach absolute bodhicitta, the reality that life is essentially dream-like and built on a foundation of love. It should be obvious, but is perhaps worth noting, that the slogans don't assume that at this point you will have perfect insight into these profound realities. The intention and the hope is, rather, that contemplating the slogans will give you a respectful appreciation for these truths and the beginnings of some faith in them. And that this will be sufficient for you to progress to the second part of the **Training in empathy and compassion,** the more hands-on, more easily understood, but perhaps more difficult part, relative bodhicitta.

Relative bodhicitta is difficult because loving actual people as they really are, in this imperfect world as it really is, always involves some pain. Obviously it won't do to love somebody and enjoy that person's company but then, when things between you get difficult, to abandon the person. No, it is clear that as pleasant as love is, it must also be unpleasant, because people

are sometimes unpleasant or go through unpleasant things, and if we abandon them at those times and run away from them because they or their situation has become unpleasant, we would have to conclude that there wasn't much to our loving in the first place. It would make no sense at all, for instance, if we love someone, to say to that person, "Well, now you are getting a little difficult and I am not enjoying you today, so I guess our association should end." Or "Now you are having a hard time in your life or you are ill or now you are dying, and I find this not so inspiring, not so nice to be around, and because of this it's getting a little hard for me to love you, so I guess I'll find someone who is not difficult, not ill, not dying, to love and forget about you, because this is not so nice for me. Sorry about that, but I hope you understand." If someone were to say such things to us in such circumstances, I am sure we would *not* understand and would feel terribly wounded and betrayed and would not think that this was a speech given to us by someone who ever really loved us at all. Beyond being abandoned now, we would be dismayed at the thought that the love we thought we had enjoyed had never been anything more than a horrible charade.

Of course, exactly such speeches (more or less) are recited every day, because for many people love is too difficult to sustain exactly because it requires that we have the capacity to accept painful situations. Even under the best of circumstances, pain will eventually come as a consequence of love, because it's guaranteed that we will lose the beloved. Not sometimes, not often, but 100 percent of the time the one that we love will leave us or we will leave him or her, through death, in the end, if not in some other way. All relationships end in parting and loss—romantic relationships and all other associations of caring.

I often say to people, "If you want to understand suffering, there is one sure way to do it—love!" The reverse is also true: if





you want to understand love, you are going to have to understand suffering. This is why the practice of this relative bodhicitta is as difficult as it is wonderful.

The original *Seven Points of Training the Mind* text is famous for introducing a meditation practice called sending and receiving (*tonglen*).

Every form of religion, and every form of Buddhism, has its cultural prejudices, and in Zen practice (especially my school of Zen, Soto Zen), the prejudice is to be antitechnique. As I've said, Zen even denies the difference between meditation and nonmeditation. How much more, then, would it be resistant to particular meditation techniques? Zen meditation is radically simple: just sit still and breathe and see what happens. Everything else seems overly fancy. So in Zen if we practice special techniques, we always hold them very lightly, without worrying too much about the details or taking them too seriously. Focusing on technique as technique seems somehow against the whole proposition of religion. It just doesn't seem reasonable that our spiritual well-being is somehow going to be ensured if we master a technique, that religion is an art form, a matter of virtuosity. Or that the reverse would be so, that somehow our spiritual path would be wrecked or invalidated because we can't master a certain technique. On the other hand, it would also be foolish to have a dogmatic principle against any technique. Sometimes a technique can come in handy when you need it. So, given this antitechnique prejudice and this flexible spirit of willing curiosity, we take up the technique of sending and receiving.

There are two slogans that describe the practice:

7. **Practice sending and receiving alternately on the breath.**
8. **Begin sending and receiving practice with yourself.**

# *Start Where You Are*

A GUIDE TO
COMPASSIONATE LIVING

PEMA CHÖDRÖN



SHAMBHALA
*Boston*
2004

## 2

# *No Big Deal*

THE PRACTICES we'll be doing help us develop trust in our awakened heart, our bodhichitta. If we could finally grasp how rich we are, our sense of heavy burden would diminish, and our sense of curiosity would increase.

Bodhichitta has three qualities: (1) it is soft and gentle, which is compassion; (2) at the same time, it is clear and sharp, which is called *prajna;* and (3) it is open. This last quality of bodhichitta is called *shunyata* and is also known as emptiness. Emptiness sounds cold. However, bodhichitta isn't cold at all, because there's a heart quality—the warmth of compassion—that pervades the space and the clarity. Compassion and openness and clarity are all one thing, and this one thing is called bodhichitta.

Bodhichitta is our heart—our wounded, softened heart. Now, if you look for that soft heart that we guard so carefully—if you decide that you're going to do a scientific exploration under the microscope and try to find that heart—you won't find it. You can look, but all you'll find is some kind of tenderness. There isn't anything that you can cut out and put under the microscope. There isn't anything that you

can dissect or grasp. The more you look, the more you find just a feeling of tenderness tinged with some kind of sadness.

This sadness is not about somebody mistreating us. This is inherent sadness, unconditioned sadness. It has part of our birthright, a family heirloom. It's been called the genuine heart of sadness.

Sometimes we emphasize the compassionate aspect of our genuine heart, and this is called the relative part of bodhichitta. Sometimes we emphasize the open, unfindable aspect of our heart, and this is called the absolute, this genuine heart that is just waiting to be discovered.

Page 81

The first slogan of the seven points of mind training is "First, train in the preliminaries." The preliminaries are the basic meditation practice—beneficial, supportive, warm-hearted, brilliant shamatha-vipashyana practice. When we say, "First, train in the preliminaries," it's not as if we first do shamatha-vipashyana practice and then graduate to something more advanced. Shamatha-vipashyana practice is not only the earth that we stand on, it's also the air we breathe and the heart that beats inside us. Shamatha-vipashyana practice is the essence of all other practices as well. So when we say, "First, train in the preliminaries," it simply means that without this good base there's nothing to build on. Without it we couldn't understand tonglen practice—which I'll describe later—and we wouldn't have any insight into our mind, into either our craziness or our wisdom.



Next, there are five slogans that emphasize the openness of bodhichitta, the absolute quality of bodhichitta. These point to the fact that, although we are usually very caught up with the solidness and seriousness of life, we could begin to stop making such a big deal and connect with the spacious and joyful aspect of our being.

The first of the absolute slogans is "Regard all dharmas as dreams." More simply, regard everything as a dream. Life is a dream. Death is also a dream, for that matter; waking is a dream and sleeping is a dream. Another way to put this is, "Every situation is a passing memory."

We went for a walk this morning, but now it is a memory. Every situation is a passing memory. As we live our lives, there is a lot of repetition—so many mornings greeted, so many meals eaten, so many drives to work and drives home, so many times spent with our friends and family, again and again, over and over. All of these situations bring up irritation, lust, anger, sadness, all kinds of things about the people with whom we work or live or stand in line or fight traffic. So much will happen in the same way over and over again. It's all an excellent opportunity to connect with this sense of each situation being like a memory.

Just a few moments ago, you were standing in the hall, and now it is a memory. But then it was so real. Now I'm talking, and what I have just said has already passed.

It is said that with these slogans that are pointing to absolute truth—openness—one should not say, "Oh yes, I know," but that one should just allow a mental gap to open, and wonder, "Could it be? Am I dreaming this?" Pinch yourself. Dreams are just as convincing as waking reality. You could begin to contemplate the fact that perhaps things are not as solid or as reliable as they seem.

Sometimes we just have this experience automatically; it happens to us naturally. I read recently about someone who went hiking in the high mountains and was alone in the wilderness at a very high altitude. If any of you have been at high altitudes, you know the light there is different. There's something more blue, more luminous about it. Things seem lighter and not so dense as in the middle of a big city, particularly if you stay there for some time alone. You're sometimes not sure if you're awake or asleep. This man wrote that he began to feel as if he were cooking his meals in a dream and that when he would go for a walk, he was walking toward mountains that were made out of air. He felt that the letter he was writing was made of air, that his hand was a phantom pen writing these phantom words, and that he was going to send it off to a phantom receiver. Sometimes we, too, have that





kind of experience, even at sea level. It actually makes our world feel so much bigger.

Without going into this much more, I'd like to bring it down to our shamatha practice. The key is, it's no big deal. We could all just lighten up. Regard all dharmas as dreams. With our minds we make a big deal out of ourselves, out of our pain, and out of our problems.

If someone instructed you to catch the beginning, middle, and end of every thought, you'd find that they don't seem to have a beginning, middle, and end. They definitely are there. You're talking to yourself, you're creating your whole identity, your whole world, your whole sense of problem, your whole sense of contentment, with this continual stream of thought. But if you really try to find thoughts, they're always changing. As the slogan says, each situation and even each word and thought and emotion is passing memory. It's like trying to see when water turns into steam. You can never find that precise moment. You know there's water, because you can drink it and make it into soup and wash in it, and you know there's steam, but you can't see precisely when one changes into the other. Everything is like that.

Have you ever been caught in the heavy-duty scenario of feeling defeated and hurt, and then somehow, for no particular reason, you just drop it? It just goes, and you wonder why you made "much ado about nothing." What was that all about? It also hap-

pens when you fall in love with somebody; you're so completely into thinking about the person twenty-four hours a day. You are haunted and you want him or her so badly. Then a little while later, "I don't know where we went wrong, but the feeling's gone and I just can't get it back." We all know this feeling of how we make things a big deal and then realize that we're making a lot out of nothing.

I'd like to encourage us all to lighten up, to practice with a lot of gentleness. This is not the drill sergeant saying, "Lighten up or else." I have found that if we can possibly use anything we hear against ourselves, we usually do. For instance, you find yourself being tense and remember that I said to lighten up, and then you feel, "Basically, I'd better stop sitting because I can't lighten up and I'm not a candidate for discovering bodhichitta or anything else."

Gentleness in our practice and in our life helps to awaken bodhichitta. It's like remembering something. This compassion, this clarity, this openness are like something we have forgotten. Sitting here being gentle with ourselves, we're rediscovering something. It's like a mother reuniting with her child; having been lost to each other for a long, long time, they reunite. The way to reunite with bodhichitta is to lighten up in your practice and in your whole life.

Meditation practice is a formal way in which you can get used to lightening up. I encourage you to follow the instructions faithfully, but within that form to





be extremely gentle. Let the whole thing be soft. Breathing out, the instruction is to touch your breath as it goes, to be with your breath. Let that be like relaxing out. Sense the breath going out into big space and dissolving into space. You're not trying to clutch it, not trying to furrow your brow and catch that breath as if you won't be a good person unless you grab that breath. You're simply relaxing outward with your breath.

Labeling our thoughts is a powerful support for lightening up, a very helpful way to reconnect with shunyata—this open dimension of our being, this fresh, unbiased dimension of our mind. When we come to that place where we say, "Thinking," we can just say it with an unbiased attitude and with tremendous gentleness. Regard the thoughts as bubbles and the labeling like touching them with a feather. There's just this light touch—"Thinking"—and they dissolve back into the space.

Don't worry about achieving. Don't worry about perfection. Just be there each moment as best you can. When you realize you've wandered off again, simply very lightly acknowledge that. This light touch is the golden key to reuniting with our openness.

The slogan says to regard all dharmas—that is, regard everything—as a dream. In this case, we could say, "Regard all thoughts as a dream," and just touch them and let them go. When you notice you're making a really big deal, just notice that with a lot of gen-

tleness, a lot of heart. No big deal. If the thoughts go, and you still feel anxious and tense, you could allow that to be there, with a lot of space around it. Just let it be. When thoughts come up again, see them for what they are. It's no big deal. You can loosen up, lighten up, whatever.

That's the essential meaning of the absolute bodhichitta slogans—to connect with the open, spacious quality of your mind, so that you can see that there's no need to shut down and make such a big deal about everything. Then when you do make a big deal, you can give that a lot of space and let it go.

In sitting practice, there's no way you can go wrong, wherever you find yourself. Just relax. Relax your shoulders, relax your stomach, relax your heart, relax your mind. Bring in as much gentleness as you can. The technique is already quite precise. It has a structure, it has a form. So within that form, move with warmth and gentleness. That's how we awaken bodhichitta.



# 3
# *Pulling Out the Rug*

As I SAID BEFORE, the main instruction is simply to lighten up. By taking that attitude toward one's practice and one's life, by taking that more gentle and appreciative attitude toward oneself and others, the sense of burden that all of us carry around begins to decrease.

The next slogan is "Examine the nature of unborn awareness." The real intention of this slogan is to pull the rug out from under you in case you think you understood the previous slogan. If you feel proud of yourself because of how you really understood that everything is like a dream, then this slogan is here to challenge that smug certainty. It's saying, "Well, who is this anyway who thinks that they discovered that everything is like a dream?"

"Examine the nature of unborn awareness." Who is this "I"? Where did it come from? Who is the one who realizes anything? Who is it who's aware? This slogan points to the transparency of everything, including our beloved identity, this precious *M-E*. Who is this *me*?

The armor we erect around our soft hearts causes

a lot of misery. But don't be deceived, it's very transparent. The more vivid it gets, the more clearly you see it, the more you realize that this shield—this cocoon—is just made up of thoughts that we churn out and regard as solid. The shield is not made out of iron. The armor is not made out of metal. In fact, it's made out of passing memory.

The absolute quality of bodhichitta can never be pinned down. If you can talk about it, that's not it. So if you think that awakened heart is something, it isn't. It's passing memory. And if you think this big burden of ego, this big monster cocoon, is something, it isn't. It's just passing memory. Yet it's so vivid. The more you practice, the more vivid it gets. It's a paradox—it can't be found, and yet it couldn't be more vivid.

We spend a lot of time trying to nail everything down, concretizing, just trying to make everything solid and secure. We also spend a lot of time trying to dull or soften or fend off that vividness. When we awaken our hearts, we're changing the whole pattern, but not by creating a new pattern. We are moving further and further away from concretizing and making things so solid and always trying to get some ground under our feet. This moving away from comfort and security, this stepping out into what is unknown, uncharted, and shaky—that's called enlightenment, liberation. Krishnamurti talks about it in his book *Liberation from the Known,* Alan Watts in *The Wisdom of Insecurity.* It's all getting at the same thing.





This isn't how we usually go about things, in case you hadn't noticed. We usually try to get ground under our feet. It's as if you were in a spaceship going to the moon, and you looked back at this tiny planet Earth and realized that things were vaster than any mind could conceive and you just couldn't handle it, so you started worrying about what you were going to have for lunch. There you are in outer space with this sense of the world being so vast, and then you bring it all down into this very tiny world of worrying about what's for lunch: hamburgers or hot dogs. We do this all the time.

In "Examine the nature of unborn awareness," *examine* is an interesting word. It's not a matter of looking and seeing—"Now I've got it!"—but a process of examination and contemplation that leads into being able to relax with insecurity or edginess or restlessness. Much joy comes from that.

"Examine the nature of unborn awareness." Simply examine the nature of the one who has insight—contemplate that. We could question this solid identity that we have, this sense of a person frozen in time and space, this monolithic ME. In sitting practice, saying "thinking" with a soft touch introduces a question mark about who is doing all this thinking. Who's churning out what? What's happening to whom? Who am I that's thinking or that's labeling thinking or that's going back to the breath or hurting or wishing lunch would happen soon?

* * *

The next slogan is "Self-liberate even the antidote." In case you think you understood "Examine the nature of unborn awareness," let go even of that understanding, that pride, that security, that sense of ground. The antidote that you're being asked to liberate is shunyata itself. Let go of even the notion of emptiness, openness, or space.

There was a crazy-wisdom teacher in India named Saraha. He said that those who believe that everything is solid and real are stupid, like cattle, but that those who believe that everything is empty are even more stupid. Everything is changing all the time, and we keep wanting to pin it down, to fix it. So whenever you come up with a solid conclusion, let the rug be pulled out. You can pull out your own rug, and you can also let life pull it out for you.

Having the rug pulled out from under you is a big opportunity to change your fundamental pattern. It's like changing the DNA. One way to pull out your own rug is by just letting go, lightening up, being more gentle, and not making such a big deal.

This approach is very different from practicing affirmations, which has been a popular thing to do in some circles. Affirmations are like screaming that you're okay in order to overcome this whisper that you're not. That's a big contrast to actually uncovering the whisper, realizing that it's passing memory, and moving closer to all those fears and all those edgy





feelings that maybe you're not okay. Well, no big deal. None of us is okay and all of us are fine. It's not just one way. We are walking, talking paradoxes.

When we contemplate all dharmas as dreams and regard all our thoughts as passing memory—labeling them, "Thinking," touching them very lightly—then things will not appear to be so monolithic. We will feel a lightening of our burden. Labeling your thoughts as "thinking" will help you see the transparency of thoughts, that things are actually very light and illusory. Every time your stream of thoughts solidifies into a heavy story line that seems to be taking you elsewhere, label that "thinking." Then you will be able to see how all the passion that's connected with these thoughts, or all the aggression or all the heartbreak, is simply passing memory. If even for a second you actually had a full experience that it was all just thought, that would be a moment of full awakening.

This is how we begin to wake up our innate ability to let go, to reconnect with shunyata, or absolute bodhichitta. Also, this is how we awaken our compassion, our heart, our innate softness, relative bodhichitta. Use the labeling and use it with great gentleness as a way to touch those solid dramas and acknowledge that you just made them all up with this conversation you're having with yourself.

When we say "Self-liberate even the antidote," that's encouragement to simply touch and then let go

of whatever you come up with. Whatever bright solutions or big plans you come up with, just let them go, let them go, let them go. Whether you seem to have just uncovered the root of a whole life of misery or you're thinking of a root beer float—whatever you're thinking—let it go. When something pleasant comes up, instead of rushing around the room like a windup toy, you could just pause and notice, and let go. This technique provides a gentle approach that breaks up the solidity of thoughts and memories. If the memory was a strong one, you'll probably find that something is left behind when the words go. When that happens, you're getting closer to the heart. You're getting closer to the bodhichitta.

These thoughts that come up, they're not bad. Anyway, meditation isn't about getting rid of thoughts—you'll think forever. Nevertheless, if you follow the breath and label your thoughts, you learn to let things go. Beliefs of solidness, beliefs of emptiness, let it all go. If you learn to let things go, thoughts are no problem. But at this point, for most of us, our thoughts are very tied up with our identity, with our sense of problem and our sense of how things are.

The next absolute slogan is "Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence." We can learn to let thoughts go and just rest our mind in its natural state, in alaya, which is a word that means the open primordial basis





of all phenomena. We can rest in the fundamental openness and enjoy the display of whatever arises without making such a big deal.

So if you think that everything is solid, that's one trap, and if you change that for a different belief system, that's another trap. We have to pull the rug out from our belief systems altogether. We can do that by letting go of our beliefs, and also our sense of what is right and wrong, by just going back to the simplicity and the immediacy of our present experience, resting in the nature of alaya.

# 6

# *Start Where You Are*

THERE ARE TWO SLOGANS that go along with the tonglen practice: "Sending and taking should be practiced alternately. / These two should ride the breath"—which is actually a description of tonglen and how it works—and "Begin the sequence of sending and taking with yourself."

The slogan "Begin the sequence of sending and taking with yourself" is getting at the point that compassion starts with making friends with ourselves, and particularly with our poisons—the messy areas. As we practice tonglen—taking and sending—and contemplate the lojong slogans, gradually it begins to dawn on us how totally interconnected we all are. Now people know that what we do to the rivers in South America affects the whole world, and what we do to the air in Alaska affects the whole world. Everything is interrelated—including ourselves, so this is very important, this making friends with ourselves. It's the key to a more sane, compassionate planet.

What you do for yourself—any gesture of kindness, any gesture of gentleness, any gesture of honesty and clear seeing toward yourself—will affect





how you experience your world. In fact, it will transform how you experience the world. What you do for yourself, you're doing for others, and what you do for others, you're doing for yourself. When you exchange yourself for others in the practice of tonglen, it becomes increasingly uncertain what is out there and what is in here.

If you have rage and righteously act it out and blame it all on others, it's really you who suffers. The other people and the environment suffer also, but you suffer more because you're being eaten up inside with rage, causing you to hate yourself more and more.

We act out because, ironically, we think it will bring us some relief. We equate it with happiness. Often there *is* some relief, for the moment. When you have an addiction and you fulfill that addiction, there is a moment in which you feel some relief. Then the nightmare gets worse. So it is with aggression. When you get to tell someone off, you might feel pretty good for a while, but somehow the sense of righteous indignation and hatred grows, and it hurts you. It's as if you pick up hot coals with your bare hands and throw them at your enemy. If the coals happen to hit him, he will be hurt. But in the meantime, you are guaranteed to be burned.

On the other hand, if we begin to surrender to ourselves—begin to drop the story line and experience what all this messy stuff behind the story line feels

like—we begin to find bodhichitta, the tenderness that's under all that harshness. By being kind to ourselves, we become kind to others. By being kind to others—if it's done properly, with proper understanding—we benefit as well. So the first point is that we are completely interrelated. What you do to others, you do to yourself. What you do to yourself, you do to others.

Start where you are. This is very important. Tonglen practice (and all meditation practice) is not about later, when you get it all together and you're this person you really respect. You may be the most violent person in the world—that's a fine place to start. That's a very rich place to start—juicy, smelly. You might be the most depressed person in the world, the most addicted person in the world, the most jealous person in the world. You might think that there are no others on the planet who hate themselves as much as you do. All of that is a good place to start. Just where you are—that's the place to start.

As we begin to practice shamatha-vipashyana meditation, following our breath and labeling our thoughts, we can gradually begin to realize how profound it is just to let those thoughts go, not rejecting them, not trying to repress them, but just simply acknowledging them as violent thoughts, thoughts of hatred, thoughts of wanting, thoughts of poverty, thoughts of loathing, whatever they might be. We can see it all as thinking and can let the thoughts go





and begin to feel what's left. We can begin to feel the energy of our heart, our body, our neck, our head, our stomach—that basic feeling that's underneath all of the story lines. If we can relate directly with that, then all of the rest is our wealth. When we don't act out and we don't repress, then our passion, our aggression, and our ignorance become our wealth. The poison already is the medicine. You don't have to transform anything. Simply letting go of the story line is what it takes, which is not that easy. That light touch of acknowledging what we're thinking and letting it go is the key to connecting with this wealth that we have. With all the messy stuff, no matter how messy it is, just start where you are—not tomorrow, not later, not yesterday when you were feeling better—but now. Start now, just as you are.

Milarepa is one of the lineage holders of the Kagyü lineage of Tibetan Buddhism. Milarepa is one of the heroes, one of the brave ones, a very crazy, unusual fellow. He was a loner who lived in caves by himself and meditated wholeheartedly for years. He was extremely stubborn and determined. If he couldn't find anything to eat for a couple of years, he just ate nettles and turned green, but he would never stop practicing.

One evening Milarepa returned to his cave after gathering firewood, only to find it filled with demons. They were cooking his food, reading his books, sleeping in his bed. They had taken over the joint. He knew

about nonduality of self and other, but he still didn't quite know how to get these guys out of his cave. Even though he had the sense that they were just a projection of his own mind—all the unwanted parts of himself—he didn't know how to get rid of them.

So first he taught them the dharma. He sat on this seat that was higher than they were and said things to them about how we are all one. He talked about compassion and shunyata and how poison is medicine. Nothing happened. The demons were still there. Then he lost his patience and got angry and ran at them. They just laughed at him. Finally, he gave up and just sat down on the floor, saying, "I'm not going away and it looks like you're not either, so let's just live here together."

At that point, all of them left except one. Milarepa said, "Oh, this one is particularly vicious." (We all know that one. Sometimes we have lots of them like that. Sometimes we feel that's all we've got.) He didn't know what to do, so he surrendered himself even further. He walked over and put himself right into the mouth of the demon and said, "Just eat me up if you want to." Then that demon left too. The moral of the story is, when the resistance is gone, so are the demons.

That's the underlying logic of tonglen practice and also of lojong altogether. When the resistance is gone, so are the demons. It's like a koan that we can





work with by learning how to be more gentle, how to relax, and how to surrender to the situations and people in our lives.

Having said all that, now I'll talk about tonglen. I've noticed that people generally eat up the teachings, but when it comes to having to do tonglen, they say, "Oh, it sounded good, but I didn't realize you actually meant it." In its essence, this practice of tonglen is, when anything is painful or undesirable, to breathe it in. That's another way of saying you don't resist it. You surrender to yourself, you acknowledge who you are, you honor yourself. As unwanted feelings and emotions arise, you actually breathe them in and connect with what all humans feel. We all know what it is to feel pain in its many guises.

This breathing in is done for yourself, in the sense that it's a personal and real experience, but simultaneously there's no doubt that you're at the same time developing your kinship with all beings. If you can know it in yourself, you can know it in everyone. If you're in a jealous rage and it occurs to you to actually breathe it in rather than blame it on someone else—if you get in touch with the arrow in your heart—it's quite accessible to you at that very moment that there are people all over the world feeling exactly what you're feeling. This practice cuts through culture, economic status, intelligence, race, religion.

People everywhere feel pain—jealousy, anger, being left out, feeling lonely. Everybody feels that exactly the way you feel it. The story lines vary, but the underlying feeling is the same for us all.

By the same token, if you feel some sense of delight—if you connect with what for you is inspiring, opening, relieving, relaxing—you breathe it out, you give it away, you send it out to everyone else. Again, it's very personal. It starts with *your* feeling of delight, *your* feeling of connecting with a bigger perspective, *your* feeling of relief or relaxation. If you're willing to drop the story line, you feel exactly what all other human beings feel. It's shared by all of us. In this way if we do the practice personally and genuinely, it awakens our sense of kinship with all beings.

The other thing that's very important is absolute bodhichitta. In order to do tonglen, we've first established the ground of absolute bodhichitta because it's important that when you breathe in and connect with the vividness and reality of pain there's also some sense of space. There's that vast, tender, empty heart of bodhichitta, your awakened heart. Right in the pain there's a lot of room, a lot of openness. You begin to touch in on that space when you relate directly to the messy stuff, because by relating directly with the messy stuff you are completely undoing the way ego holds itself together.

We shield our heart with an armor woven out of very old habits of pushing away pain and grasping at





pleasure. When we begin to breathe in the pain instead of pushing it away, we begin to open our hearts to what's unwanted. When we relate directly in this way to the unwanted areas of our lives, the airless room of ego begins to be ventilated. In the same way, when we open up our clenched hearts and let the good things go—radiate them out and share them with others—that's also completely reversing the logic of ego, which is to say, reversing the logic of suffering. Lojong logic is the logic that transcends the messy and unmessy, transcends pain and pleasure. Lojong logic begins to open up the space and it begins to ventilate this whole cocoon that we find ourselves in. Whether you are breathing in or breathing out, you are opening the heart, which is awakening bodhichitta.

So now the technique. Tonglen practice has four stages. The *first stage* is flashing openness, or flashing absolute bodhichitta. The slogan "Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence" goes along with this flash of openness, which is done very quickly. There is some sort of natural flash of silence and space. It's a very simple thing.

The *second stage* is working with the texture. You visualize breathing in dark, heavy, and hot and breathing out white, light, and cool. The idea is that you are always breathing in the same thing: you are essentially breathing in the cause of suffering, the

origin of suffering, which is fixation, the tendency to hold on to ego with a vengeance.

You may have noticed, when you become angry or poverty-stricken or jealous, that you experience that fixation as black, hot, solid, and heavy. That is actually the texture of poison, the texture of neurosis and fixation. You may have also noticed times when you are all caught up in yourself, and *then* some sort of contrast or gap occurs. It's very spacious. That's the experience of mind that is not fixated on phenomena; it's the experience of openness. The texture of that openness is generally experienced as light, white, fresh, clear, and cool.

So in the second stage of tonglen you work with those textures. You breathe in black, heavy, and hot through all the pores of your body, and you radiate out white, light, and cool, also through all the pores of your body, 360 degrees. You work with the texture until you feel that it's synchronized: black is coming in and white is going out on the medium of the breath—in and out, in and out.

The *third stage* is working with a specific heartfelt object of suffering. You breathe in the pain of a specific person or animal that you wish to help. You breathe out to that person spaciousness or kindness or a good meal or a cup of coffee—whatever you feel would lighten their load. You can do this for anyone: the homeless mother that you pass on the street, your suicidal uncle, or yourself and the pain you are feeling at that very moment. The main point is that the suffering is real, totally untheoretical. It should be heartfelt, tangible, honest, and vivid.



The *fourth stage* extends this wish to relieve suffering much further. You start with the homeless person and then extend out to all those who are suffering just as she is, or to all those who are suicidal like your uncle or to all those who are feeling the jealousy or addiction or contempt that you are feeling. You use specific instances of misery and pain as a stepping stone for understanding the universal suffering of people and animals everywhere. Simultaneously, you breathe in the pain of your uncle and of all the zillions of other desperate, lonely people like him. Simultaneously, you send out spaciousness or cheerfulness or a bunch of flowers, whatever would be healing, to your uncle and all the others. What you feel for one person, you can extend to all people.

You need to work with both the third and fourth stages—with both the immediate suffering of one person and the universal suffering of all. If you were only to extend out to all sentient beings, the practice would be very theoretical. It would never actually touch your heart. On the other hand, if you were to work only with your own or someone else's fixation, it would lack vision. It would be too narrow. Working with both situations together makes the practice real and heartfelt; at the same time, it provides vision and a way for you to work with everyone else in the world.

You can bring all of your unfinished karmic business right into the practice. In fact, you should invite it in. Suppose that you are involved in a horrific relationship: every time you think of a particular person you get *furious.* That is very useful for tonglen! Or perhaps you feel depressed. It was all you could do to get out of bed today. You're so depressed that you want to stay in bed for the rest of your life; you have considered hiding *under* your bed. That is very useful for tonglen practice. The specific fixation should be *real,* just like that.

Let's use another example. You may be formally doing tonglen or just sitting having your coffee, and here comes Mortimer, the object of your passion, aggression, or ignorance. You want to hit him or hug him, or maybe you wish that he weren't there at all.

But let's say you're angry. The object is Mortimer and here comes the poison: *fury.* You breathe that in. The idea is to develop sympathy for your own confusion. The technique is that you do not blame Mortimer; you also do not blame yourself. Instead, there is just liberated fury—hot, black, and heavy. Experience it as fully as you can.

You breathe the anger in; you remove the object; you stop thinking about him. In fact, he was just a useful catalyst. Now you own the anger completely. You drive all blames into yourself. It takes a lot of bravery, and it's extremely insulting to ego. In fact,





it destroys the whole mechanism of ego. So you breathe in.

Then, you breathe out sympathy, relaxation, and spaciousness. Instead of just a small, dark situation, you allow a lot of space for these feelings. Breathing out is like ventilating the whole thing, airing it out. Breathing out is like opening up your arms and just letting go. It's fresh air. Then you breathe the rage in again—the black, heavy hotness of it. Then you breathe out, ventilating the whole thing, allowing a lot of space.

What you are actually doing is cultivating kindness toward yourself. It is very simple in that way. You don't think about it; you don't philosophize; you simply breathe in a very real klesha. You own it completely and then aerate it, allowing a lot of space when you breathe out. This, in itself, is an amazing practice—even if it didn't go any further—because at this level you are still working on yourself. But the real beauty of the practice is that you then extend that out.

Without pretending, you can acknowledge that about two billion other sentient beings are feeling the exact same rage that you are at that moment. They are experiencing it exactly the way you are experiencing it. They may have a different object, but the object isn't the point. The point is the rage itself. You breathe it in from all of them, so they no longer have

to have it. It doesn't make your own rage any greater; it is just rage, just fixation on rage, which causes so much suffering.

Sometimes, at that moment, you get a glimpse of why there is murder and rape, why there is war, why people burn down buildings, why there is so much misery in the world. It all comes from feeling that rage and acting it out instead of taking it in and airing it. It all turns into hatred and misery, which pollutes the world and obviously perpetuates the vicious cycle of suffering and frustration. Because *you* feel rage, therefore you have the kindling, the connection, for understanding the rage of all sentient beings. First you work with your own klesha; then you quickly extend that and breathe it all in.

At that point, simultaneously, it is no longer *your* own particular burden; it is just the rage of sentient beings, which includes you. You breathe that in, and you breathe out a sense of ventilation, so that all sentient beings could experience that. This goes for anything that bothers you. The more it bothers you, the more awake you're going to be when you do tonglen.

The things that really drive us nuts have enormous energy in them. That is why we fear them. It could even be your own timidity: you are so timid that you are afraid to walk up and say hello to someone, afraid to look someone in the eye. It takes a lot of energy to maintain that. It's the way you keep yourself together.





In tonglen practice, you have the chance to own that completely, not blaming anybody, and to ventilate it with the outbreath. Then you might better understand why some other people in the room look so grim: it isn't because they hate you but because they feel the same kind of timidity and don't want to look anyone in the face. In this way, the tonglen practice is both a practice of making friends with yourself and a practice of compassion.

By practicing in this way, you definitely develop your sympathy for others, and you begin to understand them a lot better. In that way your own pain is like a stepping stone. Your heart develops more and more, and even if someone comes up and insults you, you could genuinely understand the whole situation because you understand so well where everybody's coming from. You also realize that you can help by simply breathing *in* the pain of others and breathing *out* that ventilation. So tonglen starts with relating directly to specific suffering—yours or someone else's—which you then use to understand that this suffering is universal, shared by us all.

Almost everybody can begin to do tonglen by thinking of someone he or she loves very dearly. It's sometimes easier to think of your children than your husband or wife or mother or father, because those relationships may be more complicated. There are some people in your life whom you love very straight-

forwardly without complication: old people or people who are ill or little children, or people who have been kind to you.

When he was eight years old, Trungpa Rinpoche saw a whimpering puppy being stoned to death by a laughing, jeering crowd. He said that after that, doing tonglen practice was straightforward for him: all he had to do was think of that dog and his heart would start to open instantly. There was nothing complicated about it. He would have done anything to breathe in the suffering of that animal and to breathe out relief. So the idea is to start with something like that, something that activates your heart.

So you think of a puppy being stoned and dying in pain, and you breathe that in. Then, it is no longer just a puppy. It is your connection with the realization that there are puppies and people suffering unjustly like that all over the world. You immediately extend the practice and breathe in the suffering of all the people who are suffering like that animal.

It is also possible to start with the puppy or your uncle or yourself and then gradually extend out further and further. Having started with the wish to relieve your sister's depression, you could extend further and breathe in the depression of people who are somewhat "neutral"—the ones to whom you are not that close but who also don't cause you fear or anger. You breathe in the depression and send out relief to all those "neutral" people. Then, gradually, the





practice moves to people you actually *hate,* people you consider to be your enemies or to have actually harmed you. This expansion evolves by doing the practice. You cannot fake these things; therefore you start with the things that are close to your heart.

It's useful to think of tonglen practice in four stages:

1. Flashing openness
2. Working with the texture, breathing in dark, heavy, and hot and breathing out white, light, and cool
3. Working with relieving a specific, heartfelt instance of suffering
4. Extending that wish to help everyone

The main thing is to really get in touch with fixation and the power of klesha activity in yourself. This makes other people's situations completely accessible and real to you. Then, when it becomes real and vivid, always remember to extend it out. Let your own experience be a stepping stone for working with the world.

POINT THREE

# Transformation of Bad Circumstances into the Path of Enlightenment

## Point Three and the Paramita of Patience

Now that we have studied the ultimate and relative bodhichitta practices and the postmeditation experiences connected with them, the third group of slogans is connected with how to carry out all those practices as path. In Tibetan this group of slogans is known as *lamkhyer*: *lam* meaning "path" and *khyer* meaning "carrying." In other words, whatever happens in your life should be included as part of your journey. That is the basic idea.

This group of slogans is connected with the paramita of patience. The definition of patience is forbearance. Whatever happens, you don't react to it. The obstacle to patience is aggression. Patience does not mean biding your time and trying to slow down. Impatience arises when you



become too sensitive and you don't have any way to deal with your environment, your atmosphere. You feel very touchy, very sensitive. So the paramita of patience is often described as a suit of armor. Patience has a sense of dignity and forbearance. You are not so easily disturbed by the world's aggression.

11

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

∴

Continuing with the idea of carrying everything to the path, the basic slogan of this section is:

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

That is to say, whatever occurs in your life—environmental problems, political problems, or psychological problems—should be transformed into a part of your wakefulness, or bodhi. Such wakefulness is a result of the practice of shamatha-

The Practice of Lojong
by Traleg Rinpoche

POINT THREE

# *Transforming Adversity into the Path of Awakening*

We now come to the instructions on how to train our minds amid the unfavorable and unwanted circumstances of our lives. We have been born into an imperfect world, characterized by unpredictability and adversity, as finite human beings that have foibles, make mistakes, get confused, and think irrationally. There is much to contend with, and our ability to prevent or circumvent difficulty is quite limited. We aren't omnipotent beings, and while we try to protect ourselves and maintain order in our lives, we simply don't have the ability to safeguard ourselves from its disasters.

It is self-evident that the natural world doesn't behave in a predictable way or do our bidding. We can see this in the recent examples of the Indian Ocean tsunami and the hurricane that decimated New Orleans. Natural disasters have occurred repeatedly in the past and are likely to continue to do so in the future. Millions of people have lost their lives, are losing their lives, and will lose their lives to disease: the typhoid, cholera, dysentery, and bubonic plagues of the past; the HIV epidemic of the present; and so on. Even at a personal level, many things go awry, and our efforts to complete projects are constantly thwarted and





disrupted by sickness, mental distress, and all kinds of deception and mistreatment by others.

Adverse circumstances and situations are an integral part of conditioned existence. They tend to arise as sudden interruptions, so we shouldn't be surprised that natural calamities and upheavals occur in both our private and our public lives. Buddhists do not believe in divine authorship or omnipotent governance of any kind; things just happen when the proper conditions and circumstances come together. As Shantideva tells us in his chapter on patience, "Conditions, once assembled, have no thought/ That now they will give rise to some result,"[1] but our ignorance about this process doesn't change the fact they are interdependent. The importance of understanding dependent arising cannot be underestimated, because we have to be realistic about what we can and cannot do. As Padma Karpo (1527–92) writes:

> If you look closely at your normal activities
> You will discover that they do not deserve the trust you accord them.
> You are not the agent in power but the victim of your projections.
> Don't you think you should look closely into that?
> Please turn your mind within and reflect on this.[2]

We can't tailor the world to suit ourselves, or force it to fit into our vision of things. This doesn't mean we shouldn't aspire to make things better. The bodhisattva ideal specifically recommends trying to improve our world to the best of our ability, but that ideal is based on a realistic recognition that the world is imperfect and likely to remain that way. Things may sometimes work a little better, sometimes a little worse, but so long as there is

ignorance, hatred, jealousy, pride, and selfishness, we will all be living in a world that is socially and politically imperfect. Shantideva counsels equanimity in the face of life's changing circumstances:

> If there is a remedy when trouble strikes,
> What reason is there for despondency?
> And if there is no help for it,
> What use is there in being sad?[3]

If things are interdependent, as Buddhists say, we can never expect to protect ourselves against unexpected occurrences, because there is no real order to existence apart from the regularity of certain natural processes. The fact that anything and everything can and does happen would then come as no real surprise to us. The question then becomes not so much why these things happen, but what we can do about them once they do. We cannot control the environment in any strict sense, so we must try to change our attitude and see things in a different light. Only then will we be able to take full advantage of our situation, even if it happens to be a bad one. While it often seems there is nothing we can do in the face of insurmountable obstacles, the lojong teachings tell us this is not true. The imperfect world can be an opportunity for awakening rather than an obstacle to our goals.

Sometimes things just happen, and there may be nothing we can do to change that, but we can control our responses to events. We don't have to despair in the face of disaster. We can either continue to respond in the way we've always done and get progressively worse, or we can turn things around and use our misfortune to aid our spiritual growth. For example, if we suffer from illness, we should not allow despondency to get the better of us if our recovery is slow. Despite seeing the best doctors and



receiving the best medication, we should accept our situation with courage and fortitude and use it to train our minds to be more accommodating and understanding. No matter what situation we encounter, we can strengthen our minds by incorporating it into our spiritual journey. Another text on mind training known as *The Wheel-Weapon Mind Training* states that our selfish actions create a sword that returns to cut us. This text advises us to accept adversity as both the repercussions for our own negative actions and the method for removing the self-obsession that caused them. As the text says:

> In short, when calamities befall me, it is the weapon
> of my own evil deeds turned upon me, like a smith killed
> by his own sword. From now on I shall be heedful
> of my own sinful actions.[4]

Atisha, one of the greatest Kadampa masters, was invited to Tibet during the second propagation of Buddhism (eleventh to fourteenth centuries). A story associated with Atisha tells how he brought a very difficult Bengali attendant as the object of his mind training, because he'd heard the Tibetans were extremely nice people. However, it wasn't long before he sent the attendant home. When asked why, he replied, "I don't need him anymore. I have you Tibetans." Such stories are common in the Kadampa tradition because they demonstrate that lojong practice is about strengthening the mind, instead of giving in to despair in the face of adversity.

We grow more quickly if we are open to working with difficulties rather than constantly running away from them. The lojong teachings say that when we harden ourselves to suffering, we only become more susceptible to it. The more harsh or cruel

we are toward others, the more vulnerable we become to irritation or anger that is directed at us. Contrary to our instincts, it is by learning to become more open to others and our world that we grow stronger and more resilient. It is our own choice how we respond to others. We can capitulate to the entrenched habits and inner compulsions deeply ingrained in our basic consciousness, or we can recognize the limitations of our situation and apply a considered approach. Our conditioned samsaric minds will always compel us to focus on what we can't control rather than questioning whether we should respond at all. However, once we recognize the mechanical way in which our ego always reacts, it becomes possible to reverse that process.

The great strength of the lojong teachings is the idea that we can train our minds to turn these unfavorable circumstances around and make them work to our advantage. The main criterion is that we never give up in the face of adversity, no matter what kind of world we are confronted with at the personal or political level. When we think there is nothing we can do, we realize there is something we can do, and we see that this "something" is actually quite tremendous.



### 11 • *When beings and the world are filled with evil, transform unfavorable circumstances into the path of enlightenment*

Mind training enables us to utilize adversity instead of allowing misfortune to drive us into a corner with no answers. This tendency to adopt a defeatist attitude in the face of evil is the biggest obstacle to our everyday lives and the greatest hindrance to the attainment of our spiritual goals. We need to be vigilant about the acquisition of more skillful ways to deal with our difficulties



and thereby circumvent the habit of waging war on ourselves. Responding with fortitude, courage, understanding, and openness will yield a stronger sense of self-worth and might even help to mend or ameliorate the situation. This is also how we learn to face unfavorable circumstances and "take them as the path" (Tib. *lam khyer*) so that we are working with our problems rather than against them. Because fighting with others and ourselves only exacerbates our problems, we continually need to examine our negative responses, to see whether they serve any real purpose or whether they're capitulations to the unconscious patterns that habitually influence us.

It is not only when things are going our way and people are kind to us that we can benefit from others. We can also benefit from them when they're not treating us well. This is a very delicate point, especially in the West, where people are quite sensitized to the notions of abuse and victimhood. People sometimes misconstrue this slogan to be promoting a form of exploitation, as if the victim were being told to willingly participate in the continuation of his or her abuse, but that is not its intent at all. This purpose is actually to strengthen our mind, so that we can step outside our solipsistic state and freely enter into the wider world.

If we are skillful and precise about generating love and compassion, it will make us a person of significance—with integrity, dignity, depth, and weight—rather than someone who adds to another's sense of self-inflation or advances his or her own reputation by eliciting a positive response from others.

Dharmaraksita's *The Poison-Destroying Peacock Mind Training* states:

> Just as he pulled the sinner out of the well when he was
> the monkey bodhisattva, so you too should guide evil
> people

Training in Compassion
by Norman Fischer

4

# Transform Bad Circumstances into the Path



THERE'S AN OLD ZEN SAYING: *the whole world's upside down.* In other words, the way the world looks from the ordinary or conventional point of view is pretty much the opposite of the way the world actually is (at least as far as the Zen masters have conceived of it). There's a story that illustrates this. Once there was a Zen master called Bird's Nest Roshi because he meditated in an eagle's nest at the top of a tree. This was quite a dangerous thing to do: one gust of wind, one sleepy moment, and he was done for. He became quite famous for this precarious practice. The Song Dynasty poet Su Shih (who was also a government official) once came to visit him and, standing on the ground far below the meditating master, asked what possessed him to live in such a dangerous manner. The roshi answered, "You call this dangerous? What you are doing is far more dangerous!" Living normally in the world, ignoring death, impermanence, and loss and suffering, as we all routinely do, as if this were a normal and a safe way to live, is actually much more dangerous than going out on a limb to meditate.



As we have been saying, while trying to avoid difficulty may be natural and understandable, it actually doesn't work. We think it makes sense to protect ourselves from pain, but our self-protection ends up causing us deeper pain. We think we have to hold on to what we have, but our very holding on causes us to lose what we have. We're attached to what we like and try to avoid what we don't like, but we can't keep the attractive object and we can't avoid the unwanted object. So, counterintuitive though it may be, avoiding life's difficulties is actually not the path of least resistance: it is a dangerous way to live. If you want to have a full and happy life, in good times and bad, you have to get used to the idea that facing misfortune squarely is better than trying to escape from it.

This is not a matter of grimly focusing on life's difficulties. It is simply the smoothest possible approach to happiness. As we have already learned through the practice of sending and receiving, being willing to breathe in difficulty and transform it into healing, and even joy, is much better than fruitlessly trying to escape from it. Of course, when we can prevent difficulty, we do that. The world may be upside down, but we still have to live in this upside-down world, we have to be practical on its terms. So yes, we do reasonably try to protect our investments, get regular checkups, exercise, take care of our diet, get homeowner's insurance, and so on. Point three doesn't deny any of that. Instead, it addresses the underlying attitude of anxiety, fear, and narrow-mindedness that makes our lives unhappy, fearful, and small.

The practice of **Transforming bad circumstances into the path** is associated with the practice of patience, my all-time favorite spiritual quality. Patience is the capacity to welcome difficulty when it comes, with a spirit of strength, endurance, forbearance, and dignity rather than fear, anxiety, and avoidance. None of us likes to be oppressed or defeated, yet if we can endure oppression and defeat with strength, without whining, we are

ennobled by it. Patience makes this possible. Still, in our culture, we think of patience as passive and unglamorous. Other qualities like love or compassion or insight are much more popular. Naturally, we want the good stuff, the pleasant and inspiring stuff. But when tough times cause our love to fray into annoyance, our compassion to be overwhelmed by our fear, and our insight to evaporate, then patience begins to make sense. To me it is the most substantial, most serviceable, and most reliable of all spiritual qualities. Without it all other qualities are shaky.

The practice of patience is simple enough. When difficulty arises, notice the obvious and not so obvious ways we try to avoid it. The things we say and do, the subtle ways in which our very bodies recoil and clench when someone says or does something to us that we don't like. To practice patience is to simply notice these things and be fiercely present with them (taking a breath helps; returning to mindfulness of the body helps) rather than reacting to them and flailing around. Paying attention to body, paying attention to mind. And when possible, giving ourselves good teachings about the virtue of being with, rather than trying to run away from, the anguish we are feeling in this moment.

There are six slogans under this third point:

**11. Turn all mishaps into the path.**
**12. Drive all blames into one.**
**13. Be grateful to everyone.**
**14. See confusion as Buddha and practice emptiness.**
**15. Do good, avoid evil, appreciate your lunacy, pray for help.**
**16. Whatever you meet is the path.**

The first slogan, **Turn all mishaps into the path,** sounds at first blush completely impossible. How would you do that? When things go all right we are cheerful, we feel good and have





Start Where You Are
by Pema Chodron

# 7
# *Bringing All That We Meet to the Path*

TODAY'S SLOGAN IS "When the world is filled with evil, / Transform all mishaps into the path of bodhi." The word *bodhi* means "enlightenment." This is the basic statement of lojong altogether: how to use the unwanted, unfavorable circumstances of your life as the actual material of awakening. This is the precious gift of the lojong teachings, that whatever occurs isn't considered an interruption or an obstacle but a way to wake up. This slogan is very well suited to our busy lives and difficult times. In fact, it's designed for that: if there were no difficulties, there would be no need for lojong or tonglen.

*Bodhisattva* is another word for the awakening warrior, the one who cultivates bravery and compassion. One point this slogan is making is that on the path of the warrior, or bodhisattva, there is no interruption. The path includes all experience, both serene and chaotic. When things are going well, we feel good. We delight in the beauty of the snow falling outside the windows or the light reflecting off the floor. There's some sense of appreciation. But when the

fire alarm rings and confusion erupts, we feel irritated and upset.

It's all opportunity for practice. There is no interruption. We would like to believe that when things are still and calm, that's the real stuff, and when things are messy, confused, and chaotic, we've done something wrong, or more usually someone *else* has done something to ruin our beautiful meditation. As someone once said about a loud, bossy woman, "What is that woman doing in my sacred world?"

Another point about this slogan is that part of awakening is to cultivate honesty and clear seeing. Sometimes people take the lojong teachings to mean that if you're not to blame others but instead to connect with the feelings beneath your own story line, it would be wrong to say that someone has harmed you. However, part of honesty, clear seeing, and straightforwardness is being able to acknowledge that harm has been done. The first noble truth—the very first teaching of the Buddha—is that there is suffering. Suffering does exist as part of the human experience. People harm each other—we harm others and others harm us. To know that is clear seeing.

This is tricky business. What's the difference between seeing that harm has been done and blaming? Perhaps it is that rather than point the finger of blame, we raise questions: "How can I communicate? How can I help the harm that has been done unravel itself? How can I help others find their own





wisdom, kindness, and sense of humor?" That's a much greater challenge than blaming and hating and acting out.

How can we help? The way that we can help is by making friends with our own feelings of hatred, bewilderment, and so forth. Then we can accept them in others. With this practice you begin to realize that you're capable of playing all the parts. It's not just "them"; it's "us" *and* "them."

I used to feel outrage when I read about parents abusing their children, particularly physically. I used to get righteously indignant—until I became a mother. I remember very clearly one day, when my six-month-old son was screaming and crying and covered in oatmeal and my two-and-a-half-year-old daughter was pulling on me and knocking things off the table, thinking, "I understand why all those mothers hurt their children. I understand perfectly. It's only that I've been brought up in a culture that doesn't encourage me that way, so I'm not going to do it. But at this moment, everything in me wants to eradicate completely these two sweet little children."

So lest you find yourself condescendingly doing tonglen for the other one who's *so* confused, you could remember that this is a practice where compassion begins to arise in you because you yourself have been there. You've been angry, jealous, and lonely. You know what it's like and you know how

sometimes you do strange things. Because you're lonely, you say cruel words; because you want someone to love you, you insult them. Exchanging yourself for others begins to occur when you can see where someone is because you've been there. It doesn't happen because you're better than they are but because human beings share the same stuff. The more you know your own, the more you're going to understand others.

When the world is filled with evil, how do we transform unwanted situations into the path of awakening? One way is to flash absolute bodhichitta. But most of the techniques have to do with relative bodhichitta, which is to say, awakening our connection with the soft spot, reconnecting with the soft spot, not only through the stuff we like but also through the messy stuff.

People have plenty of reasons to be angry. We have to acknowledge this. We are angry. But blaming the other doesn't solve anything.

Ishi had plenty of reasons to be angry. His whole tribe had been killed, methodically, one by one. There was no one left but him. But he wasn't angry. We could learn a lesson from him. No matter what's happening, if we can relate to the soft spot that's underneath our rage and can connect with what's there, then we can relate to the enemy in a way in which we can start to be able to exchange ourself for other. Some sense of being able to communicate





with the enemy—heart to heart—is the only way that things can change. As long as we hate the enemy, then we suffer and the enemy suffers and the world suffers.

The only way to effect real reform is without hatred. This is the message of Martin Luther King, of Cesar Chavez, of Mother Teresa. Gerald Red Elk—a close friend and teacher who was a Sioux elder—told me that as a young man he had been filled with hatred for how his people had been, and continue to be, treated. Because of his hatred, he was alcoholic and miserable. But during the Second World War, when he was in Europe, something in him shifted; he saw that he was being poisoned by his hatred. He came back from the war, and for the rest of his life he tried to bring back the sense of spirit and confidence and dignity of the young people in his tribe. His main message was not to hate but to learn to communicate with all beings. He had a very big mind.

Another slogan says, "All dharma agrees at one point." No matter what the teachings are—shamatha-vipashyana instruction, lojong instruction, any instruction of sanity and health from any tradition of wisdom—the point at which they all agree is to let go of holding on to yourself. That's the way of becoming at home in your world. This is not to say that ego is sin. Ego is not sin. Ego is not something that you get rid of. Ego is something that you come to

# 8

# *Drive All Blames into One*

I'd like to talk a bit about another slogan, "Drive all blames into one." When we say, as in a previous slogan, "When the world is filled with evil," we mean, "When the world is filled with the results of ego clinging." When the world is filled with ego clinging or with attachment to a particular outcome, there is a lot of pain. But these painful situations can be transformed into the path of bodhi. One of the ways to do that is to drive all blames into one. To see how this works, let's look at the result of blaming others.

I had someone buy me the *New York Times* on Sunday so I could look at the result of people blaming others. In Yugoslavia, there's a very painful situation. The Croats and the Serbs are murdering each other, raping each other, killing children and old people. If you asked someone on either side what they wanted, they would say they just want to be happy. The Serbs just want to be happy. They see the others as enemies and they think the only way to be happy is to eradicate the source of their misery. We all think this way. And then if you talked to the other side, they would say that they want the same thing.





This is true in Israel with the Arabs and the Jews. This is true in Northern Ireland with the Protestants and the Catholics. The same is true everywhere, and it's getting worse. In every corner of the world, the same is true.

When we look at the world in this way we see that it all comes down to the fact that no one is ever encouraged to feel the underlying anxiety, the underlying edginess, the underlying soft spot, and therefore we think that blaming others is the only way. Reading just one newspaper, we can see that blaming others doesn't work.

We have to look at our own lives as well: How are we doing with our Juans and Juanitas? Often they're the people with whom we have the most intimate relationships. They really get to us because we can't just shake them off by moving across town or changing seats on the bus, or whatever we have the luxury of doing with mere acquaintances, whom we also loathe.

The point is that if we think there is any difference between how we relate with the people who irritate us and the situation in Northern Ireland, Yugoslavia, the Middle East, or Somalia, we're wrong. If we think there is any difference between that and the way that native people feel about white people or white people feel about black people or any of these situations on earth, we're wrong. We have to start with ourselves. If all people on the planet would start with themselves,

we might see quite a shift in the aggressive energy that's causing such a widespread holocaust.

"Drive all blames into one"—or "Take the blame yourself," if you prefer—sounds like a masochistic slogan. It sounds like, "Just beat me up, just bury me under piles of manure, just let me have it and kick me in the teeth." However, that isn't what it really means, you'll be happy to know.

One way of beginning to practice "Drive all blames into one" is to begin to notice what it feels like when you blame someone else. What's actually under all that talking and conversation about how wrong somebody or something is? What does blame feel like in your stomach? When we do this noticing we see that we are somehow beginning to cultivate bravery as well as compassion and honesty. When these really unresolved issues of our lives come up, we are no longer trying to escape but are beginning to be curious and open toward these parts of ourselves.

"Drive all blames into one" is a healthy and compassionate instruction that short-circuits the overwhelming tendency we have to blame everybody else; it doesn't mean, instead of blaming the other people, blame yourself. It means to touch in with what blame feels like altogether. Instead of guarding yourself, instead of pushing things away, begin to get in touch with the fact that there's a very soft spot under all that armor, and blame is probably one of the most well-perfected armors that we have.





You can take this slogan beyond what we think of as "blame" and practice applying it simply to the general sense that something is wrong. When you feel that something is wrong, let the story line go and touch in on what's underneath. You may notice that when you let the words go, when you stop talking to yourself, there's something left, and that something tends to be very soft. At first it may seem intense and vivid, but if you don't recoil from that and you keep opening your heart, you find that underneath all of the fear is what has been called shaky tenderness.

The truth of the matter is that even though there are teachings and practice techniques, still we each have to find our own way. What does it really mean to open? What does it mean not to resist? What does it mean? It's a lifetime journey to find the answers to these questions for yourself. But there's a lot of support in these teachings and this practice.

Try dropping the object of the blame or the object of what you think is wrong. Instead of throwing the snowballs out there, just put the snowball down and relate in a nonconceptual way to your anger, relate to your righteous indignation, relate to your sense of being fed up or pissed off or whatever it is. If Mortimer or Juan or Juanita walks by, instead of talking to yourself for the next four days about them, you would stop talking to yourself. Simply follow the instruction that you're given, notice that you are talking to yourself, and let it go. This is basic shamatha-vipashyana

instruction—that's what it means by dropping the object. Then you can do tonglen.

If you aren't feeding the fire of anger or the fire of craving by talking to yourself, then the fire doesn't have anything to feed on. It peaks and passes on. It's said that everything has a beginning, middle, and end, but when we start blaming and talking to ourselves, things seem to have a beginning, a middle, and no end.

Strangely enough, we blame others and put so much energy into the object of anger or whatever it is because we're afraid that this anger or sorrow or loneliness is going to last forever. Therefore, instead of relating directly with the sorrow or the loneliness or the anger, we think that the way to end it is to blame it on somebody else. We might just talk to ourselves about them, or we might actually hit them or fire them or yell. Whether we're using our body, speech, mind—or all three—whatever we might do, we think, curiously enough, that this will make the pain go away. Instead, acting it out is what makes it last.

"Drive all blames into one" is saying, instead of always blaming the other, *own* the feeling of blame, *own* the anger, *own* the loneliness, and make friends with it. Use the tonglen practice to see how you can place the anger or the fear or the loneliness in a cradle of loving-kindness; use tonglen to learn how to be gentle to all that stuff. In order to be gentle and create an atmosphere of compassion for yourself, it's





necessary to stop talking to yourself about how wrong everything is—or how right everything is, for that matter.

I challenge you to experiment with dropping the object of your emotion, doing tonglen, and seeing if in fact the intensity of the so-called poison lessens. I have experimented with this, because I didn't believe that it would work. I thought it couldn't possibly be true, and because my doubt was so strong, for a while it seemed to me that it didn't work. But as my trust grew, I found that that's what happens—the intensity of the klesha lessens, and so does the duration. This happens because the ego begins to be ventilated. This big solid me—"*I* have a problem. *I* am lonely. *I* am angry. *I* am addicted"—begins somehow to be aerated when you just go against the grain and own the feelings yourself instead of blaming the other.

The "one" in "Drive all blames into one" is the tendency we have to want to protect ourselves: ego clinging. When we drive all blames into this tendency by owning our feelings and feeling fully, the ongoing monolithic ME begins to lighten up, because it is fabricated with our opinions, our moods, and a lot of ephemeral, but at the same time vivid and convincing, stuff.

I know a fifteen-year-old Hispanic guy from Los Angeles. He grew up in a violent neighborhood and was in gangs from the age of thirteen. He was really smart, and curiously enough, his name was Juan. He

came on really mean. He was tough and he snarled and he walked around with a big chip on his shoulder. You had the feeling that that was all he had going for him: his world was so rough that acting like the baddest and the meanest was the only way he saw to survive in it.

He was one of those people who definitely drive all blames into others. If you asked him a simple question, he would tell you to fuck off. If he could get anybody in trouble, he definitely would do so. From one point of view, he was a total pain in the neck, but on the other hand, he had a flair and brilliance about him. It was always mixed; you hated him and you loved him. He was outrageous and also sparky and funny, but he was mean—he would slap people and push them around. You knew that that was pretty lightweight compared with what he was used to doing at home, where they killed each other on a regular basis.

He was sent to Boulder, Colorado, for the summer to give him a break, to give him a nice summer in the Rocky Mountains. His mother and others were trying to help him get a good education and somehow step out of the nightmare world into which he had been born. The people he was staying with were loosely affiliated with the Buddhist community, and that's how I came to know him. One day he came to an event where Trungpa Rinpoche was, and at the end of this event, Trungpa Rinpoche sang the Shambhala





anthem. This was an awful experience for the rest of us because for some reason he loved to sing the Shambhala anthem in a high-pitched, squeaky, and cracked voice.

This particular event was outside. As Rinpoche sang into a microphone and the sound traveled for miles across the plains, Juan broke down and started to cry. Everyone else was feeling awkward or embarrassed, but Juan just started to cry. Later he said he cried because he had never seen anyone that brave. He said, "That guy, he's not afraid to be a fool." That turned out to be a major turning point in his life because he realized that he didn't have to be afraid to be a fool either. All that persona and chip on the shoulder were guarding his soft spot, and he could let them go. Because he was so sharp and bright, he got the message. His life turned around. Now he's got his education and he's back in L.A. helping kids.

So that's the point, that we tend to drive all blames into Juan because Juan is so obnoxious. We aren't encouraged to get in touch with what's underneath all our words of hatred, craving, and jealousy. We just act them out again and again. But if we practice this slogan and drive all blames into *one,* the armor of our ego clinging will weaken and the soft spot in our hearts will appear. We may feel foolish, but we don't have to be afraid of that. We can make friends with ourselves.

you are alive and not dead, because you have a human body and not some other kind of a body, because the world is a physical world and not an ethereal world, and because all of us together as people are the way we are, bad things are going to happen. It's the most natural, the most normal, the most inevitable thing in the world. It is not a mistake, and it isn't anyone's fault. And we can make use of it to drive our gratitude and our compassion deeper.

The second slogan under this third point of training the heart is famous: **Drive all blames into one.** It, too, is quite counterintuitive, quite upside down. What it is saying is: whatever happens, don't ever blame anyone or anything else, always blame only yourself. Eat the blame and it will make you strong.

There's another Zen story about this one. In Zen there's a formal eating ritual called *oryoki*. In Zen monasteries this is the way the monks eat all of their meals: in robes, seated on meditation cushions on raised platforms, with formal serving and chanting, eating in a dignified prescribed style, even washing out the bowls with water and wiping and putting them away as part of the ritual. When I was a monastic, I ate this way every day, and even now at some of our retreats we practice oryoki. At first the practice seems intimidating and overly complicated, but when you do it for a while, it becomes second nature and you see its beauty. You realize that actually it is the simplest, most elegant, and most efficient way that a group of people could eat together. In a way, it is a bit like mind training itself: it seems at first impossible and complicated, but when you get used to it, you see how beautiful and even how simple and natural it is.

In any case, once in ancient China an abbot was eating oryoki style with the monks in the meditation hall. He discovered a snake head in his soup. This was not snake soup; Zen monasteries are vegetarian. It was definitely a mistake. Probably a farmer monk out in the fields hadn't noticed that he'd cut off the head of a snake while cutting the greens, and the snake's head had found its way into the soup pot because the soup-cook monk also hadn't noticed it. Such things happen, even when you are practicing mindfulness and doing good organic farming and trying not to kill anything. But a mistake is a mistake, and a mistake that ends up in the abbot's bowl is a mistake compounded. The abbot called the *tenzo*, the head cook. "Look!" He held up the snake's head. And the tenzo, without saying a word, snatched the snake's head and swallowed it. He didn't blame the farmer, he didn't blame the soup cook. He didn't make excuses. He didn't feel guilty or ashamed. He ate the blame. It was probably very nourishing.



**Drive all blames into one** is tricky because blaming ourselves, which seems to be what the slogan is recommending, is not exactly blaming ourselves in the ordinary sense. We know perfectly well how to blame ourselves. We've been doing this all of our lives, it is commonplace; we are constantly feeling guilty about everything, and if we are not guilty, we are ashamed. We don't need Buddhist slogans to tell us to do this. But clearly this is not what is meant.

**Drive all blames into one** means that you can't blame anyone for what happens, even if it's actually someone's fault, like the farmer's or the soup cook's. It may be their fault, but you really can't blame them. Something happened, and since it did, there is nothing else to be done but to make use of it. Everything that happens, disastrous as it may be, and no matter whose fault it is, has a potential benefit, no matter how bad it may seem at first. That's the nature of something happening, that it has a potential benefit, and it's your job to find out how to turn it into a benefit. **Drive all blames into one** means that you take the full

appreciation and full responsibility for everything that arises in your life, no matter whose fault it is. This is very bad, this is not what I wanted, this brings many attendant problems. But what are you going to do with it? What can you learn from it? How can you make use of it for the path? These are the questions to ask, and answering them is entirely up to you. Furthermore, you *can* answer them; you do have the strength and the capacity. **Drive all blames into one** is a tremendous practice of cutting through the long human habit of complaining and whining, and finding on the other side of all of that the strength to turn every situation into the path.

Blaming others and blaming yourself are actually not so different when you examine them. How is it possible to blame yourself? The only way is to stand next to yourself wagging your finger at yourself, just the way you wag your finger at someone else you are blaming for something. Blaming yourself requires that you somehow stand outside yourself and scrutinize yourself, removing yourself from yourself so as to make yourself into somebody else that you could blame. This seems absurd, but when you examine it, this is exactly what happens. There is no way to be self-blaming or self- incriminating without self-externalizing. Self-judging is self-externalizing. But the question is, who is it that is standing over there wagging her or his finger at whom? So it doesn't matter whom you blame—self or another, it is more or less the same thing. The important point is to accept that what has happened has actually happened. Without hesitation you eat the snake head. You accept reality, you accept responsibility, and you figure out what to do next. And if you can't shake the recriminations? You breathe them in, you breathe them out, you try your best to stay present and patient and not let your mind run away with you. Here you are. This is it. It is not some other way, it is this way. There is no





place else to go but forward into the next moment. Repeat the slogan as many times as you have to.

The third slogan under point three is: **Be grateful to everyone.** Very simple but very profound.

My wife and I have a grandson. We went to visit him when he was about six weeks old. He couldn't do anything, not even hold up his head, much less feed himself. If he was in trouble, he couldn't ask for help. If suddenly he found his hand in his mouth and he began chewing on his hand, he didn't know what that was or who it belonged to. And if he liked the hand in his mouth and it fell out of his mouth, he couldn't figure out how to get it back in. He had no idea of anything in the world. He had his likes and dislikes, certainly, but he was powerless to do anything but experience them as the world changed every moment, not necessarily to his advantage. Unable to do anything on his own, he was completely dependent on his mother's care and constant attention. She fed him, cuddled him, tried to understand and anticipate his needs, took care of everything, including his peeing and pooping.

We were all at one time precisely in this situation, and someone or other must have cared for us in this same comprehensive way. Without 100 percent total care from someone else, or maybe several others, we would not be here. This is certainly grounds for gratitude to others.

But our dependence on others did not end there. We didn't grow up and become independent. Now we can hold up our heads, fix our dinner, wipe our butt, and we seem not to need our mother or father to take care us—so we think we are autonomous. We think there is no longer a need to be grateful to others for our lives.

But consider this for a moment. Did you grow the food that sustains you every day? Did you till the soil, milk the cow, gather

give us help and feedback through teachings, through bankruptcies, through organizational mishaps, through being millionaires, or through work in general. It is all included. We are taking a lot of chances here. We are not physically taking chances as much as we are taking spiritual chances. That seems to be the basic point of what we are doing. And giving offerings to the dharmapalas is what we have been told to do according to this commentary of Jamgön Kongtrül.





## 16

*Whatever you meet unexpectedly, join with meditation.*

∴

There are three sets of slogans connected with how to carry everyday occurrences into your practice on the path. The first set is connected with relative bodhichitta and includes the slogans "Drive all blames into one" and "Be grateful to everyone." The second set is connected with absolute bodhichitta and comprises the slogan "Seeing confusion as the four kayas / Is unsurpassable shunyata protection." The third set is the special activities connected with following the path. The headline slogan for that is "Four practices are the best of methods." And having discussed those three categories, there is a tail end, which is this slogan "Whatever you meet unexpectedly, join with meditation." It is not necessarily the least, but it is the last. It is the last slogan of the third point of mind training, which is concerned with bringing your experience onto the path properly, and it is actually a very interesting one.



In this slogan, the word *join* has the feeling of putting together butter and bread. You put together or join situations with meditation, or with shamatha-vipashyana. The idea is that whatever comes up is not a sudden threat or an encouragement or any of that bullshit. Instead it simply goes along with one's discipline, one's awareness of compassion. If somebody hits you in the face, that's fine. Or if somebody decides to steal your bottle of Coke, that's fine too. This is somewhat naive, in a way, but at the same time it is very powerful.

Generally speaking, Western audiences have a problem with this kind of thing. It sounds love-and-lighty, like the hippie ethic in which "Everything is going to be okay. Everybody is

everybody's property, everything is everybody's property. You can share anything with anybody. Don't lay ego trips on things." But this is something more than that. It is not love-and-light. It is simply to be open and precise, and to know your territory at the same time. You are going to relate with your own neurosis rather than expanding that neurosis to others.

"Whatever you meet" could be either a pleasurable or a painful situation—but it always comes in the form of a surprise. You think that you have settled your affairs properly: you have your little apartment and you are settled in New York City; your friends come around, and everything is okay; business is fine. Suddenly, out of nowhere, you realize that you have run out of money! Or, for that matter, your boyfriend or your girlfriend is giving you up. Or the floor of your apartment is falling down. Even simple situations could come as quite a surprise: you are in the middle of peaceful, calm sitting practice, everything is fine—and then somebody says, "Fuck you!" An insult out of nowhere. On the other hand, maybe somebody says, "I think you're a fantastic person," or you suddenly inherit a million dollars just as you are fixing up your apartment which is falling apart. The surprise could go both ways.





"Whatever you meet" refers to any sudden occurrence like that. That is why the slogan says that whatever you meet, any situation you come across, should be joined immediately with meditation. Whatever shakes you should without delay, right away, be incorporated into the path. By the practice of shamatha-vipashyana, seeming obstacles can be accommodated on the spot through the sudden spark of awareness. The idea is not to react right away to either painful or pleasurable situations. Instead, once more, you should reflect on the exchange of sending and taking, or tonglen discipline. If you inherit a million dollars, you give it away, saying, "This is not for me. It belongs to all sentient beings." If you are being sued for a million dollars, you say, "I will take the blame, and whatever positive comes out of this belongs to all sentient beings."

Obviously, there might be a problem when you first hear the good news or the bad news. At that point you go, "Aaah!" [Vidyadhara gasps.] That *aaah!* is some sort of ultimate bodhichitta. But after that, you need to cultivate relative bodhichitta, in order to make the whole thing pragmatic. Therefore, you practice the sending and taking of whatever is necessary. The important point is that when you take, you take the worst; and when you give, you give the best. So don't

take any credit—unless you have been blamed. "I have been blamed for stealing all the shoes, and I take the credit!"

In some sense, when you begin to settle down to that kind of practice, to that level of being decent and good, you begin to feel very comfortable and relaxed in your world. It actually takes away your anxiety altogether, because you don't have to pretend at all. You have a general sense that you don't have to be defensive and you don't have to powerfully attack others anymore. There is so much accommodation taking place in you. And out of that comes a kind of power: what you say begins to make sense to others. The whole thing works so wonderfully. It does not have to become martyrdom. It works very beautifully.

That is the end of our discussion of the discipline of carrying whatever occurs in our life onto the path, which is connected with patience and nonaggression.



Start Where You Are
by Pema Chodron

## 12

# *Empty Boat*

I HAD AN INTERVIEW with someone who said she couldn't meditate; it was impossible because she had real-life problems. In the meditation we're doing we're trying to bring home the very supportive message that real-life problems are the material for waking up, not the reason to stop trying. This is news you can use.

Today's slogan is "Whatever you meet unexpectedly, join with meditation." This is a very interesting suggestion. These slogans are pointing out that we can awaken bodhichitta through everything, that nothing is an interruption. This slogan points out how interruptions themselves awaken us, how interruptions themselves—surprises, unexpected events, bolts out of the blue—can awaken us to the experience of both absolute and relative bodhichitta, to the open, spacious quality of our minds and the warmth of our hearts.

This is the slogan about surprises as gifts. These surprises can be pleasant or unpleasant; the main point is that they can stop our minds. You're walking along and a snowball hits you on the side of the head. It stops your mind.

The slogan "Rest in the nature of alaya, the essence" goes along with this. Usually it is considered a slogan for when you're sitting on the cushion meditating; you can then rest your mind in its natural, unbiased state. But the truth is that when the rug is pulled out the same thing happens: without any effort on our part, our mind finds itself resting in the nature of alaya.

I was being driven in a car one day, when a horn honked loudly from behind. A car comes up by my window and the driver's face is purple and he's shaking his fist at me—my window is rolled down and so is his—and he yells, "Get a job!" That one still stops my mind.

The instruction is that when something stops your mind, catch that moment of gap, that moment of big space, that moment of bewilderment, that moment of total astonishment, and let yourself rest in it a little longer than you ordinarily might.

Interestingly enough, this is also the instruction on how to die. The moment of death is apparently a major surprise. Perhaps you've heard this word *samadhi* (meditative absorption), that we remain in samadhi at the moment we die. What that means is that we can rest our minds in the nature of alaya. We can stay open and connect with the fresh, unbiased quality of our minds, which is given to us at the moment of our death. But it's also given to us





throughout every day of our lives! This gift is given to us by the unexpected circumstances referred to in this slogan.

After the gap, when you've begun to talk to yourself again—"That horrible person" or "Wasn't that wonderful that he allowed me to rest my mind in the nature of alaya?"—you could catch yourself and start to do tonglen practice. If you're veering off toward anger, resentment, any of the more unwanted "negative" feelings, getting really uptight and so forth, you could remember tonglen and the lojong logic and breathe in and get in touch with your feeling. Let the story line go and get in touch. If you start talking to yourself about what a wonderful thing just happened, you could remember and send that out and share that sense of delight.

Usually we're so caught up in ourselves, we're hanging on to ourselves so tightly, that it takes a Mack truck knocking us down to wake us up and stop our minds. But really, as you begin to practice, it could just take the wind blowing the curtain. The surprise can be something very gentle, just a shift of attention. Something just catches your eye and your attention shifts, and you can rest your mind in the nature of alaya. When you start talking to yourself again, you can practice tonglen.

The surprise comes in pleasant and unpleasant forms—it doesn't really matter how. The point is

that it comes out of the blue. You're walking down the street, caught in tunnel vision—talking to yourself—and not noticing anything, and even the croak of a raven can wake you up out of your daydream, which is often very thick, very resentful. Something just pops it; a car backfires, and for a moment you look up and see the sky and people's faces and traffic going by and the trees. Whatever is happening there, suddenly you see this big world outside of your tunnel vision.

I had an interesting experience of something surprising me like this on retreat. It was a very strong experience of shunyata, the complete emptiness of things. I had just finished my evening practice. I had been practicing all day, after which you might think I would be in a calm, saintly state of mind. But as I came out of my room and started to walk down the hall, I saw that in our serving area someone had left dirty dishes. I started to get really angry.

Now, in this retreat we put our name on our dishes. Everyone has a plate and a bowl and a mug and a knife and a fork and a spoon, and they all have our name on them. So I was walking down and I was trying to see whose name was on those dishes. I was already pretty sure whose name was on them, because there was only one woman of our group of eight who would leave such a mess. She was always just leaving things around for other people to clean

Page 114



up. Who did she think was going to wash these dishes, her mother? Did she think we were all her slaves? I was really getting into this. I was thinking, "I've known her for a long time, and everyone thinks she's a senior practitioner, but actually she might as well have never meditated for the way she's so inconsiderate of everybody else on this planet."

When I got to the sink, I looked at the plate, and the name on it was "Pema," and the name on the cup was "Pema," and the name on the fork was "Pema," and the name on the knife was "Pema." It was all mine! Needless to say, that cut my trip considerably. It also stopped my mind.

There's a Zen story in which a man is enjoying himself on a river at dusk. He sees another boat coming down the river toward him. At first it seems so nice to him that someone else is also enjoying the river on a nice summer evening. Then he realizes that the boat is coming right toward him, faster and faster. He begins to get upset and starts to yell, "Hey, hey, watch out! For Pete's sake, turn aside!" But the boat just comes faster and faster, right toward him. By this time he's standing up in his boat, screaming and shaking his fist, and then the boat smashes right into him. He sees that it's an empty boat.

This is the classic story of our whole life situation. There are a lot of empty boats out there that we're always screaming at and shaking our fists at. Instead,

we could let them stop our minds. Even if they only stop our mind for one point one seconds, we can rest in that little gap. When the story line starts, we can do the tonglen practice of exchanging ourselves for others. In this way everything we meet has the potential to help us cultivate compassion and reconnect with the spacious, open quality of our minds.



*POINT FOUR*

# SHOWING THE UTILIZATION OF PRACTICE IN ONE'S WHOLE LIFE

## POINT FOUR AND THE PARAMITA OF EXERTION

The fourth point of the seven points of mind training is connected with the paramita of exertion. Exertion basically means being free from laziness. When we use the word *lazy*, we are talking about a general lack of mindfulness and a lack of joy in discipline. When your mind is mixed with dharma, when you have already become a dharmic person, then the connection has already been made. Therefore, you have no problem dealing with laziness. But if you have not made that connection, there might be some problems.

We could discuss exertion in terms of developing joy and appreciation for what you are doing. It is like taking a holiday trip: you are very inspired to wake up in the morning because you are expecting to have a tremendous experience.

Exertion is like the minute before you wake up on a holiday trip: you have some sense of trusting that you are going to have a good time, but at the same time you have to put your effort into it. So exertion is some kind of celebration and joy, which is free from laziness.

It has been said in the scriptures that without exertion you cannot journey on the path at all. We have also said that without the legs of discipline you cannot walk on the path—but even if you have those legs, if you don't have exertion, you can't take any steps. Exertion involves a sense of pushing yourself step by step, little by little. You are actually connecting yourself to the path as you are walking on it. Nevertheless, you are also experiencing some sense of resistance. But that resistance could be overcome by overcoming laziness, by ceasing to dwell in the entertainment of your subconscious gossip, discursive thoughts, and emotionalism of all kinds.

The fourth point of mind training deals with completing your training in your life altogether, from the living situation you are in now until your death. So we are discussing what you can do while you are alive and when you are dying. These two slogans are instructions on how to lead your life.





## 17

*Practice the five strengths,*
*The condensed heart instructions.*

∴

We have five types of energizing factors, or five strengths, so that we can practice our bodhisattva discipline throughout our whole life: strong determination, familiarization, seed of virtue, reproach, and aspiration.

### *Strong Determination*

Number one is strong determination. You are determined to maintain twofold bodhichitta. The practitioner should always have the attitude of maintaining bodhichitta—for this lifetime, this year, this month, this day. Strong determination means not wasting your time. It is also making it a point that you and the practice are one. Practice is your way of strengthening yourself. Sometimes when you get up in the morning, particularly if you have had a late night or you have been partying, you feel very feeble, somewhat uncertain. Quite possibly you wake up with a hangover, feeling very guilty. You wonder whether you were foolish the night before, whether you did absurd things. You wonder what other people think of

you and begin to be afraid that they might have lost their respect for you or that they might have confirmed your feebleness. You do a lot of worrying in that kind of situation.

The idea of the first strength is that as soon as you open your eyes and look out the window, as soon as you wake up, you reaffirm your strong determination to continue with your bodhichitta practice. And you do the same thing when you lie down on your bed at the end of the day, as you reflect back on your day's work, its problems, its frustrations, its pleasures, and all the good and bad things that happened. As you are dozing off, you think with strong determination that as soon as you wake up in the morning you are going to maintain your practice with continual exertion, which means joy. So you have some sense of looking forward to tomorrow, an attitude of looking forward to your day when you wake up in the morning.

Strong determination is connected with developing an attitude toward your practice that is almost like falling completely in love. You would like to go to bed with your lover; you long for it. You would like to wake up with your lover; you long for that, too. You have a sense of appreciation and joy; therefore, your practice does not become torture or torment, it does not become a



cage. Instead, your practice becomes a way of cheering yourself up constantly. Your practice might require a certain amount of exertion, a certain amount of pushing yourself, but you are well connected, so you are pleased to wake up in the morning and you are pleased to go to bed at night. Even your sleep becomes worthwhile; you sleep in a good frame of mind. The idea is one of waking up basic goodness, the alaya principle, and realizing that you are in the right spot, the right practice. So there is a sense of joy in strong determination, which is the first strength.

### *Familiarization*

The second strength is known as familiarization. Because you have already developed strong determination, everything becomes a natural process. Even if you sometimes are mindless, even if you lose your concentration or your awareness, situations will remind you to go back to your practice. This is a process of familiarization in which your dharmic subconscious gossip has begun to become more powerful than your ordinary subconscious gossip. Bodhichitta has become familiar ground in whatever you do—whether vice, virtue, or in between. So you are getting used to bodhichitta as an ongoing realization.

Again, this process is analogous to falling in love. When somebody mentions your lover's name, you feel both pain and pleasure. You feel turned on to that person's name and to anything associated with him or her. In the same way, the natural tendency of mindfulness-awareness, when the concept of egolessness has already evolved in your mind, is to flash on to dharma. You familiarize yourself with it. In other words, you no longer regard dharma as a foreign entity, but you begin to realize that dharma is a household thought, a household word, and a household activity. Each time you uncork your bottle of wine or unpop your Coca-Cola can or pour yourself a glass of water—whatever you do becomes a reminder. You cannot get rid of it; it becomes a natural situation.

So you learn to live with your sanity. That is very hard for many people at the beginning, but once you begin to realize that sanity is part of your being, there shouldn't be any problem. Of course, occasionally you want to take a break. You want to run away and take a vacation from your sanity. You want to do something else. However, your basic strength begins to become more powerful, so that your basic wickedness or insanity is changed into mindfulness and realization and familiarity with wakefulness.





*Seed of Virtue*

Number three is known as the seed of virtue. You have tremendous yearning all the time, so you do not take a rest from your wakefulness. It means not taking a break from your practice, basically speaking, but continuing on—not being content with what you are doing and not taking a break. You do not feel that you have had enough of it or that you have to do something else instead.

At that point, your neurosis about individual freedom and human rights might come up. You might begin to think, "I have a right to do anything I want, and I want to dive to the bottom of hell. I love it! I like it!" That kind of reactionism could happen. But you should pull yourself back up from the bottom of hell—for your own sake. You should realize that you cannot just give in to the little claustrophobia of your own sanity. In this case, virtue means that your body, speech, and mind are all dedicated to propagating bodhichitta in yourself.

*Reproach*

Number four is reproach, reproaching your ego. It is revulsion with samsara. Whenever any ego-centered thought occurs, you should think, "It is because of such clinging to ego that I wander in

samsara and suffer endless pain. Since ego-clinging is the source of pain, if I try to maintain ego, there can be no happiness. Therefore, I must try to tame ego as much as I can." If you even want to talk to yourself, you should talk in this way. In fact, sometimes talking to yourself is very highly recommended, but it obviously depends on what you talk to yourself about. In this case, you are encouraged to say to your ego: "You have created tremendous trouble for me, and I don't like you. You have caused me so much trouble by making me wander in the lower realms of samsara. I have no desire at all to hang around with you. I'm going to destroy you. This 'you'—who are you, anyway? Go away! I don't like you."

Talking to your ego, reproaching yourself in that way, is very helpful. It is worth taking a shower and talking to yourself that way. It is worth sitting on the toilet seat and talking to yourself in that way. It would be a very good thing for you to do when you are driving. Instead of turning on the rock-punk, just turn on your reproach to your ego instead and talk to yourself. If you are being accompanied by somebody you might feel embarrassed, but you can still whisper to yourself. That is the best way to become an eccentric bodhisattva.





*Aspiration*

Number five is aspiration. The practitioner should end each session of meditation practice with the wish (1) to save all sentient beings—by himself, single-handedly, (2) not to forget twofold bodhichitta, even in his or her dreams, and (3) to apply bodhichitta in spite of whatever chaos and obstacles may arise. Because you have experienced joy and celebration in your practice, it does not feel like a burden to you. Therefore, you aspire further and further. You would like to attain enlightenment. You would like to free yourself from neurosis. You would also like to serve all "mother sentient beings"[1] throughout all times, all situations, at any moment. You are willing to become a rock or a bridge or a highway. You are willing to serve any worthy cause that will help the rest of the world. This is the same basic kind of aspiration as in taking the bodhisattva vow. It is also general instruction on becoming a very pliable person, so that the rest of the world can use you as a working basis for their enjoyment of sanity.

Training in Compassion
by Norman Fischer

5

# Make Practice Your Whole Life



BEFORE BEGINNING our discussion of point four, a short review is in order.

We take our point of view so much for granted, as if the world were really as we see it. But it doesn't take much analysis to recognize that our way of seeing the world is simply an old unexamined habit, so strong, so convincing, and so unconscious we don't even see it as a habit. How many times have we been absolutely sure about someone's motivations and later discovered that we were completely wrong? How many times have we gotten upset about something that turned out to have been nothing? Our perceptions and opinions are often quite off the mark. The world may not be as we think it is. In fact, it is virtually certain that it is not.

There's nothing wrong with habits as such. Habits can be good. But in this case, a little reflection shows us that our habitual way of seeing things is not only not optimal, in many instances, large and small, it causes us much difficulty. It's often distorted, causing us extra upset we don't need, and it's too narrow, limiting our possibilities and our love. And yet we are pretty



stuck on our point of view. Clearly, it will take some doing to see through it, and this is why spiritual practice takes time, effort, support, and much repetition. But little by little our way of seeing the world and being in it can shift. With effort, the mind can be trained. That is the underlying assumption of this book.

Mind training begins (point one, **Resolve to begin**) with our getting in touch with our deepest, best motivation. As human beings we are *inherently* motivated to see life truly and generously. This is our human birthright, our human capacity. It is why every human community from the dawn of time to the present has had some form of wholesome and salvific spirituality. But the pressures of life and the persistence of human folly, embedded as these are in our societies and our communities (and therefore also in our own minds and hearts), have obscured this motivation in us. So our course of training begins with getting in touch with our best motivation. (I will note here what the reader will already have noticed: that mind training isn't a linear matter. We don't fully complete one step and go on to the next. We are constantly working on all the steps, partially completing one and then having to go back to it, and all the others, again and again, in circular fashion, which is why a review at this point is probably realistic.)

Point two, **Train in empathy and compassion,** awakens our willingness to be with our own suffering and the suffering of others. Most of us believe suffering is negative, difficult, and to be avoided at all costs. Suffering breaks our spirit and ruins our life. So rather than face the suffering, we blame others or the world for the unfortunate things that have happened to us. Or we blame ourselves, imagining that we are essentially incapable of happiness and right action. All of this amounts to a strategy of distraction. Blame is a way of avoiding the actual suffering we feel. And if we are unwilling to face our own suffering, how much more are we unwilling to take in the suffering of others,

let alone the whole mass of suffering of this troubled world. There is no way we could even entertain such a thought.

But the training proposes that we do exactly that. That we take in our own suffering, the suffering of our friends, of our communities, and of the world, because nothing is more effective than this to change our habitual point of view. We develop this capacity with the practice of sending and receiving, which begins with our willingness to receive and heal our own pain. Of course our efforts to do this will encounter powerful resistance within us. Suffering breeds resistance and loves it, loves our fear, gobbles it up, becoming bigger and stronger. The more we try to push away the suffering, the more difficult it is to bear. But through the practice of sending and receiving, repeated patiently over time, we discover that when we stop resisting, we can bear the suffering with much more equanimity than we previously thought possible. The monster you run away from in the dark becomes more and more frightening the faster and further you flee. The monster you face in your own house becomes a pussycat, which sometimes scratches and sometimes makes a mess on the floor, but you love her anyway. We discover we don't have to be afraid of suffering, that we can transform it into healing and love. And this is not as hard to do as we might have thought. Whatever our state, whatever our capacity, we can do it. We need only start from where we are and go as far as we can.

Doing this, we discover that our practice (and our life) isn't about—and has never been about—ourselves. As long as spiritual practice (and life) remains only about you, it is painful. Of course, your practice does begin with you. It begins with self-concern. You take up practice out of some need or some desire or pain. But the very self-concern pushes you beyond self-concern. Zen master Dogen writes, "To study Buddhism is to study the self, to study the self is to forget the self." When you study yourself thoroughly, this is what happens: you forget yourself, because





the closer you get to yourself, the closer you get to life and to the unspeakable depth that is life, the more a feeling of love and concern for others naturally arises in you. To be self-obsessed is painful. To love others is happy. Loving others inspires us to take much better care of ourselves, as if we were our own mother. We take care of ourselves so that we can benefit others.

In this spirit we realize (point three, **Transform bad circumstances into the path**) that we no longer have to strategize constant self-protection, as we have been doing all of our lives. We see that suffering doesn't have to be so frightening, that we can make use of it to deepen and strengthen our life. This changes everything. We are now capable of making use of whatever happens to us, the good as well as the bad, and no longer have to be anxious and constantly obsessed with making sure we get what we want and avoid what we don't want, that we always win and never lose. Now we are free to win and free to lose. So we live with a lot less fear and anxiety. And even though the usual stuff keeps on coming (fear, avoidance, and so on), we have a new attitude toward it. We are more patient and accepting—and even appreciative—of our own foibles. Like everyone else, we struggle sometimes. Like everyone else, our lives are colorful, sad, and sometimes painful. But they are beautiful, and we're living them with others.

With this, we are ready for point four, **Make practice your whole life.**

This point is both an effort that we make going forward and a result of what we have already done.

People often complain to me that they don't have time for spiritual practice. In today's busy world, it seems that we can barely cover the basics, let alone refine our lives further with spirituality. When spiritual practice is an item at the bottom of our long to-do lists (which are these days embedded in task-

accomplishment apps on our smartphones), it is very hard to get to it, and usually we don't. My answer to this is simple: spiritual practice is not an item on the list. It is not a task we do. It is *how* we do what we do. It's a spirit, an attitude. You are breathing all day long. It doesn't take any more time to be conscious, let's say, of three breaths in a row. Your mind is thinking distractedly all day long. It doesn't take any more time to intentionally think of a slogan you are working with. Even meditation practice, which seems to take time you ordinarily would be filling with some other activity, actually takes much less time when you realize how much time you save when your mind is a bit calmer and more focused and when your day begins with processing and settling with your life rather than rushing headlong into today with yesterday as yet undigested. Practice, in the light of this point, is not something we are doing over and above our life. It *is* our life. It is the way we live.

In Zen, traditional training expresses and extends this point. The template of the Zen life is the monastery, where you meditate when it's time to do that, eat when it's time to eat, walk when walking, talk when talking, sleep when sleeping. In other words, you do what you are doing fully, wholeheartedly, constantly trying to pay attention and be present. You use the task at hand as the meditation object, just coming back over and over again to where you are and to what is going on, just as, in meditation, you come back over and over again to the breath, without worry or fuss. As the great master Zhaozhou answered when asked about the process and meaning of spiritual practice, "Have you eaten? Then wash your bowls!"

For contemporary Zen practitioners, the template of the monastery can be applied in the tasks of daily living. We all eat, sleep, walk, work, and so on. It doesn't take extra time to do these things in the spirit of spiritual practice. **Making practice your whole life** can be seen as a simple matter of mindfulness.





Simply doing whatever you are doing with awareness, carefulness, and love. And when you notice you are not doing this, coming back to it. Theoretically, there is no reason why anyone can't do this, all of the time. Realistically, our habits are strong, and we probably need as much support as we can get to encourage us and keep us on the beam. (I hope this book is one such support.)

There are two slogans under this point. The first is:

**17. Cultivate a serious attitude** (traditionally: **Practice the five strengths**).

Probably our biggest challenge in spiritual practice is not that we don't have the time or the talent or the focus or the right atmosphere or setting. Probably the biggest challenge is simply that we don't take ourselves seriously enough. Though we may believe that spiritual practice is a good idea and self-transformation a possibility, when it comes down to it, we don't really think it's possible for *us*. Or maybe we actually don't *want* to transform. Of course we want to transform. Especially if our lives are noticeably unsatisfactory. But at the same time, we don't. Our motivations are mixed. So we can't be truly serious about our practice. This circles us back again to the first point, **Resolve to begin,** which asks us to reflect on our life in order to rediscover our best motivation. Here, in slogan 17, we are given another aid to finding and strengthening our motivation, the *Five strengths,* a traditional list of practices designed for just this purpose. The *Five strengths* are:

1. *Strong determination*
2. *Familiarization*
3. *Seed of virtue*
4. *Reproach*
5. *Aspiration*

**Strong determination** is exactly what it sounds like. It is a practice to teach us how to take ourselves seriously as dignified spiritual practitioners. To feel as if, whatever our shortcomings (and it is absolutely necessary that we are honest, even brutally honest, about our shortcomings at every point), we also have within us a powerful energy to accomplish the spiritual path. And that we do want to do this: it is of all things the most important thing for us.

When you stop to think about it, what *are* you after in your life, anyway? What is it that you most would like to accomplish or manifest with this one short, precious life you have been given? Of course you want to love and take care of your family and accomplish something in this world. You want to be someone, have some kind of identity in the world. We all need this and all it entails, in whatever way is possible for us to establish it. But why? Because we want to be good people, we want to fulfill our highest human destiny.

Page 123

At our best, we all have high purposes, noble goals, even if we are modest about them. But we forget them. The daily grind takes us far from our reasons for doing what we do. We get lost in the details, absorbed in the problems. To practice strong determination is to intentionally stay connected to our higher goals and to remind us that we truly are spiritual practitioners, we are heroes, we can make effort, we can do what needs to be done to live a noble life.

To make this into a concrete practice, you could compose a short speech for yourself to this effect. Don't be afraid to be forthright and resolute about it and to use bold language. "Well, I might look like a merely ordinary person, but I am not. I am a spiritual warrior, a spiritual hero, and though this may not be apparent to others, inside it is clear to me. I definitely will be a sage! Maybe it will take a long time, maybe I won't complete





the job in this lifetime. But there's no doubt about it whatsoever. I'm no longer committed as I was before to be stuck with my ordinary limited point of view; I'm leaving that behind. I'm going forward!" That's the spirit of *Strong determination.* So compose a speech like this for yourself and repeat it to yourself from time to time. In meditation, on the commuter train, whenever you can.

The second strength builds on this first one. With *Familiarization,* with repetition and repeated drill, comes the establishment of a new habit that is not, like the old ones, unconscious but instead is a habit you have thought about and chosen to cultivate for reasons that come out of your best motivations. *Familiarization* is brain washing, washing out an otherwise musty brain, freshening it up. Left alone with its unconscious habits, the mind goes down predictably dull and often disadvantageous pathways. We think, feel, and see in a way that doesn't serve us very well—and we assume that this is a fixed and necessary experience. It's not! *Familiarization* is repetition of teachings and intentional practices for the purpose of establishing new pathways, new habits. As we've said, the brain is plastic, fluid, it changes with our inner and outer activity. When we go to the gym to lift weights or do aerobics, we know that these activities are not something we will do once or twice. Their virtue is in the drill, the repetition over time; this is what changes our body. With *Familiarization* the habits we want to inculcate will little by little become automatic. When someone asks you for your address or phone number, you probably don't say, "Let me think about it." You don't need to reflect or consult with anyone. The information is at the tip of your tongue because you are fully familiar with it. You haven't needed to make a special study of the information, because by simple repetition with interest over time you have made these facts part of you. The same thing hap-

pens with spiritual practice. Faith, God, and inspiration aside, repetition is the true soul of spirituality.

This is a sad fact: If someone does ask you for your phone number, your address, your bank account, your place of business, and so on, you can answer easily because these things are uppermost in your mind. You refer to them every day. But if someone asks you to account for the condition of your soul, probably your response would not be at the tip of your tongue. Probably you would be embarrassed or confused by the question. How good is it that we are quite familiar with our outer circumstances and activities but quite unfamiliar with our inner lives, with our soul, our spirit? The practice of *Familiarization* proposes that we correct this imbalance and become just as fluent in our spiritual lives as we are in our material lives.

*Seed of virtue* is the recognition of our noble heritage as human beings. As we discussed under the first point, it's a rare and precious thing to be a human being. We all understand this. This is why we send money overseas in times of disaster, why we know it is wrong to take a human life. Not just because it is illegal. Because human life is sacred, precious. The heritage, the legacy, of being human is to manifest wisdom, compassion, and loving-kindness, to be fully worthy of our lives, worthy of admiration and celebration. This is your nature, my nature, the nature of every human being. In this we are all the same. No one is more worthy, more sacred, than you are. And you are no more worthy, or sacred, than anyone else.

Given this as a basis for our life, we can be perfectly aware of our many faults. Faults are perfectly natural, like earthquakes or floods. They may have bad consequences sometimes, but they are to be expected. The more we can learn to anticipate their periodic eruptions, the better off we will be.

But along with these various faults, at the same time, deep





within us is this beautiful human heritage. The virtue of our great saints and spiritual exemplars the world over is not to set up their supposed perfection as a reproach to us. It is the opposite. Their example shows us what we could be and what we are. To practice *Seed of virtue* is to remind ourselves every day of who we really are. None of the world's great spiritual exemplars has ever said, "Look at me, how great I am, pay attention to me!" All have said, "I am what you are."

The Dalai Lama is fond of saying, "I'm just a simple monk, I'm trying my best," and I believe he really means this. He's trying his best to practice. And if we admire him, what we are really admiring is not him but this potential within ourselves. To cultivate this attitude is the third strength, *Seed of virtue.*

The fourth strength, *Reproach,* is not so easy to understand or to practice, because it is so close to something we do all the time that's not very helpful. Here is a case in which the Buddhist or traditional Asian viewpoint is so different from our contemporary way of looking at things that we have to be very precise and clear with how we understand and work with this slogan.

We are all, of course, quite familiar with reproach: we reproach ourselves and others constantly; we are quite good at being critical, even hypercritical. *Judgmental,* as we say. Which we take not to be a good thing. But the practice of *Reproach* is precisely that we be judgmental. But how, and with what attitude and purpose?

We have generally, most of us, a very low sense of respect for ourselves. So we feel that we cannot afford to be critical of ourselves for fear that we'll immediately become vicious. So we do the next best thing: we blame someone else, turning our viciousness on him or her. Or maybe we are beyond this, and as good spiritual people we make a practice of not blaming others. Instead we are merciless with ourselves.

But if you have practiced *Strong determination,* if you have

practiced *Familiarization,* if you have cultivated the *Seed of virtue,* you can have a much more affectionate relationship with your imperfect self. And you can view yourself with much more generosity, just as you would a child you were trying to teach.

If we are honest we have to admit that we have a lot of bad habits that keep appearing over and over again, despite all of our good intentions. Of course! Look at all we've been through! Look at our crazy parents! Look at this troubled world we're living in! If we are wrecks inside, it's no mystery why. It's the most natural thing in the world. But it's okay, because we know that underneath that, we have a sacred noble human nature. In that spirit and with that knowledge we can correct ourselves without brutality or aggression. We can complain to ourselves ("Hey, you did it again! Cut that out! Stop that! What's the matter with you?") and still maintain a gentleness and sense of humor.

Generally we judge ourselves and others for their essential character. This is why when we are judgmental we feel so guilty or so full of condemnation and contempt. But in the practice of **Reproach** it's as if we were creating the bad habit, the greed or anger or selfishness, *to be a person in its own right.* And it's that person, not ourselves or someone else, that we reproach.

With regard to ourself, for example, we may try to become as familiar as we can with some of our most popular bad habits. Take jealousy, for instance. Instead of being spun around by our jealousy, confused and full of passion and self-blame, as if the jealousy were somehow a substance ingrained in our essential character, that it was part of us, we study the jealousy. We become curious, almost scientific about it. How does it feel inside? How does it cause us to think and want to act? We study the jealousy until we can see it as a kind of entity, as if it were an independent person rather than a part of ourselves. And then we can reproach the jealousy. "Here you are again, my skillful, silly old opponent. Many times you have fooled me and taken me in,





but not this time! I reproach you with all my heart! I see you but I am not taken in!" The jealousy is not us, it is not ourselves, it is simply something very disadvantageous that is arising. We don't have to be so convinced by it and we don't have to take it so personally .

In his commentary on this slogan, the great Tibetan master Trungpa Rimpoche spoke of making speeches to our various bad habits: To our selfishness, for instance, we could say, "You know, you are a terrible person, you have caused me so much trouble, I'm so tired of you, and you know I just don't like you anymore! It's all because of you that I have all of these problems, and you know what? I'm not going to hang around with you anymore! And who are you anyway? I'm fed up, go away! I have absolutely no use for you at all!"

To be able to address your own selfishness like this would be quite unusual. Because this is exactly *not* how we view our various faults. We don't think of our selfishness as being an opponent, an adversary in its own right. We do think of it as ours and that we ought to be ashamed ofit. The idea that my selfishness is somehow an independent entity that I can reproach and disidentify with doesn't come naturally to me.

And yet, if I think about it for a moment, why not? My experience shows me that my life consists of experiences that are constantly coming and going. As we discussed earlier, even my sense of self is something that comes and goes; there is no place it exists and no particular experience or substance I can point to that is "me." I can think this through, but even more, my daily meditation practice has given me the visceral experience that it is certainly so. There is no *essential* me. Things are coming and going, here, within the sphere of what I call my consciousness, and that is all. So it really is true—my jealousy isn't mine and isn't me. I am responsible for *dealing* with it—which I do by practicing **Reproach.** But I am not responsible for its being there; it just

arises, and it isn't really mine. It's not necessary at this point in our training that we completely grasp this point. We will grasp it eventually, little by little, as we continue. The training itself will show us that we don't have to take everything so personally. That we can have a much more flexible and even humorous attitude toward ourselves and our many faults than we ever thought possible. And once our attitude loosens up, everything becomes much more workable.

The fifth strength, *Aspiration,* is vow or commitment. I referred earlier to the Four Bodhisattva Vows in Zen practice. These are traditionally chanted by the assembly after a dharma talk, and I often wonder what people are thinking as they intone "Beings are numberless, I vow to save them; delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them; Dharma gates [entrances to the practice] are boundless, I vow to enter them; Buddha's Way is unsurpassable, I vow to become it." These are certainly very impractical commitments. In fact, they are literally, precisely impossible to fulfill. But why not have aspirations so lofty they are impossible to fulfill? To have aspirations any less lofty would be to sell ourselves short. The trick is to keep on making effort in the direction of fulfillment of the aspiration but not to think that you will actually complete the job—and not to be dismayed or discouraged by this but instead to be encouraged by it. This is a good approach because you will always have more to do and always be spurred on by the strength of your commitment. To commit to something you actually could accomplish is such small potatoes for a lofty, sacred human being like yourself.

The Four Bodhisattva Vows are extravagant and enthusiastic, vows of one who is committed to bodhicitta, the aspiration to becoming awakened for the benefit of others (as we discussed earlier). While the word *bodhisattva* may be a Buddhist word, I think it stands for something more basically human. We all want to be compassionate, giving, loving people at the bottom of our





hearts. This is a human, not a Buddhist, aspiration. We would all like to serve others, to feel for others, to love others with everything we've got. We would all like to be a light for the world.

We admire people who are wealthy, famous, or skillful in some way, but it's not hard to be like that. If you are born with some talent, a little luck, and you know the right people, you can do that. Many people do that. Much more difficult and much more wonderful is to be a bodhisattva. Not someone that many people know about and talk about but someone who has the almost magical power of spreading happiness and confidence wherever he goes. What a vision for your life, for your family, to be a light for those around you! To think of everything you do, every action, every social role, every task, as being just a cover for, an excuse for, your real aspiration, to be a bodhisattva, spreading goodness wherever you go. This requires no luck (even if everything goes wrong in your life, you can do it), no special skills, no need to meet special people and get special breaks. We can all do this. This is the aspiration we should all cultivate for training the mind.

There is one more slogan under this fourth point, and it is a very important one:

**18. Practice for death as well as for life.**

The first three points mostly have to do with practice under special circumstances, especially in difficult times, times of suffering or trouble. Compassion requires that we be able to face our own pain and the pain of others; turning difficult circumstances into the path also requires us to face difficulty and learn how to reverse the natural tendency to run away from rather than face what's hard. Since so many people identify spiritual practice with feeling good and having pleasant experiences, it is crucially important that our training begin with these realities.

# 13
# *Teachings for Life and Death*

THE FIVE STRENGTHS are the subject of two of the slogans: "Practice the five strengths, / The condensed heart instructions" and "The mahayana instruction for ejection of consciousness at death / Is the five strengths: how you conduct yourself is important."

The underlying point of all our study and practice is that the happiness we seek is here to connect with at any time. The happiness we seek is our birthright. To discover it we need to be more gentle with ourselves, more compassionate toward ourselves and our universe. The happiness we seek cannot be found through grasping, trying to hold on to things. It cannot be found through getting serious and uptight about wanting things to go in the direction that we think will bring happiness. We are always taking hold of the wrong end of the stick. The point is that the happiness we seek is already here and it will be found through relaxation and letting go rather than through struggle.

Does that mean you can just sleep all day? Does that mean there's nothing you need to do? The answer is no. There does seem to be something that we





have to do. These slogans tell us to practice the five strengths: strong determination, familiarization, seed of virtue, reproach, and aspiration. The five strengths are five sources of inspiration to trust that we've got all that we need in the palm of our hand.

These are the heart instructions on how to live and how to die. Last year I spent some time with two people who were dying. Jack and Jill were both old friends; they each had a very different relationship with their death. They each had the privilege of knowing quite a few months in advance that they were going to die, which is a great gift. Both of them began to fade away. When things began to slip away on Jack, when his body stopped working well for him, he was angry at the beginning, but then something started to shift, and he began to relax. When it was clear that everything was dissolving and slipping away, he seemed to get happier and happier. It felt as if he were letting go of all the things that had kept him separate from his basic goodness, letting everything go. He would say things like, "There's nothing to do, there's nothing to want," and he would start to laugh. Day by day he wasted away more, but that was not a fundamental problem; this dissolving was very liberating for him.

The external situation was the same for Jill, but she got scared, and she began to struggle against the whole process. As her body started to waste away and

there was less to hold on to, she became more grim and terrified, clenching her teeth and her hands. She was facing a vast abyss and was going to be pushed over into it, and she was screaming with terror, "No! No! No!"

I understood why I practice: we can discover the process of letting go and relaxing during our lifetime. In fact, that's the way to live: stop struggling against the fact that things are slipping through our fingers. Stop struggling against the fact that nothing's solid to begin with and things don't last. Knowing that can give us a lot of space and a lot of room if we can relax with it instead of screaming and struggling against it.

The five strengths are instruction on how to live and how to die. Actually, there's no difference. The same good advice applies to both, because if you know how to die then you know how to live and if you know how to live then you'll know how to die. Suzuki Roshi said, "Just be willing to die over and over again." As each breath goes out, let it be the end of that moment and the birth of something new. All those thoughts, as they come up, just see them and let them go, let the whole story line die; let the space for something new arise. The five strengths address how to give up trying all the time to grasp what's ungraspable and actually relax into the space that's there. Then what do we find? Maybe that's the point. We're afraid to find out.





*Strong determination*. The first strength is strong determination. Rather than some kind of dogged pushing through, strong determination involves connecting with joy, relaxing, and trusting. It's determination to use every challenge you meet as an opportunity to open your heart and soften, determination not to withdraw. One simple way to develop this strength is to develop a strong-hearted spiritual appetite. To do this, some kind of playful quality is needed. When you wake up in the morning, you can say: "I wonder what's going to happen today. This may be the day that I die. This may be the day that I understand what all these teachings are about." The Native Americans, before they went into battle, would say, "Today is a good day to die." You could also say, "Today is a good day to live."

Strong determination gives you the vehicle that you need to find out for yourself that you have everything it takes, that the fundamental happiness is right here, waiting. Strong determination not to shut anything out of your heart and not to close up takes a sense of humor and an appetite, an appetite for enlightenment.

*Familiarization*. The next strength is familiarization. What familiarization means is that the dharma no longer feels like a foreign entity: your first thought becomes dharmic. You begin to realize that all the teachings are about yourself; you're here to study

yourself. Dharma isn't philosophy. Dharma is basically a good recipe for how to cook yourself, how to soften the hardest, toughest piece of meat. Dharma is good instruction on how to stop cheating yourself, how to stop robbing yourself, how to find out who you really are, not in the limited sense of "I need" and "I'm gonna get," but through developing wakefulness as your habit, your way of perceiving everything.

We talk about enlightenment as if it's a big accomplishment. Basically, it has to do with relaxing and finding out what you already have. The enlightened "you" might be a slightly different "you" from the one you're familiar with, but it still has hair growing out of its head, still has taste buds, and when it gets the flu, snot comes out of its nose. Enlightened, however, you might experience yourself in a slightly less claustrophobic way, maybe a completely nonclaustrophobic way.

Familiarization means that you don't have to search any further, and you know it. It's all in the "pleasantness of the presentness," in the very discursive thoughts you're having now, in all the emotions that are coursing through you; it's all in there somehow.

*Seed of virtue*. The third strength is called the seed of virtue. In effect, this is buddha nature or basic goodness. It's like a swimming pool with no sides that you're swimming in forever. In fact, you're made out





of water. Buddha nature isn't like a heart transplant that you get from elsewhere. "It isn't as if you're trying to teach a tree to talk," as Rinpoche once said. It's just something that can be awakened or, you might say, relaxed into. Let yourself fall apart into wakefulness. The strength comes from the fact that the seed is already there; with warmth and moisture it sprouts and becomes visible above the ground. You find yourself looking like a daffodil, or feeling like one, anyway. The practice is about softening or relaxing, but it's also about precision and seeing clearly. None of that implies searching. Searching for happiness prevents us from ever finding it.

*Reproach*. The fourth strength is called reproach. This one requires talking to yourself: "Ego, you've done nothing but cause me problems for ages. Give me a break. I'm not buying it anymore." Try it in the shower. You should talk to yourself all the time without embarrassment. When you see yourself starting to spin off in frivolity, say to yourself, "Begone, you troublemaker!"

This approach can be slightly problematic because we don't usually distinguish between who we think we are and our ego. The more gentleness that comes up, the more friendliness you feel for yourself, the more this dialogue is fruitful. But to the degree that you actually are hard on yourself, then this dialogue could just increase your self-criticism.

Over the years, with encouragement from wonderful teachers, I have found that, rather than blaming yourself or yelling at yourself, you can teach the dharma to yourself. Reproach doesn't have to be a negative reaction to your personal brand of insanity. But it does imply that you see insanity as insanity, neurosis as neurosis, spinning off as spinning off. At that point, you can teach the dharma to yourself.

This advice was given to me by Thrangu Rinpoche. I was having anxiety attacks, and he said that I should teach the dharma to myself, just good simple dharma. So now I say, "Pema, what do you really want? Do you want to shut down and close off, do you want to stay imprisoned? Or do you want to let yourself relax here, let yourself die? Here's your chance to actually realize something. Here's your chance not to be stuck. So what do you really want? Do you want always to be right or do you want to wake up?"

Reproach can be very powerful. You yourself teach yourself the dharma in your own words. You can teach yourself the four noble truths, you can teach yourself about taking refuge—*anything* that has to do with that moment when you're just about to re-create samsara as if you personally had invented it. Look ahead to the rest of your life and ask yourself what you want it to add up to.

Each time you're willing to see your thoughts as empty, let them go, and come back to your breath,





you're sowing seeds of wakefulness, seeds of being able to see the nature of mind, and seeds of being able to rest in unconditional space. It doesn't matter that you can't do it every time. Just the willingness, the strong determination to do it, is sowing the seeds of virtue. You find that you can do it more spontaneously and naturally, without its being an effort. It begins with some sense of exertion and becomes your normal state. That's the seed of bodhichitta ripening. You find out who you really are.

*Aspiration*. The last strength, aspiration, is also a powerful tool. A heartfelt sense of aspiring cuts through negativity about yourself; it cuts through the heavy trips you lay on yourself. The notion of aspiration is simply that you voice your wishes for enlightenment. You say to yourself, for yourself, about yourself, and by yourself things like, "May my compassion for myself increase." You might be feeling completely hopeless, down on yourself, and you can voice your heartfelt aspiration: "May my sense of being obstructed decrease. May my experience of wakefulness increase. May I experience my fundamental wisdom. May I think of others before myself." Aspiration is much like prayer, except that there's nobody who hears you.

Aspiration, yet again, is to talk to yourself, to be an eccentric bodhisattva. It is a way to empower yourself. In fact, all five of these strengths are ways to em-

power yourself. Buddhism itself is all about empowering yourself, not about getting what you want.

The five strengths are the heart instructions on how to live and how to die. Whether it's right now or at the moment of your death, they tell you how to wake up to whatever is going on.



Training in Compassion
by Norman Fischer

6

# Assess and Extend

IF OUR FOURTH POINT was **Make practice your whole life,** don't think of it as something extra, this fifth point is the necessary next step. Remember, we are talking about a process of training. That is, envisioning your life as a process of opening and growing rather than simply enduring what happens to you, willy-nilly. If you are going to adopt a practice or training point of view for your life, you will need a way of assessing, of seeing how you are doing as the process unfolds. You will need feedback.

My wife is a middle school teacher. She is always giving her students various kinds of quizzes and tests. Maybe the students think of these unpleasant events as ways their worth or skill is being evaluated. But my wife understands that the point of such assessments is not to determine the students' worth or skill level. The point is to check whether they are learning the material, and if they are not, in what ways they are deficient. With that information, she can adjust and pinpoint her instruction so that learning—which is never perfect and never ends—can be maximized. That's what this fifth point is about. It consists of four watchwords, four slogans, for keeping you on the beam and giving you

tools to see how you are doing at any given point. Once you see how it's going, you can extend and refine your practice. (Again I caution the reader to go lightly. Do not fall into middle school mind. We are not worried about grades or even progress. We do not want to turn corrosive judgment on ourselves, which will produce discouragement. The point is simply to remain engaged and informed so we can keep on making a steady, solid, interested effort.)

This point consists of four slogans:

**19. There's only one point.**
**20. Trust your own eyes.**
**21. Maintain joy (and don't lose your sense of humor).**
**22. Practice when you're distracted.**

**There's only one point,** and it's so simple, however much we keep on forgetting it: Don't be so stuck on yourself! Open up! Mind training comes down to this. Keeping this slogan close by at all times is a good tool for seeing how you are doing. Whenever you feel upset, unhappy, dissatisfied, in a snit, frozen, constricted, bound—check and see. Probably if you reflect deeply enough, you'll come to the realization that the ultimate cause of this unpleasantness is that you are in one way or another stuck on yourself, favoring yourself and your own needs, desires, and viewpoint more than is necessary. Even recognizing this, and opening up just a little, relieves the pressure.

Think about it: you are living in a big world, with lots going on, many problems, many challenges, sad things, happy things. And all of this is the sphere of your life, it's the ocean you swim in, the air you breathe; you are not separate from it for even a moment. Why would you want to artificially, conceptually, remove yourself from life's great ocean and lock yourself up in the tiny prison of self, in which, despite your best efforts, you constantly feel confined and under attack? The whole of the prac-







*POINT FIVE*

# EVALUATION OF MIND TRAINING

## POINT FIVE AND THE PARAMITA OF MEDITATION

The fifth category of mind training is connected with the paramita of meditation. The idea of the paramita of meditation is basically that you are beginning to catch some possibility of the fever of knowledge, or prajna, already. Therefore, you begin to develop a tremendous sense of awareness and mindfulness. It has been said that the practice of meditation, that kind of mindfulness and awareness, is like protecting yourself from the lethal fangs of wild animals. These wild animals are related to the *kleshas*, the neurosis we experience. If there is not the mindfulness and awareness practice of the paramita of meditation, then we have no way of protecting ourselves from those attacks, and we also have no facilities to teach others or to work for the liberation of other sentient beings. That particular concept of meditation permeates this next section of lojong.

## 19

*All dharma agrees at one point.*

∴

In this case, *dharma* has nothing to do with the philosophical term *dharma*, or "things as they are"; *dharma* here simply means "teachings." We could say that all teachings are basically a way of subjugating or shedding our ego. And depending on how much the lesson of the subjugation of ego is taking hold in us, that much reality is presented to us. All dharmas that have been taught are connected with that. There is no other dharma. No other teachings exist, particularly in the teachings of Buddha.

In this particular journey the practitioner can be put on a scale, and his or her commitment can be measured. It is like the scale of justice: if your ego is very heavy, you go down; if your ego is light, you go up. So giving up our personal project of ego-aggrandizement and attaining the impersonal project of enlightenment depends on how heavy-handed or how open you are.

Whether teachings are hinayana or mahayana, they all agree. The purpose of all of them is simply to overcome ego. Otherwise, there is no purpose at all. Whatever sutras, scriptures, or



commentaries on the teachings of Buddhism you read, they should all connect with your being and be understood as ways of taming your ego. This is one of the main differences between theism and nontheism. Theistic traditions tend to build up an individual substance of some kind, so that you can then step out and do your own version of so-called bodhisattvic actions. But in the nontheistic Buddhist tradition, we talk in terms of having no being, no characteristics of egohood, and therefore being able to perform a much broader version of bodhisattva activity altogether.

The hinayana version of taming ego is to cut through sloppiness and wandering mind by the application of shamatha discipline, or mindfulness. Shamatha practice cuts through the fundamental mechanism of ego, which is that ego has to maintain itself by providing lots of subconscious gossip and discursive thoughts. Beyond that, the vipashyana principle of awareness also allows us to cut through our ego. Being aware of the whole environment and bringing that into our basic discipline allows us to become less self-centered and more in contact with the world around us, so there is less reference point to "me" and "my"-ness.

In the mahayana, when we begin to realize the bodhisattva principle through practicing bodhi-

chitta, our concern is more with warmth and skillfulness. We realize we have nothing to hang on to in ourselves, so we can give away each time. The basis of such compassion is nonterritoriality, non-ego, no ego *at all*. If you have that, then you have compassion. Then further warmth and workability and gentleness take place as well. "All dharma agrees at one point" means that if there is no ego-clinging, then all dharmas are one, all teachings are one. That is compassion.

In order to have an affectionate attitude to somebody else, you have to be without ground to begin with. Otherwise you become an egomaniac, trying to attract people out of your seduction and passion alone, or your arrogance. Compassion develops from shunyata, or nonground, because you have nothing to hold on to, nothing to work *with*, no project, no personal gain, no ulterior motives. Therefore, whatever you do is a clean job, so to speak. So compassion and shunyata work together. It is like sunning yourself at the beach: for one thing you have a beautiful view of the sea and ocean and sky and everything, and there is also sunlight and heat and the ocean coming toward you.

In the hinayana, our ego begins to get a haircut; its beard is shaved. In the mahayana, the limbs of ego are cut, so there are no longer any arms and



legs. We even begin to open up the torso of ego. By developing ultimate bodhichitta, we take away the heart so that nothing exists at all. Then we try to utilize the leftover mess of cut-off arms and legs and heads and hearts, along with lots of blood. Applying the bodhisattva approach, we make use of them, we don't throw them away. We don't want to pollute our world with lots of leftover egos. Instead we bring them onto the path of dharma by examining them and making use of them. So whatever happens in your life becomes a way of measuring your progress on the path—how much you have been able to shed your limbs, your torso, and your heart. That is why this slogan goes along with another saying of the Kadampa teachers, which is "The shedding of ego is the scale that measures the practitioner." If you have more ego, you will be heavier on that scale; if you have less ego, you will be lighter. That is the measure of how much meditation and awareness have developed, and how much mindlessness has been overcome.

# 14

# *Loving-Kindness and Compassion*

ALL DHARMA AGREES at one point. All the teachings and all the practices are about just one thing: if the way that we protect ourselves is strong, then suffering is really strong too. If the ego or the cocoon starts getting lighter, then suffering is lighter as well. Ego is like a really fat person trying to get through a very narrow door. If there's lots of ego, then we're always getting squeezed and poked and irritated by everything that comes along. When something comes along that doesn't squeeze and poke and irritate us, we grasp it for dear life and want it to last forever. Then we suffer more as a result of holding on to ourselves.

One might think that we're talking about ego as enemy, about ego as original sin. But this is a very different approach, a much softer approach. Rather than original *sin,* there's original *soft spot*. The messy stuff that we see in ourselves and that we perceive in the world as violence and cruelty and fear is not the result of some basic badness but of the fact that we have such a tender, vulnerable, warm heart of bodhi-





chitta, which we instinctively protect so that nothing will touch it.

This is a life-affirming view; it starts from the point of basic goodness or basic good heart. The problem is that we continually grab the wrong end of the stick. All practice agrees that there's some fundamental pattern that we have in which we're always trying to avoid the unpleasantness and grasp the pleasantness. There seems to be a need to change the fundamental pattern of always protecting against anything touching our soft spot. Tonglen practice is about changing the basic pattern.

Earlier, I referred to ego as being a room where you just tried to get everything on your own terms. To get out of that room, you don't drive up in a big machine and smash the whole thing to pieces. Rather, at your own speed, starting where you are, you begin to open the door and the windows. It's a very gentle approach, one that acknowledges that you *can* gradually begin to open that door. You can also shut it as often as you need to—not with the desire to stay comfortable but with the intention ultimately to gather more courage, more sense of humor, more basic curiosity about how to open that door, until you just leave it open and invite all sentient beings as your guests, until you feel at home with no agenda and with groundlessness.

The main thing about this practice and about all practice—all dharmas agree at one point—is that

you're the only one who knows what is opening and what is closing down; you're the only one who knows. The next slogan, "Of the two witnesses, hold the principal one," is saying that one witness is everybody else giving you their feedback and opinions (which is worth listening to; there's some truth in what people say), but the principal witness is yourself. You're the only one who knows when you're opening and when you're closing. You're the only one who knows when you're using things to protect yourself and keep your ego together and when you're opening and letting things fall apart, letting the world come as it is—working with it rather than struggling against it. You're the only one who knows.

There's a later slogan that says, "Don't make gods into demons." What it means is that you can take something good—tonglen practice and the lojong teachings, for example (that's the idea of "gods")—and turn it into a demon. You can just use anything to close your windows and doors.

You could do tonglen as one of my students once described to me. He said, "I do it, but I am very careful about the control button; I breathe in just enough so that it doesn't really hurt or penetrate, and I breathe out just enough to convince myself, you know, that I'm doing the practice. But basically, nothing ever changes." He was using tonglen just to smooth everything out and feel good. You can also use tonglen to feel like a hero: you're just breathing



in and out all over the place but your motivation isn't to befriend and begin to penetrate those areas of yourself that you fear or reject. In fact, you hope the practice will just bolster your sense of confidence, bolster your sense of being in the right place at the right time, having chosen the right religion, and "I'm on the side of the good and all's right with the world." That doesn't help much. Maybe you've noticed that sometimes you feel like you're in a battle with reality and reality is always winning.

All of the teachings, and particularly the lojong teachings, are encouraging us, if we find ourselves struggling, to let that be a moment where we pause and wonder and begin to breathe in, trying to feel what's underneath the struggle. If we find ourselves complaining, it isn't that we have to say, "Oh, I'm bad because I'm struggling." It's not that it's a sin to complain. We're simply saying that the way to change the pattern is to begin to breathe in and connect with the heart, the soft spot that's under all that protecting.

Karma is a difficult subject, but one of the reasons you are encouraged to work with what happens to you rather than blame it on others is that what happens is somehow a karmic result of things that you have done before. This kind of teaching on karma can easily be misunderstood. People get into a heavy-duty sin and guilt trip, feeling that if things are going wrong, that means they did something bad and they're being punished. That's not the idea at all. The

idea of karma is that you continually get the teachings that you need in order to open your heart. To the degree that you didn't understand in the past how to stop protecting your soft spot, how to stop armoring your heart, you're given this gift of teachings in the form of your life, to give you everything you need to learn how to open further.

I saw a cartoon that describes this. A head of iceberg lettuce is sitting in a garden saying, "Oh, no, how did I get in this vegetable garden again? I wanted to be a wildflower!" The caption reads, "Oscar is born again as a head of iceberg lettuce in order to overcome his fear of being eaten." One can think from a bigger perspective than this whole notion of reward and punishment. You could see your life as an adult education course. Some of the curriculum you like and some you don't like; some of what comes up you find workable, some you don't. That's the curriculum for attaining enlightenment. The question is, how do you work with it?

When you begin to touch your heart or let your heart be touched, you begin to discover that it's bottomless, that it doesn't have any resolution, that this heart is huge, vast, and limitless. You begin to discover how much warmth and gentleness is there, as well as how much space. Your world seems less solid, more roomy and spacious. The burden lightens. In the beginning it might feel like sadness or a shaky feeling, accompanied by a lot of fear, but your willingness to feel the fear, to make fear your companion, is growing. You're willing to get to know yourself at this deep level. After awhile this same feeling begins to turn into a longing to raze all the walls, a longing to be fully human and to live in your world without always having to shut down and close off when certain things come along. It begins to turn into a longing to be there for your friends when they're in trouble, to be of real help to this poor, aching planet. Curiously enough, along with this longing and this sadness and this tenderness, there's an immense sense of well-being, unconditional well-being, which doesn't have anything to do with pleasant or unpleasant, good or bad, hope or fear, disgrace or fame. It's something that simply comes to you when you feel that you can keep your heart open.

the principal witness, or the principal judge, is yourself. The judgment of how you are progressing in your lojong practice is yours.

You know best about yourself, so you should work with yourself constantly. This is based on trusting your intelligence rather than trusting yourself, which could be very selfish. It is trusting your intelligence by knowing who you are and what you are. You know yourself so well, therefore any deception could be cut through. If someone congratulates or compliments you, they may not know your entire existence. So you should come back to your own judgment, to your own sense of your expressions and the tricks you play on others and on yourself. That is not self-centered, it is self-inspired from the point of view of the nonexistence of ego. You just witness what you are. You are simply witnessing and evaluating the merit, rather than going back over it in a Jungian or Freudian way.





## 21

## *Always maintain only a joyful mind*

∴

The point of this slogan is continuously to maintain joyful satisfaction. That means that every



mishap is good, because it is encouragement for you to practice the dharma. Other people's mishaps are good also: you should share them and bring them into yourself as the continuity of their practice or discipline. So you should include that also. It is very nice to feel that way, actually.

For myself, there is a sense of actual joy. You feel so good and so high. I suppose I was converted into Buddhism. Although I was not sticking bumper stickers on my car saying, "Jesus saved me," I was doing that mentally. Mentally I was putting on bumper stickers saying: "I'm glad that my ego has been converted into Buddhism and that I've been accepted and realized as a Buddhist citizen, a compassionate person." I used to feel extraordinarily good and so rewarded. Where that came from was no question: I felt so strong and strengthened by the whole thing. In fact, I began to feel that if I didn't have that kind of encouragement in myself, I would have a lot of difficulty studying the vajrayana. I felt so grateful, so good. So this slogan means to maintain a sense of satisfaction and joyfulness in spite of all the little problems and hassles in one's life.

This slogan is connected to the previous one. ["Of the two witnesses, hold the principal one."] If you have been raised in the Judeo-Christian

tradition of discipline, the idea of watching yourself is based purely on guilt. But in this case, it is not that way. We do not have any logic that acknowledges, understands, or presents a concept like original sin. From our point of view, you are not basically condemned. Your naughtiness is not necessarily regarded as your problem—although it *is* witnessed, obviously. You are not fundamentally condemned; your temporary naughtinesses are regarded as coming from temporary problems only. Therefore, to follow up on that, this slogan says, "Always maintain only a joyful mind." It is a joyful mind because you do not have to be startled by any situation of wretchedness or, for that matter, sudden upliftedness. Instead, you can maintain a sense of cheerfulness all along.

To start with, you maintain a sense of cheerfulness because you are on the path; you are actually doing something about yourself. While most sentient beings have no idea what should be done with themselves, at least you have some lead on it, which is fantastic. If you step out into Brooklyn or the black hole of Calcutta, you will realize that what we are trying to do with ourselves is incredible. Generally, nobody has the first idea about anything like this at all. It is incredible, fantastic. You should be tremendously excited



and feel wonderful that somebody even thought of such an idea.

There is a sense of joy from that point of view, a sense of celebration which you can refer to whenever you feel depressed, whenever you feel that you do not have enough in the environment to cheer you up, or whenever you feel that you do not have the kind of feedback you need in order to practice. The idea is that whether it is a rainy day, a stormy day, a sunny day, a very hot day, or a very cold day, whether you are hungry, thirsty, very full, or very sick—you can maintain a sense of cheerfulness. I do not think I have to explain that too much. There is a sense of basic cheerfulness that allows you to wake yourself up.

That joy seems to be the beginning of compassion. We could say that this slogan is based on how to go about maintaining your awareness of the practice of mahayana—literally and fully. You might feel uptight about somebody's terrible job, that his or her particular shittiness has been transferred onto you and has fucked up the whole environment. But in this case, you don't blame such a person, you blame yourself. And blaming yourself is a delightful thing to do. You begin to take a very cheerful attitude toward the whole thing. So you are transcending *oy vey*—getting

out of Brooklyn, metaphorically speaking. You could do that. It is possible to do that.

This kind of cheerfulness has a lot of guts. It is founded in buddha nature, tathagatagarbha. It is founded in the basic compassion of people who have already done such a thing themselves: people like Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, Jamgön Kongtrül, Milarepa, Marpa, and all the rest. So we could do it, too. It is founded on a real situation.

If someone punches you in the mouth and says, "You are terrible," you should be grateful that such a person has actually acknowledged you and said so. You could, in fact, respond with tremendous dignity by saying, "Thank you, I appreciate your concern." In that way his neurosis is taken over by you, taken into you, much as is done in tonglen practice. There is an immense sacrifice taking place here. If you think this is ridiculously trippy, you are right. In some sense the whole thing *is* ridiculously trippy. But if somebody doesn't begin to provide some kind of harmony, we will not be able to develop sanity in this world at all. Somebody has to plant the seed so that sanity can happen on this earth.







constantly changing and developing new qualities and habits, both good and bad, so we need to look for the signs of a genuine, spiritual transformation in the way that we relate to others. Without that sign of genuine change, we'll never be able to eradicate our doubts about whether we are deceiving ourselves. As ordinary sentient beings, we'll never completely rid ourselves of egoistic thoughts and desires: it's more a question of making an honest assessment of our qualities and gradually reducing our self-obsessive tendencies. If we can appraise our attitudes as more open, tolerant, loving, and compassionate toward ourselves and others, we don't have to question the effectiveness of our mind training practices.

### *21 • Always have the support of a joyful mind*

Another measure of success with mind training is whether we have grown more at ease with others and ourselves through the practices of lojong, tonglen, and cultivating relative bodhichitta. Our natural tendency is to react to others on impulse in a haphazard and agitated fashion, becoming easily overwhelmed by fear, anxiety, sadness, and loneliness, often for no apparent reason. Thinking about other people's needs, aspirations, and dreams, rather than our own broken dreams and frustrated ambitions, will transform that tendency. We can therefore assess our progress by asking ourselves whether we are less irritated and bothered by all the trivial things that go on in our lives and whether we've found some way to remain cheerful, despite our trials and tribulations. As Sangye Gompa (1179–1250) says in his "Public Explication of Mind Training":

In brief, whatever undesirable situations befall you, without any distress, learn to turn them into conditions favorable for training the mind, and whatever adversities occur, abide in joy so that its impact is magnified by your meditative equipoise.[12]

It's quite difficult to practice love and compassion toward others when we're not habituated to spontaneous surges of positive emotions toward all beings. While there is an element of hardship in cultivating this benevolent mind, thinking about the suffering of others should make us more cheerful, rather than compounding our feelings of depression and incapacitation. If we develop a more positive demeanor by cultivating love, compassion, and other-regarding attitudes, we'll transcend our own self-centered needs and generate more life-affirming attitudes. Shantideva highlights the importance of a happy state of mind:

So come what may, I'll never harm
My cheerful happiness of mind.
Depression never brings me what I want;
My virtue will be warped and marred by it.[13]

We're trying to develop an underlying sense of cheerfulness, one that doesn't fluctuate between happiness and despair at a moment's notice. It's our internal monologues and expectations that make it difficult for us to maintain a sense of optimism. We're always thinking about what we think we need for a good life, making lists of things we require and becoming extremely disappointed and frustrated when they fail to materialize. These expectations are based on our mental projections rather than on





any kind of realistic assessment of our goals and compel us to race in hot pursuit of what we think we need, whether that is material, situational, or interpersonal. We can't enjoy the life we have, because we're constantly trying to amass more of something, yet never managing to have enough. No matter how many conditions we fulfill, we'll always want something that seems more essential for our happiness, and we will be forever subject to fears about not getting the things we want, or getting what we don't want and losing what we already have. Nagarjuna encapsulates our predicament in this verse:

Amassing wealth, guarding it and making it grow
will wear you out;
Understand that riches bring unending ruin and
destruction.[14]

The best way to maintain a sense of cheerfulness is to aim high, but without overextending ourselves through unrealistic expectations. We should always try to push the boundary of what we think we can and can't do, while at the same time recognizing that what we do in any given situation will always have its limits. This kind of balanced attitude will guard against disappointment and failure and help us to focus on the kind of person we want to become, rather than becoming distracted by temporal goals. We're encouraged to take everything in a step-by-step manner, which is why this approach is called the graduated path. Shantideva's celebratory verse reflects the power of this approach:

For mounted on the horse of bodhichitta,
That puts to flight all mournful weariness,

Who could ever be dejected,
Riding such a steed from joy to joy?[15]

We also derive inspiration from past and present masters, such as His Holinesses the Dalai Lama and Karmapa, who have the capacity to benefit many beings and impact enormously on other people's lives. We aspire to become more like these people, and we try gradually to chip away at ourselves until we have attained our desired goal, without getting carried away by fanciful thoughts of great realizations or attainments. We need to determine whether we are any happier as a result of engaging in lojong practice for ourselves. Happiness doesn't mean never feeling sad or distressed; rather, it is reflective of a general optimism toward ourselves and others.

Our potential to extend ourselves and reach for ever-higher goals is always present. Systematically achieving what we set out for ourselves in our lojong practice will give us an increasing sense of satisfaction, which in turn will boost our sense of well-being. Milarepa sings:

Having won the best conditions for Dharma practice,
I am happy;
Having ceased from evil deeds and left off sinning, I
am happy;
Treading the Path of Merits, I am happy;
Divorced from hate and injury, I am happy;
Having lost all pride and jealousy, I am happy;
Understanding the wrongness of the eight worldly
dharmas, I am happy;
Using the mind to watch the mind; I am happy;
Without hope or fear, I am ever happy.[16]





## 22 • *You are proficient if you can practice even when distracted*

After practicing lojong meditation and tonglen for some time, we'll gradually become familiar with positive mental attitudes, which will, in turn, start to become a habit rather than something we are trying to manufacture. Not all habits are bad. Lojong practices are also habit-forming, so if we do them consistently, they will gradually become part of our psychological makeup and personality traits. Where once we became distracted by moments of depression, bitterness, or hostility, we'll now, through mindfulness and awareness, become less self-obsessed and more cheerful. Jamgön Kongtrül uses the following analogy to illustrate the spontaneous application of mind training:

> A skilled horseman does not fall from his horse, even when he is distracted. In the same way, if you are able to take adverse conditions that suddenly develop as aids to mind training even without expressly directing your attention to do so, then you are proficient in mind training. The two bodhichittas arise clearly and effortlessly along with everything that appears—enemies, friends, troublemakers, happiness, or suffering.[17]

The fact that our minds become naturally inclined toward mindfulness and awareness is an indication of how much we have changed as a result of our meditation practices. The phrase "to practice even when distracted" means that we're automatically practicing lojong as we go about our business, without even noticing that we're doing so. An example of this might be Tibetan children, who

are taught from a very young age not to harm insects, and who automatically refrain from harming them when they're playing outside. Even as adults, the things we repeatedly do over a period of time become part of our character. Konchok Gyaltsen elaborates on this point:

> This does not refer merely to not being overtaken by adversities you encounter through the deliberate practice of mind training. Rather it refers to the ability to practice mind training spontaneously, without the need for deliberate effort as an antidote, when obstructions arise suddenly and unexpectedly. With deep familiarity, this is certainly possible. For do not afflictions like anger arise spontaneously due to the force of your beginningless habituation to self-cherishing? Do not the afflictions arise immediately in response to any old circumstance?[18]

Our samsaric logic tells us we'll feel better if we tolerate a constant discomfort over a long time than if we confront intense pain for a short time, similar to using some kind of balm to soothe a toothache rather than going to the dentist to remove the cause of the pain. The lojong masters, on the other hand, tell us that enduring a chronic, dull pain in order to avoid an acute, sharp pain is totally mistaken. The pain of wisdom and insight is an intense and penetrating experience, but it has a surgical effect on our mind, which relieves it of its own pain. Empathizing with the pain and suffering of others can be sharply distressing, but the samsaric mind would rather put up with the drudgery of samsaric existence than expose itself to this. However, as Sangye Gompa explains:





> In all interactions with others, accept the loss and offer them the gain. If you grant others what is most desirable among the mundane excellences and accept upon yourself what is least desirable, then even if you experience disappointments like the person who goes to the land of jewels but fails to find even a piece of rock that can be used against a dog, this [act of giving and taking] will still become a cause for buddhahood. In this sense, whatever you encounter is immediately applied to your practice. In contrast, if you lack this [habit], all your vast learning, refined meditation, and so on become endeavors of the "I."[19]

We should focus on thinking that nothing is insignificant, no matter how small or unimportant it may seem. If we keep doing something with consistency, even if it is very small, those actions will accumulate. The main point is to be satisfied with the results, without becoming self-satisfied or complacent. We should be satisfied to the extent we're moving forward and that these practices are having an impact on us. We also shouldn't set our expectations too high, or we'll always feel that our practices should be making more of a difference than they are.

Instead of deriving comfort from the suffering of others and drawing pleasure from all the wrong places, we need to generate mindfulness and awareness and take pleasure in living with the right view. If we can respond to others with less spite, jealousy, and egoism, and can demonstrate more kindness, appreciation, and compassion, we will be making progress with our mind training. This view is self-generating, according to lojong, so this method of appraisal will clarify how well our practice is transforming our habits of mind.

## Conclusion

Remembering these slogans from time to time will help us gauge our progress in mind training. If we are giving too much credence to other people's opinions, for example, we invoke the slogan "Of the two judges, rely on the principal one," and remind ourselves to make an honest assessment of ourselves. These slogans will then help us to see what we need to do to correct and direct our lojong practice. It's important to practice mind training without thinking of other people as the recipients. Even though many of the benefits of lojong practice may not at first be visible or tangible, we should have confidence that everything we do leaves an impression in our mental continuum and will continue to exert an influence. Lojong practice will definitely leave positive imprints in our unconscious, and we'll continue to receive benefits without necessarily realizing it. The goal of all Buddhist practice is to transcend our egoistic obsession and dispel ignorance. As Milarepa says:

> It is said you can tell whether someone has just eaten by how red his face is. Similarly, you can tell whether people know and practice the Dharma by whether it works as a remedy for their negative emotions and ego-clinging.[20]







pened, of course, and more than once), and find myself suddenly in a total panic—well, this would be very startling. This would definitely get my attention, and I would be curious about how I was going to handle my out-of-control mind, what would happen, and there would be some joy in that I think, some spaciousness mixed in with the strong bad feeling. Maybe I'd be thinking, "Wow, I never thought this could happen! All of these years of expensive Zen training and look at me, I'm in a total panic. Practice has been getting too easy maybe. Now I am really going to test out all of this Zen teaching I have been yakking about all of these years and see if it really works." Probably that's how I'd maintain my joyful mind and my sense of humor. And insofar as I was brought low and lost my lightness and ease, I'm sure I'd notice that and realize I was in trouble and try to get some help if I could. I have a lot of friends and am confident that somehow someone would help me.

The last slogan is **Practice when you're distracted.** As we have been saying, we're in training, we're training the mind, and training takes discipline. We have to try to pay attention, to stick to our commitments, to repeat the training disciplines (the slogans) many times, keeping on with them even when we don't feel like it.

But discipline is not what we think it is. It's not an unpleasant yoke administered by a drill sergeant, an obsessed and mean-spirited guy who screams at us when we fall down on the job, or by a harsh, scary Zen master with his big stick. Aggressive discipline like this isn't very effective for most people. It usually inspires its opposite. Every force produces a counterforce, and the harsher the discipline, the more inspired we are to rebel.

The discipline of mind training isn't like this at all. It's gentle, permissive, and easygoing. Because of this, it doesn't inspire rebellion. In fact, mind training understands that distraction and

noneffort or countereffort is inevitable and must be used as part of the effort we are making. We don't struggle against it, we cooperate with it. The discipline of mind training doesn't assume that relaxation and easygoing effort is counterproductive to the task or that it is possible for us to be on the beam all the time. The assumption is that we need to relax, we need to be spacious and open, and that this will help us train. Distraction isn't a problem. We have to learn how to practice even when we are distracted, to make the distraction part of the practice. Serving a cup of tea requires a certain kind of effort. If you are too tense, you'll pour too much into the cup, and grasping the cup with nervous fingers, you'll spill scalding tea all over yourself. Instead, you need to be loose and easy. On the other hand, if you are too loose and easy and aren't paying attention to what you're doing, you'll lose your grasp on the cup and drop it. Finding just the right amount of ease and looseness, not too much, not too little, is a key element in the training. We have to learn how to keep the thread of our training going even in lax times, even when we're daydreaming, losing track of ourselves, or enjoying the ball game or a glass of wine. We have to stop thinking that at times like that we have set our practice aside and are taking a break. That we are practicing when we are meditating or reciting the slogans and not when we are not. **Make practice your whole life.** There are no breaks. Or to put it another way, practice is just one long break from the tension and anxiety that we used to take for granted as the essential flavor of our lives.

There's another saying in Zen that I am very fond of: "When you fall down on the ground, you use the ground to get up." This is exactly what happens when you fall down. You use the ground for leverage to get up, you push off from the ground.

Again, I can use myself as an example. I usually sit in meditation in the morning while alone in my house. For many years I sat with others in official Zen meditation halls early in the morning. But now I consider my daily meditation relaxing and easygoing, a time of great ease and peacefulness. As I sit, my mind is often floating around like a cloud, this way and that way. Sometimes my mind is quiet and still, but a lot of times it's just floating like that.





You might say, "Poor fellow, he is so distracted." Maybe I am, but on the other hand, to me it seems a very beautiful thing to drift along with the mind that way, with all the various wonderful things that float into the mind and float out of the mind, with all the passions and the thoughts and feelings, and with the various stains from my lifetime, or someone's lifetime—sometimes it's not so clear whose.

You don't have to be perfect. You don't have to be on the beam every moment. Discipline isn't like that. There's a time for hard focus and a time for soft focus. It's not that practice is directed, serious, and important and that distractions are something else. Practice is life, including everything in your life, even the distractions. When you think you are distracted, when you think you have forgotten about your practice, remember this slogan: **Practice when you're distracted.** You may well be distracted. But there's nothing wrong with that. As soon as you know your state of distraction, you are practicing, you have remembered your practice. Distraction, laziness, indulging in stuck emotions like anger, jealousy, and so on, are all part of the practice. You fall down on the ground and you use the ground to get up. Using the ground to get up is remembering to notice the state you are in. As soon as you know your state, whatever that state is, you are practicing this slogan. You are back on the beam. You never actually lost track of it anyway. There are no distractions, after all.

Start Where You Are

by Pema Chodron

# 15
# *Lighten Up*

THE NEXT TWO SLOGANS—"Always maintain only a joyful mind" and "If you can practice even when distracted, you are well trained"—go hand in hand. The first is saying that if you regard everything that arises as fuel to wake up, you can remain cheerful. The second is saying that you are well trained if you *can* do that—use everything in your life to wake yourself up rather than put yourself to sleep—no matter what.

If you feel completely caught up and are spinning off into a misery scenario, the slogan "If you can practice even when distracted, you are well trained" can remind you to start to work with tonglen—to breathe in the mishap or the misery as a way of developing compassion for yourself and as a way of beginning to understand other people's pain as well. You can use the distraction to bring yourself back to the present moment, just as a horse rights itself after losing balance or skiers catch themselves just as they are about to fall. Being well trained means you can catch yourself and come back to the present.

When things are going well, that can also be a reminder. Instead of habitually clinging to what's delightful, you could become accustomed to giving it away, sending it out to others on the outbreath. This enables you always to maintain a joyful mind. It begins to ease away the burden of maintaining your own private happiness as well as your usual load of unhappy situations and minor irritations—the burden of ego.





On the other hand, sending out the joyful stuff is also difficult to do. As someone said, "I like doing the outbreath with this idea of sharing. Sharing is really nice, but giving it away? That means I wouldn't have it anymore." The outbreath and sharing what's pleasant can be threatening. You don't often feel willing to share or give away that pleasure.

There's a lot of joy as your burden begins to lessen, and it comes from doing anything that begins to change the pattern of fearing and wanting to resist what's unpleasant. Resistance is really what causes the pain; more than the anger itself, or the jealousy itself, it's resistance that causes the pain. Anything that begins to lighten up that resistance helps us to relax and open and celebrate.

Sooner or later you will find yourself in a situation where you can't change the outer circumstances at all, and you realize it all comes down to how you relate to things—whether you continue to struggle against everything that's coming at you or you begin

to work with things. "Always maintain only a joyful mind" can be very helpful to remember in such a situation.

Anything that helps us not to be so desperate about pleasure and not to fear its transitory nature is also introducing us to being at home in our world and being able to help other people. In popular songs you hear lines like "Freedom's just another word for nothing left to lose" or "I've got plenty of nothing and nothing's plenty for me." "Great bliss arising from the experience of emptiness" is how it's described in traditional Tibetan texts, which sounds somewhat remote from personal experience. However, all these words are saying the same thing: we practice and we live in order to be able to relax and lighten up and not make such a big deal about everything that happens—the successes and the failures, the rewards and the punishments.

If your principal witness (in "Of the two witnesses, hold the principal one") is a judgmental authority figure, it might be hard to lighten up. Let's say you're meditating, but there's this other "you" standing behind with a stick, saying, "You're thinking again, you're always thinking! Whack! There goes the tonglen bell and you didn't practice tonglen for even a second! Smack!" You say to yourself, "I can't do this. I'm hopeless. Everybody else seems to be doing fine, but I don't seem to have any basic goodness." Then you beat yourself up and forget all about gentleness,





or if you remember, you say, "You're not gentle! Whack!"

You hear a slogan like "Always maintain only a joyful mind," and for the whole next two weeks you're just hitting yourself over the head for never being joyful. That kind of witness is a bit heavy. So lighten up. Don't make such a big deal. The key to feeling at home with your body, mind, and emotions, to feeling worthy to live on this planet, comes from being able to lighten up. This earnestness, this seriousness about everything in our lives—including practice—this goal-oriented, we're-going-to-do-it-or-else attitude, is the world's greatest killjoy. There's no sense of appreciation because we're so solemn about everything. In contrast, a joyful mind is very ordinary and relaxed.

Once on retreat I was reading some traditional text that talked about bliss and special experiences, and I began to feel wretched. I felt poverty-stricken about never having had any experiences that felt like bliss, clarity, or luminosity. I began to feel depressed that I didn't measure up to any of these glowing words. Fortunately, I put that book down and picked up something simple about just being alive with who you are right now—nothing special, no big deal, ordinary: just keep your eyes open, keep your ears open, stay awake. Those simple instructions began to cheer me up, because I felt that I could follow them.

When your aspiration is to lighten up, you begin to

have a sense of humor. Things just keep popping your serious state of mind. In addition to a sense of humor, a basic support for a joyful mind is curiosity, paying attention, taking an interest in the world around you. You don't actually have to be happy. But being curious without a heavy judgmental attitude helps. If you *are* judgmental, you can even be curious about that.

Notice everything. Appreciate everything, including the ordinary. That's how to click in with joyfulness or cheerfulness. Curiosity encourages cheering up. So does simply remembering to do something different. We are so locked into this sense of burden—Big Deal Joy and Big Deal Unhappiness—that it's sometimes helpful just to change the pattern. Anything out of the ordinary will help, and tonglen is definitely something different. This practice is about repatterning ourselves, changing the basic pattern and unpatterning ourselves together. You can also just go to the window and look at the sky. You can splash cold water on your face, you can sing in the shower, you can go jogging—anything that's against your usual pattern. That's how things start to lighten up.

I just read a story about a woman who had been gloomy all her life. As she grew older, she got more irritable and difficult. Then she got cancer and for some peculiar reason—after an initial period of resistance and anger—instead of getting more gloomy, she began to cheer up. The more she fell apart, the happier she got. She kept saying she was glad that





she had this time to enjoy her life, which she had not enjoyed up to the moment that she got sick. Finally, the day before she died, she went into a coma. Everybody in her family, who were coming to feel more and more fond of her after all those years of finding her to be a pain in the neck, gathered around her bed crying and looking gloomy, just as she used to look. Just before she died, she opened her eyes to see them all standing there, and she said, "Gosh, you all look so unhappy. Is something wrong?" She died laughing.

So, "Always maintain only a joyful mind" and "If you can practice even when distracted, you are well trained" are implying that the best gift you can give yourself is to lighten up. One way to do that is to let distraction bring you back to the present moment. Another way is to be curious. In addition, when things are really heavy and you feel stuck in either your joy or your misery, just do something different to change the pattern. Tonglen is a good suggestion of what you could do.

*POINT SIX*

# DISCIPLINES OF MIND TRAINING

## POINT SIX AND PRAJNAPARAMITA

The paramita associated with the sixth point of mind training is prajnaparamita. These slogans are all connected with sharpening your intelligence in order to work with yourself. That is the idea of the sword of prajna. Prajna is regarded as the sword that cuts the bondage of ego. The way to cut the bondage of ego in mahayana practice is basically the same as in vipashyana practice—it is awareness, relating to the rest of your world and to your life. It is connected with a larger sense of your entire life and particularly with postmeditation experience.

Whatever occurs in your life is governed by prajna, which cuts through habitual or potential neurosis. Applying that tremendous sense of mindfulness and awareness comes from the great concentration that is developed through the bodhisattva path. With the help of the shamatha and vipashyana principles, you learn how to consolidate yourself as a mahayana practitioner—





being in a state of compassion, kindness, openness, and gentleness.

On the other hand, you are also in a state of egolessness. There is no clinging, no working or dwelling on anything connected with ego, *atman* or soul. When you are not dwelling on anything connected with ego, the activities described in the lojong text begin to permeate your life. They begin to manifest. You realize that there is no "I" to meditate on and, for that matter, no "I am" to propagate your existence. Because of that, you are able to exchange yourself for others. By first becoming able to sacrifice yourself, you are able to overcome obstacles. Then you can relate with the rest of the world. In that way, you learn how to deal with your journey on the path by means of the sword of prajna.

## 23

*Always abide by the three basic principles.*

∴

This slogan is a general description as to how we can practice the buddhadharma according to the three basic principles of hinayana, mahayana, and

POINT SIX

# *The Commitments of Mind Training*

We strengthen our resolve by making a serious commitment to persevere. A certain amount of commitment (Skt. *samaya*; Tib. *dam tshig*) is an essential element in anything that requires time and effort. It's one thing to dabble casually, but an entirely different matter to become involved in something after giving it serious consideration. There are many kinds of commitments within the various Buddhist traditions, each with their own unique vows. Damshig is a very important concept in tantric Buddhism, symbolizing the bond between you and the deity, or between you and the guru. In the context of mind training, commitment relates directly to the determination to resist the seductions of our samsaric tendencies. The word *damshig* is actually made up of two words: *dam bca,'* which means "something that binds," and *tshig*, which literally means "honorary word." The English equivalent would be a pledge or oath. The idea behind being "bound by words" is essentially about honoring the commitments we have made to ourselves. If we have taken a vow that commits us to doing something, there is more likelihood we'll see it through to the end, because it carries more weight than some vague promissory intention.







We have to abide by a commitment once we've formally declared it to others. We can't underestimate the importance of actually saying, "I will practice lojong without allowing external circumstances to interfere or to cause my practice to degenerate." We make this commitment within our capacity, to the best of our ability, and with the help of mindfulness and awareness—nobody expects more of us than that.

## 23 • *Always practice the three general principles*

This commitment relates to our motivation to practice mind training. If we recognize from the beginning that lojong is a powerful and beneficial practice, we'll commit ourselves in a genuine and continuous way by retaining a sense of impartiality and guarding against distortion. This slogan, which comprises three separate principles, is considered one of the sixteen precepts in this chapter.

### 1. Remember to Value Your Commitment

From time to time, we should deliberately think about our commitment to lojong and reaffirm our determination to do something beneficial, meaningful, and purposeful with our lives. If we become more aware and attentive to our daily situation, we'll notice just how many opportunities we squander by becoming ensnared in personal dramas. When we capitalize on situations as they arise, we'll see that most of them are capable of bearing fruit. We shouldn't assume that our life has to be running smoothly in order for us to be successful; we can make equally good use of

Training in Compassion
by Norman Fischer

# 7

# The Discipline of Relationship



REMEMBER THAT ALTHOUGH we're practicing fifty-nine slogans for generating compassion and resilience, compassion turns out not to be what it seems. There's much more to it than simply being nice and sympathetic to others. It's not that we are not trying to be nice and sympathetic to others; of course we aspire to be that way. But deeper reflection shows us that if we want to love and connect to others authentically, we have to liberate ourselves from our ingrained self-centeredness, which means we also have to work on ourselves, on our own minds, with some seriousness. Compassion isn't just about others. It's also about ourselves. We have to go deeper than the usual viewpoint of self versus others. It isn't enough to be polite or know the right ways to talk to people. We have to have a change of heart. With this change of heart comes resilience.

At this point the logic of our training program becomes clear. It starts with resolve and motivation: you have to know what you're doing and why, and based on these reflections, you firmly decide to take up the training. In this case, you realize that it's time to get serious about your life and that being serious means



getting over your old habit of self-obsession, which in turn means developing genuine empathy and compassion. Reflecting on all of this at some depth, you **Resolve to begin** (point one).

Next, although you might not be quite ready for it and might have to go back to it later, likely more than once, you contemplate at some depth the nature of self and other, which gives you a conceptual understanding as well as an experiential handle on what it would really mean to fully embrace compassion. You see (and this may be a sobering vision) that to authentically receive others, you also have to be willing to deal with pain—yours as well as theirs (point two, **Train in empathy and compassion**).

This gets your attention and puts you on notice that the training you have undertaken is thorough and profound. It's not a walk in the park. Now it becomes obvious that it is crucially important to be ready for difficulties, because difficulties are sure to arise, and if they discourage you and you don't know how to endure them and make use of them, then all the work you've done so far will blow away in the wind (point three, **Transform bad circumstances into the path**).

Having worked on that—at least to the point of questioning your usual impulse to run away from or eliminate difficulties—your level of commitment and seriousness increases until there's no difference between your mind training and your life. The discipline no longer feels like something extra added on top of what you normally do, another item on your to-do list. You are practicing all the time, even when it feels like you're not (point four, **Make practice your whole life**).

Next you learn how to assess and regulate your practice with some subtlety, so you can encourage yourself to stay on the path and avoid veering off this way or that way. You recognize the subtle inner signs of your distraction and avoidance and learn to dance with them rather than losing track of yourself because of them (point five, **Assess and extend**).

Notice that most of this is about working with your own mind. Although we've considered compassion on a profound, an almost abstract, level, the slogans have yet to instruct us in the down and dirty daily struggles that we are having with the people in our lives. Now is the time for that: point six, **The discipline of relationship.**

Simply contemplating the wording of this point gives us pause. **The *discipline* of relationship**? We don't usually think of relationship as a discipline. But it is a discipline after all. For it is through relationship that we most fruitfully expand our horizons and train our minds to be compassionate and resilient.

We learn how to be human through our interaction with others. This process began at the beginning, when we were infants learning language and basic human responses from our mothers, and it has continued ever since. Such interaction is rich and full of possibility; it is a tremendous challenge and a tremendous opportunity.

We need others so much, and yet nothing is more troublesome than others. As Sartre said in his play *No Exit*, "Hell is other people." From spousal to international relations, people-to-people exchanges seem so difficult, nearly impossible. With all the wounding that has gone on so far, all the misunderstanding and confusion, getting along with others is very complicated, and the better we know others, the closer to them we are and the more dealings we have with them, the harder it gets. We might consider ourselves to be kind and reasonable people, but others seem not to be so reasonable. Or maybe we are not so kind and reasonable: maybe we have a hard time figuring out what we want and how to act toward others. Since they are the same way, dealing with ourselves and them at the same time is daunting indeed.

I have made something of a study of this question in my years of working with conflict-resolution professionals in partnership with the Center for Understanding in Conflict, a group of wise







lawyers and mediators who have been working with the question of conflict in human interaction for more than thirty years. I have learned from them that conflict is not the exception in human relations—it is the rule. Its roots are deep, common, and various, and not easy to deal with, and there is no substitute for simply wading out into the deep waters of conflict with honesty, fierceness, and a willingness to plunge into the depth of human feeling when necessary. Regardless of how calm, good, and nice we think we have become, as long as we and others have desires and needs, we will clash, and if we don't expect this and learn how to deal with it, we will either have to live in some sequestered self-protective way or be embroiled in stressful controversy much of the time. Human relationship is indeed a discipline, and a complicated one at that. Yet how could we ever develop altruism and compassion, and therefore some measure of personal happiness, connection, and wisdom, if we can't get down to basics and deal with people as they actually are, in the world as it actually is, with all of its messiness? All of our training so far must lead us finally to this point. Now it's time to practice directly within the crazy human world.

But, again, remember: dealing with others isn't just dealing with others. We think of it that way, but that's a mistake. Dealing with others is dealing with ourselves dealing with others. There are no others apart from us, and there is no us apart from them. Our problems with others are our problems with ourselves and vice versa. Recognizing this is the first principle. Practicing the discipline of relationship is exactly training ourselves to understand and act in relation to others in ways we are not used to acting. That's what the slogans under this point do: they train us to take ourselves in hand so that we can be different in our interactions with others. Gradually we learn that when we are different, others are different too, because without our understanding

that we have been doing this, we have been cocreating with others the conflicts and interpersonal hassles of our lives.

And since this is so problematic, we need a lot of guidance, many slogans, many suggestions. There are sixteen slogans under this point, some of them surprising and quite drastic:

**23. Come back to basics.**
**24. Don't be a phony.**
**25. Don't talk about faults.**
**26. Don't figure others out.**
**27. Work with your biggest problems first.**
**28. Abandon hope.**
**29. Don't poison yourself.**
**30. Don't be so predictable.**
**31. Don't malign others.**
**32. Don't wait in ambush.**
**33. Don't make everything so painful.**
**34. Don't unload on everyone.**
**35. Don't go so fast.**
**36. Don't be tricky.**
**37. Don't make gods into demons.**
**38. Don't rejoice at others' pain.**

**Come back to basics.**

In order to embark on the difficult voyage that the discipline of relationship turns out to be, we have to pause for a moment and return to basics. It might be a good idea at this point to go all the way back to the beginning, to the four reflections that we considered under the first slogan, **Train in the preliminaries:**

*The rarity and preciousness of human life.*
*The absolute inevitability of death.*







for certain individuals, but it's still very important to develop a more inclusive approach to tonglen practice and to gradually include more people and situations into our meditations. Sangye Gompa underscores the importance of this:

> Since no training can be achieved through a biased approach, if you train without partiality, your practice will develop and progress.[3]

Tibetans often say that "when their stomach is full and the sun is warm, everyone seems capable of heroic deeds." However, this doesn't mean that we should allow our moods or personal conditions to affect our lojong practice. That we don't feel the same every day is a natural part of life and can't be helped, but it is still possible to keep these fluctuations from interfering with our mind training. Nothing is preventing us from performing tonglen with an equal degree of intensity and sincerity at all times, regardless of the diverse mental conditions we may be experiencing at any given moment.

## *24 • Change your attitude, but remain natural*

Lojong practice is about transforming the way we view the world, not changing the way we present ourselves to it. Changes in the way we perceive ourselves and in how we relate to our disturbing thoughts and emotions and our attitudes to other people are far more important than changes in our appearance, mannerisms, or personal attire. To believe otherwise would be like thinking we've become more spiritual simply as a result of donning some kind of religious habit. We are trying to transform the unwholesome,

self-destructive attitudes of our self-obsession. Whether others perceive us as different or not is irrelevant; our transformation needs to be an internal one. Drukpa Kunley is scornful of all forms of self-aggrandizement:

I, an ever-roaming Naljorpa, visited the Religious Centre
of Lhasa,
Where the hostesses were hoping for their guests' gifts
and favors—
So fearing to become a flatterer, I kept to myself.
I, an ever-roaming Naljorpa, wandering throughout
the land,
Found self-seeking sufferers wherever I looked—
So fearful of thinking only of myself, I kept to myself.[4]

"Remaining natural" refers to the importance of blending in with others, rather than acting as if we were special or an outsider. We shouldn't act in ways that give ourselves airs or deliberately try to impress anyone. Our behavior should be seemly, courteous, and in keeping with the social conventions of the community. If the majority of people are saying one thing, we shouldn't contradict or dispute them by making inappropriate, irrelevant, or noncontextual comments. In Tibet, we call this "talking high Dharma talk," because it sounds very highfalutin but nobody knows what you're talking about. This lojong commitment is simply about getting along with people outwardly while trying to transform ourselves inwardly. Godrakpa notes:

Talking about high Dharma is easy;
applying the meaning to the mindstream is hard.[5]

Page 154

Pema Chodron

## Start Where You Are



"Abandon poisonous food" and "Don't make gods into demons" are warnings that only you know whether what you are doing is good practice ("gods" or "good food"). Anything could be used to build yourself up and smooth things over and calm things down or to keep everything under control. Good food becomes poisonous food and gods become demons when you use them to keep yourself in that room with the doors and windows closed.

Another slogan that concerns compassionate action is "Work with the greatest defilements first." Developing loving-kindness for yourself is the basis for compassionate communication and relationship. The time is now, not later. The greatest defilement is what you consider to be the greatest obstacle. This slogan is suggesting that you start where you feel most stuck. Making friends with that will begin to automatically take care of the smaller obstacles.

Because the larger obstacles like rage or jealousy or terror are so dramatic, their vividness itself may be a reminder to work with the practice of tonglen. We may so take for granted the multitude of minor daily irritations that we don't even think of them as something to work with. To some degree they are the hardest obstacles to work with because they don't reveal themselves. The only way you know that these are arising is that you feel righteous indignation. Let righteous indignation be your guide that someone is

holding on to themselves, and that someone is probably you.

If you begin to work with the greater defilements, or the major stuck places, these little ones tend to become more obvious to you as well. Whereas if you try to work with all of these little ones, they are like your hands and your nose; you don't even think of them as anything but you, and there is no sense of them as obstacle. You just buy them every time they happen.

Our greatest obstacles are also our greatest wisdom. In all the unwanted stuff there is something sharp and penetrating; there's great wisdom there. Suppose anger or rage is what we consider our greatest obstacle, or maybe it's addiction and craving. This breeds all kinds of conflict and tension and stress, but at the same time it has a penetrating quality that cuts through all of the confusion and delusion. It's both things at once.

When you realize that your greatest defilement is facing you and there seems no way to get out of it because it's so big, the instruction is, let go of the story line, let go of the conversation, and own your feeling completely. Let the words go and return to the essential quality of the underlying stuff. That's the notion of the inbreath, the notion of making friends with ourselves at a profound level. In the process we are making friends with all sentient beings, because that is what life is made of. Working with the greater defilements first is saying that now is the time, and also



that our greatest obstacles are our greatest wealth. From the point of view of wanting to stay cozy and separate in your room, this work is extremely threatening. Part of the path of compassionate action is to begin to explore that notion of the inbreath and test it, to see if it rings true for you.

## The Practice of Lojong by Traleg Rinpoche

### 27 • *Work on the stronger disturbing emotions first*

In order to understand where our distorted ways of speaking and thinking originate, we have to probe still more deeply than we did with the previous two slogans. Where they come from is our conflicting emotions. Our commitment here is the reverse of what it was with the previous two slogans, for instead of admonishing ourselves and trying to transform our attitudes, we are simply advised to examine the emotions that disturb us the most. This may seem to contradict the usual lojong instructions, but the logic here is to acknowledge our limitations and work toward our goals in a gradual manner. There are many aspects of ourselves that require transformation, but the lojong teachings instruct us to simplify our approach by working with the most obvious problems first.

For instance, it's easier to recognize and gradually tame a strong disturbing emotion than it is to eliminate that emotion completely. Working with disturbing emotions as they arise is more effective than trying to eliminate our more entrenched dispositions, such as greed, lust, anger, jealousy, and so forth. Even if our disposition toward aggression and aversion remains ingrained, we can still learn to release ourselves from the physical or verbal abuses of fuming rage.

This instruction is in keeping with the Mahayana principle of acting within our capacities, instead of frustrating ourselves by having unrealistic expectations about what we can achieve. While it's important to retain our high ideals, we need to be practical in the short term. That's why this commitment isn't about eradicating the problem straight away, but about having the willingness to work at reducing it. If we do nothing to ameliorate our disturbing emotions, they will only worsen and may eventually get completely





out of control. But if we commit ourselves to containing each one now, we can gradually lessen their virulence until they become quite manageable. This is why Jamgön Kongtrül advises:

> Examine your personality to determine which disturbing emotions are the strongest. Concentrate all dharma practice on them in the beginning, and subdue and clear them away.[9]

While human beings are alike in many ways, we have quite disparate personalities, predilections, character traits, and modes of expression. This is particularly evident when it comes to how we express our emotions. Because we've established our emotional dispositions over our vast and varied karmic histories, we're predisposed toward certain emotions rather than others. We all suffer from the five main poisons, but we're not equally aggressive, greedy, lustful, and so on. Some people have a predominant issue with anger, while others are troubled by jealously or one of the other emotions. As Konchok Gyaltsen explains:

> Then, taking this as the basis, [recognize that] for some attachment is stronger, for others anger, and for others envy. In your own mind each of the afflictions generally arises like bees washing themselves. Even though all the afflictions arise, examine which specific affliction is the strongest and subdue that one first.[10]

We shouldn't assume that our more subtle emotions are easier to deal with just because they have a less noticeable impact. The more disturbing the emotion, the easier it is to recognize and work with. Subtler emotions are more difficult and elusive to

overcome, which is why so many methods have been provided to help us. One method is to adapt the emotion to whatever practice we're currently doing. As we feel less disturbed by that emotion, we can deal with it on deeper levels, because we'll gradually learn to recognize its subtle and insidious nature. Phadampa Sangye highlights the importance of eventually overcoming our emotional poisons:

> If you don't hold on to the three or five poisons, the path is near;
> People of Tingri, generate powerful antidotes against them.[11]

We make the lojong commitment to work gradually and thoroughly with our conflicting emotions because they are such disruptive forces in our everyday and spiritual lives. Our motivation shouldn't be to modify our responses so that we become more popular with others, it should be for the more exacting goal of transforming ourselves into a person with integrity, dignity, depth, and weight, rather than someone who is dominated by shallow and superficial emotions that prevent inner growth.

Page 157

### 28 • *Give up all hope for results*

This slogan may sound foreign to Western ears, but it has a long history in Buddhist thinking. The lojong teachings say that whenever we become obsessed with results, we spend our time trying to manipulate the outcome of our endeavor, instead of paying attention to the activity itself. Even though we have no real idea what the result will be, we project a picture-perfect vision of



our expectations into the future. This distracts us from doing the task at hand and usually ends in frustration and disappointment because the imagined result is never the same as the eventual outcome. Thus, we shouldn't concern ourselves with what benefits we're achieving from our mind training, but should simply focus on our practice with sincerity, for how we engage in the practice is what will determine the end result.

It's important to have a general notion of what we want to attain, but we shouldn't get too caught up in specifics or we'll waste our time and energy in fantasies. If we want to become great in the future, we need to do great things now, for thinking about the future only robs us of the future. Whether we're pursuing a worldly goal or a spiritual one, such as keeping our lojong commitments, its important to give up hopes for any imagined result. *The Thirty-seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* identifies this absence of expectation as one of the key aspects of the bodhisattva path:

> When those who want enlightenment must give even their body,
> There's no need to mention external things.
> Therefore without hope of return or any fruition
> Give generously—
> This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.[12]

The lojong teachings use the analogy of an archer to illustrate this point. People often think focusing on the target is the most important thing for hitting it with precision, but any accomplished archer knows it's actually our posture, the way we hold the bow, and how we position the arrow that will determine the accuracy of our shot. We'll never hit the mark if we focus solely on the target and ignore our posture and technique. Similarly, getting

caught up in the result of our actions rather than how we are going to obtain that result will guarantee failure in our endeavors. Konchok Gyaltsen apprises us of this aspect of our practice:

> If you fail to train unconditionally, free of expectation of rewards pertaining to this life or the hereafter, then one aspect of your spiritual practice becomes blind. It is critical, therefore, to train without any hope of reward.[13]

The slogan implies that we can't expect results to be immediately forthcoming or to find constant reassurances that things are unfolding as planned. By anticipating the kinds of signs we expect to find, we ensure our continual disappointment because we will think we've failed when those signs don't materialize. All that is really happening is that we can't see the real signs of progress because our preconceived ideas have blinded us to any genuine developments that are taking place. Because our lojong commitment is not about some grand, elaborate fantasy of the future, we should constantly remind ourselves of the futility of hopes and expectations.

## 29 • *Give up poisonous food*

Nutritious food is nourishing because it keeps us healthy. Poisonous food, on the other hand, is extremely dangerous to our health. Similarly, while virtuous thoughts and actions are highly valued, if we engage in them for the wrong reasons, they become poisoned. If we have hidden agendas involving ego gratification, our actions may appear laudable and admirable, but we'll spoil whatever we do with our selfishness. Even if we succeed in doing





are probably quite wide of the mark. Catch yourself in midthought and remember that you don't really know what someone else is thinking or feeling. Ignorant, you are better off assuming that everyone is doing his or her best and that everyone is on the same human journey you are on. Maybe at the moment another person's journey is not going so well, maybe at the moment it is leading him or her down some nasty dark alleyways. But who knows the way a person is supposed to go? The person may have to go down a dark alley first to come out into the light later, and that's just how it is for him or her.

We try our best to be supportive of our friends, and that's good. Sometimes they seek out our advice and we give it, and that's good too. But in the end probably the best thing we could do for them—or for anyone—is to let them alone, profoundly alone, in the recognition that they are so much more than we could ever understand. Leaving them alone doesn't mean abandoning them or not loving them. It means recognizing their full human dignity. Practicing **Don't figure others out** is training our minds to recall, even in the midst of controversy with others, that we don't really know what is in another's heart and that whatever we imagine is probably incorrect. To be sure, there are times when it may be a good idea to try to imagine what someone else is feeling, thinking, needing, or wanting. (Remember, the slogans can't be applied like blunt instruments: they require the wisdom of flexibility.) But when we do that, in the light of this slogan, we do it with humility, knowing that we may be mistaken.

**Work with your biggest problems first.**

Each one of us is given our own personal gift of craziness, our own preferred tendency for decompensation. Some get angry, some depressed, some anxious. Some are meddlesome, some lazy, some hyperactive, some distractible. One of the insights of

mind training (and it comes as a great relief) is that there is no normal. We are all abnormal, each in our own delightful way. The trick is, first, to accept this, and next, to have some idea of the most important ways in which you are abnormal. Let's say it's anger. You anger easily, and when you are angry you are miserable, and you inevitably say and do stupid things for which you later feel remorse and shame—and you've been this way all of your life. So good, now you are aware of your personal gift, your treasure. I have already mentioned Suzuki Roshi's crucial saying, "For a Zen student, a weed is a treasure." Rather than seeing your problem with anger as a personal defect to be hidden or overcome, you see this weed as a treasure. You don't resolve to work on other things and save this most difficult one for later. You resolve to pay attention to it now and keep on paying attention until, through your continued attention over time, things begin to change. Later, something else will be your biggest problem. It's always something. Working with this slogan helps you to see that you don't need to overcome your biggest problems overnight, nor should you defer them to another time. Pay attention right now to what bothers you the most about yourself in your relationships to others and trust that simply by paying attention, little by little you will see what you need to do.

**Abandon hope.**

**Abandon hope?** This slogan seems shocking at first. Surely hope is a good thing. Doesn't hope lie at the center of the whole proposition of mind training? Probably you do have some hope that mind training will have a positive impact on your life, that it will help you to improve as a human being, that you'll be wiser, kinder, more connected to others as a result of the training. Very possibly some of what I've written so far in this book has given you reason to have such hopes.

Hopefulness is no doubt preferable to hopelessness or apathy.





But there's a downside to hope. If we hope that mind training is going to do this or that for us, and if we measure our progress and become crestfallen when progress does not match the image our hope has projected, then hope becomes counterproductive. Hope easily becomes discouragement. In this sense, hope is limiting and unhelpful. So this slogan takes a drastic stance, a bracing shot of ice water in the face: **Abandon hope.**

Let's think more closely about how hope for personal improvement actually works. Life is very mysterious. The closer we get to ourselves and to our actual intimate experience, the more mysterious it seems. As we learn, especially on our meditation cushions (but it is true all the time), life unfolds in a profoundly immediate and continuous present. Somehow the moment of the immediate past gets swallowed up in time and completely disappears as each moment gives way to a new moment. The past is constantly going and gone, and the new present is similar to but never exactly the same as the immediate past—and this goes on moment after moment. This means that no matter what we do or don't do, we're going to change, and we always have been changing. So we don't need to hope for change. There will be change, and there always has been change.

On the other hand, do we actually change? It seems that we don't. Inside, we probably all feel pretty much the same as we felt when we were ten years old: our basic feeling of subjectivity, of being ourselves, is exactly the same, despite all the surface changes it seems we have undergone, decade by decade, year by year, moment by moment.

So: on one hand, change is every minute. On the other hand, there is no change. The French say, "The more things change, the more they remain the same."

So what change are we hoping for?

But of course, conventionally, our character does change over time, we all know that. And the question is, are we improving or

getting worse? And how would we know? If today, let's say, you are a mixed-up, unhappy person who wants to improve, you probably have an idea about what that improvement would look or feel like, however undeveloped that idea might be. This means that from the standpoint of confusion and unhappiness, you're imagining an improved you. How could that vision of an improved you not be distorted in some serious way, since it is the projection of a confused and unhappy person? Could it be that that distorted vision of an improved you is not only inherently unattainable but, worse, potentially sabotaging? Given this, all of your senses of what it means to improve or to fail to improve would necessarily be off base, and your hope for improvement would therefore be entirely counterproductive. Is it ever possible, from one position, to imagine what it's like in another position? Of course we do this all the time, but it's never accurate. My thought of what it is going to be like when I arrive in Mexico is never the same as what it is actually like when I arrive in Mexico, even though I have been to Mexico many times and know what to expect. The concrete, visceral reality of the present is never the same as what we imagined, in the present, of the future.

I've been doing Zen practice for a long time, so when people are considering taking up the practice, they are likely to ask me what I've gained from it. How has my life changed? I always say, yes of course I am much different now from who I was forty years ago. But then again, when forty years goes by, anyone is different, Zen practice or no. How can I tell how much the differences of forty years have to do with my Zen practice? Who knows whether the changes that have occurred in my life are the consequences simply of forty years of life on earth among others?

That's one problem. Another problem is: have the various changes been an improvement? Well, yes. I think I am more stable, more ethical, more empathic; maybe I am a little wiser,





calmer; maybe I have a better sense of what my life is about than I did before. But also, no: in forty years' time many things have gotten worse. Forty years ago I was younger; I had more physical endurance, more strength, a better memory, I was smarter, I could meditate better; I had more buoyancy. Improvement? Hard to say.

**Abandon hope.** That is, don't look for or celebrate improvement, and don't imagine there is no improvement or that you are getting worse. Since it really is impossible to say for certain whether or not we have improved, it is better not to frustrate ourselves with such useless questions and instead to keep on going with the training in the faith that it is worthwhile for its own sake. This faith isn't religious faith in the usual sense—a leap of faith in Buddha or Buddhism or meditation practice. It is faith we find through our own experience over the time of our training. Somehow, as we continue, we come to the definite feeling that this training is simply the right thing to do. We know it. We don't have to convince ourselves or anyone else. We don't need evidence. We simply feel the rightness of the training in the middle of our lives. We are quite happy to do our best to maintain a joyful mind as we go on practicing right now. That becomes enough.

Despite what I've just said about the impossibility, the uselessness, and even the counterproductivity of our actually knowing whether or not we are improving, the truth is many people who do the practice see all kinds of wonderful improvements in their lives. I am always quite cheered up when they tell me about it. But I have noticed that the sense of big improvement comes mostly at the beginning, in the first years (or decades). As you keep on going, you hardly notice improvements anymore. Improvements may be there, and others might appreciate them, but you yourself simply stop noticing particularly. For you, practice disappears as a vehicle for self-improvement, and the only

thing important for you now is to live your life, which means to continue your mind training. Shunryu Suzuki called this "practice without a gaining idea."

So this slogan is telling you: when you are excited about your progress or discouraged about your lack of progress, let go of that silly thought. **Abandon all hope** and go happily on.

**Don't poison yourself.**

The slogan **Don't poison yourself** is a corollary to **Abandon hope.** The poison referred to is the poison of self-centeredness, which is always so sneaky. Remember, the point of all of our training is to reduce our self-worry and self-concern and be worried and concerned for others. So **Stop poisoning yourself** with self-concern. When you notice instances of self-criticism, discouragement, or pride, remember this slogan. It's fine that those things come up. Of course they will; it is natural. Your goal is not to eliminate them but rather to practice this slogan. To know what these attitudes are and to stop eating them and poisoning yourself with them. Instead, "No, thank you, I don't eat that stuff anymore; I know it's bad for me."

**Don't be so predictable.**

If, as we've just been saying, you and everyone else you know are unfathomable, then why do you persist in imagining that you know who you and everyone else are and, based on these fixed ideas, that you can predict your behavior and that of others? Freshness and openness and a capacity for surprise are hallmarks of mind training, which is one reason why it is so much fun. It is not, as it might seem to us (mapping onto it our received sense of morality or upright conduct), a matter of being ethical and sober in all of our actions. It is very much the opposite: we view with bemused curiosity our various responses and habits, even when it is clear that they are not too wholesome or even sane. With





Start Where You Are

by Pema Chodron

# 16

# *Abandon Any Hope of Fruition*

OUR NEXT SLOGAN is "Abandon any hope of fruition." You could also say, "Give up all hope" or "Give up" or just "Give." The shorter the better.

One of the most powerful teachings of the Buddhist tradition is that as long as you are wishing for things to change, they never will. As long as you're wanting yourself to get better, you won't. As long as you have an orientation toward the future, you can never just relax into what you already have or already are.

One of the deepest habitual patterns that we have is to feel that now is not good enough. We think back to the past a lot, which maybe was better than now, or perhaps worse. We also think ahead quite a bit to the future—which we may fear—always holding out hope that it might be a little bit better than now. Even if now is going really well—we have good health and we've met the person of our dreams, or we just had a child or got the job we wanted—nevertheless there's a deep tendency always to think about how it's going

to be later. We don't quite give ourselves full credit for who we are in the present.

For example, it's easy to hope that things will improve as a result of meditation, that we won't have such bad tempers anymore or we won't have fear anymore or people will like us more than they do now. Or maybe none of those things are problems for us, but we feel we aren't spiritual enough. Surely we will connect with that awake, brilliant, sacred world that we are going to find through meditation. In everything we read—whether it's philosophy or dharma books or psychology—there's the implication that we're caught in some kind of very small perspective and that if we just did the right things, we'd begin to connect with a bigger world, a vaster world, different from the one we're in now.

One reason I wanted to talk about giving up all hope of fruition is because I've been meditating and giving dharma talks for some time now, but I find that I still have a secret passion for what it's going to be like when—as they say in some of the classical texts—"all the veils have been removed." It's that same feeling of wanting to jump over yourself and find something that's more awake than the present situation, more alert than the present situation. Sometimes this occurs at a very mundane level: you want to be thinner, have less acne or more hair. But somehow there's almost always a subtle or not so subtle sense of disappointment, a sense of things not completely measuring up.



In one of the first teachings I ever heard, the teacher said, "I don't know why you came here, but I want to tell you right now that the basis of this whole teaching is that you're never going to get everything together." I felt a little like he had just slapped me in the face or thrown cold water over my head. But I've always remembered it. He said, "You're never going to get it all together." There isn't going to be some precious future time when all the loose ends will be tied up. Even though it was shocking to me, it rang true. One of the things that keeps us unhappy is this continual searching for pleasure or security, searching for a little more comfortable situation, either at the domestic level or at the spiritual level or at the level of mental peace.

Nowadays, people go to a lot of different places trying to find what they're looking for. There are 12-step programs; someone told me that there is now a 24-step program; someday there will probably be a 108-step program. There are a lot of support groups and different therapies. Many people feel wounded and are looking for something to heal them. To me it seems that at the root of healing, at the root of feeling like a fully adult person, is the premise that you're not going to try to make anything go away, that what you have is worth appreciating. But this is hard to swallow if what you have is pain.

In Boston there's a stress-reduction clinic run on Buddhist principles. It was started by Dr. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a Buddhist practitioner and author of *Full Catastrophe Living*. He says that the basic premise of his clinic—to which many people come with a lot of pain—is to give up any hope of fruition. Otherwise the treatment won't work. If there's some sense of wanting to change yourself, then it comes from a place of feeling that you're not good enough. It comes from aggression toward yourself, dislike of your present mind, speech, or body; there's something about yourself that you feel is not good enough. People come to the clinic with addictions, abuse issues, or stress from work—with all kinds of issues. Yet this simple ingredient of giving up hope is the most important ingredient for developing sanity and healing.

That's the main thing. As long as you're wanting to be thinner, smarter, more enlightened, less uptight, or whatever it might be, somehow you're always going to be approaching your problem with the very same logic that created it to begin with: you're not good enough. That's why the habitual pattern never unwinds itself when you're trying to improve, because you go about it in exactly the same habitual style that caused all the pain to start.

There's a life-affirming teaching in Buddhism, which is that Buddha, which means "awake," is not someone you worship. Buddha is not someone you aspire to; Buddha is not somebody who was born





more than two thousand years ago and was smarter than you'll ever be. Buddha is our inherent nature—our buddha nature—and what that means is that if you're going to grow up fully, the way that it happens is that you begin to connect with the intelligence that you already have. It's not like some intelligence that's going to be transplanted into you. If you're going to be fully mature, you will no longer be imprisoned in the childhood feeling that you always need to protect yourself or shield yourself because things are too harsh. If you're going to be a grown-up—which I would define as being completely at home in your world no matter how difficult the situation—it's because you will allow something that's already in you to be nurtured. You allow it to grow, you allow it to come out, instead of all the time shielding it and protecting it and keeping it buried.

Someone once told me, "When you feel afraid, that's 'fearful buddha.'" That could be applied to whatever you feel. Maybe anger is your thing. You just go out of control and you see red, and the next thing you know you're yelling or throwing something or hitting someone. At that time, begin to accept the fact that that's "enraged buddha." If you feel jealous, that's "jealous buddha." If you have indigestion, that's "buddha with heartburn." If you're happy, "happy buddha"; if bored, "bored buddha." In other words, anything that you can experience or think is worthy

of compassion; anything you could think or feel is worthy of appreciation.

This teaching was powerful for me; it stuck. I would find myself in various states of mind and various moods, going up and down, going left and right, falling on my face and sitting up—just in all these different life situations—and I would remember, "Buddha falling flat on her face; buddha feeling on top of the world; buddha longing for yesterday." I began to learn that I couldn't get away from buddha no matter how hard I tried. I could stick with myself through thick and thin. If one would enter into an unconditional relationship with oneself, one would be entering into an unconditional relationship with buddha.

This is why the slogan says, "Abandon any hope of fruition." "Fruition" implies that at a future time you will feel good. There is another word, which is *open*—to have an open heart and open mind. This is oriented very much to the present. If you enter into an unconditional relationship with yourself, that means sticking with the buddha right now on the spot as you find yourself.

Because it's a monastery, there's nothing you can do at Gampo Abbey that's fun, unless you like to meditate all the time or take walks in nature, but everything gets boring after awhile. There's no sex there, you can't drink there, you also can't lie. Occasionally we'll see a video, but that's rare and usually





there's a dispute about what it's going to be. The food is sometimes good and sometimes terrible; it's just a very uncomfortable place. The reason it's uncomfortable is that you can't get away from yourself there. However, the more people make friends with themselves, the more they find it a nurturing and supportive place where you can find out the buddhaness of your own self as you are right now, today. Right now today, could you make an unconditional relationship with yourself? Just at the height you are, the weight you are, the amount of intelligence that you have, the burden of pain that you have? Could you enter into an unconditional relationship with that?

Giving up any hope of fruition has something in common with the title of my previous book, *The Wisdom of No Escape*. "No escape" leaves you continually right in the present, and the present is whatever it is, whatever mood you happen to be in, whatever thoughts you happen to be having. That's it.

Whether you get meditation instruction from the Theravada tradition or the Zen tradition or the Vajrayana tradition, the basic instruction is always about being awake in the present moment. What they don't tell you is that the present moment can be you, this you about whom you sometimes don't feel very good. That's what there is to wake up to.

When one of the emperors of China asked Bodhidharma (the Zen master who brought Zen from India to China) what enlightenment was, his answer

was, "Lots of space, nothing holy." Meditation is nothing holy. Therefore there's nothing that you think or feel that somehow gets put in the category of "sin." There's nothing that you can think or feel that gets put in the category of "bad." There's nothing that you can think or feel that gets put in the category of "wrong." It's all good juicy stuff—the manure of waking up, the manure of achieving enlightenment, the art of living in the present moment.





8

# Living with Ease in a Crazy World

PROBABLY BY NOW you've recognized that, as with all ancient systems of spiritual cultivation, the mind-training text has lots of repetition and overlap. Maybe the ancient pundits who devised this system weren't as organized or efficient as we are. Or maybe they deliberately included some redundancy, knowing that when it comes to mind training, you can't expect perfect efficiency and you're going to need to go over the same ground many times, in many ways. Perhaps they appreciated the nasty persistence of human folly—perhaps even nastier and more persistent the smarter and the more sophisticated we are.

I call this last point **Living with ease in a crazy world** because that's what this grab bag of final instructions is all about: how to take into account our own and the world's craziness and be able to live with it in grace and ease. In his commentary on mind training, the great twentieth-century Tibetan trickster-sage Chögyam Trungpa said that these last slogans were for the "post-meditation" stage. I've already discussed the Zen attitude toward

"postmeditation" and most other distinctions, but let me extend those comments a bit here before we launch into a specific discussion of the final twenty-one slogans.

It seems that resistance to systems and distinctions is a big point for Zen. This entire text of mind training is for the purpose of reducing self-centeredness and generating compassion, yet in Zen it's said that there is no such thing as compassion, because reality is already compassionate by its very nature, so there's no such thing as compassion per se, as distinct from anything else. Why, then, prattle on about compassion? Nor is there any such thing as meditation, since consciousness is essentially meditation already. So why talk about meditation or postmeditation as distinct categories?

This is the humor, the Big Joke, of Zen practice that one finds over and over again in the sayings of the old masters. Whatever you privilege, whatever you define and adhere to, is always wrong and will, because wrong, always lead to a problem and a danger. Whether it is meditation or compassion or goodness or truth or enlightenment—whatever noble thing you'd want to know, experience, or aspire to—as soon as you privilege something and make a big deal out of it, there is always trouble. Whatever we designate as this or that, is just that, a designation, no more and no less, and we should recognize this and not get so excited about it.

Compassion, for instance, sounds like such a good idea, but the problem with it is that it will probably make us sentimental, softheaded, and overly enthusiastic, and this will tend to make us troublesome to exactly the people we want to have compassion for, because our excessive sentimentality and insistence on being helpful will probably be annoying and counterproductive. We will likely be tripping all over ourselves in our compassion, and





in the process we will land with a thud on top of the very people we are trying to be compassionate toward. Also, quite possibly, our compassion will cause us to be disapproving or even hostile to others who we are certain are not as compassionate as we are. This, of course, is the opposite of compassion. Asked about what compassion really is, an old Zen master said, "It's like reaching back for your pillow in the dark." In other words, it's a simple and natural human act, no big deal.

And the trouble with meditation is that as soon as we identify something as meditation, we are likely to be precious about it. "Ah, yes, meditation, so peaceful, calm, focused." And then we sit down on our meditation cushion, and when we find that we are anything but peaceful, calm, and focused, we will be severely disapproving of ourselves, and in this way our precious meditation practice soon turns into a big stick with which we will hit ourselves over the head (no Zen master is required for this; we will do it quite well by ourselves). Of course, it could also go the other way. We could actually be peaceful, calm, and happy in our meditation and even in our lives—and therefore nervous about the prospect of losing that peace and calm and quite critical of all of those people and forces in the world that would seem to threaten our good state of mind. This is the trouble with the idea of meditation. Asked what meditation really is, "It's nonmeditation," an old Zen master said. A monk then said to him, "How could meditation be nonmeditation?" The master replied, "It's alive!"

Therefore, our wise and practical Zen ancestors pointed out that there is nothing anywhere we can find to inflate ourselves with. It's not that self-inflation is a moral mistake; rather, it's a conceptual mistake, which in the end amounts to self-oppression and disparagement of others, both of which lead to great unhappiness for one's self. That's why Zen is so insistent on the Big Joke

that reminds us that all designations are funny, funny in themselves, and even funnier (if tragically so) exactly because we take them so seriously. It is very obvious, if you actually look, that the emperor is naked and that we who keep imagining him clothed in finery are pretty foolish. This is why in Zen there's not much discussion about meditation or postmeditation or about compassion or lack of compassion. There is only everyday ordinary practice. The bell rings, "Oh, all right, meditation." The bell rings again, "Okay, get up, forget about meditation, it's gone." That's the spirit of Zen training. No sticking to anything. So, as I said in the beginning, we may need these slogans. Let's now contemplate these last twenty-one postmeditation slogans, making sure we keep their nakedness in mind.

**39. Keep a single intention.**
**40. Correct all wrongs with one intention.**
**41. Begin at the beginning, end at the end.**
**42. Be patient either way.**
**43. Observe, even if it costs you everything.**
**44. Train in three difficulties.**
**45. Take on the three causes.**
**46. Don't lose track.**
**47. Keep the three inseparable.**
**48. Train wholeheartedly, openly, and constantly.**
**49. Stay close to your resentment.**
**50. Don't be swayed by circumstances.**
**51. This time get it right!**
**52. Don't misinterpret.**
**53. Don't vacillate.**
**54. Be wholehearted.**
**55. Examine and analyze.**
**56. Don't wallow.**









life, even if we don't yet have the wisdom of equanimity. Jamgön Kongtrül explains:

> Without partiality for certain areas, mind training by itself should pervade everything, good or bad, which arises as an object of experience: other sentient beings, the four elements, or nonhuman beings. Deeply trained proficiency, not just lip service, is important.[21]

## *49 • Always meditate on difficult points*

It's important to have joy and enthusiasm for our practice, but we should still find it challenging enough to test our capabilities for growth. Difficulties must be welcomed because it's only by overcoming challenges that we develop. We should gradually introduce into our meditation those areas that we normally find upsetting or difficult, instead of choosing meditations that always ease our minds or make us feel good without requiring much effort on our part. If our practice becomes tedious, unproductive, or painful, we need to correct that instead of blaming the practice or succumbing to a defeatist attitude. The distinctive feature of lojong is the importance it places on topics that challenge our understanding, test our endurance, and stretch our mental capabilities.

Lojong practice provides the opportunity to exercise our minds in ways we might find difficult to implement in real life. However, the benefit of doing things as an imaginative exercise is almost the same as actually doing them in the real world, because these imaginative exercises still have a transformative effect on our attitudes and karmic dispositions. If we just stay within our comfort zone and never challenge ourselves, our progress will be

slow. Very often we think, "I can't do that, it's just too much," but that timidity only comes from our self-obsession. We must realistically assess what we can and can't do and then make a concerted effort to keep extending ourselves. Otherwise, we'll stay trapped within the samsaric condition and continue to wander aimlessly, like the people in the following verse by Godrakpa:

> In samsara, which is like a dream and illusion,
> sentient beings roam like blind lunatics.
> Not realizing the truth that confused appearances have
> no essence,
> those who cling to the false as true get so exhausted.[22]

Page 168

If we face challenges properly, instead of grimly enduring them, we'll find them much easier to deal with in the future. The Mahayana teachings say that there is nothing that doesn't get easier once we become familiar with it. A sign of success in mind training is feeling more at ease with something that we once found difficult. When we're new to lojong, we may prefer to start with the easy things and practice tonglen only in regard to the people we care about. The lojong teachings actually do recommend that we begin this way, in fact. However, we need to gradually stretch and expand our scope as we become more proficient with the practice. It's only an imaginative exercise, after all. This is the only way to develop the qualities that are necessary to become a bodhisattva.

## *50 • Don't depend on external conditions*

As lojong practitioners we should practice whenever and wherever possible, not just when the right conditions are present. If we



believe we can only practice well under certain conditions, we'll make a habit of only practicing when these conditions arise. There will always be conditions that are detrimental to our lives, because external situations are beyond our control. Konchok Gyaltsen illustrates this point in the following story:

> [Chekawa once said:] "At Chenga Monastery there were limited offerings and resources. Thinking, 'I shall go to the countryside to obtain these,' I went to Yarlung, but failed to find them there either. Because of my ignorance I had failed to understand that 'cyclic existence' is a name for deficiency."[23]

Nobody is ever consistently happy, and for as long as we live, we'll meet with favorable and unfavorable conditions. We can view all situations as favorable to our lojong practice because every situation can serve the development of bodhichitta. If we continue to practice loving-kindness and bodhichitta, we'll develop a general sense of cheerfulness and happiness, irrespective of the circumstances we meet. The true lojong spirit has no limit, and we'll find that we can persevere in all situations if our guiding principle becomes "Because everything that I experience is only my own perception, where I am or what I'm doing becomes part of lojong practice."

## *51 • This time, practice the important points*

The lojong spirit is about investing our time and energy into whatever advances our spiritual development. This slogan also has three points.

### 1. Other People Are More Important Than We Are

Training ourselves to think constantly that others are more important than we are and to perform all actions with other people's welfare in mind is far more important than expecting our practice to improve our own circumstances. The lojong teachings are essentially saying that while we may be practicing mind training, if we're worrying more about our own progress than the welfare of others, we're not practicing it properly.

### 2. Practice Is More Important Than Understanding

Page 169

While Buddhism emphasizes learning, we still have to put what we've learned into practice. Instead of thinking, "Do I really understand this?" or "Am I on the right track?" we should be asking, "Did I practice today?" or "Did my thoughts go anywhere near wishing somebody happiness?" In other words, instead of worrying about our own ongoing problems, we should concentrate on applying what we've learned to our everyday lives.

### 3. Bodhichitta Is Most Important of All

We shouldn't practice with cold detachment or extreme efficiency, but with true feeling and a warm heart. Lojong isn't something we should approach with the disciplined precision of a military exercise. Trungpa Rinpoche used to speak a great deal about precision and discipline, but at the same time he emphasized gentleness and the need to have a "soft spot" in our hearts. The most important aspect of any spiritual practice is that we do it with the



loving-kindness of bodhichitta—there is nothing more profound than this. If bodhichitta isn't present in our practices, they'll never be of any real consequence, but if bodhichitta is there, whatever we do will be instantly transformed into a genuinely spiritual exercise. Se Chilbu Chokyi Gyaltsen reinforces this point:

> Of the two aspects of Dharma, exposition and practice, the latter is more important. Compared to all other meditative practices, the practice of training in the awakening mind is more important.[24]

## *52 • Avoid misunderstandings*

Despite our best intentions, it's easy to misunderstand things or apply them incorrectly in our lives. This confusion is the result of not being able to distinguish what we need to cultivate and what we need to eliminate from our lives. There are six fundamental errors we should assiduously try to avoid in our lojong practices.

### 1. Misunderstanding Patience

We know the general difference between wholesome and unwholesome pursuits, but there are always gray areas, especially when something can be virtuous in one situation and non-virtuous in the next. As we've already observed, patience is a very good example of this, for while patience is lauded as one of the most important virtues, practicing it wrongly can have catastrophic results. We often lack fortitude in the face of spiritual hardship, but are quite

of, nothing you need to hide, that everything in you can be brought forth at the proper time and all of it is not only worthwhile, it is all a necessary part of the picture. **Train constantly** means all the time, awake or asleep, in an energetic or a lethargic mood, when resting or having fun or being in a pickle: no matter what is going on, it is all in the service of mind training.

**Stay close to your resentment.**

Suddenly, and oddly, **Stay close to your resentment** pops up here in the midst of so many positive and inspiring reflections. Probably to remind us yet again that there is no escaping human problems, most of which come not so much from situations and other people as from our reactions to situations and other people. Among these reactions is resentment, which automatically takes us outside ourselves, leaping over our minds and what is going on in them to highly uncomplimentary evaluations of situations and other people—evaluations that make us feel tied up in knots. Resentment is a nasty feeling.

Despite that, this slogan tells us to **Stay close to our resentment.** Usually when we feel resentful, we are fairly convinced that we are beyond the pale, that our training has fallen apart, that we are completely in a mess. But this slogan is telling you that resentment is the greatest of all meditation objects. Far from feeling entangled in it and frustrated with that entanglement, we should celebrate it.

Think about it. What is resentment, after all? What happens when you stop projecting outwardly (because we are always resentful of *something* or *someone* out there, even if it is life, or ourselves, as if we were outside ourselves) and turn around to look at the resentment face-to-face to find out what it is? What color is resentment? Is it green? Is it purple? Is it pink? Is it white? Is it black? Is it tall? Is it short? Is it fat? Is it thin? What happens when you investigate? Can you look resentment in the face and





see what it is? Can you feel the feelings, watch the thinking, see your actions unfold?

The investigation of resentment and of all afflictive emotions is the most powerful and the most beneficial of all practices. The peace that we are all seeking is less than half as good as the investigation of resentment, anger, greed, fear, and so on. These are basic visceral, human emotions. They are our great treasure. So we should always stay close when they arise in us, so that we can meditate on them.

**Don't be swayed by circumstances.**

As we have already noted, it's always something. If things go well, be patient, they will change. If they go poorly, be patient, they will change. What goes up will come down, what is low will be high later on. There is no end to the vicissitudes of life, as my father would always say, quoting someone. It's no good if we are blown back and forth by circumstances to the point of instability, so that we lose track of ourselves to the west when the wind blows us that way, and then to the east when it reverses course.

But I don't completely agree with this slogan. I think it is good to be swayed by circumstances, like a bamboo that is flexible enough to sway in the wind. Swaying is one thing, being uprooted another. Can we be swayed without losing our place? Swayed but with solid roots. Firm yet flexible—maybe that's a better slogan.

**This time get it right!**

**This time get it right** sounds like a joke to me, and maybe it is. After all of this training (this is the fifty-first slogan, after all), it seems that we keep on getting it wrong. After all of this maybe we haven't really begun. All of those other times we had it wrong, but *this* time we're going to get it right! This time I'm really going

to pay attention, really going to think of others, really going to soften my heart and remember to love myself and love others and really open up and take a look. Maybe never before, and maybe never again, but *this* time!

Of course this time is the only time. There's only ever this time, no other time. This time lasts our whole life through. No need to worry about the past or the future: just ***This* time get it right!**

**Don't misinterpret.**

**Don't misinterpret** may mean **Don't misinterpret** the slogans, but it may also mean **Don't misinterpret** what's going on in your life. **Don't misinterpret** what others are saying or doing, **Don't misinterpret** your own thoughts and actions. In the Indo-Tibetan tradition there's a commentary to this slogan that lists the six ways in which we are likely to misinterpret, but probably we are clever people and we could find many more than six ways. Like all the other slogans that say don't do this or don't do that, the joke is that the slogan exists exactly because we always do that which the slogan is telling us not to do. Misinterpretation is constant and inevitable. If, as we've said earlier, we can't ever really fully understand ourselves or others, and if we naturally go on imagining that we can, then we are certainly misinterpreting. Maybe the slogan actually means, When you misinterpret, as you inevitably will, know that you are doing this. And try not to build too tall and cumbersome a castle on the shaky foundations of your misinterpretation.

Here is how to notice when you are misinterpreting. When your spiritual practice is making you unhappy, when you feel grim or miserable about it, or on the other hand, when you are feeling happy about your practice and therefore quite arrogant and disapproving of others who are not as peaceful and holy as you imagine you are—when this is your situation, it is a sure sign