

## **Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva**

by Tokme Zongpo (1245-1367)

translated by Ken McLeod

Namo Lokeshvaraya

You who see that experience has no coming or going,  
Yet pour your energy solely into helping beings,  
My excellent teachers and Lord All Seeing,  
I ever humbly honor with my body, speech, and mind.

Full awakening, buddha, source of joy and well-being,  
Comes as you master the noble Way.  
Because mastery depends on knowing how to practice,  
I will explain the practice of all bodhisattvas.

1

Right now you have a good boat, fully equipped and available — hard to find.  
To free others and you from the sea of samsara,  
Day and night, constantly,  
Study, reflect, and meditate — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

2

Attraction to those close to you catches you in its currents;  
Aversion to those who oppose you burns inside;  
Indifference that ignores what needs to be done is a black hole.  
Leave your homeland — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

3

Don't engage disturbances and reactive emotions gradually fade away;  
Don't engage distractions and spiritual practice naturally grows;  
Keep awareness clear and vivid and confidence in the way arises.  
Rely on silence — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

4

You will separate from long-time friends and relatives;  
You will leave behind the wealth you worked to build up;  
The guest, your consciousness, will move from the inn, your body.  
Give up your life — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

5

With some friends, the three poisons keep growing,  
Study, reflection, and meditation weaken,

While loving kindness and compassion fall away.  
Give up bad friends — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

6

With some teachers, your shortcomings fade away and  
Abilities grow like the waxing moon.  
Hold such teachers dear to you,  
Dearer than your own body — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

7

Locked up in the prison of their own patterning  
Ordinary gods cannot protect anyone.  
Where, then, do you go for refuge?  
Go for refuge in what is reliable, the Three Jewels — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

8

The suffering in the lower realms is extremely hard to endure.  
The Sage says it is the result of destructive actions.  
For that reason, even if your life is at risk,  
Don't engage in destructive actions — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

9

The happiness of the three worlds disappears in a moment,  
Like a dewdrop on a blade of grass.  
The highest level of freedom is one that never changes.  
Aim for this — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

10

Every being has cared for you as your mother.  
If they all suffer for time without end, how can you be happy?  
To free beings without limit,  
Give rise to awakening mind — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

11

All suffering comes from wanting your own happiness.  
Complete awakening arises from the intention to help others.  
Therefore, exchange completely your happiness  
For the suffering of others — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

12

Even if someone, driven by desperate want,  
Steals, or makes someone else steal, everything you own,  
Dedicate to him your body, your wealth, and  
All the good you've ever done or will do — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

13

Even if you have done nothing wrong at all  
And someone still tries to take your head off,  
Spurred by compassion,  
Take all his or her venom into you — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

14

Even if someone broadcasts to the whole universe  
Slandorous and ugly rumors about you,  
Again and again, with an open and caring heart,  
Praise his or her abilities — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

15

Even if someone humiliates you and denounces you  
In front of a crowd of people,  
Think of this person as your teacher  
And humbly honor him — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

16

Even if a person you have cared for as your own child  
Treats you as her worst enemy,  
Lavish her with loving attention  
Like a mother caring for her ill child — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

17

Even if your peers or those below you,  
Put you down to make themselves look better,  
Treat them respectfully as you would your teacher:  
Put them above you — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

18

When you are down and out, held in contempt,  
Desperately ill, and emotionally crazed,  
Don't lose heart. Take into you  
The suffering and negativity of all beings — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

19

Even when you are famous, honored by all,  
And as rich as the god of wealth himself,  
Know that success is ephemeral.  
And don't let it go to your head — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

20

If you don't subdue the enemy inside—your own anger—  
The more enemies you subdue outside, the more that come.  
Muster the forces of loving kindness and compassion  
And subdue your own mind — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

21

Sensual pleasures are like salty water:  
The deeper you drink, the thirstier you become.  
Any object that you attach to,  
Right away, let it go — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

22

Whatever arises in experience is your own mind.  
Mind itself is free of any conceptual limitations.  
Know that and don't entertain  
Subject-object fixations — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

23

When you come across something you enjoy,  
Though beautiful to experience, like a summer rainbow,  
Don't take it as real.  
Let go of attachment — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

24

All forms of suffering are like dreaming that your child has died.  
Taking confusion as real wears you out.  
When you run into misfortune,  
Look at it as confusion — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

25

If those who want to be awake have to give even their bodies,  
What need is there to talk about things that you simply own?  
Be generous without looking  
For any return or result — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

26

If you cannot look after yourself because you have no ethical discipline,  
Then your intention to take care of the needs of others is simply a joke.  
Observe ethical behavior without concern  
For a conventional life — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

27

For bodhisattvas who want to be rich in virtue  
A person who hurts you is a precious treasure.  
Cultivate patience for everyone,  
Without irritation or resentment — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

28

Listeners and solitary buddhas, working only for their own welfare,  
Practice as if their heads were on fire.  
To help all beings, pour your energy into practice:  
It is the source of all abilities — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

29

Understanding that emotional reactions are dismantled  
By insight supported by stillness,  
Cultivate meditative stability that passes right by  
The four formless states — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

30

Without wisdom, the five perfections  
Are not enough to attain full awakening.  
Cultivate wisdom and skill  
Free from the three domains — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

31

If you don't go into your own confusion,  
You may be just a materialist in practitioner's clothing.  
Constantly go into your own confusion  
And put an end to it — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

32

You undermine yourself when you react emotionally and  
Grumble about the imperfections of other bodhisattvas.  
Of the imperfections of those who have entered the Great Way,  
Don't say anything — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

33

When you squabble with others about status and rewards,  
You undermine learning, reflection, and meditation.  
Let go of any investment in your family circle  
Or the circle of those who support you — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

34

Abusive language upsets others  
And undermines the ethics of a bodhisattva.  
Don't upset people or  
Speak abusively — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

35

When reactive emotions build up momentum, it is hard to make remedies work.  
A present and aware person uses remedies as weapons,  
To crush craving and other emotional reactions  
As soon as they arise — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

36

In short, in everything you do,  
Question how your mind is, moment by moment.  
By being constantly present and aware  
You bring about what helps others — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

37

To dispel the suffering of beings without limit,  
With wisdom freed from the three domains  
Direct all the goodness generated by these efforts  
To awakening — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

Following the teachings of the holy ones  
On what is written in the sutras, tantras, and commentaries,  
I set out these thirty-seven practices of a bodhisattva  
For those who intend to train in this path.

Because I have limited intelligence and little education,  
These verses are not the kind of poetry that pleases the learned.  
But because I relied on the teachings of the sutras and the revered  
I am confident that The Practices of a Bodhisattva is sound.

However, because it's hard for a person like me with limited intelligence  
To fathom the profundity of the great waves of the activity of bodhisattvas,  
I ask the revered to tolerate any mistakes I have made,  
contradictions, non sequiturs, and such.

From the goodness of this work, may all beings,  
In awakening to both what seems and is true,  
Not rest in any limiting position — existence or peace:  
May they become equal to Great Compassion.