

# GATSAL

## TEACHING

Jetsunma  
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on  
**37** Practices  
of a  
Bodhisattva

Part VII

Deer Park Institute  
Easter Weekend - April 2012

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

So again this verse emphasizes the practice of tonglen towards someone who is suffering or who is ill or who has any problems. We visualise taking on their suffering. However we can also practice for ourselves, if we are suffering or ill or maligned or when something difficult is happening to us, or we are completely destitute. Instead of just despairing we can practice tonglen and think all those beings in the world who are suffering what I am experiencing right now. May all their suffering ripen in me and may they be free of their suffering! May all my inherent good qualities, the endless potential of my buddha-nature, along with whatever good karma I may have, may all of that be given to them! May they be free of suffering, may all their suffering ripen upon me!

In that way, surprisingly enough we do not end up feeling total despair and suicidal, actually what happens is that one feels a kind of inner empowerment and a meaning to one's suffering. We feel some purpose in the suffering, one is not just thinking *poor me*. We are willing to be the surrogate for all the other beings in the world. If only their suffering could come to me, how happy I would be! Just as a mother would rejoice to take on the pain of her child. Likewise, when we are caught in suffering, this can open our hearts away from our own personal woe to recognize the universality of this particular anguish.

We can also practise if we lose a loved one, by just thinking, *may the sorrow of all those in the world who have experienced the loss of a husband or a child or a parent - whatever - may all that pain come onto me, I will take their suffering! May they be free of suffering!* This may be a difficult practice but it opens the heart and we recognize that this is a universal problem. So many people right now in this world are suffering as I am suffering, how sad. This is helpful because otherwise we get so caught up in our own misery and we can't admit the misery of anyone else. *I don't care about other people's suffering, it's my suffering that counts.*

So this is also a very skilful way of taking suffering onto the path. Obviously if we are suffering then we try to get better, but in the meantime we can use this practice as a way of connection

with other beings who share this problem. We are not the only one, so born of compassion, there arises the sincere aspiration, "Wouldn't it be wonderful if I could take on all their suffering and they would be free from that! I am happy to suffer as much as possible if others could just be free!" Then that suffering is not felt as suffering.

The Buddha said there are two types of suffering; one is the physical pain which is unavoidable with this human body. The other is the mental suffering which can be avoided. One way is opening up our hearts to the pain of others instead of our pain making us become more introverted, more self-pitying. So this again is an important lojong practice, taking suffering on the path and using it to develop compassion and empathy. Usually when we suffer we are caught in our own dungeon of misery and this practice opens the doors and the windows allowing us to reach beyond ourselves.

So at verse 19, we are now on an upbeat after being maligned and beheaded.

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

So generally speaking some people are very good at dealing with misfortune and taking difficulties on the path, but as soon as things start to go well they fall apart spiritually. Of course other people can practice nicely when things go well, but when things go wrong they don't know how to deal with it skillfully. So usually we're either one or the other extreme and we need to bring balance into our lives - whether everything is going really well or there are a lot of problems and obstacles for us. Either way - without hope or fear - we are learning to take whatever comes and use it as our path.

Samsara is an ocean and oceans have big waves so sometimes we are up and sometimes we're down. We need to develop inner equanimity so that whatever happens we can maintain that inner stillness able to cope with situations in a skilful manner: not getting carried away either by grief or by exaltation.

So having dealt with all the horrible things that can happen to us, Thogmé Sangpo is now saying, even if things go well, if we are famous and wealthy and everybody loves us, still we

should not grasp at that because we cannot take it with us. No matter how rich we may be, however many friends we may have, however large our family, or however many thousands of devotees surround us, still at the time of death we go empty-handed and alone.

Also we see in this day and age people who are very wealthy and then they make a mistake on the stock market and end up bankrupt. It is very precarious. If we place our reliance for happiness on wealth and success and popularity this is very tenuous because everything is impermanent. You see it today in the media with people who are popular world figures one minute and the next they're dragged through the mud. Even people like Mother Theresa and Gandhi who have had such high reputations. Until somebody writes some scurrilous book and then they're no longer so adored. Many people do not like anybody to be considered superior in good qualities to themselves and they enjoy reading books and articles that seem to bring down revered figures so as to prove that everybody is as bad as everybody else. No need to try to improve themselves.

So people who are adored one minute are often later vilified in the media. So if we attach our sense of self and happiness purely on external values and what other people are saying about us then that is very insecure. It is the nature of everything to change and as Thogmé Sangpo says, the wealth and glory of this world are without essence. People can say the most fantastic things about us, whether true or untrue, and actually it doesn't alter anything – it doesn't change who we are, it doesn't even make us happier. People can own endless corporate jets, does that make them happier? It does not. It does not make them feel any better inside. Many wealthy and famous people are under a lot of pressure to maintain that glossy outer image. They are terrified that they may lose their glory and that someone will come up and be more popular. Imagine those pop stars and movie stars and what tremendous tension they are under the whole time. Once you get to the pinnacle, how are you going to maintain it? Well you are not, in fact. So if our sense of well-being and happiness depends on other people's opinions and our external possessions then that's very sad. Because that's not who we are at all.

So just as people who say bad things about us, whether right or wrong, doesn't really affect us, then also people's praise and unrealistic projections also doesn't change who we are. So if we are dependent on the opinions of others, then we will suffer because it's unreal like an echo. So it's important not only to take pain and difficulties on the path but also to bring the good situations on to the path also. These are the mundane concerns, not just loss but also gain. It's not just blame but also praise; not just insignificance but also fame. Especially it is not just pain but also pleasure. All of it has to be taken and made use of on the path. Usually we imagine that our problems would be solved if only we could avoid the unpleasant and gain only the pleasurable. However these are two sides of the same coin. If we cling to one and try to avoid the other, then we're in a mundane state of being which is very insecure, because we are never going to get all the things we want and avoid all the things we don't want.

The point is to remain open to whatever comes, whichever side of the coin turns up, just stay balanced like a boat on the waves. The waves go up and the waves go down but the boat just glides through.

One of the problems with being famous, rich, revered or successful is that we do tend to cling and then we could become very proud. Wealthy multimillionaires hang out with other multimillionaires. They don't want to deal with the hoi polloi down below. They have their private jets and their darkened windows so nobody can see them in their cars; their mansions

have high walls around with guards and dogs. That's very sad isn't it? Imagine being like that. It's partly because they're afraid of course. However it is not a sign of being happy and at peace. Many become alcoholics. But apart from millionaires, even if we consider average people who are happy and comfortable with lots of friends who say nice things about them, even so we should not to cling to that, nor depend for one's happiness only on everything being pleasant and smooth

When I first got ordained at the age of 21, I went to Thailand and a Thai Princess invited me to her estate by the ocean. I had only been ordained a few weeks and here I was in this beautiful polished teak house situated in the centre of a lotus pond. There were three servants preparing delicious Thai food and through the mango grove was her private silver beach beside the ocean. So I said to her, *"I am supposed to have renounced the world and now I am living like this! I really feel guilty and quite uncomfortable with the situation."* She wisely replied, *"No, you didn't ask for this, you didn't seek it, but because of your good karma it has come to you. It is not going to last for long and maybe afterwards you will be poor and live in difficult conditions. So when things go well, be happy, and when things are difficult be happy also. Just keep an even mind."*

I know some people who are very ascetic in their practice and if they are taken to a nice restaurant they feel uncomfortable. They are only happy hanging out in the local cheap Indian dhabas. The point is, if we are in a nice restaurant, that's nice, or if we are in a scruffy old dhaba, that's nice too – who cares? Whatever comes, just take it and enjoy, so we don't cling. We can cling to poverty, as much as we cling to wealth.

So equanimity of mind towards whatever comes is fine. It's only the mind that makes the problem. It is important also to remember not to make this discrimination. When things ride smoothly that's nice and when the going gets bumpy that's also okay.

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

Now Thogmé has been dealing with the fact that when people are difficult to us if we get angry and retaliate it's like pouring oil on the fire - it just burns up more and more.

As the Buddha said, hatred never ceases from hatred, hatred ceases through non-hatred or love. The more we retaliate the more the problems continue to increase, as we see in world politics. The aggression will persist until we agree to let go of our differences: we're all human beings sharing the same planet, at least let's try and make this a good home to live in. Just as in a family, if we are always fighting one another, no matter how beautiful the home, we will be miserable. On the other hand if we are living in a hovel but the family stays together in harmony and love, then there is happiness. Likewise with this beautiful planet we inhabit. If we are endlessly in conflict with each other, fueled by jealousy, greed and aggression then even though it could be a Pure Land, it remains samsara. Samsara is not the planet; it's the minds of the beings that inhabit the planet: this is what creates samsara or nirvana.

When we enter nirvana we don't suddenly disappear! We would still be living on this same planet but everything has transformed because the mind has transformed. It all depends on the mind, everything depends on the mind. So therefore if we don't deal with our own mental defilements then nothing will ever evolve on this planet. It doesn't matter how many laws are passed, how many environmental groups are formed;

even though people are becoming more aware of how we are destroying our only home, yet still the devastation remains unchanged. Why are we destroying our own planet? The reason is that the anger, greed and delusion have now become totally out of control, encouraged by our consumer society, our schools and education. Our governments are controlled by rapacious multinational corporations - and the planet cannot sustain it. However this all originates from the uncontrolled mind, raging with greed and anger and envy. So many mental negativities! Then there is the arrogance that we as humans can do whatever we want to other species; or that we belong to a superior race permitting us to suppress others, seize their assets and use them for ourselves. This has happened throughout history but we never seem to learn!

Where do all the wars, all the capitalist corporate aggression and greed beyond words, come from? It all comes from the uncontrolled mind which dominates our speech, our thinking, and our actions. If we multiply that by a few billion we can see where the problem lies. So we cannot just blame the politicians, we have to look closer. From a worldwide perspective we gradually draw in closer and closer: we might focus on dharma centres, families, relationships between couples: still we find greed, aggression and ignorance. The ignorance of our believing our own ideas as being truth - what we think must be right because that is what I think!

So here he is dealing with anger (verse 20)

*If one does not conquer one's own hatred,  
The more one fights outer enemies, the more they will increase.*

We fight with this one, and then we get irritated and quarrel with someone else and so it goes on in an endless cycle when there is anger inside our heart. We can always find something to complain about and it's always somebody else's fault. All of us know people with angry minds who regard themselves as blameless but other people as difficult and problematic. They don't see that on one or two occasions that might be true, but a history of conflictive relationships indicates that the problem is not out there, but within themselves. How come we've ended up with so many enemies when we started out with so many friends? So the more one fights outer enemies, the more they will increase

*Therefore, with the armies of loving-kindness and compassion,  
To tame one's own mind is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

To assemble these armies of loving kindness and compassion we start by befriending ourselves. As the Buddha recommended, loving-kindness and compassion should first to be sent to ourselves. A lot of our anger directed towards others stems from our initial anger towards ourselves. So first we have to cultivate peace within ourselves: forgive ourselves; have an appreciation that with all our faults and problems, essentially we are good. We do have buddha-nature, so there is definite hope that we can improve and so we have got to be friends with ourselves.

If we want to tame a wild horse first we have to befriend that horse. Certainly we can beat it into submission and then the horse, though he hates us, will obey, like many of these poor donkeys that we see carrying too heavy loads. But who wants a broken-down hack for a mind? A more skillful way is to befriend the wild horse, allow the horse gradually to calm down and recognize that it is not going to be hurt. That actually this could be a worthwhile and fun relationship, so then gradually the horse begins to quieten and slowly become more amenable. Once the horse begins to trust then we can start to train.

So all this emphasis on how to deal with others is based on the idea that we have pacified and *befriended* our own mind and which then trusts that this is a good path that will benefit us all. Although Buddhism is concerned with overcoming the ego, seeing through the delusion of the ego, yet we can't overcome the ego by beating it to death, it doesn't work. Some religious traditions try to do that but all we end up with is a bitter, unhappy negative ego: it doesn't die by hitting it. The ego is dissolved by seeing through it and this comes about by cultivating an introspective practice.

In order to cultivate an introspective practice the mind has first to be tamed. That means the mind has to become trusting and want to cooperate. In other words at the beginning *the ego* wants to cooperate. Our problem is often that our aspirations go one way but our selfish desires go another way. Instead they need to work together. For example when we wake up and remember it is time to get up and meditate, we can think "*Oh meditation is fun, lets meditate.*" So then there isn't an inner battle between ones higher aspirations thinking "*Now it's time to meditate*" and the ego thinking, "*No it's not, it's time to turn round and go back to sleep!*"

In all honesty it does not say this in Buddhist books, but actually once the ego becomes more tamed, as it begins to cooperate and gain enthusiasm for the path, this is an enormous step forward. So this is why the Buddha said that first we give loving kindness and compassion to ourselves. This means that first we calm our minds so that the ego begins to trust the path, even though this path is ultimately the death of the ego. Ironically the ego will help towards its own annihilation because something inside us knows that this will open into something so much greater than the mere ego can imagine.

However if we are fighting the ego all the time we are going to have endless problems. We need to get all levels of our mind cooperating. This is important. Sometimes Buddhism seems very heavy into ego bashing but on our relative, conceptual level where we are starting to practice, we have to take *everything* we've got onto the path, and that includes our sense of self which anyway will remain with us until we reach the 8<sup>th</sup> bhumi or spiritual level! So these texts dealing with the transformation of the negative states into positive are not talking about the ultimate nature of the mind which is unchanging. Our pure awareness is naturally compassion and wisdom, that doesn't have to be transformed. What Thogmé Sangpo is discussing is the egotistic, relative level of mind, with which we all mostly live unless we are really high level Bodhisattvas.

This teaching is how to accept who we are right now and instead of making it into an obstacle, we recognise this as our big opportunity to advance on the path. So if we have to start with our sense of self then at least let us try to be a happy, cooperative, kind, sensitive, compassionate being who can travel the path to the point where the whole illusion will dissolve into something so much vaster. Of course it is important to recognize this is about the relative level - but the relative level is where we are right now. Since we can't just say about our sense of self, our sense of I "*Ok, I don't believe in you! It says in this book that ego is all delusion and it's emptiness anyway, so from now on I'm just going to be empty awareness.*" If we could do that it would be lovely but it just doesn't work. So we have to start from where we are, with what we've got and use that as the path and then there's no problem.

But also don't think that these teachings are beginning practices just for ordinary people and not for higher level bodhisattvas. Just before Khamtrul Rinpoche passed away, he called together his togdens or yogis and said, "*There is a teaching that I have to give you since now you are ready for it. Come*

tomorrow and you will receive this special teaching.” So of course the togdens were all speculating what teaching could it possibly be, since - being advanced yogis - they had already received just about everything. Perhaps some hidden Dzogchen text? It would have to be something like that. Then next day they went to see Rinpoche and what he taught was the **Seven Point Mind Training**, which is a famous Lojong text dealing with taking difficulties and obstacles on the path and transforming the mind through more skilled responses. So for Khamtrul Rinpoche the quintessential message of the Dharma was a text on Lojong - not Dzogchen, not the 6 Yogas of Naropa - that was the last teaching he gave at Tashi Jong before he died.

Once we recognise the nature of the mind, then we can practise how to relax in that natural awareness, but until we are high level bodhisattvas, we are still mainly dealing with the relative level of our mind. Things are happening all the time, and we have to know how to develop skilfulness to take everything onto the path. So it makes sense to befriend the ego in a nice way to render it cooperative. Then our thinking is transformed from a greedy and obsessive self-grasping into an open spacious consciousness which places others before itself.

Others' happiness is so much more important than our own since we are just one among all the other people. So we can rejoice in the happiness of others which gives us far more happiness than to rejoice only in our own happiness.

So instead of being angry, we cultivate loving kindness and compassion starting with ourselves. If our heart inside is feeling happy and peaceful, what other people do is not going to worry us nearly so much. It's because we have this anger inside ourselves that we are not dealing with, so therefore everyone else becomes the enemy. So we give loving kindness and compassion to ourselves and then naturally this is also going to spread out towards others.

Traditionally we think to ourselves, “*May I be well and happy! May I be free of suffering! May I be peaceful and at my ease!*” Recite any slogan that speaks to you and visualise sending loving thoughts to oneself maybe in the form of light. Loving kindness means *May beings be happy* and compassion means *May they be free from suffering*. Even though at first this may seem artificial and contrived, gradually we begin to feel a kind of peacefulness and a warmth inside ourselves. We have to forgive ourselves. We have all made mistakes and acted stupidly. So what? We're human beings. If we were so perfect then we wouldn't need a path, since we would already have arrived! It's because we have problems, because we have faults, because we've made stupid mistakes that we need a path. So therefore as we accept ourselves, so we can reach out and forgive others. We can start by befriending ourselves, being a little more tolerant of ourselves and that will help us be friendlier and more tolerant of others.

So we sit and quieten down the surface of the mind and send loving thoughts to ourselves. After that to somebody whom we feel particularly loving towards, wishing that they might be well and happy, imagining them well and happy, free from suffering. This is the easiest part - to wish happiness to people (or animals) whom we really care for.

Then spread this goodwill to somebody we feel neutral about, whom we don't care about one way or the other - the postman for example whom we see every day but usually haven't given a thought about whether they are happy or unhappy. Now, just imagine really wishing them to be happy and free from suffering. As the Buddha said, “*To each one, his own self is most dear.*”

Everybody in their heart of hearts wants to feel well and doesn't

want to feel bad. So wish that for them, imagine them being happy, imagine all their problems solved, free from suffering, - their daughter marries the right man, their son goes to a good college and their wife stays healthy and able to cook tasty meals! Everything is really nice and all their worries and problems are resolved and they are just filled with happiness. Imagine it.

Then visualise someone whom we don't like or with whom we have problems. Just think of that person and recognise that if people create difficulties for others it's because inside they are not really at peace with themselves. So wish them well and happy, imagine everything they want being fulfilled for them and all their worries and anxieties, all their problems fading away and they're just happy. Feel pleased for them.

Then just gradually expand that sense of goodwill around the world thinking of how many beings there are in the world - not just human beings but animals, insects, birds, fish, all the beings who inhabit this planet and then all the other realms of beings that we can't even see. All these beings finally experience having all their worries and anxieties melting away replaced by so much happiness and joy and satisfaction. May it be!

This is a powerful meditation that comes down from the time of the Buddha. For example in Thailand many meditators practice in the jungles where there are many poisonous snakes, tigers and other wild animals and these wandering monks don't even live in a hut, they just have a tiny one-man tent made of a mosquito netting and sometimes not even that. But in all these years the animals never harm them. Other people such as the villagers go into the jungles and they would be stung by the snakes or attacked by tigers, it is very common. But the monks were safe because they practise the loving kindness meditation and the animals can feel that. They know that these beings sitting there are not going to harm them and usually these animals only hurt people if they think they themselves are going to be harmed. Since these monks practise non-violence, these wild animals become peaceful in their presence. There are many stories of monks coming out of their meditation and finding themselves faced with a cobra or a tiger sitting there gazing at them tranquilly.

Even when I was living up in the mountains in Lahaul there was a pack of wolves who looked like large Alsations with yellow eyes. Sometimes when I was sitting outside they would come close but just friendly and curious. They would stand there looking at me and I looked at them and it didn't occur to any of us to feel threatened. Actually I have always liked wolves so it didn't even come into my mind to fear them. At night they would gather above my cave and howl. It's very beautiful the howl of wolves.

So if we don't harm others on the whole they usually don't harm us. Perhaps while we are sitting in the plane or on the train, we could practise loving kindness meditation or tonglen. We don't have to change our posture, just send out thoughts of loving-kindness. Imagine beautiful light radiating to fill the carriage and being absorbed into the cells of the passengers' bodies, taking away their suffering to be replaced with light and love and happiness. There's so much negative energy that it's good to send out positive energy.

Translation from:

*The Heart of Compassion:*

*The Thirty-seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva*

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The Padmakara Translation Group