



**The Asian Classics Institute**  
**Contemplations on the Practice of Giving and Taking (Tong Len)**  
**Table of Contents**

Contemplation One

Where does the practice of giving and taking fit into the Buddhist path?

Contemplation Two

How does the practice of giving and taking relate to developing love and compassion?

Contemplation Three

On the benefits of meditating upon love and compassion

Contemplation Four

The original text on the practice of giving and taking, from the *Offering to Lamas* (*Lama Chupa*) of the First Panchen Lama

Contemplation Five

Which goes first, giving or taking?

Contemplation Six

An explanation of the practice of giving and taking in the first reference from the *Offering to Lamas*

Contemplation Seven

An explanation of the practice of giving and taking in the second reference from the *Offering to Lamas*

Contemplation Eight

More on the breath in the practice of giving and taking

Contemplation Nine

Whose suffering do we take?

Contemplation Ten

Additional details of the visualization

Contemplation Eleven

What is it that we give?

Contemplation Twelve

On how giving and taking works, and doesn't work

**Additional readings**

A selection from *The Garden*; Chapter IX: Compassion

The Six Preliminaries to Meditation, and the Seven Ingredients

## **The Asian Classics Institute Contemplations on the Practice of Giving and Taking (Tong Len)**

### **Contemplation One Where does the practice of giving and taking fit into the Buddhist path?**

*To answer this question we turn first to a topical outline of the most famous source for the teachings on giving and taking; that is, An Offering to Lamas, the Indivisible Union of Bliss and Voidness, by the First Panchen Lama, Lobsang Chukyi Gyaltsen (1567?-1662). The outline itself was composed by Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra (1772-1851), an important figure in the lineage of teachings of the Angel of Diamond (Vajra Yogini).*

*Here we see in outline form the place that our practice takes within the steps of the path to Buddhahood: the lam-rim.*

### **III. How to Train Ones Heart in the Path for Those of Greater Scope**

#### **A. How to develop the Wish for enlightenment (bodhichitta)**

##### **1. How to train oneself in the things that cause the Wish**

- a. How to develop the very root of the path: great compassion
- b. How to meditate on the practice of seeing oneself and others as equal, and then exchanging each other

- i. How to meditate on seeing oneself and others as equal
- ii. How to meditate on exchanging oneself and others

- a) Problems that are caused by cherishing oneself
- b) Benefits that come from cherishing others
- c) A summary of the problems and the benefits
- d) The actual practice of exchanging oneself and others

##### **iii. How to practice giving and taking**

##### **c. A presentation of remaining points on the training of the mind**

- i. How to use your attitude to transform bad circumstances into the path
- ii. How to turn this entire life into practice, and how to judge whether or not you've succeeded in training the mind
- iii. How to use your actions to transform bad circumstances into the path, and training oneself in the pledges

##### **2. How to train oneself in the Wish itself**

- a. How to develop the Wish in the form of a prayer

b. How to take the vow to act out the Wish

B. How to train oneself in the activities of a bodhisattva, once one has developed the Wish

1. How to train oneself in giving
2. How to train oneself in ethical living
3. How to train oneself in not getting angry
4. How to train oneself in joyful effort
5. How to train oneself in meditation
6. How to train oneself in wisdom

- a. The deep practice of empty space—the period in meditation
- b. The deep practice of illusion—the period afterwards
- c. Features of the view of the middle way

Followed by "How to Train Ones Heart in the Path of the Way of the Diamond..."

\*\*\*\*\*

*We often see the practice of giving and taking placed within the context of the teachings on exchanging oneself and others, as for example in the outline to A Seven-Part Ritual including All the Essential Points for Collecting Goodness and Purifying Wrong, composed by the first Changkya Rinpoche, Ngawang Lobsang Chunden (1642-1714), a former life of Pabongka Rinpoche:*

A. How to develop the Wish for enlightenment, which is the door for entering the greater way, and the basis for engaging in the deeds of the bodhisattva

1. Developing the Wish through the seven-step, cause-and-effect method

- a. Reaching a state of equal-mindedness towards all living beings
- b. Developing the state of mind wherein one strives to achieve the goals of others
  - i. Recognizing them as your mother
  - ii. Recalling their kindness
  - iii. Repaying their kindness
  - iv. The "beautiful" form of love
  - v. Great compassion
  - vi. Personal responsibility

c. How the Wish is actually developed

2. Developing the Wish through the practice of exchanging oneself and others

- a. The practice of giving and taking**
- b. How the Wish is developed

*The following section describing an extraordinary combination of the two methods of reaching the Wish for Enlightenment, comes from A Detailed Outline of the "Dissection" Instruction for the Steps of the Path to Buddhahood. A copy of this text was found in the personal library of Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche, tutor of His Holiness, the present Dalai Lama.*

There are thirteen steps to the instructions on how to carry out the combined practice:

- (1) Equanimity towards all beings.
- (2) Recognizing them as your mother.
- (3) Recalling all their kindness.
- (4) Deciding to repay their kindness.
- (5) Seeing yourself and others as equal.
- (6) Contemplating, from many different angles, the problems of cherishing yourself
- (7) Contemplating, from many different angles, the advantages of cherishing others
- (8) Reasons why it is very right to cherish others
- (9) The actual practice of exchanging yourself and others
- (10) The practice of taking, accomplished by focusing on the category of compassion
- (11) The practice of giving, accomplished by focusing on the category of love
- (12) Personal responsibility
- (13) The actual Wish for enlightenment.

## **Contemplation Two**

### **How does the practice of giving and taking relate to developing love and compassion?**

*The practice of giving and taking has a distinct relationship to developing the qualities of love and compassion. We hear first from the Sun for Helping Others, a Work of Instruction on the Lineage through which the Mental Training Tradition has Been Taught, composed by the first Changkya Rinpoche:*

Suppose you fail to exchange perfectly  
Your happiness and the pain of others;  
You'll never achieve then enlightenment,  
Nor find any happiness here in life.

Thus it says, and so we must take  
Our cherishing and our ignoring,  
And reverse the objects they hold:  
The one we ignore should be ourselves,  
And the one we cherish all others.

The *Bodhisattva's Way* says the same:  
"Take the happiness from yourself,  
And give yourself others' pain."

The second part is actually training the mind by striving

For others' goals, and comes in two sections: practicing  
During the actual session, then after and inbetween times.

The first of these has two as well: **practicing giving  
For the meditation on love, and practicing taking for  
The meditation upon compassion.** The first is described  
In the words, "Alternate the two, of giving and taking."

\*\*\*\*\*

*The First Panchen Lama also describes the connection between the practice of giving and taking, and  
compassion:*

Meditate for yourself to find an attitude of disgust  
For this world of cyclic life, three realms where every one of us  
Is tortured as though in a pit of fire no one could ever bear,  
Suffering in just this way the pains of birth and death.

Look at the miserable state of your own pain, and try to guess from it  
How all your mothers, pitiful living beings, must suffer the same;  
**Develop in this way a state of genuine compassion,  
And practice constantly giving and taking, alternating the two.**

This huge machine that runs our birth and death as impure things  
Is something that's created by our projections, and nothing more:  
It has in it not a single atom of existing some other way—  
Throw yourself then into the realm of the real, pure fearlessness.

\*\*\*\*\*

*He also gives compassion as a reason to practice giving and taking:*

Remember the verse that goes,

Suffering moreover does have certain benefits:  
It gives you sadness that wipes away your arrogance,  
And teaches you compassion for those caught in the circle;  
You start to avoid bad deeds, and learn to take joy in good.

The point here is that you should learn to take on suffering happily, and gain compassion  
for those who are caught in the cycle of suffering. **And with this motivation you should  
make great efforts in the practice of giving and taking, so that you can amass great  
positive spiritual energy, and purify yourself of spiritual obstacles.**

\*\*\*\*\*

*The Mongol Buddhist master named Namka Pel, in his Mental Training of the Rays of the Sun, repeats the connection between giving and taking, and love and compassion; he then relates the importance of considering the benefits of each:*

The first point, [how to undertake the actual practice,] has two sections: meditating on love, and meditating on compassion. **The first is described in the lines that talk about "practicing giving and taking alternately"—which is to say, we should meditate upon love by giving away our bodies, our possessions, and our stores of good karma to other people.** Our joy in doing so will be much more powerful if first of all we think carefully upon the benefits of love, and so here is a description of these benefits.

### **Contemplation Three On the benefits of meditating upon love and compassion**

*Namka Pel continues his text with the benefits of meditating upon love and compassion, in the context of practicing the meditation on giving and taking:*

The *King of Concentration* says,

Suppose you travelled to a galaxy crowded with billions on billions  
Of pure paradises, and took an infinite number of different offerings  
And sat forever presenting them always to those highest of beings;  
Never could it equal a fraction of the good of thoughts of love.

The point here is that the state of mind called "love" represents much greater good karma than the act of taking vast material wealth and making offerings on a constant basis to the most infinitely holy beings who could ever receive them . . .

\*\*\*\*\*

*In his Sun for Helping Others, the first Changkya Rinpoche quotes the benefits of love mentioned by the realized being Nagarjuna himself:*

Here then are the benefits of meditating on love;  
Remember now the words in the *String of Jewels* that go this way:

Suppose that every single day you three times went and made  
Some offering of delectable food in three hundred silver cups;  
The merit that you performed this way would never equal even  
A fraction of the good you get from a moment, an instant, of love.

The gods above and men as well all take you as their friend;  
And so too do they undertake forever to protect you;  
Your mind is always contented and you've pleasures of many kinds,  
Never can you ever be harmed by poisons or any weapon.

Everything you undertake you succeed at without any effort,

And afterwards you take your birth in the World of the Pure.  
Even should you fail to achieve your liberation,  
Still you find the eight fine qualities of the Loving One.

Once you've come to see the truth of all these words, then go  
And give away for every living being your very body,  
All of your possessions, and what virtue you may have;  
Go and meditate upon the state of greatest love,  
On thoughts wherein you wish that all of them may always have  
Every kind of happiness and help that there could be.

**Contemplation Four**  
**The original text on the practice of giving and taking,**  
**from the Offering to Lamas (Lama Chupa)**  
**of the First Panchen Lama**

*Perhaps the most famous source for the practice of giving and taking as it is currently followed is the Offering to Lamas (Lama Chupa) of the First Panchen Lama. There are two important verses for the practice; we present them here in bold with some of the other verses near them, in order to show the context. The first of the two verses is considered so vital that in modern Tibetan monasteries it is repeated three times whenever the Offering is recited in the assembly of monks.*

**There is no one who desires even the slightest kind of suffering;**  
**There is no one who ever feels they have enough of happiness.**  
Please give me Your blessing to tell myself then that there is no difference  
Between myself and others: teach me joy in their happiness.

**Help me to see that this chronic disease of cherishing only myself**  
**Is the very cause that brings me all the suffering I wish to avoid;**  
Please give me Your blessing to lay the blame properly, and then learn to despise,  
And finally smash this greatest demon, holding that things have some nature.

**Help me to see that cherishing mothers, the thought to bring them to happiness,**  
**Is the doorway for me to develop within me high qualities without limit;**  
Please give me Your blessing to cherish all beings more than my life itself,  
Even should every one of them come as my enemy to attack me.

**To put it briefly, children seek only to do what helps themselves,**  
**While the Able Lords instead act only to do what is good for others;**  
Please give me Your blessing to see the problems and benefits that come from each one,  
And thus learn to see myself and others as equal, and then exchange us.

**Cherishing myself alone is the door to every trouble,**  
**Cherishing my mothers the door to every spiritual quality;**  
Please give me Your blessing then to make the practice of exchanging  
Myself and others the very heart of all my spiritual life.

*dena jetsun lama thukje chen,*

*magyur droway dikdrip dukngel kun, malu data dakla minpa dang, dakki dege shenla tangwa yi,  
drokun dedang denpar jin gyi lob.*

**And then, my high, holy Lama, Lord of All Compassion,  
Give me your blessing please so all the pain of mother beings,  
Their bad deeds and their obstacles, may ripen now on me,  
And so I may now give them all my good and happiness,  
And in this way assure that each one has all happiness.**

If the world around me and those upon it overflow with the fruits of the wrong  
I have done before, and a shower of pain, the things I hate, falls on me,  
Give me Your blessing to see it still as finishing all the results  
Of my own bad deeds, to turn bad circumstances into the path.

Help me then, in brief, to take whatever appears in my life,  
The good or bad, and use the practice of five different powers  
To turn it into a path for increasing the two forms of the Wish  
For enlightenment: give me Your blessing then to feel nothing but joy.

Help me to find the skillful means with the four applications  
To make on the spot whatever happens to me a part of my practice;  
Please give me Your blessing to follow the trainings of the mind, and my pledges,  
And the various rules of life to bring my leisure and fortune great meaning.

*The four applications are methods to apply the problems that befall us to our practice, as follows:  
using them to fill ourselves with the power of good deeds; to purify ourselves of the power of bad  
deeds; as an "offering to demons" in the sense of thanking all who have done us harm, and who have  
thus inspired us to practice more seriously; and for presenting gifts to the protectors of the  
Dharma — then asking them to do their work successfully.*

**Help me to find both love and compassion, and personal responsibility,  
With the crane machine of giving and taking, which ride upon the wind.  
Please give me Your blessing to devote myself to learning  
the Wish for enlightenment,  
So I can use these thoughts to save all beings from the sea of the cycle.**

### **Contemplation Five Which goes first, giving or taking?**

*Pabongka Rinpoche (1878-1941), in his famed text on the steps to Buddhahood entitled A Gift of  
Liberation Thrust into Our Hands, discusses the question of whether we should practice giving  
first, or taking first:*

Here is the fifth point, which is using this practice [that is, exchanging oneself and others]  
as a basis for the meditation on giving and taking. We practice taking by concentrating on  
the object of our compassion, and we practice giving by concentrating on the object of our  
love. Remember the root text [of the *Mental Training in Seven Points*], where it says,

"Alternate the two, of giving and taking." The point is that this practice of giving and taking brings the attitude of exchanging self and others to new heights.

Now there are a lot of books of instruction which say that—of the two steps, giving and taking—we should do the former one first. In actual practice though we should carry out the latter one first; and it is also allowable to do taking alone, without the giving. Think about it though—unless we take their sufferings first, it doesn't do much good for us to give them our happiness. So first we should concentrate on the step of compassion: we should try to develop the compassionate state of mind where we say, "May I free all living beings from their pain."

**Contemplation Six**  
**An explanation of the practice of giving and taking**  
**in the first reference from the *Offering to Lamas***

*The following explanation of the practice of giving and taking comes from a commentary upon the first of the two verses in the Offering to Lamas which treat the meditation. The commentary is again by Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra, and is entitled "The Fulfilment of Every Hope of Those with the Fortune Endowed by Virtue," consisting of Notes to a Teaching upon the Practices of Transfer and Confession, as found in the "Offering to Lamas, the Indivisible Union of Bliss and Voidness."*

Here is the third point, which is how to do the practice of giving and taking. This is found in the five-line verse that begins with the words, "And then my high, holy Lama..." The great Takpukpa understood that this particular subject was of the highest importance, and so he requested [the author, the First Panchen Lama] Chukyi Gyaltsen to allow him to add the first line. He was granted this permission, and so this line we can categorize as that type of sacred speech which is called "granted."

Here is how we actually carry the practice out. Visualize, once again, every living being, surrounding you. Make a sincere supplication that all their karma—either in the form of the karma that causes pain, that is, bad deeds; or in the form of the karma that results as pain, that is, pain itself—should ripen, at this very moment, upon you yourself.

Visualize black light in the hearts of all these beings; think that the light consists of their bad deeds, and spiritual obstacles, along with all their different sufferings. See it all come out of these beings in a stream of black, and entering into yourself, into your heart, to a flame there which represents your tendency to grasp that things have some self-nature of their own. Then see everything blink out into pitch black, and after that see all the bad deeds and obstacles and pains of the beings totally removed, and disappearing in a wisp of smoke.

Next visualize the happiness and good karma that you yourself have collected, are collecting, and will collect during the past, present, and future, all as white light. Send this light out to enwrap all living beings, and think to yourself that it brings them perfect and total happiness.

*After describing the practice in additional detail, as outlined further on, Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra gives more notes on how to incorporate the meditation into ones practice:*

If you plan to make the meditation on giving and taking the central point of your practice, you can follow the custom of the venerable Ngawang Dorje. First go through the process of going for refuge and bringing up the Wish for enlightenment. After that, do the meditation on giving and taking. Next make the prayer that your meditation actually come true, by the power of truth, with the lines that include, "By the pureness of the power of my intentions..."

[The full prayer here reads:

By the pureness of the power of my intentions,  
By the power of the blessings of Those Gone Thus,  
By the powers of the realm of emptiness,  
May all the goals that I may have,  
And all my wishes, whatever they be,  
Come true, with perfect ease.]

After this, bring up in your mind the clear conviction that no object in the universe has any nature of its own: not the object being meditated upon, nor the person meditating upon it, nor anything else at all. And then [continue with certain special practices, followed by a final dedication and prayer].

## **Contemplation Seven**

### **An explanation of the practice of giving and taking in the second reference from the *Offering to Lamas***

*Later in his same commentary, Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra discusses the second reference to the practice of giving and taking from the Offering to Lamas:*

Here is the second part, which is how to train oneself in the Wish for enlightenment itself. Here there are two points: how to develop the Wish in the form of a prayer, and how to take the vow for the Wish in the form of action. The first of these is expressed in the one verse from the *Offering to Lamas* which includes the words, "giving and taking, which ride upon the wind." Now if one lets the practice of giving and taking "ride upon the wind," it is actually easier to develop the Wish for enlightenment; this is because of the crucial point that the mind and the inner winds travel in tandem.

Here are some notes on the unusual Tibetan word *truldek*, found here in this verse of the *Offering*. Think of a master craftsman who is constructing a building that rises high into the sky, with many floors. He fashions a special machine (*trul*) which can act as a crane (*dek*) to bring materials up to the top of the pillars of the ground floor, which then allows him to complete the next floor up, and so on. It's the same with the seven-step, cause-and-effect method for developing the Wish for enlightenment: gaining fluency in the first step, recognizing that all beings have been our mothers, is a key that allows us to achieve the next step, and so on all the way up to the Wish itself.

As for how to let this meditation "ride on the wind," follow first the steps we mentioned earlier [in the explanation of the first reference, found above]. Then picture all your own happiness and good deeds in the form of white light. Send it out together with your breath when you exhale, from your right nostril, to every living being. See it entering their left nostrils, and think to yourself that they are now filled with happiness. Meditate thus upon love.

Contemplate next upon how all these living beings are tormented by the sufferings of cyclic life, and the three lower realms. Picture their suffering, and all their bad deeds, as black light, and see it issuing out of their right nostrils. When you inhale then, see this blackness entering into you together with the air, through your left nostril—and imagine that it has destroyed, within your heart, the tendency to grasp to things as having some self-nature. Meditate thus on compassion.

Bring up in your heart then a feeling of joy, thinking how very fortunate you are to have undertaken this practice. Finally then enter into deep meditation on *detong*. When you come out of this meditation, bring up in your heart that state of personal responsibility where you say to yourself, "Every living being must be freed from every form of suffering, and must come to have every form of happiness. I myself will assure that they do." Realize too that this is possible because everything here is only a construction of your own mind. Next go back and examine yourself, to see whether or not you presently possess any capacity to actually bring about this goal. You will soon realize that for the present you have failed to realize even your own goals, much less achieve the capacity to help others achieve theirs.

Reflect then on the question of whether there is anyone who does have this capacity already. The answer is that a fully enlightened Buddha does. And so you should go on to bring up in your heart the aspiration to achieve the goals of all other beings, saying "I will do it in order to free all of my mothers, every living being, from this ocean of cyclic suffering." And bring up too then the aspiration to reach Buddhahood, thinking, "How wonderful it would be if I could achieve the state of total enlightenment myself!"

This latter state of mind is only approaching the Wish for enlightenment in the form of a prayer; go further then and try to develop the definitive version of the Wish in this same form. This is where you make a pledge to yourself, saying "I will moreover forever keep, and never give up, that state of mind that says, 'I will do it!'" The verse then is requesting that the Lamas grant you Their blessing to be able to reach this Wish.

## **Contemplation Eight**

### **More on the breath in the practice of giving and taking**

*Perhaps the most famous early source on the practice of giving and taking is the "mental training" (lojong) text entitled the Mental Training in Seven Points, written by the bodhisattva Tokme Sangpo (1295-1369). Here are the two relevant lines, which already mention how the meditation involves the breath:*

Alternate the two, of giving and taking;  
Let these same ride on the wind.

*Pabongka Rinpoche, in his famed Gift of Liberation, begins his explanation of the practice from these same lines:*

Remember the line that says we should "Let these two ride on the wind." The point is that, when you are doing some practice of the visualization of giving and taking, you should relate the giving to when the breath is passing out, and the taking to when the breath is entering in.

You may not be able to accomplish this "riding on the wind" at the beginning. But if you practice it over and over again, you will get it to ride; and since the inner winds and the mind move in tandem, you will find it quite easy to bring up in your heart the Wish for enlightenment wherein you exchange yourself and others. As such, this practice is like a great crane machine.

This meditation, by the way, has some parallels in the practice of the "recitation of diamond," which is part of the secret teachings. This is also the point that the great Kedrup has in mind in his famed lines of praise, addressed to our Lord Lama [Je Tsongkapa]:

A single puff of breath from Your holy lips, O Savior,  
Brings soothing benefit to limitless beings.

There are many books of instruction on these points, but it would be improper for me to explain them to an audience that was not following the practice of desirelessness on a regular basis.

*Some indication of the ultimate power of the practice is imparted in a very special praise of Pabongka Rinpoche himself, written by his devoted disciple, Kyabje Trijang Rinpoche—tutor to His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama, and Root Lama of our own Root Lama, Khen Rinpoche Geshe Lobsang Tharchin:*

To summarize, we can recall the lines from the *Four Hundred Verses* [of Master Arya Deva, c. 200 AD] which say:

The Buddhas never move the slightest twitch  
Unless it serves great purpose;  
Even the slightest breath from their lips  
Is but sheer help to living kind.

So there's absolutely no need for me to mention here those major far-reaching, sacred deeds of His holy body, speech, and mind; even the slightest fraction of His high actions represent infinite and inconceivable secret qualities of divine actions, words, and thoughts—and this is true even down to the way He breathes, constantly practicing giving and taking for the benefit of all others, constantly repeating the song of the utterance of emptiness, a spontaneous hymn of the holy sound of *nada*.

Along these same lines, the glorious Chandra Kirti has said,

It's not as if the Winged Ones ever turn back  
because there's no more sky to fly in;

Rather they return in their flight across it because  
their own strength is exhausted.  
It's the same when the noble children and the Buddhas, together  
with disciples, attempt to describe the qualities  
Of a single Buddha; they're infinite as the sky,  
unspeakable, so they turn back from the attempt.

This is a reference to the great *garuda* birds, who start off on a journey across the sky. At some point in their passage the strength of their wings is exhausted, and they find that they must turn back. But it's not as if they reverse their flight because the sky itself has somehow run out.

Suppose now that "Buddhas" and the noble children of Buddhas—that is, bodhisattvas—were all to attempt to bespeak the fine qualities of even a single Buddha. [The first "Buddhas" here refers to practitioners of the lower way known as "self-made Buddhas," and "disciples" refers to other practitioners of the lower way commonly called "listeners."] They could never succeed in doing so fully, even if they tried for the same number of eons as there are drops of water in the ocean.

These are things that only Buddhas can see between each other, objects that only their discriminating wisdom can touch. They are completely beyond the ability of people like you and I, people who are "short-sighted" and have yet to see emptiness directly, to ever describe in words, or even imagine in our thoughts.

*Changkya Rinpoche further describes the process of the breath in his commentary on the tradition of mental training in the following lines:*

The *Prayer of Seventy* too says,

Think of even the tiniest bit of the negative karma that comes  
To those who are caught in the turmoil of the poison of mental affliction;  
Any single act like this would be enough to throw me  
With the greatest ease into the realms of hell below.

I take upon myself, with greatest gladness, any and all  
Of the sufferings that each and every being must undergo.  
May the hearts of all the world be filled with the very highest  
Of happiness, and may they always live in acts of virtue.

Meditate on these thoughts constantly.

When you want to do a meditation to master these points, here is a brief description of how to proceed, through the practice of giving and taking:

Remember the text that says to "let these two ride on the wind";  
For this you take the breath that passes out of both your nostrils  
And give with it to every living being first your body,  
And then all your possessions, followed by your virtuous acts.  
Imagine then that they have found the ultimate happiness,

Free of all impurity. Now when you inhale your breath  
See it coming with the pain and cause of pain for every  
Living being, deep into the center of your heart;  
Imagine then that they are free of every pain there is.  
It's said that doing the practice in this way is especially powerful,  
For the reason that—because the mind and winds both move in tandem—  
You'll be able to avoid distraction, and keep tight recollection.

*Here next are verses from the Abbreviation of the Essence, a text on mental training, again by the  
first Changkya Rinpoche:*

Now  
I'll put it all together for you;  
See  
Your breath as it passes out,  
Give  
With it Dharma: happiness, good,  
To  
Every mother in six realms.

Then  
When you breathe in take from every  
Being  
All their bad deeds and their pain.  
Go  
Thus deep, give and also take,  
Lose  
Your heart to this supreme Wish.

When  
And wherever you may be  
Run  
To your Lama and Three Jewels.  
Live  
In this way, both give and take;  
Luck  
Amazing that I found this Dharma.

Grant  
Me your blessing holy Jewels,  
Let  
Every Dharma wish come true.

\*\*\*\*\*

*The first Changkya Rinpoche describes the role of breath in the meditation of giving and taking as well in a work entitled, "Entertainment for those of the Higher Way," being an Explanation of the Letter of Instruction known as the "Eight Verses," a Work of Advice on Practicing the Wish for Enlightenment composed by the Great Bodhisattva, Dorje Senge of Langri Tang:*

On giving the body and such, Master Shantideva's said:  
"May I become a never-ending treasure to supply  
The entire range of materials things that ever may be needed  
To all those beings living in deep want and destitution,  
Appearing right before them as the thing they most require."  
Use your ability, as he said then, make a sincere wish  
That your body might become a wish-fulfilling gem:  
Practice giving, send forth to them whatever each may want.  
As for the act of taking, go again and make a wish  
That all the bad deeds and the suffering of all living beings  
Could come instead and ripen on nobody else but you.

At our present level this is nothing more than wishing,  
But in everything we do, what we wish plays the major role;  
Practice then both giving and taking in the following way.  
When the breath is going out, through both of the two nostrils  
Of your nose, see it in the form of some white light  
That carries with it every happiness, and each good deed:  
Send them forward travelling in tandem with the breath.  
Imagine then they enter the nostrils of every mother being,  
And fill up all these mothers of yours with every happiness.

When the breath returns and enters in, imagine that  
All the bad deeds and the spiritual obstacles there may be  
In your mothers comes forth from their nostrils in the form  
Of rays of some black light that reaches to you, and then enters  
Into your own nostrils. Think then to yourself that all  
Of what has come from them will ripen onto you instead.

Suppose now that you're able to practice giving and taking in  
This very way, making some strong wish to yourself as you do.  
Because of the fact that the mind and inner winds both move in tandem,  
It's easy, the scriptures say, for you to develop fierce good thoughts.

\*\*\*\*\*

*A final note on the connection between the breath and the practice of giving and taking appears in the Instructions of the Great Seal (the Mahamudra), written again by the first Changkya Rinpoche around 1700:*

When you reach the four lines with the part about "giving and taking that ride upon the wind," try first to bring up in your heart a motivation which includes thoughts of love, compassion, and personal responsibility. Then breath out from your right nostril; while the breath goes out, imagine all your happiness and goodness going with it—that is, give these things to all living beings, your mothers, and see them grow within their minds.

Breathe in then through your left nostril, and with the breath see yourself taking in all the sufferings of each mother, of every living being, along with all the causes that create this

suffering. Dump them all onto the tendency of cherishing yourself, that stays within your own mind. Use thus the instructions on the practice of giving and taking, in order to develop the "deceptive" form of the Wish for enlightenment. [This is the same as what we normally think of as the Wish, as opposed to what is known as the "ultimate" Wish for enlightenment, which is actually a code-name for the direct perception of emptiness.]

### **Contemplation Nine Whose Suffering Do We Take?**

*There are details of the suffering that we take on during the practice of taking that can make the difference in whether our attempt is successful or not. These are summarized by Pabongka Rinpoche in his famed Gift of Liberation:*

Here is a little more detail on the practice. Imagine that the pain of the heat suffered by those in the hot hells, and in fact all the fire there itself, comes as a great mass of hotness into your heart, and melts into the devil who lives there: your own selfishness. Then take all the sufferings, and all the bad deeds, and the spiritual obstacles and such that torment those in the cold hells, and craving spirits, and animals, and near-gods, and gods, and humans, and all the rest, all the way up to bodhisattvas at the tenth bodhisattva level. Imagine that you have taken all their problems onto yourself; make a wish that they could be free of all pain, and that they could clean away from themselves all negative actions, and spiritual obstacles. And make then a prayer, say to yourself, "May all these things come and ripen upon me instead."

\*\*\*\*\*

*Pabongka Rinpoche, in the same text, also describes the correct progression of the practice, as follows:*

Various types of people have widely varying mental capacities for practice. It even happens that there are some beginners who are unable to practice giving and taking at all. For these kinds of people you should recall the line that says, "The proper order of taking is to start off from yourself." The point here is that you should begin to clean beings of suffering through the process meditating, and taking upon yourself, first the pain that you anticipate might come to you yourself during the same afternoon, assuming that you are meditating in the morning. Take then the suffering you will have to experience tomorrow by following the practice today. Then take the pain you will have to endure during the entire next month, and then next year, and next over the entire remainder of your life. Next take the suffering of your future life, and then lastly the pain of the entire string of all your lifetimes all together.

Then clean these problems from your own parents, and then from all those close to you, and next from those towards whom you are neutral; then continue with your enemies and the like, and finally from every living being that there is. Each time you finish cleaning one group, then move your focus on to the next, and start again—and keep moving on. Take upon yourself all their sufferings; their bad deeds, spiritual obstacles, and all the rest.

You should practice the meditation in a gradual progression like this; don't try at first to take on the bad karma and pain of your enemies or the like, you won't be able to have the right feeling.

We can say then that, on some occasions, you should start the practice with yourself and work on out to others. On other occasions you should begin from the hells, and progress on up to those at the tenth bodhisattva level. Sometimes you can start your meditation from the foothills of your land and work in steps down to the flatlands; then at other times begin with the flatlands and work gradually up to the foothills. In the end you should learn to take on yourself any pain at all, all the way down to the suffering that a dog feels when someone throws a stone at it.

\*\*\*\*\*

*In his commentary on the Offering to Lamas, Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra describes the more subtle objects we take on ourselves with a bit more detail:*

Here is a bit more detail. When we're talking about who it is we take from, remember that your Lamas are real Buddhas, and so there's nothing to take from Lamas and Buddhas. You can though take on yourself all the bad deeds, and spiritual obstacles, and every kind of pain that is being experienced by anyone else at all—so you can go all the way from the subtle obstacles to omniscience that we find among bodhisattvas, or listeners, or self-made buddhas, and work all the way down to the hells.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Here lastly are comments by the same author, found in the "Treasure House of Precious Jewels," being Notes to the "Dissection" Instruction for the Steps of the Path to Buddhahood entitled "Easy Path for Travelling to Omniscience":*

Now as long as you have deep within your breast the tendency to cherish yourself, there is no way you can have your initial experience of the opposite tendency, to cherish others; instead, you will fall victim once again to an onslaught of useless thoughts. That is, even if you do manage to feel a tiny bit of the attitude where you cherish others, its flow will be interrupted by the tendency to cherish yourself, and you'll never be able to establish any real continuity. Therefore you should make to yourself the following resolution, again and again: "I will never, for a single instant, allow myself the attitude where I cherish only myself and ignore the needs of others."

Think about the part that mentions, "I will ignore instead myself, and cherish all others; I will take upon myself all the sufferings and negative actions of others." At this point you should meditate on compassion, thinking about how others are tormented by suffering.

Now think about the part where the text mentions, "By my act of giving away all my happiness and good deeds." Here you should contemplate how deprived others are of any happiness, and thus meditate on love. If at the beginning you find these attitudes difficult to bring up in your heart, then begin by taking on first the suffering that you yourself will be experiencing by this same afternoon. Then take on the suffering you will have

tomorrow, and then next month, and next year, and so on. So in stages you can practice giving and taking.

Alternately you can begin with the greatest forms of suffering; for example, with the heat or cold in the hells, and take then upon yourself both the pain and its causes. Work all the way up to the most subtle obstacles to omniscience contained in the minds of listeners, self-made buddhas, and bodhisattvas at the tenth level; take upon yourself all the problems that exist in both the world around you, and in all those who live together with you here.

## **Contemplation Ten**

### **Additional details of the visualization**

#### **How the blackness leaves them**

*We follow now with a few short notes on other details of the meditation. The first and second are found in the Gift of Liberation by Pabongka Rinpoche:*

Peel all the suffering off of them as if you were shaving a hair off with a razor; see it come off in the form of black light, and imagine that it comes into your heart, and sinks into your tendency there of cherishing yourself.

#### **About how it feels**

Concentrate now on what you took from them. You should never just let it fade away somewhere, or doing something like set it off to the side; rather, take it right into the very center of your heart. If at this point you feel a touch of fear, it's a very good sign.

#### **On not trying to take your Lama's "suffering"**

*The theme of not trying to take on any "suffering" from your Lama is repeated often in the teachings on giving and taking:*

*Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra, in the "Treasure House of Precious Jewels," being Notes to the "Dissection" Instruction for the Steps of the Path to Buddhahood entitled "Easy Path for Travelling to Omniscience," states:*

You must always think of your Lama as an actual Buddha. As such, there could never be anything to take from them in the first place.

*Pabongka Rinpoche concurs:*

When you do the taking part, there's nothing at all you could ever take from either your Lama or the Buddhas.

*In an extraordinary record of interviews with a number of his students, Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra discusses the point in some greater detail. The section here is named, A Demonstration of How those Texts which Describe a Method for the Expiation of the Wrong Deeds of One's Lama have No Authoritative Source:*

Here is the ninth point. I see no authoritative source at all for those books that describe how to help your Lama purify himself or herself of negative karma. We see all over the place, in all the sections of the mental training texts where they teach about giving and taking, how there are no problems at all you could ever take from your Lama or the Buddhas. It seems to me better then if we make no attempt to help our Lamas purify themselves of any so-called "bad karma."

### **Contemplation Eleven** **What is it that we give?**

*There is no shortage of exquisite descriptions in scripture for the things we send out to all living beings when we do the practice of giving. The first selection here is taken again from the Treasure House of Precious Jewels, by Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra:*

When you do the practice of giving as you breathe out, think of the quantity of virtue you have in you from your acts of taking refuge, and observing the laws of karma and its consequences. Also imagine that you have some immaculate happiness to give, even though at this point we have yet to gain any. Do the act of giving all these, focusing on the those in the lower realms. See them reaching the higher realms as a result.

Next take the quantity of virtue that you possess from following the path of the three trainings. Give it out to those in the higher realms, and imagine that they have thereby achieved freedom.

Take finally the quantity of virtue you have from learning the Wish for enlightenment, and from following the way of life of the noble sons and daughters of the Buddhas. Imagine that you have given this virtue away to people like the listeners and the self-made buddhas. Imagine finally that this helps them reach Buddhahood itself.

To sum it all up, think to yourself that all the planet, and all the living beings contained by the planet, represent a veritable galaxy of total purity. Emanate out all you possess—your body, your material possessions, and the sum total of all the goodness you have ever done—in the form of an infinite cloud of offerings. Wish to yourself then that, as you present them, the victorious Buddhas could receive these offerings, and that they felt within them a fresh experience of the immaculate combination of bliss and voidness. At the beginning do this only in your thoughts, and then—when you have gotten used to it a little—do it the way we do when we are letting the giving and taking ride upon the winds.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Pabongka Rinpoche, in his Gift of Liberation, describes the giving as follows:*

Here is how to do the practice of giving, by focusing upon the category of love. Remember the text that says,

In order to accomplish the goals of every living being,

Turn your body into the form of a wish-fulfilling jewel.

Sutras such as *Stalks in Array* and the *Victory Banner of Diamond* also state that we should learn to give away our body and our possessions. Here you turn your body into anything and everything that someone might want to have, and then send it out to the world, and to the people living in the world.

First for example send out your body to the creatures of the hot hells, as a sweet, gentle rain; then picture that this rain has cleared away all their suffering. Next change your body into one with all the leisure and fortune required for successful spiritual practice, and picture that they have attained it.

Next turn your body into a beautiful place, with a lovely building upon it. Give it then, and imagine that they enjoy these things. Turn yourself into excellent food and beverage, and give that, imagining that they are filled to their hearts' content. Turn into clothes, and let them wear you. Imagine finally that you have turned into a Spiritual Guide, and that you teach them the Dharma, and thereby bring them to the state of enlightenment.

Then change yourself into sunlight, or clothes, or anything of the like, and give it away to those suffering in the cold hells. For the tormented spirits, turn into food, drink, and the like and give it. For animals turn yourself into the wisdom that is able to analyze things clearly. For the near pleasure beings, turn to armor [since out of jealousy they are constantly battling the full pleasure beings]; and for the pleasure beings themselves become the five objects of the senses. Humans are completely full of desire, and so for them just become whatever they may want at the time, and give it to them.

Do the same with two different kinds of material possessions: you can only give away those of your current life and your future lives; the ones from your past lives cannot now be given away. When you do the giving practice, think of all living beings as we talked about before. Think of how they live, bereft of any happiness, and concentrate mainly on developing feelings of love. You must try to make this single section of the mental training tradition the very heart of your practice.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra, finally, gives us a suggestion on how to succeed at the practice of giving, in the following note from his Fulfilment of Every Hope of Those with the Fortune Endowed by Virtue:*

When you are learning how to do the giving practice, start out by giving away little things, things to eat and drink like vegetables or the like. Make sure the thoughts you have as you give these small things, and the manner in which you present them, are as pure as possible. In the end then you will find yourself capable of giving away even your own body and life. As the famous lines go,

There doesn't exist a single thing at all  
Which isn't easy once you're used to it.

## Contemplation Twelve

## On how giving and taking works, and doesn't work

*The first Changkya Rinpoche, in his Entertainment for those of the Higher Way, explains how the practice of giving and taking actually works, and how it doesn't work:*

It's true that it is difficult to do any good for others directly  
Simply by practicing the way of thinking that we've described.  
Still it's very important to practice thinking in this way,  
And this is shown in the words of the realized being, Nagarjuna:  
"Even though it has no power to function to help others,  
One should nonetheless continue thinking this way always.  
Anyone who does maintain this kind of motivation  
Keeps within himself the power in its real form."

Thus he spoke, and Master Shantideva said as well,  
"If the question of whether you've reached the perfection of giving is decided  
From whether or not we've eradicated poverty in the world,  
Then because we see around us now such beings in distress,  
How could anyone say the Protectors had reached this same perfection?"

Thus he spoke, and so it is that the high and holy ones  
Have sung the highest praises of this very attitude.  
It's of crucial significance then to practice it all the time.

Using this way we should take great care to amass a great collection  
Of good deeds for the purpose of reaching the state of knowing all;  
Remember too these deeds must be imbued with a mass of wisdom,  
As the Master, Shantideva, has noted too in the following words:  
"Every single one of all these various parts was spoken  
By the Able Ones to be directed towards attaining wisdom.  
This then is why all those who have any hope to put a stop  
To all their suffering should attempt to develop this same wisdom."

Thus did he speak, so take then all these parts that relate to method  
Within the Wish for enlightenment, the six perfections and such,  
And use them with wisdom which sees nothing has a nature of its own,  
To eliminate both the obstacles; thus were they spoken, is what he's saying.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra elsewhere notes how the practice of giving and taking, along with more advanced versions of the meditation, actually work. The following is found in his "Secret Treasure of the Angels," consisting of Notes on the Stages of Creation and Completion in the Secret Practice of the Holy Angel (Vajra Yogini) in the Tradition of Naropa:*

This practice cannot help living beings directly, but it does help you to assemble very quickly a great mass of goodness for yourself—and this brings you to attain the state of Enlightenment. Then you really are able to be of some direct help to every living being.

\*\*\*\*\*

*The same Lama, in his Treasure House of Precious Jewels, speaks further on the subject:*

Now all this is only a picture in a meditation; in actual fact, I myself and every other living being are even at this very moment being tormented by suffering. Try to bring up in your heart then the feeling of personal responsibility: say to yourself, "I will see to it that every other person, every living being, is freed from pain, and that they come to possess perfect happiness."

Think to yourself too such things as "But right now, I have no ability to do so at all." With these thoughts, meditate upon the Wish for enlightenment: see your Lama at the crown of your head, and picture a duplicate of him or her melting down into you. Then do all the steps up to where you give away your body, your material possessions, and all your collected virtue, just as you did when we were talking about the seven-step, cause-and-effect method.

All of this represents just a very brief presentation of the essential points on how to do the practice of giving and taking.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Pabongka Rinpoche, in his famed work on the steps of the path, covers the same point in two different places:*

Even if you do undertake the contemplation this way, the fact is that you will find yourself unable to take away anything directly. You will though finish amassing a great amount of virtuous karma, in a very effective way; and if you really get used to the practice then you will find yourself later actually able to take something. This is similar, said our Lama, to the story of the dedicated practitioner of the meditation of Loving One.

\*\*\*\*\*

Now at the very end you should look into yourself and see whether things really happened the way you pictured they should when you did the giving and taking. And what you will find is that it was all only a wish: that in actuality there was no help or happiness which came about at present. This should lead you to think to yourself, "Well then, I will have to see to it that this actually does happen." Try to bring up in your heart therefore the feeling of personal responsibility, where you decide that you would be willing to carry the load all on your own.

### **Contemplation Thirteen On making the meditation on giving and taking an all-day practice**

*Pabongka Rinpoche, in his masterpiece on the steps of the path, includes the following section on how to make an all-day practice from the meditation on giving and taking.*

Remember moreover the lines that say,

In all your activities, practice the words  
To inspire you to remember it.

The point here is that, in order to stay constantly aware of the practice of giving and taking, we should in every place and time keep reciting the lines for it. For this there do exist some lines that were stated in the *Sutra of Golden Light*, but we might not know them, and in this case it is very appropriate to recite the lines that begin with, "And then, my high, holy Lama, Lord of All Compassion..." There are even stories of Lamas of the past who used this verse as the basis of a recitation practice, saying it over and over and keeping track of the number accomplished.

We should moreover try to use taking and giving during all of our daily activities, as a way to develop our Wish for enlightenment further and further. For this you should refer to descriptions in the *Majority Sutra*, and the *Sutra on the Total Pure Objects of the Activities of the Bodhisattvas*. Those of you who hope to make the Wish for enlightenment the inner heart of your practice should study and contemplate upon the *Majority Sutra* over and over, as described in the life story of our gentle protector, the great Tsongkapa.

\*\*\*\*\*

*The reference from the Sutra of Golden Light, incidentally, is quoted in full in such places as the Path of Ease, by the first Panchen Lama, and the Great Book on the Steps of the Path, by Tsongkapa the Great. Here is the context as found in the latter:*

The *Compendium of All the Trainings* [by Master Shantideva] states the following:

There are certain lines in the *Holy Sutra of Golden Light* that teach us how to meditate upon love and compassion. We should contemplate upon them with our every thought, and in the end we should even recite them in our words, on a constant basis. The lines go like this:

May the sound of the great drum  
of the *Holy Golden Light*  
Fly to all three realms of a thousand  
thousands of a thousand worlds  
And put to an end there all pain:  
the pain of the lower realms,  
The pain of the Lord of Death,  
and the pain of poverty.

### **Contemplation Fourteen** **On using the practice of giving and taking** **to help turn problems into spiritual opportunities**

*The incomparable Tibetan master Je Tsongkapa gives the following description on turning the problems that occur throughout our lives into spiritual opportunities, along with the help of giving*

and taking. The selection is found in a piece entitled, *A Very Brief Instruction on the Practice of Transforming Suffering into a Spiritual Path*:

Think of living beings in general, and most especially those humans and non-human spirits who act as the outer factors in causing you to suffer. Contemplate again and again on the fact that they are your mother, and make a wish that the pain you are going to feel might compensate for all the troubles that could ever come to them—that all their troubles stop. Purify thus the way you think: make efforts in the practice of giving and taking, even if all it is for you at this point is something forced, and artificial. Give away to them all your own happiness and goodness, and take from them all their pain.

Use the rite of Kusali, the one for creating great masses of merit, to send out an infinite number of forms of yourself, giving to each living being that very thing they wish for, regardless of who, or what. Carry out this little practice every day as many times as you can, and at the end of each time put the final touch upon it, by reflecting on how the three parts of your deed [the gift, the one who receives it, and you who give it] are, each one of them, free of any nature of their own.

Then lastly make a powerful prayer—from the bottom of your heart—for living kind in general, and more particularly for the sake of those who have hurt you. This way of doing the meditation is highly praised, and you can make it the basis of your daily practice, doing your other recitations and meditations in between sessions of this one, alternating as you go. If you keep this up, your understanding of the practice will constantly increase, and so I ask you to maintain it this way.

When you do maintain this practice, then all the pain and trouble that comes to you on any particular day—all those problems that might otherwise prevent you from doing good—turn into opportunities that help you reach your highest goals. Keep up this way of thinking then: realize that you can turn difficulties into the path; use bad luck to attract good fortune, and by so doing you can turn the very devil into a teacher of the ways of virtue.

Keep on transforming things this way; and every time you are able to pull off a transformation, make supplication to your Lama and to your Close Angel, offering too a *torma* cake to the spirits who are obstructing you, begging their help by saying: "Could you be kind enough to send me yet another problem like that other one, or perhaps even one a little worse?" If you display this kind of strength, then these difficulties will have no power to upset you, and you'll be able to see them as something that actually supports your attempts to live a virtuous life.

The Holy Ones have stated that—if you are able to follow these practices and work on problems while they are still in their lesser stages—then you will be able to remove the karma that would have brought you more serious problems. I therefore ask that you live your lives this way.

This brief explanation has been put down on paper by the glorious Lobsang Drakpa [Je Tsongkapa] in response to a request received, through other parties, from the embodiment of all scripture and reasoning: Rinchen Samdrup, the Teacher from Nyel.

*The eminent Pabongka Rinpoche, in his Gift of Liberation, further links the concept of giving and taking with that of transforming problems into siritual opportunities:*

Whenever then illnesses and different sufferings, various problems or anything of the like come to you, you must think of them as helping you in your quest to achieve enlightenment. Remember the line [spoken by Lama Serlingpa to Lord Atisha, as are the ones below] which says "Illness is a broom that sweeps away your bad deeds, and obstacles." And so whenever sickness or any other such problem comes to you, you must think to yourself that your bad karma from the past, all your negative actions and obstacles—things that were surely going to send you down to a birth in the lower realms—have instead ripened upon the mind and body you have now, and have been fully replaced thereby. As such you should rightly feel an immense sense of relief.

And that's not all. You should beyond that feel great joy, thinking to yourself, "In the past I did the practice of giving and taking, trying to take on myself all the bad deeds and obstacles of every living being. And now I see my wishes have been accomplished." And then continue your meditation, with the hope that whatever suffering might remain should also come and ripen upon you, that it should be added atop what has come already, and that it should compensate, in full, for the entire quantity of suffering that living kind is going to experience ever again in the future.

Think then with your whole heart, do an intense practice of giving and taking, saying "Now the time has finally come; this is my chance to actually take upon myself all the pain of every living being." Then the sickness—instead of acting as an obstacle in your life—will turn into something that brings your practice of goodness to grow even higher. Things will end up just like the story of disciple of the hermit Drakpa Gyeltsen, the one who came down with leprosy, and was cured at Kyimo Dzatreng [through his decision to make the illness into a spiritual practice].

Remember too the line that says that "Problems urge you on to a higher practice of goodness." If you do, then this thought will come to you: "If you don't like to suffer, then why don't you give up all the negative deeds that you do?" Then turn it around, and do everything you can to collect new good karma, and clean yourself of your obstacles from the past.

If people like you and I don't get an occasional problem, then we tend to just sit around enjoying ourselves, and forget about the Dharma. When we do get a problem—when something goes wrong; when we undergo a great loss of some kind; when we get sick, or anything of the like—then we start to feel a sense of renunciation. This wakes us from our stupor, and inspires us to undertake good deeds.

Think finally of the lines that say,

Demons and the spirits that make you sick  
are a miracle sent by the Victors;  
And suffering is the crucible  
In which you discover reality.

Whenever you are hurt in any way—by some authority, by some kind of evil force, or demon or harmful spirit or anything of the like—get used to thinking to yourself, "This is coming to me now because, in the past, I failed to think of the Dharma, and thus let down the entire world. It is a great kindness then that this is happening, and urging me on to practice."

If you really understand how to turn things around this way, then it's not beyond the realm of possibility that you could even use the various sufferings you undergo as something like an aid in perceiving ultimate reality itself.

\*\*\*\*\*

Think about people who have gotten really good at training their minds this way. They might get sick or such even in the act of undertaking to save the Dharma, or something of the like. But they can think to themselves,

Now I've succeeded in accomplishing the goals I was trying to reach when I undertook the practice of giving and taking: now I've been able to get all the sufferings of every living being to ripen upon myself.

And they can also call on these beings to do their great and holy deeds:

Now come again, and send me more sickness, but please let it be even more terrible than the last!

And if you go further and offer a *torma* cake to the evil spirits, talk to them—think to yourself like this:

The harm you have done to me helped me clean myself of my bad karma and obstacles. It helped me to collect a mass of new good karma. It ignited new power in my practice too; and thus it was an act of great kindness. So now please send to me new harms, even bigger ones, and more numerous ones, than those you inflicted upon me before.

Perhaps there are those among you who haven't learned to think in such a radical way yet, and who may find yourselves unable to practice this way—you may even be afraid to try it. In that case you can just follow the normal course of action: call on the spirits and ask them to help you avoid the sickness, or whatever it may be. In any case, you have to consider where it's all coming from when any kind of trouble begins in your life. Be like a person who finds a pool of water on the floor of their house, and runs around looking for where it's coming from, so they can stop it. Get rid of the real cause of your suffering—your own bad deeds—and go about bringing together the real causes of happiness: your own good deeds.

*Our next selection is taken from The Rays of the Sun (S0185), a text on training oneself in the Wish for enlightenment, by Hortun Namka Pel:*

Next is a line that speaks of how we know when we have actually succeeded in training our minds: when this training has reached the point we hoped for. The line goes:

You are able to stay in a state of happiness  
alone, in a constant stream.

The point is that, once you have practiced it, you start to get a feeling for the sweet taste of the Dharma; then no matter what kind of problem comes to you—whether it be some kind of pain, or a bad name, or anything of the like—you learn to think to yourself that the goal of your practice of giving and taking, your training in the Wish for enlightenment, has been attained. Then these problems stop turning into something that brings you any kind of unhappiness; rather, they cause you nothing but sheer joy. When you are able to meditate this way, then we can say that you've reached the first point of the antidote.

To summarize, there is a great potential problem in your practice of trying to develop the Wish for enlightenment. This is that—when something happens that you don't like—you begin to feel unhappy thoughts, which can lead to anger; and then the anger rips out your store of virtue. Remember the words of Shawopa:

Some people go around saying things like "My spiritual teacher seemed a little upset." It seems to me that this is the biggest mistake you could ever make in under-rating another person.

As for the actual point at which you have been able to train your mind in the wish, it is said that "The point at which you're trained is when you think the opposite [of thinking that your Teacher could ever be upset]."

*We find the following actual record of just such a practice in the biography of the eminent master Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra, at S6260. It was composed by his close disciple, Yangchen Druppay Dorje (1809-1887):*

It never even occurred to me that this illness would pose any problem. I received the very adamant instructions that I should "See whether it had any true nature of its own, or not," and I took the time to listen to them. From that moment on I did not suffer, nor feel any fear at all, regardless of how painful the sickness sometimes was. Much less; for I would do short, intense practices of giving and taking and the like, accompanied by thoughts of joy about how the illness was purifying me of a great many of my past bad deeds, and my spiritual obstacles. And, just as your holy diamond words had predicted, the sickness gradually left me.

*Here is a final snippet from His Holiness the First Panchen Lama, advising us how problems can inspire us to the practice of giving and taking. It comes from a work entitled: A Record of a Number of Offerings Made at the Feet of the King of the Shakyas, the Precious Lord (found at S5977-168).*

Remember the lines that say,

Beyond all this, suffering has virtues of its own:  
This dismay it makes you feel removes your arrogance;  
It gives you compassion for those in the cycle of pain;  
You learn to avoid bad deeds, and enjoy the good.

And so you must make great efforts in learning to take pain on yourself happily; and to feel compassion for those still stuck in the cycle of pain; and then finally to practice taking and giving, motivated by these thoughts, in order to collect great masses of good karma, and remove all spiritual obstacles.

### **Contemplation Fifteen** **On using the practice of giving and taking at death**

*Perhaps the most important single time to use the practice of giving and taking is the moment of death, and there is a wonderful precedent for this with a great teacher from the Middle East whom the Tibetans call simply "Yishu." Here we return to the five powers that were mentioned back in Contemplation Four, with the Offering to Lamas by His Holiness the First Panchen Lama. Master Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra presents the five within a practice of giving and taking for the moment of death, in a text entitled "Fulfilling the Hopes of those with the Needed Goodness," being Notes on the Practice of Transferring your Consciousness at Death, and a General Confession, relating to the "Lama Practice of Indivisible Bliss and Voidness" at S6411.*

1

The first power [relating to how you should die] is the "power of pure white seeds." This is where, whatever you may have, you give it all away, without any attachment to any of these things at all.

2

The second power is the "power of prayer." This is where you picture yourself in the presence of the assembly of holy beings belonging to the practice of the Offering to Lamas, make offerings to them, and make very strong prayers—over and over again—that they help you find the ability to accomplish the practice of transferring your mind at death.

3

The third power is the "power of destruction." This is where you come to see that the tendency to perceive things as having some nature of their own, and your habit of cherishing yourself, are the true enemy—for they have, over time with no beginning, thrown you into suffering. You then make a resolution that, regardless of whatever happiness or suffering you may experience in this life or the next, you will never—for even a single instant—allow yourself to fall under the power of either one: the tendency to see things as having a nature of their own, or the habit of cherishing yourself.

4

The fourth power is the "power of resolution." This is where you try to reach a very powerful state of resolve in which you say to yourself, "It would be best if, at the very moment of death, I had none of the normal intense pain that normally comes during the process of dying. But even if I do, then I will follow this very specific method to turn the

whole experience into the Buddhist path itself, by following practices like giving and taking.

5

The fifth power is the "power of habituation." This is where you undertake these spiritual practices—of giving and taking and the like—very intensely, over and over again.

*The following actual description of using the practice at death is found, again, in the biography of Master Ngulchu Dharma Bhadra at S6260.*

It happened that I would not be able to travel to the Heaven of Joy unless I were to spend some three years on my bed to finish the death process, for I still had remaining karma that I had to clean myself of. Up until now, only a bit more than two years of this process have passed, but during this time I have been following the practice of giving and taking with great enthusiasm. And so the great majority of my negative karma has been removed, and as soon as my mind and body leave each other you can be certain, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that my consciousness will fly like a bird to the Heaven of Joy.

### **Contemplation Sixteen** **Slow and steady wins the race**

*Perfecting the practice of giving and taking takes slow and steady practice: a little bit each day, without skipping a day—then even the highest spiritual attitudes can be reached. Here again we begin with the Rays of the Sun:*

Here is the meaning of the line "Training yourself in practice is easy." You might think to yourself something like "Taking on all the pain that others have, and giving them all my happiness and goodness, seems like something that would be very hard to do." But start doing it now, if only in your imagination. After a while you'll get used to thinking this way, and then you won't find any difficulty at all in actually doing giving and taking in real life.

*These words are echoed in the first Changkya Rinpoche's Sun for Helping Others:*

The advices then are the following.  
"Do all your practices with a single one,"  
It was said, meaning that when you eat,  
Wear clothes, or anything else at all  
Do it with thoughts to help other beings.

It says next to always "Do two things  
At the beginning and the end,"  
Meaning that, until the day you die,  
Whenever you begin the day  
Rise from your bed and think to yourself,  
"Today I will not allow myself  
To be the slave of a single bad thought."

Make a firm resolve in your mind  
That whenever you eat, or wear some clothes,  
Or enjoy the use of a place to stay,  
You'll always do so with constant thoughts  
Of wishing to reach enlightenment  
For the sake of others beings.  
And then at the end of the day,  
When it's time to go to bed,

Check and see if you've been able  
To carry your resolution out.  
If you have, then take pleasure  
In your good;  
If you haven't, then try to feel regret,  
And make a decision that you will not  
Repeat the same mistake again.

It says that "Training yourself in practice  
Is easy"; what this means is that  
If you follow the practice of giving and taking  
And practice it well in your thoughts,  
It will come to be a solid habit.

*As the Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life says,*

Each time you make a mistake in your practice,  
Tell yourself how bad you've been.  
Think for a long time how, no matter what,  
You will do in the future what you should,  
And not make the same mistake again.

*As the Guide also says,*

There's not a single thing in the world  
That doesn't come easy when you become  
Accustomed to it. Therefore first get used to bearing  
Small harms that others do to you,  
And soon you'll find that you are able  
To bear the greater ones as well.

Even the Ultimate Guides first practiced  
Giving away things like vegetables  
And the like at the beginning.  
Once They had gotten used to this,  
Then gradually They were later able  
To give away even Their flesh.

At a certain point then you're able to think  
Of your body the same as you do  
About vegetables and such things.  
By this time you'll have no trouble at all  
To give away to others  
Your own flesh and the like.

**The Asian Classics Institute**  
**A selection from: *The Garden***

Chapter IX: Compassion

The meeting with Master Guna Prabha left me with months of thinking to do. I would walk through the streets of the market in town, or sit at the window of the library, looking out at the fields of cotton and groves of orange, and try to imagine how these could be produced by some seed or imprint within my own mind. It seemed difficult to accept, but during my meditations I reviewed the ideas we had talked about again and again, and could find no fault with them. I knew that Guna Prabha had spoken truly when he said I would have to overcome my natural feelings about what appeared to my eyes, and the prejudices of the culture in which I had been raised, and use instead the sight endowed by careful reasoning.

In time, with continued thinking and observation, I grew accustomed to this new way of seeing things, and it brought me a great deal of comfort that it explained every aspect of my world, and my own experiences over the course of a lifetime. Especially when things went wrong—when the keeper of the library shouted at me for some minor error, or when something I had dearly hoped for failed to work out—I reviewed my meeting with Master Guna Prabha, to try to identify what I must have done in my past thinking, speaking, or acting to cause me to see this event.

And I realized that, in every case, the natural reaction which I would have had, such as saying something rude back to the library keeper when he berated me, was exactly the kind of action that would plant an imprint for me to see myself being shouted at again; that is, if I did not restrain myself from my natural negative reaction, I would be perpetuating the very suffering I was trying to avoid.

It became quite clear then that it would make sense for me to take some step that would help me restrain from my natural reactions to wrongs, and so I determined to take the five lifetime vows of a layman. The kindly abbot of the small hermitage where I kept my room granted them to me, with a simple ceremony in his modest quarters.

I truly enjoyed the vows and made it a custom every few hours during the day to review them; it was not that I might have killed a man in every such period of time, but I made it a challenge to find the action I had done which came the closest to endangering the life of another person, or even an animal. Then, in order to achieve a balance within my heart, I also searched the hours to find something I had done in a positive way, something I had done to protect and preserve life, and set aside a few minutes to take joy in what I had

done—for the abbot had advised me that this was a certain way to increase the power of the positive seeds in my mind.

And at the end of every day, before sleeping, I reviewed several of the ten actions that Master Guna Prabha had spoken of, to see what negative thing I had done closest to them, and what thing I had done which was the positive opposite of them. I kept a little diary for this purpose, each day organizing two or three of the ten actions and their opposites like this, on a single page—

1) taking life

closest I came to it today: almost hit someone with my horse

closest I came to the opposite (protecting life): made sure R took her medicine

The list of the ten actions and their opposites I kept in the front of my journal, like this—

1. Taking life

2. Stealing

3. Sexual misconduct

4. Lying

5. Divisive talk

6. Harsh words

7. Idle talk

8. Craving what belongs  
to others

9. Taking pleasure in  
others' misfortunes

10. Holding on to harmful  
ideas

1. Protecting life

2. Respecting others' property

3. Respecting others' partners

4. Telling only the truth

5. Bringing people together

6. Kind and gentle speech

7. Saying only meaningful things

8. Helping others get what they  
want

9. Helping others in their  
misfortune

10. Examining my beliefs, and  
keeping only those that  
were true and good

And so I would write down several instances where I had done or thought or said something that was in any way close to the two or three actions I had chosen for that evening, in both the negative column and the positive column. Within the course of but a few weeks I found something changing in myself and my world.

The first thing I noticed was rather upsetting, for I began to realize that throughout the day, especially as I spoke to others, I was constantly dropping hints, or even making outright statements, that were in a subtle way meant to cast myself in a good light, and to estrange people from others; or else I would say things that, even though I did not use any obviously harsh words, were meant to have the same effect. I began to worry then that I was getting worse, and not better, but the abbot counseled me, and told me that this was a normal impression when someone first started to really watch what they said or did or thought.

The most immediate effect of my efforts was that I simply stopped saying, doing, or thinking things that were so obviously negative that, even as a novice on this Path, I could not help but notice them. What happened then had little to do with the seeds or imprints

that I had learned about; it was much simpler: I simply had more time in my mind for better things, for positive thoughts, and I found myself becoming more creative, better able to concentrate, and in a good mood throughout the day, which was simply very enjoyable. Avoiding bad seeds in my mind was, well, fun, and not the drudgery I'd anticipated when Guna Prabha had first spoken of vows.

In a slower but very steady way, I also noticed my world itself changing, and I remembered that if seeds were planted very consciously and sincerely that they could ripen relatively quickly: in an ideal case, one could even alter one's entire reality within this life. The change that started happening to me is difficult to describe, but it was definitely noticeable and real. Foods tasted better, colors were brighter, I felt joy and creativity bubbling within me, and people all around me seemed to begin saying and doing things that inspired my spirit.

I felt instinctively that, if I were able to take this way of life to its final end, then even those things in life which seemed inevitable—such as illness and old age, or death itself—had the potential to change entirely. I also sensed that this greater change would require something more powerful than my present efforts, and so once more I felt compelled to travel to the Garden.

Winter by now had passed, and spring was at its gorgeous height. As I walked through the gate that evening I noticed, perhaps not a little because of my recent practices in the art of a virtuous life, that the small patch of grass had turned to a lush lawn. The fountain seemed to flow with more crystal desert water than ever, and the limbs of the carob tree had spread far beyond the perimeter of the little brick platform around it: they reached out and then down nearly to the endearing little wooden bench where I had learned so much.

I sat on the end of the bench and in the twilight turned my thoughts and eyes to the southern part of the garden, to a small plum tree under which I remembered standing once with my Golden Lady, drawing a design across her forehead with my lips, and then suddenly being struck by a sense of concern for people I had never known, and simultaneously feeling a kind of jolt deep within my body. So deeply did I muse on these thoughts that I was unaware that Master Asanga had entered the Garden, and was seated at my side, on the bench.

I turned, and the first thing I saw was his hand, stretched out towards me, holding a small, fragrant *cupsay*, a kind of pastry my mother had often baked for us. "Here," he said, "I heard you like these." He was already munching on one in a friendly way, completely unassuming, and urged me to follow suit. And so we sat there, enjoying the splendid garden and food; each time I finished with one piece, he urged upon me another from a small bag he had pulled from beneath his upper robe.

He looked very different than I would have imagined. He and his half-brother Vasu Bandhu, who had already blessed me with his instruction in the Garden, had during the last sixteen centuries been considered two of the greatest thinkers known to us. And yet here before me he seemed simply a very pleasant and friendly companion, with a simple, honest face and a completely gentle manner of moving and speaking, almost to the point of shyness. He wore his robes naturally, not overly concerned about how they looked but

looking therefore as if they were an extension of his very being, so perfectly did their gentle folds match his own evident kindness.

"Are you all right?" he asked, "did you have enough? Do you think I might have put too much sugar on them? I tried to powder it, but I haven't quite got it right yet."

I looked at him in amazement as I imagined one of the greatest philosophers of all time fussing over a hot fire to make sure my pastries had been done just right. But this seemed so typical of his nature, and taught me a great lesson even before he began to speak in earnest.

"Time passes," he said gently, looking at me with soft brown eyes, full of concern, "and I find personally that I tend to neglect things of importance."

I grasped immediately that he was alluding to my mother, and my search for my mother, and my journey to find some way that I could help her still, if this were in any way possible. I realized that the pursuit of my own happiness in life had overshadowed my original intentions to help her, and in the presence of such goodness I was forced to flush in shame, and lower my eyes to the top of the bench.

He reached out in a very natural motion and took my hand, as if to apologize for hurting me, but held the fingers with a firmness that told me it was a necessary place to start, for the lessons which I needed in my life now.

"Gardens are so nice," he said with warmth. "Have you ever wondered how much thought it takes to plan one properly? One must think carefully, and imagine what would most please every one of the many different people who will ever visit the garden, each seeking some brief moment of serenity in their lives, and finding it in a slightly different way, within a single Garden."

I felt a pang in my chest, and it seemed as though, in these few simple words, he were standing before me, shouting, and accusing me of trying thus far in my spiritual life to build a very strange garden, one only big enough for myself, with no thought of my mother and all the others who needed happiness as well, but who had found no teacher or Path to help them. His extraordinary way of using everyday conversation to draw my attention to the very things I most needed to think about struck me intensely, reminded me deeply of Someone else with a very similar quality.

"Suppose for example," he continued, as if completely unaware of the way his words were pummeling my heart, "that the person who designed the garden enjoyed plums and roses. I guess that it would take some degree of self-control, and sensitivity, to realize that others might prefer other flowers and fruits. And so the designer of the garden would at some point have to go to other gardens, to observe carefully the people who went there, and try very hard to put himself in their places, and learn to see what *they* enjoy in a garden, almost as well as they do."

Again his words struck a soft point in my heart, and I felt compelled to confess to him, at that very moment, a thought that had troubled me for some time.

"I am not a person who has lived many years," I began, "but even before I had spent much time in this life I quickly understood what a sacred thing it would be if I could really put myself in others' places, if I could truly manage to be as concerned about what they want as much as they were—in short, if I could learn to feel the kind of love or compassion that wants to provide others with what *they* want in life, and wants it every way as much as they themselves do.

"But to be entirely honest," I continued, "I cannot see how it is possible. I am completely aware that I am always infinitely more interested in what I want than in what others want, even if their want is a more serious want, even if their want is a question of their inner or physical survival. I simply cannot imagine any way that I could learn to care for others with the same care with which I care for myself, and this bothers me deeply, for I sense what joy it would bring all of us here in this world if we could learn this one sacred way of living."

"You are completely right," he said with a somber expression, full of concern for my concern. "It is so natural and easy for us to pass through life, worrying about those minor needs and wants that we have for ourselves, and ignore those who may even be dying of hunger and want of shelter, before our very eyes. And as you say we are aware of this deficiency in our compassion, and I know of few thinking people who do not feel disturbed from time to time by their own inability to care for others with even a sliver of the concern that they automatically show for themselves. We know we want to love, and we know we do not know how."

We sat silently for some time, and I wondered at how close I already felt to him, how he made me feel his equal and even his confidante, within but a few minutes. Then he cleared his throat softly, as if afraid to speak, and said, "I am no great saint..."

And in the way he said it, I realized that he was.

"But someone once taught me this meditation that perhaps could help us..."

And of course, I knew it would.

"Not that I'm saying that I've been able to do it very well myself..."

And I knew that he had perfected it.

"But perhaps you would find it of some use," he concluded. Instinctively I raised my hands to my breast, and touched my heart, as if asking him to change it, then and there.

"Prepare yourself for meditation," he said softly, but with the ultimate tone of authority, the authority of love itself. And I prepared myself, within my mind, as I had learned from master Kamala Shila, here in the Garden.

After a few minutes Asanga said, "Now watch your breath. Watch it pass, in and out. Do not try to change it in any way, simply watch it."

This I did, quietly.

"And now think," he continued almost in a whisper, "of some kind of pain or trouble that you can expect to come to you before this night itself ends."

I could imagine no pain or trouble here in the Garden, especially with Master Asanga by my side, and so I moved my mind later on into the night, thinking of the empty feeling that I always had when I left the gate of the Garden, as I realized once again that I was leaving without having met the Golden One for whom, I had to admit, I still lived.

"And now take that empty feeling," he said quite naturally, "of that future you, of yourself in perhaps an hour from now, and imagine that the feeling has changed to a little pool of pitch black light, deep in your, his, heart."

I did so, seeing a small blot of pure blackness within myself over there, near the gate, in an hour or so, as he, I, left the gate of the Garden.

"Now wish that you could take that black light away from that future you; make a wish that he would never have to experience that empty feeling, and decide that you will take it away from him."

I made this decision; it was not so hard, considering that I was going to feel better than I would have felt otherwise, if only in an hour from now.

"And now cut that pool of black light away from the heart of the future you, as if with some razor, and decide that you would be willing to take it into yourself now, if he would not have to feel it later."

This time I felt a bit of hesitation, a feeling that it might hurt me, but since it was just saving myself the same pain later, I decided I could do so, in the same way that we endure having a cut cleaned out with alcohol, knowing it will help us stop a greater hurt later, if we take the smaller hurt now. I decided to accept the black hurt light now.

"Now draw the black light into yourself, suck the empty feeling out of that future you, as he walks through the gate over there. Change it to a long thin stream of black light and let it float on the air of your breath, as you inhale, and your breath returns to your body. If the picture is not clear with one in-breath, then bring the black stream in on several of them."

I did as Master Asanga instructed, and the more I concentrated, the more I felt a slight distaste. But I brought the black light in on my breath, knowing I was helping my future self.

"The breath is entering your chest; the black light is riding on the breath. Now see a tiny flame in the very middle of your heart: this is your own selfishness, and the misunderstanding of your life and your world that creates this selfishness. See, look at the black light, it is approaching that little flame of selfishness; it is about to touch it."

I saw the tip of the thin ray of black light as I breathed it in through my nostrils, and saw it stream down the throat, into my chest, and about to touch the red flame of my selfishness.

"Watch carefully now, concentrate, for it will all be over in a flash. The black light hits the flame; there is a burst of white light; the flame of your selfishness blinks into nothingness; and the black light itself flashes into a puff of thin white smoke, that evaporates as well into nothingness—all in a split second. Your own selfishness, and your own future pain, which you decided to take upon yourself, are gone forever, and your heart is clean and pure."

This part was more fun, a happy ending, and I practiced it a few times. Each time I felt a sense of relief, and release, as the little flame was snuffed out, and the puff of white smoke faded away.

"Rest for a moment," he said. He pulled a little wooden bowl from a fold at the side of his robes, stepped slowly and gracefully to the spring, and filled it. Then he came and offered it to me, and I drank gratefully, only afterwards realizing how natural it seemed that this extraordinary master of philosophy, and of life itself, should be serving a spiritual beginner like me.

He seated himself again, and continued: "Now think of some suffering, some painful situation or thought, that you can anticipate might come to you sometime tomorrow."

This was no great feat, for the thought of the disgruntled look on the library keeper's face, as I entered for work perhaps an hour or two late, directly from a late night's ride on the coach, came immediately to mind. I could easily imagine the feeling of resentment that would well up inside of me then, despite my best efforts in the moment, and whatever sincere resolutions I might make in advance, to prevent it.

"Now see the resentment in his heart, in tomorrow-you's heart, as a small pool of black light."

I closed my eyes and imagined it, a black blot inside my chest as I stood framed in the door of the library, facing the keeper's writing desk.

"Now cut it away from your heart." And I did.

"Now be sure to see it for what it is, be sure to think of it as that future pain in your own heart, and decide to take it into yourself.

"Now see it as a thin stream of black light, riding the in-breath, approaching your face.

"Entering your nostrils.

"Seeping down your throat, nearly touching the tiny flame of selfishness and misunderstanding at your heart.

"Touched!

"Flash of white light!

"Selfishness blinks out!

"Resentment gone to a puff of smoke, and the smoke—vanished!" he said urgently.

"Your heart—pure, and clean!"

I felt again the feeling of release, of freedom, and a sort of pride that I was taking care of someone else, even if it was myself. The meditation was having some kind of deeper effect on me, one which I hardly would have anticipated.

"Now try to imagine the three or four worst pains you might have in the whole week ahead. Don't be lazy, define them clearly in your thoughts, and see them as the pool of black light in his, I mean your, heart, a week from now."

This was a little more of an exercise, but I did so. Almost certainly there would be a major insult, or at least a snide remark, from the keeper of the library, one that would stay with me a few days, disturbing my thoughts and sleep. I could probably count on a problem with my horse, he was always losing a shoe or running from me in the morning, when I was already late to the library. No doubt the spring rain would get to the firewood, and my dinner would be late; and, yes, I could, after tonight, expect some sharp feelings of pain, feelings that stayed over the years, remembering my mother, and wondering how I could help her.

"You know the steps," he said. "Now take the pain yourself."

This was something new, trying to keep my mind on three or four different hurts at once, but I could feel that the reward from doing so would be even greater, and I went through the whole meditation slowly, picturing each step clearly. Strangely I felt very relieved that I would have the whole week ahead without at least these few sufferings.

"And now do the whole month," he said. "Define clearly the seven or eight worst things that could come to you in the next thirty days, and go through the exercise yourself. Go slowly, make sure everything is clear."

It took me nearly twenty minutes, but I did as Master Asanga said. On one hand I was becoming more accustomed to my natural hesitation to take on the pain, and I was learning to overcome it; but on the other hand it seemed a larger and more difficult task each time the amount of pain was increased. I caught myself trying not to think of the specific kinds of pain very clearly as the black light approached my face, but I knew instinctively that this was not the point, and so redoubled my courage and pictured them clearly in the black.

"Enough," he said, "rest again." I leaned back and breathed the sweet spring air, gazed up at the awesome desert stars, and allowed my thoughts to wander the nooks and crannies of the Garden where She had given me other lessons.

Then he leaned over to me warmly, took up my hands in his own, and gazed sincerely into my eyes. "When you have the strength, then increase the pool of black to include the major problems and pains you will face in the coming year. When you are still stronger, visit yourself at your deathbed, and help take away his extraordinary pain. Later on begin to add the suffering and confusion that you will experience just after dying, as you enter that

temporary spirit form, and begin the journey to your new life. Then take the pains of the entire coming life, and then the lives after that.

"Go carefully, make sure you think of each of the pains clearly, and be very sure to go slowly, do not hurt yourself, take in only what you can do comfortably. It is a good sign if you feel some slight anxiety and hesitation, for it shows that you are really imagining the pains clearly. But at no time, in any meditation, should you push yourself to a point where it hurts, where you become nervous or distraught, for this is very harmful to the heart and to the spiritual body. The key is to meditate regularly, and to build up steadily, little by little, so that the meditation becomes firm and strong, rather than making major but hysterical efforts, for these usually collapse entirely within a short time.

"When your strength is great, your inner strength, then begin to imagine one or two minor sufferings of someone close to you, say your own father or mother. Practice taking these into yourself, and destroying them and your selfishness, along with the misunderstanding that causes this selfishness, in the flash of white light. Then build up to a week with them, and then a month, and so on.

"Move on next to other people that you love, relatives and close friends, as before.

"When you feel yourself even more advanced, then shift over to people to whom you feel neutral: strangers who visit the library, people on the side of the road as you pass.

"When your meditation is powerful enough for a greater leap, then take upon yourself the pains of those whom you actively dislike. This, when you are able to do it honestly, will be a great achievement, an inner achievement, so little recognized by the world at large, which is more impressed if a person can win a battle of strength with a horse, than if he or she can win a battle of strength with his or her own bad thoughts and habits, although the latter is infinitely more difficult.

"And then finally, when you are at your peak, send your mind out to every possible habitation of the world: to the houses of humans, to the caves of animals, to the pools where fish live, to the oceans and trees and holes beneath the ground, and imagine every living thing, and practice this sacred act with every outer and inner pain they have. Go beyond your own world to the stars, and to other realms, realms mostly of horror, that your mind knows must exist, although your eyes cannot yet see them. Go, to worlds and planets and realms of hurting things that your mind can barely imagine, and take their black hurt away from them." He sat silently, then raised a corner of his robe, and wiped away his tears, silently.

We sat in the quiet, and I enjoyed the sweet feeling of choosing to notice the pain of others, and wanting to take it from them. I felt at that moment that there was no sweeter emotion in the world—not the pleasure of a lover, nor the thrill of success, nor the fire of power or money.

"Sometimes I think," he began, and I heard coming another one of those lessons that was not a lesson, a teaching disguised as a passing thought, "of how mothers must feel; it is not a feeling that you or I will ever be able to feel in this life, but we can watch and observe

mothers, and see their blind and overpowering love for their children, a love that would impel them to commit any act they had to, if it meant helping their children.

"This love seems to have two sides to it: there is one kind of love they have that cannot bear to watch their child suffer—you must have seen yourself, a mother with a sick infant in her arms, pushing her way through a crowd of people who wait to see some great physician; a mother racing to protect her child from an oncoming carriage; a mother like a lion rising in fury to anyone who would threaten her child.

"Then there is the side of a mother's love that wants to give, that wants to provide; I suppose we think most naturally of how she wants at the very beginning to give milk, to fill her child with this warm, liquid happiness, and see the contentment on the babe's face afterwards. And then throughout her life a mother strives to see to it that her child, even when he or she is already grown, gets everything they wish for: some special piece of clothing, a good schooling, good and helpful friends, and then in their adult years prosperity—a good occupation, a good home, spouse, and their own children.

"The mother wishes all these things on her child in a way that sometimes amazes me as I think of it, because it often seems that—of all the people in the world—it is only your mother who cares for you more than you care for yourself."

And I knew the truth of Master Asanga's words, for this very realization had come to me on the eve of my mother's death, when the winds howled through the trees outside my door at the Academy, and I realized that I had lost the one person who cared more for my happiness even than I did.

"And so," the Master said quietly, with a look that was an incongruous mixture of shyness and extreme inner power, "there is a second part to the meditation, which if you don't mind, I can try to describe to you, although I hardly understand it so well myself."

I smiled despite myself, and nodded.

"The entire practice we are doing together tonight is called 'giving and taking,' although when we actually perform it we do the taking part first, and the giving part later. What we take, as you have seen, is the suffering of others, by rehearsing first with our own suffering. Remember the suffering can be anything that hurts a person, all the way from the atrocities that take place in the vast realms of misery—beyond our present sight—on up to the very last moment of doubt, the very last moment before knowledge becomes total, in the mind of a great saint.

"And what we give is all happiness, everything we can, everything we have, as I shall now instruct you. By thinking of how mothers behave you will easily see why the taking comes first, for it would be senseless to offer a child a small sweet, or a toy, if he were at that moment writhing in pain from some disease that was about to take his or her life.

"Now we'll do the giving part," he said, bouncing a bit on the bench, like a child about to play his favorite game. "Prepare yourself for meditation."

And this I did, as before.

"Turn your mind again to your breath, to the flow in, and out, and in again."

I did this almost automatically, as I had been taught, in order to focus myself inward.

"Now picture all your goodness, all your good thoughts and words and deeds, and all the sacred knowledge you have ever learned, and all the imprints lying in your mind that will produce happiness for you in the future. See it all lumped together, as a glowing, pure white light at your heart."

"Next think of someone you know—someone dear to you is easiest to begin with—and think about what they would most like to have, some thing or relationship, or anything else at all."

I thought for a moment and hesitated. My first instinct had been to send Her something, but upon reflecting I could not imagine what she might want, because in my heart I felt that, when I looked at the way she held her eyes, with the lids half closed in some kind of constant bliss, she seemed somehow complete, and there was nothing more she needed at all. This too, I surmised, was why Master Asanga had not mentioned focusing either side of this meditation on the Enlightened Ones, for there was nothing to take, and nothing they needed. At the same time it occurred to me that I could perhaps at times offer them what little good thoughts or realizations I had reached, as a child proudly shows a parent some little drawing they have made.

And so I settled on my mother, and imagined that I could provide her with some great lantern, a mystical lantern, which would show her how to make her way away from the realms of terror that her mind might encounter in the time after her death in this world. And as she held the lamp in her hand it would also direct her to this holy Path, like a good horse who knows the way home, even after the sun has set, and darkness covered the world.

"Now as you watch your breath, focus on one of the outgoing breaths. Do not, by the way, ever try to hold your breath, or control it, during this meditation: it should simply go as it wants to go, without any interference on your part. On one of the outgoing breaths, or several if it feels more comfortable, send forth a slender ray of the white light from your heart, riding on the breath.

"Imagine that the breath flows out into the world, or to the entire galaxy, and seeks out your mother, wherever she may be at this moment. On the tip of the ray of light see your magic lantern; make it full size, for the lightrays of thought know no limitation: they can reach to the farthest corners of existence and deliver there any object, from a drop of water to the greatest of oceans.

"Imagine that the ray of light reaches her side.

"Imagine that she looks down, in awe, and sees the white light that has come to her.

"Imagine that she realizes the light has come from you, from her son, and imagine that a great joy, as white as the light, fills her heart.

"Imagine that she reaches into the ray of light and takes up the lantern.

"Imagine that, as we speak, it has already begun to draw her forth, to the greater Light."

Whilst Master Asanga spoke, my heart wrenched with painful memory, and at the same time leapt with sudden hope. "Is it possible?" I asked fervently, "Can she really see it? Does it really go to her?"

He gave me a look of intense compassion, his eyes glistening, and said quietly, "Listen carefully, for I bring you very glad tidings, but not the kind that you may expect. Let me ask you, first of all, a few simple questions. Do you believe in the existence of the Enlightened Ones?"

"Yes," I said, "I may not be able to see them, but more importantly I understand how they can exist, and I even understand how I might become one. Aside from all this I have an instinct—although I admit that instincts are generally to be viewed with caution, whereas understanding can always be trusted—which has stayed with me throughout my whole life, and throughout my whole being; and this instinct informs me that the Enlightened Ones certainly do exist."

"And do you imagine," he said, "that an Enlightened One is aware of the suffering of those beings who are not yet enlightened?"

"Most certainly so, for they know all things, and our suffering is but one of all things."

"And do you believe that these Enlightened Ones are compassionate? When they see one of us suffering, do they care?"

"Of course they care, they care about our suffering even more than we do."

"And so if there were any way in which they could remove any single atom of our suffering, say by doing this meditation themselves, do not you think that they would have done so, a long time ago?"

I sat silent, stunned by the thought.

"And so cannot we say, that the fact that we do suffer now, is proof that suffering cannot be removed simply by someone wishing it removed, whether that someone is ourselves or any other being in the universe?"

My utter silence confirmed the truth of Master Asanga's words.

"So what is the use," I cried out then, "what is the use of doing this meditation, or anything else? If it cannot really remove anyone's pain, or provide anyone with happiness, then why do we even try?"

He gazed at me somberly. "I ask you," he said quietly. "Why was it that you and I started this meditation in the first place, earlier this evening?"

"I had asked you if there was a way to learn compassion; if there was any way that I could learn to care for others with the same intensity that I care for myself."

"And do you understand why your heart, and the heart of every living being, craves so for this holy water? Do you understand why you thirst so deeply for this ability, this ability to love equally?"

"It is nothing I can put into words, only I sense it to be true, I think we all sense it to be true."

"The real reason," he replied sincerely, "is that with this love we can do all things, and be all things. And there is a part of our mind which realizes this fact, although we are too weak to act on it properly. To put it very simply, this compassion is the one quality that can turn you into a spiritual Warrior. It is the only emotion which can drive you to the greatest height of human endeavor, which is the absolute and unquestioning service of all those around us who need in any way."

"And so actually this meditation cannot help my mother or anyone else," I mused, hardly hearing his words.

Master Asanga grabbed me full on the shoulders, and for the first time he revealed the strength, the overpowering might, of both his body and his intellect. He gave me one powerful shake, and said "Look in my eyes! Now!"

I looked.

"Think!"

I tried, I was tired, I was beginning to lose the point.

"What would be the logical result of a meditation in which you attempted, if only mentally, to remove the sufferings of every living creature in the universe, and to bring them every wish their hearts desired, from the measly happinesses of the damned existence we live now, all the way up to the highest bliss of total enlightenment?"

I thought for a moment, more clearly under the intensity streaming through his iron arms and hands. "Like all thoughts," I began haltingly, "it would plant a seed or imprint in my mind. But I cannot imagine a more pure intention, nor any thought which could cover a greater object, since we would be wishing for the ultimate happiness not of just ourselves or a few loved ones, but rather for the whole livingkind of the entire universe."

And then it dawned on me. "If I had to choose the one action which could create an entirely perfect world in the future, if I had to choose one thing which could leave an imprint in my mind that would make me see every single detail and person of the world as completely perfect, as pure light, and pure bliss, then it would be the very meditation we are doing tonight."

He nodded, and continued to stare in my face, waiting for more.

"But what good is a perfect world that I have created only for myself, if my mother cannot see it? What good is a perfect garden if it is only large enough for a single selfish person?"

"Now listen," he commanded me again. "What does logic tell you? What can your mind find to answer your question? Think! This is why you have come here, this is why the Garden itself exists, this is why you have seen and talked to us, to me.

"When your mother was ill, when the cancer started to eat at her breasts, and then moved to her arms and belly, and finally clawed its way into her heart and released the red blood there over the floor of your entire house, was there anyone who could have come and removed her sickness with a wave of their hand?"

"No, no one, not for her, not for anyone, as long as humanity has lived."

"And what caused her to be ill?"

"According to all that we have said, it was because she herself failed, at some point in the past, to respect life."

"And why did she fail to respect life?"

"Well, because she was like all of us, she was like the entire mass of humanity, who live out their existence, and suffer horribly through that existence, and know no end to this suffering, neither even recognize that the suffering will continue beyond death, nor even often as they suffer realize they are suffering, but continue on like sheep to the slaughter, in fact like sheep that could somehow pick up the knife and slit their own throats—for we suffer because we have caused suffering to others, and we are completely ignorant that this is what brings us our suffering, and because, finally, in seeking to protect what we think are our own interests we respond to evil with new evil, and thus assure evil upon ourselves in the future as well."

"And how is it that you came to know this truth?" he said simply.

"It is the kindness," I said, breaking into tears, "the kindness of yourself, and the kindness of all the teachers who have come to this Garden, to show me that the real source of all pain is the pain we do to others."

"And why did we have to show you? Why did we have to speak, and describe, and reason with you, and make you think, and bring you to a true understanding? Couldn't we have simply taken what we know, and magically put it into your mind, without these hours of heartfelt discussion and contemplation?"

"No, I don't think this is possible."

"Why not?"

"If you love me, you would have done so long ago; I would have had no reason to come to the Garden, I would know everything already, simply because you wanted me to know."

"And do you think that we understand simply because we understand? Or do you think rather that, once upon a time, at some point in the past, we were exactly like yourself, and knew nothing of the Path, and then had the great blessing to meet spiritual guides?"

"I think you must have been, at some time in the past, just like myself. And then you met the spiritual guides, and you came to understand their teaching, and so finally you reached the ultimate goals of that teaching."

"And so now we have come to the point. I ask you to imagine a world without a single spiritual guide. Think of this garden as an empty, dark place, with none of the light that you have seen here since that first night, when She granted you the kindness of allowing you to enter this sacred place."

I could not bear the thought. I shook my head violently, and pushed back against his hands on my shoulders.

"And so I ask you; what is the best, and in fact the only, way to help your mother? Do you think you are going to send her a house to stay in, or a bed to sleep in, or some piece of bread or fruit? Do you think this will help her where she is now? Do you think this is what she needs? Do you not know, very well, that during her brief stay in this world she had a house, and that she slept in a bed, and that she filled herself with the mountain of food that a person consumes over the course of a lifetime? And did these things stop the cancer?"

"No, no," I sobbed.

"So what will you send to her, on the white light from your heart?"

"Light, a lantern, a special lantern that guides her to a place without suffering, the lamp of understanding the very things you have taught me."

"And who can be her lamp? Who can teach her truly, the entire Path, from beginning to end? Who sees her whole past, and her whole future, and her whole mind: who knows exactly what knowledge she needs, what steps to lead her upon?"

"Only an Enlightened One," I burst back.

"And what creates an Enlightened One?" he demanded.

"That same thing which creates all things: actions of the mind, actions of the speech, and actions of the body—but to create an Enlightened One these actions must be totally pure, they must plant the seeds in the mind that will make us see ourselves become Enlightened Ones," I said urgently.

"And what meditation is it that plants those seeds most perfectly?" he demanded.

"I can think of none more perfect and complete than the one you have just taught me," I replied, calming within, "because this is the Path to compassion itself, the compassion which loves all others as we love ourselves, better than we love ourselves."

"And so now you tell me," he said, releasing my shoulders, and looking down quietly. "Can you, simply with the power of meditation, take away the sufferings of your mother, and fill her with her every wish, her ultimate wishes—perfect happiness and paradise?"

"If that meditation makes me an Enlightened One, and gives me the ability to go to her and teach her this Path perfectly, then," I said, with a sudden feeling of complete joy, "yes."

"Then send her the white light," said Master Asanga as he rose from the bench, "send the lantern, be the lantern. Send water to those who thirst, become the glass of water. Send a companion for those who are alone, become the companion. Be a lover for those who need a lover, be a child for those who want a child, be a tree for those who wish to sit and rest, be a rose for those who seek beauty, be all things to all people that bring them any happiness at all. Send everything on the white light, out with your breath.

"Our breath moves in harmony with our spiritual body, and changes as a reflection of the health of the spiritual body. The spiritual body in turn is affected by the breath, and as the mind gains in purity both the breath and the spiritual body are made whole. You will find thus that, as the breath carries the light, it will affect you in ways I cannot reveal to you now.

"Devote yourself to this practice of taking, and giving. You will find true compassion, but you must practice seriously; whisper to yourself as you move through the day, 'giving and taking'; let it be on your mind, and on your lips, constantly, like the breath itself. You can do this practice anywhere, in the market, as you eat, as you work, as you lie on your bed waiting for sleep. And it will, I tell you, bring you to your paradise, your own Garden, where you must go first yourself, if you have any hope of finding and helping your precious mother.

"Here now my son," and he leaned over, stretching forth his hand. "Take the rest of these pastries I made for you."

## **The Asian Classics Institute**

### **The Six Preliminaries to Meditation, and the Seven Ingredients**

The following selection is taken from the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path (Lam-rim chen-mo)* written by Je Tsongkapa (1357-1419). This part of his work is a commentary on a special prayer called the *King of All Prayers, the Prayer of the Realized One, Deeds of All Goodness*.

\*\*\*\*\*

From the *Great Book on the Steps of the Path* by Je Tsongkapa:

Here we begin a brief presentation of how to practice the steps of the path to Buddhahood. First we will make the actual presentation, and after that refute certain mistaken ideas about the steps. The presentation itself comes in two sections; the first is how to proceed during meditation periods. This starts with Six Preliminaries to meditation.

[1] Here we are following the descriptions of how Serlingpa practiced during his life. The first preliminary to meditation is to make the room tidy and clean; then set up a beautiful altar, with representations of the Buddha's body, speech, and mind.

[2] The second preliminary is to go and find offerings that you obtain without using any dishonest means. Put them forth in an attractive arrangement.

[3] Now the *Levels of Listeners* [by Master Asanga] says that, when you are practicing to purify the mind of the obstacles of sleepiness and fogginess, you should "press them upon each other." It also states that, when you are practicing to purify the mind of other kinds of obstacles, such as attraction to the objects of the senses, you should seat yourself upon a platform or smaller seat and assume the full lotus position. Therefore the third preliminary is to seat yourself on a comfortable cushion, sit up straight, and assume a full lotus position with your legs (a half lotus is also acceptable). In this pose then sink your mind deep into the thoughts of taking refuge, and the wish for enlightenment.

[4] The fourth preliminary is to visualize the garden for gathering the power of good. In the space before you, imagine the Lamas of both the far-reaching lineage, and the lineage of the profound view. Together with them are an inconceivable mass of Buddhas, and bodhisattvas, listeners, self-made Buddhas, and protectors of the Dharma.

[5] It is extremely difficult to bring the path to grow within the stream of your mind if all you practice is the various principal causes. You also need the supporting causes for the path to grow; you need to gather together the different factors that are conducive to the path, and you need to clean yourself of the factors that are obstacles, the ones that oppose the path. Therefore you must train your mind in the Seven Ingredients, which include in them all the critical points for gathering good and cleaning away obstacles.

[a] The first ingredient is prostration. There is one kind of prostration that combines all three doors of expression. It is found in the verse [from the *King of All Prayers, the Prayer of the Realized One, Deeds of All Goodness*] that includes the words "Whosoever they are, as many as there may be."

[The full verse reads:

I bow down, and purely,  
In body and speech and mind,  
To all those Lions of living kind,  
Whosoever they are,  
As many as there may be,  
To those Who are Gone;  
Gone in the past,  
In the present or the future,  
On any of the planets  
In the ten directions of space.]

Here we are not talking of a Buddha on a certain planet in a certain direction of space, nor are we talking of a Buddha of a particular time; our prostrations rather are directed at each and every Victorious Buddha, those who live in every one of the ten directions of space itself—those who have already come before, those who are going to come in the future, and those who now are here. Don't do your prostrations just to go along with the crowd; do them rather out of deep respect, from the depths of your heart.

On this the master Yeshe De, in his commentary, notes that "The good deed you do by prostrating to a single Buddha is beyond any means of measuring. So there's no need to mention what a goodness it is to picture this many Buddhas, and then prostrate yourself to them."

This is how we explain what it is to prostrate through each one of the three doors of expression. The first is the prostration in body, and is found in the one verse that includes the lines "Deeds of Goodness" [The full verse reads:

By all the power  
Of the prayer of Deeds of Goodness  
Each and every Victorious One  
Is actually here  
Before my mind,  
And I bow myself to them  
Perfectly,  
With bodies that are as many  
As the atoms  
Of all the worlds  
Of the universe.]

Here first picture each and every Victorious One, those of every place, and those of every time; see them in your mind, as if they were actually here before you. Then send forth copies of yourself, bodies that are equal in number to the atoms of all the worlds of the universe, and bow down to them.

Next is the prostration in mind. This too is found in a single verse, the one with the words "Atop a single atom." [The full verse reads:

Atop a single atom  
Are Buddhas as many  
As all the atoms  
There are.  
Around them are  
Their sons and daughters.  
I see  
Every corner of space,  
Each and every place,  
Filled like this,  
With Victors.]

Imagine every single atom of the universe, and atop each one see Buddhas, as many as all the atoms there are. These Buddhas are surrounded by their followers, all the bodhisattvas. Try to have a feeling where you see, where you sense you are in the presence of, all their incredible good qualities.

Last is the prostration in speech. This one is found in the single verse which mentions "my words of admiration." [The full verse reads:

I sing the praises  
Of all those  
Who have Gone to Bliss;  
I proclaim  
The high qualities  
Of each and every Victor;  
And my words of admiration  
Are an ocean that will never dry,  
A sea of sound  
From the seed of harmony.]

Speak now words of admiration, words that never end, for each of the holy beings before you, in a song of lovely harmony. Do this the way it is described in the other books; turn each head of your bodies into an infinite number of tongues, and sing. Here in the verse the word "harmony" refers to the praises you sing, and their "seed" is what makes them come out; that is, your tongue. The words "sea" and "ocean" express the idea of a multitude.

**[b]** This brings us to the second ingredient: offering. The offering which does have something higher is found in the two verses that contain the words "holy flowers". [The full verses read:

I make offerings  
To all of these  
Victorious Ones;  
Holy Flowers, holy garlands,  
Cymbals and ointments,  
The highest parasol,  
The highest lamp,  
And holy incenses.

I make offerings  
To all of these  
Victorious Ones;  
Holy silken clothing,  
The highest scent,  
And a mountain of incense powder  
High as Meru—  
All set forth  
In a way more lovely  
Than any other thing there is.]

The words "holy flower" refer to the most wondrous blooms of all in the lands of both pleasure beings and humans; here they are single flowers. "Garlands" are assortments of flowers pressed together on a string. Either way, the flowers can be real ones, or made of other things.

The word "cymbals" refers to all types of music, whether it's on a stringed instrument, a wind instrument, or percussion like drums or cymbals. "Ointments" are thick potions with a delicious smell of incense. The "highest parasol" is the finest of all umbrella-like coverings. The "highest lamp" is one that burns from a fragrant mixture like incense and butter; it shines bright, and gives forth a light as lovely as the flask of a precious gem. The incense mentioned can be either the kind that is a concoction of various sweet-smelling substances, or just one of these substances by itself.

"Holy silken clothing" refers to the finest of all the clothing there is. "Highest scent" means perfumed liquid presented in the form of a water offering; it is made of water, or something similar, imbues with a delicious scent so powerful that it can spread throughout the entire system of a thousand thousand planets. "Incense powder" refers to incense in the form of powder, which you either spread itself or sprinkle atop a fire to make a fragrant smoke. It is in packets, or else laid out in lines like the colored sand used to draw a mandala, in a huge mass as high and wide as Meru, the great mountain in the center of the world.

The phrase "set forth" applies to each of the substances that are being offered; the original Sanskrit word here can mean "majority," or "put forth," or "various."

The other kind of offering is the one which does not have anything higher. This one is found in the single verse which includes the words "Any and every offering." [The full verse reads:

I see as well  
Any and every offering  
Unsurpassed, reaching far and wide,  
Handed up to every Victor;  
By all the power of my faith  
In the Deeds of Goodness may I truly  
Bow down and make offerings  
Onto all the Victors.]

Offerings which we say "have something higher" are those of worldly beings. Therefore the offerings made in this verse consist of all the many wondrous things that very powerful beings, such as bodhisattvas, are capable of emanating with their mind.

The words of the second half of this verse should be applied anywhere in the verses before where the intent is not stated directly. Their function is to express both the motivation with which the prostration and offering are made, as well as the object towards which they are directed.

[c] The third ingredient is confession, and is found in the single verse with the words "like and dislike". [The full verse reads:

I confess, one by one,  
Each and every one  
Of all the wrong deeds  
I may have committed  
In action or word,  
And also thought,  
Motivated by like or dislike,  
Or by dark ignorance.]

This refers to what was done with one of the three mental poisons as its cause; and with my body or of the rest as the vehicle; and with a nature of having been committed, either directly by myself, or by someone else at my bidding, or by someone else with my gladness that it was done. The words "all the wrong deeds I may have committed" are meant to include all these elements.

Try to bring to mind all the problems that these deeds will bring you, and so feel regret for whatever you have done in the past, and a sense to restrain yourself in the future. Then make your confession. Doing this prevents any future wrong from starting at all.

[d] The fourth ingredient is rejoicing, and is found in the one verse with the words "Victors in any of the ten directions." [The full verse reads:

I rejoice  
Over every single one  
Of the good deeds ever done  
By beings in any of the ten directions:  
By all of the Victors,  
By all of their Sons and Daughters,  
By those Self-Made,  
By those on the paths of learning,  
By those on the paths done learning,  
By anyone at all.]

Try to think about the great goodness that comes from the virtuous deeds of these five different kinds of holy beings, and dwell in a sense of gladness, like a beggar who has stumbled across a mine of gold.

[e] The fifth ingredient is urging holy ones to turn the Wheel of the Dharma. This is found in the one verse with the words "Who in all the ten directions." [The full verse reads:

Lamps who light  
Each of the worlds  
In all the ten directions  
Of space;

Those who have taken  
Each of the steps  
To Buddhahood,  
And so reached  
The state beyond desire,  
The Buddha's enlightenment;  
Saviors I urge You all,  
Turn the Wheel of the Dharma,  
Nothing is higher.]

This verse is addressed to those who in paradises in all the ten directions of space have but only recently found Buddhahood in the Buddha's perfect enlightenment—who have reached the state beyond desire, a knowledge which goes anywhere it wants, unstoppable. We are urging them to send forth an equal number of bodies, to come and teach the Dharma.

The commentary by Yeshe De gives the root text here as "found Buddhahood in the Buddha's perfect enlightenment" [rather than "taken each of the steps to Buddhahood," and I have followed him.]

[f] The sixth ingredient is supplication, and is found in the one verse which contains the words "pretend to pass into nirvana." [The full verse reads:

I press my palms at my breast,  
And make this supplication  
To all of those who may intend  
To pretend to pass into nirvana:  
Stay, I pray to help all beings  
And bring them to happiness;  
Stay for eons equal in number  
To the atoms of every world.]

Here we are making supplication to all those in worlds of the ten directions of space who might pretend to pass into nirvana. We are requesting them to stay, ultimately to bring all beings help, and in the interim to give them happiness. We ask them to stay, and not to pass on, for eons equal in their number to all the atoms that make up the various worlds of the universe. We make our supplication, praying that they will remain, in bodies beyond all counting.

[g] The seventh ingredient is dedication, which is found in the verse with the words "prostrations and..." [The full verse reads:

I dedicate  
To my future enlightenment  
All my merit,  
Whatever little goodness  
I may have gathered here  
By bowing myself and offering,

By confessing and rejoicing,  
By urging and supplication.]

Here we are taking all the virtuous seeds within us, represented by the goodness we have accomplished in practicing the six ingredients that have already come, and dedicating them as a cause for the full enlightenment of ourselves and every living being, together. Make this dedication with tremendous will, and the power of your good will flow forever, and never finish.

Read this prayer as I have taught you to here; understand what each verse means, and say it out slowly, without letting your mind wander to something else. If you can do this, then you will gain a great mountain of good deeds, beyond any kind of measuring.

Five of the ingredients we have listed here—prostrating, offering, urging, supplicating, and rejoicing—help you to gather together the different factors that are conducive to the path. One of them, confessing, helps you clean yourself of the factors that are obstacles, ones that oppose the path. One part of rejoicing—dwelling in a sense of gladness over the good you have done yourself—also functions to multiply your virtue.

Dedication works to multiply, fantastically, even the minor good deeds you have done in the acts of gathering, and cleaning, and multiplying. It also takes good deeds that are short-term, those that are going to give a good result and then disappear, and changes them so that they will never be exhausted. In brief, it functions in all three ways: to gather, to clean, and to multiply such that goodness never ends.

[6] For the sixth and final preliminary, refresh your visualization, and make an offering of a mandala. Then make a request that the Lamas bless the stream of your mind. Ask Them to help you stop, quickly, everything from disrespecting your Spiritual Guide on up to grasping to some ingrained self-nature, in either of its two forms. Ask Them to help you develop, smoothly, every single kind of thought which is perfect and unmistaken; everything from respect for your Spiritual Guide, on up to the realization of suchness, the fact that nothing has any nature of its own. And ask them finally to help you put a final end to all the things, within you or outside of you, that might obstruct your spiritual progress.

Make this supplication over and over, many times, with fierce hopes for its success.