



The Buddha Project

IDMT Year 3-Term 1

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Seven Points of Mind Training: the Final



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Content

Introduction	3
Introductory remarks	3
Seven Point of Mind training	6
2.3.6 The Commitments of Mind Training	6
2.3.7 The Precepts of Mind Training	10
Conclusion	23



Introduction

As promised this is the last recording of the IDMT this year, as I didn't manage to finish the text, and I promised to record the final part of the commentary on these verses by Chekawa Yeshe Dorje.

Before we start, let us take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha.

SANG GYÄ CHÖ DANG SOG KYI CHOG NAM LA

I go for refuge until I am enlightened

JANG CHUB BAR DU DAG NI KYAB SU CHI

To the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly.

DAG GI CHÖ NYEN GYI PE SÖ NAM GYI

By the merits I create through listening to the Dharma,

DRO LA PEN CHIR SANG GYE DRUB PAR SHOG (3x)

May I become a buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings. (3x)

Introductory remarks

Before we go into the text of the Seven Points of Mind Training , two remarks:

1) The method

The last weeks we practiced exchanging self and others to get a good grounding in how this works and why it works. And I hope you gained familiarity and a variety of ways of approaching, discovering and exploring the practice; in order to *make it yours*. You also have the basic commentary by Lama Je Tsongkhapa on this challenging, beautiful and rewarding practice.

I emphasized the different reasonings about exchanging self and others. Though it is a very complex practice. For minds not grounded it can be difficult or even a harmful perspective.

So it was important to deeply discover how the practice works, to understand what the disadvantages of self-cherishing are, as well as the advantages of other-cherishing.

In the last session we practiced like having a conversation with oneself from the perspective of the Buddha you will become. The practice does not lead to a view of a non-existing person; we would then be unable to understand we impose by imputation the person we are, thus not being able to liberate the person we truly are.

This is the final topic of this IDMT for 2025: we are Buddhas to be and in final view, we are Buddhas: we liberate ourselves through this practice of the fettered, limited view of who we think we are, and thereby liberate the limitless person underneath.

You will understand we could have kept practicing this for many months, however we do not have the time to do so.

During the two-month break I advise you to

- Get familiarized with these different approaches by using the guided meditations or reading the transcripts of the meditations.
- Once you are familiar with these practices, then to take time and explore them for yourself, and there are different ways of practicing.

You can take specific elements from a meditation and see how they work for you, why they are true, or why you find them difficult. This instigates further investigation, where I emphasize to pay more and more attention to the *feeling your practice elicits*.

The point of course is to generate the effective sense '*I do not only want, I need to become a Buddha for the welfare of all living beings.*'

Once this feeling arises, use the awakening factors to be and keep mindful of this feeling and then use the second awakening factor (*investigation of dhammas*) to explore this felt sense.

Based on the combination of an increasing mindfulness and (facilitated by) investigation you will discover more and more detail. The more familiar you become with Bodhicitta, the easier it is to hold on to it.

With this strengthened mindfulness, take time to use the other awakening factors to develop a measure of calm abiding, based on the felt sense.

During an hour session for example, I advise you to use app. 30 minutes to strengthen this feeling by reasonings in any way that suits you. Next, once the sense of Bodhicitta has arisen, then practice calm abiding on this sense of Bodhicitta.

You can of course do the entire method (*like practiced in the last 5 weeks*). At the same time all meditations lead into a single argument.

You could also spend some time reflecting on the disadvantages of self-cherishing, realizing how harmful it is to you, to then direct your mind at other-cherishing, focusing on one aspect of the awakening mind: you need to become Buddha. This way you will come to understand how liberating it is not to prioritize this unrealistic sense of self and how liberating is to be free of this misunderstanding. It is the kindness of all mother-sentient beings to allow you to do practice this.

You can also focus on the advantages of other-cherishing by practicing *giving and taking*.

Whatever way you practice, you always come to a felt sense; this felt sense might sometimes be superficial, might be deep, it might have different aspects to it. But whatever feeling arises, hold it gently with mindfulness, gently investigate (*the little fish in the ocean*). It is easier to maintain with that felt sense, when you actively engage with it. You will find mindfulness and investigation of this felt sense increase your sense of energy, of enthusiasm. This will bring joy and the other awakening factors, allowing you to remain with the felt sense longer and longer.

This would be a good way to spend time the upcoming two months.

Unfortunately we had too little time to explore everything, but for sure we will do a retreat on Bodhicitta.



2) Experiences on and of the cushion

One of the outcomes of the research project, some of you participated, is (and to my delight) many of the participants of the yogi bootcamp encounter experiences of selflessness. Not necessarily on the cushion (though some do) but also had these experiences of the cushion.

I find this very important and encouraging. As you know we looked at selflessness a lot and you will find many texts about selflessness in the traditional text. In Pali *bhavana* refers to the practice, development, in Tibetan we talk about *Gom*.

But development is not something exclusively for the meditation cushion! The foundational sutras are full of people having liberative experiences for example during listening to an exposition of the Dharma.

Sariputta being one of them: when he first encounters a Buddhist monk and asks him about the teachings, the monk explains the Buddha teaches conditions lead to the arising of a phenomena and when these conditions cease, the phenomena ceases as well. At that very moment, just the hearing of this phrase led Sariputta to become a stream-enterer (the first stage of awakening). You find people finding awakening while doing walking meditation, while sweeping the monastery grounds, etc.

The purpose of IDMT is to adapt the Dharma into your lives. IDMT is not presenting a monastic perspective or the perspective of people able to do the traditional three-year three-month-retreat. We want to incorporate the Dharma into the day-to-day lives. The Dharma is not separated from nursing, or managing, or parenting, or researching; or whatever your daily activity is. We practice to incorporate the Dharma in every single aspect of life. Therefor experiences with Bodhicitta, the awakening mind, might happen not only during a meditation session through Shamatha, but it might also happen in your interactions with others. It might be with one of your children, with a beggar, a person in the park, with the friends you invite for Christmas dinner. During these moments you might practice to see them from a Dharma-perspective and suddenly have a deep experience of the awakening mind.

My point is not to separate your practice from daily life, please keep in mind the purpose of IDMT is to use your entire life to generate the mind of awakening. It might surprise you when this mind pops up; please feel encouraged and hopeful by taking example in the great enlightened beings from the past. This is another reason to read the sutras, to read biographies. You will be empowered by them; and know not all of them were monastics, not all of them had time to do extended retreats. Famous in this context are [Migāramāta](#) and [Anathapindika](#); two of the lay followers of the Buddha who were both rich merchants and had very busy lives and nevertheless managed to attain stages of awakening.

Whether or not you actually attain stages of awakening doesn't matter. However close you come to awakening will be fulfilling, will have made this precious human rebirth worthwhile and that is an important point. We will get there together one step at a time and this training will run for a long time. We will get there.



Seven Point of Mind training

(Page 33 of the reader) the highlighted line is where we stopped.

2.3.6 The Commitments of Mind Training

Train constantly in three basic principles.
Change your attitude, but remain natural.
Do not speak of the defects of others.
Don't ponder others' flaws.
Train first with the strongest destructive emotions.
Abandon any expectations of results.
Give up poisonous food.
Don't maintain inappropriate loyalty.
Don't lash out in retaliation.
Don't lie in ambush.
Don't strike a vulnerable point.
Don't transfer the ox's burden to the cow.
Do not sprint to win a race.
Don't abuse this [practice] as a rite.
Don't reduce gods to demons.
Don't seek misery as a means to happiness.

So I highlighted where we stopped:

This line says:

Don't maintain inappropriate loyalty.

I am not sure if I explained this sentence the last time, but let's go back there.

This line sort of prevents seeing the Dharma as what is called [quietism](#), a passive abiding in the world.

We should avoid criticizing others, but that doesn't mean we should always be quit, sometimes it is best to criticize unjust acts. While criticizing we should:

- Take care not to denigrate people
- Separate people and their actions.

We can call out negative actions, but it is very helpful by separating the act from the person. Doing so, you grant the person freedom from identification with his or her actions. When I say: '*you are a bad person because of what you did*', I lock the person into the narrative; I am implicitly saying the person **is** like that, this person can be known by this inherent characteristic and thereby create a vision the other person is not conducive to change. At the same time, when I call out an unjust action (and we should!) this is a very difficult form of generosity: when I call out a certain action was inappropriate or unskilful, I break the bond between action and person. There are many different ways one could approach this. I implicitly say the unskilful action

occurred because at that moment the other person saw the world in an incorrect way and therefore was not 'guilty'.

Thus you open the door for that person to take responsibility.

Expressing condemnation of truly harmful behaviour is very important. From my monastic life I can tell you that between monastics and monastic communities, this is considered to be very difficult to do. And many monastics will decline doing so, but if you cannot correct others with kindness and compassion, you also deprive them of the opportunity to figure out what is going wrong.

Often people repeat certain behaviours because they just do not realize it is inappropriate; or they don't see any other way of behaving unless we help them to find if there are more appropriate ways to act. People often repeat behaviour for many different reasons. One reason for people to repeat inappropriate behaviour can be because they belong to a certain community where this behaviour is normal or even needed to stay part of the community. In some cases, to behave in ways that do not fit the community that you are part of can be quite expensive. It is important to call out unfortunate behaviour. It can be very helpful to approach things differently in order not to lose the support-group you need, and at the same time they can give up the unskilful behaviour.

Loyalty here refers to *the wrong view of not speaking out*, we often do not speak out to those we are attached to. We don't mind calling out people we don't like. Of course we might experience this with friends and family, but it might also happen in the context of our work: we have difficulty speaking out against inappropriate behaviour of our bosses as we fear by not being loyal, we might lose our job, etc..

This is not helpful behaviour and it can be worthwhile, especially between us as a spiritual community, to then discuss like how would I approach this? And how can I then help someone else to let go of this behaviour in a way (e.g.) your boss does not lose their authority, but finding a way to address their behaviour while at the same time affirming their authority.

The next line says

Don't lash out in retaliation

This is pretty straightforward; it is about vengeance and especially where you know you hurt people.

The next line says

Don't lie in ambush

These two lines go together.

Vengeance, as the commentary highlights, can take many different forms.

I take these two lines together because I think they overlap. It is not only about taking revenge, but taking revenge in cheeky ways, in ways where the other person is vulnerable.

For example, finding moments in public and then voicing malicious jokes that undermine their standing, undermine authority, how third persons view your victim of



revenge and leave them vulnerable. The vulnerable person is unable to defend themselves.

The next line says

Don't strike a vulnerable point

This line is also close to the former two.

I would say *retaliation* is about not to take vengeance; *ambush* is about the moments where other people are vulnerable and *strike a vulnerable point* I understand (a slight difference from the commentary) do not hurt those aspects of another person where they are vulnerable.

When we encounter unfortunate behaviour we would like to change, we need to understand hurting someone where they are vulnerable does not elicit change of behaviour; in fact they might be disempowered. It is important to choose the opposite way. You see the same in, for example, management training. When I was a department-manager at a major marketing company and needed to address somebody on their inappropriate behaviour. I would often start by standing beside them rather than express their vulnerabilities and thereby lift myself up to a point of authority so I could denigrate them from a perspective of power. But that doesn't work. By standing beside them, being a friend, highlighting what I appreciate in them, what I find strong and powerful in them. And then to say, *'this behaviour on a certain moment I think was inappropriate, can you explain why you think it is was necessary in order to find a better way together'*.

The next line says

Don't transfer the ox's burden to the cow

This refers to: shame shift blame and liabilities to others by devious means for one's own fault.

I am not always content with the negative descriptions in the commentary. One could also read this sentence as *'take responsibility for your own faults.'*

The text invites us to hide our good qualities and express our vulnerabilities. To only talk about our strengths when we really need to and for the rest to give pleas to others. It is a burden to maintain *'your good name'*.

The next line says

Do not sprint to win a race

I would say this is a reference to the modern rat race. To use unbecoming behaviour in order to obtain ownership or to get something before someone else; e.g. *'elbowing at work'*. Do not participate in the rat race by trying to obtain things at the cost of others. We are trying to benefit others.

The next line says

Don't abuse this [practice] as a rite

This line has different aspects.



- The text refers to practices that are either inappropriate (like future foretelling or astrology)
- More important, especially in the context of tantric practice: do not use your practice in a ritualistic sense.

The purpose of the Dharma is to transform the mind; not to bring fortune to ourselves or harm to others. The essence of this line is to use the Dharma in an appropriate way and not to deceive others by practices that are either based on a lack of proof or an overestimation of incidences (we have a tendency to overestimate: once we did something and it had a result, then we generalize it into something special which it might not be at all).

The next line says

Don't reduce gods to demons

To me this is an important line and refers (and related to the previous line) to not using the Dharma to inflate one's ego. Do not use the Dharma to prop yourself up and to denigrate others; we can only achieve Buddhahood by serving all other living beings and not the ego. That is simply not possible. Aside from *reduce gods to demons* leading nowhere, remember it is due to the kindness of the presence of all living beings we are able to walk the path of the Dharma, without them we would not be able to induce or evolve, transform into limitless qualities Buddhas have.

The commentary even says: '*we should comport ourselves as the lowest of the low among the servants of all sentient beings*'.

As I said before, the term servant is a burden on the shoulders in our culture. But it is nice to think of oneself as shouldering all other living beings. Servant has the implicit meaning of someone that is forced to do something, someone weak. But when we talk about ourselves as being able to shoulder the suffering of all living beings, this is a position of power, implicitly suggesting we are powerful enough to do so one day and we need that perception of power. If you read the commentary on the sentence '*we should comport ourselves as the lowest of the low among the servants of all sentient beings*' we don't refer to an inferior perspective, but to a vision that we would like to be the shoulders where other people can stand on.

As an intermezzo: this is one of the reasons I became a monastic in a Western monastery. I take great joy in thinking about the things I contributed to my monastic community (and hopefully I have some time to contribute a bit more) to create a ground where future generations can even do better than I did. The sense of looking forward, to what next generations can do based on what my hands produced, is a perspective of great joy and implicitly encourages and empowers me.

The next line says

Don't seek misery as a means to happiness

On one side this line refers not to use other people's misery as a means to happiness; we often do so especially in regard to our enemies. However, there is no joy to be found in the suffering of others.



By the way, this is also a good moment to talk about *hygiene of mind*. Much of modern entertainment evolves around generating a form of joy around the misery of someone else. Doing so we generate a momentary sense of joy for their failing, being destroyed, etc. As a modern example it is the joy some experience of what happened to Dart Vader. This behaviour diminishes who we are as bodhisattva-practitioners.

On the other side, I understand the line in a way our practice invites us to, when we encounter difficulties, transform difficulties into a path of happiness. We are invited to use every instant of our lives, either good or bad, as a platform to develop the awakening mind.

At the same time, this is never an invitation to seek misery in order to flourish. Life is challenging enough, you need not seek more trouble than you already have. This is another good way to look at this training.

2.3.7 The Precepts of Mind Training

Do everything with a single intention.

Counter all adversity with a single remedy.

Two tasks: one at the beginning and one at the end.

Whichever of the two occurs, be patient.

Keep the two, even at your life's expense.

Train in the three difficulties.

Adopt the three principal conditions.

Contemplate the three that are free of degeneration.

Keep the three from which you must not separate.

Apply the training impartially to all.

It is vital that it be deep and all-pervasive.

Meditate constantly on those who've been set apart.

Don't be dependent on external conditions.

Engage in the principal practices right now.

Don't apply misplaced understanding.

Don't be inconsistent.

Train wholeheartedly.

Gain freedom through discernment and analysis.

Don't be boastful.

Don't be irritable.

Don't be temperamental.

Don't seek acknowledgement.

When karmic seeds left over from former trainings were aroused in me, I felt great interest, and so, without regard for suffering or disparagement, I sought instructions on subduing ego-clinging. Now, even in death, I shall have no regrets

The first line of 2.3.7. The precepts of Mind Training says

Do everything with a single intention

This line refers to the single intent of the awakening mind.

The text becomes somewhat crescendo.

This is such a powerful practice because it will produce the cause for full enlightenment. Further down the text we learn that through approaching everything with this single intention, the wish to become a Buddha can transform everything into practice. I immediately think about the first chapter in that beautiful little booklet by Tich Nhat Hahn: *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, where he writes about a discussion he once had with a friend. The friend is married and has children. The father describes he figured out the time he spends with his wife and children was not only his choice, not only his time, but he realized this shared time is all also an occasion to develop his practice.

The awakening mind transforms everything into striving towards full enlightenment. And moreover, 'taking your practice to daily life' also gives everything a magnificent glow, so to speak, everything gets the colours of awakening. This insight allows us to see those around us (friends, family, even enemies) with appreciation. The encounter with them brings us one step closer to our goal.

Every moment we used to experience as challenging is transformed into an opportunity to find freedom.

The next line says

Counter all adversity by a single means.

We could talk about this one sentence forever, but it especially refers to the method of *giving and taking*.

When we encounter adversity, tend to think *this difficulty comes from a past action by me* – this is victim blaming, but granting ourselves agency! Of course this is related to the wheel of sharp weapons (as we looked at in year 2). Stop and observe a difficult situation, stop being victimized by the situation saying '*no, I'm not a victim I have agency.*' What I now observe is a result of causes and conditions in the past, negative karma was then created.

This way the moment becomes a beautiful opportunity to overcome karma, while realizing: *I am not alone*. All the challenges you can imagine are shared by multitudes of others; take that moment of power to push your shoulders under all those other beings that like you have this challenge: '*may all the adversity descend upon me, may all the good that I developed benefit them and alleviate them*'. And to experience the more authentic, the more sincere your wish is, the more you are benefited.

It is one of the great paradoxes of this practice: the heavier you try to take this burden of all sentient beings upon your shoulder, the lighter it becomes



On the other hand, the more we try to take the burden from our shoulders and feel self-pity etc., the heavier it becomes.

I wish the author had spent a bit more time on this specific topic as discussing this without this extra information, this text might look a bit normative where it isn't. It is how it works.

The next line says

Two tasks, one at the beginning and one at the end

This line refers to practicing all day – every day, mornings to evenings.

It is a good practice to wake up rejoicing the fact you obtained another precious human rebirth, that you woke up again, that you created good karma in the past that created another day of practice.

The one practice that holds all other Dharma-practices is the overcoming of self-cherishing, overcoming the prioritizing of the false sense of self and thereby liberating others and liberating yourself.

'May my awakening mind be powerful throughout the day and not degenerate.'

We are not Buddhas yet, so challenges will arise and the way to deal with these challenges is by our practice in the evening. The commentary highlights to lay down in the lions [majestic pose](#) and reflect on the day: on your side with your knees on top of each other, feet interlocked, one arm on your side, the other hand under your head, and some other elements.

I would first reflect on what is called *recalling your teacher's instruction*. We all blossom in relationships, and in this context the relationship with our teacher is the most precious.

Constantly reflect on the instructions is a good thing to do: what practices and challenges did the teacher give – and then to reflect on what did not go well. The commentary speaks of flaws, however I do not consider them as *flaws*, more as *unskillful*. We will discover things were unskillful because the mind was grasping at an illusory sense of self: self-cherishing. Once you deeply understand this, you do not have to blame yourself! Realize it happened and take responsibility:

- Analyse how it happen, in what perspective it happened, in that perception that made this occur?

Then to do purification practice by the four opponent powers. The power of the basis reflecting that you have refuge in the Buddha Dharma and the Sangha, the power of regret in this context; knowing that if we don't deal with what happened today, it will keep growing. To use a single intent: I don't want to do this again, I am really going to try and stop this. Then to use what is called the antidote of the opponent power. E.g. when we talked down on someone, to use patience or compassion or a moment of sympathetic joy, reflecting on the good qualities of this person. We can also practice [Vajra Sattva](#) or other purification practices.

- Then rejoice in all skillful activities.

A famous story in a Lamrim commentary about a yogi reflecting on two heaps of stones, white stones and black stones. In our context as beginning practitioners, we



would reflect on the day and add a black stone to the pile of black stones for all unskillful actions and a white stone to the pile of white stones for skillful actions. In our case this might lead to slightly more black stones.

Rejoicing in the white stones (actions) we collect, in itself becomes a strong element for making the pile of white stones grow. Rejoicing is empowering and encouraging: it tells us *we have goodness within*.

- This way, when we finished our practice, we not only have the virtues of today's, but also the virtue of the practice itself. The virtue of having reflected on unskillful actions and purified them – and the virtue of having reflected on skillful and dedicated them.

We can dedicate the virtues to our full enlightenment for the welfare of all living beings. A good way to do this would be the seven-limb prayer.

This is a good practice to memorize and to use in your evening practice.

It is crucial to always finish on a high point, good for your psychological health and the continuation of your practice. Don't let your mind dwell on unskillful actions.

The Buddha was a compassionate teacher, he taught purification practices so we can take responsibility and then let go.

After your purification practice, also take a moment to reflect on the trust you have in the Buddha and through his teachings you have been liberated from what went wrong. To be encouraged by those few who can do this. It takes an aspiring bodhisattva to be able to take on this practice.

The next line says

Whichever of the two occurs, be patient

This line refers to practicing patience, no matter if you encounter challenging moments or moments where good things come your way. When good things come your way, and you experience fortune, try not to become attached become arrogant; these are the best moments to practice gratitude, rejoicing, appreciation. Karmically, one could say, in the continuum that preceded you good things happened and you now experience the fruits of it. Be therefore kind, appreciative and grateful to the person in the past, as well as being grateful to the aspects of the mind that produced this result, etc.. Appreciation and gratitude are very powerful protectors against pride and arrogance.

When misfortune happens, do not become depressed or demoralized. When unfortunate moments arise karma is ripening and luckily for us karma only ripens once.

To both types of moments patience is the answer.

No matter how good opportunities are, they will pass; no matter how great challenges are, they will pass as well – it is the law of impermanence.

In the commentary you will find this beautiful verse:

Even if you are prosperous like the gods, pray do not be conceited.

Even if you become as destitute as a hungry ghost, pray do not be disheartened.



I have great trust you are on your way to Bodhisattva-hood. It is neither nor of use to you.

The next line says

Then keep the two even at your life's expense

Two refers to

- 1) The precepts and commitments in general and those of this teaching.

Many of you have lay-vows, bodhisattva-vows, tantric-vows or monastic-vows. This line talks about the lay-practitioners: the commitment not to commit any of the ten non-virtuous actions. Keep to these vows, know the ornament of life is ethical conduct.

- 2) The specific trainings in this teaching.

It is the reason I shared this text: it is so beautiful, rich and rewarding in its different practices.

One could take on the practices in stacks and conclude: *this is this my commitment to hold all the practices within this template of other-cherishing to overcoming self-cherishing.*

The texts says

Even the mundane happiness of the present life will elude you if these two commitments become degenerate, hold them more dearly than your life.

The good things in life come from the practice of ethics, let alone the good things of next lives and ultimate Buddhahood.

Ethical conduct always is the great protector of your mind, is the great deliverer of happiness.

The next line says

Train in the three difficulties

This is looking at and being realistic about the context we are in.

The three difficulties here are:

- 1) In the beginning

The commentary argue that, in the beginning, it can be difficult to remember the antidotes. For those of you familiar with Asanga, you might remember he says it is one of our challenges – even in the practice of calm abiding – to remember and to apply the antidotes. It is hard to practice mindfulness and overcome forgetfulness. That is why we talked about different ways to keep reminding ourselves of this practice. E.g. marks on your hand, a mala, reminders on your cell phone, post-its, whatever suits you.

- 2) In the middle

When practice starts to develop, it can be difficult to overcome the afflictions. We now are more mindful and can apply the antidotes, but the afflictions can be very powerful (keep in mind the power of the afflictions comes from their illusory aspect and their habitual force – there is no power in the afflictions itself); in time we will become better at overcoming the afflictions.

E.g. when anger arises at the beginning it is very difficult to overcome. Even if we



remember the antidotes, the power of anger is huge, because of habituation and because afflictions pervert the way the world appears to us. But, through practice we come to see wisdom and correct view is much more powerful. The afflictions and the ignorance underlying the afflictions cannot be supported by reasoning – where wisdom and right view can be supported by reasoning.

It is important to keep in mind you empower yourself by way of this practice.

3) At the end

The commentary then says *At the end it can be difficult to eradicate the continuum of the affliction.*

Once we are capable of applying the antidote, we still need persistence.

When I took full ordination, there was a fabulous fully ordained nun by whom I was trained, [sister Jotikav](#), she now leads a monastery in Spain. One of the monks asked her *what is what is the most challenging aspect of the ordained life?* She answered *the greatest challenge is that, whenever you think you have overcome something, there is a tendency to become forgetful, and the problem you thought you had overcome has a tendency to come back in ways you did not expect.* In this context the Buddha uses the analogy of a sandy dune: *once you start climbing a dune, you can't stop as you will then slide down. The only place to rest is at the top.*

And therefore the text highlights we should practice, in the morning we should put on an armour of joyous effort and dedication. We have to set our mind on Buddhahood; we know what we are doing and unlike children we hold on to our vows to our motivation.

The next line says

Adopt the three principal conditions

These are three conditions that are supportive to our practice.

The commentary states

1) A qualified teacher

There should be a qualified teacher who possesses the pith instructions and is endowed with higher realizations.

Whatever quality we would like to obtain in life, we obtain by way of engaging with a person that has these qualities. When you have found a spiritual teacher (in the Tibetan tradition one has one root-teacher, but you can have many other; Tsong Kappa had over a hundred) you need to keep these qualified spiritual teachers close. First figure out who is a qualified spiritual teacher and when you have confidence: don't let go of that confidence. hold on to that person.

The commentary argues *the bond between the teacher and you should be so close that no dog can come between, a teacher should also be pleased with you.* That is why we in a way we think it would make our teacher happy. This doesn't mean we never make mistakes. Our teachers know we make mistakes but they will be very happy when we purify the mistakes.

2) Perfume the mind with realizations

This is the expression we introduced in year two of IDMT. To perfume the mind with

realizations and realizations can be anything from basic understanding all the way up to directly seeing emptiness; from having a profound understanding of your precious human existence to knowing there is no self-sufficient – substantially existent self, etc.

These realizations make the mind grow, become richer. Teachers can only be refuge to a certain extent. The real refuge is the Dharma that ripened in our hearts. That is what this relates to.

3) Conditions conducive to Dharma practice that must be gathered

This relates to not only overfocussing on intellectual understanding but to deeply know these understandings must be related to other aspects of the mind such as faith, intelligence, enthusiasm, disenchantment. In relation the illusory aspect of our perception dissolves.

We should also make sure the appropriate conditions arise. Some simple such as the need of food, a place to practice in peace, good friends, a spiritual community.

So we need a teacher, the right qualities of mind and secondary conditions – one should not be separated from these three.

The commentary says: *since all the attainments of the Mahayana depend upon the student's faith and respect towards his or her teacher. Make sure you are never divorced at any time from the perception of your teacher as a Buddha.* This is common in the Mahayana as it is in all Buddhist traditions.

This is not a tantric context, but in the tantric context Vajradhara, the primordial Buddha, states *I will always be with you in a way you need me to be.* To realize my teacher is a manifestation of Vajradhara, my teacher is what I need in this moment; imagine having to live with His Holiness the Dalai Lama in your room 24/7, that might be just too much, his practice and engagement might not be what you are up to yet. Your teacher manifests in a way that is appropriate for now. Enjoy his presence and take it serious.

With regard for to the qualities of the Dharma keep the quintessence of the training close to your heart. Shantideva beautifully says *the butter churned from the milk of the Dharma.* This is the most potent seed of Buddhahood, your highway to awakening.

Please constantly engage in these incomparable practices 'to make them yours' and they become the ornaments of the mind.

Regarding the pledges and trainings you took, use what is here called *shame and conscientiousness.*

Self-respect is important as the holder of these trainings and at the same time be aware of what infractions do to others' trust and well-being.

The next line says

Apply the training impartially to all.

It is vital that it be deep and all-pervasive.

These lines don't overlap well with the commentary, but let's explore them.



Impartially to all refers to, e.g., when we start the training we need to be free from holding some cloth and others on a distant. We want to liberate all mother living beings, that is what should pervade our lives.

The commentary gives three categories to deepen our practice – make our practice all pervasive in live:

- Never be divorced from such virtuous excess offering services to your spiritual teachers, making offerings to the three jewels, offering [Torma-cakes](#) to the Dhamma protectors and the elemental spirits, making prostrations, performing [circumambulations](#) and so on.

They are the accumulation of virtue as we talked about. What the offering services to your spiritual teachers highlight and what the Buddha highlights according to the Pali canon, is that without practitioners like Sariputta, Moggallana (but also [Ayya Kema](#) and others), the Buddha would not have been able to do what he did. The actions of any Buddha are dependent on the disciples with whom he forms a community.

Without a community and without all the people participating and without all the work of the FPMT Lama Zopa Rinpoche would not have been the teacher he was, his activities could not have been nearly as vast as they were.

Teachers can only be teachers when they are supported and the support makes students gradually become like them.

This is what spiritual parenthood is about. In modern mythology, children and their adolescents want to remove themselves from their parents, want to be different. But in spiritual adolescence relates to the wish to become like the parents. This can be realized by offering our services, just like our parents have done.

Lama Zopa Rinpoche was also often called the perfect disciple, for decades he served Lama Yeshe. Lama Zopa Rinpoche in a way was in the same position as we are today: we are serving others. And by serving others you will become good teachers in your own right. When you start to enact activities for the welfare of others, you will inspire others to follow you and I hope you will also find students to support you in these actions for the welfare of all living beings.

Every generation is inspired by the generation before them and serves them and inspires the next generation and will be served by those.

- Then there is a category of speech: *never being divorced from such virtuous activities and reciting verses on taking refuge repeating mantras and doing recitations.*

This relates to protecting wrong speech as well as developing right speech (e.g. speaking kind words, words of truth, consoling words and appreciative speech – anything that makes your speech gradually turn into the speech of a Buddha). This will ultimately lead to never being divorced from the two awakening minds

- 1) The wish to become a Buddha for the welfare of all living beings
- 2) The mind realizing emptiness

In the commentary this poetically stated: *to be endowed with inconceivable courage to vanquish all the conceptualizing afflictions such as self-cherishing.* To make the mind of a single taste – so to speak.



The next line says

Meditate constantly on those who've been set apart.

The commentary highlights we seem to easily deprecate a group of beings. Beings might even look repulsive, or we simply find undesirable, we can be easily deceived by appearances: our perceptions can be skewed by prejudice. It is important to practice and overcome prejudice as it harms our mind of awakening. For those having Bodhisattva vows: remember the primary vow is not to abandon a single living being. The commentary argues: knowing we suffer from prejudice, we should separate these living beings out for special focus. To quote the commentary: *to train our mind by perceiving them as parts of our own heart*. So rather than expelling them to bring them to the centre of our practice. Looking away from this group carries the greatest risk of losing our awakening mind.

The other group the text separates out is spiritual teachers, parents, and bodhisattvas.

- The teachers that provide us with the Dharma.
- The parents that gave us this precious human rebirth
- The bodhisattvas in general who manifest and exemplify the qualities we strive for.

Know they are vulnerable to our conceit, pride, arrogance, the inclination to denigrate them because that is the way society seems to work. It is too often suggested we should move up the ladder of society by pushing others down – and that might relate to spiritual teachers, parents and bodhisattvas as well, something that would cause us immense harm.

We should take care of all living beings.

Abandoning those we misconceive as repulsive or undesirable might destroy the awakening mind. Abandoning spiritual teachers, parents and bodhisattvas denigrates the causes, the foundations of the path to Buddhahood.

The next line says

Do don't be dependent on external conditions

This is pretty straightforward.

The text highlights most other Buddhist practices require many external conditions. For example when you studied Shantideva's Bodhicharyavatara, chapter 8, he describes the practice of Shamatas, how to develop samadhi. He describes you need external conditions like a spiritual community, a comfortable hut, a place where you can beg for food, not having environmental problems, etc..

The commentary however explains that for this practice, none of this is necessary. In fact, even the most difficult circumstance can be an better condition for the development of the awakening mind. This practice makes practicing incomparable to any other because we can practice no matter what circumstances are, it is the quintessence of the Dharma. And, we can practice regardless of what we do or what our function is; presidents, teachers, caretakers or nurses, dentists, etc.. This practice can transform any circumstance, any activity, any challenge into the path to Buddhahood.



The next line says

Engage in the principle practices right now.

In other words: avoid procrastination.

This precious human rebirth, with all its pleasures and opportunities, is absolutely rare and we don't know how long it is going to last. It will definitely end and that might be tomorrow.

To procrastinate would truly be a waste of time. We found courage in ourselves, and know the benefits of this practice, how much it benefits this very life, as well as everything else.

The text highlights we need to study, but not at the expense of practice. And though in a general sense you can't separate study and practice (to study the Dharma is to practice the Dharma), but mainly studying the Dharma can take a mere intellectual aspect. Just like the example of new year's vows 'we will absolutely accomplish' and then break on the 2nd of January. A mere intellectual understanding of the Dharma does not transform the mind a whole lot.

That is why the commentary highlights *of the two practice is more important.*

Another way of looking at it is when we study we need take time, practice is something we can constantly do: with your children, while brushing your teeth, while walking in the park, while working or talking to your boss or employees, and so forth. There is no limitation to practice-time.

Then the text emphasizes to practice especially the awakening mind, to practice applying the antidotes when hindrances occur. Do also use time to meditate on your cushion. I advise early morning- and late evening practice; thus holding the day between sitting practices and to be constantly vigilant regarding the afflictions arising in the mind. This way you constantly know what you are vulnerable to and addressing the afflictions righteously.

A few more lines that I will highlight shortly or concisely.

The next line says

Don't apply misplaced understanding.

The commentary determines several types of misplaced understanding

- Misplaced forbearance

Rather than using patience and forbearance to overcome challenges in our practice, we only apply our practice regarding objects of desire: the circle of friends or subduing foes. This line relates to prioritizing forbearance with our practice, not with worldly concerns.

- Misplaced aspiration

Admirable worldly qualities will do nothing to us when we get into trouble, neither in this life nor when we leave this life. We should aspire more foundational qualities: the wisdom realizing emptiness, the wisdom seeking awakening for the welfare of all living beings.

Social standing cannot make you happy in and of themselves.

On the other hand, you can pursue goods and standing in order to serve others. This



is not excluded, Buddhism has no vow of poverty. Anathapindika and Migāramāta were very rich and used their sources to help others. Imagine in what ways Elon Musk could benefit living beings!

- Misplaced savouring
Where we dwell on memories, sensual pleasures and triumphs over our enemies.
- Misplaced compassion
An interesting item, often used regarding Buddhas. In other traditions it is often said we should love God and care for God. From a Buddhist perspective, this doesn't make sense because love is wanting someone to be happy who is unhappy. Compassion or care is to see somebody suffers and to want to alleviate their suffering. That is why to love and care for Buddhas does not make sense as they don't need any, they are happy and not suffering.
This line however relates to a more narrow interpretation: there is no need to be compassionate for those who have chosen an aesthetic life and meditative pursuits: they do not suffer from it – they know what they do. Compassion is for challenges for difficulties that living beings choose without deeply understanding.
- Misplaced dedication
This refers to those who dedicate their activities to material wealth rather than spiritual qualities
- Misplace rejoicing
This is really ugly: rejoicing in misfortune and disasters that befall your adversaries, this is like the opposite of rejoicing. True rejoicing is an antidote to seeking revenge but also on jealousy to rejoice in the qualities and the fortune of others.

The next lines say

Don't be inconsistent

In countering other traditions of his time the Buddha said they implemented ascetic practices to punish their bodies, a diligent practice, originally referred to as *set of practices* such as standing on one leg, or only eating grass, etc. The Buddha said this is not helpful, doesn't support your practice. We need to practice consistently. This also instructs us not to hop from one practice to another. One of the things the commentary highlights not to be a consumerist of a variety of practices. For example practice a little bit of loving kindness and then become bored by it and move to emptiness – and when practicing emptiness move on to yet another thing. When we set the mind on developing the awakening mind, or loving kindness or emptiness, hold on to that practice until real change happens and only then move onwards.

The next line says

Train wholeheartedly

Wholeheartedly is also a reference to enthusiasm coming from developing trust within yourself. Based on your practice you develop a deep knowing you can and want more.



The next line says

Gain freedom through discernment and analysis.

The two mental factors *discernment* and *analysis* are of utmost importance. Something we will also look in to during the retreat on Anapanasati. The Buddha highlights them often highlights discernment and analysis in combination with wisdom: the capacity to discern between wholesome and unwholesome, the investigation of dharmas. The mind is constantly inquisitive.

In this context, specifically investigating the afflictions (having a tendency to arise in the mind) as well as investigating skillful states of mind (equally easily arising in the mind) and analyse the causes and conditions how they came to arise.

Once you identify afflictions to discern what antidotes to use. Once you identify skillful states of mind to discern what conditions made them arise.

Analysis here refers to investigating the underlying ignorance. To recognize and know the basis of afflictions are wrong views; and recognize the basis of skillful states are right views. You undercut wrong view, knowing things cannot exist in the way they appear to be. At the same time you explore right view relating to the arising of skillful mental states.

For example, when we do experience compassion for someone who is ill and our heart reaches out. When we investigate this specific perception; the mind acknowledges we are interdependent. The mind recognizes your state was changed by this person and your actions will improve this person's situation.

Skillful states are, one could say, wisdom-states: the make you understand something about the world. This way you enrich your toolbox with insight you already possessed but have not always acknowledged.

The next line says

Don't be boastful

To go a bit beyond the commentary, I would argue that – when things are truly precious to you (matter a lot to you) it is good not to share them broadly with others. Sharing them often leads to the misunderstanding that you say '*I am like that.*' As if you create another identity, which you then have to live up to. E.g. I might be content with how I taught this evening, but expressing my contentment to others, I then have to live up to the expectation of always speak well; then contentment becomes a burden. When I keep this contentment to myself, I can just appreciate it and let it go – this way encouraging the mind to do it again in the future. In monastic life we tend not to tell when our day of ordination is scheduled as this might lead to all sort of problems, strange attitudes within the person to be ordained: we are not Buddha. Pride arises when one is to be ordained, it is unavoidable and we should protect the mind against it.

The next line says

Don't be irritable.

Irritable relates to the time challenges happen and not to hit out to others but to seek the causes within ourselves. Avoid humiliating or abusing others – but restrain the



minds. It is important to understand that, when we hit out to others, we tell ourselves a narrative we are victims of others.

E.g., this morning at 04.00 a. m. my neighbour decided to turn up his stereo as he was having a party – something I can get irritable over. However, the moment I 'm irritable, I become his victim. Relating the situation to myself, I can look at the situation from a perspective of past karma – or the context of him being happy about the fact he is having fun, etc.. Yes, at 04.00 there was a moment of irritation, but then I realized it is not a mind-state to fall asleep again; so I reflected on him having a good time and I did fall asleep. This morning when I woke up, I found a message on my phone (sent at 04.00 hours) where my neighbour said *I came home with some friends, he had a couple of drinks and was going to play some music – but if it was too loud, please let me know.* Looking back I was able to understand what happened and rejoiced he thought about my sleep while coming home at 04.00!

This story gives some context not to be irritable.

The next line says

Don't be temperamental

The commentary is slightly different from the root text. Temperamental can refer to

- Not showing uncontrolled behaviour, or
- Not being erratic in your responses: develop a well-balanced and equanimous mind.

The last line says

Don't seek acknowledgement

Do not to seek fame and praise through expressions of gratitude from others when you have done good. A well-disciplined mind does good for the sake of goodness itself.

The beautiful expression from Jesus: *love is sufficient unto itself.*

Understand that well-doing is like wholesome food to the mind, and leave it at that. We are already the benefiteres of what we did.

There is one more point in the commentary that that is not in the root text:

Through proliferation of the five degenerations transform every event into the path of enlightenment.

I mention this is because you might experience this at times.

[The five degenerations](#), and I am not going into detail about them, there are degeneration of lifespan, of views, of afflictions, of sentient beings, moral capacities and cognitive capacities.

Times are more turbulent than ever. The present era incites

- A strong sensual desire
- Strong feelings of resentment
- A mental turbulence because times are unstable.

Rather than to resist this and get worried and overburdened it is more wholesome to realize your practice services a purpose. We may allow ourselves the freedom to call ourselves bodhisattvas. There is a narrow description and narrow definition of

bodhisattvas, but the feedback you give and the questions and doubt you share show your bodhisattva-path comes to fruition at moments.

Focusing on your development in this era of turbulence enables you to become empowered as you know *'I have purpose'* and not to become disempowered as many people do. You know what you have to do: *I work hard for the preservation of the natural environment; I support others who feel ignored or let down or angered, etc.*

The final lines say:

When karmic seeds left over from former trainings were aroused in me, I felt great interest, and so, without regard for suffering or disparagement, I sought instructions on subduing ego-clinging. Now, even in death, I shall have no regrets.

Here the author speaks to himself and shares why he wrote this text.

A high point to end this teaching: when we use this text and its practice as the essence of our spiritual life, then when death comes our way, we will have no regrets. We will look back on life and say:

I am grateful for having had this existence. May it ripen in the next precious human one, but I hope that it has benefited the manifold.

I am sure your practice has accomplished this, I have great faith in each one of you.

Conclusion

I wish you great holidays. Enjoy your time with your family, with your parents, with your loved ones, friends, colleagues. Commit some random acts of kindness whenever and wherever we can.

I hope to have the fortunate karma to meet all of you in good health, relaxed.

We will start IDMT in February again, maybe with some repetition to then quickly move towards the wisdom realizing emptiness: what does it mean things do not self-exist but exist only in dependence on parts? Causes and conditions and imputation.

It is going to be a wondrous journey leading to the exploration of who we truly are: we are Buddhas to be.

Sadhu, sadhu, sadhu.

