

Thirty-Seven Things that Bodhisattvas Do

By Thomge Zangpo (1295-1369)

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Namo Lokeshvaraya

Although seeing all dharmas neither come nor go
To help wandering beings sole effort you show.
To the supreme Guru and savior Chenrezi,
With respectful three doors I prostrate constantly.

The perfect Buddhas, source of help and happiness,
Are born when sublime dharma has been accomplished.
And since that depends upon knowing what to do
The bodhisattvas' practice, I'll explain to you.

1. When the rare ship of freedom and riches is won,
For us and others to cross samsara's ocean
Without any neglect both the day and night through
To hear, think, and train is what bodhisattvas do.

2. To our close kith and kin, like water passion sways.
To our distant enemies, like fire hatreds blaze.
Forgetting discernment, dark ignorance ensues.
To cast off homelands is what bodhisattvas do.

3. Afflictions slowly fade when bad places are shunned.
Virtue easily grows where there's no distraction.
With a clear mind trust in the dharma is produced.
To stay secluded is what bodhisattvas do.

4. From each and every dear companion we will part.
We will leave possessions for which we've strived so hard.
The body's guest house the guest, consciousness, will lose.
To renounce this life is what bodhisattvas do.

5. When with certain people, the three poisons increase.
Hearing, thinking, and training decline and grow weak.
Love and compassion become completely removed.
To give up bad friends is what bodhisattvas do.

6. When attending special people, faults are consumed.
Qualities increase like the waxing of the moon.
To cherish sublime teachers with greater value,
Than our own body is what bodhisattvas do.

7. Within samsara's dungeons they themselves are chained.
So, who do worldly gods have the power to save?
Thus, in the three jewels' undeceiving refuge
To go for shelter is what bodhisattvas do.

8. The most hard to bear are lower realms' sufferings.
Shakyamuni taught they are the fruit of bad deeds.
Therefore, even at the cost of our lives, to choose
To never do wrong is what bodhisattvas do.

9. The pleasures of the three realms are like dew on grass.
They fall to peril in a momentary flash.
For the unchanging state of freedom absolute,
To seek and to strive is what bodhisattvas do.

10. Since beginningless time, us they have had love for.
What good is happiness, when our mothers suffer?
To free infinite beings by giving birth to
The enlightened mind is what bodhisattvas do.

11. From desire for pleasure all suffering springs forth.
From thoughts to help others complete Buddhas are born.
To take others' pain as we fully substitute
Our own happiness is what bodhisattvas do.

12. Even if those by force of greedy obsession,
Steal or have stolen all our wealth and possessions,
To offer them our bodies, wealth, and all virtues
Within the three times is what bodhisattvas do.

13. Even without having done the slightest of faults
If people come along and cut our heads right off,
Through compassion's power, to take their non-virtues
All upon ourselves is what bodhisattvas do.

14. Even if about us people speak vicious words
And proclaim them across the entire universe,
With a pure heart of love to express through and through
All their qualities is what bodhisattvas do.

15. At gatherings of masses, even if people
Expose all our hidden faults and call us evil,
Recognizing them as our teachers of virtue,
To bow with respect is what bodhisattvas do.

16. Even if those for whom we have cared like our child
Look upon us as if we are their arch rivals,
Like a mother for her children stricken with flu,
To love them still more is what bodhisattvas do.

17. Even if equal or inferior beings,
Under power of pride degrade us and demean,
To show respect for them as we would our Guru
Received on our crowns is what bodhisattvas do.

18. Destitute and by people forever despised,
Stricken by grave illness and demons in our lives,
Still, the sin and pain of all beings to assume
With courageous hearts is what bodhisattvas do.

19. Although famous and revered by many beings,
With a great fortune like the god of wealth achieved,
To see that grandeurs of existence have no truth,
And not be haughty is what bodhisattvas do.

20. If our enemy of hatred has not been tamed,
Outer foes may be vanquished, yet still escalate.
With armies of love and compassion to subdue
Our own stream of mind is what bodhisattvas do.

21. Salty water and sense pleasures are much the same.
However much enjoyed, thirsts grow and never fade.
All things by which longing and desire are produced
To cast off at once is what bodhisattvas do.

22. Whatever the appearance, it is our own mind.
Mind's nature transcends concepts since primeval time.
Attributes of something grasped and one grasping to
Not to form in mind is what bodhisattvas do.

23. When meeting with objects so lovely to the mind,
Just like rainbows that appear in the summertime
Beautiful things appear, yet see they have no truth.
To give up desire is what bodhisattvas do.

24. All agonies are like our child's death in a dream.
Holding illusions as real, we grow most weary.
When situations of adversity ensue,
To see illusion is what bodhisattvas do.

25. We must give even our lives for enlightenment.
Do outer objects really need to be mentioned?
With no hope for reward or karma to bear fruit
To be generous is what bodhisattvas do.

26. If without discipline our own goal is not reached,
Quite laughable a wish to help others would seem.
Without having any mundane intent pursued
To guard discipline is what bodhisattvas do.

27. For bodhisattvas who wish for virtue's pleasure,
All doers of harm are like a precious treasure.
Towards all without having hostile attitudes
To practice patience is what bodhisattvas do.

28. Hearers and self-made Buddhas work just for themselves.
Yet, strive like it's a fire on their heads that they quell.
To rouse diligence, the source of fine attributes,
For all beings' sake is what bodhisattvas do.

29. Understanding through insight while resting calmly
Our afflictions are brought to their entire defeat,
To practice concentration that transcends in truth
The four formless realms is what bodhisattvas do.

30. Our complete enlightenment can not be achieved,
Through the first five perfections, with wisdom lacking.
To practice wisdom with method and no thought to
Three separate spheres is what bodhisattvas do.

31. When our very mistakes we fail to comprehend,
Though seeming like dharma, we may do wrong actions.
With our mistakes constantly inquired into
To abandon them is what bodhisattvas do.

32. If under power of afflictions, we discuss
Other bodhisattva's faults we become corrupt.
To speak not of the faults of those who've gone into
The great vehicle is what bodhisattvas do.

33. Seeking gain and respect will lead to quarreling.
Hearing, thinking, and training decline and grow weak.
To give up clinging to the households of those who
Are kin and patrons is what bodhisattvas do.

34. Harsh words create disturbances in others' minds,
And lead the bodhisattva's conduct to decline.
To give up the harsh words which are unpleasant to
The minds of others is what bodhisattvas do.

35. When afflictions are habits, they're hard to turn back.
So with the sword-like cure of mindfulness in grasp,
As soon as afflictions like desire are produced,
To strike them right down is what bodhisattvas do.

36. In short, in all activities we undertake,
We must ask, "How is my mind in this present state?"
Fulfilling the goal of others through continued
Mindful awareness is what bodhisattvas do.

37. To dispel sufferings of infinite beings,
Understanding the three spheres' complete purity,
To dedicate such earnestly attained virtue
For enlightenment is what bodhisattvas do.

Adhering to the teachings of the sublime ones,
Meanings of sutras, tantras, and explanations,
I wrote for those wishing to follow the path through,
These thirty-seven things that bodhisattvas do.

Since I have a poor mind and my learning is weak,
Scholars will not be pleased by this poetry.
Yet since I drew from sutras and sublime teachings,
These practices are without mistakes, I believe.

Still bodhisattvas' actions are waves of greatness,
And it's hard for my poor mind to fathom their depths.
For faults, errors, contradictions, and all the rest
O' sublime ones have patience, I humbly request!

May all beings, by virtue arising from this,
Through bodhichitta relative and ultimate,
Dwelling not in extremes of existence or peace,
Become the same as our protector Chenrezi.

For the sake of benefiting himself and others, the scripture and logic expounding monk, Thogme (1295-1369),
composed this in the Ngülchu Rinchen Cave.