

The Thirty-Seven Practices of All Buddhas' sons

By Thogme Zangpo (1295-1369)

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Introduction:

I pay heartfelt homage to you, Lokeshvara;
You have true compassion extending to all.

To those who in every coming and going
Have seen that each thing is inherently void,
And thus can devote both their time and their efforts
With one aim in mind — "Let me benefit all!"
To such foremost Gurus and you, Lokeshvara,
All-seeing protector, with utmost respect
I bow down before you in constant obeisance,
And turn to your service my thoughts, words and deeds.

The Fully Enlightened Victorious Buddhas,
From whom all true pleasure and benefits derive,
Have reached their attainment by following Dharma
And leading their lives through this noblest of paths.
*To live by the Dharma depends on full knowledge
Of how we must practice and what we must do,
Thus I'll attempt now a brief explanation
Of what is the practice of all Buddhas' Sons.*

1

This sound human body endowed with full leisure —
An excellent vessel rare to be found —
Since now we've obtained one in no way deficient,
Let's work night and day without veering off course
To take across the ocean and free from samsara
Not only ourselves but all others as well.
First listen, think hard, then do much meditation
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

2

Remaining too long in one place our attraction
To loved ones upsets us, we're tossed in its wake.
The flames of our anger towards those who annoy us
Consume what good merit we've gained in the past.
The darkness of closed-minded thought dims our outlook,
We lose vivid sight of what's right and what's wrong.
We must give up our home and set forth from our country —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

3

Withdrawing completely from things that excite us,
Our mental disturbances slowly decline.
And ridding our mind of directionless wandering,
Attention on virtue will surely increase.
As wisdom shines clearer, the world comes in focus,
Our confidence grows in the Dharma we've learned.
Live all alone far away in seclusion —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

4

Regardless of how long we spent living together,
Good friends and relations must some day depart.
Our wealth and possessions collected with effort
Are left far behind at the end of our life.
Our mind, but a guest in our body's great guest house,
Must vacate one day and travel beyond —
Cast away thoughts that concern but this lifetime —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

5

From staying together with friends who misguide us,
Our hatred, desires and ignorance grow.
With little time left to continue our studies,
We don't think of Dharma; we meditate less.
Our love and compassion for all sentient beings
Are lost and forgotten while under their sway.
Sever such ties with misleading companions —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

6

When placing ourself in the hands of a Guru,
We're turning sincerely for guidance to someone
Whose competence both in the scriptures and practice
Expands like the moon growing full.
We'll then solve all our problems, dispel our delusion,
If we place our full confidence solely in him.
We must cherish our Guru far more than our body —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

7

The gods of this world are not yet free from sorrow
For caught in samsara, some day they must fall.
If they're bound as we are, how can they protect us?
How can someone in prison free anyone else?
But Buddha, his teachings and those who live by them
Are free to give comfort —they'll not let us down.
Go to the Three Jewels of Refuge for shelter —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

8

Buddha has said that the grief past endurance
Of creatures whose lives contain nothing but pain
Is unfortunate fruit of the the wrongs they've committed
Against other beings in lifetime gone by.
Not wishing to suffer from horrible torment,
Not flinching if even our life is at stake,
Turn from all actions that harm other beings —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

9

Like the dew that remains for a moment or two
On the tips of the grass and then melts with the dawn,
The pleasures we find in the course of our lives
Last only an instant, they cannot endure;
While the freedom we gain when becoming a Buddha
Is a blissful attainment not subject to change.
Aim every effort to this wondrous achievement —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

10

In each incarnation, through all of our lives,
We've been cared for by others with motherly love.
While these mothers of ours are still lost in samsara,
How cruel to ignore them and free but ourself!
To save other beings, though countless in number,
to free from their sorrow these mothers of old,
Produce Bodhicitta, the wish to be Buddha —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

11

All of our sufferings, without an exception,
Derive from the wish to please but ourselves,
While the thoughts and the actions that benefit others
Conceive and give birth to supreme Buddhahood
Thus in exchange for our selfish desires
and shameful neglect of our suffering kin,
Replace thoughts of self with concern for all others —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

12

If under the sway of compulsive desire
And longing for things that he does not possess,
Some unfortunate person has stolen our riches
Or lets others rob us and idly stands by;
Then out of compassion and with no attachment,
To him we must dedicate all of our prayers:
May he have wealth, our body and merits —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

13

Although we're not guilty of any offence
And never have harmed anyone in our life
If someone deluded should threaten to kill us
Because he is crazed with a tormented mind,
Then mercifully wishing for him not to suffer
Further misfortune because of his state,
Selflessly take on the effects of his actions —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

14

If someone insulting should spread ugly rumours
About us with cruel words unpleasant to hear,
And even if what he has said spreads to others
And gains wide acceptance as being the truth;
Yet out of our wish for the one who's maligned us
To conquer his trouble and gain peace of mind,
Praise all his virtues and treat him with kindness —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

15

If in the midst of a large crowd of people
Someone should single us out for abuse,
Exposing our faults before all within hearing
And pointing out clearly the flaws we still have;
Then not getting angry nor being defensive,
Just listening in silence and heeding his words,
Bow in respect to this man as our teacher —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

16

If someone we love and have cared for with kindness,
As an unselfish mother would cherish her child,
Should shun our devotion with thankless resentment
And treat us as if we're his most hated foe,
Then seeing these acts as a terrible sickness
Befallen our child and affecting his mind,
Treat him with even more love and affection —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

17

If by our own equals or those who are lower
In intellect, spiritual level, or wealth,
We're insulted and treated as if we were nothing
By force of their pride and their jealous contempt,
Then seeing that they are like Gurus to teach us
To always be humble and conquer our pride,
Treat them with honour and place them above us —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

18

If we are but men of most meagre subsistence
And always receive a great deal of abuse,
If we find ourselves constantly gripped by much sickness
And experience harm, interruptions and pain,
Then accepting ourself all these hardships which others
Would surely have suffered from the wrongs they had done,
Never lose courage to take pain from others —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

19

Though praised and well-known, admired by many
Who act most respectful by bowing their head,
Though having obtained a vast treasure of riches
Which equals the store of the great God of Wealth,
Yet seeing full well that this fruit of samsara,
Though fortunate, still has no essence at all,
Cast out what pride we might have in these glories —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

20

If anger that dwells in our heart lies neglected
And, turning instead to our external foes,
We try to destroy them and even kill thousands,
Then thousands of others will plague us still more,
So seeing this action is not the solution,
Let us muster the forces of mercy and love;
Turn inwards and tame the wild flow of our mind-stream —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

21

Indulging in objects our senses run after
And drinking salt water are one and the same:
The more we partake, for our own satisfaction,
The more our desire and thirst for them grow.
*Thus when we conceive a compulsive attraction
Towards whatever object our senses desire,
Abandon it quickly without hesitation —*
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

22

Whatever appears to be truly existent
Is merely what mind in delusion creates;
This mind of ours also is from the beginning
Devoid of an essence inherently real.
Then realizing Truth is beyond the conceptions
We have of the known and the knower as well,
Dispel the belief in inherent existence —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

23

Whenever we meet with a beautiful object,
Or something attractive which pleases our mind,
Do not be deceived into thinking it differs
In fact from a summertime rainbow:
Though both of them have such a lovely appearance,
Nothing substantial lies behind their facade.
Abandon the drives of compulsive attraction —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

24

The various ills in our life that we suffer
Resemble the death of our son in a dream;
To hold as the truth what is merely illusion
Is needless exhaustion of body and mind.
For this very reason, when faced with unpleasant
Conditions that normally cause us much grief,
Approach them as if they were only illusion —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

25

The beings who strive to be Fully Enlightened
Would give up their body pursuing this aim;
With this peerless example, what need is the mention
Of gifts we should make of the objects we own,
Without any hope of return for our kindness.
Not considering even the merit to be gained,
Engage in the practice of generous giving —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

26

If lacking strict moral control of our conduct
We haven't been able to reach our own goal,
How can we fulfil all the wishes of others?
Undisciplined effort is surely absurd!
We first must renounce our attachment to pleasure
Which binds us so tightly to samsara's wheel,
Then protect all our vows of sworn moral behavior —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

27

For all Bodhisattvas with minds set on merit
Who wish to amass a great store of good deeds,
Encounters with those causing harm and destruction
Which test their commitment are mines of great wealth.
For this very reason, abandon resentment
And anger directed towards those who do harm;
Perfect meditation on patient endurance —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

28

If Sravakas as well as Pratyekabuddhas,
Who work towards Nirvana for merely themselves,
Exert so much effort fulfilling their purpose
That were they in flames, they'd not stray from their goal,
Then how much more energy must be expended
By those of us working for everyone's sake;
Enlightenment calls for the most perseverance —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

29

Higher insight that penetrates right to the essence,
Revealing the true way in which things exist,
Can only root out our emotional problems
If mental quiescence is laid at its base.
Thus surpassing the four formless states of absorption
We must work to achieve single-minded control,
And the full concentration of deep meditation —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

30

Perfection of Charity, patience and morals,
Absorption and effort alone won't suffice;
Without the Perfection of Wisdom these five are
Unable to bring us to full Buddhahood.
With the methods of pure Bodhicitta develop
The wisdom to see that the actor, the act,
And the acted upon lack inherent existence —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

31

Without making efforts to analyze clearly
Delusions we have and mistakes we commit,
Then even though outwardly practicing Dharma,
We still may perform many non-Dharmic deeds.
*For this very reason, let's try to examine
Mistakes and delusions, the faults we possess,
Then afterwards try to remove them completely —*
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

32

While speaking of others, the force of delusion
May cause us to dwell on the flaws they possess;
Should those we find fault with be Bodhisattvas,
Our own reputation will suffer instead.
So avoid the mistake of disparaging others
Who've entered upon Mahayana's great path;
Only the faults that we have should we mention —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

33

Domestic disputes with our friends and relations,
To gain their respect or the things we feel due,
Will leave us unable to listen to Dharma:
Unable to study or meditate well.
Since danger is found in the homes of our patrons,
As well as in those of our family and friends,
Abandon attachment we have to these households —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

34

The words of abuse that we utter in anger
Cause others much pain by disturbing their mind;
And we who are striving to be Bodhisattvas,
Will find that our practice will surely decline.
So seeing the faults that arise from harsh language,
Which those who must hear find unpleasant and rude,
Abandon abuse directed towards others —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

35

Defiled types of actions will soon become habits
As we grow accustomed to base states of mind;
Strenuous effort will then be required
For the force of opponents to counter these stains.
So armed with the weapons alertness and memory,
Attack such defilements as lust on first sight;
Remove these obstructions that hinder our progress —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

36

In short then, whatever we do in whatever
Condition or circumstance we may confront,
Should be done with the force of complete self-awareness
Which comprehends fully the state of our mind.
Then always possessing alertness and memory,
Which keep us in focus and ready to serve,
We must work for the welfare of all sentient beings —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

37

All merits we gain from the efforts we're making
To put into practice these virtuous ways,
Which we do for the sake of removing the suffering
Endured by the limitless mothers we've had,
We must dedicate purely for them to be Buddhas,
With wisdom which sees that both they and ourself,
As well as this merit all lack true existence —
The Sons of the Buddhas all practice this way.

Closing

By carefully following all of the teachings
My most holy Gurus have imparted to me —
Concerning the meanings of sutra and tantra
Explained by the Buddhas and masters of old
I have written this work on the practices numbering
Thirty and seven of all Buddhas' Sons
To benefit those who desire to follow
The path that all sons of Buddhas must tread.

Because of my poor intellectual powers
And the meagre amount of training I've had,
I haven't been able to write polished verses
In metre and style which would please those with skill;
But as I've relied on the words of the sutras
And all that my most holy Gurus have taught,
I am certain that this is without any errors;
This truly is what Buddhas' Sons have all done.

However, because the extent and the depth
Of the great waves of conduct of all Buddha's sons

Are hard to be fathomed by someone of limited
Power of intellect as is myself,
There are bound to be faults, contradictions in meaning,
Disjointed connections and many such flaws;
So most holy Gurus, I beg your indulgence,
Be patient with all the shortcomings I have.

With pure Bodhicitta of ultimate Voidness,
Yet relative nature of mercy and love,
Devoid of extremes in this worldly existence
And passive absorption in blissful release,
May all sentient beings receiving the merit
Amassed by the effort I've made in this work
Soon reach your attainment, O great Lokeshvara,
All-seeing protector with love for us all.