The Thirty-Seven (37) Practices of Bodhisattvas by Ngulchu Thogme

The Thirty Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas is a transcription of an oral teaching by a Buddhist scholar and teacher. The text on which the teaching is given is a set of verses written in the 14th century by a Tibetan Buddhist monk... this work seeks to elucidate the day-to-day practice of the Bodhisattva. The original verses are short and fairly clear, and the commentary by Rinchen makes the meaning and the demanding character of the Bodhisattva ideal realistic for the contemporary reader. The two titles offer insight upon insight as to the way a life should be lead. Rinchen's is perhaps the more accessible to general readers. (Amazon.com)

Ngulchu Thogme's Prologue:

I pay homage through my three doors,
To my supreme teacher and protector, Chenrezig,
Who while seeing all phenomena lack coming and going,
Makes single-minded effort for the good of living beings.

Perfect Buddhas, source of all well-being and happiness,
Arise from accomplishing the excellent teachings,
And this depends on knowing the practices,
So I will explain the practices of Bodhisattvas.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Root Verses of &quot;The 37 Practices of Bodhisattvas&quot;</th>
<th>Memory Device</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Having gained this rare ship of freedom and fortune, Hear, think and meditate unwaveringly night and day In order to free yourself and others from the ocean of cyclic existence -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
<td>+ Effort</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Attached to your loved ones you are stirred up like water. Hating your enemies you burn like fire. In the darkness of confusion, you forget what to adopt and discard. Give up your homeland -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
<td>- Hate - Love</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>By avoiding bad objects, disturbing emotions gradually decrease. Without distraction, virtuous activities naturally increase. With clarity of mind, conviction in teaching arises. Cultivate seclusion -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
<td>+ Seclusion</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Loved ones who have long kept company will part. Wealth created with difficulty will be left behind. Consciousness, the guest, will leave the guesthouse of the body. Let go of this life -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
<td>- Attachment</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>When you keep their company your three poisons increase, Your activities of hearing thinking and meditating decline, And they make you lose your love and compassion. Give up bad friends -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
<td>- Negative peers</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>When you rely on them your faults come to an end And your good qualities grow like the waxing moon. Cherish spiritual teachers even more than your own body -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
<td>+ Spiritual friend</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Bound himself in the jail of cyclic existence, What worldly god can give you protection? Therefore when you seek refuge, take refuge in the Three Jewels which will not betray you -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
<td>+ Refuge</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>The Subduer said that all the unbearable suffering of bad rebirths Is the fruit of wrongdoing. Therefore, even at the cost of your life, never do wrong -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
<td>- Negative actions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practice</td>
<td>Description</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Like dew on the tip of a blade of grass, pleasures of the three worlds last only a while and then vanish. Aspire to the never-changing supreme state of liberation -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>When your mothers, who have loved you since time without beginning, Are suffering, what use is your own happiness? Therefore to free limitless living beings, Develop the altruistic intention -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>All suffering comes from the wish for your own happiness. Perfect Buddhas are born from the thought to help others. Therefore exchange your own happiness for the suffering of others -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Even if someone out of strong desire Steals all of your wealth or has it stolen, Dedicate to him your body, your possessions and your virtue, past, present and future -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Even if someone tries to cut off your head When you have not done the slightest thing wrong, Out of compassion take all his misdeeds upon yourself -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>Even if someone broadcasts all kinds of unpleasant remarks About you throughout the three thousand worlds, In return, with a loving mind, speak of his good qualities -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
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<td>15</td>
<td>Though someone may deride and speak bad words About you in a public gathering, Looking on him as a spiritual teacher, bow to him with respect -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Even if a person for whom you have cared Like your own child regards you as an enemy, Cherish him specially, like a mother does her child who is stricken with sickness -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>If an equal or inferior person Disparages you out of pride, Place him, as you would your spiritual teacher with respect on the crown of your head -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Though you lack what you need and are constantly disparaged, Afflicted by dangerous sickness and spirits, Without discouragement take on the misdeeds and the pain of all living beings -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Though you become famous and many bow to you, And you gain riches to equal Vaishravana's, See that worldly fortune is without essence and do not be conceited -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>While the enemy of your own anger is not subdued Though you conquer external foes, they will only increase. Therefore with the militia of love and compassion, subdue your own mind -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Sensual pleasures are like saltwater: The more you indulge, the more thirst increases. Abandon at once those things which breed clinging attachment -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 22 | Whatever appears is your own mind.  
Your mind from the start is free from fabricated extremes.  
Understanding this, **do not take to mind [inherent] signs of subject and object**  
-- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. | Non-duality |
| 23 | When you encounter attractive objects,  
Though they seem beautiful  
Like a rainbow in summer, **do not regard them as real,**  
**And give up attachment**  
-- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. | Attachment & Impermanence |
| 24 | All forms of suffering are like a child's death in a dream.  
Holding illusory appearances to be true makes you weary.  
Therefore, **when you meet with disagreeable circumstances,**  
**See them as illusory**  
-- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. | Unpleasant circumstances & Illusion |
| 25 | When those who want enlightenment must give even their body,  
There is no need to mention external things.  
Therefore without hope of return or any fruition  
**Give generously**  
-- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. | + Generosity |
| 26 | Without ethics you cannot accomplish your own well-being,  
So wanting to accomplish others' is laughable.  
Therefore without worldly aspirations  
**Safeguard your ethical discipline**  
-- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. | + Ethics |
| 27 | To Bodhisattvas who want a wealth of virtue  
Those who harm are like a precious treasure.  
Therefore towards all **cultivate patience without hostility**  
-- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. | + Patience |
| 28 | Seeing even Hearers and Solitary Realizers, who accomplish only their own good,  
Strive as if to put out a fire on their head,  
For the sake of all beings **make joyful effort**  
**Toward the source of all good qualities**  
-- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. | + Equality |
| 29 | Understanding that disturbing emotions are destroyed  
By special insight with calm abiding,  
**Cultivate concentration which surpasses the four formless absorptions**  
-- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. | + Meditative stability |
| 30 | Since five perfections without wisdom  
Cannot bring perfect enlightenment,  
Along with skillful means **cultivate the wisdom which does not conceive the three spheres [as real]**  
-- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. | Emptiness |
| 31 | If you do not examine your errors,  
You may look like a practitioner but not act as one.  
Therefore, always **examining your own errors,**  
**Rid yourself of them**  
-- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. | - Errors |
| 32 | If through the influence of disturbing emotions  
You point out the faults of another Bodhisattva,  
You yourself are diminished, so **do not mention the faults of those who have entered the Great Vehicle**  
-- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. | - Criticism |
| 33 | Reward and respect cause us to quarrel  
And make hearing, thinking and meditating decline.  
For this reason **give up attachment to the households of friends, relations and benefactors**  
-- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. | - Human attachment |
| 34 | Harsh words disturb the minds of others  
And cause deterioration in a Bodhisattva’s conduct.  
Therefore **give up harsh words which are unpleasant to others**  
-- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. | - Harsh speech |
### 35 Habitual disturbing emotions are hard to stop through counter actions. Armed with antidotes, the guards of mindfulness and mental alertness.

*Destroy disturbing emotions like attachment at once, as soon as they arise.*

--- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas.  

- JAPID (Jealousy, Anger, Pride, Ignorance, Desire)

| 36 | In brief, whatever you are doing, Ask yourself, "What is the state of my mind?"
With constant mindfulness and mental alertness
Accomplish others' good -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. |
| + Mindfulness |
| + Awareness |

| 37 | To remove the suffering of limitless beings,
Understanding the purity of the three spheres,
*Dedicate the virtue of effort to enlightenment* -- This is the practice of Bodhisattvas. |
| + Dedicating merits |

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**Ngulchu Thogme's Epilogue:**

*Relying on what is taught in the sutras, tantras, treatises,*  
*And the words of the genuine masters,*

*I have composed these thirty-seven Bodhisattva practices*  
*To benefit those who wish to train on the Bodhisattva's path.*

*Because my intelligence is small and my studies few,*  
*I cannot compose poetry to please the scholars.*

*Yet since they are based on sutras and teachings of the genuine masters,*  
*I believe these practices of a Bodhisattva are not mistaken.*

*Nevertheless, since the vast conduct of a Bodhisattva is difficult to fathom*  
*For one with an inferior intellect such as mine,*

*All my mistakes such as contradictions, incoherence, and so on.*

*By virtue of the merit gathered here,*  
*By the power of relative and ultimate bodhicitta,*

*May all sentient beings become like the Protector Chenrezig*  
*Who dwells neither in the extreme of existence nor in that of peace.*

*The monk Thogme,*  
*A proponent of scriptures and logic,*  
*Has composed these verses*  
*In a cave known as Ngulchu Rinchen Puk*  
*To benefit himself and others.*

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**Alternative translations:**

- The Thirty-Seven (37) Practices of Bodhisattvas (pdf), by with some commentary by His Eminence Garchen Rinpoche
- The Thirty-Seven (37) Practices of Bodhisattvas (doc), with commentary by Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche
- The Thirty-Seven (37) Practices of Bodhisattvas (pdf), with commentary by NTZP
- The Thirty-Seven (37) Practices of Bodhisattvas (pdf), translated by Yonten Gyatso with the help of Dechen Wangmo.