

Section Six: The pledges that a practitioner of the Mind Training instruction should observe

There are eighteen pledges that a practitioner should observe. The first three are indicated in the following line from the root text:

Always train yourself in the three general principles.

(1) The first of the three principles is not to let your Mind Training practice conflict with other precepts. This means that we should not use our Mind Training practice to justify disregarding lower forms of vows, such as those taught in the Hinayana Vinaya system.

(2) The second principle is not to let your Mind Training practice become tainted with reckless behavior. This means that we should not use our Mind Training practice to justify doing actions that might disturb human beings or spirits, in an attempt to give the impression that we have overcome our self-cherishing mind. An example of such reckless behavior would be to cut down a tree inhabited by a powerful spirit [331a].

(3) The third principle is not to let your Mind Training practice be biased. This means that we should avoid the partiality of being patient with our friends but not with our enemies, or being patient with human beings but not with spirits. These are the three general principles.

(4) Change your aspirations but remain natural.

This means we should not allow our mind to remain as coarse as it was in the past. We should try to correct our mind by steadily improving it. The best aspiration would be to think that we could generate a proper attitude within one day. A middling one would be to think that we could do so within a month. The lowest aspiration would be to think that we could generate it within a year. If we fail even to develop this last way of thinking, our mind will still be in the same condition as it was before we became a monk or nun, even though we may be a lot older than we were when we left the householder's state.

Therefore, we must change our aspirations and avoid being like "the boulder behind the family home."³⁰ What method should we use to change our aspirations? We must change them with enlightenment mind, renunciation, reflecting on impermanence, and so on. At the same time, our outer conduct should remain natural. It isn't proper, for instance, to raise our eyebrows as

³⁰T: *khang lag gi brag gong bzhin*. This Tibetan saying means we should avoid being as unchangeable as a rock.

a sign that we are devout practitioners or to make other outer gestures of piety when we haven't actually gained a *kar-nga*'s³¹ worth of inner spiritual knowledge. Whatever religious experiences or improvement in our spiritual knowledge we may have should only be manifest in our mind.

(Kyabje Rinpoche told us we must be like the Bodhisattva Shantideva and Arya Pantaka.³² They were very advanced in their practice, yet no one knew that they had abandoned many of the path's obstacles and reached a high state of spiritual realization. Rinpoche also told us a story about the glorious Chandrakirti. Although he was not highly esteemed and was thought to be just an ordinary pandit, inwardly he had reached such a high level of attainment that he could draw real milk from the picture of a cow.)

None of these great beings displayed any outer sign of their spirituality. Moreover, the lamas of this Kadampa tradition [331b] deliberately avoided becoming widely known as great practitioners and gaining fame through displaying signs of their spiritual attainment. We must also attempt to conduct ourselves in a similar manner. Otherwise, if we make our spiritual knowledge too widely known—like a person who shows off a wishing jewel to others—it can bring us many obstacles.

(Kyabje Rinpoche then said that some of us have a practice that is motivated by this life's aims, making us no different from ordinary worldly people. Others may do a genuine dharma practice, but then behave as if they are waving a banner on some high place. These are not proper attitudes. In this Kadampa tradition established by Lord Atisha's followers, we must keep our spiritual knowledge hidden, like a lamp inside a pot.)

(5) Do not mention others' flaws.

This simply means that we should avoid talking about the faults of others.

(6) Never think negatively about others.

This means that we should completely give up searching for faults in others. Instead, we should examine our own faults. If we scrutinize others—including our dharma friends or the monks of our college or house—for the sole purpose of finding their faults, the natural result is that we will come to see faults even in the Buddha. This will only increase our tendency to

³¹T: *skar inga*. Literally five "stars" (T: *skar ma*), this is a Tibetan coin of modest value, roughly equivalent to a dime.

³²For the story of Arya Pantaka, see Part One, Day Four, pp. 118–123.

engage in such misdeeds as disregarding and defaming the Buddha and his teaching. Therefore, we should avoid criticizing others.

(7) First strive to remove your worst mental affliction.

We should first try to remove from our mind whichever of our mental afflictions is strongest. For instance, a person in whom desire is predominant should try to overcome this mental affliction by practicing its antidote—for example, by meditating on the body's ugliness.³³

(8) Give up all expectation of reward.

We should not do any virtuous action with the hope that it will bring us something favorable in return or that it will bring us a favorable karmic maturation.

The remaining pledges are described in a series of brief aphorisms:

(9) Avoid poisonous food.

This means we should not eat food—that is, virtuous activities—that has been tainted with the poison of a self-cherishing mind [332a].

(10) Don't be steadfast.³⁴

This means that when we develop any of the mental afflictions we should not allow them to continue unchecked because we failed to apply the appropriate antidote.

(11) Don't engage in bitter quarreling.

We are not religious ascetics unless we possess the four essential qualities of an ascetic, since we agreed in the presence of our preceptor and

³³See Day Fifteen, pp. 49–50.

³⁴T: *gzhung bzang po*. This term generally means the quality of being loyal to one's friends (T: *phyi thag ring ba*). Here it is being used, presumably with deliberate irony, in a different sense. The principal explanation of the aphorism, which is repeated in numerous commentaries, is that we should not cling steadfastly to the resentment that stems from being harmed by others. Ngulchu Dharmabhadra and Yongzin Yeshe Gyeltsen add that "steadfastness" also refers to the strong and enduring habituation we have toward our mental afflictions. According to this interpretation, the aphorism means that we should abandon such "loyalty" to our mental afflictions by overcoming them as soon as they appear. Kyabje Pabongka Rinpoche is following this second explanation here.

instructor to adhere to these principles.³⁵ Therefore, if someone calls us an old dog, we should not call him a thief in return. And if someone strikes us once, we should not hit him back twice.

(12) Don't wait along a back road.

Sometimes a person will wait along an isolated back road in order to get revenge on someone who harmed him earlier. We should not wait for such an opportunity to harm another.

This is the kind of deceit in which a person has a smile on his face while his heart is black. Foolish worldly people view this as a good quality. This also shows why the spiritual and worldly spheres are in direct opposition to one another.

(13) Don't strike a vulnerable point.

If we learn that someone has a serious fault, we should not denounce or criticize him for it in public. This aphorism also means that we should not recite harmful mantras to overcome spirits and other sentient beings.

(14) Don't place a *dzo*'s³⁶ load onto an ox.

We should avoid using deceit to lay the responsibility for some action on another person. We should also avoid trying to shift the blame for something from ourselves onto another person.

(15) Don't practice perversely as if doing worldly rituals.

The main purpose of this Mind Training teaching is to overcome our self-cherishing mind. If we meditate on the instructions for a different reason—such as to avoid being harmed by spirits or to gain wealth, honor, and fame—our practice will only serve to increase our self-cherishing mind.

³⁵The four essential qualities of a religious ascetic (S: *carvārah śramaṇakāradharmāḥ*, T: *dge sbyong du byed pa'i chos bzhi*) are: (1) not to respond to abusive speech with abusive speech, (2) not to respond to anger with anger, (3) not to respond to criticism with criticism, and (4) not to respond to physical blows with physical blows. Monks and nuns accept these four principles when they take ordination. The preceptor (S: *upadhyāyah*, T: *mkhan po*) and instructor (S: *ācāryah*, T: *slob dpon*) are the two major functionaries who preside at the ordination ceremony.

³⁶T: *mdzo*. A cross between a yak and a cow, or a bull and a *dri* (T: 'bri, i.e., female of the yak species).

Therefore, we should avoid this sort of false dharma practice, which is like the *tochō*³⁷ rituals that are done for worldly reasons [332b].

(16) Don't try to be the fastest.

We should not try to gain sole possession, as quickly as possible, of property that is jointly owned. Nor should we attempt to obtain the best portion of anything before others.

(17) Don't turn a god into a demon.

We should not let our Mind Training practice strengthen our self-cherishing mind instead of serving as its antidote.

(18) Don't seek misery as a means to happiness.

If we hope that our enemies meet with misfortune or that they die so we may gain some form of comfort or happiness, then we are violating this pledge.

This completes the eighteen pledges.

Section Seven: A presentation of the precepts that practitioners of the Mind Training instructions must observe

The twenty-two precepts are taught with the following aphorisms:

(1) Do all yoga practice with one thought.

The person who is practicing this teaching does not need to cultivate many different types of virtuous activities. He should do everything in connection with the attitude that exchanges self and others. For instance, since we have given ourselves to all sentient beings, when eating we should reflect as follows: "I am nurturing this body so that I can benefit all sentient beings." This same principle should be applied to all our activities. We should also be motivated by this attitude when we do all tantric activities, such as reciting mantras and urging dharma protectors to do various deeds on our behalf.

³⁷T: *to bcas*. A type of ritual that is performed to remove obstacles or avert misfortune.

- (2) Respond with one thought when overwhelmed by obstacles.

If a physician cannot cure a patient with medicine, he will resort to a more radical treatment such as *tarsek*.³⁸ Similarly, this single mental practice of exchanging self and others can effectively cure all the hundreds of diseases of the mental afflictions.

- (3) Two actions are for the beginning and the end.

There are two important exercises we should do: (1) at the beginning of all our spiritual practices we should correct our motivation, and (2) at the end, we should dedicate whatever virtue we accumulated. We should also examine the activities we do throughout the day to determine whether they are consistent with the resolve that we made when we got up in the morning.³⁹

- (4) Be patient, no matter which of the two you encounter.

We must make sure that whenever we encounter either good fortune or bad we do not lose our Mind Training practice. Some persons lose their dharma practice when they experience good fortune, such as gaining a high position or wealth. Others lose their dharma practice when they encounter an enemy who causes them to experience misery [333a].

- (5) Protect the two even at the cost of your life.

We must observe both the general pledges that relate to dharma and the pledges of this Mind Training teaching with even greater concern than we have for our very lives.

- (6) Train yourself in the three that are difficult.

We must exert ourselves intensely in three difficult exercises, first by learning what they are and then by training ourselves to practice them. The three are: the difficult practice of recognizing the mental afflictions, the difficult practice of applying their antidotes, and the difficult practice of preventing their recurrence.

³⁸T: *gtar sreg*. This refers to a treatment used in traditional Tibetan medicine that includes bloodletting and applying lighted cotton tapers or hot needles.

³⁹See the section called "The strength of intention" above, p. 186.

(7) Take up the three principal causes.

We should pray that we and others are able to acquire the three principal causes for practicing dharma: to meet with an excellent guru, to have a mind that is well-disposed to practice, and to gain the material necessities—such as food, clothing, and so forth—that facilitate spiritual practice.

(8) Meditate on the three in an undiminished form.

We should cultivate the following three attitudes in such a way that we do not let them become weakened: reverence and respect for our guru, devotion to the Mind Training teachings, and a commitment to observing the Mind Training precepts through practicing recollection and vigilance.⁴⁰

(9) Maintain the three you should never be without.

We should never let ourselves become lax about continually practicing virtuous activities of body, speech, and mind. Moreover, virtuous activities of the body doesn't only mean doing prostrations and circumambulations. Even sitting up straight can be a physical virtue.⁴¹

(10) Train yourself impartially toward all objects.

We must practice the Mind Training teachings impartially toward both sentient beings and inanimate objects. Thus, we must avoid distinguishing between those we consider enemies and those we consider friends, or feeling a dislike for any geographical region or climate.

(11) Cherish everything with a practice that is heartfelt and all-encompassing.

We also must practice Mind Training from the bottom of our heart and in a way that encompasses every object, just as Chekawa did.

⁴⁰Recollection (S: *smṛtiḥ*, T: *dran pa*) and vigilance (S: *samprajanyam*, T: *shes bzhin*) are discussed in relation to ordinary activities in Part Two, Day Nine, pp. 69–71. They also form the fifth and sixth of eight “remedial factors” in the instruction for achieving quiescence (see Day Twenty-one, pp. 244–249).

⁴¹For example, when listening to a dharma teaching.

(12) Train yourself constantly toward special objects.

We should meditate with particular intensity in relation to certain special objects, including those with whom we live. Other special objects include our enemies, toward whom we have great difficulty generating patience and similar virtuous attitudes, and our gurus and parents, because the actions we do in relation to them are very powerful karma.

(13) Don't let your practice depend on conditions.

We should meditate on the Mind Training instructions regardless of whether or not the circumstances are favorable, or we have material necessities such as food and clothing. We should not be like the individual described in these lines:

Though pious with a full stomach and a sun that warms,
He turns ordinary whenever misfortune descends [333b].

(14) This time, practice what is most important.

Although the practices we are doing at this time—such as meditating on enlightenment mind—are difficult, they hold great meaning for us. We must also practice them with the aim of bringing ultimate benefit both to ourselves and others, not merely to gain something that will benefit us in this life.

(Kyabje Rinpoche further remarked that we must consider future lives to be more important than this life, the dharma to be more important than worldly concerns, and meditation on this Mind Training instruction to be more important than any other dharma teaching or practice.)

The remaining precepts are presented in a series of brief aphorisms:

(15) Don't do mistaken activities.

The instructions describe six mistaken activities. Mistaken patience is being able to endure the hardships of worldly activities, but not those of practicing dharma with great effort.

Mistaken enjoyments are engaging in or thinking about such activities as worldly conversation, business affairs, wars, and the like. The proper enjoyment is to practice the three dharma activities of listening, reflection, and meditation.

Mistaken compassion is to pity someone who endures hardships for the sake of the dharma, instead of pitying those who engage in nonvirtuous deeds.

Mistaken aspiration is wanting to achieve worldly happiness, wealth, and power, instead of wanting to practice a genuine dharma.

Mistaken counsel is to teach others skills that might bring them great harm in future lives—such as how to sell things or how to engage in litigation. Proper counsel would be to convince those who trust us to do what will benefit them in future lives—that is, we should try to persuade them to practice dharma.

Mistaken rejoicing is to rejoice when someone does nonvirtuous deeds or when an enemy experiences suffering. Proper rejoicing is to rejoice at our own and others' virtuous deeds, and when others experience happiness.

(Kyabje Rinpoche made this further point about mistaken rejoicing: Long ago, a certain monk became pleased when he learned that a rival had committed an expulsive transgression.⁴² When Geshe Potowa heard this, he declared that rejoicing at the rival's defeat was a greater misdeed than the expulsive transgression [334a].)

(16) Don't practice sporadically.

When we listen to dharma from a guru, we sometimes generate a shallow form of renunciation that causes us to become extremely earnest about doing all kinds of virtuous activities for a few days.⁴³ After a short while, though, we tire of this and give up doing virtuous activities. We should avoid this sort of sporadic behavior.

Gomba Rinchen Lama had a saying: "Train your eyes far ahead, keep a strong mind, and remain inwardly free."⁴⁴ This means, in part, that we should take a long-term view toward the dharma, and maintain an even-mindedness in which we are neither too strained nor too lax about our practice.

(Kyabje Rinpoche then made this point: We should begin by establishing a basic understanding of what our entire practice is, from the waking meditation up through the end. Later, we can learn the practices in greater detail.

⁴²S: *parājīkāh*, T: *phas pham pa*. Any of four offenses that require a monk or nun to be expelled. See also Day Fifteen, note 159.

⁴³See Day Fifteen, p. 43 and accompanying note 4 for another reference to this attitude, which is called "goose-bump renunciation."

⁴⁴This saying is also quoted and explained in Part Two, Day Ten, p. 102.

He illustrated the effectiveness of this approach using the story of the louse and the flea.⁴⁵)

The next precept states:

(17) Train in a way that cuts through indecision.

This precept is sometimes explained as meaning that we should devote ourselves completely to the Mind Training practice. However, a more vivid description is the following: When a physician is letting blood from a patient, he cuts through the flesh and various small blood vessels, deeply and all at once. Similarly, when we practice the Mind Training instructions, we must apply them to our mind with a firmness that is like rock meeting bone.⁴⁶

(18) Free yourself using deliberation and reflection.

Furthermore, we must practice analytic meditation by applying deliberation⁴⁷ and reflection⁴⁸ to the Mind Training instructions, so that we can remove any uncertainty we may have about them. We should also practice the antidote to whichever one of our mental afflictions is the strongest.

(19) Don't be conceited.

It is only proper that we exert ourselves on behalf of all sentient beings. Indeed, we have pledged ourselves to the pursuit of this goal. Therefore, we should never boast to anyone about how we have devoted ourselves to such activities.

(20) Don't be resentful.

If someone belittles us when we are in the company of others, we should not become angry and so forth.

⁴⁵A Tibetan version of the fable of the tortoise and the hare.

⁴⁶T: *rdo rus thug pa bzhin*. This saying is also quoted in Part Two, Day Ten, p. 101.

⁴⁷S: *vitarkaḥ*, T: *rtog pa*. One of the mental states discussed in Buddhist Abhidharma literature. It is defined as a kind of discursive thought in which the faculties of volition (S: *cetanā*, T: *sems pa*) and wisdom (S: *prajñā*, T: *shes rab*) are used to examine an object in a relatively coarse manner.

⁴⁸S: *vicārah*, T: *dpyod pa*. This mental state is similar to deliberation, except that it examines its object in a more subtle or careful manner.

(21) Don't be fickle.

We should avoid becoming quickly pleased or upset at the slightest provocation, like the sky in springtime.

(22) Don't yearn to be thanked.

Whenever we help someone, we must not long to be thanked or receive some other expression of gratitude.

This completes the explanation of the precepts.

If we can practice all these instructions [334b], we will be able to transform unfavorable conditions into elements of the path to enlightenment, even during times when the five degeneracies—that is, the degeneracy of life spans and the rest—have become strong.⁴⁹

These instructions have been transmitted through a lineage that comes down to us from Suvarnadvipa Guru. Chekawa himself gained such contentment through practicing them that he declared he could face death with no regrets.

With the above explanations, I have taught everything except the instructions that relate to the correct view. While many of the commentaries to this teaching describe the instructions on correct view according to the opinions of early Kadampa teachers, those explanations are not completely reliable.

The commentary entitled the *Mind Training Like the Rays of the Sun* explains the instructions on correct view according to the Madhyamaka Prasangika School. Therefore, we must contemplate that portion of the root text in a way that is consistent with the Prasangika viewpoint. Suvarnadvipa Guru originally held the view of the Chittamatra or Mind Only School. It is said that later he became a follower of the Madhyamaka School.

(Kyabje Rinpoche made this final comment at the end of the discourse: When a practical instruction⁵⁰ on the stages of the path to enlightenment is being taught, the custom of explaining and then reviewing all the major points three or four times is only followed up through the topic of generating enlightenment mind. For the remaining topics, this practice does not need to be followed.)

⁴⁹See Day Seventeen, note 45 for a description of these five factors.

⁵⁰T: *nyams khrid*. See Part One, Day One, p. 25 for a description of various types of instruction, including a practical instruction.