



A Trackless Path

A Retreat with Ken McLeod

New Mexico ~ Summer 2009



**Rowing harder doesn't help
if the boat is headed
in the wrong direction.**

~ Kenichi Ohmae

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The front cover illustration of Niguma is from a thangka of the Shangpa lineage painted by Sanje Elliott in the collection of Kagyu Changchub Chuling in Portland Oregon.

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Opening and Closing Meditation Sessions

Opening Prayers

The Four Instructions of Gampopa

Let my heart turn to practice.
Let practice become a path.
Let this path dissolve confusion.
Let confusion become wisdom.

Taking Refuge

I take refuge in my teacher, treasured buddha.
I take refuge in the three jewels, buddha, dharma and sangha.
I take refuge in the three sources, guru, deity and protector.
I take refuge in experience itself, empty, clear, without restriction.

Repeat three times

Awakening Intention

Beings are numberless: may I free them all.
Reactions are endless: may I release them all.
Doors to experience are infinite: may I enter them all.
Ways of awakening are limitless: may I know them all.

Repeat three times

The Four Immeasurables

May all beings enjoy happiness and the seeds of happiness.
May they be free from suffering and the seeds of suffering.
May they not be separate from true happiness free of suffering.
May they rest in great equanimity, free from preference and prejudice.

Repeat three times.

Closing Prayers

Dedication

Goodness comes from this practice now done.
Let me not hold it just in me.
Let it spread to all that is known
And awaken good throughout the world.

Aspiration for Awakening Mind

Awakening mind is precious.
May it arise where it has not arisen.
May it not fade where it has arisen.
May it ever grow and flourish.

Good Fortune

Through the power of truth of aspirations made with a totally pure mind,
Through the inevitability of dependence and conditions totally formed,
And through the force of what is, profound and totally true,
May the brilliance of good fortune blaze forever.

Practice Support

The Four Reminders

Precious Human Life: Resources & Opportunities

From the *Shangpa Practice Reminders* by Jamgön Kongtrul:

*To have the eight freedoms
And the ten favorable conditions in this human form
Is so much better than being a god;
It is just like a pauper's finding a jewel.*

*For so many reasons —
Cause, number, example and others —
It is difficult to find it but for this moment.*

*It is impermanent too, like a bubble of froth, certain to perish soon.
At that time, nothing but Dharma is even a hair tip's help.
Hence, I practice the profound path, the pith of the supreme dharma.*

Commentary

Of all the planets in the universe, I am on this one — warm, green, hospitable. Of the billions of creatures on this planet, I am a human being. Of all the times and places I could have been born, I am in this time and place.

Many people live in poverty, lacking adequate food, shelter, and health care. My life is free from war, from oppression, from grinding poverty, from debilitating addiction or crippling mental illness. I enjoy basic health, with my senses and intelligence intact.

I have all the freedoms and conditions necessary for spiritual practice. I am endowed with natural awareness. I have access to authentic spiritual teachings by qualified and compassionate teachers. I can rely on the support of experienced companions on the path.

This life has great potential for good or harm. The coming together of all these freedoms and conditions is fragile, and may end at any time. I want to understand my life and make the most of it. I don't want to waste these resources and opportunities.

*All human beings should try to learn
before they die what they are running from,
and to, and why.
~ James Thurber*

Impermanence: Everything Changes

*The universe, this external world,
Will be destroyed by fire and water.
The four seasons, mere moments, come and go.
Everything is impermanent, bound in the four ends.*

*There has never been a person born who doesn't die.
Life and breath are like lightning and dew.
It is not even certain which will come first,
Tomorrow or the next world.*

*If I only think about dharma but don't practice it,
The demons of distraction and laziness carry me away.
Since I must go empty-handed and naked
I should practice the supreme dharma without delay.*

Commentary

Every event and circumstance in this world is dependent on complex causes and conditions that are constantly arising and disappearing.

The pleasures, conditions, beliefs, and relationships that I rely on — which of them is genuinely reliable and lasting? What am I taking for granted? As I observe the world about me, I can see that everything changes — nothing stays the same.

The inhabitants of the world come and go. Every one of them will die. Though I see change, impermanence, and death all around me, I act as though I were going to live forever — but I too will die.

My death will definitely come, and I have no idea when. I may live a long time, or I may die today. What I do know is that each day brings me one day closer to my inevitable death. Nothing — not wealth, intelligence, strength, power, friends or family — will prevent me from dying.

Where in my life do I ignore change? What am I trying to cling to?

What is really important to me? Am I living the life that I want?

the four ends

*the end of accumulation is dispersion
the end of building is ruin
the end of meeting is parting
the end of birth is death*

Karma: Actions Evolve Into Experienced Results

*At death, everyone, even a universal monarch, leaves power and influence behind.
I wander alone in limbo.
The effects of my actions follow me
Like my shadow follows my body.*

*I will experience the effects of every one of my actions.
I will not experience the effects of actions I haven't done.
My actions keep evolving into experienced results.
The virtue and evil that I do inevitably ripen as happiness and suffering for me.*

*I am only here in this world for a moment, but samsara is long without end.
To avoid bringing about my own downfall, I must accept the principle of
action and result.
In particular, I must abide by my commitments
And let no failing stain my experience.*

Commentary

Though I may not be able to see all the impacts of my actions, I know that acts do have consequences. Everything I think, say, and do has consequences, large or small, immediate or distant.

Karma is the evolution of action and result. Each action's intended and unintended consequences become new seeds, setting up conditions that influence my future actions.

Every action I do becomes easier to repeat. Repeated actions become habits, and habits become character. My actions inevitably ripen into my experience of happiness and suffering. Ignoring the effects of my actions does not relieve me of the consequences. I alone am responsible for my actions and my experience of life.

Everyone has the potential to wake up, to see how things are, to stop creating suffering, to help others. But not everyone does. This brief, precious life can be used for good or ill. Is my life my own, or is it being directed and consumed by habitual patterns I do not choose?

When you really know yourself, you will realize how important it is to practice zazen. Before you know what you are doing, you don't know why we practice. You think you are quite free, that whatever you do is your choice, but actually you are creating karma for yourself and others. You don't know what you're doing, so you don't think there is any need to practice... But we have to pay our own debts; no one else can pay our debts. That is why we practice. To fulfill our responsibility we practice. We have to.

~ Suzuki Roshi

We have about as much room to move as a violin in a violin case. But it's enough.

~ Sufi saying

Samsara: A Life of Reaction Is Unsatisfactory

*From the pinnacle of existence down to the depths of torment,
From top to bottom, the regions of samsara
Are like a fiery trench or a thicket of razors.
No chance for happiness ever appears.*

*Until now, I have wandered in samsara.
Ignorance, confusion, and samsara haven't come to an end.
Now that I understand this intolerable unhappiness
A fierce determination rises in me.*

*I enter the path to freedom and true happiness
And follow the freedom of the lineage teachers
To awaken fully in this one life.*

Commentary

The aches and pains of the physical body, the grief of losing what one holds dear, old age, sickness and death — some things are unavoidable. But I create extra suffering for myself and others with craving, aversion, and delusion.

When I define my life by wealth, pleasure, praise, and reputation, then my happiness depends on circumstances and conditions.

Reactive emotions do not bring me happiness; they produce exactly what I am trying to avoid. Samsara, the life of reactivity, is a never-ending cycle through realms I am creating: Caught up in anger and aggression, I find myself in a realm of conflict. Consumed by grasping and neediness, I never seem to get what I want. Seeking security and comfort, I get stuck in the same old ways of doing things. Jumping from desire to desire, chasing possessions and pleasures, my desires are never satisfied for long, and my busyness is endless. Feeling inadequate, jealous and competitive, I'm compelled to accomplish more and more. Self-satisfied, trying to maintain my position, I'm blind to the inevitability of change.

The cycles of reactivity and suffering can be brought to an end. Our fundamental nature is goodness and awareness. A path of awakening and freedom has been developed and refined over many centuries of experience. I can place confidence in the teachers and practitioners of that path, and in my ability to travel it.

Verses by Jamgon Kongtrul translated by Ken McLeod. Commentary by George Draffan.

Seeing from the Inside

1
Breathing in I feel this emotion/pain/problem
Breathing out I feel this emotion

2
Breathing in I feel the reactions to this emotion
Breathing out I feel the reactions to this emotion

3
Breathing in I feel calm in this emotion
Breathing out I feel calm in this emotion

4
Breathing in I feel at ease in this emotion
Breathing out I feel at ease in this emotion

5
Breathing in I know how this emotion arises
Breathing out I know how this arises

Based on a condensed version of anapanasati (awareness with breathing) by Thich Nhat Hahn.

*I have lived on the lip
of insanity, wanting to know reasons,
knocking on a door. It opens.
I've been knocking from the inside!*

~ Rumi

Verses for the Four Immeasurables

by Ken McLeod

Equanimity

May I be free from preference and prejudice.
May I see into whatever arises.
May I experience the world knowing me just as I am.
May I know things just as they are.

Loving kindness

May I be happy, well, and at peace.
May I welcome whatever arises.
May I experience the world opening to me just as I am.
May I open to things just as they are.

Compassion

May I be free of suffering, harm, and disturbance.
May I serve whatever arises.
May I experience the world accepting me just as I am.
May I accept things just as they are.

Joy

May I enjoy the activities of life itself.
May I know what to do, whatever arises.
May I experience the world taking joy in all that I do.
May I enjoy things just as they are.

The Essence of the Dharma

by Kalu Rinpoche

If you don't work at the Dharma, you will be born in the six realms, the gods, titans, humans, animals, hungry ghosts, and hell beings. When you take birth there, that is samsara, and you will have to struggle a lot.

It's difficult to be human. It's difficult to hear the Dharma. If you know the Dharma, that's significant, but to work at the Dharma, you have to recognize mind.

Mind doesn't exist — it has no form, substance or color. It's not outside. It's not inside. It's not in between.

This body is a projection of mind, like a dream.

If you send this mind away, it doesn't go. If you hold it down, it doesn't stay. Sometimes there is nothing going on and sometimes it's all over the place. You end up confused, and that's hard.

If you look at mind, you don't find it. If you don't look, you fall into confusion.

Let mind settle naturally. Don't control it. Just recognize it. If you stay right there, mind, on its own, is empty, clear, unrestricted — luminously radiant. Although all kinds of thinking may arise — attraction, aversion, and so on — if you rest, just recognizing what is there, it will release itself naturally and have no effect on you. It's like water and waves. If you keep that empty, clear, radiant, unrestricted, present mind, that's mahamudra. Those who become experienced in this practice will not struggle when ill, nor will they be afraid when they die. Like Lord Milarepa, they will be fully awake. When you are fully awake, you have countless abilities.

First, repeat refuge many times. Then generate awakening mind, the intention to work at Dharma to bring all sentient beings to full awakening. Cultivate being Avalokiteshvara in empty appearance, like a rainbow. Recite the six syllables many times. Nothing is more helpful than this. Continuously pray to your guru and dedicate all virtue to the awakening of all beings.

This summary covers all Buddhist instruction.

Tilopa's Six Words of Advice

Let go of what has passed.
Let go of what may come.
Let go of what is happening now.
Don't try to figure anything out.
Don't try to make anything happen.
Relax, right now, and rest.

Don't recall.
Don't imagine.
Don't think.
Don't examine.
Don't control.
Rest.

The Vajra Song Recognizing Mind as the Guru

by Kyergongpa

Guru bodhicitta namami

The gurus who point out mind itself are like no one else:
They are done with their own needs and have taken on the needs of others.
Their awareness is limitless, their compassion universal.
To my kind and gracious gurus I bow.

Yes, gurus do point out how things are,
But the guru who is natural being is within.
Mind that is my guru, here is how you are:

You have no genesis: you are just naturally present.
Misfortune doesn't hurt you; correctives don't affect you;
You don't come or go; you don't change with time;
And I cannot say you exist or don't exist.

I can't see, hear, taste, smell or touch you:
You are not a thing, yet you are the source of all experience.
Try as I may, there's nothing I can point to and say, "That's you!"
But when I sit and don't look for you, you are present in everything.

You are not subject to conditioning, good or bad.
Finer than everything, you don't attach to anything.
Not being a thing, you are the basis of everything.
Free from reasoning, you arise clearly when I don't reason.

Because you aren't anywhere, you arise as anything anywhere.
Yet you don't belong to any one place.
So, while you are not anything I can point to,
You are my guru!

What is your spiritual history? Here it is:

Because distance doesn't apply to you,
You are present in every being.
Because of your pure intentions,
Every being belongs to your family.

Because of your great compassion,
Every being is originally placed in full awakening.
Because of your powerful actions,
You engage and master everything in samsara and nirvana.

Because change doesn't apply to you,
Even when I look at things the wrong way, what is true is still right there.
You've never gone away for a moment.
And yet, though a long-time companion, everyone has trouble seeing you.

Because death doesn't touch you,
You've always been the constant watchman: that's amazing!

Oh, mind that is my guru,
I meet you by recognizing what I am.
I pray to you by letting go of doubt and hesitation.
I revere you by letting go and settling naturally.

I serve you by resting continuously in the nature of things.
I provide you with food by resting without strain in empty clarity.
I provide you with drink by knowing attention and distraction make no difference.
I clothe you by knowing appearance and sound as enchantments.

I seat you on the cushion of non-reactive ecstasy.
I crown you with what has always been there but cannot be found.
I give you offerings by not doing anything with what arises.

Past, present, and future — you always live
In the sanctuary of total knowing that holds no identity.
Attended by no preference for samsara or nirvana,
You are constantly giving higher instruction in experience.

How amazing you are, mind that is my guru!
Again, how kind you are, supporting me with compassion!
How much energy you have from practice in earlier training!
How amazing you are — your compassion never ends!

When I turn to you in these ways,
Waves of energy wash through me.

Without running away, I stop going into samsara.
Without going anywhere, I arrive at buddhahood.
I understand that no experience is good or bad.
The difference between buddhas and ordinary beings is direct knowing.
When I know directly exactly how mind is
And the knowing is full and present, that is buddha.
What one can do then can't be described in words.

When I look outside, a guru may teach, but this is what happens:
Because I don't know mind itself directly,
I take what is not as what is.
Chasing the past, I fall into old habits and pain.
That's called ordinary being.

Now, let me be my own watchman.

As for samsara, I don't chase what is past, I don't let what has happened bother me.
A big effort is not to generate a nirvana:
I rest in mind itself and do nothing.

I cannot identify mind itself as this or that.
It arises as I refine this wonderful not knowing.
And this understanding is fulfilling.

Here's how I know it is fulfilling.
Emptiness is just there: I don't need to hunt for the dimension of truth.
Whatever appears just arises: I don't need to block the dimension of form.
Mind itself is free as it is: I don't need to control the three dimensions of being.

Samsara is destroyed at its root: I don't need to discard anything.
My mind is buddha: I don't need to hope for anything.
It's always been this way: I don't need to cultivate anything.
Isn't this a better way to work?

If contemplatives who look at mind without distraction
Are free from the mind that looks, what's the problem?
If deep meditators who continuously meditate on no separation
Release what meditates, what's the problem?

If practitioners who constantly practice with awakening energy
Understand the natural presence of no practice, what's the problem?
If truth masters who carefully guard against managing mind
Do away with mind itself, what's the problem?

I have studied with many capable gurus:
Each guru has given me his or her own advice.
All advice comes down to one point — mind.
So, mind that is my guru,
I look at you, listen to you, and seek your instruction again and again.

I pray to the seven kind and gracious gurus,¹
I praise them, give them offerings, and ask for their energy.
By doing so, I know directly that mind is the guru.
Because this knowing arises internally,
When I see writings that contradict or conflict with my experience:
I consider the meaning, not the words.

This song is the babbling of a crazy man.
I don't ask anyone to pardon it.
No pardon, and don't offer me anything for it either.

*By Kyer-gong-pa Chökyi Senge. Because his teacher, Kalu Rinpoche, advised him to take it to heart,
Ken McLeod, a student in name only, translated this song.*

¹ This line probably refers to the first seven gurus of the Shangpa lineage: Vajradhara, Niguma, Sukha Siddhi, Maitrepa, Rahula, Chungpo Naljor, and Mochokpa.

The Wisdom Experience of Ever-present Good

from The Heart Essence of Great Space Cycle² by Jigme Lingpa

*I bow to mindful Ever-present Good.*³

Mind itself is utterly without root, like space.
Just as space does not refer to the nature of space,
Nor can awareness be pointed out by examples.
Yet I use such methods to explain the key points.

Suppose the house of a poor man contains a wonderful treasure,
And, although he has it, he doesn't know it:
He continues to be a poor man.
In the same way, you are tangled in a net of unaware thinking
And don't know what you have. How heartbreaking, you beings in samsara!

When you turn your back on the path of natural being,
Mistaken notions don't stop at all.⁴
So you ascetics latch onto a single principle
From such flawed philosophies as order or chaos.
How confused you are by wrong ideas, you extremists!⁵

Mind itself is originally pure, like space.
As long as you use conceptual knowing to look for it,
You get stuck, like a bug caught in its own spit.
Turning your back on what is, you are still ruled by wanting.
How worn out you must be, you listeners,⁶ from blocking things!

Your mind is the source of all experience, patterned or free.
You awaken completely when you rest and do nothing at all.
Instead, you follow meticulously and exclusively
The cycle of teaching on ignorance, interdependence, and samsara.
How charmed you must be, you self-reliant ones,⁷ by your artificial awakening!

Mind itself, always complete in its natural expression,
Rests in the womb of uncontrived original nature.

² The Longchen Nying Thig (klong.chen.snying.thig), cycle of teachings revealed by the 18th century teacher and treasure revealer Jigme Lingpa ('jig.med.gling.pa).

³ Sanskrit Samantabhadra, Tibetan Kuntu-zangpo (kun.tu.bzang.po), the primordial buddha in Dzogchen. The *good* here is the good beyond concepts of good and evil. The text is written in the first person so that what follows are the words of Ever-present Good.

⁴ Variations between texts lead to two different readings: *mistaken notions never end* or *mistaken notions become intolerable*.

⁵ This verse refers to those who hold views contrary to the Buddhist principle of the middle way, i.e., the views of order (everything is determined) or chaos (everything is random).

⁶ Sravakas are those who listen to the teachings and practice on their own. Their form of practice is to reduce desire by withdrawing from the world.

⁷ Pratyekabuddhas also withdraw from the world and practice for their own liberation.

Caught up in logic and analysis, you sophists distort how things are
Because you believe in descriptions of the two truths.
How far you have to go, you followers of the philosophy of awakening beings!⁸

Because mind itself doesn't take up the good or give up the bad,
A shrewd moral practice acts as an added pollutant.
The forms of dualistic fixation distort what is not two.
Ritual tantra⁹ seeks to attain a state where there is nothing to attain.
How elegant you are, you followers of ritual philosophy!

The natural condition is not good or bad. It doesn't grow or fade.
Even when you stop ordinary concepts with outlook, practice, and behavior,
You still hold as real your activity in means and wisdom.
In behavioral tantra,¹⁰ you waste time doing stuff when there is nothing to do.
How tiring your chosen disciplines, you followers of behavioral philosophy!

There is no outer, inner, or in between in the nature of attention.
Mind itself is free from any sense of manipulation.
In union tantra¹¹ you use thoughts to manipulate symbols of what is profound and clear,
But to little effect, you followers of union philosophy!

By resting in a state that doesn't rely on effort or process,
You can use the result, pure being, as the path.
Instead, you use complex practices to relieve and refresh mind, channels, and energy.
How tired you must be, you followers of supreme philosophy!¹²

Mind itself has no heads, hands, or regalia.
When you fall into the mistake of seeing what arises as a deity's form
And hold mistaken ideas about sound as mantra,
You won't see what is true through the path of great union!¹³

Here ends the first chapter of The Wisdom Experience of Ever-present Good, which presents the conceptual philosophies¹⁴ of the eight vehicles.¹⁵

⁸ In the context of Indian and Tibetan monasticism, Mahayana philosophers (referred to here as bodhisattvas or awakening beings) expended considerable effort to define the nature of perception and knowing exactly. Such philosophical pursuits do not directly contribute to an experiential understanding of mind nature.

⁹ Kriya tantra relies on the precise performance of rituals to develop attention and transform experience.

¹⁰ Upaya tantra relies on precision in behavior to develop attention and transform experience.

¹¹ Yoga tantra uses symbols of what is ultimately true to join mind with direct experience.

¹² Anuyoga tantra uses energy transformation to generate a similitude of direct awareness.

¹³ Mahayoga tantra uses identification with an expression of awakened mind in the form of a deity to transform experience.

¹⁴ While the language of this section can be easily misinterpreted as criticism of the eight vehicles, the intention is to point out habituated tendencies that prevent complete knowing. The tendencies corrupt these eight approaches so that they miss the fundamental nature of being.

¹⁵ The eight vehicles are listening (shravaka), self-reliant awakening (pratyekabuddha), awakening being (bodhisattva), ritual tantra (kriya), behavioral tantra (upaya), union tantra (yoga), supreme union tantra (anuyoga), and great union tantra (mahayoga).

Kye ho!

My nature is great completion.¹⁶

All experience, patterned and free, is complete — nothing to discard or attain.

The essential instructions are complete — total natural releasing.

The essential views are complete — neither order nor chaos.

The paths of practice are complete — no effort to make.

The teachings on behavior are complete — no do's or don't's.

The essence of fruition is complete — no expectation.

And this “complete” is nothing but a concept, too.

Awakening mind is the essence of all teaching.

Awakening mind is the heart of all awakened ones.

Awakening mind is the life of all beings.

Awakening mind is neither apparently nor ultimately true.¹⁷

To say “it is not” does not make it empty.

To say “it is” does not make it solid.

It is a realm beyond mind where experience is just there — no taking hold, no letting go.

It is space free from all complications of thought and object.

Because I am free from the thinking that distorts experience,

The evolution of good and evil actions comes to a complete stop.

What are deities, mantras, and absorptions meant to do?

I am not a wakefulness¹⁸ that comes from practice.

My nature is universal presence:

How can seeing come from progressing through paths and levels?

Therefore, let go of the tangles of hope and fear.

Let the knife-edge of outlook drop away.

Come out of deep meditation's cocoon.

Get rid of stiff or pretentious behavior.

Forget about expectations for big results.

In a state of attention that is beyond meditating or not meditating

Evaluations of what you are doing or not doing disappear completely.

Awakening mind is beyond empty or not empty.

It is the original space where existence and non-existence drop away.

In awareness, indescribable, inconceivable, inexpressible,

The center pole is no corrective — nothing that holds a position.

With simple, steady, self-releasing freshness,

¹⁶ Completion, Tibetan dzog (rdzogs), in this context does not mean an end of a process, but a total wholeness and fullness that is naturally present.

¹⁷ Awakening mind (bodhicitta) is usually described in the sutric tradition as having two aspects, awakening to what is apparently true (compassion and the world of experience) and awakening to what is ultimately true (emptiness and the nature of experience). Ever-present Good is using awakening mind to mean that which is before or beyond any such concepts.

¹⁸ Buddha. Ever-present Good is saying that wakefulness (buddha) is always already present. It is not created or generated through practice.

In a space free from complications or effort,
Rest without ebb or flow in the three times.¹⁹

Here ends the second chapter of The Wisdom Experience of Ever-present Good, which presents the original freedom of Great Completion.

Kye ho!

Awakening mind, free from discarding or attaining,
Buddha nature, the essence of awareness,
Is present in you. Still, it is stuck in a cage of inventions.
All meditation just clouds the heart of the matter.

In pure being, which is without origin or essence,
What is experienced has no beginning or end.
Your misconceptions twist what is formless into form.
Slipping away from what is true, you become confused and reactive.

Some people cut off the ebb and flow of thoughts and feelings
And construct an emptiness practice corrupted by goal-seeking.
They are worn out from pushing a forced practice.
Big problems develop when you misdirect energy into the life channel.²⁰

Others do not see original presence.
Misled by descriptions of presence, their practice is ineffective.
Taking an intense dullness that conceals thoughts and feelings
As the essence of practice, they are very confused.

Some use their ability to know movement as mind
To mull over the traces as thoughts and feelings ebb and flow.
People who track arising and fading in stable meditation
Just spin in confusion, even if they practice for a hundred years.

In general, work and effort alone just create opposition.
You aren't happy when you practice and you stir up all sorts of pains;
When you don't practice, you don't know your own nature and wander in confusion.
In either case, you fall away from what is natural and true.

Kye ho!

Because these mistakes stop you from going beyond ordinary human experience,
Be clear that the approach of meditation versus not meditation
Relies on an artificial distinction.
Be present right now, without trying to change or control anything.

Put a complete stop to any kind of scrutiny, control,
Or goal-seeking using conditioned states of mind.

¹⁹ The past, present, and future.

²⁰ The life channel is another term for the central channel, the channel in the center of the body where energy transformation techniques are usually directed. If you work with energy without a sense of presence, you end up pushing energy into reactive processes. The subsequent imbalances create serious mental and physical problems that can be difficult to resolve.

Direct awareness is no big deal and doesn't need any work.
Stop trying to change or adjust it. Just let it be.

Whenever conceptual thinking arises,
Don't look at what arises: be what knows the arising.
Like an oak stake in hard ground,
Stand firm in awareness that knows, and go deep into the mystery.

In the nature of what is, plain and simple,
You may rest free from movement or change.
If you don't avoid the trap of correctives based on positions,²¹
You will get lost in the ways of the analytic approach.

All the technicalities of outlook, practice, and behavior
Are, from the perspective of what is true, just intellectual chaff.
Let correctives that work on mindfulness subside into space.
Maintain the chosen discipline of not naming "wandering" or "not wandering."

Let things be, without messing around with projecting or absorbing.²²
Rest in space free from the complications of effort.
The great treasure is to be free of thought and thinking:
To know that there is originally no buddha,
To be where wanting has never been.

With this special teaching that rots the roots of samsara,
Wake up from the realm of misery. Open and relax.
In emptiness that goes beyond what is true or what is false
Is the meaning of arising and releasing, self-releasing, and direct releasing.²³
Know this and you are no different from all the awakened ones.
You will awaken and be no different from me.

In this age of strife, these key instructions of the great mystery
Are mingled with the authoritative writings of the analytic approach.²⁴
Those knowledge holders who are not different from me
Will confirm this wisdom experience.
Masters of this teaching, the expression of the awakening beings of the three families,²⁵
And those blessed with natural talent, may you make use of it.

²¹ The Tibetan (der. 'dzin.gnyen.po) means correctives that are based on a specific philosophical stance.

²² This term refers to generating and dissolving states of mind in both deity meditation and energy transformation practices.

²³ Three forms of release. *Arising and releasing* refers to thoughts releasing into awareness as they arise, like snow falling on a hot stone. *Self-releasing* refers to thoughts releasing by untying themselves, like a snake tied in a knot. *Direct releasing* refers to thoughts releasing on their own, like a thief entering an empty house.

²⁴ The collection of texts that comprise the teachings of the Buddha and commentaries on them by Indian and Tibetan masters. Ever-present Good is saying that in the present times, the teachings of Great Completion (Dzogchen) are mixed in with the canonical teachings, but those who understand Great Completion are able to differentiate them.

²⁵ The vajra, padma, and buddha families are headed by the three lords Vajrapani (awakened power), Avalokiteshvara (awakened compassion), and Manjushri (awakened intelligence), respectively.

The Magic of Faith: A Teacher Practice with Niguma²⁶

by Ken McLeod

In the sky in front of me is my teacher, arising in the form of Niguma.
Every part of me prays to be free from disturbance, physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual:

I and all beings, infinite in number, take refuge in the buddha, dharma, and sangha.
I and all beings, infinite in number, take refuge in the teacher, the practice,
and what arises in experience.
I and all beings, infinite in number, take refuge in the empty clarity of experience
arising without restriction.

Repeat many times.

Beings are numberless: may I free them all.
Reactions are endless: may I release them all.
Doors to experience are infinite: may I enter them all.
Ways of awakening are limitless: may I know them all.

Repeat many times.

Here in this forest, the middle of my life,
Trees close in, the darkening path awaits my feet.
Much have I learned, yet more I seek to know.
What sense does it make for me to turn back now?

*namo buddhaya namo guruhe vajra viri virini shri daka dakini yoga yogini sarva
buddha bodhisattvaya sharanam gacha me kye kye²⁷*

Repeat many times.

Though many teachers assure me time and again
About what they feel I know and understand,
My heart still longs for what no words will serve.
What is there to do but trust this yearning and go on?

*namo buddhaya namo guruhe vajra viri virini shri daka dakini yoga yogini sarva
buddha bodhisattvaya sharanam gacha me kye kye*

Repeat many times.

“Find Niguma,” I’m told. With the magic of that name
I find a strength that gently leads me on.
Dark the way, yet clear my heart and mind.
How does this mystery show me where to go?

²⁶ The practice is based loosely on Khyungpo’s first meeting with Niguma.

²⁷ The mantra, in rough translation, reads: *Homage to buddha and guru. Vajra heroes and heroines, noble dakas and dakinis, yogins and yoginis, I take refuge in all buddhas and bodhisattvas. Listen to me, listen to me.*

*namo buddhaya namo guruhe vajra viri virini shri daka dakini yoga yogini sarva
buddha bodhisattvaya sharanam gacha me kye kye*

Repeat many times.

The skeletons of my life are scattered all about.
So is the rotting flesh of love and hate and fear,
And hair, the wild wild hair of thought, wafts everywhere:
Oh, Sosa Grove²⁸, what have you brought me to?

*namo buddhaya namo guruhe vajra viri virini shri daka dakini yoga yogini sarva
buddha bodhisattvaya sharanam gacha me kye kye*

Repeat many times.

“What are you doing here?” a voice shouts from the sky,
This place isn’t safe, especially for the likes of you.
Begone, before my companions soon arrive,
And feast on you, your flesh, and, yes, your bones.”

Niguma!
Dark tan your skin, black your hair, and
Your three eyes blaze like fire.
The rattle of a drum in your right hand
Summons your companions, intent and fierce.
Your left, holds a skull cup, and encircles Shiva’s staff.
At ease you sit and turn your gaze on me.

“Here, take this gold” I plead, “the last of all the wealth I’ve known.”
“Is that all you have?” you sneer, and toss it far away.
Grinning, your cannibal companions lick their lips with glee.
For me what’s left now? What more can I do?

*Use either of these two prayers to pray with the deep devotion that comes when all hope
is gone and you have nothing left to lose:*

Treasured teacher,
In whose presence I awaken free from time,
I pray to you.
For the sake of all beings,
Give me energy to let self-fixation go.
Give me energy to be free of need.
Give me energy to master enchantment and dream.
Give me energy to know the sheer clarity of just being.

²⁸ Sosa Grove is the name of the burial ground where Khyungpo Naljor was told to look for Niguma.

Or

Treasured teacher, I pray to you.
Give me energy to let self-fixation go.
Give me energy to be free of need.
Give me energy to let ordinary thinking stop.
Give me energy to know mind has no beginning.
Give me energy to let confusion subside on its own.
Give me energy to know that experience is pure being.

She smiles and as I feel her light touch,
I slowly rise into the sky.
When I look into her deep black eyes,
I meet space, open, vast, beyond all measure.

“Like and dislike are the mind’s disease,
Certain to drown you in samsara’s sea.
Know that there is nothing here at all,
And then, my child, everything is gold.

Experience arises like magic.
If you practice like magic
You will awaken like magic
Through the power of faith.

Don’t think about your teacher or your practice.
Don’t think about what is real or not real.
Don’t think about anything.
Don’t control your experience at all.
Just rest in how things are.”

With these words, she dissolves into light,
And, like water pouring into water,
She and I become one.

Rest without reference and then conclude with this dedication.

I let go of all the good that comes from this practice:
May it touch everyone and everything I know.
May it ease the pain of struggle everywhere.
And awaken new possibilities for all.

At the request of Lawrence Ladden of Pennsylvania, who wanted a way to connect with Niguma and her teaching, Ken McLeod, composed this short practice in the month of November 2008 in Los Angeles, California.

Filling Space to Benefit Beings

by Tongtong Gyalpo

Refuge and Bodhicitta

Until I awaken, I take refuge in
buddha, dharma, and the supreme assembly.
Through the goodness of generosity and other virtues
May I awaken fully in order to help all beings.

Repeat three times

Creation of the Deity

Crowning the head of each and every being,
Whose numbers match the boundlessness of space,
There rests a white lotus and full moon seat.
From *hri* appears the great All-seeing One.
Five-colored light shines from his clear white form,
And kindness from his eyes and smiling face.
Of his four hands, a pair are joined in prayer;
The left holds a lotus, and the right
A crystal rosary. With silks he is
Adorned, with gems and ornaments of gold,
And over his shoulder falls a deer's soft pelt.
He sits, his legs at rest in vajra pose,
His back resting against a perfect moon.
The Buddha Boundless Light adorns his head.
He is all refuge deities in essence joined.



Think that oneself and all sentient beings pray with a single voice:

Oh Lord of whitest form, unstained by fault,
Whose head a perfect buddha crowns in light,
Whose compassionate eyes regard each living being:
To you, All-seeing One, I bow my head.

Repeat three times

Then:

As I complete this single-minded prayer,
Light shining from the holy form removes
All impure karma and bewilderment;
The external world becomes the Realm of Joy;
Each living being's body, speech, and mind
To Chenrezi's three faculties are changed.
All awareness, sound and all appearing forms
Become inseparable from emptiness.

As you practice this, say the mantra according to your ability.

om mani padme hum

Afterwards, rest in mind nature, free from the conceptual framework of the three domains.

I and others are the holy form;
The mantra sings and hums in every sound;
As deep and vast awareness thoughts arise.

The recitation for the meditation of the Great Compassionate One, Filling Space to Benefit Beings, is endowed with the blessed speech of the great siddha Tongtong Gyalpo. He received the teachings for this meditation practice directly from Chenrezi.

Dedication of Merit

Through virtue of this practice may I now
Quickly achieve All-Seeing One's great state.
And to this state come to lead
Every being, not one left behind.

Translated by Ken McLeod in Vancouver, Canada in 1974 in an attempt to render this practice in English verse.

Supporting Texts

Thirty Pieces of Sincere Advice

by Longchenpa

From the infinite sky of your pristine awareness,
the totality of experience, and the great clouds of your aspirations and prayers
Warm rays of compassion and showers of elixir stream down,
Ripening the three forms²⁹ in the fields, your students' minds.
I bow to you, my teacher, my protector, supreme among the Three Jewels.

With stronger aspirations I might have joined the practice lineage.
I didn't make the effort and now enter the twilight of a meaningless life.
I intended to follow the ancient masters, but I've given up and I see others like me.
So, I'll outline these thirty pieces of sincere advice to evoke some determination in me.

Too bad! You've built up a large following, one way or another.
You look after a large institution where all the right conditions are present.
But it's all just a basis for conflict and ideas like "This is mine."
Live alone—that's my sincere advice.

In public ceremonies you heal children or subdue demons.
You give your capabilities away to the crowd.
Because you really want food and money, your own needs cloud your judgment.
Tame your own mind—that's my sincere advice.

You collect a lot of pledges from the poor
And use them to build big monuments, help the needy, and so on.
The good works you do cause others to live badly.
Goodness must be in your mind—that's my sincere advice.

You've taught the Dharma to others because you wanted to be famous.
You cleverly keep a large circle of admirers around you.
To take these to be real is the seed of pride.
Limit your projects—that's my sincere advice.

You earn money by trading, charging interest, cheating or other dishonest ways.
Although you make large offerings with your accumulated wealth,
Good actions based on greed lead to the eight conventional concerns.³⁰
Cultivate non-attachment—that's my sincere advice.

Although you think you're serving the welfare of beings

²⁹ The three forms (three kayas) are the form of what is (dharmakaya), the form of enrichment (sambhogakaya) and the form of manifestation (nirmanakaya).

³⁰ Pleasure and pain, gain and loss, praise and blame, fame and obscurity.

By acting as a guarantor, witness or advocate to help settle others' disputes,
Your own opinions will inevitably assert themselves.
Don't be concerned—that's my sincere advice.

Your political power, wealth, connections, good fortune and reputation
May spread all over the world.
When you die, these things will not help you at all.
Work at your practice—that's my sincere advice.

Managers, assistants, directors, and such
Provide the infrastructure for both communities and religious institutions.
But your involvement in such matters gives rise to worry and concern.
Limit your business—that's my sincere advice.

You take what you need, images, offerings,
Books, cooking gear, whatever, and stay in solitude.
Right now you have it all together but later difficulties and disputes arise.
Don't need anything—that's my sincere advice.

In these difficult times you may feel that it is helpful
To be sharp and critical with aggressive people around you.
This approach will just be a source of distress and confusion for you.
Speak calmly—that's my sincere advice.

Intending to be helpful and without personal investment,
You tell your friends what is really wrong with them.
You may have been honest but your words gnaw at their heart.
Speak pleasantly—that's my sincere advice.

You engage in discussions, defending your views and refuting others'
Thinking that you are clarifying the teachings.
But this just gives rise to emotional posturing.
Keep quiet—that's my sincere advice.

You feel that you are being loyal
By being partial to your teacher, lineage or philosophical tradition.
Boosting yourself and putting down others just cause hard feelings.
Have nothing to do with all this—that's my sincere advice.

As you carefully go over the teachings you've studied
You may think that picking out others' mistakes is real understanding.
You will just build up a lot of negative fixations.
Keep your perception clear—that's my sincere advice.

Mindless talk of emptiness ignores causation.
You may think the ultimate teaching is that there is nothing to do,
But when you stop the two ways of growing³¹, your practice will wither.
Cultivate these two together—that's my sincere advice.

³¹ The two ways of growing are through goodness and through pristine awareness.

You think that you will enhance your practice by taking a partner
And transforming sexual energy in the context of the third empowerment,
But the path of non-retention has snared many great meditators.
Keep to the natural path—that's my sincere advice.

Giving empowerments to those who aren't ready,
Or even distributing sacred materials in large gatherings,
Leads to abuse and causes commitments to be broken.
Be precise—that's my sincere advice.

You may think that you practice deliberate behavior³²
By going naked in public and shocking people in other ways.
Such actions just cause ordinary people not to trust the Dharma.
Be impeccable—that's my sincere advice.

You work at being ethical, learned, and noble
So that you will be the best person in your district.
But from this peak you can only fall to a lower status.
Be moderate—that's my sincere advice.

Wherever you live, in towns, spiritual communities or in isolation,
Don't seek out special friends.
Don't be close or at odds with anyone, no matter who is around.
Be independent—that's my sincere advice.

Maybe you appear deferential and appreciative
To your faithful supporters who provide you with your livelihood,
But in deceiving others you only entangle yourself.
Treat everyone equally—that's my sincere advice.

Countless books on divination, astrology, medicine and other subjects
Describe ways to read signs. They do add to your learning,
But they generate new thoughts and your stable attention breaks up.
Cut down on this kind of knowledge—that's my sincere advice.

You stop arranging your usual living space,
But make everything just right for your retreat.
This makes little sense and just wastes time.
Forget all this—that's my sincere advice.

You make an effort at practice and become a good and knowledgeable person.
You may even master some particular capabilities.
But whatever you attach to will tie you up.
Be unbiased and know how to let things be—that's my sincere advice.

You may think awakened activity means to subdue skeptics
By using sorcery, directing or warding off hail or lightning, for example.
But to burn the minds of others will lead you to lower states.
Keep a low profile—that's my sincere advice.

³² A discipline in vajrayana in which you directly test the depth of your understanding.

Maybe you collect a lot of important writings,
Major texts, personal instructions, private notes, whatever.
If you haven't practiced, books won't help you when you die.
Look at the mind—that's my sincere advice.

When you focus on practice, to compare understandings and experience,
Write books or poetry, to compose songs about your experience
Are all expressions of your creativity. But they just give rise to thinking.
Keep yourself free from intellectualization—that's my sincere advice.

When a thought arises, the key is to look right at it.
When you know about mind, the key is to be right there.
Although there isn't anything to cultivate, the key is to keep cultivating.
Keep yourself free of distraction—that's my sincere advice.

Act from emptiness knowing the effects of your actions.
When you understand not doing, observe the three vows.³³
With non-referential compassion work to help beings
Keep the two ways of growing inseparable—that's my sincere advice.

I've studied with many learned and masterful teachers and received their profound
instruction.
I've read some profound sutras and tantras and understood a little of them.
But I don't practice what I know. It's too bad. I just fool myself.
So, for me and those like me I offer these thirty pieces³⁴ of sincere advice.

May the good from writing these verses with this attitude of determination
Guide all beings out of the desolation of existence and bring them great joy.
May we follow the way of the buddhas of the three times, their followers and the ancient
masters,
And become their great and powerful offspring as well.

*Thirty Pieces of Sincere Advice was written by Tsultrim Lodru (Longchenpa) out of some slight
feelings of determination. Ken McLeod translated this work because it spoke to him.*

**Row, row, row your boat
gently down the stream,
merrily merrily merrily merrily
life is but a dream....**

³³ The vows associated with individual liberation (the five precepts and monastic ordination), the bodhisattva vow, and the vajrayana vows.

³⁴ There are actually only twenty-nine verses of advice. I don't know whether this is due to a corrupt Tibetan text or, as is often the case, the whole work is counted as one, too.

The 37 Practices of a Bodhisattva

A Summary of How an Awakening Being Behaves

by Togme Zongpo

Namo Lokeshvaraya

You who see that experience has no coming or going,
Yet pour your energy solely into helping beings,
My excellent teachers and Lord All Seeing,
I humbly and constantly honor with my body, speech, and mind.

The fully awake, the buddhas, source of joy and well-being,
All come from integrating the noble Way.
Because integration depends on your knowing how to practice,
I will explain the practice of all bodhisattvas.

1
Right now, you have a good boat, fully equipped and available — hard to find.
To free others and you from the sea of samsara,
Day and night, fully alert and present,
Study, reflect, and meditate — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

2
Attraction to those close to you catches you in its currents;
Aversion to those who oppose you burns inside;
Indifference that ignores what needs to be done is a black hole.
Leave your homeland — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

3
Don't engage disturbances and reactive emotions gradually fade away;
Don't engage distractions and spiritual practice naturally grows;
Keep awareness clear and vivid and confidence in the way arises.
Rely on silence — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

4
You will separate from long-time friends and relatives;
You will leave behind the wealth you worked to build up;
The guest, your consciousness, will move from the inn, your body.
Forget the conventional concerns — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

5
With some friends, the three poisons keep growing,
Study, reflection, and meditation weaken,
And loving kindness and compassion fall away.
Give up bad friends — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

6

With some teachers, your shortcomings fade away and
Abilities grow like the waxing moon.
Hold such teachers dear to you,
Dearer than your own body — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

7

Locked up in the prison of their own patterning
Whom can ordinary gods protect?
Who can you count on for refuge?
Go for refuge in the Three Jewels — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

8

The suffering in the lower realms is really hard to endure.
The Sage says it is the result of destructive actions.
For that reason, even if your life is at risk,
Don't engage in destructive actions — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

9

The happiness of the three worlds disappears in a moment,
Like a dew on a blade of grass.
The highest level of freedom is one that never changes.
Aim for this — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

10

For time without beginning, mothers have lovingly cared for you.
If they are still suffering, how can you be happy?
To free limitless sentient beings,
Give rise to awakening mind — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

11

All suffering comes from wanting your own happiness.
Complete awakening arises from the intention to help others.
So, exchange completely your happiness
For the suffering of others — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

12

Even if someone, driven by desperate want,
Steals, or makes someone else steal, everything you own,
Dedicate to him your body, your wealth, and
All the good you've ever done or will do — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

13

Even if you have done nothing wrong at all
And someone still tries to take your head off,
Spurred by compassion,
Take all his or her evil into you — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

14

Even if someone broadcasts to the whole universe
Slandorous and ugly rumors about you,

In return, with an open and caring heart,
Praise his or her abilities — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

15
Even if someone humiliates you and denounces you
In front of a crowd of people,
Think of this person as your teacher
And humbly honor him — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

16
Even if a person you have cared for as your own child
Treats you as his or her worst enemy,
Lavish him or her with loving attention
Like a mother caring for her ill child — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

17
Even if your peers or subordinates,
Put you down to make themselves look better,
Treat them respectfully as you would your teacher:
Put them above you — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

18
When you are down and out, held in contempt,
Desperately ill, and emotionally crazy,
Don't lose heart. Take into you
The suffering and negativity of all beings — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

19
Even when you may be famous, honored by all,
And as rich as the god of wealth himself,
Don't be pompous. Know that the magnificence of existence
Has no substance — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

20
If you don't subdue the opponent inside, your own anger,
Although you subdue opponents outside, they just keep coming.
Muster the forces of loving kindness and compassion
And subdue your own mind — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

21
Sensual pleasures are like salty water:
The deeper you drink, the thirstier you become.
Any object that you attach to,
Right away, let it go — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

22
Whatever arises in experience is your own mind.
Mind itself is free of any conceptual limitations.
Know that and don't generate
Subject-object fixations — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

23

When you come across something you enjoy,
Though beautiful to experience, like a summer rainbow,
Don't take it as real.
Let go of attachment — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

24

All forms of suffering are like dreaming that your child has died.
Taking confusion as real wears you out.
When you run into misfortune,
Look at it as confusion — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

25

If those who want to be awake have to give even their bodies,
What need is there to talk about things that you simply own.
Be generous, not looking
For any return or result — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

26

If you can't tend to your needs because you have no moral discipline,
Then intending to take care of the needs of others is simply a joke.
Observe ethical behavior without concern
For conventional existence — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

27

For bodhisattvas who want to be rich in virtue
A person who hurts you is a precious treasure.
Cultivate patience for everyone,
Completely free of irritation or resentment — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

28

Listeners and solitary buddhas, working only for their own welfare,
Are seen to practice as if their heads were on fire.
To help all beings, pour your energy into practice:
It's the source of all abilities — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

29

Understanding that reactive emotions are dismantled
By insight supported by stillness,
Cultivate meditative stability that passes right by
The four formless states — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

30

Without wisdom, the five perfections
Are not enough to attain full awakening.
Cultivate wisdom, endowed with skill
And free from the three domains — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

31

If you don't go into your own confusion,
You may just be a materialist in practitioner's clothing.

Constantly go into your own confusion
And put an end to it — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

32

You undermine yourself when you react emotionally and
Grumble about the imperfections of other bodhisattvas.
Of the imperfections of those who have entered the Great Way,
Don't say anything — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

33

When you squabble with others about status and rewards,
You undermine learning, reflection, and meditation.
Let go of any investment in your family circle
Or the circle of those who support you — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

34

Abusive language upsets others
And undermines the ethics of a bodhisattva.
So, don't upset people or
Speak abusively — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

35

When reactive emotions acquire momentum, it's hard to make remedies work.
A person in attention wields remedies like weapons,
Crushing reactive emotions such as craving
As soon as they arise — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

36

In short, in everything you do,
Know what is happening in your mind.
By being constantly present and alert
You bring about what helps others — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

37

To dispel the suffering of beings without limit,
With wisdom freed from the three spheres
Direct all the goodness generated by these efforts
To awakening — this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

Following the teachings of the holy ones
On what is written in the sutras, tantras, and commentaries,
I set out these thirty-seven practices of a bodhisattva
For those who intend to train in this path.

Because I have limited intelligence and little education,
These verses are not the kind of poetry that delights the learned.
But because I relied on the teachings of the sutras and the revered
I am confident that The Practices of a Bodhisattva is sound.

However, because it's hard for a person with limited intelligence like me
To fathom the depths of the great waves of the activity of bodhisattvas,

I ask the revered to tolerate
Any mistakes — contradictions, non sequiturs, and such.

From the goodness of this work, may all beings,
Through the supreme mind that is awake to what is ultimately and apparently true,
Not rest in any limiting position — existence or peace:
May they be like Lord All Seeing.

Tog-me, the monk, a teacher of scripture and logic, composed this text in a cave near the town of Ngülchu Rinchen for his own and others' benefit. Translated by Ken McLeod because, being a bear of little brain, he sought a rendering that he could understand.

The Sutra of the Heart of Lady Perfection of Wisdom

I bow to Lady Perfection of Wisdom

Thus have I heard. At one time Lord Buddha was staying at Vulture Peak Mountain in Rajagriha, with a great gathering of the monastic sangha and the bodhisattva sangha.

At that time, Lord Buddha entered an absorption, called Profound Radiance, in which all elements of experience are present.

At the same time, noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, was looking right at the experience of the profound perfection of wisdom and he saw the five groups to be empty of nature.

Then, through the power of the Buddha, venerable Shariputra asked noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva,

“How does a son or daughter of the noble family, who wishes to practice the profound perfection of wisdom, train?”

Addressed in this way, noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, said to venerable Shariputra,

“O Shariputra, a son or daughter of the noble family who wishes to practice the profound perfection of wisdom looks in this way: see the five groups to be truly empty of nature.

Form is emptiness; emptiness is form. Emptiness is not other than form; form is not other than emptiness. In the same way, feeling, concept, mental formation, and consciousness are emptiness.

Therefore, Shariputra, all experience is emptiness. It is not defined. It is not born or destroyed, impure or free from impurity, not incomplete or complete.

Therefore, Shariputra, in emptiness, there is no form, no feeling, no concept, no mental formation, no consciousness; no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body, no mind, no appearance, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no mind object; no eye element up to no mind element and no mind consciousness element; no ignorance, no end of ignorance up to no old age and death, no end of old age and death; no suffering, no origin, no cessation, no path; no pristine awareness, no attainment, and no non-attainment.

Therefore, Shariputra, because, for bodhisattvas, there is no attainment, they rest, trusting the perfection of wisdom. With nothing clouding their minds, they have no fear. They leave delusion behind and come to the end of nirvana.

All the buddhas of the three times, by trusting this perfection of wisdom, fully awaken in unsurpassable, true, complete awakening.

Therefore, the mantra of the perfection of wisdom, the mantra of great awareness, the unsurpassed mantra, the mantra equal to the unequalled, the mantra that completely calms all suffering is not a ruse: know it to be true. Thus, the mantra of the perfection of wisdom is said in this way:

om gaté gaté paragaté parasamgaté bodhi svaha

Thus, Shariputra, do all bodhisattva mahasattvas train in the profound perfection of wisdom.”

Then Lord Buddha arose from that absorption and praised noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, saying,

“Well done, well done, o son of noble family; thus it is, thus it is. One practices the profound perfection of wisdom just as you have taught. Those Who Have Gone This Way also rejoice.”

Then venerable Shariputra and noble Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva mahasattva, that whole assembly and the world with its gods, humans, titans, and sky spirits, rejoiced and praised the words of Lord Buddha.

The last of a long series of translations by Ken McLeod, seeking to render this sutra in comprehensible English.