

These wonderful teachings stand as a monument to the compassionate heart of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche." —Pema Chödrön

# THE BODHISATTVA PATH OF WISDOM & COMPASSION



CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA



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*Binding Yourself*

The first type of discipline is the discipline of binding yourself. In Tibetan, it is *dom-pe tsültrim*. *Dom* means “binding,” and *pe* makes it a noun, *tsültrim* of course is “discipline”; so *dom-pe tsültrim* is the “binding factor of discipline.” You are binding yourself to the discipline and to the dharma. This does not mean punishing oneself and being a hermit, or running away from the world, but rather that you are not indulging the neurotic aspect of sense pleasures. *Dom-pe tsültrim* cuts the nervousness of mind; it cuts discursive thoughts and unnecessary preoccupations. It allows your mind to dwell in one particular place, which puts your mind at ease. You are bound by your authentic, genuine commitment.

Traditionally speaking, *dom-pe tsültrim* is practiced by becoming a monk or nun, but the basic point of the binding factor of discipline is taming the mind. It is related to the refuge and bodhisattva vows that you take. You are bound together with your particular world, with your immediate family and friends, as well as with the vaster world. With *dom-pe tsültrim*, you keep the discipline of not being a nuisance to yourself, and beyond that, the discipline of not being a nuisance to others. The aspirations you had when you took the bodhisattva vow are actually taking place. So with *dom-pe tsültrim*, you become a decent person. When you respond to and fulfill the needs of others, you begin to fulfill your own needs as well. In relating to yourself, you learn to give up ego-centeredness and relate much more to the notion of *maitri*, or loving-kindness. In relating to others, you develop the notion of *karuna*, or compassion—and beyond that, *mahakaruna*, or great compassion.

One of the qualities of *dom-pe tsültrim* is that it brings stillness of mind. You are controlling your mind whether you are prone to agitation or to laziness. Both laziness and excitement are controlled by *dom-pe tsültrim*. Through discipline, you are controlling your system altogether.

*Dom-pe tsültrim* is similar, in a sense, to the popular and very ordinary concept of social graces. If you are having an elegant cocktail party, for instance, you don't yell at the top of your voice. Maybe that is a rather low-level example, but the idea is that it is possible to be constantly even all the time. In that way, you are bound by basic, good behavior throughout your life. Through breakfast, lunch, and dinner, from the time you get up, as you go through the day, until you retire in the evening—throughout the

whole day—you maintain basic uprightness all the time. You are free from laziness and free from too much excitement, frivolity, and emotionalism. That allows your mind to settle down.

At the beginning, the discipline of *dom-pe tsültrim* could be a tremendous strain. You feel that you have to behave like a zombie, the same from morning to evening, and you cannot even express yourself. Particularly in modern culture, people are supposed to scream and shout. So you might think that disciplining yourself not to do that would be absurd and terrible, that you would not have any chance to show your characteristics or your particular color and beauty. But if you think about it further, you will see that your basic goodness is showing throughout the whole thing. Your good aspects are being cultivated, and your wicked aspects are being subjugated. In turn, you will find that being in your company becomes pleasurable to yourself and to others. You become a decent person twenty-four hours a day. Through *dom-pe tsültrim*, you have bound your frivolity, which is usually allowed so much room.

### *Gathering Virtuous Dharmas*

The second type of discipline is known as gathering virtuous dharmas, or gathering goodness. In Tibetan it is *ge-we chödü*. *Ge-we* means “goodness,” or “virtue.” To express this from a negative point of view, *ge-wa* is nonaggression, and from a positive point of view, *ge-wa* is a sense of expansion, relaxation, sympathy, and benevolence. That is the definition of virtue in Buddhism altogether, and it also applies here. *Chö* is “dharma,” and *dü* means “gathering”; so *ge-we chödü* is the “way to gather in the goodness of dharma.” It is the discipline of ripening and developing oneself.

With *ge-we chödü*, there is an emphasis on the idea of intellectual study: hearing, contemplating, and meditating. There is also an emphasis on realizing the value of your teacher, which comes from hearing, contemplating, and meditating on what the teacher has said. *Ge-we chödü* is also connected with mindfulness. You become a very tamed person, as well as a heroic, bodhisattva-like person.

Gathering virtuous dharmas, or the discipline of ripening or developing yourself, is the only way for dharma to mix with your mind and your existence so that your mind and dharma are one. With this view, you begin to listen to the dharma, to think about it, and to practice it. Furthermore, you respect your teacher, who only exists because of the teachings. Rec-

ognizing the value of the teachings through the practice of *ge-we chödü* allows you to realize how to appreciate dharma twenty-four hours a day, and how to put your dharma practice into effect. You are interested in understanding the meaning of dharma, and you are also interested in how the world functions. The way the world functions becomes a message of dharma each time, so whether you are in Grand Central Station or an airport in Tokyo, you are inspired. You are never off guard. You understand that everything that happens in your life, whether your rice burns or your milk boils over, is an expression of dharma. Seeing that whatever happens in your life is dharma takes enormous discipline.

The meaning of gathering dharmas is that you are making your whole being ripe for the dharma. You are trying to become a completely dharmic person, as opposed to someone who is purely learned. You may know the terms and ideas, but if you do not apply the dharma to yourself personally, it remains foreign to you. By means of *ge-we chödü*, you become thoroughly soaked in the dharma—in passionlessness and egolessness. You are soaked in the softness, gentleness, and reasonableness of the dharma. When you become a dharmic person, your whole being is completely ripened with dharmic capability, like a fully ripened fruit.

We can actually see the differences between a dharmic person and a non-dharmic person. A dharmic person speaks with awareness, mindfulness, and softness, whereas a non-dharmic person shouts, or jumps up and down, and is always nervous. It is quite literal. It is obvious in the way people walk, in the way they conduct themselves, and in the way they talk to others. Becoming a dharmic person through *ge-we chödü* is not just a tale or myth; it actually takes place.

### *Benefiting Sentient Beings*

The third type of discipline is the discipline of benefiting sentient beings. It is called *semchen tön-che*. *Semchen* means “sentient beings”; *sem* means “mind,” and *chen* makes it “those who have a mind.” *Tön* means “benefit,” or “purpose,” and *che* means “doing it”; so *semchen tön-che* is “fulfilling the purpose of those who have a mind,” which simply means benefiting others. *Semchen tön-che* also means making others worthy, preparing them for the dharma. It includes bodhisattva actions such as relating with relatives and friends, business partners, bosses or subordinates, people who may not have any connection with the dharma.

Benefiting sentient beings means that you are willing to spend time working for someone else, whether it is your own child, your parents, or, for that matter, a stranger or someone you do not particularly like. There is always work that needs to be done. Discipline is not moralistic; you do not work with others because it is good for you to do. You do it automatically because of your interest. Working for others means propagating the message of gentleness, which seems to be the core of the Buddhist approach altogether.

The basic idea of *semchen tön-che* is that you bring together your mind and the dharma, so there is no conflict in performing the actions of both absolute and relative bodhichitta. Both bodhichittas come along right at the beginning, and then continue through all the paramitas. Relative bodhichitta is like a flashlight with a beam of light coming out of it: in order to use the light, you have to hold the flashlight properly. Holding it properly and making it work for you so that the light will shine wherever you need it is absolute bodhichitta.

With *semchen tön-che*, you are able to produce psychological harmony for others. When you are practicing this particular *shila*, you do not create a disturbance when you walk into a room. Instead, when you enter a room—whether you are working at Western Union, or the post office, or in a factory—there is a feeling of harmony. When you enter a particular situation, there is a good feeling about the whole thing. That is what is known in the texts as organizing the discipline of harmony.

With *semchen tön-che*, you can create harmony, and beyond that, because of your virtue, you are also able to cut through other people's neurosis. You can benefit people by your good presence in any situation. For example, if a person is creating chaos, you should have enough power and strength, wisdom and control, to say or do what is needed to cut through that person's confusion and destroy their neurosis. When you see that someone is doing something neurotic, the first thing to do is stop them, and not even bother to tell them why you are stopping them. Later that person may realize that it made sense for you to stop them. They may have a second take on the whole thing. At that point, if they are interested, you can tell them why you stopped them. That is our *Kagyü* style. We stop people first—we don't talk it over with them through our lawyer.

If you want to reach people, you have to take positive action. People in *samsara* always do harmful things. Quite literally, they hang themselves up and kill themselves. So there is no room to philosophize. It is a very

immediate situation, like walking into the emergency room of a hospital. You see that same kind of craziness everywhere. From a bodhisattva's point of view, the whole world is a giant emergency room. You have to stop people from harming themselves. As a would-be bodhisattva, that is what you have to do. You cannot just leave, and hope somebody else will come along and do the job for you. You have to be the person who does the job, who actually saves somebody. The responsibility is on you. You should be willing to use the corrective mechanism of telling the truth; from the minute you wake up, you should be willing to speak up if there is a problem. The discipline of working for others applies to everything you do.

Through the practice of the three principles of *shila paramita*, you are able to let go of your ego. *Paramita* means going beyond. You are going beyond your preconceptions, your neurotic habit patterns, and your guilt (guilt being an addition from the Western world). *Paramita* means having arrived at the other shore. Starting out from an ego-structured situation, going to the other shore is like traveling to a foreign land. It takes adaptation, some getting used to. With *paramita* practice, you are learning how to go to a foreign country, as opposed to staying securely at home.

It has been said that until you reach *prajna paramita*, everything that you do involving the first five paramitas is mindfulness practice. It is *upaya*, or skillful means. *Shamatha* and *vipashyana* continue throughout all the paramitas. With the help of *shamatha*, you learn how to be settled in your own spot; you are able to settle down and make yourself at home in this universe. *Paramita* practice begins with being: being patient, being exertive, and being meditative. It is a question of how to be a full-fledged *buddhadharma* person. And when you finally reach the level of *prajna paramita*, you know how to apply the paramitas in the world. So first of all, you have to be, and then you can act out what you are. It is be and being.

The *paramita* of discipline is somewhat a matter of repression. There is repression, but it works, and quite rightly so. The repression of *mahayana* is inherited from the careful precision of *hinayana* discipline—and when you get to *vajrayana*, which is greater and more dangerous, you have to control yourself even further. By comparison, the quality of repression in *mahayana* is very small. You have to be careful here and there, but you could still take delight in working with others. In general, the wider the highway, the more you want to speed along it—but you have to control

yourself. You have to slow down. That is why the paramita that follows discipline is patience.

In the mahayana, what you are developing is heart, or compassion, and what you are trying to get rid of is conducting your life in an ego-centered and unmethodical way. That may get a little messy. The more aware you are, the more outstanding the obstacles seem to be. But you have to work with them—and I can assure you that there is such a thing as attainment at the end. You are controlling yourself, because whatever you do affects you, and not only you alone but everybody else as well. If you make one little mistake, you mess up hundreds of other people. It is like building a highway: if you build a highway badly, all the travelers are bound to have more accidents and more pain. So in the mahayana, you have greater responsibility—and that is good news.

*Patience has the quality of balance to add to the notion of equilibrium, a desire and longing for the dharma added. When that spice has been added, that is the real meaning of patience. Don't bite off or to hold on, but in this case it is to taste the flavor. You might bite your tongue, taste the blood, swallow it, and then*

**T**HE THIRD paramita is patience, the paramita of patience, or *ksanti*. If you are not perturbed by any samsaric conditions, you are patient. In the *Dictionary*, patience means being willing to wait for something to happen, but in this case it means being willing to hold it as it is, stay where you are. Whether you are wearing blue, red, or gray clothing, whether you are short or tall, whether you have short arms or long arms, whether you have blue shoes, green shoes, or purple shoes, whether you have short or long hair, you remain as you are. Patience means bearing uninterruptedly. If you are like the ocean, whatever happens, the ocean cannot be disturbed for the time.

The Tibetan term for patience is *shenpa*, which means "bearing any problems." *Shenpa* also means "willing to bear any problems."