37 WEEKS WITH THE BODHISATTVA'S PRACTICES

A Weekly Reflection Companion

Based on the Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva
attributed to Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo (14th century)

How to Use This Booklet

This booklet takes one practice per week from the Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva, a widely studied Tibetan text traditionally attributed to the 14th-century master Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo. Each of the thirty-seven practices is a short, pointed verse of guidance; together they move from foundational reflections on this life, through specific guidance for difficult situations, and on toward the subtler practices of wisdom and dedication.

Each week presents the practice itself, a teaching that unpacks its meaning in plain language, a short list of key points, and reflection questions. As with the earlier twelve-week booklet on Shantideva's Bodhicharyavatara, no outside reading is required — everything needed to engage with each week's practice is here.

Because there are thirty-seven weeks, this booklet spans a longer season of practice than a single quarter. It pairs naturally with the twelve-week Shantideva booklet, either as a longer follow-on study or as parallel material for a different point in the year — many of the same themes (patience, generosity, wisdom, dedication) appear in both, approached from different angles.

WEEK 1

A Precious Human Life

THE PRACTICE

> *Having gained this rare human life, with the freedom and opportunity to learn and practice, devote yourself wholeheartedly to listening, reflection, and meditation, for your own benefit and the benefit of others.*

THE TEACHING

The text opens not with a technique but with a fact worth pausing on: this life, with a functioning mind, some degree of freedom, and access to teachings, is genuinely rare. Most conditions of existence don't afford the leisure or the capacity for this kind of reflection at all. That rarity is the whole argument for taking practice seriously rather than treating it as something to get to eventually.

"Listening, reflection, and meditation" names a simple but demanding sequence: first hearing or reading a teaching, then genuinely thinking it through until it makes sense on its own terms, and only then working it into direct experience through sustained practice. Skipping straight to the third step without the first two tends to produce practice built on sand.

KEY POINTS

- This life's conditions — a working mind, some freedom, access to teachings — are rare and not to be taken for granted.
- Practice unfolds through three stages: listening, reflection, and meditation — each builds on the last.
- The purpose named from the very first practice is dual: benefiting yourself and benefiting others, not one at the expense of the other.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *What conditions in your current life make reflection and practice possible? Have you taken them for granted?*
2. *Of listening, reflecting, and meditating, which do you tend to skip or rush past?*
3. *What would it mean to treat this life as genuinely rare rather than simply ordinary?*

WEEK 2

Leaving Attachment and Aversion Behind

THE PRACTICE

> *Attachment to those we love pulls us one way, hostility toward those we dislike pulls us another, and confusion obscures the path. Leave behind the conditions that continually strengthen these habits.*

THE TEACHING

This practice names the three forces — attachment, aversion, and confusion — that most reliably distort clear seeing and pull attention away from practice. It isn't asking us to stop loving people or to become indifferent; it's pointing at the way strong pulling and pushing narrows the mind and makes patient, honest reflection difficult.

The instruction to "leave behind the conditions" is practical rather than purely internal: certain environments, routines, and company reliably intensify craving or hostility. Recognizing which conditions do this for you personally, and being willing to adjust them, is treated as a legitimate and necessary part of practice — not avoidance, but wise arrangement of one's life.

KEY POINTS

- Attachment, aversion, and confusion are named as the three forces that most reliably obscure clear practice.
- The instruction targets conditions and habits that strengthen these patterns, not the underlying capacity to love or care.
- Adjusting one's environment and routines is treated as a legitimate practice, not an evasion of harder inner work.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *What conditions in your life reliably intensify craving, attachment, or aversion in you?*
2. *Is there a habit or environment you could adjust, not out of avoidance, but out of genuine wisdom about your own patterns?*
3. *Where does confusion — simply not seeing clearly — show up most often for you?*

WEEK 3

Seeking Solitude

THE PRACTICE

> *By stepping away from distractions, harmful tendencies gradually weaken. With fewer distractions, wholesome qualities naturally increase and understanding becomes clearer.*

THE TEACHING

Solitude here doesn't necessarily mean permanent isolation; it means deliberately creating space away from constant stimulation and social pressure so the mind has room to settle. Harmful patterns are often sustained less by their own strength than by continuous reinforcement — every distraction is a small opportunity for an old habit to reassert itself.

The claim that wholesome qualities "naturally increase" with fewer distractions is worth taking seriously: it suggests that virtue doesn't always need to be manufactured through effort so much as allowed to emerge once the noise quiets down. Understanding, too, tends to sharpen not through acquiring more information but through having enough uninterrupted space to actually digest what's already been learned.

KEY POINTS

- Solitude reduces the continuous reinforcement that keeps harmful habits active.
- Wholesome qualities are described as arising naturally with fewer distractions, rather than needing to be forced.
- Clarity of understanding often comes from digesting what's already known, which requires uninterrupted space.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *What does meaningful solitude look like in your actual, current life?*
2. *When was the last time you had enough quiet, undistracted space to let an idea or feeling fully settle?*
3. *What distraction, if reduced even slightly, might create real room for clarity?*

WEEK 4

Remembering Impermanence

THE PRACTICE

> *Loved ones will eventually separate, possessions will be left behind, and consciousness will leave this temporary body. Practice with this understanding.*

THE TEACHING

This is one of the most direct meditations on impermanence in the collection: everything we hold — relationships, possessions, even the body itself — is temporary, without exception. Stated plainly like this, it can sound bleak, but the traditional intent is closer to urgency and honesty than despair: since none of this lasts, better to engage it wisely and wholeheartedly now than to live as though it were permanent and be blindsided later.

Practicing "with this understanding" means letting the fact of impermanence inform daily choices — how tightly we grasp at outcomes, how much energy we pour into securing what cannot ultimately be secured, and how we treat the people and time we do have. It reframes practice itself as more urgent, not less important, in light of how little time is guaranteed.

KEY POINTS

- Relationships, possessions, and even the body are described as temporary without exception.
- The purpose of this reflection is urgency and clarity, not despair or resignation.
- Letting impermanence inform daily choices changes how tightly we grasp at people, things, and outcomes.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Where in your life are you grasping at something as if it were permanent?*
2. *Does reflecting on impermanence make you more anxious, more present, or both? What does that tell you?*
3. *If you took this teaching seriously today, what might you do differently with your time?*

WEEK 5

Avoiding Harmful Companionship

THE PRACTICE

> *Some relationships strengthen anger, attachment, and confusion while weakening compassion and wisdom. Distance yourself from influences that continually lead the mind away from practice.*

THE TEACHING

This practice is a frank acknowledgment that we are shaped by the company we keep. Certain relationships and social environments, even when not malicious, reliably pull the mind toward reactivity, craving, or carelessness — and over time this adds up, whether or not any single interaction feels significant.

The instruction to "distance yourself" is not a call to abandon people or become cold. It's a recognition that discernment about influence is itself a form of self-respect, and that protecting one's own capacity for compassion and clarity sometimes requires honest boundaries, especially early in a practice when patterns are still fragile.

KEY POINTS

- We are shaped, often gradually and invisibly, by the company and environments we spend time in.
- Some influences reliably strengthen anger, attachment, or confusion, even without any single dramatic incident.
- Setting boundaries around harmful influence is framed as self-respect and protection of practice, not coldness or abandonment.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Is there a relationship or environment in your life that reliably pulls you toward reactivity or carelessness?*
2. *What would a boundary rooted in self-respect, rather than resentment, look like there?*
3. *Who or what in your life reliably strengthens your compassion and clarity instead?*

WEEK 6

Relying on Spiritual Friends

THE PRACTICE

> *A wise spiritual friend helps our faults diminish and our good qualities grow. Value such a teacher or companion as carefully as you would protect your own life.*

THE TEACHING

Just as certain influences pull us away from practice, others actively support it — a wise teacher or companion who can see our blind spots, offer honest feedback, and model the qualities we're trying to cultivate. This kind of relationship is rare enough, and valuable enough, to be worth deliberate care and protection.

The intensity of the phrase "as carefully as you would protect your own life" is meant to counter a common mistake: taking good influences for granted once we have them, or failing to invest real effort in maintaining relationships that quietly do a great deal of good for us. Genuine growth is rarely a solitary achievement; it tends to happen in relationship with people who can see us more clearly than we can see ourselves.

KEY POINTS

- A wise teacher or companion helps faults diminish and good qualities grow — often by offering perspective we can't generate alone.
- Such relationships are rare and easy to take for granted once established.
- Growth is rarely a solitary achievement; it tends to require people who can see us more clearly than we see ourselves.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Who in your life plays something like this role — someone whose honesty and example genuinely help you grow?*
2. *Do you invest in that relationship deliberately, or take it for granted?*
3. *Is there someone you could be this kind of presence for?*

WEEK 7

Taking Refuge Wisely

THE PRACTICE

> *Worldly sources of security are themselves impermanent and limited. Take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha as guides toward genuine liberation.*

THE TEACHING

Much of ordinary life is spent seeking security in things that cannot ultimately provide it — status, wealth, relationships, achievements — not because these things are worthless, but because none of them are stable enough to serve as an ultimate foundation. This practice asks us to notice that pattern honestly.

Taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha means orienting toward the teacher, the teaching, and the community of practitioners as a more reliable compass — not as magical protection from difficulty, but as a stable reference point that doesn't shift with circumstance the way worldly security does.

KEY POINTS

- Worldly sources of security — status, wealth, relationships, achievement — are all impermanent and ultimately limited.
- Refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha functions as a stable compass rather than protection from all difficulty.
- The practice asks for honest recognition of where we're currently seeking security that can't actually provide it.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Where are you currently seeking security in something that, if you're honest, can't ultimately provide it?*
2. *What does a stable, reliable reference point look like in your own life and practice?*
3. *How do you distinguish genuine refuge from simply another form of grasping?*

WEEK 8

Understanding Karma

THE PRACTICE

> *Suffering arises through causes and conditions, including harmful actions. Even when facing difficulty, avoid intentionally creating further suffering.*

THE TEACHING

This practice offers a basic but easily forgotten principle: suffering does not arise from nowhere, and our own actions are among its causes and conditions. This isn't meant as a tool for blame, especially self-blame in moments of hardship, but as an invitation to notice how present choices shape future difficulty or ease.

The instruction to avoid "intentionally creating further suffering" is especially pointed for moments when we ourselves are already struggling — precisely when it's tempting to lash out, cut corners, or act from reactivity. Holding the line here, even in hardship, is treated as one of the more demanding but important applications of this understanding.

KEY POINTS

- Suffering arises through causes and conditions, including our own actions — not from nowhere.
- This understanding is meant to inform choices, not to become a tool for blame or self-blame.
- The hardest test of this principle often comes during our own difficulty, when reactivity is most tempting.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Where have you seen your own actions genuinely shape later suffering or ease, for yourself or others?*
2. *How do you distinguish honest reflection on cause and effect from blame?*
3. *In your most recent difficult moment, did you add to the suffering through reactivity, or hold the line?*

WEEK 9

Seeing Worldly Happiness as Temporary

THE PRACTICE

> *Pleasures and accomplishments are fleeting, like dew on grass. Rather than making temporary happiness the ultimate goal, seek liberation.*

THE TEACHING

The image of dew on grass is deliberately gentle rather than harsh — worldly pleasures aren't condemned as bad, simply seen clearly as brief. Dew is genuinely beautiful while it lasts; the problem isn't enjoying it, but mistaking it for something permanent or building an entire life's foundation on it.

"Seeking liberation" as an alternative goal doesn't mean rejecting ordinary happiness. It means recognizing that lasting peace of mind is unlikely to come from accumulating more fleeting pleasures, and redirecting some portion of life's energy toward something less dependent on circumstance.

KEY POINTS

- Worldly pleasures are described as genuinely enjoyable but fleeting — like dew, not bad, just brief.
- The error named is mistaking something temporary for a stable foundation, not enjoying it in the moment.
- Liberation is offered as an alternative center of gravity, less dependent on shifting circumstance than pleasure or accomplishment.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Where have you built more of your sense of stability on temporary pleasures or accomplishments than you realized?*
2. *Can you enjoy something fully while also holding it lightly? What does that feel like?*
3. *What would it mean to redirect even a small portion of your energy toward something less dependent on circumstance?*

WEEK 10

Awakening Bodhicitta

THE PRACTICE

> *Since countless beings experience suffering, cultivate the aspiration to awaken so that you may genuinely help them become free.*

THE TEACHING

This is the pivot point of the entire collection — the moment personal practice explicitly widens to include everyone else's suffering as a motivating concern. The scale named ("countless beings") is intentionally vast, resisting the temptation to limit compassion to a comfortable, manageable circle of people we already know and like.

Bodhicitta here is framed as aspiration paired with genuine intent to help — not sentiment alone, but a wish oriented toward real capability. This sets up much of what follows: many of the remaining practices are essentially different situations in which that aspiration gets tested and made real.

KEY POINTS

- This practice widens concern from personal wellbeing to the suffering of countless beings, not just a familiar circle.
- Bodhicitta is aspiration paired with genuine intent to help, not sentiment alone.
- Many later practices are specific situations in which this aspiration gets tested in daily life.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Does compassion for "countless beings" feel abstract to you, or can you find a way to make it concrete?*
2. *Where does your circle of genuine concern currently end, and what's just outside it?*
3. *What would it mean for this aspiration to become more than a nice sentiment in your actual week?*

WEEK 11

Exchanging Self-Centeredness for Compassion

THE PRACTICE

> *Much suffering grows from continually placing ourselves first, while awakening grows from concern for others. Practice exchanging self-centered concern for compassionate concern.*

THE TEACHING

This practice names a pattern most of us rarely question: the automatic, near-constant prioritizing of our own comfort, reputation, and interest above others'. It isn't wrong to have needs, but the habitual, unexamined version of self-first thinking is identified here as a major source of ongoing dissatisfaction, precisely because it keeps attention narrowly focused on a self that can never be fully secured or satisfied.

The "exchange" isn't a single dramatic act but a gradual retraining — noticing, in small daily moments, when self-concern and others' concern compete, and practicing choosing differently, even in minor ways, so the habit itself begins to loosen over time.

KEY POINTS

- Habitual, unexamined self-first thinking is identified as a major source of ongoing dissatisfaction.
- This is not a rejection of having needs, but a loosening of automatic self-priority.
- The exchange happens gradually, through small daily choices, not one dramatic reversal.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Where does self-concern run so automatically that you rarely question it?*
2. *Can you recall a moment when placing another's need ahead of your own actually brought more peace than self-priority would have?*
3. *What's one small, concrete way you could practice this exchange this week?*

WEEK 12

When Someone Steals From You

THE PRACTICE

> *If someone, driven by desire, takes your possessions or encourages others to do so, practice generosity of heart rather than hatred.*

THE TEACHING

This is the first of several practices that take a specific, concrete provocation and ask how to meet it. Being stolen from is a real loss, and the instruction doesn't pretend otherwise — but it names the internal reaction (hatred) as an additional, separate harm on top of the loss itself, one that's within our own control even when the loss isn't.

"Generosity of heart" as a response doesn't mean pretending the theft is fine or refusing reasonable boundaries or consequences. It means not letting the event harden into lasting resentment, and recognizing the other person's desire, however misdirected, as itself a form of suffering rather than pure malice.

KEY POINTS

- The loss from theft and the internal reaction of hatred are treated as two separate things — only the second is fully within our control.
- Generosity of heart doesn't mean forgoing reasonable boundaries or consequences.
- Seeing the other person's desire as a form of suffering can soften hatred without excusing the act.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Recall a time something was taken from you. How much of your distress came from the loss itself, versus the anger afterward?*
2. *What would "generosity of heart" without excusing the act actually look like?*
3. *Is there a boundary you can hold firmly while still not carrying hatred?*

WEEK 13

When Falsely Accused

THE PRACTICE

> *Even when someone unjustly blames or attacks you, try not to retaliate with hatred; respond from compassion.*

THE TEACHING

False accusation is one of the more provocative situations to remain steady through, precisely because the injustice of it feels like it justifies a forceful response. This practice doesn't ask us to accept the false accusation as true, only to notice the pull toward retaliatory hatred and decline to feed it.

Responding "from compassion" rather than from injury protects something important: it keeps us from becoming, in reaction, something closer to what we're accused of. It also recognizes that people who make false accusations are often acting from their own fear, insecurity, or confusion — which doesn't make the accusation fair, but does make hatred an unnecessary addition to an already difficult situation.

KEY POINTS

- The practice doesn't ask us to accept a false accusation as true — only to decline feeding retaliatory hatred.
- Reacting with hatred risks making us resemble the very thing we're being accused of.
- False accusations often stem from the accuser's own fear or insecurity, which can inform response without excusing the injustice.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *How do you typically respond when unfairly blamed — what does your body do before your mind catches up?*
2. *Can you separate correcting a false accusation from carrying hatred toward the accuser?*
3. *What might it look like to respond firmly and honestly, but from compassion rather than injury?*

WEEK 14

When Publicly Criticized

THE PRACTICE

> *If someone humiliates or speaks badly about you before others, resist the urge to strike back. See the situation as an opportunity to practice patience and humility.*

THE TEACHING

Public humiliation carries a particular sting because it involves an audience — the discomfort isn't just the criticism itself but the exposure. This practice asks us to notice that added layer and work with it directly, rather than letting the social dimension amplify a defensive reaction.

Framing the moment as an "opportunity" rather than purely an injury is a recurring move throughout this collection: difficult situations are repeatedly reframed as training grounds, specifically because comfortable situations rarely test or build patience and humility the way public criticism does.

KEY POINTS

- Public humiliation carries an added social sting beyond the criticism itself, worth recognizing directly.
- Striking back in front of others often escalates rather than resolves the discomfort.
- Difficult moments like this are reframed as training grounds precisely because comfortable situations don't build the same patience.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *What's different for you about being criticized privately versus publicly?*
2. *Where does the urge to strike back come from — protecting your reputation, or something else?*
3. *Can you recall a public criticism that, looked at now, actually taught you something useful?*

WEEK 15

When Corrected Harshly

THE PRACTICE

> *Even when someone exposes your faults in an embarrassing way, consider whether there is something useful to learn and regard that person as a teacher.*

THE TEACHING

There's a real difference between the manner of correction and its content — someone can point out something true while doing so clumsily, unkindly, or embarrassingly. This practice asks us to separate those two things rather than dismissing valid feedback simply because it was delivered badly.

Calling the person a "teacher" in this context isn't about excusing harshness; it's a practical reframe that makes it easier to actually extract the useful information rather than getting stuck defending against the delivery. Some of the most useful feedback in life arrives poorly wrapped.

KEY POINTS

- The manner of correction and the truth of its content are two separate things worth evaluating separately.
- Dismissing valid feedback because of how it was delivered means losing something potentially useful.
- Calling a harsh critic a "teacher" is a practical reframe, not an excuse for their harshness.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Think of a time you dismissed feedback because of how it was delivered. Was there something true in it anyway?*
2. *How do you usually separate the message from the delivery in the moment, rather than only afterward?*
3. *Who has been an unlikely teacher for you, despite (or through) a harsh delivery?*

WEEK 16

When Someone You Helped Turns Against You

THE PRACTICE

> *If someone you cared for responds with hostility or ingratitude, practice compassion rather than resentment.*

THE TEACHING

This may be one of the more quietly painful situations named in the collection — help or care met not with gratitude but hostility. The natural response is a particular flavor of resentment, sharpened by the sense of unfairness: after all I did for them.

The instruction doesn't ask us to stop helping people or to expect nothing in return as some kind of transaction avoided in advance. It asks whether compassion — recognizing the other person's own suffering or confusion behind their hostility — can hold steady even when reciprocity fails to appear, which is a genuinely demanding but clarifying test of whether the original care was conditional.

KEY POINTS

- Hostility or ingratitude from someone we've helped triggers a particular, sharpened kind of resentment.
- The practice doesn't ask us to stop helping or expect nothing in return, but to notice if our care was conditional on reciprocity.
- Holding compassion steady here is a genuine test of whether care was unconditional in the first place.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Has someone you cared for responded with hostility or ingratitude? What did that reveal about your own expectations?*
2. *Was your original care conditional on some return, even unconsciously?*
3. *What would compassion without resentment actually look like in that specific relationship?*

WEEK 17

When Someone Looks Down Upon You

THE PRACTICE

> *If someone treats you arrogantly or contemptuously, do not become consumed by pride or retaliation. Practice humility.*

THE TEACHING

Contempt from another person tends to trigger a defensive counter-pride — an urge to assert our own worth loudly enough to override theirs. This practice notices that reaction and asks for something quieter: humility that doesn't need to compete for status in the moment.

This isn't the same as accepting the contempt as accurate or deserved. It's a recognition that getting drawn into a contest over relative worth rarely leads anywhere useful, and that genuine self-respect doesn't actually require winning that particular argument.

KEY POINTS

- Contempt from others often triggers a defensive counter-pride, an urge to assert worth loudly.
- Humility here means not accepting the contempt as accurate, but declining to compete over relative worth.
- Genuine self-respect doesn't require winning a status contest in the moment.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *When someone treats you with contempt, what's your first internal reaction — before you decide how to respond?*
2. *Have you ever gotten pulled into a status contest that, in hindsight, wasn't worth engaging?*
3. *What does self-respect that doesn't need to win look like for you?*

WEEK 18

When Overwhelmed by Hardship

THE PRACTICE

> *Even when poor, sick, rejected, or surrounded by difficulty, do not lose compassion. Take the suffering of beings into your heart rather than closing it.*

THE TEACHING

It's tempting, under real hardship, to treat compassion as a luxury available only to those with enough surplus energy — something to return to once things are easier. This practice pushes against that instinct directly, naming poverty, sickness, and rejection specifically as moments when the heart is most tempted to close rather than open.

"Taking the suffering of beings into your heart" during one's own hardship is not about ignoring or minimizing personal difficulty. It's a recognition that shared vulnerability, engaged with rather than avoided, can actually be a source of connection and meaning precisely when isolation would otherwise deepen the suffering further.

KEY POINTS

- Hardship — poverty, sickness, rejection — is precisely when the heart is most tempted to close rather than open.
- This practice doesn't ask us to minimize our own difficulty in order to care about others'.
- Shared vulnerability, engaged with openly, can become a source of connection rather than deepening isolation.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *During your own hardest times, has your compassion for others tended to close or to deepen?*
2. *What would it look like to stay open-hearted during a difficult stretch without minimizing your own pain?*
3. *Is there a connection or source of meaning you've found specifically through shared difficulty with someone else?*

WEEK 19

When Praised or Successful

THE PRACTICE

> *Even when respected, prosperous, or admired, remember that worldly success is temporary and avoid becoming arrogant.*

THE TEACHING

Success and praise are, in their own way, as destabilizing as hardship, just in the opposite direction — they can quietly convince us that our current standing is permanent and deserved in a way that invites carelessness or arrogance. This practice pairs naturally with the earlier reflection on impermanence, applied specifically to good fortune rather than only to loss.

The instruction isn't to reject success or refuse to enjoy it, but to hold it with the same lightness recommended for pleasure elsewhere in the collection — appreciating it honestly while remembering that circumstances shift, and that our worth was never actually dependent on this particular condition holding steady.

KEY POINTS

- Success and praise can destabilize just as much as hardship, by inviting a sense of permanence they don't actually have.
- This isn't a call to reject or downplay success, but to hold it with the same lightness recommended for any pleasure.
- Worth is framed as independent of whether current good fortune continues.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *How does success tend to affect your humility — does it stay steady, or shift?*
2. *Have you seen success quietly breed carelessness or arrogance in yourself or someone you know?*
3. *What would it mean to enjoy a genuine success fully while still holding it lightly?*

WEEK 20

Conquering Anger Within Yourself

THE PRACTICE

> *Defeating external enemies does not end hostility. The real opponent is the anger and hatred within one's own mind.*

THE TEACHING

Even a complete external victory over an adversary doesn't eliminate hostility itself — another opponent, real or imagined, tends to appear, because the pattern that generates hostility lives in the mind rather than in any particular external situation. This practice locates the actual battle correctly: not out there, but in the habitual anger and hatred we carry.

This reframing has real practical consequences. Energy spent trying to permanently secure peace by controlling or defeating external circumstances is, on this view, largely misdirected; the more durable path runs through examining and working with our own reactive patterns directly, since that's the one place lasting change is actually possible.

KEY POINTS

- Defeating an external enemy doesn't eliminate hostility itself, because the pattern lives in the mind, not in any single situation.
- The "real opponent" is named as our own anger and hatred, not any external adversary.
- Energy spent controlling external circumstances for peace is often misdirected compared to working with internal reactive patterns.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Has "winning" a conflict ever actually resolved your underlying hostility, or just relocated it?*
2. *Where do you spend more energy: trying to control external circumstances, or examining your own reactive patterns?*
3. *What would it look like to treat your own anger, rather than another person, as the opponent worth working with?*

WEEK 21

Recognizing Craving

THE PRACTICE

> *Sensory pleasures can resemble salt water: the more we consume, the thirstier we become. Learn to release attachment rather than continually feeding it.*

THE TEACHING

The salt water image is precise: craving doesn't behave like ordinary thirst that's satisfied by drinking. Feeding it tends to intensify it, producing a cycle where more consumption generates more wanting rather than eventual satisfaction. Recognizing this pattern clearly is itself most of the work — many of us assume, against real evidence, that just a little more will finally be enough.

"Releasing attachment" is offered as the alternative to endless feeding, though the text doesn't pretend this is simple. It requires noticing the craving cycle in real time, in specific instances, rather than only recognizing it abstractly after the fact.

KEY POINTS

- Craving is compared to drinking salt water — consumption intensifies rather than resolves the thirst.
- Recognizing this cycle clearly, rather than assuming "just a little more" will satisfy it, is most of the work.
- Releasing attachment is the alternative to endless feeding, though it requires real-time recognition, not just abstract understanding.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Where in your life does consumption reliably increase wanting rather than satisfying it?*
2. *Can you catch this pattern in the moment, rather than only recognizing it afterward?*
3. *What would "releasing" rather than "feeding" look like the next time you notice this cycle starting?*

WEEK 22

Understanding the Nature of Mind

THE PRACTICE

> *Experience arises within mind, while mind itself cannot ultimately be grasped as a fixed thing. Do not become trapped in rigid ideas about subject and object.*

THE TEACHING

This practice moves into more subtle territory: examining the mind that has been doing all this observing throughout the previous practices. When we actually look for mind directly — try to locate it, pin it down, describe exactly what it is — it resists being grasped as a solid, fixed thing in the way we instinctively assume.

The caution against "rigid ideas about subject and object" points toward a loosening of the sharp boundary we normally draw between an observing self and an observed world. This is subtle, philosophically dense material, closely related to teachings on emptiness found elsewhere in Mahayana literature, and it rewards patient, repeated reflection rather than a single quick read.

KEY POINTS

- When examined directly, mind resists being grasped as a fixed, solid thing, despite how solid it seems by default.
- This practice loosens the rigid boundary we normally assume between an observing self and an observed world.
- This is subtle material connected to broader Mahayana teachings on emptiness, worth returning to repeatedly.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *If you try, right now, to locate exactly where or what your mind is, what do you notice?*
2. *Does the boundary between "you observing" and "the world observed" feel as solid as it usually does, once you look closely?*
3. *What was it like to sit with material this subtle, rather than needing an immediate, clear answer?*

WEEK 23

Pleasant Experience Like a Rainbow

THE PRACTICE

> *Beautiful things appear vividly yet cannot be possessed permanently. Enjoy them without clinging to them as ultimately real or lasting.*

THE TEACHING

A rainbow is genuinely, vividly beautiful, and also entirely insubstantial — there's nothing to grasp or hold onto, no matter how real it appears. This practice applies that same quality to pleasant experience generally: enjoyment doesn't require believing something is permanent or solid in order to be real and worthwhile in the moment.

This connects directly to the earlier reflection on temporary happiness, but sharpens it into an actual practice instruction: full enjoyment, paired with non-clinging, rather than either indulgence or renunciation. The rainbow can be genuinely appreciated precisely because no one expects to keep it.

KEY POINTS

- Beautiful, vivid experience and lasting solidity are two separate qualities — something can be fully real in the moment without being permanent.
- The practice pairs full enjoyment with non-clinging, rather than choosing between indulgence and renunciation.
- Appreciating something fully doesn't require the expectation of keeping it.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Can you recall a beautiful experience you enjoyed fully without needing to hold onto it?*
2. *Where do you currently try to make something permanent that might be more like a rainbow?*
3. *What changes in your enjoyment of something when you stop expecting it to last?*

WEEK 24

Suffering Like a Dream

THE PRACTICE

> *Painful experiences can dominate our awareness and seem completely solid. Learn to experience them without adding unnecessary grasping and identification.*

THE TEACHING

Just as pleasant experience is compared to a rainbow, painful experience is compared to a dream — vivid and consuming while it's happening, but not as solid or permanent as it feels in the moment. This is a delicate teaching to offer, since real pain deserves acknowledgment rather than dismissal, and the text isn't suggesting that suffering is simply unreal or unimportant.

The key phrase is "unnecessary grasping and identification" — the secondary layer we often add on top of raw pain, turning "this hurts" into "this defines me" or "this will never end." Working with that secondary layer, rather than the raw experience itself, is where this practice actually operates.

KEY POINTS

- Painful experience is compared to a dream — vivid while happening, but not as solid or permanent as it feels.
- This is not a claim that suffering is unreal or unimportant; real pain still deserves acknowledgment.
- The practice targets the secondary layer of grasping and identification we add on top of raw pain, not the pain itself.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Can you distinguish, in a recent painful experience, between the raw pain and the story or identification layered on top of it?*
2. *Does "this hurts" tend to become "this defines me" or "this will never end" for you? How does that shift the experience?*
3. *What would it look like to acknowledge pain fully without adding unnecessary grasping to it?*

WEEK 25

Practicing Generosity

THE PRACTICE

> *If awakening requires willingness even to give oneself for others, then ordinary possessions should certainly be shared generously without expecting reward.*

THE TEACHING

This practice uses a logical move common throughout the collection: if the more extreme version of a commitment (willingness to give even oneself) is part of the aspiration, then the much smaller version — sharing ordinary possessions — should follow relatively easily by comparison. It's a way of catching any residual stinginess in the act.

"Without expecting reward" is the qualifier that turns ordinary generosity into practice rather than transaction. Generosity given with an eye toward return, recognition, or even spiritual credit is subtly different from generosity given freely, and this practice asks for the latter.

KEY POINTS

- The logic runs from the extreme (giving even oneself) to the ordinary (sharing possessions), making the smaller version harder to justify avoiding.
- "Without expecting reward" distinguishes genuine generosity from generosity as transaction.
- This practice invites noticing any residual stinginess that the larger aspiration might otherwise mask.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Where do you notice yourself giving with a quiet expectation of something in return?*
2. *What would it feel like to give something freely, with no tracking of reciprocity at all?*
3. *Is there an area of ordinary generosity — time, possessions, attention — where you could be more open-handed?*

WEEK 26

Practicing Ethical Conduct

THE PRACTICE

> *If we cannot guide our own actions wisely, we cannot genuinely benefit others. Keep ethical discipline without being motivated merely by worldly gain.*

THE TEACHING

This practice makes a foundational claim: the capacity to help others depends on some basic capacity to govern one's own actions first. Good intentions alone, without ethical discipline, tend to produce inconsistent or even harmful results, however sincere the underlying wish to help.

The caution about worldly gain is important — ethical conduct maintained purely for reputation, advantage, or approval is a fragile foundation, likely to bend under pressure when no one is watching or when following the discipline becomes inconvenient. Genuine ethical discipline is meant to hold steady regardless of whether it's being observed or rewarded.

KEY POINTS

- The capacity to help others is described as dependent on some basic capacity to govern one's own actions first.
- Good intentions without ethical discipline tend to produce inconsistent or harmful results.
- Ethical conduct maintained only for reputation or reward is fragile and likely to bend when inconvenient.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Where has good intention, without follow-through or discipline, led to an inconsistent or unhelpful result?*
2. *Does your own ethical conduct hold steady when no one is watching, or does it shift?*
3. *What's the difference, in your experience, between discipline held for its own sake and discipline held for approval?*

WEEK 27

Practicing Patience

THE PRACTICE

> *For someone seeking awakening, difficult people and situations can become precious opportunities for developing patience rather than hatred.*

THE TEACHING

This practice states directly a theme that's been implicit throughout many of the earlier situational practices (theft, false accusation, criticism, contempt): difficulty itself is reframed as raw material for growth rather than simply an obstacle to be endured or avoided.

Calling these opportunities "precious" is a strong word choice, and it's meant seriously — comfortable situations offer little chance to actually develop patience, since patience by definition is only tested under friction. Difficult people, in this light, do something friends and easy circumstances generally cannot.

KEY POINTS

- This practice names directly what earlier situational practices implied: difficulty is raw material for growth, not just an obstacle.
- Patience, by definition, can only be tested and developed under friction, not in comfort.
- Difficult people are described as offering something friends and ease generally cannot.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Looking back across the situational practices so far, which difficult person or situation has actually taught you the most patience?*
2. *Does calling a difficulty "precious" feel honest to you, or does it feel forced? What's underneath that reaction?*
3. *Where in your life right now is friction currently testing your patience?*

WEEK 28

Practicing Joyful Effort

THE PRACTICE

> *If people exert tremendous effort for temporary accomplishments, how much more worthwhile is steady effort toward wisdom, compassion, and awakening.*

THE TEACHING

This practice makes a comparative argument: people routinely exert enormous, sustained effort toward goals that are acknowledged, even by the people pursuing them, to be temporary — careers, status, possessions, achievements. If that much effort is considered worthwhile for temporary things, the argument goes, effort toward something more lasting deserves at least as much energy, likely more.

"Joyful" is an important qualifier here, distinguishing this effort from grim obligation. The text elsewhere (and traditions built on it) generally frame sustained effort as most durable when it's rooted in genuine interest and appreciation for the goal, rather than pure willpower or duty.

KEY POINTS

- People often exert enormous effort toward goals openly acknowledged as temporary — this is used as a comparative argument for effort toward lasting growth.
- "Joyful" effort is distinguished from grim obligation or pure willpower.
- Sustained effort tends to be more durable when rooted in genuine interest rather than duty alone.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Where do you already exert significant effort toward something you know is temporary?*
2. *How much of your effort toward practice or growth feels joyful versus obligatory?*
3. *What would make effort toward your own growth feel more genuinely interesting rather than dutiful?*

WEEK 29

Practicing Meditation

THE PRACTICE

> *Understanding that calm abiding joined with insight can transform afflictive states, cultivate concentration that goes beyond mere temporary states of peace.*

THE TEACHING

This practice distinguishes between two things that can look similar from the outside: temporary calm, which feels pleasant but doesn't necessarily change anything underneath, and calm abiding joined with insight, which actively works on and transforms the afflictive states (anger, craving, confusion) rather than simply setting them aside for the duration of a pleasant sitting.

The instruction to go "beyond mere temporary states of peace" is a caution against mistaking relaxation for transformation. A meditation practice can become quite skilled at producing calm without ever addressing the underlying patterns that disturb that calm the moment the sitting ends — this practice asks for something more integrated than that.

KEY POINTS

- Temporary calm and calm abiding joined with insight are distinguished — the first feels pleasant, the second actively transforms afflictive states.
- The caution here is against mistaking relaxation for genuine transformation of underlying patterns.
- Meditation is asked to be integrated with daily life, not just a pleasant state confined to the sitting itself.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Does your own practice (meditation or otherwise) tend to produce temporary calm, deeper transformation, or both?*
2. *Have you noticed calm from a practice evaporate quickly once daily life resumes? What might that suggest?*
3. *What would it look like to bring insight, not just relaxation, into a regular practice?*

WEEK 30

Practicing Wisdom

THE PRACTICE

> *Generosity, ethics, patience, effort, and meditation reach fulfillment through wisdom. Cultivate insight that does not cling to fixed ideas of self, other, or inherent existence.*

THE TEACHING

This practice names wisdom as the element that completes and fulfills all the others — generosity, ethics, patience, effort, and meditation are each valuable, but without wisdom they can remain somewhat mechanical, performed correctly without fully dissolving the underlying self-concern that limits their reach.

The specific wisdom named here — not clinging to fixed ideas of self, other, or inherent existence — echoes the deeper philosophical material touched on in the practice on the nature of mind. It's a reminder that all this ethical and compassionate effort is ultimately meant to be paired with genuine insight, not just good behavior layered on top of an unexamined sense of a solid, separate self.

KEY POINTS

- Wisdom is named as the element that fulfills and completes the other practices — without it, they can remain somewhat mechanical.
- The specific wisdom described is not clinging to fixed ideas of self, other, or inherent existence.
- This practice reminds that ethical and compassionate effort is meant to pair with genuine insight, not just correct behavior.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Where has one of the earlier practices (generosity, patience, effort) felt more mechanical than genuinely transformative for you?*
2. *What might change if you paired that practice with the kind of insight described here?*
3. *Does the idea of not clinging to a "fixed self" feel threatening, freeing, or both?*

WEEK 31

Examining Yourself

THE PRACTICE

> *It is easy to appear spiritual while overlooking our own faults. Continually examine your mind and actions and honestly acknowledge harmful tendencies.*

THE TEACHING

This practice names a specific risk that tends to grow alongside sustained practice itself: the appearance of spiritual maturity can become detached from the reality of it, especially as vocabulary and behavior start to look the part. Continual, honest self-examination is the corrective, aimed specifically at closing that gap.

The emphasis on "honestly acknowledge" rather than simply notice is worth sitting with — it's possible to see a fault clearly and still find subtle ways to excuse or minimize it. This practice asks for the fuller, more uncomfortable step of genuine acknowledgment, without which the noticing accomplishes little.

KEY POINTS

- The appearance of spiritual maturity can become detached from its reality, especially as vocabulary and behavior start to look the part.
- Continual self-examination is aimed specifically at closing that gap between appearance and reality.
- Honest acknowledgment goes further than simply noticing a fault — it resists the subtle urge to excuse or minimize it.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Where might you be performing spiritual maturity more than embodying it?*
2. *Can you think of a fault you've noticed in yourself but subtly excused rather than fully acknowledged?*
3. *What would honest, non-punishing self-examination look like this week?*

WEEK 32

Not Dwelling on Others' Faults

THE PRACTICE

> *Constantly pointing out another person's shortcomings strengthens our own afflictions. Repeatedly speaking about the faults of those walking the path only weakens practice.*

THE TEACHING

This practice makes a somewhat counterintuitive claim: habitually focusing on and voicing others' faults doesn't just affect the relationship in question, it actively strengthens our own afflictive patterns — cultivating a critical, fault-finding orientation that tends to generalize well beyond its original target.

The specific mention of "those walking the path" suggests a particular caution for spiritual communities, where critique of fellow practitioners can masquerade as discernment or accountability while actually functioning as ordinary gossip or judgment, quietly corrosive to the community and to the speaker's own practice.

KEY POINTS

- Habitually voicing others' faults is said to strengthen our own afflictive, fault-finding patterns, not just affect the relationship in question.
- This pattern tends to generalize beyond its original target, coloring how we see people more broadly.
- Special caution is given for spiritual communities, where critique of fellow practitioners can masquerade as discernment while functioning as ordinary gossip.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *How often do you find yourself dwelling on or voicing someone else's faults?*
2. *Has focusing on another's shortcomings ever left you feeling more critical generally, beyond that one relationship?*
3. *Where might critique in your own community be closer to gossip than genuine accountability?*

WEEK 33

Letting Go of Competition

THE PRACTICE

> *Desire for status, offerings, respect, or material gain creates conflict and weakens practice. Release attachment to reward and recognition.*

THE TEACHING

This practice targets a subtle risk that can arise even within earnest spiritual effort: competing, consciously or not, for status, recognition, or material advantage among fellow practitioners or within a community. This kind of competition can undermine the very cooperative, compassionate spirit the practice is meant to cultivate.

Releasing attachment to reward and recognition doesn't mean becoming indifferent to feedback or contribution — it means examining whether the drive behind our effort is oriented toward genuine benefit or toward securing a particular standing relative to others, and gently loosening the latter where it's found.

KEY POINTS

- Competition for status, recognition, or material gain can arise even within earnest spiritual effort, often unconsciously.
- This kind of competition can undermine the cooperative, compassionate spirit practice is meant to cultivate.
- Releasing attachment to reward doesn't mean indifference to feedback, but examining what's really driving our effort.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Have you noticed subtle competition for status or recognition within a community you're part of, spiritual or otherwise?*
2. *Where might your own effort be partly driven by a desire for standing rather than genuine benefit?*
3. *What would it feel like to contribute fully without needing recognition for it?*

WEEK 34

Avoiding Harsh Speech

THE PRACTICE

> *Cruel words disturb the minds of others and undermine compassionate practice. Speak in ways that do not intentionally wound.*

THE TEACHING

Speech is treated here as a genuine ethical arena, not a minor or separate concern from the rest of practice — words spoken carelessly or cruelly disturb another person's mind directly and immediately, in a way that's easy to underestimate because the damage isn't always visible right away.

The qualifier "intentionally" is worth noting: this isn't a demand for a kind of speech so cautious it becomes dishonest or avoids necessary difficult conversations. It targets the specific choice to wound, whether through tone, timing, or content, distinguishing that from honest but kindly delivered truth.

KEY POINTS

- Careless or cruel speech disturbs another person's mind directly, even when the damage isn't immediately visible.
- The target is intentional wounding specifically, not honesty itself — necessary difficult conversations aren't ruled out.
- Tone, timing, and content are all part of how speech can wound or avoid wounding.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Can you recall a time words spoken to you carelessly caused more lasting harm than the speaker likely realized?*
2. *Where might you soften delivery without softening honesty?*
3. *What's the difference, for you, between speaking a difficult truth kindly and avoiding it altogether?*

WEEK 35

Working with Afflictions Immediately

THE PRACTICE

> *Habits such as anger and craving become stronger when repeatedly indulged. Recognize them as soon as they arise and apply mindfulness and awareness before they take control.*

THE TEACHING

This practice emphasizes timing: afflictive states like anger and craving are far more manageable when caught early, while they're still small, than after they've built momentum and started driving words or actions. Waiting until an affliction is already in full control makes intervention far harder.

"Mindfulness and awareness" applied at the earliest possible moment functions almost like catching a spark before it becomes a fire — the same amount of afflictive energy is present either way, but the window for working with it skillfully is far wider near the beginning than near the end.

KEY POINTS

- Afflictive states are far more manageable when caught early, before they build momentum.
- Waiting until an affliction has already taken control makes skillful intervention much harder.
- Early mindfulness functions like catching a spark before it becomes a fire — same energy, far wider window to work with it.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *Can you identify the earliest physical or mental sign that anger or craving is beginning to arise in you?*
2. *How much does your ability to work with an affliction change between its early stage and its full expression?*
3. *What would it look like to build a habit of checking in at that earliest stage?*

WEEK 36

Maintaining Mindfulness in Everything

THE PRACTICE

> *Wherever you are and whatever you are doing, observe the condition of your mind. Continually ask whether your actions are bringing benefit or harm.*

THE TEACHING

This practice generalizes mindfulness beyond formal sitting practice into the whole of ordinary activity — work, conversation, errands, rest. The instruction isn't to add a new activity to an already full day, but to bring a continuous, light quality of attention to whatever is already happening.

The specific question — benefit or harm — gives this ongoing mindfulness a practical anchor rather than leaving it vague. It's a simple enough question to ask repeatedly throughout an ordinary day, and demanding enough, honestly answered, to actually shape behavior over time.

KEY POINTS

- Mindfulness is generalized beyond formal practice into all ordinary activity, not added as a separate task.
- The recurring question — is this bringing benefit or harm — gives mindfulness a practical, repeatable anchor.
- This is meant to be a light, continuous quality of attention rather than an intense, effortful state.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *How often during an ordinary day do you check in on the condition of your own mind?*
2. *Try asking the benefit-or-harm question about your next few actions today. What do you notice?*
3. *What would it take to make this kind of check-in a light, natural habit rather than an effortful add-on?*

WEEK 37

Dedicating the Merit

THE PRACTICE

> *Whatever goodness arises from practice, dedicate it toward the liberation and awakening of all beings rather than holding it as personal spiritual accomplishment.*

THE TEACHING

The collection closes, fittingly, in the same spirit that Shantideva's own text closes: by turning whatever has been gained outward rather than holding it as private accomplishment. This final practice answers a question that could otherwise linger after thirty-six practices of inner work — what is all of this actually for?

Dedicating merit is both a formal gesture and a genuine reorientation: it resists the quiet accumulation of spiritual pride that can build up, practice by practice, and redirects the entire preceding effort back toward its original motivation — the wellbeing of all beings, not the private satisfaction of having practiced well.

KEY POINTS

- The collection closes by turning whatever has been gained outward, resisting private spiritual accomplishment.
- This final practice directly answers the question of what all the preceding inner work is actually for.
- Dedication resists quiet spiritual pride and redirects effort back to its original motivation: the wellbeing of all beings.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. *If you dedicated whatever has grown in you through these 37 weeks, who or what would you dedicate it to?*
2. *Have you noticed any quiet spiritual pride building up along the way? What would it mean to let that go?*
3. *Looking back across all 37 practices, which one do you most want to carry forward — not just remember, but actually live?*