

The Seven-Point Mind Training

From the eight verses composed by Geshe Langri Thangpa (1054–1123)

Introduction:

“Dear Dharma friends, as we dwelled on the topic of mind training for quite a few teachings sessions, I took the time to bring you the essence of these teachings brought from India to Tibet by Lord Atisha who received them from Dharmarakṣita and Serlingpa also known as Dharmakīrti of Suvarṇadvīpa.

The teachings were emphasized by Geshe Langri Thangpa, a great master of the Kadampa lineage about 900 years ago. He lived very simply, practicing compassion in all circumstances. His most famous text is called *The Eight Verses of Mind Training*.

At the same time, another Kadampa master, Geshe Chekawa, collected the key lojong instructions into what is known as *The Seven-Point Mind Training*. These two texts are like companions—they show us how to bring Dharma into daily life, not just in meditation halls but in every difficulty we face.

What is special about the Kadampas is this: they taught us not to run away from problems, but to use them. Their leitmotiv was this:

- When life is hard—use it to grow compassion.
- When people are difficult—see them as your best teachers.
- When your ego complains—remember that this is the root of suffering.

This is why Geshe Langri Thangpa is remembered as someone who turned every hardship into practice. He taught us to place all the blame on one thing: self-cherishing. And he taught us to cultivate one great theme: caring for others.

If we practice in this way, step by step, then even ordinary days—work, family, challenges—become the very path to awakening.”

Due to the keen interest in this topic, although there are many contemporary teachers who commented these various texts such as His Holiness The Gyalwa Karmapa, Orgyen Trinley Dorje, I have been inspired to revisit the various texts and took some time to approach them from a few points of view providing the following notes which I gladly will share with you.

Short presentation:

Mind training (lojong) is a method for transforming difficulties into the path of awakening.

1. The Preliminaries – Foundation for Practice

- **Contemplate the Four Mind Reversers:**
 - The Precious Human Life
 - Death and Impermanence
 - Karma Cause & Effect
 - The Reality of Suffering.
- **Why to do so:**
 - These reflections give strength and urgency.
 - Without them, practice stays intellectual.
- **How to practice:**
 - Each morning, remind yourself: “*This day is rare. Life is uncertain. May I use it to bring benefit.*”
 - Notice how actions bring results; train to choose wholesome ones.

2. The Actual Training in Bodhicitta

- **The heart of Lojong:**
 - The heart of lojong is generating *bodhicitta*
 - The wish to attain awakening for the benefit of all beings.
- **The Method:**
 - *Equalizing and exchanging self and others.*
- **How to practice?**
 - Reflect: *“Just as I wish happiness, so do all beings.”*
 - Practice ‘*tonglen*’ (sending and taking):
 - While inhaling, imagine taking in the suffering of others.
 - While exhaling, send them your happiness, love, and peace.
 - Do this both in meditation and daily encounters.

3. Transforming Adversity into the Path

- **What to transform:**
 - Use difficulties, criticism, or misfortune
 - See these as opportunities to deepen compassion and wisdom.
- **How to practice:**
 - When insulted, think: *“This reveals my pride; may I use it to grow humility.”*
 - When suffering, think: *“May this take the place of others’ suffering.”*
 - Let challenges remind you of the shared human condition.

4. Integrating the Practice in Daily Life

- **What:** Keep the training alive in all situations.
- **How to practice:**
 - At the start of the day, set the motivation: *“Today, may my thoughts, words, and actions benefit others.”*
 - In the evening, review: *“Did I act with kindness? Where can I improve?”*
 - Turn ordinary actions (eating, walking, working etc.) into practice by remembering others.

5. Measuring Progress in Mind Training

- **What:**
 - Progress is not measured by intellectual understanding, but by reduced self-cherishing and increased compassion.
- **Signs of progress:**
 - You feel less anger when criticized or facing difficulties
 - More concern for others’ wellbeing.
 - A lighter heart in adversity.
- **Practice:**
 - Instead of seeking praise, look for growth in patience, kindness, and flexibility.

6. Commitments of Mind Training

- Geshe Langri Thangpa set ‘*samayas*’ to keep the training pure:
 - Do not blame others for your problems but see your mind’s grasping.
 - Do not boast about your practice.
 - Do not expect quick results.
 - Avoid gossip, fault-finding, and self-righteousness.
- **Practice:**
 - Keep the discipline of kindness, even in small things.

7. Guidelines for Training

These are practical reminders for living the training every day:

- Keep a cheerful mind, whatever happens.
- Don't expect rewards from others; act for their benefit regardless.
- Maintain compassion especially toward difficult people.
- Practice consistently, not only in meditation but in conversations, work, and relationships.

Summary for Practice

- Morning: Set your intention.
- Daytime: Practice *tonglen* with every situation, pleasant or difficult.
- Evening: Review your day with honesty and kindness.
- Always: Train to see all beings as equal in wishing happiness and freedom.

The Essence of the Seven-Point Mind Training:

Turn the mind from self-cherishing to cherishing others, using every circumstance—good or bad—as fuel for awakening.

A Detailed, practice-oriented presentation:

1. The Preliminaries: Preparing the Ground

Before training the mind, we must recognize why it is necessary.

- **Key reflections:**
 1. Precious human life – rare and meaningful, yet fragile.
 2. Impermanence – death can come at any time.
 3. Suffering – all beings experience dissatisfaction, pain, loss.
 4. Karma – actions bring results, so our choices matter.
- **Practice example:**
 1. Each morning, remind yourself: *“Today could be my last. May I use it for kindness.”*
 2. When tempted to waste time, remember: *“This life is short; better to use it well.”*
 3. When suffering, reflect: *“This is the truth of samsara; only wisdom and compassion bring freedom.”*

2. Training in Bodhicitta: The Heart of the Path

Bodhicitta is the wish to attain awakening for the benefit of all beings. The method here is **equalizing and exchanging self with others**.

- **Practical reflection:**
 - Just as I wish to be happy, so does everyone. My pain feels heavy, but theirs is equally real.
 - Holding tightly to “me, mine, my comfort” is the root of suffering.
- **Practice: Tonglen (Sending and Taking)**
 - **In meditation:**
 - Inhale: imagine taking into your heart the suffering of others, dissolving it into compassion.
 - Exhale: send them peace, health, love, and joy.
 - **In daily life:**
 - When you see someone stressed at work, silently breathe in their tension, breathe out calm and clarity.
 - When a friend is sick, breathe in their pain, breathe out well-being.

3. Transforming Adversity into the Path

Instead of being defeated by problems, use them to grow.

- **Examples:**
 - **Criticism:** When someone insults you, think: *“This reveals my pride. May this reduce my arrogance. May I use this pain to understand others who suffer criticism.”*
 - **Illness:** When sick, think: *“May my pain take the place of others’ pain.”*
 - **Failure:** If a project collapses, use it to practice humility and patience.
- **Practice tip:**
 - When something unpleasant happens, pause and ask: *“How can I use this to deepen compassion?”*

4. Integrating Practice into Daily Life

Mind training is not separate from daily activity—it must color all moments.

- **Daily habits:**
 - **Morning:** Set your intention: *“Whatever happens, may I use it for awakening and the good of others.”*
 - **During the day:**
 - In traffic: instead of impatience, practice patience and wish safety for all drivers.
 - At meals: before eating, offer your food mentally to all beings, wishing them nourishment.
 - At work: dedicate your effort to the well-being of your colleagues and clients.
 - **Evening:** Review the day. Ask yourself:
 - Did I act with kindness?
 - When did self-cherishing take over?
 - Can I forgive myself and try again tomorrow?

5. Measuring Progress in Mind Training

The measure is not eloquence, but transformation of the heart.

- **Signs of progress:**
 - Less irritation when inconvenienced.
 - More concern for others’ happiness.
 - Feeling lighter in difficulties.
 - Spontaneous compassion toward strangers.
- **Example:**
 - A student once said: *“Before lojong, if someone cut me off in traffic, I would shout. Now I think: ‘May they be safe. Maybe they are rushing to help someone in need.’”*

6. Commitments of Mind Training

To keep the practice pure, Geshe Langri Thangpa gave reminders (samayas):

- Don’t blame others; look at your own self-grasping mind.
- Don’t boast about being “spiritual.”
- Don’t expect immediate results.
- Avoid gossip and unnecessary talk.
- Don’t abandon compassion even for “difficult” people.
- **Practice example:**
 - When you notice yourself blaming, pause: *“The root problem is my attachment to ‘me.’”*
 - If tempted to show off, remember: *“Lojong is for reducing ego, not feeding it.”*

7. Guidelines for Living the Training

Practical points to keep your training alive:

- Keep a cheerful mind, even in hardship.
- Help others without expectation of reward.
- Be especially kind toward those who irritate you—they are your best teachers.
- Practice consistently, not just on the meditation cushion.

- **Example:**
 - If someone at home or work annoys you, see them as your “lojong partner.” Without them, you cannot practice patience and compassion.

Daily Short Practice Routine

1. **Morning intention:**
 - “Today I will transform whatever happens into the path of awakening.”
2. **Daytime tonglen:**
 - Use every difficulty as a chance to breathe in suffering, breathe out relief.
3. **Evening review:**
 - Acknowledge progress, forgive shortcomings, dedicate merit.

Conclusion

The Seven-Point Mind Training is not theory—it is a set of living tools. By applying them in daily life, every situation—pleasant or painful—becomes part of the path to awakening.

Essence:

Turn every thought, every word, every event into a training ground for compassion and wisdom.

Scholastic Commentary Approach

Geshe Langri Thangpa (1054–1123) was a prominent Kadampa master, renowned for his text *The Eight Verses on Training the Mind*. He transmitted Atīśa’s Lojong system through the Kadam lineage, emphasizing the transformation of adverse conditions into the path of awakening. His style is noted for its practicality and sharp precision, embodying the Kadampa ethos of “*Dharma in daily life*.”

Historical Context

- The *Seven-Point Mind Training* originates with Atīśa (982–1054), who transmitted it from the Indian Mahāyāna masters Dharmarakṣita and Serlingpa (Dharmakīrti of Suvarṇadvīpa).
- Geshe Chekawa Yeshe Dorje (1102–1176), a contemporary of Langri Thangpa, compiled the lojong slogans into the structured format of “seven points,” preserving Langri Thangpa’s oral teachings.
- Thus, Geshe Langri Thangpa’s *Eight Verses* and Chekawa’s *Seven-Point Mind Training* are sister texts within the Kadampa lojong tradition, later absorbed by the Kagyā and Gelug lineages.

Relation to the Kadampa Ethos

- The Kadampas emphasized applying Dharma to ordinary life. Instead of retreating from difficulties, they taught transforming adversity into spiritual opportunity.
- This practical turn is exemplified in lojong, where the ultimate view (*śūnyatā*) is always balanced with the relative practice of compassion (*karuṇā*).

Doctrinal Notes

1. **Preliminaries** – Grounding in the Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind (precious human life, impermanence, suffering, karma).
2. **Bodhicitta** – Cultivation of altruistic intention through equalizing and exchanging self with others.
3. **Transforming adversity** – Rooted in Śāntideva’s *Bodhicaryāvatāra*, particularly the patience and wisdom chapters.
4. **Integration** – Kadampa stress on “bringing practice to the marketplace,” i.e., integrating Dharma into ordinary life.
5. **Measuring progress** – By lessening self-cherishing (*bdag gces*).

6. **Commitments (dam tshig)** – Ethical discipline adapted to mind training; restraint from gossip, arrogance, or discouragement.
7. **Guidelines** – Kadampa aphorisms for sustaining practice; many correspond to lojong slogans.

Summary in Kadampa Perspective

Mind training is essentially the unification of *śūnyatā* and *bodhicitta*. Langri Thangpa embodied this in the pith line:

*“Put all blame on the one i.e. self-cherishing;
Meditate on one great theme i.e. the welfare of others.”*