MIND TRAINING: THE SEVENTY-TWO EXHORTATIONS

Kharak Gomchung
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The Seventy-Two Exhortations

by Kharak Gomchung

KAGYU MONLAM INTERNATIONAL
I prostrate to the gurus.

Precious jewel and spiritual friend,
Yidam deities, and three jewels,
I supplicate you, be my crown jewel!
While being my crown ornament,
Please look upon my shameless mind.

For phony practitioners who lack dharma
And have shameless, wrong intentions,
I’m giving advice as a remedy.
This will help you long, so listen!
If I do not expose your faults,  
You will not understand, you dolt.  
If you don’t listen to loving advice,  
You’ll just get worse and worse.

Your present sufferings all occur  
Because you’ve done wrongs in your past lives.  
The fault is yours; prepare to bear hardship.  
Do not take the moral high ground.
All pains and pleasures of the present
Depend on karma from the past,
So you do not have any choice—
Whatever happens, make it your friend.

The pleasures of this life are fleeting.
If you want lasting happiness,
You must willingly accept
All the minor sufferings of this life.
Even the tiniest present pains
Can exhaust sufferings from past deeds
And become pleasure in the future,
So cultivate joy for suffering.

Adversity is a spiritual friend.
Obstacles inspire spiritual practice.
Suffering is the broom of misdeeds.
Don’t be upset or view them as misfortune.
Fame is the flattery of the maras.
Respect is the lasso of the fetters.
Good fortune is a block to spiritual practice.
Do not view poison as medicine.

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If you don’t cut through the ideas you project,
Whatever you do, you’ll never be happy.
For those who see through their own projections,
Misfortune appears as a friend.
If you aren’t embarrassed by your own mind,
Others’ rebukes are an illusion.
Do not listen to others’ words.
Instead, make your own mind the judge.

Do not build yourself up in this life,
Using dharma to deceive by acting
Counter to dharma as if that were dharma.
Put the worldly out of your mind.
Of the two, fame and bounty in this life
And the dharma that helps in the next,
Do not just do whichever comes up
Or else whatever carries you away.
Definitely practice the dharma for the next.

Nothing is rarer than an entourage with faith and respect.
Nothing is worse than a scoundrel for a leader.
Don’t act like a bigwig, admired by all.
Grasp the humble aspects of lowliness.
You are the lowliest in the world.
Being envious and competitive
Toward others with merit while unashamed
Of your own faults is a mistake.

Without reversing from deep within
Desire for appearances—sensory objects—
Do not act to deceive laypeople
By faking a wish to be venerable.
Unless you have conviction in your mind
About the sutras and tantras the Buddha taught,
Don’t be so proud and delude yourself
By clinging to jargon and words.

Ingrained from beginningless time,
Misconceptions are not discarded at once,
So don’t expect excellence too soon—
Develop your mind gradually.
Doing studies competitively,
Being a teacher for fame, and speaking
With the pride of wanting to be erudite:
Think—can these three become dharma?

There is no benefit in teaching others
What hasn’t arisen in your own mind.
You should be ashamed of yourself,
So do not sell the true dharma for gain.
Not feeling truly weary with the world,
You keep the eight concerns in your heart
And feign renunciation to others—
Do not grumble so much.

Your mouth has great faith; inside, you have little.
While thinking you’ll do something, you’ve grown old.
You are quick to start but slow to mature.
Meditate on being disgusted with yourself.
Just as the nature of fire is hot,
The nature of beings is to have faults.
Instead of thinking of others’ flaws,
Consider your own and give them up.

The behavior of a mahayana guru
May not look good on the outside,
But you don’t know their innermost thoughts,
So do not ponder the guru’s faults.
Any thought in your mind is clear
And unobscured to the buddhas’ wisdom.
Don’t let bad thoughts that would offend
The yidam deity stir in your mind.

Like sighted people among the blind,
The buddhas and the bodhisattvas
Always see with unobscured vision.
Do not behave badly in private.
Ordinary beings are hard to please. From familiarity, instead of your qualities, They’ll see your faults and criticize you. Practice in solitude.

All parents, children, nieces and nephews, Cousins, and relatives in this life Are like travelers arriving and leaving an inn. In your own mind, do not feel related.
When you leave empty-handed and naked,
Though poor, you’ll still leave things behind.
Don’t gather things by doing wrong.
From deep within, commit to begging.

You have no power to stay forever
In the tall houses that you build,
So don’t do pointless construction work.
Keep to mountain retreats.
When the unmarried get married,
Children they do not need are born;
They will have to be shameless beggars.
Don’t listen to bad advice to take a spouse.

Great beings who are free of desire
Have no need for a karmamudra.
When the mind is mixed with desire,
The mudra will lead you to lower realms.
Don't look at inferiors’ bad examples,
The causes of nondharmic behavior.
Instead, see them as deserving compassion,
And follow the mahasiddhas’ footsteps.

Skillfully give up negative friends.
Follow exalted spiritual friends
With learning and venerable qualities
Who have given up the world.
As with a wish-fulfilling jewel,
Blessings come from the respect in your mind.
Have fervent devotion for the deities,
The gurus, and the three jewels.

The guides, the spiritual friends,
Show you the unmistaken path.
Make the instructions they have taught
Into the core of your practice.
By learning well with intelligence
The baskets of the Buddha’s teachings,
Free yourself of unknowing and doubt.
Study while you are young.

If you are not cared for by a great friend,
Just as a shoddy pot leaks from its base,
Your defiled mind is forgetful, so guard it
By contemplating what you have listened to.
With all the powers in your being,
Keep cleanly without any stain
The precious training in discipline—
The cause of gaining a precious human body.

They stir up the mind and harm the body.
They’re condemned by the learned and venerable.
They are the origin of all wrongs—
Give up alcohol and sex.
When you feel overly helpful toward the women among your disciples,
Desire masquerading as compassion can create obstacles for dharma.

To conquer the enemy afflictions, who create suffering for you,
Do not be afraid or discouraged.
Rouse the pride of confidence.
Just as bleeding and burning
Are cures for internal illnesses,
The severe austerities of dharma are means
To cure the sufferings of the lower realms.
Don’t be too delicate and afraid.

If you are unable to endure
Such present sufferings as these,
Your hope to endure the sufferings
Of the three lower realms is deluded.
If you will not gain a precious human body
By behaving in the way you do,
The high view of hoping to achieve
Buddhahood is mistaken.

You’ve gained what’s difficult to get,
The precious human body with leisures and resources.
Don’t let what you’ve got disappear—
Grow the everlasting crop.
Meditate on rejoicing in the virtue
That others do. If you’ve an urge
To do what you should not, restrain
The movements of your body and speech.

The source of supreme and common siddhi,
It dispels your own and others’ obstacles.
Exert yourself without any doubt
In the practice of the yidam deity.
Once the drunken elephant of mind
Has been dragged away from wrong objects,
The gale of the afflictions will blow,
So hold it with the rope of mindfulness.

It’s hard for the low-walled house of words and listening
To withstand the armies of afflictions.
To build the tower of certainty,
Strive hard at contemplation and meditation.
Free yourself with the human boat
From the great river of suffering.
Such a boat is hard to get again.
Now that you’ve got it, don’t be lazy.

What’s built falls down, what’s gathered is left behind.
You will leave your close relatives
And go all alone, but who knows where—
A traveler should not plan too much.
There’s no place you can stay without dying.  
Death is certain and will come soon.  
Nothing can help you when you die.  
Always keep a sense of urgency.

Now you have a choice between  
The lasting pleasure of higher realms  
And the suffering of the lower realms.  
Ponder this earnestly.
Vile actions such as fraud, deceit, cheating, lying, and taking what’s not given produce the sufferings of the lower realms.
Give up bad actions and misdeeds.

The pleasures of this life are fleeting.
If you want lasting happiness, while you are able to accomplish something, strive at virtues like generosity.
Everything is the deceit of illusion.
Beside the three jewels, there is nothing
That, if you trust it, won’t deceive you,
So always go for refuge.

Those in samsara have no happiness.
The three and eight types of suffering,
Like cancer, torment people.
Meditate on the defects of samsara.
Grasping is the cause of suffering.
Discard through the path of selflessness
The origin, karma and afflictions.
Cultivate the qualities of peace and happiness.

From anger, you jettison your own aims
And sadden friends and relatives.
Don’t throw the poison dart, harsh words;
Give up your ill nature—hatred.
You and other beings are the same
In wanting pleasure and not wanting pain.
Extrapolate from your own experience;
Meditate that you and others are equal.

For the kind beings of the three realms,
Who’ve been your parents in past lives,
Abandon all malice and hostility
And cultivate loving-kindness and compassion.
When you cause harm to sentient beings,
The compassionate victors feel
Like parents whose only child is killed.
There’s no way at all that it could please them.

All the sufferings of samsara
Arise from the cause, karma and afflictions.
Those arise from conceiving of a self,
So look at egolessness.
Free of apprehender and apprehended,
Your own mind has never arisen.
It is beyond the sphere of intellect,
So you must be free of all desires.

A beginner’s realization is clear,
But it has no stability.
Don’t toss it on the winds of thought;
Hold it with the rope of mindfulness.
No nature at all can be established,
So it's inherently free of the four extremes.
Within that, no mind can be conceived,
So be free of any thought of an apprehender.

Phenomena are all like dreams and illusions.
There is no true thing at all.
Do not have too much fixation
For things that appear though nonexistent.
Like causes and effects in dreams,
Though not established in the actual nature,
Karma and results of the confused are unfailing—
Give up misdeeds and strive at virtue.

Cultivate regret for your past misdeeds,
And from now on, refrain from them,
Even if it should cost your life.
Always strive at the antidote,
The virtue of refuge and bodhichitta.
Even a trifling virtuous thing
Will become an inexhaustible result.
Precede all dedications of the three times
With the resolve of bodhichitta.

If your mind comes into harmony
With this advice, you will be freed
From all suffering in the lower realms,
And in the short-term, you’ll gain the pleasures
Of the higher realms of gods and humans.
Ultimately you’ll purify the two obscurations
And have the three kayas and four wisdoms.
You will achieve unexcelled enlightenment
That dwells in neither samsara nor nirvana.

This completes the *Seventy-Two Exhortations*, written by Kharak Gomchung from Tsang at Kharak Tsa Monastery.
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