

Illuminating Darkness of the Heart — A Guide to Differentiate what is Dharma and what is not

Homage to the Sublime Avalokitesvara

Alas! In this world, upon the vast earth,
where the five poisons of inner affliction hold such power,
most beings engage in misdeeds,
and after death, all go to the realms of hell.

As a result, the virtuous gods decline,
while the dark faction — the race of demi-gods — multiplies.
As the demi-gods triumph and the gods are defeated,
disease, famine, and conflict arise throughout the world.
Those who wish to understand this in greater detail
should consult the *Sūtra of the Application of Mindfulness*¹.

To pacify the coming danger of weapons
that will arise especially when the Iron Dog Year dawns —
in keeping with the import of the prophecy needed now, in this Dragon Year —
the faithful assemblies of lay and monastic throughout Bhutan
have practiced pure white virtue in general, and in particular
have completed some five billion recitations
of the Heart-Essence Siddhi of Mahāguru, embodiment of all refuge.
Rejoicing in this from the depths of my heart,
I dedicate that virtue for the sake of all sentient beings:
may the fears of the coming degenerate age be pacified.

Even so, to satisfy the desires of certain people
who do not know what to adopt and what to abandon,
the trade in meat is established as a standing custom —
the supposed best of all means to acquire wealth and prosperity.

Since these actions accord with their own karmic lot,
and so appear most beautiful in their own eyes,
with compassion, refrain from disparaging them;
instead, be a companion in praying that they may one day find happiness.



Yet, among a hundred heads, one cherishes one's own the most;
among the ten fingers of the hand, whichever is cut brings pain.
If you truly wish to do yourself a great kindness,
uphold cause and effect, properly choosing what to adopt and abandon.

Among all meat, meat killed for oneself is the gravest misdeed;
that is to say, meat slaughtered purposely, aimed at a specific person.
In the past, whatever meat one obtained was not necessarily killed for oneself,
but now, without doubt, it is.

Even in a gathering of householders, let alone Dharma practitioners,
it is most excellent to wholeheartedly refrain from meat.
Otherwise, no different from the slaughterers,
the eaters too sink into the mire of misdeeds.

When misdeeds, like a river's unbroken current,
is passed down to the generations yet to come —
ask yourself: can you make [of yourself and your heirs]
a stone sunk in saṃsāra's depths, never to be freed?

If craving for the taste of flesh becomes ingrained,
one becomes no different from ferocious beasts of prey.
Ultimately, even eating human flesh will bring no sense of shame —
reflect on the story of the rākṣasa Spotted-Foot.¹ⁱⁱ

To those who have no faith in virtue and non-virtue, I do not presume to speak;
these words are offered, rather, as a reminder to those who do.
Yet do not sit in judgment of those sublime beings
who can transmute the five poisons into the five wisdoms.

Merely eating meat does not make one bad;
though alike in appearance, in reality there are many distinctions.
The nomad's yak, the farmer's pig, and such—
meat not killed for one's own sake, but obtained through others—

Among these factorsⁱⁱⁱ — basis, intention, application, and completion —
should any be absent, the fault is less.
Drawing the consciousness upward and blessing the meat:
this is how those of supreme realization eat.

¹ Spotted-Foot — Tib. *rkang-bkra*, rendering Skt. Kalmāṣapāda (also Saudāsa). The story of a king who, having tasted human flesh, became a man-eating rākṣasa.



With pure aspiration, caring for those who have passed beyond —
this is how compassionate beings eat.
Making offerings above, giving alms below, treating it as festive food —
this is how ordinary worldly patrons eat.

Without the slightest doubt, relying merely on local custom —
this is how worldly guests of no fixed direction eat.
For the weary, spent by toil, taking it as nourishing medicine —
this is how servants and laborers eat.

With no livelihood beyond flesh and blood —
this is how sinful butchers eat.
Seeking wealth, establishing the standing custom of killing —
this is how fools who know neither benefit nor harm eat.

Even non-virtue, when it benefits others, becomes virtue.
When benefit and harm combine, virtue and non-virtue likewise mingle.
From doing harm, virtue can never arise.
Judging whether virtue or non-virtue is greater, embrace or relinquish accordingly.

Gain derived from meat is not counted as beneficial.
Arising from the seed of the poison of afflictions,
that resultant wealth, too, is poison.
Once consumed, it severs the very life-vein of liberation.

The individual and collective karma of sentient beings differ:
the fruit of individual karma ripens on oneself alone,
but the collective negative karma of beings is so powerful
that the terrors of disease, famine, and war destroy the nation.

When boundless merit gathers in harmony,
the sun of peace and happiness dawns over the nation.
But when the vast lake of non-virtuous deeds bursts forth,
even those endowed with knowledge and wealth can scarcely turn it back.

The medicinal valley of Bhutan is like a white vulture,
soaring through the sky on twin wings — the spiritual and the secular.
Now the spiritual wing is on the verge of breaking —
may the white vulture never plunge into the abyss.



The Dharma King's compassion is like the sun,
casting impartial rays upon all.
But when the clouds of beings' negative karma veil it,
the sun of compassion, though luminous, does not shine forth.

The king, ministers, subjects, and retinue are like the sun, moon, and stars —
though the winds of non-dharma cannot scatter them,
their beauty fades when stained by the dust of misdeeds
of beings whose minds are filled with wrong views.

Misconduct stirred by improper wrong views
knows no self or other, no race or place.
Wherever it abides, whoever they may be,
it causes their fame and virtue alike to wane.

However learned and brave one may become,
when one's own mind falls under the power of the afflictions —
like a slave whose neck is already yoked to another —
one does not tread the path of the peace one ultimately longs for.
Through the karmic force of killing others in past lives,
though at present one has done no wrong at all,
one becomes, to all beings, a foe more harmful than any enemy;
and though one's own life is constantly taken, no protector appears.

Karma is never lost, even over a hundred eons.
Whatever suffering the one now slain endures
will surely fall upon the one who killed them.
Yet for those who hold wrong views, what means of help can there be?

Among humans, butchers are called the lowest class,
and yet their number is but few.
A hundred thousand non-virtuous butchers are no match
for the one who institutes the standing custom of harming beings.

To take another's life to sustain oneself —
even taking one's own life a hundred times would not equal it.
Harming living beings violates the precepts of refuge
and impairs the samaya of the holy Dharma.



Since all beings of the six realms are our kind parents,
no non-virtue is greater than killing one's own parents.
Ultimately, all beings are forms of male and female deities;
thus, taking their lives impairs the samaya of empowerment.^{iv}

Whoever has impaired their samaya
has nowhere to go but the hell realms.
In general, there is no happiness in the realms of samsara;
and in particular, who could endure the suffering of hell?

When meat is sold beyond one's own land,
it would be good if it were praised as "meat from a Dharma land."
If people disparage it — "the people of a Dharma land commit such misdeeds" —
would it not bring shame upon Bhutan?

Though oneself may hold wrong views,
not all others come to hold them.
Though oneself cannot discern good from bad,
where in the realm are there no wise and learned people?

Through them, too, the nature of good and bad —
what benefits whom, and what harms whom,
drawn from the path of Dharma and the world,
a good message shall surely arise.

Once, in the glorious kingdom of Bhutan,
though we boasted of possessing Dharma and tradition,
shall we now boast of having the meat trade
as the root of all our wealth?

Though all constantly proclaim upon their lips
"a land of Dharma, replete with happiness and prosperity²,"
with no other means to suffice,
in the end we must fall back on killing animals —

When speech and conduct match no more than sky and earth —
it is as if one seeks one's aim toward the east
yet takes every step toward the west:
how could that aim ever be accomplished?

² "happiness and prosperity" — Echoes Bhutan's guiding philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH), which weighs the nation's well-being above mere economic growth.



The young people who delight in the means of killing,
 now like sons and daughters of the gods —
 is there any certainty that by tomorrow
 they will not become fuel for the fires of hell?

Through deeds of skillful means,
 the malicious are struck down to protect the Dharma;
 such acts, though seemingly sinful, are in truth virtuous.
 But deliberate killing is not of that kind.

Like King Maitrībala in former times,
 today the sovereign, father and son,
 guard their subjects in peace through the power of love —
 yet they have also taken up extremely harsh means.

In this land, when Jigme Namgyal³, lord of men,
 asked from the prescient seer Jangchub Tsöndrö
 for a divination of Bhutan's well-being,
 the master said: "Forbid hunting in the mountains and fishing in the rivers."

Even fierce predators like tigers that take the lives of others
 are deemed worthy of protection,
 yet even the animals that benefit us
 are generally considered fit to be killed.

Kindness is shown to humans who speak and understand,
 yet among animals, some are cherished, others harmed.
 This is merely a partial mind — of kin and stranger, attachment and aversion —
 not the bodhicitta⁴ of equanimity, impartial toward all.

When one wishes well-being for beings across the six realms,
 drawing no distinction between human and animal,
 the outlook of the Four Immeasurables^v — loving-kindness and the rest — arises.
 But in a mind inclined toward harm, loving-kindness has no way to arise.

Where loving-kindness is absent, the very root of peace and happiness is severed.
 When Shakyamuni attained Buddhahood at Bodh Gaya,
 the weapons of Māra turned into a rain of flowers —
 this, too, is the fruit of meditating on loving-kindness.

³ Jigme Namgyal (1825–1881), the Trongsa Penlop and de facto ruler of Bhutan. He was the father of Ugyen Wangchuck, who in 1907 was enthroned as the first Druk Gyalpo (King of Bhutan), founding the Wangchuck dynasty.

⁴ Altruistic intent to attain full enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings



In the Land of Snows⁵, the Dharma-King Songtsen Gampo⁶,
and in this land, the refuge-protector Ngawang Namgyal,
established the laws of the ten virtues^{vi} of the divine Dharma,
and the sixteen pure laws of human conduct.^{vii}

Where beings are harmed, there can be no true laws of human conduct;
without them, how could the divine Dharma arise?
Since Dharma and non-Dharma cannot abide together,
how could Bhutan become a land of Dharma?^{viii}

Empowered as a son by Indra⁷, lord of the gods,
appointed king of humankind to spread happiness and well-being —
when unrighteous conduct⁸ disturbs the gods,
even the royal lineage will be destroyed.

As the glorious Year of the Dragon dawns,
as the enlightened activity of the Sovereign King flourishes,
as rites for the peace and well-being of the world are performed —
at this juncture, though auspicious interdependence and aspiration-prayers must be attended
to with care,

yet methods that subject innocent beings to suffering,
methods that debase the dignity of a Dharma land,
methods that incite people to non-Dharma deeds —
is it right to engage in every manner of wrongdoing?

When such improper conduct persists for long,
the Dharma protectors and guardians turn their gaze toward Mount Meru,
the gods who guard the side of virtue flee afar,
and many kinds of ill omens bring the kingdom to ruin.^{ix}

⁵ Tibet

⁶ Kyabgön Ngawang Namgyal (1594–1651), the Zhabdrung Rinpoche, a Drukpa Kagyu master who unified Bhutan and is revered as the founding father of the nation. He established its dual system of spiritual and temporal rule, built its network of dzongs (fortresses), and codified its laws.

⁷ Indra (Tib. *lha'i dbang po*, lit. "lord of the gods"; Skt. *Śakra / Indra*): the ruler of the Heaven of the Thirty-Three (Trāyastriṃśa). The verse draws on the Indian-Buddhist idea of divine kingship (*devarāja*): Indra adopts the human king as his son and consecrates him (Tib. *dbang bskur*, Skt. *abhiṣeka*), commissioning him to foster the well-being of the world.

⁸ non-Dharmic



When famine born of poverty and destitution arises,
no meat from slaughtered animals can ever bring satiety.
When one is helplessly led away by Yama, Lord of Death,
the wealth gained through taking life can hardly ransom one's life.

The fear that arises from misdeeds —
the fear of illness, famine, and weapons is no match for it.
Illness, famine, and weapons destroy only this present life,
while misdeeds destroy the lasting happiness of all lifetimes.

Do not scorn even the smallest form of life,
for the many Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,
and all the executioners of the hells take its side—
so it is taught in *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*.^x

Those who commit sinful deeds,
at the hands of the fierce hell-wardens born of their own karma,
for many lifetimes, through hundreds of thousands of years,
endure the torment of being boiled, burned, cut, and hacked.

Though the awakened mind⁹ has no good or bad,
under the sway of the five poisons one harms living beings,
and one's conduct sinks to that of the base, the ignoble, the outcaste butcher —
such is the fruit one has bought for oneself.

If we have it, that suffices to build wealth;
without it, the means to build wealth is lost.
Is the trade in animal flesh alone
the one unerring means of building wealth?

Even if wealth can be gained from meat,
should the greatness of the Dharma nation decline,
and illness, famine, weapons, and the like lay the country to waste —
should any of it come to pass, could there truly be no regret?

Some advocate violence as Dharma;
others acknowledge neither virtue nor non-virtue;
some uphold the path of non-violence and peace.
What is the view of this land of Bhutan?

⁹ Awakened mind: Tib. byang chub sems, Skt. bodhicitta. Here it refers to the mind's own awakened nature, which in itself is neither good nor bad.



Throughout our land, in dzongs and monasteries,
in accord with the treasure teachings of the siddha Karma Lingpa,
through the sacred dances that enact the bardo of becoming —
have you not seen beings guided toward virtue?

For those who govern glorious Bhutan,
though realizing the meaning of the perfect Dharma is not required,
they must not fall under the sway of wrong views,
and must surely be persons who uphold cause and effect.

However learned one may be in many fields,
if one thinks only of this life and not the welfare of lives to come,
such a person — borne through rebirth by karma, yet with no faith in cause and effect —
should never be trusted or relied upon.

Although the sublime Dharma is the antidote to non-virtue,
just as butter cannot soften a leather butter-bag,
so the Dharma brings no benefit to one who holds wrong views —
among the ten non-virtues, wrong view is the gravest.

If you still deem this merely an untrue explanation,
dismissing the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions
and all the authentic scholars and adepts of India and Tibet —
who then remains as witness for one who holds wrong views?

Wherever the improper, unwholesome consumption of meat and blood
spreads among the people,
regard it as a great sacrificial offering — the very cause
of gradually shortened lives and many illnesses.

Though one with bodhicitta may be lowly in this life,
in reality they become an object worthy of the homage of gods and humans;
though one with a non-virtuous mind may be mighty and powerful,
in reality they are but firewood for the flames of hell.

Whatever misdeed one engages in
leads toward suffering for oneself and all others;
whatever virtuous action one engages in
is the supreme benefit and happiness for oneself and all others.



In former times, under the rule of a Chakravartin¹⁰,
 the subjects enjoyed happiness and prosperity equal to the gods';
 not even the name of the peril of disease, weapons, and famine existed —
 it is taught that all this arose through the power of virtue.

By refraining from non-virtues such as killing and taking what is not given,
 and establishing laws grounded in respect and loving-kindness for all,
 a land grows auspicious and abundant —
 reflect on this in the tale of the Four Harmonious Brothers.

When dying amid boundless fear and terror,
 the very breath turns to poison itself;
 mingling with space and wind, it spreads across the earth,
 bringing inauspiciousness to the land and all who dwell therein.

The Buddhas of the three times arose for the benefit of sentient beings;
 the whole of the sacred Dharma arose for the benefit of sentient beings;
 the precious Sangha arose for the benefit of sentient beings;
 without sentient beings, even the Three Jewels would not exist.

At the beginning, taking refuge;
 in the middle, accomplishing whatever virtuous deeds one can;
 at the end, dedication and prayers of aspiration and the like —
 all arise in dependence upon the benefit of sentient beings.

Thus, to attain Buddhahood, sentient beings are essential;
 to cultivate bodhicitta, sentient beings are essential;
 to accumulate the vast accumulation of merit, sentient beings are essential;
 for those who cut life short, their fortune in all these is cut off.

But if you desire none of this,
 and are content with mere food and drink in this life,
 and would gladly dwell forever hereafter
 in hell's lovely mansions — then do as you please.

¹⁰ Chakravartin — the Universal King (Tib. *'khor los bsgyur ba'i rgyal po*, "wheel-turning king"; Skt. *cakravartin*): the ideal universal monarch of Buddhist cosmology, who governs the world through Dharma rather than force. His reign is the archetype of an age when the power of virtue brings peace and plenty. Cf. the *Kṣitigarbha Sūtra* and the *Gyalsid Zhide Nyima*.



When one's own mind is not aligned with the Dharma,
it becomes unclear where the so-called Māra^{xi} resides;
taking the forms of parents, ācāryas¹¹, and others,
they diligently lead beings onto a wrong path.

When inwardly one's own mind is freed from afflictive emotions,
outwardly, one is freed from all the fears of saṃsāra.
This is what is called the genuine, sacred Dharma;
place no trust in Dharma of empty words and outward appearances.

Under the pretext of one's title of tulku¹² and the like,
deceiving patrons across countries for gain and honor,
one severs the very life-vein of the Buddha's teaching —
such a one is, in truth, worse even than those who slaughter animals.

Though Dharma is the means to attain Buddhahood,
failing to act in accordance with Dharma is itself the cause of the lower realms;
if, in the guise of a Dharma practitioner, one engages in non-Dharma,
who then will uphold the pure teaching of the Three Trainings? ^{xii}

Whoever tells the great lie¹³ of falsely claiming superhuman attainments
is called a thief of beings, even of the gods.
If this is true — as the Victorious One has taught again and again —
how can those who practice the Dharma bear it in their hearts?

When one lacks the inner qualities of awareness and liberation,
better to swallow an iron ball blazing like fire
than to accept the offerings given in faith by the land;
thus it is taught in the Vinaya of the sacred Dharma.¹⁴

Outer demons were subdued by Padmasambhava and others,
yet the inner demons of conceptual thought know no end.
When they settle within the hearts of Dharma practitioners,
the Buddha's teaching will, before long, fall into ruin.

¹¹ ācārya (Tib. *slob dpon*, phon. Lopen; Skt. *ācārya*) — a spiritual teacher or preceptor, qualified to instruct disciples and confer vows and precepts; here, one of the trusted figures Māra is said to impersonate.

¹² tulku — a recognized reincarnate teacher, held to be the intentional rebirth of a realized master.

¹³ falsely claiming to have attained superhuman dharma (*uttari-manuṣya-dharma*), i.e., lying about having gained spiritual powers or realizations; known in the Vinaya as the "great lie" (*mahā-mṛṣāvāda*).

¹⁴ *Dharmapada*, Niraya-vagga (Hell Chapter), verse 308



If the wisdom of union is not realized within,
 then outward offerings, however excellent, accrue as karmic debt;
 when that debt must be repaid with one's own body,
 one will surely meet the same fate as the Tsang Lama Black Horse.

If clinging to the eight worldly concerns is not uprooted from within,
 then among the four demons, the celestial Māra of delight ¹⁵
 draws near to lamas and tulkus endowed with fortune;
 therefore, strive in the means to overcome it.

Freed from the bonds of karma and afflictive emotions,
 unwavering in the naturally-abiding expanse of Dharmakāya —
 such a one is praised by all as truly a Buddha;
 why hope at all for the mere title of tulku?

In former times, the recognition and enthronement of a tulku
 was like raising the main great pillar of a noble mansion;
 for upholding, safeguarding, and spreading the Buddha's teaching,
 it was regarded as a responsibility greater than all others.

Though some are truly the reincarnations of realised beings,
 should the virtuous imprints of former lives wane,
 and the qualities of realisation fail to dawn from within,
 even they may be deceived by the Māra of improper, negative thoughts.

So long as the realization of one's own aim is not yet actualized,
 it is best to shun mere semblances of benefiting beings like poison;
 when the darkness of expectation, grasping, and striving clears,
 effortless enlightened activity radiates a thousand rays of light.

Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and ordinary spiritual teachers,
 samaya-violators, gyalpo spirits¹⁶, demonic emanations, and the like —
 all, the scriptures say, may appear in any guise;
 so place no excessive trust in the mere title of tulku.

¹⁵ Devaputra-māra

¹⁶ gyalpo spirits (Tib. *rgyal po / rgyal 'gong*) — classes of powerful worldly spirits in Tibetan tradition, often said to arise from practitioners who died under the sway of broken samaya, pride, or anger; they cause obstacles and lead beings astray (among the "eight classes" of spirits, *lha srin sde brgyad*).



Those given to the killing of animals,
 those forever hoping to gain the title of tulku,
 and those who place their trust and faith in such people —
 none of them benefit others; they are the cause of their own ruin.

Without wearing yourself out to win others' favor,
 if you gain mastery over your own thoughts,
 then all beings, without exception, come under your sway,
 and the time has come to bring them benefit.

Arising from the dharmadhātu¹⁷ as rūpakāya¹⁸, taming beings as needed;
 coming, through the power of aspiration, for the welfare of beings;
 taking birth driven by karma alone —
 alike in name, yet in essence not the same.

Buddhas and sentient beings differ only in awareness and ignorance;
 yet no one else can pin down that difference precisely in words.
 Since one's own mind is never hidden from oneself,
 it is best to know oneself, by oneself.

Lacking clairvoyant insight,
 one is in no position to take the measure of another person¹⁹,
 to do so risks becoming a condition for amassing negative karma —
 so refrain from disparagement and cultivate pure perception.

However, when you enter into a Dharma relationship —
 just as unexamined food may turn out to be poison,
 an unexamined teacher brings more harm than good;
 so it is vital to examine first, and only then rely.

Having realized the wisdom of union from within,
 and inwardly freed from clinging to the eight worldly concerns²⁰ —
 to such great realised beings this is not fit to be addressed;
 it is spoken only for the benefit of Dharma practitioners like myself.

¹⁷ dharmadhātu (Tib. *chos dbyings*)— the all-pervading expanse of reality, the formless ultimate dimension (closely identified with the dharmakāya, the truth-body).

¹⁸ rūpakāya (Tib. *gzugs sku*) — the "form body," the embodied aspect of a buddha.

¹⁹ In the original the term is pudgala (*gang zag*), lit. "one who repeatedly takes rebirth"; rendered here as "person."

²⁰ The eight worldly concerns (Tib. *chos brgyad*)— four pairs: gain and loss, pleasure and pain, fame and disgrace, praise and blame.



Furthermore, listen well, there's more to understand:
when Bhutanese householders don the white kabney²¹
who refrain from killing, stealing, and the rest,
they are just like vow-holding laymen and laywomen.

Then comes the rank known as *nyi-kyelma*²²
when upon the body they don the red kabney,
they are just like the ordained and the novices,
clearly rising above worldly householders.

Then comes the rank of the Lhengye²³, ministers,
when upon the body they wear the orange kabney,
they are just like the arhats and elders
who uphold the teaching through hearing, contemplation, and meditation.

If inwardly one engages in sinful deeds,-
one is like a golden vase filled with filth;
like fishermen, outcasts, butchers, and the like,
one falls even beneath ordinary worldly beings.

They are not counted among lamas, officials, or eminent persons,
nor deemed worthy of reverence or praise;
yet if they practice the sacred Dharma properly, as it is taught,
even they possess the fortune to attain Buddhahood.

If one must, by all means, form a small committee for sinful deeds,
its leader does not deserve the title of minister;
rather, clad in black, an ox's head for a crown,
better to name him a guide who knows the road to hell.
Human rights are on their lips,
even as they strive to rob innocent animals of life;
ever boasting loudly of the good they do for others —
yet, though labeled Dharma, in essence it is deceit and hypocrisy.

²¹ Kabney (Tib. *gzan dkar*, "white shawl"; Dzongkha *bka' bney*) — the ceremonial scarf draped over one shoulder by Bhutanese men above the traditional *gho*. The plain kabney is worn by ordinary lay citizens.

²² Nyikyelma (or Nyi-Kyelma) is a high-ranking honor in Bhutan, often represented by the awarding of red kabney by the King, which signifies the recipient as a Dasho.

²³ Lhengye (Tib. *lhan rgyas*, "assembled in full, plenary") — in Bhutan, short for the *Lhengye Zhungtshog*, the Council of Ministers (Cabinet).



No fear is greater than that of losing one's life,
yet this very terror they inflict directly on animals;
still they profess to lead others to happiness —
though embraced as Dharma, its true purpose is lost.

Through countless aeons, the Lord of Sages
offered his own life to save the lives of others;
moved by great compassion, he took this realm as his disciples to be tamed —
do you hold any gratitude and reverence for him?

Though they wish for neither short life, sickness, nor suffering,
their deluded minds still delight in creating the very causes of them;
meditate on all such beings as objects of compassion —
for beyond compassion there is no higher Dharma.

The root of all Dharma is compassion;
the essence of all Dharma is compassion;
the fruit of all Dharma is compassion;
when compassion declines, all Dharma collapses.

Even the eighty-four thousand collections of Dharma
were taught by the Victorious One as a means to realize great compassion;
for this very reason, all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
arise in dependence upon great compassion alone.

Though one does not see one's wrongful deeds as faults,
and may grow angry at these honestly spoken words —
the view that holds cause and effect in mind
is indispensable for reaching the isle of liberation.

Though ultimately one cannot reverse the force of karma,
if one does not strive to protect those now engaged in immoral deeds
from the abyss of the lower realms,
then one abandons sentient beings and contradicts bodhicitta.

Although these words may be harsh to the ears of some —
just as sunlight and darkness stand opposed —
they are spoken not out of malice, but express the true nature of things,
for Dharma and non-Dharma are utterly incompatible.



Though Padmasambhava felt tender compassion for the Snow Land, his disciples to be tamed,
because its beings were unwilling to heed words spoken for their benefit,
and seeing that their negative karma could not be remedied,
it was with this true intention that he departed for Ngayab Ling²⁴.

Though my words contain no eloquence,
they are without fault, being drawn from the teachings of the Victorious One.
May the hum of this guileless, altruistic, humble-minded bee
sink into the ears of all, soothing them like spring.

Thus I, Jangsem Yeshey Nyima Oephoe²⁵ — the light of wisdom —
dedicate this light, which shines, even if only faintly, in the hearts of beings
and dispels all the darkness of perverse wrong views,
as a cause for all beings to realize great compassion.

There are one hundred and fifteen verses.

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²⁴ Ngayab Ling (Tib. *rnga yab gling*; Skt. *Cāmaradvīpa*) — a south-western subcontinent, land of the *rākṣasas* (flesh-eating demons), where Padmasambhava dwells atop the Copper-Coloured Mountain (*Zangdok Palri*); revered as his pure land.

²⁵ Yeshe Nyima Yoed (Tib. ཡེ་ཤེས་ནི་མཛོ་འོད་, "Light of the Wisdom-Sun") — the bodhisattva name of the author, His Holiness the 70th Je Khenpo of Bhutan (chief abbot and spiritual head of Bhutan's Central Monastic Body). The verse plays on the name's meaning, likening his words to a ray of the wisdom-sun shining in beings' hearts.



ⁱ **The Sūtra of the Application of Mindfulness**

The Sūtra of the Application of Mindfulness comprises thirty-six thousand ślokas, translated by the Indian paṇḍitas Ābhayākara Gupta, Śākyarakṣita, Subhūticandra, and others, in collaboration with the Tibetan translator, the monk Tsültrim Gyaltzen.

According to *The Sūtra of the Application of Mindfulness*, the balance of power between the gods and the demi-gods (asuras) is determined by the ethical conduct of human beings in the human world. When people live in accordance with the Dharma, the Four Celestial Guardian Kings rejoice and report this harmony to the gods of the Thirty-Three God Realm; the gods' strength increases, the forces of Māra decline, and divine protection is actively maintained over the human realm. Under such conditions, kings rule with the support of the gods, social order is preserved, and royal lineages remain stable.

When humans abandon the Dharma, however, this causal relationship is reversed. The Four Celestial Guardian Kings fall into distress and inform the gods of the Thirty-Three God Realm that the people of the human world no longer follow righteous conduct. As a result, the power of the gods diminishes, while the forces of Māra and the asuras grow stronger. This strengthening of the demi-gods is not autonomous; it arises directly from human non-virtue—particularly the neglect of moral discipline, of reverence for parents and Dharma practitioners, and of restraint from harmful actions. As the gods weaken, their capacity to protect the human realm declines, and hostile forces gain ascendancy.

This shift is understood to have implications for kingship and the continuity of royal lineages. When divine support recedes and disruptive forces gain strength, the traditions describe the emergence of conflict, natural adversity, and social strain. In such circumstances, rulers find the task of maintaining harmony and stability increasingly difficult, and the well-being of the realm becomes more fragile. The teachings therefore present the flourishing of rulers and dynasties as closely bound to the ethical conduct and collective virtue of the people.

Illuminating the Meaning of the Sūtra of the Application of Mindfulness, a commentary by the Karmapa Rangjung Dorjé, further clarifies that non-Dharma conduct activates destructive forces—such as poor harvests, environmental disturbances, and collective fear. Likewise, *The White Lotus*, Künkhen Longchenpa's commentary on *The Precious Treasury That Fulfills Wishes*, explains that conflict between the gods and the asuras arises through three principal causes: the accumulation of non-virtuous human karma; the asuras' coveting of the gods' prosperity; and the jealousy that arises when the gods look upon the beautiful female asuras. Taken together, these sources establish a consistent doctrinal position: human moral decline directly empowers hostile forces, weakens divine guardianship, and undermines the stability of kingship in the human realm.



ii The story of the rākṣasa Spotted-Foot

According to the sūtra *The Wise and the Foolish*, the Buddha explained that Aṅgulimāla's violence in his final life was not unprecedented, but rather the continuation of destructive actions committed across former lifetimes. Again and again, the Buddha had subdued him and guided him toward virtue, demonstrating the power of compassion across cycles of rebirth.

In a distant aeon, there lived King Baladāra of Vārāṇasī. While hunting in a forest, he became separated from his retinue and encountered a lioness overcome by desire. Fearing for his life, the king united with her. From this encounter a son was born, human in form but marked by striped feet. The king later recognized the child as his own and raised him, naming him Stripe Foot (Kalmāṣapāda).

Stripe Foot grew into a powerful ruler and in time inherited the throne. He took two queens, but rivalry soon arose between them. One day the brahmin queen was delayed in paying homage at a shrine and, as a result, lost the king's favor. Consumed by anger, she destroyed the shrine. The offended deity, unable to enter the palace directly, disguised itself as a revered sage and deceived the king into altering his ritual offerings. When the true sage later arrived and saw the disrespect, he cursed the king to become an eater of human flesh for twelve years.

The curse ripened when the king unknowingly consumed the flesh of a child and developed a craving for it. He ordered his cook to abduct and kill children in secret. When these crimes were discovered, the ministers resolved to execute him. Facing death, Stripe Foot made a powerful aspiration grounded in his past merit; through this resolve, he transformed into a flying rakṣasa known as Rakṣasa Kangta. Escaping execution, he vowed revenge, became a devourer of humans, gathered a retinue of demons, and imprisoned kings in preparation for a great feast.

To complete the number of his victims, Rakṣasa Kangta seized King Sutasoma. Sutasoma asked for a seven-day reprieve in order to fulfill a vow of almsgiving, and, moved by the king's truthfulness, the rakṣasa released him. After completing his vow and renouncing all attachment to worldly power, Sutasoma returned willingly. He then taught the rakṣasa the Dharma, explaining the impermanence of existence, the dangers of desire, and the grave karmic consequences of killing.

Deeply transformed, Rakṣasa Kangta abandoned violence, released the imprisoned kings, and was restored to his throne, the sage's curse having run its course. The Buddha concluded by revealing that King Sutasoma had been the Buddha himself in a former life, and that Kalmāṣapāda—later Rakṣasa Kangta—had been Aṅgulimāla in a subsequent rebirth. Those whom he repeatedly killed were beings bound to him through past karmic connections. In each lifetime, the Buddha subdued him and led him toward virtue, demonstrating the enduring power of compassion, truthfulness, and moral restraint across the cycle of rebirth.



iii **The Four Factors of Killing**

The four factors are explained in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* by Patrul Rinpoche as follows:

1. **The basis / object** — another living being (a sentient being other than oneself).
2. **The intention** — recognizing that being for what it is, and forming the wish to kill it (driven by an affliction — hatred, desire, or delusion).
3. **The act** — actually doing the killing, by any means (weapon, poison, etc.).
4. **The completion** — the being dies as a result of the act, before the killer's own death.

The karmic weight of killing is not limited to taking a life directly. It also includes causing another person to kill, as well as knowingly praising, approving of, or rejoicing in the act. Even when death occurs through contributing factors rather than by one's own hand alone, it is still regarded as killing.

iv **Taking life violates the samaya**

The reason that taking life violates the samaya of empowerment is explained in *The Words of My Perfect Teacher* as follows:

If one indulges in slaughtered meat and blood—making offerings of flesh and blood, performing protector practices, and similar rites—the wisdom deities and Dharma protectors would not even approach such offerings, let alone accept them. Since these deities are bodhisattvas, they naturally turn away from actions rooted in violence. As the incomparable Dagpo Rinpoché stated, all wisdom deities would flee in revulsion.

This point is summed up in the following verse:

“To summon wisdom deities and offer them freshly killed meat and blood is like killing one’s child before inviting one’s mother.”

v **The Four Immeasurables**

The Four Immeasurables are four boundless attitudes cultivated on the Buddhist path, especially within the Mahāyāna tradition. They are called "immeasurable" because they are extended impartially toward all sentient beings, without limit or distinction.

1. **Loving-kindness (maitrī)** — the heartfelt wish that all sentient beings possess happiness and the causes of happiness.



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2. **Compassion (karuṇā)** — the sincere wish that all sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.
 3. **Sympathetic joy (muditā)** — delight in the happiness and virtue of others, free from envy or competitiveness.
 4. **Equanimity (upekṣā)** — an even-minded attitude that transcends attachment and aversion, regarding all beings with impartial concern.

^{vi} **The Ten Divine Laws**

The Ten Divine Laws, also known as the Ten Virtuous Actions, are called "divine" because they lead to higher rebirths, to harmony in society, and to progress on the path to liberation. They are grouped according to body, speech, and mind:

Actions of the Body

1. Abstaining from killing
2. Abstaining from stealing
3. Abstaining from sexual misconduct

Actions of Speech

4. Abstaining from lying
5. Abstaining from divisive speech
6. Abstaining from harsh or abusive speech
7. Abstaining from idle or meaningless talk

Actions of the Mind

8. Abstaining from covetousness
9. Abstaining from ill will
10. Upholding right view

^{vii} **The Sixteen Pure Human Laws**

The Sixteen Pure Human Laws are ethical principles drawn from the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. In simple terms, they are as follows:

1. Have faith in and respect for the Three Jewels (the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Sangha).
2. Study and practice authentic spiritual teachings.
3. Respect one's parents and repay their kindness.
4. Honor and value those who possess good qualities.



5. Show respect and humility toward elders and those of higher standing.
6. Be honest, modest, and loyal toward friends and relatives.
7. Be helpful and kind toward neighbors and members of the community.
8. Cultivate humility, gentleness, and self-control.
9. Act nobly and with regard for the future.
10. Be moderate and content with food and wealth.
11. Do not forget or abandon those who have shown kindness in the past.
12. Repay debts on time, and avoid deceit and dishonesty.
13. Treat everyone impartially, without jealousy or bias.
14. Refrain from harmful speech and maintain self-restraint.
15. Train in speaking gently, and avoid excessive talk.
16. Cultivate a vast and generous mind in keeping with the Great Vehicle (Mahāyāna).

viii **Bhutan as a Dharma Nation**

This passage gives a concise account of Bhutan's historical and spiritual legacy, establishing it as a sacred Dharma nation. It emphasizes that a land is considered great not because of material wealth or political power, but because the Buddha's teachings are deeply present there, preserved, and actively practiced. Lands in which the Dharma thrives are therefore praised as central and accessible fields for engaging with the Dharma.

The text explains that Guru Padmasambhava, together with the ḍākinīs Yeshe Tsogyal and Tashi Khuedren, was the first to open the way for the Dharma in this land, sanctifying countless sacred sites and subduing harmful forces.

Following him, many great enlightened masters—such as Gelongma Palmo, Phadampa Sangye, Machig Labdrön, Penchen Ngag gi Rinchen, Nyoton Dechog (Trulzig Chöje), Phajo Drukgom Zhigpo, Gyalwa Lorepa, Gyawang Je Kunga Peljor, Kunkhyen Longchen Rabjam, Tertön Sherab Membar, Dorji Lingpa, Ratna Lingpa, Rigzin Nyingpo, Thangtong Gyalpo, Drukpa Kunley, Karmapa Chödrak Gyatso, the 23rd Sakya Trizin Ngakchang Kunga Rinchen, and Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal—established monasteries, lineages, and enduring spiritual institutions across the country.

Bhutan also became the birthplace of many sublime beings, including Pema Lingpa, along with his spiritual descendants, incarnations, and lineage holders, as well as the successive Je Khenpos of Bhutan, who have faithfully upheld and transmitted this Dharma legacy through the centuries.



Through their enlightened activity—founding monasteries, transmitting teachings, disciplining harmful forces, and uniting spiritual and temporal leadership—the country came to be known as Druk Yul, the Land of the Dharma.

The passage concludes that, through the compassion and timely activity of the Buddhas and bodhisattvas, this land was continually blessed and protected, allowing the Dharma and society to flourish together in harmony.

^{ix} **When Harmful Signs Arise**

This passage explains that when many harmful signs arise, a country may fall into ruin. In *The Noble Golden Light Sūtra*, the Buddha teaches that if a land is abandoned by its guardian deities, great disorder will follow. When the gods and protectors depart, the country will suffer civil conflict, quarrels among rulers and people, fear, disease, natural disasters, strange signs in the sky, famine, and invasion by foreign armies. As a result, suffering increases, harmful emotions grow stronger, and the land declines.

The text further explains that serious non-virtuous actions—such as establishing slaughterhouses and killing living beings—weaken the power and dignity of the land's protective deities, while destructive forces grow stronger. Another sūtra teaches that when people no longer honor the Three Jewels and instead support actions opposed to the Dharma, the spiritual guardians lose their strength and can no longer protect the country.

The Buddha concludes that the strength and protection of a land depend on three causes: upholding the Buddha's teachings, governing the country in harmony with the Dharma, and increasing merit through virtuous actions. When these are maintained, the land remains stable and protected; when they decline, great harm and misfortune arise.

^x **Refraining from Harm (Bodhicaryāvatāra)**

This teaching comes from Chapter Five (Vigilant Mindfulness) of *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life (Bodhicaryāvatāra)* by Śāntideva. In this chapter, Śāntideva repeatedly emphasizes refraining from harm to all living beings, even the smallest forms of life, explaining that such restraint is essential to the bodhisattva path. The imagery that all Buddhas and bodhisattvas protect beings—and that even those who appear as executioners in the hell realms serve as guardians within the moral order—supports the teaching that non-harming is universal and uncompromising.



^{xi} **The Nature of Demons (Dharmadhātu)**

From *The Treasury of Commentary and Scriptural Authority on the Dharmadhātu* by the Omniscient Longchenpa:

At this point, since it is essential to understand the nature of demons in order to be freed from the precipice of that which is to be abandoned, demons are defined as confused conceptual thought accompanied by ignorance and the dualistic grasping of subject and object. Because such grasping obstructs liberation, it is called a "demon" (māra).

As for their classification, the root division consists of two demons—grasping and fixation—which together form subject–object duality. From these arise four branch divisions:

1. the demon of the aggregates,
2. the demon of death,
3. the demon of the afflictive emotions, and
4. the demon of the divine child.

When further subdivided, there are secondary divisions, including twenty-eight types, such as the external demons. When classified according to how they manifest, demons cannot be counted conceptually, for they are as numerous as the extremes of thought, the varieties of karma, and the multitude of afflictive emotions.

In summary, all demons are ultimately subsumed within conceptual thought alone.

^{xii} **The Three Trainings**

The Three Trainings form the core structure of the Buddhist path and are practiced progressively and in mutual support:

1. **Training in Ethical Discipline (śīla)** — the cultivation of moral conduct through restraint and virtuous behavior, which serves as the foundation for inner stability and spiritual development.
2. **Training in Concentration (samādhi)** — the development of mental focus and composure through meditation, enabling the mind to become calm, clear, and undistracted.
3. **Training in Wisdom (prajñā)** — the insight that realizes the true nature of reality—impermanence, suffering, and non-self—leading ultimately to liberation.

These three are taught as an integrated path, and together they encompass the entirety of Buddhist practice and training.

