

CHAPTER NINE

Thirty-Seven Practices: *The Golden Stanzas of My Perfect Teacher*



*An Excerpt from
Garchen Rinpoche's Biography*

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Garchen Rinpoche . Arizona 2005



*May I tirelessly perform enlightened
activities for an ocean of eons...*

Om tare tuttare ture svaha



When the *Precious One* turned thirteen, it was Lama Gar Chime Dorje who first introduced the young *tulku* to the treasure teachings of the *Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*.

Everyone in the monastery, the monks and the yogis, was asked to memorize by heart the thirty-seven stanzas compiled by Ngulchu Thogme Zangpo, a Sakya master

known throughout the land as a Bodhisattva, with qualities equal to those of Asanga, the great Buddhist *pandita* from the famed Nalanda University in the 4th century.

Having complete faith in these teachings and seeing them as the perfect, uncompromising, golden advice for all to follow, Lama Gar Chime Dorje took time to carefully write down each of the thirty-seven stanzas on paper scrolls and pasted them on the walls of the monastery for everyone to see. He encouraged everyone to study all those stanzas well.

There was one young monk by the name of Damring Wangyal who had been accepted into the monastery ever since he was a child. This monk was illiterate, and no matter how hard he tried, he still could not read or write. Due to his low mental dispositions and the dark imprints from his past lives, he used to commit many negative deeds. He would steal, lie, hunt, and repeatedly break many other rules.

However, Lama Gar Chime Dorje never lost faith in this poor monk who ended up being called “Tolei” by some people in the monastery.

“Tolei” literally means “cow.” It is a name given to people who are stupid or fools. Out of his great kindness and compassionate mind, the lama never failed to lure Damring Wangyal into examining his own heart and would find ways to skillfully help him to come home to his primordial purity.

Every day, Lama Gar Chime Dorje would ask Damring Wangyal to come into his room, and then, he would sit down and patiently recite the *Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* loudly for this boy to hear.

Then, every few days or so, the lama would tell Damring Wangyal to try to memorize at least one stanza. And in turn, because he could not read, Damring Wangyal would go around the monastery looking for people to orally recite that one stanza for him to hear, again and again, so that he could memorize.

After a seemingly long, long time and much endurance, Damring Wangyal was finally able to recite by heart each of the verses of the *Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas*. Lama Gar Chime Dorje was very happy with such an outcome. He

continued to give to the poor monk bits of teachings, and slowly, ever so slowly, the illiterate one began to give up harmful habitual tendencies and overcome heaps of karmic obscurations. He began to sincerely generate the thoughts of engaging in practices that would bring benefits rather than harm to other beings. Through that, he trekked the path of fulfilling simultaneously the purposes of self as well as others...



During the time he spent memorizing and reciting this sacred text, the *Precious One* himself was not able to develop much confidence in his abilities to follow in the footsteps of the Bodhisattvas. The profundity and vastness of the heart-essence teachings expressed in those thirty-seven golden stanzas were too much for him to absorb.

The *Precious One* was taught that cyclic existence was like a small thorn. Gradually, this thorn would pierce through every one's body, and poisons and pain would

pervade. Everyone wished for comfort and happiness, and no one wished to suffer. Yet, to combat these poisons and pain of suffering, the *Thirty-Seven Practices of Bodhisattvas* seemed to thrust out bold strokes and offer timeless flowers that were larger than life. These flowers blossomed in poison, just as peacocks ate poison and became even more ravishing. But then, could it be possible for anyone to put his trust in, much less to resort to, these most delicate, fragrant flowers as antidotes to eliminate the deadly poisons?

The *Precious One* remembered making a confession to his lama one day.

“Lama Chime Dorje!”

Calling out to his teacher – the *mahasiddha* of Gar, the *Precious One* could not help but express his unsettled opinion and doubts; his mind overfilled with strong, disturbing waves.

“I really don’t believe in many of the verses that you wanted us to memorize. I really don’t!”

“Garchen Rinpoche...” The lama

gently raised his brows.

Then, with a tint of hesitation, the lama posed the question.

“Why is that so, Rinpoche? Please tell me.”

The young *tulku* cautiously recited one of the most difficult verses:

“Even if others cut off [my] head when [I am] utterly blameless, taking upon [myself] all these negative deeds by the power of compassion is the bodhisattvas’ practice.”¹

¹ Verse #13 – English translation by Ari Kiev.

Then looking into his teacher's eyes, he exclaimed:

“It is too much for anyone to follow. It is impossible. If you ask me to do *tonglen*² for people who are sick and people who are suffering, then that is a different story. But if they were to cut my head off then... how am I to take upon myself their negative deeds by the power of compassion? ”

“Please tell me then,” the lama insisted, “of all of those verses,

² The practice of exchanging one's happiness for others' suffering.

which are the ones that you *do* believe in?”

The *Precious One* contemplated this question for a short while, and with an ascending, self-assuring tone of voice, he responded:

*“The Subduer said all the unbearable sufferings of the lower realms is the fruition of wrongdoing. Therefore, never committing negative deeds, even at the peril of one’s life, is the bodhisattvas’ practice.”*³

³ Verse #8 - English translation by Ari Kiev.

“Karma.” The *Precious One* exclaimed.

“That’s all I *can* believe in. The workings of cause and effect. Karma.”

The powerful master of extraordinary abilities started to gaze deeply at the young *tulku* – the guru of his past life. He became completely silent for what seemed like a long time. Perhaps, at that moment, if one could capture the tenderheartedness reflected in Gar Chime Dorje’s soulful eyes, one could then understand and catch a true glimpse of the all-pervasive,

inexpressible, exalted love of the Buddha.

“That is good, then.” The lama concurred softly.

“If you have that kind of belief, then you should continue to nurture unfailing confidence and trust in the law of karma. And based on your understanding of karma, investigate your faults and tame your mind.”

“Then slowly, one day,” the lama affirmed, “you *will* be able to develop great trust in the rest of the teachings, even in those that are

most difficult, most impossible...”

The wise, generous energy that Gar Chime Dorje carried in his deep and serene voice brought a sense of calmness to the young *tulku*'s mind. Thus, he decided to say no more.



The *Precious One* truly believed that he had met a perfect Buddha, his teacher.

This unmistakable devotion toward

Lama Gar Chime Dorje, master of this lifetime and disciple of his past, was something inexplicable that liberated the heart. He made the promise to his lama to continue to develop indestructible faith in the infallible workings of karma. He yielded to the thought that *perhaps*, one day, he too, could follow his teacher's seemingly impassable instructions to defeat the hordes of potentially dangerous obstructers, inner and outer, in the manner of the Bodhisattvas...

But never did he realize that less than half a life away, the thirty-seven stanzas that he was asked to

memorize during his youth became the preeminent teachings that he fervently aspired to offer to his own students across the continents. By then, the *Precious One's* trust and confidence in each of the faultless *Thirty-Seven Practices of the Bodhisattvas*, in its entirety, reached a paramount level that spread far beyond any realm of existence.

And by then, the monk of many faults in his youth – Damring Wangyal, too, had reached a level of realization beyond expectation.

It was said that Damring Wangyal grew old to be an accomplished,

masterful meditator. On the day he was about to leave his worldly body, Damring Wangyal went around to say goodbye and told everyone in the monastery that the time for him to face death was now approaching. He then walked back to his room, sat down in the full lotus posture and went into a deep state of meditative absorption. He passed away sitting upright, like an unshakable mountain. When people in the monastery found the body of Damring Wangyal, they found a highly realized practitioner who encountered death in the manner of a fearless snow lion.

Thereafter, many people continued to talk about how Damring Wangyal drew his last breath sitting up in meditation, reaching a peaceful and blissful state of consciousness beyond suffering. Just as the masters have always said, only at the moment of death can the authentic practitioner's true level of realization be revealed.

Without a genuine, spiritual master to guide Damring Wangyal through the various stages of practices to purify his body, speech and mind, then, who knows which of the horrific lower realms the old monk would end up in at the end

of his life due to his heavy propensities and the whirlwind of karma? Yet, through his lama's unfailing and un-repayable kindness, he was able to abandon his faults and completely tame his mind. He merged into the great expanse of wisdom awareness.

He became victorious.



And in that way, the *Precious One* by the name of Garchen Rinpoche,

Konchog Gyaltzen, and the extraordinary monk Damring Wangyal, once a fool, now fulfilled the aspiration of their noble-minded lama, Chime Dorje, the perfect teacher, the most skillful, most patient and conscientious *mahasiddha* of Gar.



*Rinpoche oi,
with the indestructible drop
of Bodhicitta
in your living heart,
please guide
my hands...*

Sue P. hu

*Irvine, CA
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*This chapter (with editorial suggestions by
Bertrand Sauzier) is an excerpt from
Garchen Rinpoche's biography:*

***The Lama of the Many Lifetimes:
Touching the Living Heart
of Garchen Rinpoche
(a work in progress)***

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*BOOK ONE (1937-1959)
of Garchen Rinpoche's biography
will be in print in 2012*

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*Bodhicitta, the Excellent and
Precious Mind,
Where it is unborn,
may it arise,
Where it is born,
may it not decline,
But ever increase higher
and higher.*



... a work in progress ...