

Commentary on The Seven-fold Prayer

Tarchin Hearn, 2026
Green Dharma Treasury

Introduction

This essay is an expanded version of a chapter on the Seven-fold Prayer taken from "[The Unbroken Wholeness of Sublime Understanding and Love](#)". The seven-fold prayer, or seven-fold contemplation, or seven-fold practice, or seven-fold training, is a core component of many Tibetan sadhanas. Readers who have explored with me either the [Sadhana of Samantabhadra](#) or the [Sadhana of Buddha Amitabha](#), will be familiar with the base text. In this essay I will refer to the text from the Amitabha sadhana but with a bit of mental editing, you should be able to apply these reflections to other versions of the prayer / practice.

Personally, I find it useful to think of it in terms of seven trainings since each of the seven sections is potentially a profound contemplative yoga in and of itself. As part of a longer sadhana, this seven-fold practice is often introduced after the yogi has recognised at least to some degree, the nature of mind – the wholeness of inter-being~inter-knowing. It then provides various ways of deepening that recognition/realisation through applying it's implications in the activities of our daily living. Reflecting on these themes again and again and experimentally allowing them to shape the way we interact with the world becomes a rich path of maturation that can reveal an immeasurable field of vast activity integrating body, speech and mind, inner and outer, self and other, micro and macro, in short, everything.

For those less familiar with this practice I have included a complete version of the base text so that you can get a general sense of the whole training. This is then followed by a relatively detailed commentary.

May your explorations continue to be rich and fulfilling

Seven-fold Prayer *(base text)*

1 – Reverencing the Infinite Realm of Awakening

To all the Tathagatas

however they appear in the immeasurable expanse of space and time;

to each and every one of them, with body, speech and mind,

I bow with great sincerity and respect.

By the power of this prayer of profoundly inclusive activity,

bowing with as many bodies as atoms in the myriad fields of awakening,

in the presence of all these Enlightening Ones, manifest in my mind,

I fully honour and revere this Ocean of Blessing.

*Around each single atom, there are as many Buddhas as atoms,
seated in the midst of their countless spiritual sons and daughters and so
I imagine the immeasurable realms of dharma as filled with myriad radiant beings;
Victorious in the flow of awakening.*

*With unending oceans of praises for them all,
with a symphony of wonder, appreciation and heartfelt reverence,
I extol the Tathagata's virtues and sing hymns to all these Sugatas.*
GURU BUDDHA DHARMAKAYA NAMO

2 – Releasing into the Vast Flow of Offering

*Beautiful flowerings and networks of flowerings,
easeful communication and the balm of healing presence,
canopies of shelter and refuge,
lamps of clear seeing and deep understanding,
and the fragrance of love and wholesome relating,
I offer these to all beings who are awakening to, or abiding as,
the flow of primordial ever-fresh awareness.*

*With the clothing of harmonious thought forms
and the exquisite perfume of devotion,
with activities that beautify the body of manifestation
and a measureless array of wonderfully inspiring qualities,
I make offerings to these beings dwelling in the realm of spontaneous liberation.*

*Giftings, incomparable and vast,
continuously arising in the spacious play of my own knowing,
I joyfully offer to all Awakening Ones.
By the power of my faith in wholesome activity,
I bow to and pay respects to all these Victorious Ones.*

3 – Acknowledging One's Own Unwholesome Actions

*Whatever unwholesome actions I have done,
driven by compulsions such as desire, hatred, delusion and fear,
whether by body, speech or mind;
Each one of these I thoroughly and openly acknowledge.*

4 – Rejoicing in All Wholesome Actions

*Contemplating the inconceivable merit of the Awakened Ones in the ten directions,
along with the merit of all Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, Sravakas,
and all sentient beings, wherever they appear,
In this vast ocean of wholesome activity, I rejoice.*

5 – Entreaty to Turn the Wheel of Dharma

*They who illumine all worlds of experience,
solid in their realisation of love and awareness in every situation and circumstance,
protectors of life in all its abundance and mystery,
I entreat you to turn the incomparable wheel of Dharma.*

6 – Request to Stay

*To those who would pass from sorrow,
withdrawing from active engagement into a nirvana of inner peace,
I fervently pray that for as many eons as there are atoms in all Buddha fields,
you continue to inspire and teach in myriads ways,
supporting the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings.*

7 – Sharing the Merit

*May any virtue generated through this practice of
reverencing, offering, acknowledging, rejoicing, entreating, and requesting,
support the awakening of wisdom and compassion in all sentient beings.*

Commentary

In the sadhana of Amitabha, the section on sevenfold prayer becomes particularly relevant only after extensive investigation of your life and living, seeing the inter-being~inter-knowing nature of everything and then learning the art of resting in and as mystery of suchness.¹ Having developed a deep familiarity with these themes the text then continues:

Imagine yourself and all beings offering gestures of profound respect to Buddha Amitabha and all the surrounding radiant beings. Then enter the seven-fold contemplation of Samantabhadra.

The earliest written indication of the seven-fold prayer or, as I like to think of it, the seven-fold contemplation or training of Samantabhadra, appeared in sixth century China, in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* – The Flower Ornament Sutra² – where it is part of a very extensive aspiration prayer / vow made by a great bodhisattva named "Universally Good" (*Samantabhadra*). Today, depending on tradition, it is found in a variety of different forms.

Prayer often carries a sense of wishing for something to happen in the future, but these contemplations involve much more than mere wishing. Having cultivated a vibrant sense of being in the presence of Buddha Amitabha (a blossoming of sublime understanding and love), these seven contemplations further broaden our vision and understanding of inter-dependent life to

¹ In 2026 I gave a series of classes on this sadhana. Recordings of these teachings can be found on [Green Dharma Treasury Youtube](#)

² The *Avatamsaka Sutra* could be thought of as a very comprehensive instruction manual for bodhisattvas. It describes the path of awakening in such an inspiringly universal and thoroughly inclusive way that it has provided a textual foundation for most, if not all of the schools and traditions of Mahayana Buddhism that exist in the world today. It has been skilfully translated into English by Thomas Cleary and is available from Shambala Publications.

include all beings, everywhere. Practiced sequentially, these seven disciplines draw us into a deepening and expanding experience of skilful action in the world. In this way, the seven-fold contemplation is a practice of profound yoga – a way of being in and with the world that is utterly in tune with our growing intuition of wholeness-in-process.

1 – Reverencing the Infinite Realm of Awakening

This first training is essentially a training in universal reverence and respect. It involves recognising and reverencing suchness³, the 'holoverse',⁴ the immeasurable expanse of inter-being~inter-knowing that involves everything and everyone. With this practice we find ourselves immersed in the totality of *bodhicitta* – realms within realms interpenetrating realms without obstruction.

To all the Tathagatas, however they appear in the immeasurable expanse of space and time; to each and every one of them, with body, speech and mind, I bow with great sincerity and respect.

The historical Buddha did not use the pronoun 'I' when referring to himself. Attempting to be more accurate in what he was saying he used the word *tathagata*. *Tatha* means 'such' or 'thus'. *Ga* derives from the verb *gate* which means to come, to go and to be. I sometimes wish we had a similar single term in English that can remind us of the truth that every 'coming', seen from another perspective, is a 'going' and that all acts of 'being' are themselves composed of dynamic coming~going processes. In a general sense the *ga* implies movement. The suffix *ta* indicates 'ness'. Put together, *tathagata* could be translated as 'thus moving one', 'one moving as thusness or suchness', or 'suchness moving'. This first practice of reverencing is based on realising that everything, living and non-living alike is a dynamic expression of suchness.

Tathagata is often capitalised and used exclusively to indicate a fully awakened Buddha – One gone to or coming from suchness. However, I don't think that the Buddha was trying to claim anything special for himself. He looked deeply into the ineffable matrix of his living and experienced 'suchness moving'. Every living being is tathagata – an unfathomable mystery of inter-becoming. Of course, not everyone realises this.

A term closely linked with *tathagata* is *tathagatagarbha*. *Garbha* has many meanings, depending on context. It can signify embryo, germ, womb, a interior chamber or sanctuary of a temple, calyx⁵, seed or matrix. At some point, the term also assumed the meaning of "core," "heart,"⁶ and "pith". *Tathagatagarbha* could be thought of as a gestating tathagata realisation, or tathagatahood

³ For more on 'suchness' see <https://greendharmatreasury.org/2018/06/24/translating-suchness/>

⁴ For more on what I mean by 'holoverse' see [Gifts of Wonderment](#) p 49 - 53

⁵ A calyx is the outermost whorl of sepals that protect the developing flower.

⁶ *Tathagatagarbha* could be translated as the *tathagata* heart or the pure mind which Mikyo Dorje (the Eighth Karmapa) has equated with Mahamudra. Some commentators on Maitreya's *Uttaratantra* equate *tathagatagarbha* with "the nature of mind" (emptiness) and "Buddha nature" (luminosity) obscured by thought coverings. This has lead some scholars to link the term *tathagatagarbha* with *dharmadhatu* poetically translated by Namkai Norbu Rinpoche as "the total field of all events and meanings". *Dharmadhatu* or *tathagatagarbha* is what we are. *Dharmakaya* or *tathagata* is the direct knowing / experience of this.

obscured by or contained within wrappings where the wrappings consist of beliefs and concepts and the perceptual worlds that accompany them. In this sense, depending on one's realisation, all beings are either tathagatas or tathagatagarbha. Through this practice of "reverencing the infinite realm of awakening", we strengthen this understanding by applying it in our day to day living. Awakening is everywhere we look. Everyone we meet is suchness-in-action. Can we honour this? Can we train ourselves to see each and every being this way?

(To all the Tathagatas, however they appear in the immeasurable expanse of space and time;)

To all the tathagatas, all the manifestations of tathagatagarbha, all manifestations of suchness, however they appear in the immeasurable expanse of space/time/known – this involves recognising the inter-being~inter-knowing nature of each and every being that we meet. We could think of this as an 'exterior' directed knowing.

(To each and every one of them, with body, speech and mind, I bow with great sincerity and respect)

For many people today, the idea of bowing is archaic and overly formal. We are unlikely to bow to everyone we meet and if we did we would probably be regarded as strange and quirky. To bow with integrity, we probably need to understand this in a fresh way. Consider a dandelion flower. It continuously turns towards the light, changing its 'posture' – the direction and angle of its 'bow' – following the sun as it moves through the day. In this sense, to bow is to give all of our attention to what we are doing and to whom we are meeting.

To bow with great sincerity and respect involves an 'interior' flow of tactile/kinaesthetic knowing. This tactile kinaesthetic knowing will be qualitatively different with each tathagata or tathagatagarbha or manifestation of suchness we are bowing to. This 'bowing' isn't a generic. It is continuously and forever fresh. Explore the tactile kinaesthetic sensations that arise in your organism when you are fully present with and for another. Our entire being leans into the encounter: our eyes and ears, our sensitivity, our thinking, our feeling and empathising – all of me present with and for all of you. "With body, speech and mind I bow with great sincerity and respect."

How does one do this? How do you bow with your physical body; your face, your torso, your hands, your legs and feet? How do you physically orient yourself to another in a way that conveys sincerity and respect? This is worth exploring. How do you bow with your speech in the act of language-ing with another? Doing this with sincerity and respect surely implies deep listening and care-filled speaking. How do you bow with your mind, with sincere and respectful thinking? This is really an ongoing exercise of mindful presence.

(By the power of this prayer of profoundly inclusive activity,)

"This prayer" is not merely the recited words but the actual activity or practice that these words invoke or encourage. By the power of this inclusive attentive engagement, bringing together our interior tactile kinaesthetic experience and our exterior knowing of the tathagatas around us, our practice becomes "profoundly inclusive".

. . . bowing with as many bodies as atoms in the myriad fields of awakening, in the presence of all the Enlightening Ones, manifest in my mind, I fully honour and revere this Ocean of Blessing.

In the act of sincerely attending to the tathagata-ness of whoever we are meeting, each one of us is already an inter-being of 'many bodies', many integrated collectives. We are collaborations of atoms, molecules, cells, tissues, organs, feelings, attitudes, social and cultural bodies of knowing and being. We are symbiosings of complex gatherings, and through this continuously evolving activity, our current body of experience is brought forth. Each one of us is composed of myriad fields of awakening process. Each participant, at every level of being, is reflecting the activities of all the other participants, like an infinite hall of moving mirrors; minds shaping minds, knowing shaping knowing, worlds interpenetrating worlds without obstruction.

Around each single atom, there are as many Buddhas as atoms seated in the midst of their countless spiritual sons and daughters⁷ and so I imagine the immeasurable realms of dharma as filled with myriad radiant beings; victorious in the flow of awakening.

An 'atom' is not only referring to the cluster of protons, neutrons and electrons described in physics. It also refers to the smallest, most fundamental, indivisible component in any particular domain of existence. In this text the word atom is being used in this original sense of 'not dividable'. With this understanding of the term, a single human being is an atom of a human society. A cell is an atom of a multi-celled organism. A molecule is an atom of a cell. Individual elements of the periodic table are atoms of molecules. Strangely, sub-atomic entities are atoms of 'atoms'. Essentially, depending on the frame of reference, an atom can be any being or phenomena of interest. It is a *parikalpita*; a constructed object of imagination used for the purpose of making sense of the universe.⁸ If we look deeply into any 'atom' of experience we will find it to be composed of myriad other interacting beings and processes, which themselves are composed of interacting beings and processes. Mysteriously, in the midst of all this whirling, the being or phenomena of interest remains for a time, in our view. Experiencing thus, we find that this ordinary world is in fact an immeasurable dancing of change and transformation. We live in and as an intelligent universe. The entire world is dense with sentience – an immeasurable expanse of inter-being~inter-knowing.

This section is pointing to what might be thought of as mandala practice, a flow chart of living process. In the centre is the primary person or object of interest – a tathagata or tathagatagarbha (unbroken wholeness). Surrounding them are other beings who in one way or another have contributed to the central being's existence. You could visualise concentric rings or spheres of contributing factors: historical, physical, environmental, social, conceptual and so forth. Each being could themselves be the centre of attention in which case the original buddha in the centre would

⁷ spiritual sons and daughters => *bodhisattvas*; beings in the process of awakening while cultivating skill in supporting the awakening of others.

⁸ *Parikalpita svabhava* is one of three natures described in Yogacara philosophy. For a very brief introduction to this see [Nature of Being](#) in "Reminders and Resources", May 10/26, p2

shift to the side and becomes a supportive factor. From this perspective, life is immeasurable, filled with radiant knowing, actively participating in this dance of awakening.

With unending oceans of praises for them all, with a symphony of wonder, appreciation and heartfelt reverence, I extol the Tathagata's virtues and sing hymns to all these Sugatas.

Sugata means “one who has fared well,” “one who goes well,” or “one who lives in bliss” and is another way of referring to tathagatas, enlightened ones, or victorious ones. *Su* means auspicious, good or goodness; *gata*, as in tathagata, means coming, going, being; in other words moving. *Sugata* can literally mean; goodness moving, or moving in, as, or towards goodness.

2 – Releasing into the Vast Flow of Offering

In the first training we strengthen our intuition that every living being is *tathagatagarbha*, an immeasurable dancing of responsive relating – an infinite realm of awakening. Now we continue this process, actively releasing into this unfathomable matrix of giving and receiving.

Essentially the second training is a training in generosity – *dana parami*. It could be seen as an extensive elaboration of the 2nd precept in positive expression. “I will train myself to dwell more and more in the mind of spontaneous generosity. Daily I will give material support, emotional support and an example to others of awakening in action.” Generosity involves giving, releasing and the non-clinging of letting go, which in turn, requires a capacity for bending, flexing and non-fixation. This is the primary *parami* or perfection, from which flow the others six.⁹

As we learn to see everyone and everything as tathagata, we increasingly realise that through their sheer existence, a seamless flowing of giving and receiving, each being, without doing anything in particular, is already pouring offerings into the world. The question remains though, what exactly are we offering? Are we offering misery: fear, distrust, anger, stupidity, up-tightness, stinginess, anxiety and so forth. Or are we offering love, compassion, forgiveness and appreciative understanding? In this world of inter-being~inter-knowing, the process of giving and receiving is not optional. Rather it is the fundamental dynamic of all living systems. Realising this, we begin to train ourselves to live in ways that uplift and sustain all beings.

Beautiful flowerings and networks of flowerings, easeful communication and the balm of healing presence, canopies of shelter and refuge, lamps of clear seeing and deep understanding, and the fragrance of love and wholesome relating, I offer these to all beings who are awakening to, or abiding as, the flow of primordial ever-fresh awareness.

In traditional renditions of the Seven-fold Prayer this section would describe symbolic offerings you would find in Buddhist temples: beautiful flowers, garlands of flowers, precious parasols, fine cymbals, healing balms, radiant lamps, fragrant incense, exquisite apparel, sweet-smelling perfume,

⁹ The six *parami* (Pali) or *paramita* (Skt) (perfections) are *dana parami* (perfection of generosity) *sila parami* (perfection of wholesome relating), *ksanti parami* (perfection of patience), *viriya parami* (perfection of skilled use of effort/energy), *samadhi parami* (perfecting a continuity of caring and enquiry ie meditation) and *prajna parami* (perfection of wisdom or profound understanding)

and jars of scented powder piled high like a mountain.¹⁰ Essentially, these offerings represent qualities of living experience and so our manifesting these qualities becomes a profound and meaningful offering to the world. Many of these offerings are self explanatory so I will only comment on some of them.

beautiful flowerings: Flowerings of perception and conception. In general, flowers represent beautiful mental factors or mental states, particularly the cultivation of wholesome qualities and the unfolding or flowering of knowledge/understanding.

networks of flowerings: Linked networks of lived understanding, inspiring theories or paradigms.

canopies of shelter and refuge: Physical and social structures that support a deepening sense of belonging, groundedness and well being.

With the clothing of harmonious thought forms and the exquisite perfume of devotion, with activities that beautify the body of manifestation and a measureless array of wonderfully inspiring qualities, I make offerings to these beings dwelling in the realm of spontaneous liberation.

clothing: In tantric symbology, clothing, often in the form of free robes, represents conceptual thought forms. Harmonious thought forms are indicators of well integrated, non-conflicted thinking.

perfume: This symbolises devotion, in this case devotion to realising radically inclusive wholeness.

activities that beautify: Beauty is an indication of functional attunement or harmony.

Giftings, incomparable and vast, continuously arising in the spacious play of my own knowing, I joyfully offer to all Awakening Ones. By the power of my faith in wholesome activity, I bow to and pay respects to all these Victorious Ones.

Releasing into the vast flow of offering we give all that we have and all that we are to support the unfolding of beings, wherever and whoever they are.

3 – Acknowledging One's Own Unwholesome Actions

The terms wholesome and unwholesome are often treated as synonyms for good and bad, or positive and negative. Though this understanding can be useful in a rather generalised way, at this stage of the sadhana we are aspiring to greater depth and discernment. Let's consider these terms in a rather literal fashion. 'Whole – some' could imply somewhat whole, not necessarily totally whole, but at least moving in the direction of recognising the wholeness or *suchness*, the ungraspable inter-being~inter-knowing nature of the currently arising moment. 'Karma' basically means activity. Many domains of activity: chemical, cellular, muscular, metabolic, emotional, and mental are synergistically interacting to manifest our human experience. Wholesome activity can refer to any and all activities that help nudge us in the direction of experientially realising the state

¹⁰ For more on the meaning of these offerings see <https://greendharmatreasury.files.wordpress.com/2019/02/yoga-of-eight-offerings-gdt.pdf>

of all inclusive wholeness – the "Pure-land of Amitabha". Unwholesome actions on the other hand, are activities that contribute to physical, emotional and or mental states of disharmony, disintegration, fragmentation, and a solidifying sense of separation between self and other, knower and known. In this third training we are encouraged to look deeply into any unwholesome actions (*akusala karma*) – activities of body, speech or mind that tend to obscure an appreciation of ineffable wholeness.

*There is a wholeness about living.
It's not cracked. It's not glued together.
Feelings, values, perceptions and conceptions are
tumbling and flowing through and with each other
wherever we look.
If we look!*

*Every experience is experienced by someone.
And every someone, is a matrix of looking;
a unique contribution of knowing,
a collaboration of domains and dimensions.*

*To survive we must look,
and not merely look as if through looking we might see what is.
To survive we must look with passion,
with caring, with discernment and with playful enthusiasm.*

*Looking as an act of participation,
and together
we bring forth worlds.¹¹*

Through this sevenfold prayer, practice, or training, blended with the various preceding contemplations found in the sadhana,¹² we will increasingly come to know a deepening absorption (*samadhi*) in suchness – the tathagata nature of everything and everyone. Inevitably though, this absorption will be interrupted periodically by emotional and conceptual habit patterns of unclear seeing. Whatever form these interruptions take, they will tend to obscure our appreciating the flowing holomovement of luminous ever-fresh awareness.¹³ At this point in our explorations, sufficiently bolstered with strength and courage from our ongoing contemplations, we can make effort to actively acknowledge difficult patterns as they arise.

¹¹ These are the first lines of a longer poem of called "*The Seamlessness of Experience*" written August 10, 2017. The complete poem can be found on Green Dharma Treasury in [A Sheaf of Poems 2010 - 2019](#) p 83

¹² This essay will equally apply to the Sadhana of Buddha Amitabha and to the Sadhana of Samantabhadra, both available on Green Dharma Treasury

¹³ Buddhist teaching refer to two types of obscuration: afflictive obscurations which basically refer to emotional responses that obscure our clear seeing/understanding and cognitive obscurations which involve very subtle levels of assumption about the nature of the universe.

With a translucentsing gaze we look deeply into a particular obscuration until we once again see/remember how it, along with everything else, is a fundamentally ungraspable inter-being~inter-knowing process-in-action. In the face of such all engulfing mystery, even conventionally negative states will reveal themselves to be part of the dancing wholeness.

Whatever unwholesome actions I have done, driven by compulsions such as desire, hatred, delusion and fear, whether by body, speech or mind; each one of these I thoroughly and openly acknowledge.

To "thoroughly and openly acknowledge" these patterns is much more than merely naming them. 'Thoroughly' suggest we investigate the arising with exquisite attention to detail. 'Openly' implies that we do so non-defensively, not trying to justify or excuse anything. Acknowledge derives from ad-knowledge, in other words towards knowledge or multi-levelled understanding.

With heart/minds of generosity and deepening understanding, we revisit and reflect on any unwholesome actions we have initiated or engaged in. When appropriate, we can begin with a specific memory of unresolved past action and observe how it plays out in our present physiology, our ways of communicating and in our patterns of thinking. Held gently, with patience, forgiveness and love, these states begin to soften and fade in the light of deepening understanding.

Initially our investigations will likely be drawn to the domain of personal individual actions. Things you've done, or said, to others and your reaction to things others have done to you. Through working on this, eventually we will be able to extend these contemplations to include activities perpetuated not only by ourselves as individuals, but by ourselves as part of a collective: a family, society, culture, race and species. For a tragic number of people, hidden under their personal stories of challenge and suffering are unconscious wounds of ancestral harm, generational trauma, war, displacement, cultural prejudices, social class and religious hopes, fears, attitudes and biases. The interweaving of these personal and collective levels of unclear seeing is revealed in the conscious and unconscious activities that support global warming, species extinction, sectarianism, apartheid, and political systems backed up by the industrial military complex that support a consumer society awash with manufactured needs. Cultivating the capacity to touch all of this with love and clear seeing is a vast work. It may have begun with the desire for personal healing but it can grow into a recognition that through this work we are contributing to the healing of all beings, not just humans.

I'm reminded of a statement by biologist Alexander Skutch in his book "Life Ascending". *"An outstanding attribute of an awakened spirit is its expansiveness, its insatiable hunger to experience more widely, to know more broadly and profoundly, to cultivate friendly intercourse with the whole of Being. The noblest mind is that which understands, appreciates and loves the largest segment of the Universe."*

Eventually we may begin to recognise a more subtle level of unwholesome activity referred to in Buddhism as 'cognitive obscurations'. These comprise the largely unconscious attitudinal assumptions about life revealed in our ethical values, our acceptance of such things as the

necessity of progress or the sanctity of the individual or concern for human rights (while ignoring the rest of the living world). At the most subtle level are persistent assumptions of the existence of self and other, knower and known, inner and outer, mundane and spiritual. As the Third Zen Patriarch Sengtsan wrote;

*The great way is not difficult
for those free of preferences.
Without attachment or aversion,
everything is transparent.*

*Missing the way by a hairsbreadth,
you separate earth and sky.
If you want to see the way as it is,
do not affirm or deny it.*

*Being divided by opposites
is the disease of the mind.
Not perceiving the heart of things,
ease and joy disappear.¹⁴*

Although this third training begins with exploring the affect of relatively gross personal unwholesome activities, with persistent practice we will notice ever more subtle levels of obscuration. Eventually, we may find ourselves hovering on the very threshold of *mahamudra*, learning the art of 'abiding where there is no abiding'.

4 – Rejoicing in All Wholesome Actions

*Cease to do evil
Learn to do do good.
Purify your mind.*

This verse, from a collection of sayings of Gautama Buddha¹⁵, is said to be his most pithy and succinct description of the path of awakening. The first line, "cease to do evil", is addressed in the previous training. The second line, "learn to do good" reflects this fourth training.

Having acknowledged one's own unwholesome tendencies, we now rejoice in the wholesome activities of others. We do this by cultivating *mudita*, the empathic or sympathetic joy that can spontaneously flood one's being when contemplating the wholesome activities of others. Think of this as an infectious joy. With *mudita* we feel uplifted and strengthened in body and spirit. In this sense wholesome activity can be seen as powerful or strengthening activity, *punna kamma*.

¹⁴ This is an excerpt from a much longer poem "Verses on the Faith Mind" by the Third Patriarch Sengtsan. There are many available translations into English. This one was done by Sensei Kazuaki Tanahashi and Roshi Joan Halifax.

¹⁵ "The Dhammapada" verse 183

Contemplating the inconceivable merit of the Awakened Ones in the ten directions, along with the merit of all Bodhisattvas, Pratyekabuddhas, Sravakas, and all sentient beings, wherever they appear, in this vast ocean of wholesome activity, I rejoice.

The word 'merit' is a translation of *punna* (Pali) - pronounced [*poon-ya*] with the emphasis on the first syllable. It refers to "the inner sense of well being that comes from having acted rightly or well and that enables one to continue acting well".¹⁶ Joined with *kamma* (Pali) or *karma* (Skt) we get *punna kamma* which can mean powerful or wholesome activity. Wholesome activity, powerful activity emerging from wholeness, inspires or synergises further wholesome activity.

In today's world we seem to idolise power as something positive and desirable whereas to be powerless is a problem to be addressed. We humans talk of powerful militaries, powerful weapons, powerful drugs (in that they can wipe out the disease) and powerful techniques (even meditation techniques) that can force or speed up a desired result be it healing or awakening. This kind of power is often attributed to a singular entity or being; a teacher, guru, or military, political or economic leader. We are used to thinking of power to destroy, defeat, win or coerce. Perhaps we are seduced by it because it can be spectacularly abrupt and shocking. It easily catches our attention. The power of *punna kamma* however is very different.

Great power is the power to create, to live, and to thrive, and this is always a collaborative mystery. Ultimately *punna kamma* is activity of the *dharmadhatu*, the total field of all events and meanings. It is an ungraspable capacity, the elusive obvious that assembles the cells and tissues of a foetus, the process that creates life out of stardust, that without human understanding or intervention can heal a cut or a wound. Theocentric religions might call it, the power of God. Buddhists might call it the blessing of dharma. Essentially this power is the creative activity of the universe.

Life itself is an ongoing expression of myriad interwoven rhythmic cycles and timings. It took billions of years of collaborative inter-being~inter-knowing to make the extraordinary world we participate in today. Creative power or wholesome activity is beginningless and endless, flowing in and around us continuously. It can take centuries to grow a mature old growth forest, years comprised of billions of moments of inter-species sharing. It's hard to see and appreciate such detail, yet in a matter of days we can destroy it! In psychological terms, individual *punna kamma* or meritorious action describes activity that is inspiring and healing and that helps bring us closer to recognising the fundamental *punna kamma* of life itself.

This fourth training speaks of "inconceivable merit" – a deepening disposition for creative goodness; wholeness manifesting in an inconceivable number of life affirming ways. In this training we are invited to consider living beings throughout the world and to appreciate how all of them, at least from time to time, have engaged in spontaneous acts of *punna kamma* in the form of life supporting generosity, kindness and love.

¹⁶ <https://www.wisdomlib.org/definition/punna>

Buddhist eco-activist, Joanna Macy suggested a playful contemplation to contact the magnitude of such positive activity. Imagine that as each wholesome act takes place, a unique and beautiful snowflake falls into the world. Each time a moment of generosity arises: a gift, a smile, an offering of wonderment, a sharing of food, comforting a child, inspiration, encouragement, teaching or practical support, a beautiful snowflake gently descends upon the earth. This isn't restricted to humans. All sorts of creatures, mammals, fish, birds, insects and reptiles nurture and protect and at least to some degree educate their young. Ancient mother trees act as nurseries for myriad young sprouts. Viewing the activities of living beings throughout the biosphere, such moments punya kamma are uncountable.

In this section of the seven-fold prayer, we celebrate the beautiful life enhancing activities brought forth by *Buddhas* – awakened ones or perhaps 'awakening oneness', *Bodhisattvas* – beings consciously cultivating the arts of wisdom and compassion for the sake of all beings, *Pratyekabuddhas* – beings who have spontaneously awakened with very little obvious study or practice, *Sravakas* – monks and nuns who are living a life of formal buddhist training; along with myriad other sentient beings of innumerable backgrounds and traditions – relatives, strangers, humans and non-humans alike. With each moment of life enhancing goodness a delicate snowflake enters the world. With wide open arms, we gently gather the flakes together into a huge radiant snowball and then we play with it, tossing it up into the air. Eventually it dissolves into us and we are filled with this uplifting love and inspiration.

5 – Entreaty to Turn the Wheel of Dharma

The phrase, "Turning the wheel of dharma" appears in numerous Buddhist texts and has conventionally come to mean, teaching dharma. Like many well used metaphors, there are layers of depth often missed in traditional usage.

Dharma (Skt) or *dhamma* (Pali) has a variety of meanings depending on how it is used. Some more common examples are: truth, law, phenomena, thing, or teaching. Digging into its roots we find *dhar*, from *dhareti* (Skt) which means to hold, or support and by extension, to cradle and nurture. *Ma* in many languages means mother. Putting them together dharma can refer to that which holds, supports, nurtures and mothers. The study, practice and realisation of dharma recognises that everything and every being is a manifesting web of dynamic relationships. We are supported, nurtured and mothered by myriad other beings, situations and circumstances. Simultaneously, from the other's point of view, our ongoing existence contributes to holding, supporting, nurturing and mothering of others. This mutual shaping is what I think of as primordial dharma.¹⁷

Celebrating Primordial Dharma;

Where meditation practice mirrors realisation.

Where, path and goal are not different.

Where what is studied or practised, is who is studying and practising.

¹⁷ This paragraph with a few edits and the following verse are taken from a longer essay "Primordial Dharma" [Click here to read the full essay.](#)

*Where love and clear seeing perfumes the ever-fresh gardens of our lives
 and the lives of all living beings,
 Primordial Dharma is an ungraspable treasure.
 Fundamentally inconceivable,
 it is good in the beginning, good in the middle and good at the end.
 It mothers, holds, supports and cradles everything,
 This ever-fresh dancing of creativity and wonderment.
 Its what I am and what I do,
 this primordial dharma that is also you.
 It manifests everyone – mysteries unfolding – inviting investigation,
 Realised by wise lovers of suchness, everywhere.
 Blessed.*

Seen this way, the study and practice of dharma is a reciprocal loop – like the drawing by Escher that illustrates two hands holding pencils, each one drawing the other. Study leads to practice which in turn leads to fresh understanding which lead to further avenues of study and so forth. In a general sense, every living being, is nurtured, mothered and supported by countless beings while simultaneously nurturing and supporting and mothering countless others. This is a beginningless endless cycling – the wheel of dharma. Deepening understanding invites compassion which in turn invites deepening understanding. The wheel is already turning. Great teachers of dharma manifest wisdom through their effortless living of this truth. They radiate compassion by teaching it to beings who are ready to be nudged more deeply into it. Depending on the needs of the beings seeking help, the emphasis of teaching that is given will appear in different ways, thus forming vehicles of different traditions.¹⁸

They who illumine all worlds of experience, solid in their realisation of love and awareness in every situation and circumstance, protectors of life in all its abundance and mystery, I entreat you to turn the incomparable wheel of Dharma.

When a mature being, rich in life experience meaningfully and effectively helps another to recognise their deep roots in life unfolding, that mature being is said to be "turning the wheel of dharma". They do this by offering the best of themselves; their presence, their understanding, their wisdom, empathy, compassion, skill, life experience and so forth – in short, their most admirable qualities or talents. In a similar way we can invite not just recognised 'dharma teachers', but all beings to turn the wheel of dharma. We issue the invitation or entreaty, not necessarily by

¹⁸ In Tibetan texts we come across three major vehicles each with their own type of wheel; *Hineyana, Mahayana and Vajrayana*.

In Hineyana, the earliest teachings attributed to Gautama Buddha, we had; cease to do evil → learn to do good → purify your mind, or *sila* → *samadhi* → *prajna*. One part of the wheel leading seamlessly to the next until we get back to the beginning and so it 'revolves' and the vehicle of life moves on.

In Mahayana teachings we have a cycling of the *Six Parami*: generosity → wholesome relating → patience → skilled use of energy → a continuity of caring and enquiry → profound understanding.

In Vajrayana exemplified in mahamudra/dzogchen/essence zen practice, we have a wheel comprised of view → meditation → conduct, or base → path → fruition, or *samatha* ↔ *vipassana*.

words but by our actions. In this fifth training we actively cultivate situations and circumstances whereby the finest capacities in whoever we are meeting are invited to flower. Recognising that every being is tathagatagarbha, we interact with them in ways that encourage their goodness to fully shine. This is entreating them to turn the wheel of dharma.

6 – Request to Stay

It can help to see the fifth and sixth trainings as a pair. The fifth was directed to others, inviting, requesting, supporting them to bring forth their best qualities, to "turn the wheel of dharma". This sixth training although it could be directed to all teachers in general, it is most meaningfully directed towards oneself. Here we encourage bodhisattvas, including our bodhisattva-selves, to continue to turn the wheel of dharma even when difficulties and challenges to do so become great.

To those who would pass from sorrow, withdrawing from active engagement into a nirvana of inner peace, I fervently pray that for as many eons as there are atoms in all Buddha fields, you continue to inspire and teach in myriads ways, supporting the welfare and happiness of all sentient beings.

No matter who you are, a life of helping others can from time to time feel discouraging, overwhelming and sometimes just impossible. Faced with what seems to be an inexhaustible ocean of need, caregivers can totter on the edge of burn-out. We might think about retiring or changing our profession, and yet how can we retire from this ever fresh inter-being of life unfolding that we are? Some experienced yogis and meditators may think they have found an answer having developed varying degrees of ability to enter into blissfully detached states of *samadhi* and to remain there, in some cases, for as long as they wish. This can appear as a seductive option. Faced with the immense amount of suffering in the world, such an option is not difficult to understand but it falls short of full realisation of love and clear seeing. Discouragement like this is still motivated by at least a subtle concern for one's own well being while neglecting the well-being of others. This "request to stay" is a reminder of something that we all know deep in the heart of our living. May we stay actively involved, actively engaged. We have no other life. Have courage – keep going with the good work!

7 – Sharing the Merit

With this last training we come to understand how the previous seven trainings arise together as a seamless whole. We begin by reviewing the first six while aspiring that these efforts be of benefit to all beings. Gradually, this practice will shift from being an expression of wholesome aspiration, to become an ever strengthening confidence born from insight, that since everything is interconnected and interdependent, these wholesome activities are already meaningfully supporting the well being of everything and everyone.

May any virtue generated through this practice of reverencing, offering, acknowledging, rejoicing, entreating, and requesting, support the awakening of wisdom and compassion in all sentient beings.

At the end of a particularly pithy sadhana of Guru Rinpoche there is a beautiful verse that can shed light on the profundity of this Sevenfold Prayer / Training. The sadhana verse is in italic, followed by a brief comment.

One's view of things is all embracing.

May the Dharmakaya bring blessings.

(Through "reverencing the infinite realm of awakening" and "releasing into the vast flow of offering", one's view of things (dharma) becomes all embracing.)

One's thoughts are in tune with every situation.

May the Sambhagakaya bring blessings.

(Through "acknowledging one's own unwholesome actions" and "rejoicing in all wholesome actions", we attune to every situation both positive and negative.)

All one's actions spring from this.

May the Nirmanakaya bring blessings.

(Through our "entreaty to turn the wheel of dharma" and "request to stay", we engage in skilful action.)

These three become one in the vision of the ground of being.

May the union of these three bring blessings.

(Through "sharing the merit" we acknowledge that these three (pairs) together form an inseparable whole.)