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Succinct Notes on the Eight Sessions Mind Training

Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo



KHYENTSE VISION
PROJECT

blo sbyong thun brgyad ma'i zin bris nyung gsal

B644

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Khyentse Vision Project: Translating the Works of
Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

OUTLINE

SUCCINCT NOTES ON THE EIGHT SESSIONS MIND TRAINING

1. Mind Training Pertaining to Food
2. Mind Training Pertaining to Breathing
3. Training the Mind by Multiplying Your Body into the Number of Grains of Sand in the Ganges and Taking Upon Yourself the Sufferings of the Beings of the Six Realms
4. Mind Training Pertaining to Flesh and Blood
5. Mind Training Pertaining to Torma Offering
6. Mind Training Pertaining to the Natural Elements
7. Training the Mind by Transforming Oneself into a Wish-Fulfilling Jewel
8. Mind Training as an Instruction for the Moment of Death

NOTES

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GLOSSARY

INTRODUCTION

The *Succinct Notes on the Eight Sessions Mind Training* is an instructional text on mind training (*lojong*) in the form of edited notes.¹ The notes are based on teachings given by one of Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo's masters from the Geluk tradition, Könchok Tenpa Rabgye (1801–1866). The root text, the *Eight Sessions Mind Training*, is attributed to Dromtön Gyalwe Jungne (1005–1064). Lojong instructions, which often take the form of succinct statements for reflection and meditation, evolved within the Kadam tradition that developed after Atiśa Dīpaṅkara's (982–1054) arrival in Tibet in the first half of the eleventh century.²

Lojong as a Genre

The key features of the mind training practices can be explained by the connotations of the term *lojong* itself. The first syllable *lo* is a generic term for mind or thought, but also, specifically in this context, refers to our attitude toward ourselves and others. The second syllable *jong* carries the connotations of (1) training to acquire specific skills or mastering a certain field of knowledge, (2) habituating oneself to specific ways of being or thinking, (3) cultivating mental qualities such as compassion, loving-kindness, and bodhicitta, and (4) cleansing or purifying one's mental afflictions.³

The mind training practices work in a very practical way to change our basic understanding of others by recognizing that they are equal to ourselves. We do this by considering that every being has been our mother over beginningless lifetimes and by acknowledging the fact that all beings are equal in their wishing for and pursuing of happiness and wanting to avoid suffering. It is this idea of mental transformation as the central purpose of Buddhist practice that makes up the heart of the instructions of the Kadam masters. We transform the deluded state of self-centeredness and egoism into other-centered altruism by means of developing compassion, bodhicitta, and the practice of mentally giving away our own

happiness and taking upon ourselves the suffering of others, a practice known as “giving and taking” or *tonglen*.

Authorship of the *Eight Sessions Mind Training*

As pointed out by Thupten Jinpa in his translation, the authorship of the root text on which Khyentse Wangpo’s notes are based, the *Mahāyāna Mind Training in Eight Sessions*,⁴ is difficult to determine.⁵ The author of the text himself refers to it as “Dromtönpa’s instruction,”⁶ an attribution that is confirmed by the Geluk scholar Tuken Lobzang Chökyi Nyima (1737–1802) in his influential work *Crystal Mirror of Philosophical Schools*⁷ and by the Mongolian author Yeshe Döndrub (1792–1855) in his *lojong* anthology *Treasury of Gems*.⁸ The Kadam master Khamlungpa Śākya Yönten (1025–1115) played a major role in the dissemination of this teaching.⁹ Being a student of Dromtönpa, from whom he received Atiśa’s teachings on mind training, he is sometimes referred to as the fourth of the three “Kadam brothers”¹⁰ and supposedly met Atiśa in person.¹¹

Drakgön Shabdrung Könchok Tenpa Rabgye

As demonstrated in the colophon, Khyentse Wangpo’s *Succinct Notes* are based on teachings he received from Könchok Tenpa Rabgye, who is listed in Khyentse Wangpo’s biography as one of his teachers from the Geluk tradition.¹² Elaborating on Khyentse Wangpo’s sources of influence, Matthew Akester writes, “Progressive and syncretic trends within the contemporary Gélukpa tradition, mostly in the Domé region of north-east Tibet ... could be considered another source of influence. Khyentsé Rinpoché studied with several representatives of this school, Drakgön Könchok Tenpa Rabgyé (1801–1866) in particular.”¹³

Könchok Tenpa Rabgye hailed from Amdo in eastern Tibet, where he was recognized by the Third Jamyang Shepa (1792–1855) as the incarnation of Drakgönpa Lobzang Sherab. He mainly studied at Labrang Monastery, of which he eventually became the forty-ninth abbot. He was also a student of Gungtang Tenpe Drönme (1762–1823),¹⁴ and his most influential work is on the history of Buddhism in Amdo.¹⁵

Khyentse Wangpo’s biography contains an exhaustive list of teachings he received from Könchok Tenpa Rabgye consisting of more than a hundred works.¹⁶ Among those are copious texts and teachings related to the Kadam tradition—a tradition that Khyentse Wangpo held in great esteem¹⁷—such as *Mind Training: The Great Collection*, *The Book of Kadam*,¹⁸ Langri Tangpa’s (1054–1123) *Eight Verses on Mind Training*, Lechen Kunga Gyaltzen’s fifteenth century influential history of the Kadam tradition, and the collected writings of Gyalse Togme (1297–1371), to mention but a few examples.

Text Location in Khyentse Wangpo's Collected Works

The text can be found in the first chapter of volume 11 in the 2014 edition of Khyentse Wangpo's collected works. The first chapter of this volume is all about mind training, featuring five other texts of that genre. Apart from the present text, it includes a teaching method of Zhönu Gyalchok's (1382/85–1439) fourteenth century *Mind Training: Compendium of Well-Uttered Insights*,¹⁹ three works related to Sumpa Lotsāwa's (late twelfth/early thirteenth century) *Ear-Whispered Mind Training*,²⁰ and an instructional text by Mahāsiddha Virvapa.²¹ There are various other works on mind training included in Khyentse Wangpo's collected works, for example, his well-known commentary on the *Seven-Point Mind Training*²² entitled *Seeds of Benefit and Well-Being*.²³

OUTLINE

1. MIND TRAINING PERTAINING TO FOOD
2. MIND TRAINING PERTAINING TO BREATHING
3. TRAINING THE MIND BY MULTIPLYING YOUR BODY INTO THE NUMBER OF GRAINS OF SAND IN THE GANGES AND TAKING UPON YOURSELF THE SUFFERINGS OF THE BEINGS OF THE SIX REALMS
4. MIND TRAINING PERTAINING TO FLESH AND BLOOD
5. MIND TRAINING PERTAINING TO TORMA OFFERING
6. MIND TRAINING PERTAINING TO THE NATURAL ELEMENTS
7. TRAINING THE MIND BY TRANSFORMING ONESELF INTO A WISH-FULFILLING JEWEL
8. MIND TRAINING AS AN INSTRUCTION FOR THE MOMENT OF DEATH

ལྷོ་སྤྱོད་སྤུན་བརྒྱད་མའི་བེན་བྲིས་ཉུང་གསལ།

Succinct Notes on the Eight Sessions Mind Training

Namo gurave!

The profound teaching known as the *Mahāyāna Mind Training Instruction in Eight Sessions* contains the following points.²⁴

1. Mind Training Pertaining to Food

In order for your benefactors' accumulation of merit to be accomplished, to not become indebted through eating food, and to be able to advance to the level of a perfectly enlightened buddha on the basis of just these methods, you should in general cultivate the thought of nurturing the microorganisms in your body and so on. In particular, as you swallow food and drink, connect that with the visualization of taking upon yourself the causal negative actions and their resultant sufferings of all sentient beings. Then, as you breathe out, connect your exhalation with the visualization of sending forth your happiness and virtue. Practice this until it happens naturally.

2. Mind Training Pertaining to Breathing

Start by taking, for example, your own mother as a mental object. As you fully exhale through your right nostril,²⁵ [61] imagine that you are giving away all your virtues and their fruits, which transform into white light. They enter your mother's left nostril, giving her an extraordinary feeling of happiness. As you inhale again, feel that the wind of your breath draws out all the negativities and obscurations from your mother's mind stream through her right nostril, like hair being sheared off with a sharp knife. Imagine that they then gather into a dark mass and enter you

through your left nostril. Once this mass arrives in your heart, it directly strikes the cherishing of what you conceive as “I,” and then vanishes instantly.

Visualize like this twenty-one times, or as many times as you wish, and then continue your giving-and-taking visualization by sending forth infinite rays of white light to your father and all other sentient beings. From time to time, take upon yourself the suffering of the beings from each of the six realms and practice sending forth your happiness and so on to benefit all of them.

3. Training the Mind by Multiplying Your Body into the Number of Grains of Sand in the Ganges and Taking Upon Yourself the Sufferings of the Beings of the Six Realms

Imagine that you multiply your body infinitely, equal to the limitless extent of space, and that once you have sent forth a body to every sentient being, all their desires are fulfilled. Then focus on each realm one by one—from the hells up through the higher realms, [62] the ten bodhisattva grounds included—and feel that you are taking upon yourself all the negative actions and obscurations of the beings therein and offering them your happiness and virtues.

4. Mind Training Pertaining to Flesh and Blood

Summon into your presence the classes of beings that inflict harm upon yourself, upon all other sentient beings, upon fellow Dharma practitioners, and in particular upon the life span and activities of the sublime and glorious teachers. Imagine evoking them in this way: “You have been my mothers countless times and since time without beginning. Thus, to repay your kindness,²⁶ I shall offer you this body of mine as a substitute for the bodies of all sentient beings, especially of Dharma practitioners, and even more particularly of the sublime and glorious teachers. Devour my flesh if you like flesh! Drink my blood if you like blood! Chew my bones if you like bones! Take my skin if it is skin you like! If you are in haste, eat me raw! If you are not in a hurry, eat me cooked! I shall give this body to you so you can do with it whatever you please; whether you use it as food, clothing, or a pleasant dwelling place to stay—use it in whichever way you like! Take whatever you want of my body, wealth, and roots of virtue, and do what you want with them! Use them as you wish! Whosoever desires, take them! Use them in whichever way you please!” [63]

Recite this without hope and fear. Give away your body like a medicinal plant that, with no notion of self or any particular thoughts even when it is being cut, brings great healing to all sentient beings in need.

5. Mind Training Pertaining to Torma Offering

Visualize this world as a torma vessel made of precious jewels. Imagine that your body is then cut into pieces inside this vessel and turned into ambrosia with the

recitation of OM ĀḤ HŪM. Imagine giving it in the form of an offering cloud from the sky treasury to all the guests from within and beyond this world, thus making them delighted and content. At the end, seal this session with a spacelike state of mind free from the concepts of the three spheres. When you arise from that state, meditate that everything is like an illusion.

6. Mind Training Pertaining to the Natural Elements

Imagine that the flesh, bones, and other parts of your body constituting the inner element of earth dissolve into the external element of earth. Likewise, your blood, serum, and other body fluids dissolve into the external water element; your body heat and so on dissolve into the external fire element; and your breath and so on dissolve into the wind element. Then contemplate the thought that this body of yours, now transformed into the four natural elements, serves as a basis of sustenance²⁷ for all sentient beings.

From time to time, send beings whatever they may desire from multiple emanations of your body, equal to them in number; at other times, send desirable things directly emanating from your body alone. Sometimes, transform your body into things such as food, clothing, a home, [64] or a ship, and give them away to whomever needs them to use in whatever way they please. In this way, play with whatever you conjure up with your imagination.

7. Training the Mind by Transforming Oneself into a Wish-Fulfilling Jewel

Think of your body as a wish-granting jewel from which whatever each being desires descends upon them like rain. Imagine that, in order for those who have not yet entered the path to enter it now, and for the extraordinary qualities of those already on the path to increase more and more, your body transforms into masters teaching the sacred doctrine, volumes of its scriptures, and abundant places and requisites for Dharma practice. You thus accomplish unsurpassed happiness and benefit for those in the three lower realms, for the śrāvakas and pratyekabuddhas, and all the way up to the bodhisattvas on the ten grounds in accordance with their needs.

On this point, the older scriptures say that you should transform your body into the form of a wish-fulfilling octagonal beryl gemstone and then proceed with the visualization as before. If beginners do it in that way, so that the object of visualization appears more easily in the mind, it will not be wrong. Whichever way you may find suitable, the meditation will serve its purpose.

8. Mind Training as an Instruction for the Moment of Death

According to this teaching, when you approach death, [65] you should make a final offering²⁸ of all your possessions, large and small. By means of various practices

such as the seven-limb practice, and in particular by offering your own body, you should sever your clinging.

Then, make the following supplication: “Bless me so that I may not forget the mind training during the four situations when it is most likely to be forgotten— (1) during the moment of death, (2) during the intermediate state, (3) in the mother’s womb, and (4) in the next life. Bless me so that I may not lose my mind training in the four situations when it is most likely to be lost—when suffering harm caused by (1) humans, (2) nonhumans, (3) an illness, and (4) when strong afflictions arise.”²⁹ Grant your blessings so that the notion of mind training newly arises where it has not yet arisen and that it grows stronger and stronger where it has already taken root.”

First make this supplication and then practice loving kindness and compassion through giving and taking. Thus you will face the moment of your death in a state of being perfectly accustomed to the two aspects of bodhicitta.

When practicing profound instructions such as these, you should, as a preliminary, do the six preparatory practices, and especially meditate on guru yoga and pray fervently. During the main part, you should develop complete familiarity with each of the visualizations. Afterward, when you rise from the meditation session, you should dedicate the roots of virtue. Also, during all intervals between sessions you should, without separating from the essence of the main practice, spend your time practicing virtuous actions, sustained by mindfulness and vigilance. [66]

Once you have gained a certain amount of familiarity with the practice, you should train in such a way that all occasions—both when actually performing the practices and at other times—are taken onto the path. Practicing the two aspects of bodhicitta like this, with all your strength, is a marvelous way of extracting the essence of the freedoms and advantages of this human existence.

These notes were penned by Khyentse Wangpo, who received the kind gift of this method from the venerable master Könchok Tēnpa Rabgye Palzangpo, the lord of learning and accomplishment. May it bring virtue and excellence!

NOTES

1. *zin bris*.
2. On the origins of the mind training teachings, see Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 6–8.
3. Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 1.
4. *theg pa chen po'i blo sbyong thun brgyad ma*. This work, although not actually by Khyentse Wangpo himself, was nevertheless included in his collected works directly preceding the present text, which consists of his notes on it. A translation of the root text can be found in Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 225–37.
5. Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 606n348.
6. In the first chapter, “Mind Training Pertaining to Food,” it says: “Now, in order to put into practice the instructions of Geshe Dromtönpa” (*yang 'brom ston pa'i gdams ngag lag len du byed na/*), referring to his *blo sbyong thun brgyad ma* (Kabum, vol. 11, 40–60), which has been translated by Thupten Jinpa (*Mind Training*, 225–37).
7. *grub mtha' shel gyi me long*. For an English translation of this text, see Geshé Lhundub Sopa, *Crystal Mirror*.
8. *legs par bshad pa bka' gdams rin po che'i gsung gi gces btus legs bshad nor bu'i bang mdzod*. See Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 606n348.
9. Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 606n348.
10. Potowa Rinchen Sal (1027–1105), Puchungwa Zhönu Gyaltzen (1031–1106), and Chengawa Tsultrim Bar (1033–1103).
11. Jinpa, *Book of Kadam*, 660n545.
12. Akester, *Life of Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo*, 144.
13. Akester, *Life of Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo*, iv.
14. Minyak Gönpö, *gangs can mkhas dbang gi rnam thar mdor bsdus (deb gnyis pa)*, 312.
15. *mdo smad chos 'byung*. Akester, *Life of Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo*, 277n117.
16. Akester, *Life of Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo*, 86–89.

17. In the colophon of his *Ambrosia of the Mind* (*blo sbyong don bdun ma'i gsol 'debs yid kyi bdud rtsi*, 551.6), Khyentse Wangpo describes himself as being greatly devoted to the Kadam tradition (*bka' gdams rin po che'i ring lugs la mchog tu gus pa*). Another example can be found in the colophon of his *Chariot of Benefit and Happiness* (*jo bo bka' gdams pa'i gzhung gdams man ngag mtha' dag gi brjod bya mdor bsdu pa'i glu dbyangs phan bde'i shing rta*, 73.1–2), where he states that he feels great faith in contemplating the lives of the Kadam masters and that he has studied their scriptures extensively.
18. For an English translation of this text, see Jinpa, *Book of Kadam*.
19. *blo sbyong legs bshad kun btus*. Like the present text, Khyentse Wangpo's *'chad thabs* is based on teachings he received from Könchok Tenpa Rabgye. Thupten Jinpa argues that the last section of Zhönu Gyalchok's *Compendium* is the basis of the influential *blo sbyong brgya rtsa* collection; see Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 14. Both Zhönu Gyalchok's *Compendium* and *blo sbyong brgya rtsa* contain the *Eight Sessions Mind Training*.
20. *sum pa lo tsā ba'i blo sbyong snyan brgyud*.
21. *grub chen bir+wa pa'i man ngag mnyam med snying rje'i rnal 'byor gyi blo sbyong*.
22. *blo sbyong don bdun ma*, composed by Chekawa Yeshe Dorje (1101–1175).
23. *blo sbyong don bdun ma nyams su len tshul snying por dril ba phan bde'i sa bon*. Due to the reorganization of the volumes in the newer editions of Khyentse Wangpo's collected works, this text has unfortunately been separated from the other mind training works in volume 11 and included—together with a supplication prayer—at the end of volume 10 in the 2014 edition. In the original edition from 1919, all the *lojong*-related works are contained in volume 7 (*ja*). This commentary can also be found in volume 2 of Jamgön Kongtrul's *Treasury of Precious Instructions* (*gdams ngag mdzod*).
24. The translation of the titles of the eight sessions follows that of Thupten Jinpa in his translation of the “root text” (Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 225–37).
25. The other nostril is closed with a finger.
26. The guests refer to the beings one invites as recipients of the offering.
27. Emended to *nyer 'tsho* (text: *nyer 'tsho*, 63.5). In this section, the root text quotes a verse from Śāntideva's *Bodhicaryāvatara* (3.20) which reads, “Like great natural elements such as earth, and like space, may I always become, for countless beings, diverse forms of sustenance.” (Translation by Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 232). The last line reads: *rnam mang nyer 'tsho'i rgyur yang shog/*, which supports the emendation of *nyer 'tsho* (“harm”) to *nyer 'tsho* (“sustenance”).
28. The Tibetan reads *spong thag* here, which has been translated by Thupten Jinpa (*Mind Training*, 114) as “gifts of the deceased,” referring to “articles belonging to a deceased person that are offered to a lama or a monastery, or sometimes to the poor, when requests for the performance of the death ritual are made. It became customary in Tibet, especially for dedicated religious practitioners, to make such offerings even before their death. This is to encourage acceptance of the reality of your death so that you can let go of attachment to your possessions and concentrate on meditative practice, such as mind training, with increased urgency.” Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 593n227.

29. The second set of four situations is specified in *Mahāyāna Mind Training Eliminating Future Adversities* (*theg pa chen po blo sbyong gi ma 'ongs pa'i 'gal rkyen spong ba*) in Zhönu Gyalchok's *Mind Training: Compendium of Well-Uttered Insights* (223.1): "There are four occasions when mind training is most likely to be lost: (1) when suffering severe harms caused by humans, (2) [when suffering severe harms] caused by nonhumans, (3) when suffering a grave illness caused by the elements, and (4) when strong afflictions arise." Translation by Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 241.

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GLOSSARY

afflictions

ཉོན་མོངས། • *nyon mongs* • kleśa

“A class of dissonant mental states, including both thoughts and emotions, that have their root in ignorance. They are referred to as ‘afflictions’ because they afflict the individual from deep within. The classical Abhidharma texts list six root afflictions—(1) attachment, (2) aversion, (3), conceit, (4) afflicted doubt, (5) ignorance, and (6) afflicted view—and twenty afflictions that are derivative of these root afflictions.” Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 655.

giving and taking

གཏོང་ལེན། • *gtong len*

“One of mind training’s most memorable contributions to world spirituality is the practice of *tonglen*, or ‘giving and taking.’ *Tonglen* is a seemingly simple meditation practice of giving away one’s own happiness and good fortune to others and taking upon oneself their suffering and misfortune. Traditionally, the meditation is designed to enhance the cultivation of loving kindness and compassion, two central ideas in Mahāyāna Buddhism.” Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 3–4.

intermediate state

བར་དོ། • *bar do* • antarābhāva

The state between death and the moment of conception in the next life.

pratyekabuddha

རང་སངས་རྒྱས། • *rang sangs rgyas*

“Literally ‘solitary realizer’ or ‘self-enlightened one,’ a pratyekabuddha is an adept who seeks liberation on the basis of autonomous practice. Along with the vehicle of the śrāvakas, the vehicle of the pratyekabuddha belongs to the Hīnayāna path, requiring a thorough realization of the truth of dependent origination.” Jinpa, *Illuminating the Intent*, 660.

seven-limb practice

ཡན་ལག་བདུན་པ། • *yan lag bdun pa* • saptāṅga

The seven-limb practices, derived from Śāntideva’s *Way of the Bodhisattva*, are preparatory practices one undertakes before Dharma practice. These include (1) prostration; (2) offering; (3) confession; (4) rejoicing; (5) praying that the wheel of Dharma be turned; (6) praying that the buddhas and bodhisattvas remain active in the world; and (7) dedication.

six preparatory practices

སྦྱར་བའི་ཚེས་རྒྱལ། • *sbyor ba’i chos drug*

These have been transmitted and brought to Tibet by Atiśa (982–1054), who in turn received them from his master Serlingpa (ca. 10th century). They include (1) cleaning the meditation room and setting up representations of a Buddha’s body, speech, and mind; (2) obtaining offerings without hypocrisy and setting them up in a beautiful arrangement; (3) laying out a proper meditation seat, sitting in the eightfold posture, and taking refuge and reaffirming bodhicitta; (4) visualizing a field of merit; (5) performing the seven-limb practice and maṅḍala offering; (6) seeking blessing from the lineage masters. See Berzin, “Sweeping and Cleaning the Meditation Room.”

sky treasury

ནམ་མཁའ་མཚོ། • *nam mkha’mdzod* • gaganagañja

“The expression sky treasury ... alludes to a common legend in Buddhist literature of an inexhaustible treasure. It is said that the one who has gained ... this wealth can pull material objects from the sky as if it were a treasury. This power is seen as one of the marks of a bodhisattva who has fully mastered the perfection of giving, which takes place on the first bodhisattva level.” Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 586–87, n. 122.

śrāvaka

ཉན་ཐོས། • *nyan thos*

“Literally ‘hearers,’ śrāvakas are disciples of the Buddha whose primary objective is to attain liberation from cyclic existence. They are often paired with pratyekabuddhas as spiritual trainees on the Hīnayāna path, as distinct from the bodhisattvas, who embark on the Mahāyāna path to full enlightenment.” Jinpa, *Illuminating the Intent*, 662.

substitute

སྤྲ། • *glud*

glud or *glud tshab* refers to a ransom offered to some malignant spirit, consisting of an effigy of the potential victim made of barley or wheat-straw, and its interior filled with grain, edibles, cloth, medicine, and precious articles such as gold, silver or coins, and then thrown in the direction from which the evil spirit is thought to have come.

three spheres

འཕོར་གསུམ། • *'khor gsum* • trimaṅḍala

The three spheres refer to the three key elements of an action: the object of an action, the agent, and the action itself.

torma

གཏོར་མ། • *gtor ma* • bali

“A cake for ritual offerings made from dough; in some contexts, a representation of a deity. Often cone-shaped and composed of yak butter and barley flour, *torma* can be as simple as a dough ball or elaborately crafted with colorful butter ornamentation.” Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 663.

two aspects of bodhicitta

བྱང་ལྡན་སེམས་གཉིས། • *byang chub sems gnyis*

(1) Relative bodhicitta refers to the altruistic intention to achieve enlightenment in order to benefit all beings. Relative bodhicitta is in turn understood in terms of two aspects: bodhicitta in aspiration and action. (2) Absolute bodhicitta refers to the direct realization of emptiness of the fully awakened mind. See Jinpa, *Mind Training*, 656.