

The background of the cover is a photograph of a landscape. The top half is a deep blue sky with some lighter, wispy clouds. Below the sky is a ridge of a hill covered in dry, golden-brown grass. A single, dark green tree stands on the right side of the ridge. The bottom half of the cover is a solid, light brown or tan color.

ALWAYS MAINTAIN
A Joyful Mind

AND OTHER *LOJONG* TEACHINGS ON
AWAKENING COMPASSION AND FEARLESSNESS

Pema Chödrön

Author of *When Things Fall Apart*

Always Maintain a Joyful Mind

*And Other Lojong Teachings on
Awakening Compassion and Fearlessness*

TRANSLATED BY THE
Nālandā Translation Committee

WITH AN INTRODUCTION AND COMMENTARIES BY
Pema Chödrön



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INTRODUCTION

Training in Loving-Kindness and Compassion

FOR MANY YEARS, the fifty-nine slogans that are contained in this book have been the primary focus of my personal practice and teaching. These Tibetan Buddhist slogans (called *lojong*, or “mind training” teachings) offer pithy, powerful reminders on how to awaken our hearts in the midst of day-to-day life, under any circumstances.

The *lojong* teachings presented in this book come from a classical Tibetan text called *The Root Text of the Seven Points of Training the Mind* by Chekawa Yeshe Dorje. When I first read these slogans, I was struck by their unusual message: we can use everything we encounter in our lives—pleasant or painful—to awaken genuine, uncontrived compassion.

The *lojong* teachings include a very supportive meditation practice called *tonglen* (“taking in and sending out”). This is a powerful practice designed to help ordinary people like ourselves connect with the openness and softness of our hearts. I offer additional instruction on *tonglen* practice in an audio program that accompanies this book. To learn more about this practice, go to www.shambhala.com/alwaysmaintainajoyfulmind.

The basic notion of *lojong* is that we can make friends with what we reject, what we see as “bad” about ourselves and in other people. At the same time, we could learn to be generous with what we cherish, what we see as “good.” If we begin to live in this way, something in us that may have been buried for a long time begins to ripen. Traditionally, this “something” is called *bodhichitta*, or “awakened heart.” It’s something that we already have but usually have not yet discovered.

It’s as if we were poor, homeless, hungry, and cold, and although we didn’t know it, right under the ground where we always slept was a pot of gold. That gold is *bodhichitta*. Our confusion and misery come from not knowing that the gold is right here—and from always looking somewhere else. When we talk about joy, enlightenment, waking up, or awakening *bodhichitta*, all that means is that we know the gold is right here, and we realize that it’s been here all along.

The basic message of the *lojong* teachings is that if it’s painful, you can learn to hold your seat and move closer to that pain. Reverse the usual pattern, which is to split, to escape. Go against the grain and hold your seat. *Lojong* introduces a different attitude toward unwanted stuff: if it’s painful, you become willing not just to endure it but also to let it awaken your heart and soften you. You learn to embrace it.

If an experience is delightful or pleasant, usually we want to grab it and make it last. We’re afraid that it will end. We’re not inclined to share it. The *lojong* teachings encourage us, if we enjoy what we are experiencing, to think of other people and wish for them to feel that. Share the wealth. Be generous with your joy. Give away what you most want. Be generous with your insights and delights. Instead of fearing that they’re going to slip away and holding on to them, share them.

Whether it’s pain or pleasure, through *lojong* practice we come to have a sense of letting our experience be as it is without trying to manipulate it, push it away, or grasp it. The pleasurable aspects of being human as well as the painful ones become the key to awakening *bodhichitta*.

The method I suggest is one that was recommended to me by my teacher, Tibetan meditation master Chögyam Trungpa.

1. Each morning, pick a slogan at random from the book.
2. Read commentary on that slogan. (In addition to my own comments offered here, you could also consult additional commentaries on the *lojong* slogans. See the book list in the Additional Resources section for recommendations.)
3. Try to live by the meaning of that slogan throughout your day.

Sometimes, over the course of a day, I forget the slogan I've selected. Usually, however, something challenging arises, the slogan of the day, or perhaps a different one altogether, will come to mind and provide me with valuable on-the-spot instruction. The slogans always introduce me to a bigger perspective, and I begin to gain confidence that I can use them to become less reactive and see things more clearly throughout my life. Even the most difficult of situations have become more and more workable.

I hope that slogan practice will help you, as it has helped me, to transform all circumstances in the path of enlightenment.

The Lojong Slogans with Commentary

First, train in the preliminaries.

COMMENTARY

The preliminaries are also known as the four reminders. In your daily life, try to:

1. Maintain an awareness of the preciousness of human life.
2. Be aware of the reality that life ends; death comes for everyone.
3. Recall that whatever you do, whether virtuous or not, has a result; what goes around comes around.
4. Contemplate that as long as you are too focused on self-importance and too caught up in thinking about how you are good or bad, you will suffer. Obsessing about getting what you want and avoiding what you don't want does not result in happiness.

Regard all dharmas as dreams.

COMMENTARY

Whatever you experience in your life—pain, pleasure, heat, cold, or anything else—is like something happening in a dream. Although you might think things are very solid, they are like passing memories. You can experience this open, unfixated quality in sitting meditation; all that arises in your mind—hate, love, and all the rest—is not solid. Although the experience can get extremely vivid, it is just a product of your mind. Nothing solid is really happening.

Examine the nature of unborn awareness.

COMMENTARY

Look at your mind, at just simple awareness itself. “Examine” doesn’t mean analyze. It means just looking and seeing if there is anything solid to hold onto. Our mind is constantly shifting and changing. Just look at that!

Self-liberate even the antidote.

COMMENTARY

Do not hang on to anything—even the realization that there's nothing solid to hold onto.

Rest in the nature of *alaya*, the essence.

COMMENTARY

There is a resting place, a starting place that you can always return to. You can always bring your mind back home and rest right here, right now, in present, unbiased awareness.

In postmeditation, be a child of illusion.

COMMENTARY

When you finish sitting meditation, if things become heavy and solid, be fully present and realize that everything is actually pliable, open, and workable. This is instruction for meditation in action, realizing that you don't have to feel claustrophobic because there is always lots of room, lots of space.

Sending and taking should be practiced alternately.

These two should ride the breath.

COMMENTARY

This is instruction for a meditation practice called *tonglen*. In this practice you send out happiness to others and you take in any suffering that others feel. You take in with a sense of openness and compassion and you send out in the same spirit. People need help and with this practice we extend ourselves to them.

Three objects, three poisons, and three seeds of virtue.

COMMENTARY

The three objects are: friends, enemies, and neutrals. The three poisons are: craving, aversion, and indifference. When you feel craving, you own it fully and wish that all beings could be free of it. When you feel aggression or indifference you do the same. In this way what usually causes suffering—what poisons us and others—becomes a seed of compassion and loving-kindness, a seed of virtue.

In all activities, train with slogans.

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