“These gems of the Tibetan tradition represent a sophisticated path to an inner transformation that modern contemplative neuroscience now studies to better understand the greater potentials of the human mind and heart.”
—Daniel Goleman, author Emotional Intelligence

Thibetans revere the mind training (lojong) tradition for its practical and down-to-earth advice. The key to happiness is not a life free of problems but rather the development of a mind capable of transforming any problem or situation into a cause of happiness. Translated and introduced by the Dalai Lama’s own translator, Thupten Jinpa, Essential Mind Training contains eighteen individual works, including such renowned classics as Eight Verses on Mind Training and The Seven-Point Mind Training.

“The clarity and raw power of these thousand-year-old teachings of the great Kadampa masters are astonishingly fresh.”
—Buddhadrāma

“With the current rise of positive psychology, in which researchers are seeking a fresh vision of genuine happiness and well-being, this volume can break new ground in bridging the ancient wisdom of Buddhism with cutting-edge psychology.”
—B. Alan Wallace, author of The Attention Revolution

Thupten Jinpa has been the principal English-language translator for His Holiness the Dalai Lama for more than two decades and is president of the Institute of Tibetan Classics. A former monk, he completed his doctorate in religious studies at Cambridge University. Author of many books, he also teaches at McGill University in Montreal.
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Preface

_Essential Mind Training_ is the first publication in a new series called _Tibetan Classics_, which presents accessible soft-cover editions of translations of seminal Tibetan Buddhist works excerpted from the larger, hardcover volumes of _The Library of Tibetan Classics_. The original volume from which this particular anthology is drawn is _Mind Training: The Great Collection_, which I had the privilege to translate into English. Mind training, or _lojong_, is a method for transforming our habitual self-focus into a more compassionate and altruistic way of life, and it gives me great joy to be able to help present this cherished practice to a wider audience.

This selection of eighteen essential texts of the mind training tradition is accompanied by an essay in the form of an introduction, short explanations for each section of the book, explanatory endnotes, as well a glossary to assist the reader with key terms. All of these seek to provide useful context—about authorship, central themes, and historical background—to allow the reader to engage with the texts in a deeper and more meaningful way.

I would like to express my deep gratitude, first and foremost, to my two teachers, His Holiness the Dalai Lama, for being such a shining examplar of the Tibetan tradition, and Kyabjé Zemé Rinpoché, for embodying the spirit of Tibetan mind training teachings and introducing me to its wonderful world. My heartfelt thanks also go out to Barry J. Hershey, Connie
Hershey, and the Hershey Family Foundation, whose support enabled me to undertake the translation of the texts in this volume. I also want to thank Pierre and Pamela Omidyar, who, through a special grant, allowed me to develop this particular volume for a general readership.

Let me also take this opportunity to offer profound thanks to Nita Ing and the Ing Foundation and Eric Colombel and the Tsadra Foundation for their ongoing support of translating multiple volumes from *The Library of Tibetan Classics*. I would also like to thank David Kittelstrom, our longtime editor at Wisdom Publications on the classics series, whose incisive editing always makes my English look better than it actually is; Tim McNeill and his team at Wisdom Publications, for their dedication to excellence; and last but not least my wife Sophie Boyer Langri, for her unwavering support and patience in the face of my never-ending work related to classical Tibetan culture.

Thupten Jinpa
Montreal, 2011
Introduction

Within the vast body of Tibetan spiritual literature, one genre stands out for its inspirational power, universality, and down-to-earth practicality, qualities that have made these teachings dear to the Tibetan people for generations. I am referring to a collection of texts and their associated contemplative practices known simply as *lojong*, or “mind training,” which first appeared in the land of snows almost a millennium ago. At its heart the Tibetan mind training teachings represent a profound celebration of the spiritual ideal of genuine altruism, a deeply felt compassion for all beings and a dedication to serve their welfare. This is an ideal shared across many of world’s great spiritual and humanistic traditions. By the twelfth century *lojong* had become a most cherished spiritual heritage on the vast Tibetan plateau, with attendant myths and legends associated with its origin and development.

Today, as interest in Tibetan spiritual teaching and insights grows worldwide, often it’s the mind training teachings that are most shared with the larger world by Tibetan teachers. I vividly remember the beautiful morning of August 15, 1999, when nearly a hundred thousand people from all walks of life gathered in New York’s Central Park to listen to His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s exposition of *Eight Verses on Mind Training*. As on many of the Dalai Lama’s trips, on that day I had the privilege to sit beside him as his official translator, and on this occasion, the beauty and simplicity of these eight short verses brought a
special power and poignancy to the event. The atmosphere was pervaded by a stillness of attention, deep spiritual presence, and a shared experience of warmth toward all things living, and those present felt—at least for an hour and a half—that they had touched something deep within themselves.² Three years later the Dalai Lama returned once again to Central Park, and that time he chose to teach Atiśa’s *Bodhisattva’s Jewel Garland* to a gathering whose size exceeded even the previous meeting. Both of these seminal mind training texts are featured in the present volume.

In my own life, I have been fortunate to be exposed to the mind training teachings from an early age and have, for more than three decades now, recited the Tibetan teacher Langri Thangpa’s *Eight Verses of Mind Training* on a daily basis. The story of Langri Thangpa’s single-pointed contemplation of the suffering of all beings, even to the point of acquiring the nickname the “one with a tearful face,” and how he came to befriend the wild animals living around his retreat imprinted in me an intuitive affinity with the Kadam lineage, which is associated with the emergence of *lojong* teaching. As a young monk, I would daydream of the idyllic scene where, as an old hermit, I would feed grass to the wild animals that would be living around my hut in some remote mountainous wilderness.

My own personal teacher at Ganden Monastery, Kyabjé Zemé Rinpoché, at whose house I had the honor to live as a monk student, was a great embodiment and master of mind training. While I was deeply immersed in the study of intricate philosophical views that was part of our regular curriculum, every now and then, Rinpoché would remind me of the critical need to be grounded in everyday reality and the need to never be disconnected from contemplating others’ welfare. He would stress that, at the end of day, it’s the teaching of *lojong* that helps
us make the insights and wisdom of the Buddha a reality in our own lives.

On several occasions I was also able to witness at first hand the power of mind training practice to engender courage and resilience in ordinary individuals. A neighbor of mine at the monastery, an ordinary monk, suffered a debilitating skin condition that produced thick scabs on the surface of his skin, which would harden and then crack open. In the heat of the South Indian summer, he had to avoid, as far as possible, any contact between two skin surfaces, such as around the armpits and behind the knees. Though his pain and discomfort were severe, this monk, as a mind training practitioner, always maintained a tranquil and happy state of mind. This capacity to greet life’s difficulties with calm and joy is one of the key indicators of success in training the mind.

In fact, there is a saying attributed to the Kadam lineage masters that the best measure of our spiritual development is how we relate to death when our final day arrives. Those most advanced in their spiritual development will face their mortality with joy; those of medium development will do so without fear. Even the least developed, we are told, should ensure that they approach their final day without any regrets.

Having spent the first three decades of my life in India, a major portion of that in the Tibetan monasteries, I was privileged to see this “measure” of spiritual development in operation. The grace and calm, the note of true freedom in their ability to let go, and the genuine lack of remorse, borne of the awareness that they have done their best while alive—these are some of the characteristic qualities of the state of mind I observed in many of the senior monks, including my own personal teacher, as they approached their own mortality. Even today, when I think of these examples of what some might call
“graceful exits,” the words that come easiest to mind are serenity, dignity, and grace.

The Meaning and Origins of Mind Training

The Tibetan term *lojong* is composed of two syllables. Lo stands for “mind,” “thought,” or “attitudes,” while jong connotes several interrelated but distinct meanings. First, jong can refer to *training* whereby one acquires a skill or masters a field of knowledge. Jong can also connote *habituation* or familiarization with specific ways of being and thinking. Third, jong can refer to the *cultivation* of specific mental qualities, such as universal compassion or the awakening mind. Finally, jong can connote *cleansing* or purification, as in purifying one’s mind of craving, hatred, and delusion.

All these different meanings carry the salient idea of transformation, whereby a process of training, habituation, cultivation, and cleansing induces a kind of metanoesis, from the ordinary deluded state, whose modus operandi is self-centeredness, to a fundamentally changed perspective of enlightened, other-centeredness.3 Today, thanks to research on neuroplasticity, we have a much better appreciation of the brain’s capacity for transformation and change.

Broadly speaking, all the teachings of the Buddha can be characterized as “mind training” in the senses described above. However, the genre called *mind training* or lojong refers to specific approaches for cultivating the *awakening mind*—the altruistic aspiration to seek full awakening for the benefit of all beings—especially through the practice of equalizing and exchanging of self and others as found in Śāntideva’s eighth-century classic, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*.4

Two famous short works of the Tibetan mind training genre are today well known to the English-speaking world, with
Introduction

numerous commentaries by contemporary Tibetan teachers. These are Langri Thangpa’s *Eight Verses on Mind Training* and Chekawa’s *Seven-Point Mind Training*, both of which are contained in the present volume together with translations of their earliest commentaries.5

Traditional Tibetan sources identify the Indian Bengali master Atiśa (982–1054) to be the source of *lojong* in Tibet. Judging by currently available literature, the early origins of mind training as a separate genre of texts and spiritual practice appear to lie in the varied pithy instructions Atiśa may have given individually to many of his disciples. These instructions came to be later compiled under the rubric of “root lines on mind training,” thus forming the basis for the emergence of subsequent *lojong* literature.

A well-known legend associated with the emergence of the *lojong* teachings is Atiśa’s sea voyage to the Indonesian island of Sumatra, where he went to seek the instruction on “mind training” from Serlingpa.6 It is from him Atiśa is said to have received the profound instruction on the techniques of “equalizing and exchanging self and others,” which entails a disciplined process aimed at radically transforming our thoughts, prejudices, and habits from self-centeredness to other-centered altruism. Years later, in Tibet, whenever Atiśa uttered his teacher Serlingpa’s name, it is said, he would instinctively fold his palms together in homage with tears in his eyes. “Whatever degree of kind heart I possess,” he is reputed to have exclaimed, “this is due entirely to my teacher Serlingpa.” Such was the depth of Atiśa’s gratitude for having received the mind training instructions.

In tracing the immediate source of the *Seven-Point Mind Training*, there is a memorable passage in a thirteenth-century work that describes a brief exchange between two Kadam masters, Chekawa (1101–75), the author of the *Seven-Point*, and his
teacher Sharawa. Having been intrigued by the powerful altruistic sentiments expressed in Langri Thangpa’s *Eight Verses*—such as “May I accept upon myself the defeat / and offer to others the victory”—Chekawa asks Sharawa whether these teachings have a scriptural basis. The teacher then cites some stanzas from Nāgārjuna’s *Precious Garland* and asks if there is anyone who does not accept the authority of Nāgārjuna. This story is often repeated in later literature. According to Chekawa, several sutras and early Indian treatises stand out as the primary sources of mind training teachings, but the most important are undoubtedly Nāgārjuna’s *Precious Garland* and Śāntideva’s *Guide to the Bodhisattva’s Way of Life*.

The present book contains the seminal Tibetan works on mind training extracted from *Mind Training: The Great Collection*, the earliest known anthology of this genre. I had the privilege to bring a translation of the complete anthology to the English-speaking world, and it gives me great pleasure to be able to present here the most seminal and inspiring works from within that collection.

**Key Features of Mind Training**

There is no denying that, historically, the mind training teachings evolved in the context of Buddhist practitioners whose primary goal is to seek enlightenment, in fact Buddhahood, for the benefit of all beings—the highest aspiration of a Mahayana Buddhist. And the mind training instructions and practices were recognized by many such aspirants to be a highly effective set of contemplative practices to achieve this end. In addition, it was those meditators who were single-pointedly dedicated to the pursuit of full awakening who found these instructions to be a source of deep inspiration and personal transformation. One need only recall such examples as the story of the “three
Kadam brothers”—Potowa, Chengawa, and Phuchungwa; the ever-weeping Langri Thangpa; Chekawa, the teacher of the lepers; Ben Gungyal, the famed robber turned hermit; and Shawo Gangpa, who inscribed self-exhortation lines on the posts he erected in the four cardinal directions around his meditation hut.

This said, as the history of mind training testifies, much of the popularity and success of mind training teachings lie in their universality, their relevance to the everyday lives of people from all walks of life, not just serious meditators. Furthermore, since the order in which the various aspects of mind training are enacted depends principally on where we are as spiritual aspirants, as the early lojong teachers would say, there is something in mind training practice for everyone.

A central theme of mind training practice is the profound reorientation of our basic attitude toward both our own self and fellow sentient beings, as well as toward the events we experience. In our current naïve everyday attitude, we not only grasp at an intrinsically real “self” as being who we truly are, we also cherish this “me” at the expense of all others. We feel hurt when someone insults us, disappointed when someone we love betrays us, outraged when provoked for no reason, pangs of jealousy when others are successful, and all of these tend to strike us more intensely the stronger our self-cherishing.

The mind training teaching challenges us to question this. By deeply understanding others as friends “more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel”—as Langri Thangpa puts it in his *Eight Verses on Mind Training*—and recognizing that our true enemy lies inside ourselves, we overturn our habitual self-centeredness. It is self-cherishing that opens us to painful and undesirable experiences. Mind training teachings admonish us to instead “Banish all blame to the single source. / Toward all beings contemplate their kindness.”
This somewhat paradoxical instruction that *if we truly cherish our own happiness, we must seek the welfare of others* captures a powerful insight into our human condition. Whether in the domain of our relationships, our sense of purpose in life, or our overall degree of contentment, today researchers are increasingly telling us that what matters most is a basic feeling of connection with others and a need to care for others’ well-being. In other words, modern research seems to be telling us the simple truth that excessive self-centeredness is costly, in terms of both our own personal happiness and our relationships with others and the world around us. The moral of these findings is clear: All of us, those who care for our own well-being, need to shift our basic attitude and move closer to a stance rooted in caring for others.

As an important step toward this other-centeredness, the mind training masters admonish us to view our fellow beings not with rivalry and antagonism but rather with a feeling of gratitude. We cultivate this feeling of appreciation regardless of whether others mean to be kind to us or not, for the fact is that we owe everything in our life to others. From birth to basic survival, from simple joys of eating a meal to a deeper sense of contentment, in every way, the presence of others is indispensable. Today, research on happiness increasingly points to the truth of this basic *lojong* teaching.

One of mind training’s most evocative 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. The meditation is meant to enhance loving-kindness and compassion. In mind training, this practice is combined with our breathing, whereby when we breathe in, we imagine taking from all other beings their pain and misfortune, relieving them of all their
negative traits and behaviors—visualized as streams of dark clouds, as smoke, or as brackish water—entering our body. These become like an antibody, attacking the virus of excessive self-centeredness. Then, when we exhale, we imagine giving to others all our happiness and good fortune, as well as our virtuous traits and behaviors. These are visualized as white clouds, bright lights, or streams of nectar, radiating from us and entering the bodies of other beings, bringing them joy and calm. The *Seven-Point Mind Training* presents this practice most succinctly: “Train alternately in giving and taking; / place the two astride your breath.”

In Tibet lamas often would advise their disciples, especially if they happened to fall ill, to focus on *tonglen* meditation. The idea is to seize the opportunity presented by your sickness to recognize the universality of suffering and creatively use misfortune to reflect on others’ suffering. You might cultivate the thought, “May my sufferings serve to spare others from similar experiences in the future.” Imagining that you are taking upon yourself the same illness afflicting many others right at that moment, you imagine that you thereby spare them from their illness.

So *tonglen* practice helps you to be courageous in the face of suffering while at the same time empathically connecting with the suffering of others. This is a beautiful spiritual practice, which practitioners of other faiths, such as Christianity, or even of no faith, can easily incorporate into everyday life. Indeed, that is happening in many parts of the world today.8

Since a key goal of mind training is the radical transformation of our thoughts and habits, remedies for the various ills of the mind are a dominant feature of these teachings. To begin with, as the instruction “Purify whatever is coarsest first” puts it, there is the practical advice to tackle our most glaring mental afflictions first. Then comes the admonition to “overcome
all errors through a single means,” namely the cultivation of compassion.

In addition, we find the crucial injunction to ensure the purity both of our initial motivation and of our state of mind upon concluding an action. The Seven-Point Mind Training expresses this injunction as “There are two tasks—one at the start and one at the end.”

Finally, we are advised to make our own self the primary witness to our thoughts and actions presented in the line “Of the two witnesses, uphold the primary one.” A witness here means a kind of overseer, someone watching to make sure we do not go astray. If we rely only on others to be witnesses to our conduct, there will be occasions when we have no witness. And even if others are watching us, it is not always easy for them to gauge the internal states driving our actions. In contrast, we can never escape from ourselves. More importantly, if we can establish a positive self-image, then every time we encounter a situation that tempts us to behave in a way that is contrary to our self-image, we will recognize such conduct to be unbecoming and reject it. Being a witness unto ourselves in this way can be a most effective means of guarding against destructive tendencies.

If, after all of this, we fail to recognize that the ultimate nature of all things is without substantial reality, and we continue to fall prey to self-grasping, we are advised to learn to view all things from their ultimate perspective, as dreamlike. Given our deeply ingrained tendency to reify—to project concrete reality onto—anything we deem worthy of attention, once our remedies for self-cherishing prove successful, we risk grasping at the remedies themselves and finding ourselves still in bondage to mental afflictions. So we are told, “The remedy, too, is to be freed in its own place.”

On the spiritual path we meet all kinds of circumstances,
both positive and negative. To be successful, we need a way to remain steadfast in the face of difficulties. In this, the mind training teachings excel brilliantly. The *Seven-Point Mind Training* puts it this way: “When the world and its inhabitants are filled with negativity, / transform adverse conditions into the path of enlightenment.” Say we are slandered by someone with no justifiable basis; we can see the situation as a precious opportunity to cultivate forbearance. If we are attacked by someone, we can view the assailant with compassion, seeing that he is possessed by the demon of anger.

The masters of the mind training teachings extend this principle to all possible situations. They speak of taking onto the path both good luck and bad, both joy and pain, both wealth and poverty. In a beautiful stanza, the Kashmiri master Śākyaśrī, who came to Tibet at the beginning of the thirteenth century, writes:

When happy I will dedicate my virtues to all;  
may benefit and happiness pervade all of space!  
When suffering I will take on the pains of all beings;  
may the ocean of suffering become dry!9

When we as spiritual practitioners learn to relate to all events in this radically transformed manner, we will possess something akin to the philosopher’s stone, able to transform every circumstance or event, whether positive or negative, into a condition conducive to enhancing altruism. No wonder the early mind training masters compare this teaching to an indestructible diamond, to the all-powerful sun, and to the mythological wish-granting tree. If we lived our lives according to the principles of mind training as instructed by the great masters of the tradition, we could easily relate to the sentiments of Chekawa:
Because of multiple aspirations,  
I have defied the tragic tale of suffering  
and have taken instructions to subdue self-grasping;  
now, even if I die, I have no remorse.

One of the central themes running throughout the mind training instructions—whether it is cultivating gratitude for others’ presence, or recognizing how self-destructive obsessive self-centeredness is, or transforming adversities into opportunities, or being one’s own principal witness—is the notion of genuine courage. This is not a courage based in foolhardiness; rather, it is a courage rooted in a clear understanding of the complexity that is our human condition. Instead of adopting a simple stoic approach to life’s inevitable sufferings, lojong instructions show us a different path, a way that each of us can become more connected with and caring for the complex, messy, entangled web that is the deeply interconnected world of sentient beings. The mind training teachings show us a remarkable way, whereby while maintaining courage in our immediate personal concerns, we also remain totally connected with the needs and concerns of others and learn to relate to every event from such a compassionate standpoint. This is a fine balance. The vision is this: a carefree mind rooted in a deep joy. The following stanza attributed to Atiśa captures this quality succinctly:

He who sees as spiritual teachers  
the objects that engender afflictions—  
be they enemy or friend—  
will remain content wherever he is.10

For me, and perhaps for many others too, one of the greatest attractions of the mind training teachings is their earthy practi-
Unlike many other established teachings of the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, such as the rigorously systematic approach of the stages of the path teachings, the somewhat mystical approach of mahāmudrā and dzokchen teachings, or the highest yoga tantric meditations, with their ritualized deity visualizations, the mind training teachings are down to earth. In fact, the masters of mind training extol its simplicity, lack of systematic organization, and unadorned pith.

Mind training is not ostentatious, but it is nonetheless very powerful. Even a single line can be said to encapsulate the entire teaching of the Buddha, in that a single line has the power to subdue self-cherishing and the mental afflictions. Unlike other teachings, mind training has no complicated structure, no confusing outlines, and it requires no complex philosophical reasoning. From their earliest stages, the mind training teachings became a shared heritage of all the Tibetan Buddhist schools.

There is a wonderful story about how mind training teaching became public in the early stages of its development. The thirteenth-century master Sangyé Gompa speaks of how Chekawa shared the mind training instructions first with individuals suffering from leprosy. Public censure of lepers was apparently a major social issue in central Tibet at the time, and Kadam teachers were deeply concerned about this. Legend has it that even Dromtönpa himself, one of the founding fathers of the Kadam school, devoted the latter part of his life to nursing lepers and eventually became himself a victim of the disease. As word spread about the mind training teaching within the leper community, more and more lepers gathered to hear Chekawa’s teaching and engage in the practice, such that the teaching came to be referred to as “teaching for the lepers.” Perhaps it was the mind training instructions on how to rise above both fortune and misfortune and transform adversities
into opportunities for spiritual growth that provided them the much-needed solace and strength to cope with their difficult life situation.

**Atiśa’s Three Indian Masters of the Awakening Mind**

One critical element of the traditional account of the origins of the mind training teaching is the story of the “three Indian masters” from whom Atiśa is said to have received instructions on awakening mind. Chekawa’s teaching, as penned by his student Sé Chilbu (1121–89), is again an important source for the legend. According to this story, Atiśa received instructions on the generation of awakening mind from three different Indian masters. The first is the teacher Dharmarakṣita, a yogi whose compassion was so great that he once cut off a piece of his own flesh and gave it to a sick man as medicine. The second is Kusalī Jr., a dedicated yogi of Maitreya, who is therefore sometimes called Maitriyogi. Finally, there is Serlingpa Dharmakīrti, whom Atiśa is said to have deliberately sought by braving a twelve-month sea voyage to the Indonesian island of Sumatra.

All biographies of Atiśa agree that, of the Indian masters on awakening mind, Atiśa held Serlingpa to be the most important. From the beginning of the twelfth century, especially after the codification of Atiśa’s scattered sayings by Chekawa into the well-known seven points, Master Serlingpa’s instructions on the cultivation of awakening mind as transmitted to Atiśa have effectively formed the kernel of the Tibetan mind training teachings. This seven-point approach became so influential that for many later authors, especially after the fifteenth century, Chekawa’s *Seven-Point Mind Training* became almost equivalent to mind training itself.
Seven-Point Mind Training

Chekawa was one of the first teachers, if not the first, to present the key elements of Atiśa’s mind training instructions in terms of seven key points. The seven points are:

1. Presentation of the preliminaries
2. Training in the two awakening minds
3. Taking adversities onto the path of enlightenment
4. Presentation of a lifetime’s practice in summary
5. The measure of having trained the mind
6. The commitments of mind training
7. The precepts of mind training

That Chekawa did not actually write all the lines of the Seven-Point in the sense of an author composing his own original work appears fairly certain. To begin with, there are at least two versions of so-called root lines of mind training—almost all lines of which find their way into the Seven-Point.

One version appears as the second work in the present anthology, where it is attributed to Atiśa. It is difficult to determine with any certainty who the original author of these seminal lines was and who first compiled them into a cohesive text. However, it seems likely that these lines were based on spontaneous instructions that Atiśa gave to different individuals on numerous occasions and that were later compiled by various teachers into oral transmissions so that they would not be lost. Their origin in oral transmissions is evident from their brevity and vernacular style. It is perhaps also due to this oral origin that so many redactions of the root lines came about, some of which do not demonstrate any familiarity with the others. It is on the basis of some of these different redactions that Chekawa, drawing on the instructions of his teacher Sharawa, organized the root lines according to seven points.
Following the organization of the root lines on mind training into the seven key points, the *Seven-Point Mind Training* effectively became the root text of Atiśa’s mind training teachings. This short text attracted numerous commentaries from many great Tibetan teachers. Sé Chilbu’s twelfth-century commentary compiled from Chekawa’s own lectures is featured in the present volume, and it is this text that is the source for the root text in chapter 3. Later well-known ones include those by Thokmé Sangpo (fourteenth century), Hortön Namkha Pal (fifteenth century), the First Dalai Lama (fifteenth century), and Jamyang Khyentsé Wangpo (nineteenth century). At the beginning of the fifteenth century, thanks to Namkha Pal and other similar commentaries on the *Seven-Point Mind Training*, a unique transmission of the *Seven-Point* based upon the ear-whispered instructions of the great Tsongkhapa (1357–1419) came into being. Atiśa’s mind training teachings became a particularly dominant element of pedagogy and practice in the dominant Geluk school founded by Tsongkhapa. Due to this diversity in the presentation of the instructions of the *Seven-Point Mind Training*, several different redactions of the *Seven-Point* evolved. There are some variations in the length of these different versions, with certain lines appearing in some yet not in others. In addition, some versions present the training in the cultivation of the ultimate awakening mind (*bodhicitta*) in the beginning part, while others present the ultimate awakening mind toward the end.

**Compilation of the Present Anthology**

The original Tibetan volume from which all the texts featured here are selected was put together by Shönu Gyalchok and his student Könchok Gyaltse at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Shönu Gyalchok is said to have studied with numerous
noted fourteenth-century masters, including Tsongkhapa and Yakṣé Paṇchen, but received the mind training instructions from a direct student of Thokmé Sangpo called Tsültrim Pal. As for Könchok Gyaltsen we know his dates to be 1388–1469 and that he was a known master in the Sakya tradition of the Path with Its Result (lamdre). As mentioned, the full text of this important anthology of mind training texts, Mind Training: The Great Collection, is today available in English translation under the same title. Here, however, we offer the seminal texts from within that collection for the benefit of a wider audience.

Our volume opens with Atiśa’s Bodhisattva’s Jewel Garland followed by Root Lines of Mahayana Mind Training and the famed Seven-Point Mind Training, which as explained earlier, was compiled by the Tibetan master Chekawa. A Commentary on the “Seven-Point Mind Training” is Sé Chilbu’s synthesis of Chekawa’s oral teachings. Next to follow in the volume is the pithy Eight Verses on Mind Training by Langri Thangpa. Langri Thangpa was reputed for the depth of his compassion for all beings; he came to be nicknamed the “Crying Langthangpa,” for he was said to be constantly consumed by compassion for the suffering of all beings. The commentary on Eight Verses on Mind Training featured next is the earliest exposition of this root text and was composed by Chekawa. Together, the texts in chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5 constitute the fundamental source texts of the Tibetan mind training tradition.

The next three texts, as well as one commentarial work, represent the instructions that Atiśa is said to have received from his “three Indian masters of the awakening mind.” The first ones, Leveling Out All Conceptions and its commentary, represent the instructions of Master Serlingpa of Sumatra. Wheel of Sharp Weapons, attributed to the Indian master Dharmarakṣita, is a piquant verse work bringing sharp
awareness into our everyday lives based on a series of devastating critiques of the self-obsessed nature of our habitual thoughts and behaviors. Next, *Melodies of an Adamantine Song*, which is attributed to Maitrīyogi, presents a series of meditations on loving-kindness based on invoking Maitreya, whom the Mahayana tradition understands to be the embodiment of the loving-kindness of all enlightened beings.

Following these “Indian masters’ texts,” the next six works (11–16) present short instructions by Tibetan masters on particular facets of mind training. Next, the present volume features *Mind Training in a Single Session* by the famed master of Sangphu Monastery, Chim Namkha Drak (1210–85), an example of how all the key themes of mind training can be reviewed in a single session of formal sitting. The final text in the present volume is a special instruction on the meditative cultivation of universal compassion from the Indian adept Virvapa.

**Conclusion**

The texts in *Essential Mind Training* present the flowering of an important spiritual culture dedicated to the perfection of the human heart by cultivating the altruistic intention. In their birthplace of Tibet, these spiritual writings have inspired, nurtured, and transformed the hearts of millions of individuals across generations. Even though the first mind training texts emerged nearly a millennium ago, the simple yet profound teachings presented in them have retained their appeal and poignancy.

There is no denying that, if put into practice, the insights of mind training can exert powerful impact in our day-to-day lives. What can be more powerful in defusing the intensity of anger toward someone than imagining that person to be as vulnerable as a defenseless child? Who can deny the power of
countering jealousy or joy in another’s suffering than reflecting in the following manner?

As for suffering, I do not wish even the slightest; as for happiness I am never satisfied; in this there is no difference between others and me. May I be blessed to take joy in others’ happiness.

This stanza from Pañchen Losang Chögyen’s famed *Guru Puja* (seventeenth century) encapsulates a key teaching of the mind training tradition, where a profound recognition of the fundamental equality of self and others with respect to the basic drive to find happiness and avoid suffering becomes the basis for generating genuine compassion for all beings.

Today, as our world becomes ever more complex, with the consequence of making even our everyday lives a source of stress and constant challenge, I believe that these practical insights of Tibetan mind training can bring great benefit to many. In my own life, during now more than two decades living in the West amid all the complexities of modern existence, I have come to appreciate more deeply the value of the Tibetan mind training teaching. Confronted with the common question of how to maintain a healthy balance between parenthood, marriage, and work, and, more specifically, having to deal with the critical challenge of how to stay sane and rooted against all the social and cultural forces pulling us in so many directions, I have found the clear and poignant wisdom of *lojong*, especially the advice on maintaining a joyful state of mind, a tremendous source of personal inspiration and strength. So by making these Tibetan mind training teachings available for a general audience, it is my sincere hope and wish that many readers will be able to share in the wonderful insights of the mind training teachings and experience their profound rewards.
**Seven Points**

*Seven-Point Mind Training* is perhaps the earliest work organizing the assortment of root lines on mind training attributed to Atiśa into a systematic framework of instruction and practice. Prior to the emergence of the *Seven-Point*, it appears that these root lines remained scattered, giving rise to at least several different compilations referred to as “the root lines on mind training.” In addition to the one above, *Mind Training: The Great Collection* includes another distinct set of such root lines.

As a simple comparison of the *Seven-Point* to the *Root Lines on Mind Training* above reveals, the two works are closely connected. In fact, some Tibetan authors make the point that Chekawa (1101–75) should be considered more as the compiler rather than the author of the *Seven-Point*, since all the key lines of that text, if not all, are attributable to Master Atiśa himself. Even the organization of the root lines into seven points is said to come from the instruction of Chekawa’s teacher Sharawa. From a very early stage, however, the famed *Seven-Point* came to be hailed as “Chekawa’s Seven-Point Mind Training.”

As noted in my general introduction, Chekawa’s discovery of the mind training instruction began with his intrigue upon hearing *Eight Verses on Training the Mind*, especially the lines “May I take upon myself the defeat / and offer to others the victory.” Having heard these lines, Chekawa went on to seek out the full teaching as well as its sources. This quest took him to Sharawa’s monastery, where one day he saw the master circumambulating
a stupa. Laying down his shawl-like upper robe on the floor, Chekawa asked Sharawa to be seated so that he could request some instructions. Thus began Chekawa’s full discovery of the mind training instruction, which led to his presentation of it in seven points. After Langri Thangpa’s *Eight Verses*, Chekawa’s *Seven-Point* came to be the most well known and widely disseminated mind training teaching. Judging by the enormous volume of commentaries it attracted, it could be argued that the *Seven-Point* came to define what mind training is.

In terms of its literary genre, a unique characteristic of the lines of the *Seven-Point* is their pithy, aphoristic nature. Unlike *Eight Verses*, there are very few, if any, actual stanzas in the *Seven-Point*. Most of the lines are stand-alone maxims capturing an essential instruction or a specific spiritual practice. It’s no wonder, therefore, that today some contemporary Western teachers of Tibetan Buddhism refer to these lines of the *Seven-Point* as “slogans.” Furthermore, there is a certain orality to the lines in this text, as if they were meant to be recited aloud as you embark on the various practices presented in them. As the *Seven-Point* puts it, “In all actions, train by means of the words”; this constant use of maxims as an integral part of one’s spiritual practice is an important feature of the mind training approach.

We are fortunate to have, through the commentary of Sé Chilbu (1121–89), access to the earliest exposition of Chekawa’s *Seven-Point Mind Training*. That the author of this commentary studied and practiced at the feet of Master Chekawa for over two decades assures us that he knew the thoughts of his teacher quite intimately. In fact, there is no doubt in my mind that the commentary we have in our present anthology was compiled on the basis of lecture notes taken directly from Chekawa’s exposition of the seven points. For example, throughout this commentary, the author frequently inserts the verb *sung* (*gsungs*), which can be translated as “said” or “taught,”
Seven Points

at the end of a sentence or paragraph. This is quite characteristic of a specific genre of Tibetan spiritual writing called sindri (zin bris), which are effectively lecture notes taken at a teaching or teachings and later compiled into a coherent text. So the verb “said” or “taught” at the end of a sentence or paragraph should be read as “the master taught” or “the master said,” and “master” here refers to Chekawa.

Master Chekawa, whose personal name was Yeshé Dorjé, was born in central Tibet in the first year of the twelfth century. Although he was inspired initially to pursue a nonmonastic yogi’s life and received teachings from Milarepa’s disciple Rechungpa, at twenty he took ordination and became a monk. The turning point in his spiritual career came when he first heard Eight Verses from the Kadam master Chakshingwa and, more specifically, when at thirty years old he met Sharawa. With the founding of the monastery of Cheka, from which the epithet Chekawa is derived, he appeared to have ensured the continuation of the lineage of his teachings. On the personal level, he combined life as a hermit with his duties as the head of a monastery.

Although most renowned for his Seven-Point Mind Training, Chekawa is known also for another set of mind training instructions, all aimed at taking adversities onto the path of enlightenment. These instructions entail (1) taking obstacles onto the path of enlightenment through the cultivation of patience, (2) taking suffering onto the path through equalizing and exchanging self and others, (3) taking adverse conditions onto the path through turning one’s adversaries into friends, (4) taking the afflictions onto the path through application of their relevant antidotes. In addition to his more practically oriented mind training works, Chekawa also composed one of the earliest works of the druptha genre, which contrasts the central tenets of various classical Indian philosophical systems.
3. Seven-Point Mind Training

Chekawa Yeshé Dorjé

I. Presentation of the preliminaries, the basis
First, train in the preliminaries.

II. Training in the awakening mind, the main practice
A. Training in ultimate awakening mind
Train to view all phenomena as dreamlike.
Examine the nature of the unborn awareness.
The remedy, too, is freed in its own place.
Place your mind on the basis-of-all, the actual path.
In the intervals be a conjurer of illusions.

B. Training in conventional awakening mind
Train alternately in the two—giving and taking.
Place the two astride your breath.
There are three objects, three poisons, and three roots of virtue.
In all actions, train by means of the words.

III. Taking adverse conditions onto the path of enlightenment
When the world and its inhabitants boil with negativity,
transform adverse conditions into the path of enlightenment.
Banish all blames to the single source.
Toward all beings contemplate their great kindness.
With the three views and treasury of space, 
the yoga of protection is unexcelled. 
By meditating on illusions as the four buddha bodies, 
emptiness is protection unsurpassed. 
The fourfold practice is the most excellent method. 
Relate whatever you can to meditation right now.

IV. Presentation of a lifetime’s practice in summary
In brief the essence of instruction is this: 
Apply yourself to the five powers. 
As Mahayana’s transference method is 
the five powers alone, their practice is vital.

V. Presentation of the measure of having trained 
the mind
The intent of all teachings converges on a single point. 
Of the two witnesses uphold the principal one. 
Cultivate constantly the joyful mind alone. 
If this can be done even when distracted, you are trained.

VI. Presentation of the commitments of mind training
Train constantly in the three general points. 
Transform your attitudes but remain as you are. 
Do not speak of the defects [of others]. 
Do not reflect on others’ shortcomings. 
Discard all expectations of reward. 
Discard poisonous food. 
Do not maintain inappropriate loyalty. 
Do not torment with malicious banter. 
Do not lie in ambush. 
Do not strike at the heart. 
Do not place the load of a dzo onto an ox. 
Do not sprint to win a race.
Do not abuse this [practice] as a rite.
Do not turn the gods into demons.
Do not seek misery as a means to happiness.

VII. Presentation of the precepts of mind training
Accomplish all yogas through a single means.
Overcome all errors through a single means.
There are two tasks—one at the start and one at the end.
Whichever of the two arises, be patient.
Guard the two even at the cost of your life.
Train in the three difficult challenges.
Adopt the three principal conditions.
Contemplate the three that are free of degeneration.
Be endowed with the three inseparable factors.
Train constantly toward the chosen objects.
Do not depend on other conditions.
Engage in the principal practices right now.
Do not apply misplaced understanding.
Do not be sporadic.
Train with decisiveness.
Be released through the two: investigation and close analysis.
Do not boast of your good deeds.
Do not be ill-tempered.
Do not be fickle.
Do not be boisterous.
Through this proliferation of the five degenerations
transform [every event] into the path of enlightenment.

Because of my numerous aspirations,
I have defied the tragic tale of suffering
and have taken instructions to subdue self-grasping.
Now, even if death comes, I have no regrets.