

# The Practical Art of Mind Training

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## Mind-Training: Brief Background

Mind-training—Tibetan “lo-jong”—has a long and distinguished tradition in Indian and Tibetan philosophy. There are many texts that provide us with many ways to train our minds, but the goal of them all is the same: gradually to develop our minds so that even the most difficult circumstances that we face in life can be transformed into a positive, life-giving energy that will sustain us, and perhaps even provide us with the happiness that we all seek.

From *Approaching the Buddhist Path*, by the Dalai Lama  
and Thubten Chodren, 2017.

“One of the practices I cherish and enjoy the most is mind-training. Many texts have been written on this, and I myself often teach them. Mind-training presents techniques for transforming adverse circumstances into the path.” (p. 155)

# Buddhism and the Study of the Human Mind

- Religious language vs. biological transformation: bodhicitta, equanimity, altruism, and community
- The logic of transformation: plasticity and neurotransmitters

## A Foundational Story: Atisha Travels to Indonesia and Tibet



In the early 11<sup>th</sup> century, the great practitioner and scholar, Atisha, traveled to Indonesia to study with the renowned master, Serlingpa. He stayed there for twelve years and then returned to India where he became abbot of Nalanda Monastery, the greatest Buddhist monastery in India. He received many kinds of instruction while in Indonesia, but for our purposes, the most important teachings he received were two:

- The seven-point mind training
- Exchanging self with others

## Atisha and Tibet

While abbot of Nalanda monastery, Atisha was approached by a Tibetan delegation, asking him if he would come to Tibet and help re-establish Buddhism in its strongest and purest form. After much deliberation, he granted the request, traveled to Tibet, and remained there for seventeen years. He composed many famous texts while there, but the two teachings mentioned above—the seven-point mind training, exchanging self with others—were the most simple and practical instruction that he gave.



## Lama Tsongkhapa's Collection

Over two centuries later, the great spiritual adept and founder of the Gelug lineage, Lama Tsongkhapa (1357-1419), combined these two teachings into a single practice consisting of eleven points. They represent an eleven-stage sequence of meditations, meant to be done on a daily basis. They are challenging, but clear in presentation and effective in their results.



# The Eleven-Point Mind Training, I

1. Equanimity (friend, enemy, stranger)
2. All sentient beings as your mother
3. Basic kindness of all mothers
4. Basic kindness of those *not* your mother
5. The equality of self and others

## The Eleven-Point Mind Training, 2

6. The disadvantages of self-cherishing (illusory nature of the self; toxic self-cherishing and the community; self-cherishing and altruism)
7. The advantages of cherishing others (dismantles claustrophobic self; energizes community ideals; gives the gift of love and its resonant power)
8. Breathing in the suffering of others
9. Breathing out your cultivated goodness and compassion to alleviate suffering
10. Generating a sense of responsibility to enact your commitments wherever possible
11. Closing with an inner affirmation that your meditation will affect you, your friends, and your community