

Practice the Five Strengths, the Condensed Heart Instructions. the mahayana Instruction for Ejection of Consciousness at Death is the Five Strengths; How You Conduct Yourself is Important

...This slogan tells us that it is important for us to realize that death is an important part of our practice, since we are all going to die and since we all going to relate with death anyway...the instruction for how to die in mahanaya is the five strengths.

STRONG DETERMINATION, number one, is connected with taking a very strong stand: "I will maintain my basic egolessness, my basic sanity, even in my death."

FAMILIARIZATION is developing a general sense of mindfulness and awareness so that you do not panic when you are dying.

The SEED OF VIRTUE is connected with not resting, not taking any kind of break from your fear of death. It also has to do with overcoming your attachment to your belongings.

REPROACH means realizing that this so-called ego does not actually exist. Therefore, you can say "What am I afraid of, anyway? Go away, ego."

...

And the last one, ASPIRATION, is realizing that you have tremendous strength and desire to continue and to open yourself up. Therefore, you have nothing to regret when you die. You have already accomplished everything that you can accomplish.

From [Training the Mind & Cultivating Loving-Kindness](#) by [Chogyam Trungpa](#)

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The five strengths are instructions on how to live and how to die. Actually, there's no difference. The same good advice applies to both... [Suzuki](#) Roshi said, "Just be willing to die over and over again." As each breath goes out, let it be the end of that moment and the birth of something new.

The first strength is strong determination. Rather than some kind of dogged pushing through, strong determination involves connecting with joy, relaxing, and trusting. When you wake up in the morning, you can say "I wonder what's going to happen today. This may be the day that I die. This may be the day that I understand what the teachings are all about." The Native Americans, before they went into battle, would say, "Today is a good day to die." You could also say, "Today is a good day to live."

The next strength is familiarization. What familiarization means is that the [dharma](#) no longer feels like a foreign entity, your first thought becomes [dharmic](#). We talk about enlightenment as if it's a big accomplishment. Basically, it has to do with relaxing and finding out what you already have. Familiarization means you don't have to search any further, and you know it.

The third strength is called the seed of virtue. In effect, this is Buddha nature or basic goodness. Buddha nature isn't like a heart transplant that you get from elsewhere. It's just something that can be awakened or, you might say, relaxed into. Let yourself fall apart into wakefulness. The strength comes from the fact that the seed is already there; with warmth and moisture it sprouts and becomes visible above the ground.

The practice is about softening or relaxing, but it's also about seeing clearly. None of that implies searching. Searching for happiness prevents us from ever finding it.

The fourth strength is called reproach. This one requires talking to yourself: "Ego, you've done nothing but cause me problems for ages. Give me a break. I'm not buying it anymore." This approach can be slightly problematic because we usually don't distinguish between who we think we are and our ego. To the degree that you actually are hard on yourself, then this dialogue could just increase your self-criticism.

Reproach can be very powerful. You teach yourself the [dharma](#) in your own words. You can teach yourself... ANYTHING that has to do with the moment when you're just about to create [samsara](#) as if you personally had invented it. Look ahead to the rest of your life and ask yourself what you want it to add up to.

The last strength, aspiration, is also a powerful tool. The notion of aspiration is simply that you voice your wishes for enlightenment. Aspiration is much like prayer, except that nobody hears you. Aspiration, yet again, is to talk to yourself, to be an eccentric [Bodhisattva](#). It is a way to empower yourself. In fact, all five of these strengths are ways to empower yourself. Buddhism itself is all about empowering yourself, not about getting what you want.

From [Start Where You Are : A Guide to Compassionate Living](#) by [Pema Chodron](#),

A Summary of the Essential Instructions: Train in the Five Forces

The five forces summarize the crucial points of practice and, in a single phrase, contain numerous profound key instructions for the practice of the holy [dharma](#). First is the force of impetus, to give a strong impetus to the mind by thinking:

From this moment until enlightenment, at least from now until I die, and especially for the next year and the next month, and definitely from today until tomorrow, the two aspects of [bodhicitta](#) will never be absent from my mind.

The second is the force of familiarization. Whatever occupation or activity you are engaged in-virtuous, nonvirtuous, or indeterminate-maintain mindfulness and awareness strictly and train again and again in keeping the two aspects of [bodhicitta](#) ever in mind. In a word, study and train in [bodhicitta](#) as your principal form of virtuous activity.

The third is the force of virtuous seeds. Always concentrate your full energy - physical, verbal, and mental - on virtuous activity. Never be content with your efforts to arouse and strengthen [bodhicitta](#).

The fourth is the force of repudiation. Whenever ego-cherishing thoughts come up, abandon them completely by thinking:

Previously, for time without beginning, you have made me wander in [samsara](#) and experience different kinds of suffering. In addition, all the suffering and evil that occur in this life are brought on by you. There is no happiness in your company, so I shall now do everything I can to subdue and destroy you.

The fifth is the force of aspiration. At the end of any virtuous activity, pray sincerely and dedicate all virtue to these objectives:

May I, on my own, guide all sentient beings to buddhahood. In particular, from now until I attain enlightenment, may I never forget the two aspects of precious [bodhicitta](#), even when I am dreaming. May the two aspects of [bodhicitta](#) grow stronger and stronger. Whatever adverse conditions I encounter, may I take them as aids to [bodhicitta](#).

What to Do at Death

Second, what are the instructions for the moment of death in this tradition of teaching?

The [mahayana](#) instructions for how to die are the five forces. How you act is important.

When a person who has trained in this teaching is stricken by terminal illness, he or she should practice the five forces. First, the force of virtuous seeds means to give away all possessions without a trace of attachment, clinging, or concern. In general, they can be given to one's gurus or to the [jewels](#). In particular, they can be given wherever the person thinks they will be most helpful. The force of aspiration means to make enlightenment the single focus of aspiration by practicing the seven-branch prayer if possible or, if not possible, by praying:

Through the power of whatever virtuous seeds I have gathered in the three times, may I never forget but train and strengthen precious [bodhicitta](#) in all future experiences in existence. May I meet the pure gurus who reveal this teaching. I pray that these aspirations be realized through the blessing of my gurus and the [jewels](#).

The force of repudiation is to think:

This ego-cherishing has led me to suffer for countless existences, and now I experience the suffering of dying. Ultimately, there is nothing that dies, since neither self nor mind have true existence. I'll do whatever I must to destroy you, ego-clinging, who constantly think in terms of "I'm ill, I'

From [The Great Path of Awakening : An Easily Accessible Introduction for Ordinary People](#) by [Jamgon Kongtrul](#), translated by [Ken McLeod](#)

To Synthesize the Essence of This Practical Guidance, Apply Yourself to the Five Powers

1. THE POWER OF RESOLUTION. Looking forward with determination, we resolve not to be parted from the cultivation of the two bodhicittas, relative and ultimate, until our full awakening. We resolve not to abandon this practice for as long as we live; not for this entire

day, not for this entire month, not for this entire year. We can establish this continuity of mind most earnestly when we appreciate the depth and magnificence of these two qualities of mind: ultimate bodhicitta that probes into the nature of reality with such depth, and relative bodhicitta, born of loving kindness and compassion, that aspires to full awakening for the benefit of all creatures. Until these two are brought to culmination, we resolve never to be parted from the practice of cultivating them.

2. THE POWER OF FAMILIARIZATION. Looking to the present rather than the future, the author encourages us never to be distracted from the cultivation of ultimate and relative bodhicitta. Profound spiritual transformation occurs only with persistent practice, for it is through familiarizing ourselves with fresh ways of viewing reality and fresh ways of responding to situations that old, harmful patterns are broken up. Sudden breakthroughs, such as a vivid insight, are certainly meaningful experiences on the spiritual path, but unless they are sustained through the power of familiarization, their long-term influence on our lives is bound to be quite limited.

3. THE POWER OF THE WHITE SEED. Imagine our present practice as a seed for spiritual growth, white in its virtue and wholesomeness, which when mature will transform into the tree of awakening. Cultivate this seed by welcoming any opportunity to transform unfavorable circumstances into spiritual growth. We can cultivate it by engaging in wholesome actions and accumulating merit, and especially by using our body and possessions to do whatever brings the greatest blessing. With so many options presented, we need to seek out what is most meaningful for the cultivation of these bodhicittas and then strive in that.

4. THE POWER OF ABANDONMENT. In this practice what is being abandoned is self-grasping. We are reminded again that since beginningless time beyond all imagination, self-grasping has lain at the very core of all mental distortions and afflictions. It has brought us to unfavorable rebirths and is responsible for all the undesirable circumstances that we encounter. It is self-centeredness that obstructs realization and prevents us from deriving the full benefit from our spiritual practice. Recognize when self-grasping manifests in daily life. It is important to notice it especially at times of passion, when we are aroused or irritated, and try not to succumb to it for even a moment.

I mentioned before that self-centeredness can be overcome only gradually because it is so deeply ingrained in our minds and behavior. But it is also true that if we focus right in the moment and recognize self-centeredness, it is often not so difficult to reject. To be free of self-centeredness continuously for a whole year may be difficult, but a moment is easy. Not only in negative terms but positively, we can be sensitive right in the present to the needs of others, sensitive to things that make others happy, be it a small gift, an act of service, or simply a friendly gaze. For a moment we can become a very brief but good facsimile of a [Bodhisattva](#). And the more of these moments we can saturate with the cherishing of others, the more we are molding ourselves into the [Bodhisattvas](#) that we will become.

5. THE POWER OF PRAYER. Like the dedication of merit, this is a directing of the spiritual momentum of merit that we have accumulated by engaging in wholesome behavior. One prayer that is strongly encouraged here is to dedicate the fruits of our practice for all future

*Excerpted from: [The Seven-Point Mind Training](#) (first published as *A Passage from Solitude : Training the Mind in a Life Embracing the World*), by [B. Alan Wallace](#).*

The Pith Instructions Briefly Summarized: put the Five Strengths Into Practice

If we possess these five strengths, Bodhicitta will arise in us.

The power of resolution. This is, for example, the taking of a firm decision that, for this month, this year, until we die or until we attain enlightenment, we will not abandon Bodhicitta; even though hurt or injured by others, we will not give way to anger. And this strong resolution should be reinforced again and again.

The power of familiarization. In the beginning, meditation is difficult but it becomes easier if we persevere in it. For as the saying goes, "There is nothing that one cannot get used to." Once upon a time, there was a very miserly person unable to give anything away. He went to see the Buddha.

'It is impossible for me to be generous', he said, 'what shall I do?'

'Imagine,' the Buddha replied, 'that your right hand is yourself and your left hand a poor unhappy person. Give from your right hand to your left some old food, which you don't like or need. Try hard to get used to this. Do it until you are no longer miserly.' The man began the practice, but he was so tight-fisted that at first he could give away only a few left-overs or food he did not like. Gradually, however, he acquired the habit so that the day arrived when he did not feel so niggardly. Thereupon, he went to see the Buddha and reported, 'Now when I give food from my right hand to my left, I don't feel so miserly.' Buddha replied, 'Now, with your right hand, which you take to be yourself, give some gold, silk or fine clothes to your left hand, which you imagine to be a beggar. Try to see if you can give open-handedly, without avarice.' The man tried and when he got used to it he went again to see the Buddha. 'Now, you can be a benefactor,' the Buddha said, 'you are free from attachment; you can give away food and clothing to those who lack them.'

Freed from his miserliness, the man thus came to help many beggars and poor people. He gradually practised and in the end his generosity was steady, without any wavering. He understood that there is no point in being parsimonious or attached to riches. He became a monk and attained the level of an arhat. Through persistent practice one may likewise become accomplished in the two Bodhichittas.

The power of positive seeds. This is, in fact, the accumulation of merit. Going to temples and monasteries, performing prostrations and devotions before sacred objects, we should pray, "May I be able to cultivate the two types of Bodhicitta. May I be peaceful and without anger towards those who do me harm. May I be free from one-sided attachment for friends and relatives." By repeatedly praying in this way, and through the power of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, we will be able to accomplish these qualities.

The power of revulsion. Through careful thought it is possible to see that all the suffering and afflictive emotional states experienced in life are the results of the devastating flood of ego-clinging. Ego-clinging is the cause of every ill. Therefore when it arises, even if only for an instant, we should apply the antidote, like the doctor who gives us healing medicine when we are sick. As the saying goes, "Hit the pig on the nose; clean the lamp while it is still warm." When an angry pig rears up at us, if we hit it on the nose with a stick, it will immediately turn around and run away, unable to bear the pain. If we clean the butter lamp

while it is still warm, the job is very easily done. In the same way, if we apply the antidote before our ego-clinging has gathered strength, we shall not fall under its influence.

The power of aspiration. Whenever we have completed some positive action we should pray, "From now on until I attain enlightenment, may I never abandon the two Bodhicittas. Whatever conflicts I may encounter, may I be able to use them as steps along the path." Praying in this way, we should make offerings to the Teacher, the

From Enlightened Courage, by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.