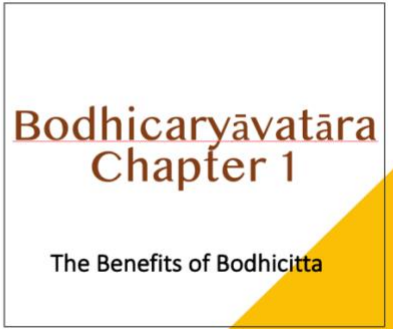


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Introduction to the Bodhisattva Vows

Bodhisattva vows serve to inspire, guide and train those on the Mahayana path but whilst many of us might have taken these vows, it is unfortunate that many are vague or clueless of the commitments involved upon receiving the bodhisattva vows. We are unaware of how they train us in our thought and conduct and what the dos and don'ts are. This subject is therefore to introduce a deeper understanding of the various commitments related to taking the vows.



As a prelude to the introduction to the Bodhisattva vows, we are going to review the first chapter of Bodhicaryavatara (The Guide to Budhisattvas' Way of Life) which lays out the benefits of bodhicitta. The rationale is that as the bodhisattva vows are premised on bodhicitta, it is important to see the value of generating bodhicitta. This in turn will inspire one to take the Bodhisattva vows and thereby engage in the Bodhisattva practices. I think no other text offers a better explanation of the benefits of bodhicitta than Bodhicharyavatara (Tib–ChoeJuk).

Though many of you have covered this text before, if you have my type of memory that forgets easily, I think reviewing this topic will serve as a good revision. ChoeJuk is a very powerful teaching. It employs logic and observable situations to elucidate its points and are therefore easy to understand. It presents the teachings in a practical and doable manner, which leaves us no room for excuses. Normally, we blame the texts for our inability to put them into practices by complaining that this particular teaching is so hard to understand that I cannot integrate in my daily life. However, ChoeJuk is known for its applicability and practicality and hence our excuses will bear no weight.

Importance of bodhicitta:

Why is bodhicitta so important? To answer this, I wanted to refer to a stanza that I recently came across (It's in Tibetan – no English translation). This is a beautiful quote which points out our weakness - our obsession with worldly concerns. It uses the analogy of a bird. A bird has two wings to fly and two eyes to see. Despite having wings and eyesight, some birds still fall prey to the predators. Likewise, we have obtained all the faculties and conditions (leisure and endowment) that are conducive to practicing dharma. Moreover, we have met dharma and gained wisdom to discern what is to be abandoned and what is to be cultivated. Despite the conduciveness, we tend to fritter away our life chasing after worldly pleasures. Is such a pursuit a worthwhile endeavor?

Materialistic pursuits relate only to this life. If we limit our concern only to this life, mainly ensuring our survival, we are no different from insects and animals. Tiny insects such as cockroaches also focus on caring for its needs to survive. There is nothing extraordinary about that urge. We have

bigger brains and greater intelligence. What we can accomplish is far more extensive. Hence, we should be better than cockroaches. Our greater intelligence would be better used in pursuing greater goals – long term goals that not only ensures happiness in this life but also in future lives; not only for ourselves but for others too. Aspiring towards such goals will differentiate us from insects and animals. Such pursuits are termed wholesome/worthwhile pursuits.

What are worthwhile pursuits?

Spiritual or dharma pursuits entail thinking about goals beyond this life. To qualify as dharma practice, as a minimum, one's concern should be for the next life because to ensure a good rebirth, one has to engage in meritorious deeds. Such positive actions done with the next future life in mind, qualify as a dharma practice. Thus, securing a good rebirth is a worthwhile pursuit.

However, there is no certainty that one can attain good rebirth in the life after the next. As long as one remains under the influence of karma and delusion, there is no certainty that one will not fall into the lower realms. Hence achieving total freedom from delusion and karma is crucial if one wishes to escape birth in samsara. Such freedom is called Nirvana or liberation. Doing practices in order to attain liberation is another worthwhile pursuit.

When one finally attains liberation, one is free from samsaric rebirths. However, one has not attained perfection yet. There are still obscurations to be extirpated; qualities and realizations to be actualized. In that sense, upon attaining liberation, one's realizations are only partially complete and therefore one is still incapable of benefiting other sentient beings. Perfect realization and ability to help countless sentient beings is only possible when one achieves the state of Buddhahood. Pursuing Buddhahood is the best and most meaningful pursuit of all. Such pursuit will lead to the attainment of highest state of happiness.

However, there is no other way to attain this final goal of enlightenment other than cultivating bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is like the gateway to Buddhahood. One must enter through the bodhicitta door to reach the house of enlightenment. No other doors will lead to the house of enlightenment. Bodhicitta is crucial in achieving the state of enlightenment and that is why bodhicitta is so important.

In sutra, bodhicitta is likened to a diamond. A diamond, even a small chip of it, retains its name of diamond and is more valuable than any other unbroken precious stones. Likewise, bodhicitta even at a beginning stage, is regarded as superior to those cultivating wisdom realizing emptiness. A bodhisattva who is at the path of accumulation is more revered than a non-bodhisattva who is on the path of meditation. Why? Because although in terms of ranking on the path, the non-bodhisattva on the path of meditation is higher but due to bodhicitta, the bodhisattva at the beginner's stage is known as the Son of the Buddhas.

Bodhicitta is also a determining factor whether one is a Mahayana or not. The moment one generates bodhicitta, one joins the Mahayana family. Likewise, the moment one abandons bodhicitta, one ceases to be a Mahayana. Here, the degree of one's insight into emptiness is a secondary factor. For that reason, in sutras, we see that bodhicitta is referred to as father, while emptiness is referred to as mother. This is due to the caste system that existed in ancient India. A child's caste is determined by the caste of his father and not by mother. A caste of son born to a low caste father automatically becomes a low caste despite his mother's high caste status. Likewise,

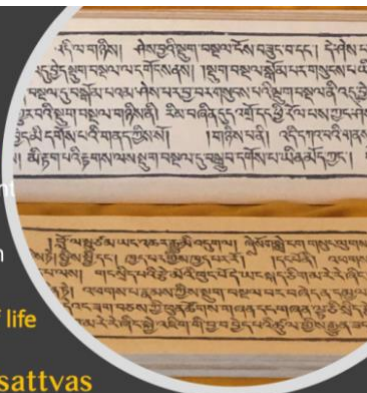
bodhicitta determines what path or yana one belongs to rather than wisdom realizing emptiness. In short, bodhicitta is the core ingredient for Buddhahood. Without it, Buddhahood is unattainable.

Another reason to pursue the cultivation of bodhicitta is that the merit of any practice that is motivated by bodhicitta is potent. For example, if four persons recite one round of Tara mantra, depending on their motivation, the amount of merit each generates would be different. Let's say the first person's motivation revolves around achieving long life, good health, success in business, good grades for his/her children etc. The second one recites the mantra to achieve good rebirth in the next life. The third person is motivated to achieve liberation from samsara. The final one does the Tara recitation to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings. In terms of physical practice, they all engaged in Tara mantra recitation. The number of recitation is also same – one round of mala. However, due to the different motivations, the merit will be different. The first person's practice is concerned only for this life, as such it did not even qualify as dharma practice. Many of our practices fall in this category and hence we need to be very careful. The second person's practice is driven by concerns beyond this life, it becomes a dharma practice and the cause to obtain rebirth in the higher realms. The merit is double the first one. The recitation by the third person is born out of renunciation of samsara and thereby the merit is far bigger than the second one. The fourth person's practice is motivated by bodhicitta, it becomes the Mahayana practice and becomes the cause to achieve enlightenment. The merit of this practice supersedes all the other practices. So, doing any practices out of bodhicitta commands a great accumulation of merit. This is another reason why bodhicitta is important.

We do a cost and benefit analysis in our daily life projects and issues. People in business do a thorough cost & benefit analysis before starting a new business. We apply this habit even when helping others. For instance, we might think “What is in it for me?” or “What do I get in return for helping you?”. Since we are applying the cost & benefit analysis to our everyday convention, why not apply this to our spiritual endeavors as well. When we do that, we will come to the conclusion that the practices that generate the highest profit is generating bodhicitta. As we look for quick ways to earn huge gains, bodhicitta is such a method and therefore we should try our best to do any practices motivated by bodhicitta. This way, we gain huge merits in short time.

Let me now briefly introduce you to the author of the Bodhicaryavatara, Shantideva. Shantideva is a 8th century Indian scholar from Nalanda. Born as a prince, he became monk and eventually a great bodhisattva. However, monks at Nalanda monastery failed to see Shantideva as a great practitioner. Instead, to their eyes, Shantideva was a lazy, good for nothing person and therefore nicknamed him “BhuSuKu”, an acronym for the one who only eats, sleeps and defecates. Monks at Nalanda were expected to engage in studying, recitation and meditation but Shantideva did not overtly display these. As such, monks thought Shantideva was simply being lazy. In order to humiliate him, the monks sent Shantideva to teach at a big gathering expecting that he had nothing to teach and that would ridicule him. Once seated, Shantideva asked the audience whether they preferred listening to a recitation of a sutra or his own composition. Curiosity got the better of the audience and they chose to hear Shantideva's own composition. And the result was this text – ChoeJuk. It is said that Shantideva started levitating as he began the 9th chapter and started to rise higher. When teaching the 10th chapter, the audience could only hear him but could not see him. Since then, the vast and profound ChoeJuk has been one of the core Buddhist teachings.

That teaching by Shantideva was a wakeup call for the monks who saw Shantideva as an ordinary person who was only good at eating, sleeping and defecating. As those monks learned their lessons, we too should take this as a lesson to be careful about what we say about other people. Bodhisattvas appear in many forms and they won't be brandishing "I am a bodhisattva" placard. Unless we have an omniscient mind or clairvoyance, we cannot accurately assess another person. Gyaltsep Jey likened judging others without true knowledge of the person to walking on burning ambers covered with ashes. One will not see the burning ambers because of the layer of ashes but walking on it, thinking that it's only a layer of ashes, will burn one's feet. This is what happened at the talent show called Britain's Got Talent, when Susan Boyle appeared for her singing audition. When she said she wanted to be like Elaine Page, everybody in the audience including the judges were skeptical and even scoffed at her. However, she shocked everybody with her great singing voice. This incident lends credence to the saying that we should not judge a book by its cover. Hence, we should suspend our judgment of others and thereby hold back our criticisms. I think that's the lesson we should take from Shantideva's life story.



Title & translator's homage

- **Bodhisattva-carya-avataṛa**
 - Bodhi- (Tib-JangChub) – Enlightenmen
 - Sattva – (Tib-Sempa) – Altruistic mind
 - Carya – (Tib-Choepa) – Conduct /Action
 - Avataṛa - (Tib-Jugpa) – Engage

A guide to the Bodhisattva's way of life

Homage to Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
(Sutra basket)

Now we will dive into the text itself. The text begins with its title in Sanskrit - Bodhisattvacaryavataṛa. As we have discussed in previous classes on the reasons for retaining the Sanskrit name of a scriptural text, I will not repeat here. The title serves the purpose of indicating what the text is about. Let's dissect the title Bodhisattvacaryavataṛa. "Bodhi" refers to enlightenment. It is translated as JangChub in Tibetan. "Jang" refers to purification or eradication of the two obscurations. "Chub" refers to actualization of realizations or perfection of all the good qualities. Together it means "the one who has purified all the negativities and perfected all the qualities". Hence it refers to the Buddha. "Sattva" here refers to the altruistic mind. "Carya" refers to conduct or action. "Avataṛa" refers to engage. Put together, it literally means Engaging in the bodhisattva conduct or action. In other words, a guide to the bodhisattva's way of life. Title is followed by a line of homage made by the translators. In this text, the homage is made to Buddhas and bodhisattvas to show that this text belongs to the sutra basket of teachings.



Homage & pledge

With devotion I pay homage to the
buddhas gone to bliss,
To their Dharma body, noble heirs and
all worthy of respect.
In accordance with the scriptures, I
shall now in brief describe
The way to adopt the discipline of all
the buddhas' heirs.

The first stanza consists of homage and declaration. At the onset of the actual teaching, Shantideva pays homage to Three Jewels and all that is worthy of respect. It reads:

“With devotion I pay homage to the buddhas gone to bliss,
To their Dharma body, noble heirs and all worthy of respect.”

The gone to bliss is an English translation of the Sanskrit word “Sugata” (Tib-Deywar Shegpa). “Sugata/DeWar ShegPa” has three different connotations based on three different context/perspectives. Firstly, Buddhas are called gone gracefully (ZePar ShegPa) because they are free of any flaws. Secondly, since they have eliminated the two obscurations, they don’t have to return to samsara and therefore they are called gone for good (Lar MeDokPar ShegPa). Finally, they are known as gone completely (MaLuPar ShegPa) because they have perfected all the good qualities. These highlight the Buddhas’ qualities of abandonment of the two obscurations and actualization of all positive qualities.


So “...buddhas gone to bliss”, refers to the Buddha Jewel. The second line that says “to their dharma body” which means the Buddhas who possess Dharmakaya refers to the second jewel - the Dharma. “Noble heir” refers the Sangha Jewel. Hence objects of homage here is the Three Jewels and any other object worthy of veneration.

Text then reads:

“In accordance with the scriptures,
I shall now in brief describe
The way to adopt the discipline of all the buddhas' heirs.”

This falls under the declaration or pledge. The author makes a declaration on what he is going to write. The purpose of doing so is said to help them complete their work. Great beings fulfil their pledges and making a pledge to compose a book helps them succeed in their writing. Here Shantideva says that he will teach how to engage in bodhisattavas’ practices. To show that he is not making this up, Shantideva says, “in accordance with the scripture” i.e. whatever he is going to teach is purely in accordance with Buddha’s teachings. One may then wonder that since all Buddha’s teachings were already made available, why compose another text? To answer this question, Shantideva wrote, “I shall now in brief describe”. Here Shantideva is saying that he agrees that Buddha’s teachings are available but as the teachings were voluminous and vast, it was difficult for

ordinary people to distill the relevant practices. Accordingly, his intention was to present the teachings in a concise and easy to apply manner.



A Display of humility

There is nothing here that's not been
said before;
And I have no skill in the art of
composition.
Therefore I do not expect this to be of
much use to others,
And write it only to acquaint it to my
mind.


The next two stanzas state the purpose of composing this text and at the same time, is a display of Shantideva's humility. Since there are people who chase only after novelty, Shantideva says here that for those who are looking for something new, he has nothing new to offer. “There is nothing here that's not been said before” and therefore, “I do not expect this to be of much use to” to those who are after novel teachings. There are also others who are only intrigued by poetic skills. He says that since “I have no skill in the art of composition, I do not expect this to be of much use to others (those seeking poetic works)”. Here, Shantideva displays humility because he was already a great scholar who had fine skills in the art of composition. It appears that he composed this entire text impromptu and in verse form. One needs compositional skills even to phrase words and ideas into verses.

I think this highlights two important points: Firstly, it advises us not to chase after esoteric or novel practices. Many of us have this tendency to show a preference for something novel and so called “higher” practices. For instance, we might prefer teachings that are considered special and rare e.g. if we are given a choice to attend a teaching on karma or on Mahamudra, many of us would choose Mahamudra over karma despite karma being a core subject of Buddhism. Without a firm foundation in karma understanding and living our lives according to that understanding, nothing beneficial can come out of our attempt at Mahamudra practices. Chasing after novel teachings may enrich one's intellectual knowledge but will not contribute towards one's progress on the spiritual path. So, the first lesson is to focus on the core teachings rather than chasing after esoteric teachings. Second lesson is to be humble. Nobody likes a person who brags about their qualities or achievements. We have a saying in Tibetan which literally translates into, “Gold underground, Rays in sky”, which means that if there is gold, it will shine no matter where it is. Likewise, if we possess real qualities, they will be noticed. We do not need to brandish our qualities. Boastfulness fuels arrogance which brings undesirable ramifications. If we are bloated with conceit, we will be like a tight balloon that has little room for wisdom to get in. Lojong teachings advise us to regard ourselves as the lowest among all and hold others as supreme. Even if we cannot do that, at least we should reduce our pride through humility. This renders our mind more open and receptive to wisdom and it will also

have a positive impact on our interaction with others and thereby improve one's relationships with others.

Having said that he does not expect his teachings to be of much benefit to others, one might then raise the question of why compose? To answer this, Shantideva says "I [write it only to acquaint it to my mind](#)". He explains that it is to help himself develop familiarity with bodhicitta.

Purpose:



Through this, my faith will be strengthened for a while,
And I will grow more accustomed to what is virtuous.
Then should others, somehow equal to myself in fortune,
Chance upon these words, they might find them beneficial.

This raises another question. If one is writing about the Bodhisattva practices, one should have already been acquainted with the practices or else one would not be able to write about it. And if one is already familiar with the practices, why the need to acquaint oneself with the practices? To dispel this confusion, Shantideva writes;

["Through this, my faith will be strengthened for a while,
And I will grow more accustomed to what is virtuous"](#).

Shantideva responds by saying that he is familiar with the topic and thereby adequately qualified to compose this text. However, by composing this text, it helps him to strengthen his faith in the bodhisattva's practices and increase the bodhicitta he has already developed. The text goes on to explain that this composition might benefit some fortunate ones. It reads;

["Then should others, somehow equal to my fortune,
Chance upon these words, they might find them beneficial."](#)

This concludes the statement of purposes for this composition. From here onwards begins the main body of the text. It begins with an exhortation to seize the opportunity that comes with this precious human birth to extract the essence (dharma practice).



Verse: 4

Leisure and endowment are very hard
to find;
And, since they accomplish what is
meaningful for man,
If I do not take advantage of them now,
How will such a perfect opportunity
come about again?

| The Leisures | | Ten Endowments | |
|---|------------------------|---|---|
| - Freedom from eight states in which there is no opportunity to practice Dharma | | Five personal endowments | |
| The eight unfavorable conditions: | | Five endowments that pertain to others | |
| Four non-human states | Human States | 1. Being born as human | 1. Buddha has come |
| Hell being | Remote Land | 2. Being born in a central land | 2. Dharma was taught |
| Hungry ghost | Deficient faculties | 3. Having all the faculties intact | 3. The teachings survive |
| Animal | Holding wrong views | 4. Not having committed the most extreme negative actions | 4. Followers exist |
| Long-lived god | No Buddha has appeared | 5. Having faith in the source | 5. A feeling of compassion for others exist |

We have previously covered in detail the 8 leisures and 10 endowments of the precious human rebirth. I will not repeat them here. Basically, the life that we have acquired now is said to be free from eight unfavorable conditions (4 non-human states & 4 human situations). For instance, if we were born as animals, we would not be able to practice dharma. In order to practice dharma, one needs to understand dharma. Animals, even the most intelligent ones, cannot understand a single word of dharma, let alone understand the concepts of emptiness and bodhicitta. So, we are fortunate to be free from such non-human states. Even one obtains a human rebirth, there is no guarantee that one can practice dharma. For instance, if one is born in a place where there is no dharma, the opportunity to meet and practice dharma would not arise. We are lucky enough to be born in a place where buddhadharma is still easily accessible. When we examine our conditions carefully, we will realize that our existence is free from all the eight unfavorable conditions and endowed with conducive conditions to practice dharma.

Here Shantideva reminds us of the importance of utilizing this precious human life because we can accomplish various meaningful achievements if we use our lives sensibly. For example, if we want to avoid falling into the lower realms, this life can facilitate our accomplishing this by ensuring our rebirth in the higher realms. Likewise, if we work toward achieving Nirvana (liberation from samsara), we can do so with this life. Furthermore, this life has the potential to attain enlightenment. In that sense, the human birth that we have right now, is very precious and has enormous potential. Lama Tsongkhapa extolled the precious human rebirth as more valuable than a wish-fulfilling gem. Better than Aladdin's Genie! A genie may fulfill worldly wishes but cannot help prevent one from falling into the pit of three lower realms. In contrast, this precious human birth has the potential to

fulfill all our wishes concerning this life, as well as the future lives AND has the potential to attain enlightenment in this very lifetime.

If such rebirths are common and easy to find, it is ok to have a loose attitude towards such an opportunity. However, the precious human rebirth is rare and hard to come by. As with all composite phenomena, things do not come about from nothing (i.e. no causes). Not only it requires causes and conditions, it requires concordant causes and conditions. This means we need to cultivate virtue in order to achieve a good human rebirth. However, our virtues are scarce and feeble, whereas our non-virtues are in frequent and powerful. This should be obvious to us. In the 24 hours of a day, we spend very little time on dharma practice/doing virtue. The dharma practices we do engage in often lack quality. Three components must be present in a practice in order to qualify as a quality practice: proper motivation, the actual practice and dedication. When we put our own practice to scrutiny, we will realize that most of our practices either lack all the three components or one or two of them. For instance, for most of us, when we recite one mala of Tara mantra, we forget to set our motivation at the beginning and even when we remember to do so, our motivation revolves around the goals of only this life (i.e. good health, success and prosperity). And then while performing the actual practice, in this case, recitation, we are distracted. At the end, we fail to dedicate our merits and even when we do, instead of dedicating it towards enlightenment for the sake of all living beings, we dedicate mainly for this life's purposes. From that perspective, our dharma practices are very feeble. On the other hand, when it comes to non-virtue, all the three components are fully present. For instance, if one decides to harm another person, firstly, the ill intention is there from the beginning and strong. One is fully focused when engaging in the actual action of harming the other. At the end, there is a strong sense of satisfaction in inflicting harm. In that way, we commit the non-virtue in a perfect way. Based on our habits, we create more causes for lower realm rebirths and is the reason for saying precious human rebirth is hard to come by.

Another reason for the precious human rebirth being rare is that it requires specific causes and we often lack such causes. Even an ordinary human rebirth requires at least observing ethical discipline such as abstaining from committing ten non-virtues, not to mention for a rebirth that is free from unfavorable conditions. From our own experience, many of us are not able to avoid even one of the ten non-virtues. Merely not committing any of the ten non-virtues is not tantamount to observing ethical discipline pertaining to those ten. To qualify as observing ethical discipline, it requires the conscious intention or determination to avoid the non-virtue. For us monks, our vows include observing the ten non-virtues and therefore, not engaging in ten equals to observing ethical discipline in relation to the ten non-virtues. However, those who have not taken such vows have to make conscious determination on daily basis to avoid the ten non-virtues. For that reason, I often suggest setting up the motivation every morning and decide from among the ten, which non virtue one is going to abstain from committing. For instance, if one feels that one can abstain from committing the three physical ones for the day (killing, stealing and sexual misconduct), one should set that determination accordingly from the morning. That's how one gains merit from observing ethical discipline. Taking all the above into consideration, we now understand the rarity of the optimum human rebirth and thereby the importance of maximizing our human life to extract its essence. With this understanding, we should arrive at four logical conclusions based on four sound reasons. Let's go through the four conclusions.

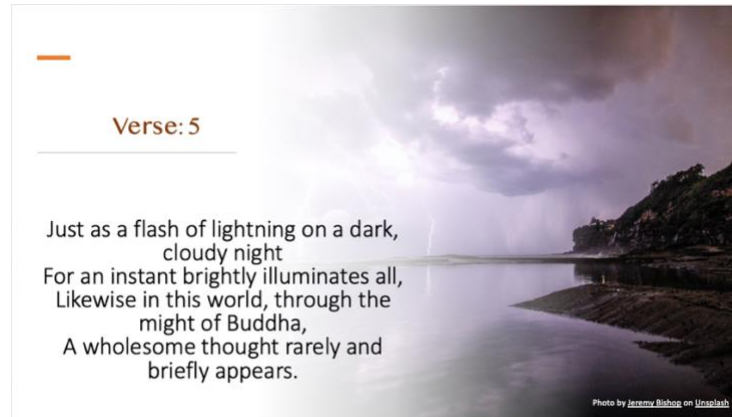
Four resolutions to extract the essence of this life:

1. **Seeing the necessity of practicing Dharma** – We all seek happiness
2. **Recognizing the capability to accomplish the practices** – We obtained inner and external facilities
3. **Necessity to accomplish the practice in this life** – Difficult to obtain precious human rebirth in the future
4. **Necessity of accomplishing it right now** – Time of death is uncertain

1. **Necessity to practice dharma:** Firstly, one realizes the necessity of practicing dharma because one is seeking happiness and avoiding suffering. The achievement of happiness and freedom from suffering is dependent on practicing dharma (subduing the delusions/afflictions). Karma is certain in that virtuous action results into happiness and non-virtuous action results into suffering. No amount of unwholesome action will bring desirable consequences. Neither will any amount of wholesome action result in undesirable consequences. In that sense, karma is fixed. Since we aspire to be happy, dharma practice is a must. With this realization, we need to resolve to practice dharma.
2. **We have the capability to practice dharma:** Once we realize that we must practice dharma, we then wonder whether we have the capability to do so. Identifying the 8 leisure and 10 endowments, we realize that we are fully equipped as we have the perfect conditions to practice dharma. Not only we have this human rebirth, we have also met dharma and dharma teachers. So, both internal and external facilities are present for that. If we put our heart into the practice, there is nothing to hinder us from achieving the happiness we seek. This adds to the reasons to engage in dharma practice and we should thus resolve to do so.
3. **Must practice in this life:** Despite having conducive conditions, we tend to delay our practice thinking that we can do it in the next life. To counter this, one should contemplate on how difficult it will be to obtain another precious human rebirth in the future. As we discussed earlier, human rebirth is so hard to obtain. Therefore, we cannot afford to leave our dharma practice to the next life. There is no guarantee that we will be born human again and must engage in dharma practices in this very lifetime.
4. **Must begin practicing right now:** Even after realizing how critical it is to practice in this very life, we tend to procrastinate and prioritize our worldly endeavors over spiritual practices. For instance, we tend to say that “Yes, I know I need to do spiritual practices but first I need to finish my project”, or “I’ll do it when I retire”. To counter this type of procrastination, we reflect on the uncertainty of death. Death is certain but the time of death is uncertain. If we know when we are going to die, at least we can make plans. We can say, “My death is coming in three years’ time, I better start my dharma practice”. Unfortunately, the time of death is not fixed. We can die at any time. We hear stories of people who are up and about in the morning and dead by evening. This shows the uncertainty of the time of death. Death will not wait for us to finish our obligations and our dharma practice. Reflecting on this, we should come up with a resolution that we will practice dharma right away.

For the above reasons, Shantideva urges us to take advantage of this human rebirth and develop bodhicitta when he writes:

“If I do not take advantage of them now,
How will such a perfect opportunity come about again?”



After discussing the rarity of the physical human body, Shantideva now discusses the rarity of the wholesome thought. He likens our virtuous mindset as fleeting and like the momentary illumination by a flash of lightening on a dark cloudy night. Firstly, lightning occurs occasionally and its duration very short. It lasts only momentarily. Likewise, for us ordinary beings, wholesome thoughts are very rare and arise very briefly. We are constantly overwhelmed by unwholesome thoughts. We can tell from our own experience. During the 24 hours of the day, we spend more than half of it sleeping and doing our jobs. In the remaining waking hours, how often does a thought of helping others out of compassion arise in us? Not often. When we are with people, we engage in gossip or negative speech that is influenced by afflictive emotions. When we are alone, our thoughts are imbued with the afflictions. Even when we sit down to meditate, our minds wander and meet our best buddies – attachment, hatred and ignorance. We may be thinking about ways to make more money or achieve greater success. Or we could be thinking about our enemies and how to get even with them. Most of our thoughts tend to be driven by either attachment, hatred or indifference. When we closely examine our thoughts, we will realize that unwholesome thoughts such as anger and jealousy arise effortlessly. It is near-automatic and does not require conscious effort. However, when it comes to wholesome thoughts, such as kindness, love and compassion, even with effort, we find it difficult to generate them. As such, Shantideva urges us to work toward developing a habit of having more virtuous thoughts.



The actual discussion of the virtues of bodhicitta begins from here onwards. Since our virtue is perpetually feeble and non-virtue is extremely strong, we need to overcome the non-virtues. Without purification, our negative karma will catch up with us. Karma once created will bear fruit no matter how long it takes. An ordinary seed can become useless as it rots or dries up after a long period of being dormant. However, karma will produce its results when met with right conditions, regardless of time. The consequences of negative karma can be dreadful as they are magnified and thus, we need to exhaust such karma. There are various ways to purify negative karma. However, the most effective antidote to negative karma is through the generation of the Fully Awakening Mind of bodhicitta. In sutra, an analogy of a cat and rat is used to illustrate this point. Just as a mere glance from a cat can overwhelm a rat, a generation of bodhicitta too will overcome delusion and negative karma. It is said that the generation of bodhicitta can prevent even a person who has committed heavy negative karma, from falling into the lower realms. So, this stanza highlights the purification power of bodhicitta and urges us to work toward cultivating this great mindset.

Verse: 7

All the Buddhas who have
contemplated for many aeons
Have seen it to be beneficial;
For by it the limitless masses of beings
Will quickly attain the supreme state
of bliss.



This stanza extolls Bodhicitta for its ability to produce sublime happiness. The buddhas who are committed to helping sentient beings have contemplated for aeons on the best way to achieve sublime happiness and found that bodhicitta is the method. Lasting happiness is achieved when one eradicates the root of suffering without even a trace of its stains and that is when one becomes a Buddha. At that stage, not only has one eradicated all sufferings and their causes but also perfected all good qualities. One becomes perfect in every way – infallible in every way. The only way to achieve this is through the cultivation of bodhicitta alongside wisdom realizing emptiness. The past buddhas have utilized this method that has yielded the result of enlightenment. Hence, they say bodhicitta is the one that leads countless sentient beings to the supreme state of bliss.

Verse: 8

Those who wish to destroy the many sorrows
of (their) conditioned existence,
Those who wish (all beings) to experience a
multitude of joys,
And those who wish to experience much
happiness,
Should never forsake the Awakening Mind.

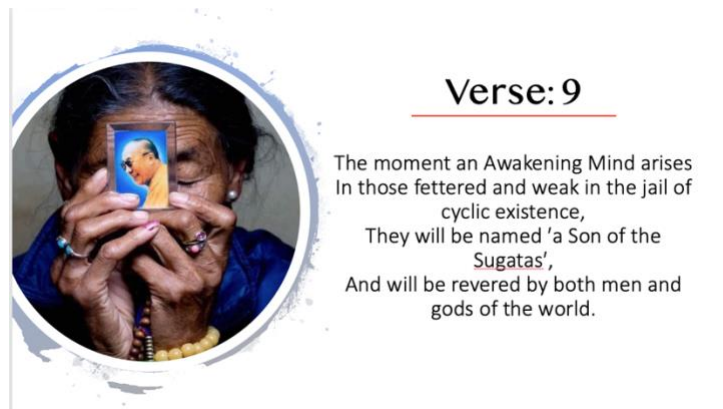


This stanza points out how bodhicitta fulfills our many wishes. Being born in samsara, we constantly suffer from varying types and degrees of suffering. There is no way of generating genuine

compassion for all sentient beings without thoroughly understanding the types of sufferings they are undergoing (the three types of suffering – the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change and pervasive suffering). This understanding begins with our gaining insight into our own suffering nature and this insight leads us to developing renunciation of samsara. It is the mental state that recognizes samsara as an ocean of suffering and thereby aspire to be free of it and achieve nirvana. With renunciation, each of our actions will be aimed at achieving emancipation from the suffering existence and constantly creating causes and condition to attain liberation. Seeing that all other sentient beings suffer as we do, we strive to liberate them from such suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness. This is the basis of bodhicitta. In that sense, the verse shows how bodhicitta fulfills the wishes of all beings.

Bodhicitta is also a source of myriad of joys and happiness. Of course, it leads to the supreme happiness – the state of enlightenment. Even in samsara, when we have bodhicitta, our sources of happiness increase exponentially. Normally, we have only a handful of reasons to be happy. For instance, we feel happy when good things happen to ourselves and those close to us. We rarely rejoice when good things happen to those who are not in our inner circle. For instance, a colleague's promotion may not engender happiness and joy but may instead incite envy and jealousy. However, once we develop bodhicitta, our sources of happiness become infinite because bodhicitta is about wishing others to be happy. Thus, when we see others' accomplishments or good things happening to them, we feel joy. Since sentient beings are infinite, our sources of happiness are also infinite.

This has also direct implications in our relationships. Relationships fail for many reasons, but the self-cherishing/selfish attitude often lies at the core of failed relationships. Bodhicitta is an attitude of cherishing others and prioritizing others' happiness. As such, when we cultivate bodhicitta, our principal concern is shifted to the other person. We prioritize others' welfare over our own and thereby there is no room for selfish attitude to arise. This will then help us interpret other persons and situations more positively, thereby minimizing friction and improving our relationship with others. That is why bodhicitta is like a wish-fulfilling jewel that invariably grants all our wishes.




Bodhicitta is not only a source of all happiness, it also carries a special standing. When one successfully develops genuine bodhicitta, one is accorded with a special name and reverence amongst beings and gods of this world. Similar to an ordinary person winning an election and becoming a leader of a country. Before the election, nobody even knows the candidate, let alone showing him respect. The moment this person is declared the leader of a country, respect and privileges are automatically accorded. Likewise, the moment an ordinary person who is trapped in the jail of samsara and undergoing torture is able to generate real bodhicitta, that person will be

accorded the name “the Son of Buddhas” and is respected by humans and gods of the world. Shakyamuni Buddha whom we prostrate to, was once an ordinary being like us. Shakyamuni Buddha developed bodhicitta and completed the path of bodhisattvas and became an object of reverence. We did not follow his path and as a result we are still struggling in samsara. This stanza not only extols the virtue of bodhicitta, it also highlights the potential we each possess. The line that says “..those fettered and weak in the jail of cyclic existence” emphasizes that such benefits are not limited to bodhisattvas who are on higher paths such as the path of seeing and meditation but to those ordinary beings who are still struck in the ocean of samsaric suffering. Thus, it urges us to work toward developing this altruistic attitude of bodhicitta.

Verse: 10

It is like the supreme gold-making
elixir,
For it transforms the unclean body
we have taken
Into the priceless jewel of a
Buddha-Form
Therefore firmly seize this Awakening
Mind.



In this stanza, Shantideva uses an analogy of elixir to illustrate the benefits of bodhicitta. It is said that there is a elixir or potion that can transform ordinary metal into gold. Gold is one of the expensive and valuable objects in this world. In the era of Coronavirus, the market for other commodities plunged but gold price has rocketed. So, for many, it would be wonderful to be able to lay their hands on such a potion. However, if one were to acquire this elixir and produce a ton of gold, it will not avert death, it cannot help beyond this life (even in this life, one’s family members may be quarrelling over possession of this gold). However, cultivating bodhicitta can transform our ordinary flawed body into a priceless buddha body that can fulfill both our short-term and long-term goals. As such, Shantideva exhorts us to firmly seize this awakening mind by taking the bodhisattva vows and abiding in them.



Verse: 11

Since the limitless mind of the Sole
Guide of the World
Has upon thorough investigation seen
its preciousness,
All beings wishing to be free from
worldly abodes
Should firmly take hold of this precious
Awakening Mind.

This discusses the preciousness and rarity of bodhicitta through an analogy of a precious jewel. In ancient times, people embarked on a sea journey in search of treasure on the Land of Jewels. The goal was to return with the treasures with the hope of dispelling poverty. They entrusted their welfare in the hands of their ship's captain who was known to be an expert in navigation and experienced in sailing to this particular place. Upon arriving at this place, the captain was skilled in finding the most valuable jewels. If the sailors listened to their captain's advice, they would collect and bring back with them the most valuable jewels. Similarly, we sentient beings are also stricken by the poverty of happiness and are constantly drowning in the ocean of suffering. If we are serious about wanting to eliminate the poverty of happiness, we need to find a jewel that can eliminate the poverty of happiness. Likewise, we need an experienced guide who has already made that successful journey to finding that jewel. There is no other more experienced guide than the past Buddhas who have successfully found the priceless jewel of bodhicitta, that alleviates all suffering and serves as a panacea for all our suffering. These perfect guides advise us to seize the jewel of bodhicitta which is very precious and rare. This advice did not come from guesswork. Through putting their infinite wisdom into investigation and experimentation, they discovered that bodhicitta is the supreme jewel that can solve sentient beings' poverty of happiness. Hence, Shantideva recommends that we should firmly take hold of this precious awakening mind.

Verse: 12

All other virtues are like the plantain
tree;
For after bearing fruit they simply
perish.
But the perennial tree of the Awakening
Mind
Unceasingly bears fruit and thereby
flourishes without end.




Our main goal is to achieve Buddhahood but without an enormous accumulation of both wisdom and merits, Buddhahood will remain elusive to us. As such, we need to first find ways to accumulate the merits and then methods to effectively preserve them. In the absence of any one of the two, we would fail in gathering enough merit to result in Buddhahood. This is similar to the way we try to save money. First, we need a steady income and then find a means to prevent the depletion of that income. Otherwise, we would not be able to build up our bank balance. One way to achieve this is for example, by getting a good earning job and investing that money which can generate good monthly income. This way, we can keep snowballing our existing money. In terms of increasing our merits, Shantideva suggests an effective method involving bodhicitta. He uses an analogy of two different trees: a plantain (banana) tree and a perennial tree. ChuShing (Tib) translated as plantain tree is known to bear fruit only once and then it perishes. However, JonShing (Tib) translated as perennial tree is believed to bear fruits again and again for a long time. A plantain tree is likened to merits that are not motivated by bodhicitta. The merit will yield a onetime result and then get extinguished. However, the merits that are propelled by bodhicitta just like the perennial tree, produces results over and over. Shantideva says “[unceasingly bears fruit and thereby flourishes](#)”

without end.” Since we are hungry for merits to achieve enlightenment, generating bodhicitta is the most effective way to gather merits. This is one more reason to cultivate bodhicitta.

Verse: 13

Like entrusting myself to a brave man when
greatly afraid
By entrusting myself to this (Awakening
Mind) I shall be swiftly liberated
Even if I have committed extremely
unbearable evils.
Why then do the conscientious not devote
themselves to this?

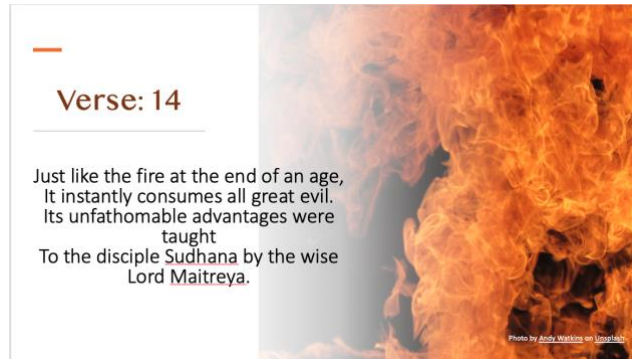


This stanza extolls bodhicitta for its power to protect us from experiencing the results of heavy negative karma. Shantideva employs the analogy of a bodyguard. Having a trusted bodyguard can protect a person from dangers such as assassination attempts. A better example is that of a convicted serial killer, who when being transferred from one place to another is often accompanied by the police. One reason is to prevent the culprit from escaping but another reason is to protect him from being attacked by the angry public. Although the felon has committed heavy crimes and deserves punishment, as long as the guards are around, he/she is protected. Similarly, Bodhicitta can protect anyone who has committed even the heaviest negative karma such as inflicting harms to the Three Jewels or committed the five heinous karmas (killing one’s mother or father, killing an arhat, drawing blood from a Buddha, and causing schism in the Sangha of bikshus). The ramifications of these negative deeds are grave. Committing such karma will result in birth in the hell realms in the very next life. Other karmas’ results may not be immediate. That is why these five acts or heinous karmas are called “TsamMey” which literally means “without any interval”. It is sometimes translated as “acts of direct fruition or automatic transgressions”. Despite their gravity, through the generation of bodhicitta, one can escape the dire consequences of such misdeeds. The text reads;

“By entrusting myself to this (Awakening Mind), I shall be swiftly liberated
Even if I have committed extremely unbearable evils.”

Seeing bodhicitta’s ability to liberate us from the consequences of heavy negative karma, we should devote ourselves to developing this mindset.

The way bodhicitta protects a person from the negative consequences of heavy negative karma is through destroying negative karma, thereby leaving no chance to experience the result. It is like eliminating the seed of a plant so that there will be no sprouts. This is illustrated with an analogy of a conflagration - the fire at the end of age of universe.



In Abhidharma, it is said that the world will eventually be destroyed by fire. It describes about how at the end of the world, seven suns will appear and engulf the earth and turning it into ashes. Perhaps the seven suns are a metaphor for global warming! We can see even now the dangers posed by global warming. Every year, there are extensive forest fires that destroy hundreds of habitats. The text is making the point that when that “doomsday” arrives, the world we know will be completely destroyed by an inferno so powerful that it swallows everything except the realm beyond the 4th state of concentration (the final state of form realm). Likewise, bodhicitta is so powerful that like the fire at the end of an age, bodhicitta can also burn all the negative karmas so that one does not have to experience its suffering consequences. While verse 13 discusses how bodhicitta overwhelms negative karma, verse 14 highlights its power to destroy even the seed of negative karma. The beneficial effect of bodhicitta is profound and vast.

The story of Asanga helps us understand the power of bodhicitta. Asanga undertook a 12 year retreat in an effort to propitiate and meet Maitreya but was unsuccessful. At the end of the 12th year, when Asanga finally came out of the retreat, saw a pitiful dog that was infested with maggots. Driven by compassion, Asanga decided to help the maggot-ridden dog but realized that simply removing the maggots would kill them. The only solution was to use his own tongue to lift them out of the dog and transfer them on to piece of flesh that he had cut from his body. As he knelt down to do so, the maggot-ridden dog disappeared and, in its place, stood Maitreya. When Asanga asked why Maitreya did not appear for the last 12 years, Maitreya explained that he had been there all along. However, because of the obscuration caused by Asanga’s past negative karma, he could not see Maitreya. That single act of genuine compassion purified all the negative karmic hindrances to seeing Maitreya. If generating an instant of compassion can purify so much grave negative karma, we could easily extrapolate that to see the extensive positive impact of bodhicitta on our own and others’ lives.

The reason for bodhicitta’s ability to do this is because when one develops genuine bodhicitta, one creates immeasurable positive karma or merit. This is because bodhicitta is unique many ways:

(1) **It focuses on infinite number of beings:** Bodhicitta is not about benefiting a small number of people. It is concerned about helping all sentient beings and therefore its focus is on infinite number of beings. As such it is unique for its focus or object.

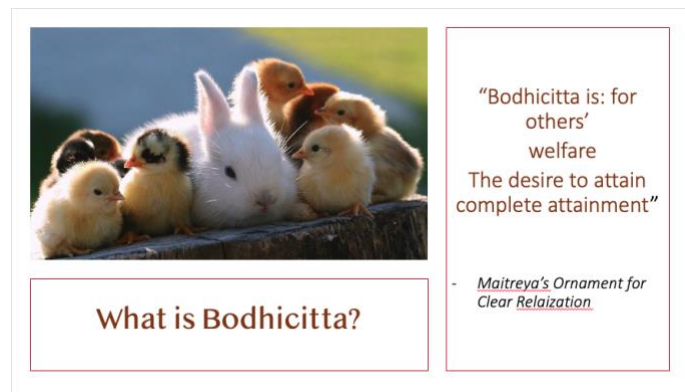
(2) **It aims to alleviate an infinite number of sufferings:** The very purpose of generating bodhicitta is to liberate sentient beings from their sufferings. The goal is not limited to a certain degree of suffering. It is aimed at alleviating all forms of suffering, whether it be gross or subtle. In fact, bodhicitta aims to eradicate even the causes of suffering. Since the suffering of sentient beings

are infinite and bodhicitta aims to eliminate all, it is unique in terms of its goal in freeing sentient beings from their suffering.

(3) **It aims to render infinite happiness:** Bodhicitta is not only concerned about alleviating the sufferings of sentient beings, it is also committed to providing limitless happiness to all sentient beings. The ultimate goal is to lead them to the state of sublime, permanent, infinite happiness. Therefore, bodhicitta is unique in relation to providing infinite happiness and joy.

(4) **It aims for infinite duration:** The freedom from suffering and happiness that bodhicitta aspires to provide is not a temporary one. It aims to create lasting joy and happiness for sentient beings and therefore the duration is infinite.

On account of the above unique features, engaging in bodhicitta garners immeasurable merits and thereby becomes a powerful antidote to negative actions. In turn, it eradicates negative karma and prevent it from fruition. This and many other unfathomable benefits of bodhicitta are taught in detail by Maitreya to his disciple Sudhana. In the Sutra of the Arrayed Trees, the virtue of bodhicitta is extolled over 200 analogies. To list a few, bodhicitta is likened to a seed that bears the fruit of enlightenment; a field that flourishes virtue; a jewel vase that fulfills all wishes; a short spear that defeats the enemy of afflictive emotions and so on.

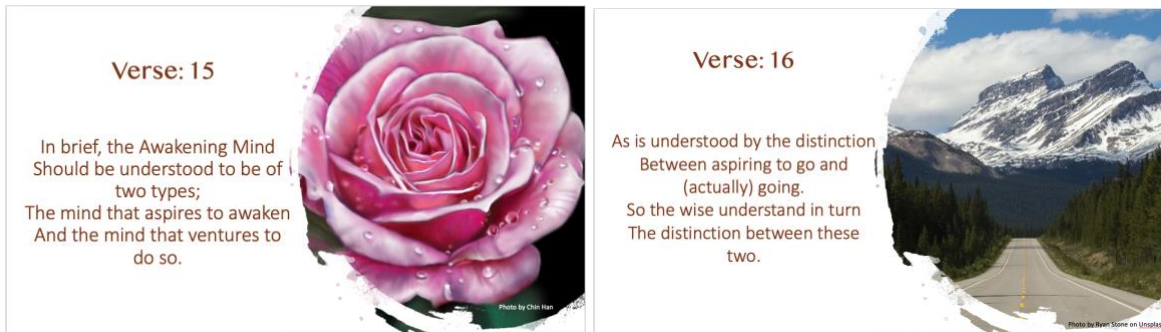


From the above, we have gained some understanding on the benefits of bodhicitta. Now we focus on the definition of bodhicitta. What is bodhicitta? In Maitreya’s the Ornament of Clear Light Realization, Bodhicitta is defined as:

“Bodhicitta is: for others’ welfare
The desire to attain complete attainment”.

Let’s unpack the definition. The main goal is to help sentient beings. “Others’ welfare” consists of temporary and ultimate goals. The temporary goal is to enable sentient beings to cultivate the path that leads to the freedom from samsara and its result - nirvana. The ultimate goal is to bring them to full Buddhahood. The intention is to fulfill these two goals. However, at the moment, one does not have the capacity to liberate even one sentient being, let alone liberating all sentient beings. Only when one becomes Buddha, would one have such ability. So, motivated solely by the wish to liberate others, one aspires to achieve enlightenment. Such aspiration is called bodhicitta. One’s desire for one’s own enlightenment is a secondary goal. It is simply the means to achieve the primary goal, which is benefitting others. In Lamrim Chenmo, Lama Tsongkhapa likens this to a person looking for a cup in order to quench his/her thirst. Quenching one’s thirst is the primary goal but searching

for the cup is a means to hold the liquid that will quench the thirst. In simple words, bodhicitta is an attitude that aspires to achieve enlightenment in order to help other sentient beings.



The first stanza lists the 2 types of bodhicitta and the second stanza lays out the distinction between the two. There are two types of bodhicitta: aspiring bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta.

Upon contemplating the virtues of bodhicitta, we get inspired to develop bodhicitta. Employing one of the two methods of developing bodhicitta, there will come a time where bodhicitta will arise spontaneously (effortlessly). The initial stage of generating the wish to cultivate bodhicitta in order to attain enlightenment to free sentient beings from suffering is called aspiring bodhicitta. At this stage, one has not committed to engaging in the practices of the six perfections. Neither has one taken the bodhisattva vows. Although such aspiration is noble and virtuous, it is a mere aspiration and that is not enough. This will not get one far into fulfilling the goals of achieving enlightenment and liberating others. In order to progress, one needs to commit to engaging in the bodhisattva practices that will lead to Buddhahood and for this purpose, one takes the bodhisattva vows. This type of bodhicitta is called engaging bodhicitta.

The difference between aspiring and engaging bodhicitta can be explained in another way: Let's say there is a person who has heard a lot about Tibet and wishes to visit someday. A year later, this person actually embarks on the journey. The aspiration to visit Tibet is present in the both cases. The difference is in the action taken. In the first case, it was a mere wish or desire that lacked action. In the second case, not only the aspiration was present, but the action too is present. So aspiring bodhicitta is like the first case, where only a wish is present. Engaging bodhicitta is like the second case where the aspiration is accompanied by action. The actual distinction lies in the bodhisattva vows. While bodhicitta that is complemented by bodhisattva vows is engaging bodhicitta; bodhicitta that is not complemented by bodhisattva vows is aspiring bodhicitta. So, it depends on whether the person who has generated bodhicitta has taken the bodhisattva vows or not. This distinction is clearly stated in Lamrim Chenmo. However, it is not be confused with the simple act of taking bodhisattva vows. Many of us has taken bodhisattva vows during tantric empowerments. In order to qualify as engaging bodhicitta, one needs to be a bodhisattva, a person who has actually developed bodhicitta. Just because we recite refuge and bodhicitta prayers, we should not think that we have generated actual bodhicitta. Ours is a contrived bodhicitta, one that is based on our being motivated to practice bodhicitta but is not as yet the fully developed form of actual bodhicitta, which is the spontaneous/effortless bodhicitta that flows without interruption. The moment that contrived progresses to a spontaneous bodhicitta, we can then say "I have generated bodhicitta" or "bodhicitta has arisen in me".

Verse: 17

Although great fruits occur in cyclic
existence
From the mind that aspires to
awaken,
An uninterrupted flow of merit
does not ensue
As it does with the venturing mind.



Photo by Sabrina Ringquist on Unsplash

Having set out the two types of bodhicitta and their distinguishing features, Shantideva now turns to discuss the virtues of aspiring and engaging bodhicitta respectively. First, he hails the benefit of aspiring bodhicitta. Aspiring bodhicitta is the seed of enlightenment. With the appropriate effort on its cultivation, it will eventually bear the fruit of enlightenment. Upon developing aspiring bodhicitta, one then progresses to taking Bodhisattva vows, thereby transforming the aspiring bodhicitta into engaging bodhicitta. This involves undertaking the practices of the six perfections which will eventually lead to Buddhahood.

Until we attain enlightenment, we remain in samsara, so possessing bodhicitta provides many benefits. In sutras, aspiring bodhicitta is likened to a piece of diamond. No matter how small it is or even a broken piece of it, a diamond will always retain its name/value and is superior to any size of gold. Similarly, any practice that is motivated by aspiring bodhicitta is more beneficial than other practices not motivated by bodhicitta. For instance, one round of mala of Mani recitation with the bodhicitta mindset is more efficacious than a hundred thousand rounds without the bodhicitta mindset. That's how big a difference bodhicitta can make in terms of acquiring merits. The more merits one accumulates, the more happiness one will reap. In the sutra, it says that "Merit results happiness and dispels suffering, one's wishes will be fulfilled when one has merits". So, with bodhicitta, the chances of being happy and having wishes getting fulfilled increases exponentially.

Even at the ordinary, daily-life level, bodhicitta is precious. It helps enrich our relationships. We live in society and relationships play an integral role. One major culprit that hinders good relationships is our me-first, selfish attitude. However, when cultivating bodhicitta, selfishness has no place because bodhicitta is concerned about the others' welfare, about prioritizing others' wellbeing without expecting returns. One is willing to sacrifice one's own happiness for the sake of others' happiness. Starting from small deeds like offering your seat to someone, to a vast deed like saving a life, once we are immersed in bodhicitta, there is no room for conflict and friction. In that way, bodhicitta helps promote good relationships. As mentioned earlier, with bodhicitta, one's source of happiness becomes infinite. As such, while in samsara, bodhicitta bears bountiful fruits ("Although great fruits occurs in cyclic existence"). Shantideva then makes a comparison between the merits of aspiring and those of engaging bodhicitta. Although the generation of aspiring bodhicitta is very meritorious, it is not as great as that of engaging bodhicitta. With aspiring bodhicitta, it produces merits only during its actual presence. However, with engaging bodhicitta, its merit is not contingent on its actual presence. The moment one possesses engaging bodhicitta, an uninterrupted flow of merit ensues. The following text elaborates on this.

Verse: 18 & 19

From the moment one takes up
This irreversible attitude—
The mind that aspires to liberate entirely
The infinite realms of beings,

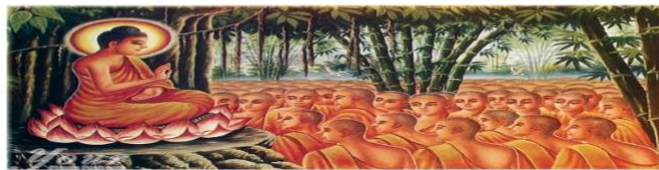
From that time hence,
Even while asleep or distracted
A force of merit equal to the sky
Will perpetually ensue.

The first stanza describes engaging bodhicitta as an irreversible attitude that aspires to liberate the entire sentient beings who dwell in the three realms. As described in Lama Choepa text, this kind of attitude is committed to putting up with any hardship in order to help sentient beings:

Even if I must remain for an ocean of eons in the fiery hell of Avici
For the sake of even just one sentient being,
I seek your blessings to complete the perfection of joyous effort,
That out of compassion untiringly strives for supreme enlightenment.

Bodhisattvas are so committed that they are willing to remain in hell realms for eons just to help one sentient being. The duration of hardship does not matter, as long as there are sentient beings to help, they will strive to help. When engaging bodhicitta arises in a person, one's courage and capacity to face challenges knows no bounds. Nothing can erode one's determination. For that reason, Shantideva uses the term "irreversible attitude". The moment one generates that kind of attitude, the flow of merits ensues. Whether one is sleeping, walking or sitting, the merit continues to flow. Even when one is distracted and not consciously engaging in any virtue, the force of merit will still ensue. In that sense, engaging bodhicitta is like an elixir that transforms every action into a virtuous one. How wonderful it would be to possess such an ability as our activities would become virtues and a single moment of our life would not go wasted. All the 24 hours of each day would be a merit-filled day. This is not a fantasy. This is possible when we develop engaging bodhicitta and therefore there is good reason for us to work toward cultivating this mindset.

Verse: 20



This was explained by the Buddha,
Together with supporting reasons,
In a teaching given at Subāhu's request,
For the sake of those inclined to lesser paths.

Here onwards, Shantideva provides reasons for the benefits of bodhicitta. A common way to establish a point is through either citing a sutra or providing a logical reason. In this case, Shantideva first starts establishing the point by spiritual authority which is quoting Buddha's word. In Tibetan, we call it "LungLa Tenpa or LungGe DrupJhey". It is so and so because Buddha said so. It is not possible to propound every statement with logical reasoning. For instance, it is difficult to establish through logical reasoning why a peacock's feather is perceived as beautiful and has so many colors. Only the Buddha can tell the specific causes of peacock's feather. In such circumstances, a quote of Buddha is employed. That is one way to establish a point. Here, Shantideva is not saying that the benefits of bodhicitta cannot be established through logical reasoning. It is more about making a statement that the benefits are not of his own creation. These benefits are taught by Buddha himself and there are also logical reasons to support such benefits. Accordingly, Shantideva says, "This was explained by the buddha...In a teaching given at Subahu's request." In the Sutra, Buddha explained the benefits of bodhicitta using multiple examples which we discussed earlier. Buddha taught this at the request of Subahu in order to help many disciples who were on the verge of departing from Mahayana path. Those disciples, upon hearing that Mahayana path takes eons, felt discouraged and sought an easier path such as Theravadan path. As Buddha saw they had the potential and propensity for the Mahayana path, he skillfully taught the merits of bodhicitta to inspire them and help them continue in the Mahayana path to enlightenment. That is the meaning of "[For the sake of those inclined to lesser paths](#)".

Verses: 21 & 22



If even the thought to relieve
Living creatures of merely a headache
Is a beneficial intention
Endowed with infinite goodness,

Then what need is there to mention
The wish to dispel their inconceivable misery,
Wishing every single one of them
To realize boundless good qualities?

Now Shantideva turns to establishing the reasons for such benefits. The main reason lies in bodhicitta's focus on eliminating the infinite number of sufferings of an infinite number of beings. The motivation is vast and meritorious. Here Shantideva extrapolates that if a small kindness generates merit, what more a great kindness. The first stanza is better understood with this story of Zawoe' Bumu.

"*Bumu*" means "girl" in Tibetan but this name given to a boy. There are different versions of the story, but the most common version is that this boy named Zawoe' Bumu was shipwrecked and ended up in a human slaughterhouse on an island. In the slaughterhouse, he witnessed people being chained, sawed and undergoing much pain and torture. Upon seeing that, strong compassion arose in him and he genuinely wished them to be free of such pain and suffering. That act of generating compassion exhausted his negative karma to be in this place and he achieved rebirth in deva realm. The merit was so strong because of his benevolent intention. It was purely motivated to help others

and was free from any self-interest. As such the text reads; “If even the thought to relieve...is a beneficial intention”. So, Shantideva argues that if a thought of relieving others of a mere headache creates enormous merit, then no need to mention the immeasurable merits from wishing to dispel all miseries of every single sentient being. Because of bodhicitta’s unique focus and intention, it becomes potent in garnering merits and effective in exhausting negative karmas. Shantideva urges us to contemplate on such benefits and to embrace this mindset.



Verse: 23

Do even fathers and mothers
Have such a benevolent
intention as this?
Do the gods and sages?
Does even Brahma have it?

In this stanza, Shantideva provides various icons and compares them to bodhicitta in an effort to illustrate the rarity of this mindset in sentient beings. The first comparison is made with parents. Parents care for their children and their concern for them extends beyond themselves. Shantideva compares parental caring to the bodhicitta mindset and finds that no matter how caring parents may be, their care is limited to their children. They do not possess the altruistic mind that is concerned about the welfare of all sentient beings. Such is the expanse of bodhicitta. The second comparison is made in relation to devas, celestial beings. Devas are viewed as benevolent. The term “Jigten KyongWai Lha” which means Devas, are those celestial beings who protect humans. Generally, there are two kinds of celestial beings: the ones who are kind and supportive of dharma practitioners and the others who are ill-intentioned and hinder dharma practice. These “good” devas are said to help practitioners by creating a conducive environment for the dharma practice. Despite their benevolent mindset, they do not possess bodhicitta and hence their generosity and help are reserved only for those whom they regard as real practitioners. Sages are another icon, who are considered persons to be wise and revered. They possess great knowledge and are known to be truth tellers. Shantideva says that even sages do not possess this altruistic mind. Brahma, according to Hinduism, is the creator of the universe. In Buddhism, Brahma is a celestial being who abides in the four immeasurables (immeasurable compassion, loving kindness, joy and equanimity) yet he does not possess this altruistic mindset of bodhicitta. As such, Bodhicitta is very rare and precious.

Conventionally, many rare objects are considered precious. Look at the image on the slide. This is a blue diamond. It is one of the rarest diamonds on earth and therefore very expensive. I looked up its price and one carat of it costs around US\$200K. The rarer the item is, the greater its value.


Bodhicitta is not only rare, it is a source of all good qualities. Bodhicitta confers temporary benefits such as happiness in this life, to ultimate benefits such as achieving nirvana and enlightenment.

Bodhicitta has the ability to fulfill all our wishes. Now the question arises: Why is Bodhicitta so rare and difficult for it to arise in sentient beings? The answer lies in the next stanza.

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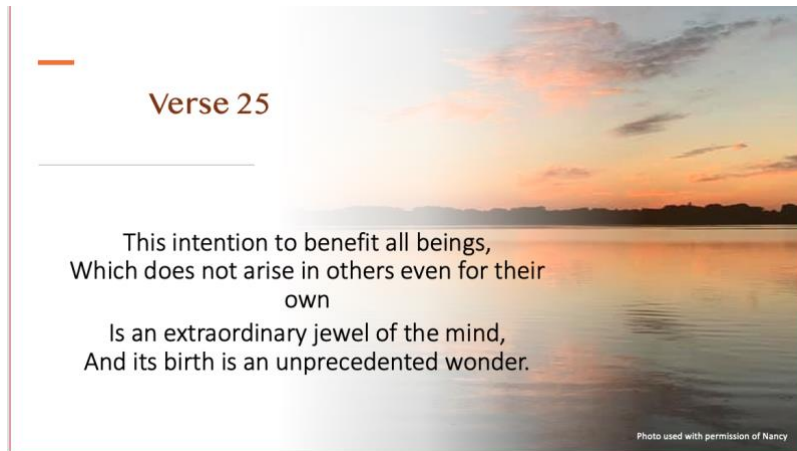
Verse: 24

If those beings have
never before
Even dreamt of such an
attitude
For their own sake,
How would it ever arise
for the sake of others?

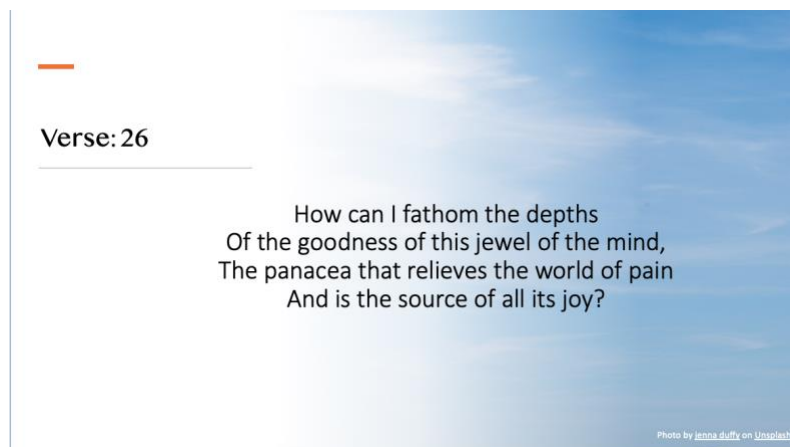


Bodhicitta is an aspiration to achieve enlightenment to benefit all living beings. Shantideva says that for many, the aspiration to achieve enlightenment even for their own purpose does not arise in dreams. We are generally self-absorbed and busy at engaging in a myriad of self-serving activities. Aspiring for enlightenment is normally not amongst them. How many people in the world subscribe to the concept of enlightenment or Buddhahood? Maybe the Buddhists? Even among Buddhists, how many really understand what enlightenment means? Many do not have the correct understanding of the meaning of Buddhahood or enlightenment. If one is clueless about enlightenment, it is unlikely that the person would have any interest in it. Even among those who understand the meaning of enlightenment, many lack the aspiration for it. This is quite obvious from our own experience. We engage in all kinds of virtuous actions including our practices. Upon closer scrutiny, we find that most of our virtuous deeds are motivated by the concerns for this life. For example, we pray to Tara for long life, we recite Medicine buddha mantra for good health, we engage in Zambala practice for wealth etc.. All these are motivated by this life's concerns. How often do we practice out of the wish to benefit others or to achieve Nirvana or enlightenment? If we are honest with ourselves, we would find that concerns for liberation and enlightenment are not a common motivation for our virtuous endeavors. From this examination, we can see the rarity of bodhicitta arising in sentient beings.

Sometimes we dream about things that are not conceivable in our waking hours. However, if something does not even occur in one's dreams, it is unlikely that it would happen in our conscious hours. Here Shantideva uses dreams to stress the point that it is hard for bodhicitta to arise in many people because for many, the thought of achieving enlightenment for their own sake does not even occur in their dreams, let alone consciously generating aspiration for the sake of others. Normally it is easier for us to do things for ourselves than for others. Since we do not generate the aspiration to achieve enlightenment for our own sake, Shantideva stresses that there is no way we would do so for others. Therefore, the generation of bodhicitta is very rare and consequently has great value or merit.

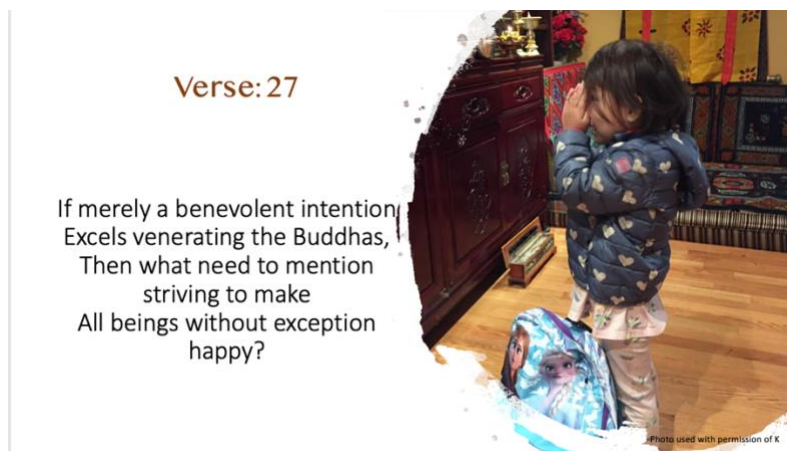


In this stanza, Shantideva urges us to rejoice when bodhicitta arises in oneself and in others. Bodhicitta is made up of two aspirations: aspiration for enlightenment and aspiration for benefiting others. As detailed earlier, the mere aspiration to achieve enlightenment does not arise even for one's own sake. Therefore, it is highly unlikely for it to arise for the sake of all sentient beings and thus said to be very rare. Once developed, bodhicitta is like a wish-fulfilling jewel. It can fulfill all our temporary and ultimate goals because it enables all good qualities to flourish and facilitates our benefitting all sentient beings. That is why the text reads; “[is an extraordinary jewel of the mind](#)”. Accordingly, when one sees it arise in oneself or in others, one should rejoice and work toward increasing it further.



The forementioned stanzas discussed the benefits of aspiring bodhicitta. From here onwards, Shantideva provides reasons for the benefits of engaging bodhicitta. Listing the various benefits, Shantideva says that the benefits or merits of bodhicitta is limitless and therefore unfathomable. Firstly, bodhicitta is the source of all happiness. Happiness for others because they receive help and not harm from us. Happiness for ourselves because bodhicitta builds up a treasury of qualities that bring us closer to enlightenment. When good things happen to others, including those who do not like us, we feel happy because our bodhicitta seeks the happiness of others anyway. Each and every being's happiness becomes our happiness as well. This is how through the generation of bodhicitta, one can achieve the highest level of happiness for oneself and others. So bodhicitta is not only a source of happiness for oneself but also for others as well. That's what it means when the text says; “[And is the source of all its joy](#)”.

Bodhicitta is said to be like a supreme medicine that cures all ailments and suffering. As a cure-all medicine has the ability to cure all forms of sicknesses, Bodhicitta too has the capability to dispel all forms of sufferings. Through the cultivation of bodhicitta, one purifies the negativities that would otherwise have sent us to the lower realms and ensure the continued sufferings of cyclic existence. In this way, bodhicitta is a panacea that quells all forms of sufferings. Hence the text reads; “The panacea that relieves the world of pain”. Bodhicitta is also likened to a precious wish-fulfilling jewel that eliminates poverty and fulfills all the wishes. Due to the great merits generated through cultivating bodhicitta, one meets with conducive conditions to fulfill one’s needs and wishes. A wish-fulfilling jewel can dispel one’s poverty and provides a wealth of resources. Likewise, bodhicitta strengthens the mind with enthusiasm and courage and thus eliminate one’s pain and suffering and brings abundant happiness and joy. Therefore, the merits of a mind that is endowed with bodhicitta is unfathomable. How can one measure “the depth of goodness of the jewel of this mind?”. It is simply inconceivable! It has no limit. In other words, the sky is the limit.



In this stanza, Shantideva provides logical reasons for the benefits of engaging bodhicitta. There are two ways to interpret the above stanza. The first way compares the merit of engaging bodhicitta with that of the merit of generating loving-kindness. The second way is by comparing the merit of engaging bodhicitta with the merits of aspiring bodhicitta. In the King of Concentration Sutra, Buddha said that venerating buddhas through making countless offerings of various types is meritorious but the merit of generating one moment of loving kindness is far more meritorious than making such offerings. Here Shantideva elaborates that since the merit of simply generating loving kindness is superior to making offerings, there is no need to mention the greater merit of actually engaging in the practices of six perfections motivated by bodhicitta. Loving-kindness is the noble intention of wishing others to have happiness and the causes of happiness. It is an other-oriented mindset and therefore benevolent. However, that is a mere wish and it lacks the commitment and responsibility to secure it for others, whereas engaging bodhicitta goes beyond the aspiration for others to be happy. It undertakes the commitment and responsibility upon oneself to lead others to happiness. Therefore, engaging bodhicitta is a far superior mindset than loving kindness as the text reads:

“Then what need to mention striving to make
All beings without exception happy?”

In another sutra, Buddha compared the merits of generating bodhicitta with that of making offerings of seven precious offerings. If a person makes an offering of the seven precious objects to Buddha-lands equaling to the number of sand particles of the River Ganga, one would accumulate enormous merits. However, the merit from generating bodhicitta exceeds that of making the aforementioned offerings. Shantideva argues that if simply aspiring to achieve enlightenment for the sake of sentient beings is extolled for its merits, all the more so the vast merit of actually pursuing this goal. Aspiring bodhicitta is a mere wish and without action that aspiration will not be fulfilled. However, engaging bodhicitta involves taking action to accomplish that aspiration to guide all beings without exception, to sublime happiness and hence engaging bodhicitta is more meritorious than aspiring bodhicitta. In both cases, the logic Shantideva employed is that if smaller acts, like generating loving kindness and aspiring bodhicitta are considered meritorious, taking on something greater, i.e. engaging bodhicitta, will produce far more merit.

In another sutra, Buddha said that if there were a form to illustrate the merit of generating bodhicitta, the sky would be too small to accommodate it. Thus, the merits of bodhicitta is limitless and Shantideva urges us to work toward developing this mindset of immeasurable virtue.



Photo by Barbara Mrazel on Unsplash

Verse: 28

Although wishing to be rid of misery,
They run towards misery itself.
Although wishing to have happiness,
Like an enemy they ignorantly destroy it.

In the earlier stanza, Shantideva argued that engaging bodhicitta is committed to working for the welfare of others. This raises the question why sentient beings themselves cannot look after their own welfare by solving their own problems and finding happiness. Why is there a need for bodhisattvas to help lead sentient beings to happiness and dispel their suffering? To answer this, the text reads: “[Although wishing to be rid of misery...Like an enemy they ignorantly destroy it.](#)” This stanza beautifully captures the situation of sentient beings. Fundamentally, we all aspire to be happy and wish to avoid suffering. Even tiny insects such as mosquitos do the same thing. However, despite wishing to be rid of misery, we end up in misery. Although wishing to be happy, we are deprived of happiness. Why is this so? Shantideva points to our ignorance!

Shantideva says that “[we run towards misery itself](#)” and destroy our happiness “[like an enemy](#)”. Who would knowingly run into misery when wishing to be rid of it? Who would destroy one’s own happiness as if it were one’s enemy? No person with a sound mind will knowingly do so. The answer lies in the word “ignorantly..”. Due to our ignorance of the causes and conditions that give rise to misery and those that lead to happiness, we commit negative acts with body, speech and mind that secure our unhappiness and fail to undertake virtues that bring about happiness. Buddha has made it very clear that non-virtues give rise to miseries and virtues give rise to happiness. There is no other way. No amount of non-virtues will bring about happiness nor will virtues give rise to suffering. Virtue and non-virtue produce corresponding results. Karma is certain or fixed in that sense. However, we are either ignorant of cause and effect or our understanding of it is superficial.

Instead of cultivating virtue that will result in happiness, we create non-virtue. It is like planting chilly seeds and expecting strawberries to sprout. This will never happen. When we examine the ten non-virtues, we can see how ignorant we are in terms of our knowledge on the means to achieve happiness. For instance, stealing: We steal to dispel the suffering of poverty in the short term but create causes for our loss and poverty in the future. We use harsh speech on others thinking it will earn us respect without understanding that by doing so, we are planting the seeds for us to receive abuse from others in the future. The irony is that over and above the results mentioned, we end up being born in the hell and preta realms, where sufferings are far greater than the suffering of hunger and poverty.

Not only are we ignorant about the causes and conditions for happiness, we ascribe the wrong causes and conditions for it. We believe that fixing our external conditions will solve our problems and bring lasting happiness. That is why many people change jobs, change where they live, change their looks all in the pursuit of wealth, fame and power. They believe that wealth, fame and power will guarantee happiness and therefore are prepared to enslave themselves for worldly gains. However, we know from our own experience and observation that it is not the case. There are billionaires, royalty and celebrities who are unhappy with life. We hear of suicides and relationship conflicts in these circles. At the other end of the scale, I can share with you that monks in the large monastery I am from have very little money and yet have a happy mindset. This indicates that money, position and fame have little to do with happiness. This illustrates that fixing external conditions is not the solution to ending problems and suffering. This is because happiness and misery are mental experiences and it is from within one's mind that happiness arises. The Buddha's teachings are aimed at training the mind to attain perfect wisdom and perfect bodhicitta that result in lasting happiness. Right now, many of us have no sense of contentment. How then will one ever be satisfied and happy even with all the wealth of the entire world? Our greed has no limit. In the absence of contentment, the more we get, the more we want. It is like drinking salty water. The more one drinks, the thirstier one becomes.

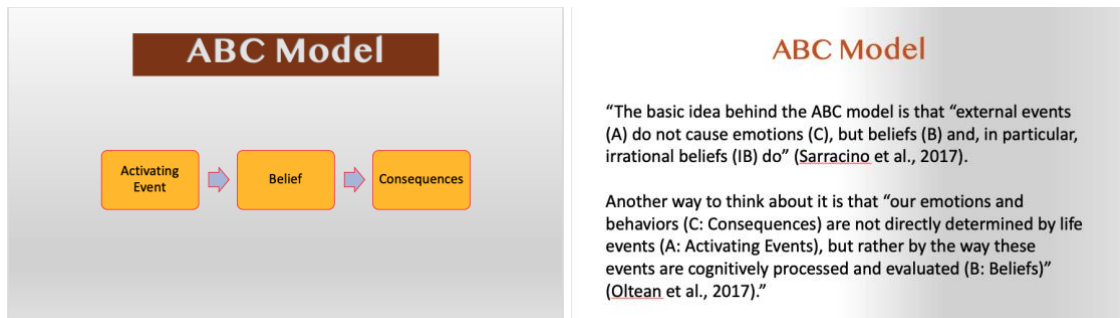


HAPPINESS IS A STATE OF MIND

Look at the two images. The boy who came in third appears to be happier than the one who was first. If their happiness is dependent on the position, the boy standing on the first position be happy but you can see he is not happy about it. There are many such incidences. A student X can be happy for getting B-grade in all 10 subjects and at the same time, Student Y could be unhappy despite scoring A for 9 subjects and B+ for one subject. This shows that happiness is not determined by the situation itself but by how we interpret the situation. In that way, happiness is a state of mind. The

second image lends credence to this. Who says that you need a smartphone to enjoy taking a selfie? Look at the image. These children do not possess a smart phone but appears to be thoroughly enjoying the gesture of taking a selfie using their slippers.

The role of our mind in creating happiness or suffering is clearly illustrated in Albert Ellis' (Psychologist and researcher) ABC model.



According to this model, external events are not the cause happiness or suffering but irrational beliefs are. Let's take a closer look at the model.

A stands for Activating event – any given situation.

B stands for Belief – our interpretation of the situation.

C stands for Consequences – outcomes (behavior or feeling) elicited by our belief or interpretation

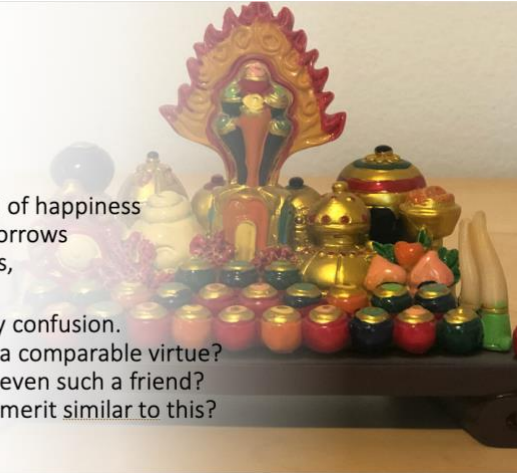
Here is an example: Imagine yourself driving on highway 35W. As you drive, you are enjoying good music and you are in a good mood singing along. Suddenly someone abruptly cuts into your lane and speeds away. In this situation, someone cutting into your lane is the activating event. What happens in the next few seconds? The consequences/outcome of this lane-cutting event depends entirely on your beliefs - how you interpret the situation. If you interpret the situation in a positive way, giving the benefit of the doubt to other person - for instance - thinking that the person cut into your lane as he/she was late for an important meeting or has an emergency at home, the outcome of that situation will be non-hostile and neutral. However, if you interpret the situation negatively, such as perceiving it as a threat or disrespect, you will become furious and your happy mood will be replaced by anger, destroying your peace of mind. You may even end up in a chase. From this situation, we can clearly see that different outcomes can arise from the same event, depending on how we interpret a situation. This highlights the role of our attitude in the creation of happiness and misery. Even someone who is physically very ill can be at peace due to adopting a calm attitude. When His Holiness the Dalai Lama, at one time was rushed to hospital due to appendicitis and was in great pain. As the car passed a small Indian village, His Holiness saw the hardships of the local people. Spontaneously, a strong compassion arose in him. His holiness could not take his mind off the sufferings of the people he just witnessed and, in the meantime, had forgotten his own pain. There are also stories of how great practitioners who were terminally ill managed to remain steady and peaceful. Most ordinary people when faced with life threatening illnesses, not only suffer from physical pain, also experience range of mental pain including anxiety and depression. So, even the impact of sickness is dependent on one's perception of the situation.

A positive outlook on life contributes towards engendering happiness. Since we all desire for happiness, we should focus on bringing about inner transformation rather than trying to fix external conditions. There are millions of people who are ignorant about the causes and conditions of happiness and suffering. However, we are very fortunate. We have obtained the precious human

rebirth that is endowed with 8 leasures and 10 endowments. In addition, we have met buddhadharma and met qualified teachers. We also have wisdom to discern what is right and wrong and what is to be abandoned and what is to be cultivated. So, we do not have any excuse not to work on our own minds to transform problems into the spiritual path. We are still alive today but sooner or later we will die. Death will not wait for us to finish our projects. Neither it will wait for our retirement or a convenient time. We should take appropriate action to generate the positive causes for happiness right now and what better cause is there than cultivating bodhicitta.

Verses: 29 & 30

For those who are deprived of happiness
 And burdened with many sorrows
 It satisfies them with all joys,
 Dispels all suffering,
 And clears away confusion.
 Where is there a comparable virtue?
 Where is there even such a friend?
 Where is there merit similar to this?



After stating the reasons for sentient beings' inability to achieve freedom from suffering by relying on their ordinary afflictive habits, Shantideva now extols bodhicitta for its priceless values in terms of its ability to dispel sufferings, provide happiness and eliminate ignorance. The primary goal of bodhicitta is to lead all sentient beings to Buddhahood and that entails alleviating their suffering and ensuring their happiness. It is due to the ignorance that sentient beings fail to secure happiness and end up in suffering. It is thus imperative to light the lamp of wisdom to illuminate the darkness of ignorance. Bodhicitta facilitates this and as such, there is no other virtue that can rise to the level of bodhicitta. Other virtuous mindset such as faith in Three Jewels or even wisdom realizing emptiness, are not concerned about dispelling suffering of others. Nor are they focused on providing happiness and joy to others. There are other virtues such as compassion and loving kindness that are other-oriented but they are mere wishes that lack commitment and responsibility. Bodhicitta on the other hand, is dedicated to leading sentient beings to the state of freedom from all sufferings. Hence, no other virtue can surpass it. In that sense, it is incomparable!

Shantideva then compares bodhicitta to a friend. We say "a friend in need is a friend indeed". We may have many friends and some are more helpful than others. However, no matter how helpful, they cannot commit themselves to our welfare. The commitment of help from our friends have limitations. They cannot accommodate all our requests. Moreover, the help they provide is limited to worldly matters. Some friends even abandon us when we need them the most. However, bodhicitta will never betray nor let us down. It is steady and works in a way that secure our wellbeing. Therefore, bodhicitta is far superior than our friends.

The merit of bodhicitta is matchless. Wisdom realizing emptiness is the quality that severs ignorance, the root cause of misery. However, without bodhicitta, even possessing the wisdom realizing emptiness will not lead one to enlightenment. Bodhicitta is the one that transforms every virtue into

causes of Buddhahood. In the absence of bodhicitta, no other merit can lead one to Buddhahood. We have discussed before how other merits can be easily destroyed by a moment of anger but not the merits that are motivated by bodhicitta. In that sense, there is no more powerful merit than that of bodhicitta.

Here we need to understand that the manner in which bodhicitta dispels suffering of sentient beings. Shantideva is not saying that Bodhisattvas use magic wands to wave off the sufferings of sentient beings. Nor is he saying that bodhisattvas can transfer their realizations and share their happiness. There are no such things in Buddhism. Even Buddha cannot eliminate our pain and suffering by touching our heads. The elimination of one's suffering and attainment of sublime happiness is achieved through one's own practice of the Path. Propelled by bodhicitta, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas lead sentient beings to liberation by showing the Path. Sentient beings need to practice the paths shown by the bodhisattvas if they seek its results. There is no other way. Buddha once said:

“I show you the path to liberation
Know that the attainment of liberation is dependent on you”

The attainment of liberation is contingent on one's own effort. In the absence of our own practice, liberation remains elusive. There is a beautiful story illustrating this point.

During Buddha's time, there was a retired trader who approached Buddha. He told Buddha that he had been attending the teachings for some time and he noticed that many of attendees had attained various levels of realization but he had not and asked for the reason. Buddha being very skillful, instead of giving a direct answer, engaged in the following dialogue with the retired businessman:

Buddha: Are you from this area? What do you do for a living?

Trader: I am from this town. I was a trader and but no more.

Buddha: That means you used to travel to the next town on business?

Trader: Yes. I travelled all the time.

Buddha: Having travelled so many times to the next town, you must know the path to that town very well?

Trader: Yes. I know it very well. I would be able to journey there even I were blindfolded.

Buddha: In that case, many people must have come to you for directions. Have they?

Trader: Yes. Many have approached me for directions and I gave them clear instructions.

Buddha: Do all of them reach the next town?

Trader: Not all. Only those who walked the entire path reached there. Others did not.

Buddha: So not everyone who came for the directions reached there?

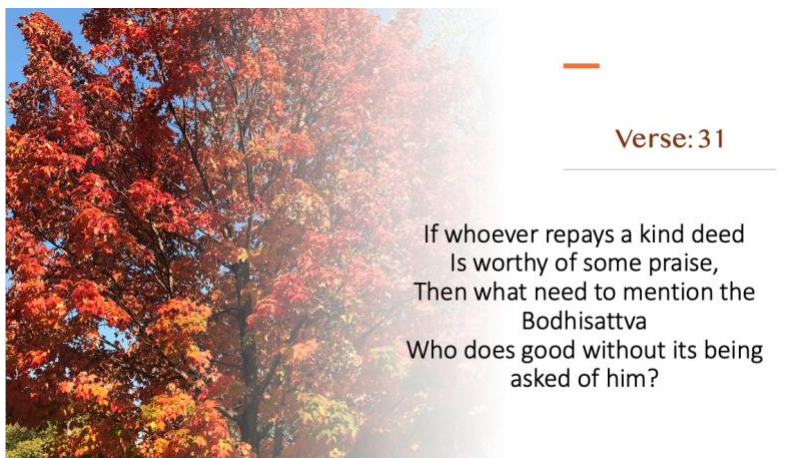
Trader: No! How can they reach their destination if they didn't even embark on the journey nor walk the entire path?

Buddha: Exactly! In order to get to the next town, one needed to embark on the journey and walk the entire path. Similarly, people have come here to listen to my teachings, knowing that I have walked the path to nirvana. They come to receive the directions to nirvana but if they do not take the necessary steps and are simply happy with possessing the instructions, how can they reach nirvana?

When one is sick, one needs to consume medicine. It won't help merely to possess the medicine and not use it. Buddha made it very clear that without our own effort at practice and application of the teachings, even the Buddha cannot bring us to Nirvana. That is one distinguishing feature of Buddhism from theistic religions. There is no external savior that absolves all the negative karma and bring the person to the land of happiness. In Buddhism, we are our own savior as well as we are

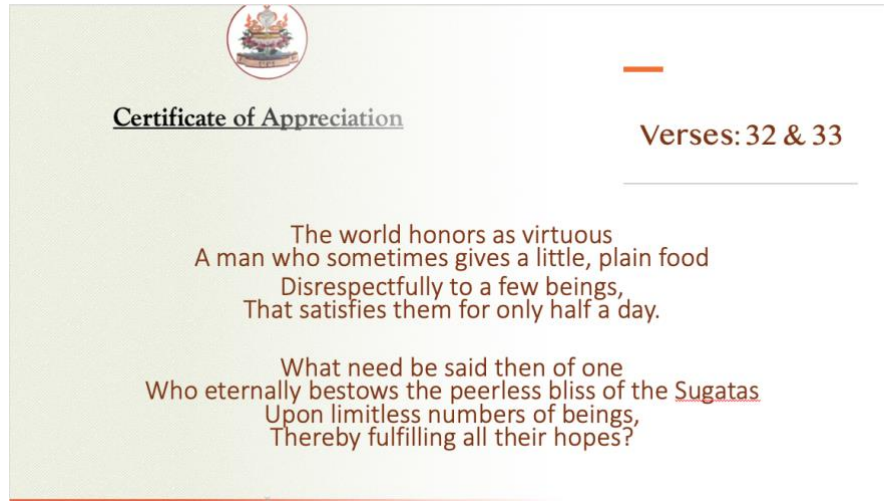
our own enemy. We can save ourselves from the abyss of all suffering, whether deep or shallow, by putting an end to the creation of negative karma. Or we can continue engaging in negative karma and consequently destroy our own happiness. As long as the causes and conditions are present, fruition will occur. This is the law of cause and effect. Karma is based on that universal law. It is very important for us to understand and develop conviction in karma, as it shapes the lives we have. Real dharma practice comes from observing karma, abiding by the principles of karma.

We wish to avoid misery but we actively engage in the causes of suffering. This suggests that either we have misunderstood the concept of karma or our understanding lacks application. If we witness a person wanting to live long but consuming poison, we would perceive that person as unwise or insane. We would not consider that person as having a sound mind. Our own action is no different from that person. We do not even hesitate to engage in negative karma although it will cause us suffering. This is because of our lack of conviction in karma. We do not have the conviction that negative karma will result in suffering and therefore we continue engaging in unwholesome actions. If we are able to develop an authentic conviction of faith in karma, we will never engage in even a minor non-virtuous karma because we are convinced of its suffering result. This is evident in the current Covid-19 pandemic. Those who have the conviction that the virus is dangerous and contagious will take precautions and thereby be less likely to fall sick to the virus. However, those who lack conviction fail to take the preventive measures and thus fall sick. We see that happening at the White House too. Therefore, it is very important to develop a conviction in karma so that we will naturally engage in the practice of abandonment of non-virtue and undertake the cultivation of virtue. This will ensure us happiness and freedom from suffering. For that reason, in Lamrim text, karma is described as the root source of all goodness or happiness.



From here onwards, Shantideva celebrates the persons who possess bodhicitta. The first stanza praises bodhisattvas for providing unsolicited yet much needed help. It makes a comparison between ordinary reciprocal action and bodhisattva's unconditional support and help. It is a common practice to return favors. However, such actions are simply a gesture of gratitude for the assistance one has previously received. We normally say, "I should help him because he helped me when I was sick". It is simply a return of a gesture that may not be motivated by compassion. Sometimes such reciprocal actions are motivated by concerns for fame, praise or even something in return, yet are perceived as honorable and thus deserving praise. However, Bodhisattvas' deeds are free from such worldly concerns. Their help are not acts of reciprocity. They are not seeking praise or favors. Bodhisattvas' actions are purely motivated by compassion and therefore unconditional.

They do not expect anything in return. As such, Shantideva makes the case that if a simple act of repaying kindness in a worldly sense is considered noble and worthy of praise, no need to mention the praiseworthiness of bodhisattvas' unsolicited and unconditional acts of kindness which are born purely out of compassion.



In this stanza, Bodhisattvas are praised for being the best benefactors. Compared with ordinary help, Shantideva explains why bodhisattvas' help is superior. Imagine we are driving on a street that is frequented by homeless people. There we see someone providing free meals to the homeless but also notice that the provider is rude. Despite the rudeness, we would still perceive the gesture as an act of kindness, generosity and virtue. Shantideva says that the world would view such person praiseworthy. However, such an act of generosity is no match to bodhisattvas' help. The help that bodhisattvas offer differs in a superior way in that firstly, the object (the recipient) of ordinary giving is limited to a certain number of people. No matter how great the number may be, there is a limit. However, bodhisattvas are committed to helping an infinite number of sentient beings and therefore superior in terms of its object. Secondly, it differs in terms of what help is given. In the above case, offering a meal to quell hunger for a day is the goal. Even if other things such as clothes and medicine are offered, would not equal bodhisattvas' help because bodhisattvas are even willing to give away their own body, not to mention material possessions, to help others. More importantly, bodhisattvas help extends beyond meeting mundane needs of living beings and aim to lead them to lasting happiness and enlightenment. Therefore, the scope of their generosity knows no bound. Thirdly, ordinary giving such as feeding the hungry, does not occur all the time. In some cases, such practices are carried out only on special days and can be said to be "onetime" acts of generosity. However, bodhisattvas have vowed to help sentient beings until they reach enlightenment as stated in bodhisattvas' prayers;

For as long as space endures
And for as long as living beings remain,
Until then may I too abide
To dispel the misery in the world.

So, it is an "eternal" help and thereby is superior in terms of frequency and duration. Fourthly, bodhisattvas help supersedes ordinary giving in terms of the manner in which help is offered. In the above example, the benefactor was rude and disrespectful. However, bodhisattvas have a sense of endearment to all sentient beings and therefore attend to their needs with compassion and respect.

As stated in the Eight Verses on Mind Training, bodhisattvas view others as their spiritual teacher even when others display ingratitude to them. In short, bodhisattvas are the greatest benefactors. Shantideva's rationale is that since the world honors someone who provides a simple meal to a small group of people,

“What need be said then of one
Who eternally bestows the peerless bliss of the Sugatas
Upon limitless numbers of beings,
Thereby fulfilling all their hopes?”

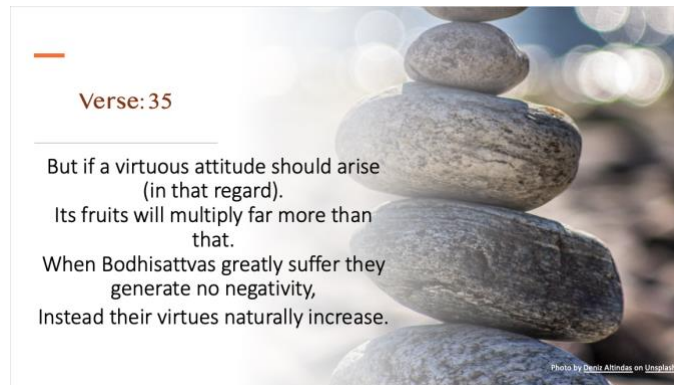
Verse: 34

The Buddha has said that whoever
bears an evil thought
Against a benefactor such as that
Bodhisattva
Will remain in hell for as many aeons
As there were evil thoughts.



The next two stanzas discuss how bodhisattvas are the supreme field of virtue but potentially of non-virtue as well. Why of non-virtue? The first stanza covers the detrimental consequences of bearing an evil thought against a bodhisattva, not to mention causing actual harm. Buddha taught that anyone who holds ill intention against bodhisattva will remain in hell for as many aeons as there were moments of evil thoughts. We have discussed this in length earlier. In sutra, it is mentioned that a diamond can only be cut or broken by a diamond. No rock, wood or any type of weapon can break a diamond. Likewise, nothing but negative thoughts and harms against a bodhisattva will bring a person to a hell rebirth. This shows the severity of evil thoughts or harm against a bodhisattva. In another sutra, Buddha said that anger against a bodhisattva is more detrimental than a person who imprisons all sentient beings or strips them of their possessions. It is also stated as being more serious than demolishing stupas equaling to the number of sand grains of the River Ganga. The reason for its gravity is that bodhisattvas are the seeds of buddhas (who are the sources of all the goodness in the world) and buddhas sprout from bodhisattvas. Harming them is like destroying the seed that will blossom into a beautiful flower; like destroying a future buddha.

We may think that we can avoid this by selectively choosing the object of our anger. Therefore, we think that it is safe to get angry at our spouses, family members, colleagues and of course our enemies, who look like ordinary humans. The problem is that we do not know who is a bodhisattva and who is not. Until we have clairvoyance, we cannot identify bodhisattvas amongst us. Therefore, whenever anger or evil intention against someone arises in our minds, we are like walking on a minefield. Any misstep can trigger the explosive mine and kill us instantly. As such, we should be mindful of losing our temper and regulate our negative emotions. Since evil thoughts are dangerous and damaging, Shantideva urges us to avoid evil thoughts and harmful actions against bodhisattvas. Instead we should cultivate a virtuous attitude toward bodhisattvas as per the next stanza.



Here, Shantideva discusses the benefits of generating a positive attitude toward bodhisattvas. He says that any wise person who holds a virtuous attitude such as faith toward bodhisattvas will experience positive results for aeons. The positive effect is far greater than that of negative consequences of evil thoughts mentioned in the previous stanza. For instance, if a moment of anger results an aeon of birth in hell realm, a moment of positive attitude results good rebirth for countless aeons. In sutra, it is said that just a glance at bodhisattva with a positive attitude is far more meritorious than restoring the eyesight of all sentient beings. Buddha taught that generating faith in bodhisattvas or venerating them is superior in merit compared to the merits amassed from liberating all sentient beings from prison. All these illustrate that bodhisattvas are a supreme field of merit as any positive attitude or action toward them accrues enormous amount of merits.

Another reason why bodhisattvas are worthy objects of praise is because of their unperturbed perseverance. In the face of challenges, bodhisattvas are never deterred. Instead of getting frustrated and discouraged, they double down on their forbearance and strive forward. In *Entering the Middle Path*, Chandrakirti says that bodhisattvas' joy knows no bound in responding to calls for help and those in the advanced stage of practice are able to give away even their bodies, let alone material possessions. For ordinary people, even parting with a dollar becomes challenging. How many times have we tried to avoid beggars on the street? Sometimes we take a detour just to evade beggars. Bodhisattvas on the other hand, light up when there are such opportunities to offer help. For that reason, Shantideva says;

“When bodhisattvas greatly suffer, they generate no negativity
Instead their virtues naturally increase.”

There is another interpretation of the above two lines. Whenever bodhisattvas encounter those who hinder their practice, it engenders more love and compassion within them and thereby their virtues, such as patience, increases. So, the first stanza (V-34) discusses the detrimental effects of harboring evil thoughts against bodhisattvas so that we abstain from committing massively heavy negative karma. The second stanza (V-35) praises the merits of engendering positive attitude toward bodhisattvas so that we can develop the habit of cultivating a virtuous attitude toward bodhisattvas.

For the above reasons, Shantideva makes prostrations to bodhisattvas:

I bow down to the body of him
In which the sacred precious mind is born
I seek refuge in that source of joy
Who brings to happiness even those who harm him.

Shantideva offers praise to bodhisattvas for being the source of joy and happiness. The first two lines describe bodhicitta as a precious jewel which we have discussed earlier. The second two lines shows bodhisattvas as the supreme source of joy and happiness for all beings. Here Shantideva says that Bodhisattvas bring happiness even to those who harm them. Upon receiving harm, out of their great compassion, they make special prayers and dedication to benefit that particular person. The first five disciples of Shakyamuni Buddha had a long history with him. In past lives, they had caused harm to the Buddha but by the power of Buddha's dedications, they became the first disciples to receive teachings from Shakyamuni Buddha. One account is of the story of a King called Jampai Top. When Buddha was born as King Jampai Top, five spirit beings approached the King and asked for his blood. Without hesitation, the King cut his veins and fed them to their satisfaction and made special prayers to satiate them with dharma upon achieving enlightenment in the same way he satiated their hunger with his own blood. The five spirit beings later became the Five Disciples. So that is meaning of “Who brings to happiness even those who harm him”. As such, Shantideva bows down and offers his prostrations to bodhisattvas.

Actual bodhisattva vows



For the past several classes, we discussed about the many benefits of bodhicitta including its power to exhaust all negativities and fulfill all wishes. As such, it is highly worthwhile developing such a mindset. However, if upon working on developing it we just leave it there merely as a hope, we won't be able to progress on the spiritual path. It will remain as a mere aspiration and this will not lead us to Buddhahood. We need to engage in the Bodhisattva's practices in order to harvest the fruit of the bodhisattvas' path. The bodhisattvas' practices comprise of the practice of the six perfections, that begins with the practice of the perfection of ethical discipline. This in turn entails three types of ethical disciplines:

The ethical discipline of restraint

The ethical discipline of gathering virtue:

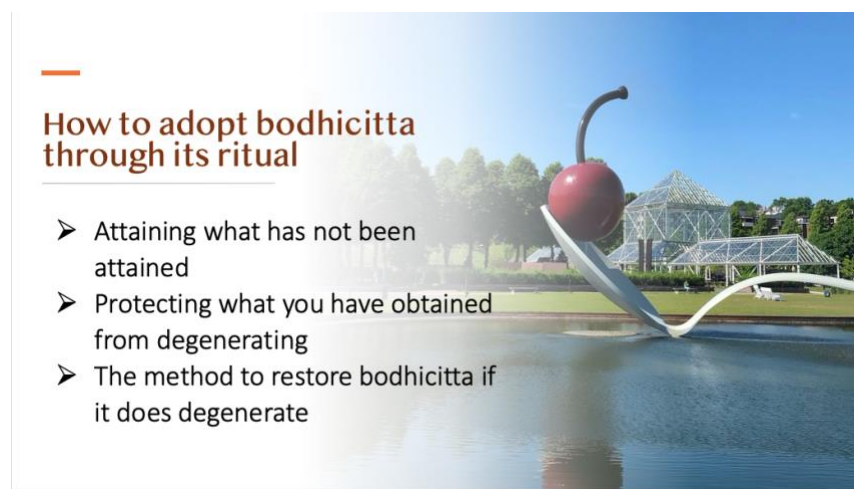
The ethical discipline of helping living beings

The ethical discipline of restraint: Ethical discipline is to help us refrain from harming others. Any Praktimoksha vow (vows of individual liberation) constitutes the ethical discipline of restraint. Generally, there are seven types of Praktimoksha vows: Vows for full ordination for monks and nuns, novice vows for monks and nuns, post-novice vows for nuns, lay vows for five precepts for

men and women. If one has not taken any of the above vows, the abstention from the ten non-virtue is the bare minimum for the ethical discipline of restraint.

The ethical discipline of gathering virtue: This is aimed at cultivating virtue. Any wholesome practices, including the practice in the six perfections, fall under this category. The bodhisattva's primary goal is to liberate sentient beings from oceans of suffering. To do this, one needs to first achieve enlightenment and that requires cultivating virtue and gaining realizations. As such, the first two types of ethical disciplines are called the ethical disciplines to "ripen oneself" because they help oneself to attain realizations and become buddha.

The ethical discipline of helping living beings: This ethical discipline is to gear us toward helping others. Assistance can be material or spiritual. This type of ethical discipline is known as "ripening others" because through observing the first two disciplines, it enables us to find effective ways of helping others. However, one should remember the saying that "there is no way to tame others without taming oneself first." Hence the sequence of these three types of ethical discipline.



The taking of vows is generally explained under the three common headings as below.

Attaining what has not been attained: This relates to how one takes a vow. Under this heading, it outlines details on who one should take the vows from, what the vow-conferring ceremony involves and the procedures. We are not going to discuss this here.

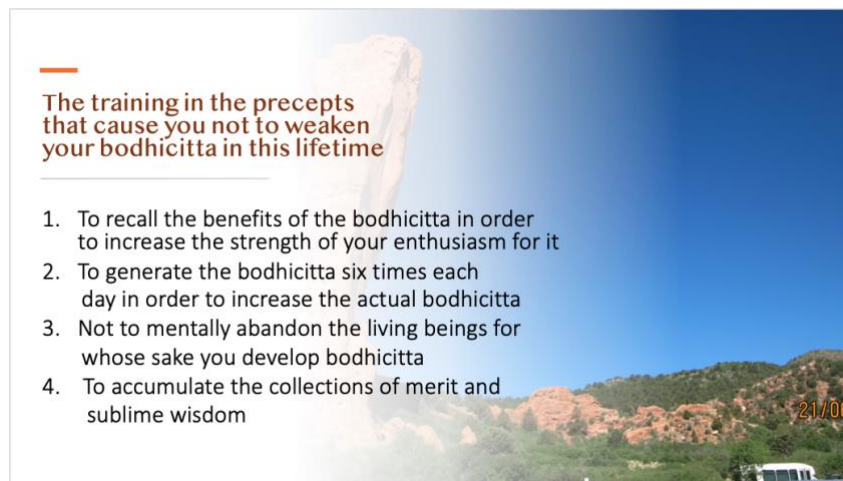
Protecting what you have obtained from degenerating: Once we receive a vow, we need to protect it from degenerating. In order to properly vows, we need to understand what the vows are and under what circumstances do we damage them or break them entirely. Generally, when we take any empowerment (initiation), whether it be of lower tantra or highest yoga tantra, we have to take bodhisattva vows. Without knowing each and every individual bodhisattva vow well, we cannot protect our them. We would not even know when we are breaking our vows. Therefore, it is important that we have a clear understanding of each bodhisattva vow.

The method to restore bodhicitta if it does degenerate: This refers to ways to restore or remedy our vows once they were either damaged (partially broken) or completely broken. Under this

heading, it details specific methods for repairing specific transgressions, depending on the severity of the breach of the vows. We will discuss this later.

You will recall that there are two types of bodhicitta: aspiring bodhicitta and engaging bodhicitta. Aspiring bodhicitta is an aspiration to achieve enlightenment in order to benefit others. The ritual for aspiring bodhicitta is a promise made to buddhas and bodhisattvas to hold on to this aspiration (to achieve enlightenment) until one achieves Buddhahood. As such, strictly speaking, it is not a vow per se in the sense that it is a promise to uphold an aspirational attitude but does not involve taking action to do something for others. However, there are precepts in relation to aspiring bodhicitta that one still needs to observe. The precepts comprise of two sets:

1. The training in the precepts that cause you not to weaken your bodhicitta in this lifetime
2. The training in the precepts that cause you not to separate from your bodhicitta in future lifetimes as well.



The first set of precepts concerns maintaining bodhicitta in this life. There are four practices we can do to preserve the bodhicitta that is arisen within us. The first precept is to recall the benefits of the bodhicitta in order to increase the strength of enthusiasm for bodhicitta. Contemplating on the merits of bodhicitta provides inspiration to those who have not yet generated bodhicitta and motivates them to cultivate this mindset. For that reason, in Buddhist texts, whenever a new topic is introduced, it always begins by extolling the virtue of the topic. The reason is that when we hear the benefits, it makes us want to engage in it. For example, when we hear the good features of an iPhone, it makes us want to acquire one. Likewise, if we are able to frequently contemplate on the virtue of bodhicitta, we will be earnest in developing bodhicitta. That is why companies spend so much money on advertising. We have spent the first few classes going through the benefits of bodhicitta based on the first chapter of Bodhicaryavatara and now is the time to incorporate that knowledge here. A real practitioner is someone who is able to assimilate every bit of teachings into one's own practice as a means to navigate us on our spiritual journey. Reflection on the virtues of bodhicitta also helps reenergize and provide resilience to those who have already developed it. When faced with challenges, we sometimes get discouraged and lose enthusiasm. In such circumstances, contemplating on the merits of bodhicitta can reinforce our conviction and keep us on the track. Hence, the need for reflection on the virtues of bodhicitta as often as possible in order to preserve and strengthen bodhicitta.

The second precept is to generate the bodhicitta mindset six times each day. This is to help us increase the bodhicitta that has already arisen within us. We need to habituate ourselves to this attitude until it can arise spontaneously and effortlessly. Hence, the advice to generate this thought six times a day (three times during the day and three times during the night). Even if we have not yet developed bodhicitta, adopting this habit of generating bodhicitta six times a day can help us acquaint ourselves with this altruistic thought. Many of us recite six session guru yoga prayers which contains verses to generate bodhicitta. For myself, I recite a particular verse (see below) throughout the day every time I remember the motivation that I set up in the morning. Some days, I recite 20 times or on other days less, depending on how mindful I am on that particular day. I find this very helpful to remind myself of the importance of bodhicitta. Reciting this at least six times a day will also fulfill this precept.

(1)

I go for refuge to the Three Jewels;
 I confess individually all my negativities.
 I rejoice in the merit of migrating beings.
 I take hold with my mind the perfect state of a buddha.
 I go for refuge until I am enlightened
 TO the Buddha, the Dharma, and the supreme Sangha assembly,
 And I do so to attain an enlightened mind.
 In order to fulfill the aims of myself and others
 I shall develop a supreme enlightened motive,
 And toward all sentient beings, my invited guests,
 I shall act with supreme enlightened conduct.
 May I become a buddha to benefit all.

I believe the key practice is to set one's motivation or intention in the morning. For example, we can make a pledge in the morning to spend our day well by being mindful of engaging in any activities that are contradictory to bodhisattva's practice. We can say, "Today I will try my best to not engage in negative actions"; "Today I will not allow myself come under the control of afflictive emotions such as anger, jealousy, hatred, greed and so on. I will not let self-cherishing attitude control me and when it arises, I will recognize and counter it." Upon setting such motivation, throughout the day, try to be mindful of the commitments made in the morning. As and when you remember your pledge during the day, contemplate briefly on the faults of self-cherishing attitude and the vast benefits of other-cherishing attitude. Recite any of the following stanzas to reinforce your resolve:

(Lama Choepa) – (2)

Seeing that grasping the self is a chronic illness
 That is the cause of undesirable suffering,
 May I be able to bitterly hold it to blame
 And destroy the demon of self-cherishing.

(3)

Cherishing myself is the doorway to all loss,
 While cherishing my mothers is the foundation of all qualities.
 Hence I seek your blessings to make my heart practice
 The yoga of exchanging myself for others.

(Shatideva's Bodhicaryavatara)- (4)

Whatever happiness there is in the world

Comes from wanting others to be happy.
 Whatever misery is in the world
 Comes from wanting happiness for yourself.

(5)

If you do not really exchange
 Your happiness with others' suffering
 You will not attain Buddhahood
 Nor will you have happiness in the world.

While reciting any of the above lines of prayers, it is good to reflect and remind ourselves of the risk and danger of clinging onto self-centered attitude. And then generate bodhicitta reciting either the forementioned verse (1) or the short bodhicitta prayer below:

Until I attain enlightenment I go for refuge
 To the supreme Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.
 By whatever I have done such as giving and so on
 May I attain Buddhahood in order to benefit other beings.


Or

Gurus, victorious ones, and your children, please listen to me.
 Just as the previous Sugatas generated bodhicitta
 And practiced the bodhisattva trainings in stages,
 So will I too, in order to benefit beings, generate bodhicitta
 And practice the bodhisattva trainings in stages.

It does not matter which prayers we recite. It is more important to contemplate on the meaning of prayers we are reciting. Sometimes, after repeatedly reciting the same prayers for a period of time, it becomes a mechanical act and we may even forget to reflect on the meaning. So, I suggest you give this practice a try and see how it goes.

The third precept is not to mentally abandon the living beings for whose sake you seek to develop bodhicitta. Excluding any sentient being from your efforts, for example thinking, "I'm praying for this person but I won't pray for that person" is mentally abandoning a living being which is a serious violation of the bodhisattvas' practice. Committing this will cause you to automatically lose bodhicitta and thereby the bodhisattva vows you may have taken. This can happen with people whom we have helped but who harm or disappoint us in return. In such circumstances, the thought that "I will never help this person again" may arise and this is exactly what it meant by abandoning sentient beings. This precept is about not giving up on helping sentient beings whomsoever. When we make our pledge, we give our word to the Buddhas and bodhisattvas as well as to all sentient beings that we will always work for sentient beings. Not honoring this is tantamount to betraying the buddhas and bodhisattvas as well as sentient beings. Hence, we need to be careful when we encounter difficult people.

The fourth precept is to accumulate the collection of merit and sublime wisdom. We have discussed earlier how important it is to amass tons of merits to develop bodhicitta and maintain it. Developing bodhicitta alone will not bring us to enlightenment without developing the wisdom aspects of the path, such as insight into the emptiness. Gaining such insight requires the support of merits. Hence, the need to accumulate the two collections of merit and wisdom. The above four precepts are to help us maintain bodhicitta in this life.

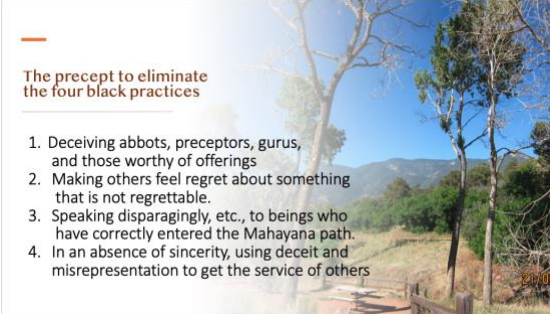


The training in the precepts that cause you to not to separate from your bodhicitta in future lifetimes as well

1. The training in the precept to eliminate the four black practices that weaken bodhicitta
2. The training in the precept to adopt the four white practices that keep bodhicitta from weakening

The precept to eliminate the four black practices

1. Deceiving abbots, preceptors, gurus, and those worthy of offerings
2. Making others feel regret about something that is not regrettable.
3. Speaking disparagingly, etc., to beings who have correctly entered the Mahayana path.
4. In an absence of sincerity, using deceit and misrepresentation to get the service of others



Now we turn to the training in the precepts that cause us not to separate from our bodhicitta in future lifetimes as well. The text identifies four practices that are contrary to bodhisattva practices and label them as “black practices” which are to be eliminated.

The first one is deceiving abbots, preceptors, gurus, and those worthy of offerings. This refers to lying to significant people in our spiritual lives. “Abbot” here does not mean the abbot of a monastery. When we receive Praktimoksha vows, many people are involved in the ritual of bestowing the vow. The main person who grants the vows is called the abbot. Preceptors are others who are involved in the ritual. For example, a person who announces the time of receiving the vow at a novice or full ordination vow ceremony is a preceptor. There is more than one preceptor involved in such rituals. Worthy of offering refers to a person with whom one may not have a personal relationship but one who is well respected and considered worthy of reverence. So, this precept relates to deceiving any one of the above mentioned persons. One commits this first of the black practice when for instance, our guru enquires into our practice and we intentionally mislead the guru to believe that all is well when it is not. This precept is about preventing oneself from engaging in acts of deception to the persons forementioned.

The second is making others regret about doing virtue or something that is not regrettable. If out of jealousy or ill intention, one makes another person who is earnest in his/her dharma practice regret doing a good deed or something that one has no basis to regret. For example, someone spends the morning doing meditation for an hour. Although you know it is a good thing to do but out of jealousy, you tell the person that he/she should not have done so. Hearing this, the person may feel that all his/her effort was wasted and feel regret for doing it, this constitutes the engaging in the second black practice. Further, it is not necessary for the other person to feel remorse. As long as your intention was to make the other person feel remorse in doing virtue, is enough to complete the black action.

The third is denigrating those who have entered the Mahayana path. This refers to criticizing those who have generated bodhicitta (bodhisattvas). This relates to the intention of deterring someone from Mahayana path, propelled by hatred. For example, when one accuses a bodhisattva of stealing out of anger or jealousy, one completes this third black practice. The consequence of such karma is said to be very heavy. As mentioned in earlier sessions, one thing that can bring a bodhisattva down to hell realm is criticizing another bodhisattva. This third black action can happen to us easily and therefore, we need to be extra cautious and watch our speech.

The final black practice is about dealing with sentient beings with deceit and misrepresentation. It is about not being sincere and genuine with others. The Tibetan term used here is “YoGyu” and each

syllable has a different meaning. “Yo” refers to hiding one’s faults and “Gyu” means pretending to possess qualities that one does not possess. When one engages in the act of pretense or deceit, one completes the fourth black practice.

The precept to adopt the four white practices

- ✓ Forsaking consciously lying to any living being whatsoever
- ✓ Not deceiving but remaining sincere to all living beings
- ✓ Developing the idea that all bodhisattvas are the Teacher
- ✓ Causing the living beings that you are helping to mature to not want the modest vehicle but to adhere to perfect enlightenment

The second set of precepts are called “white practices”. These practices are antidotes to the four black practices that we earlier discussed and therefore these are practices to be adopted.

Forsaking consciously lying to any living being whatsoever: This is a direct antidote to the first black practice of deceiving one’s gurus, abbots and preceptors. It is about avoiding intentional lies. Here, forsaking conscious lying is not restricted to a certain group of people but to all sentient beings. According to the Lamrim Chenmo, this includes avoiding lies that are meant as a joke and engaging in this practice will prevent us from deceiving people whom we have special spiritual connections.

Not deceiving but remaining sincere to all living beings: This refers to being straightforward, sincere and truthful. Sometimes, when we are with others, we disguise our shortcomings and portray ourselves in a good way. This practice entails forsaking such deceit and pretense.

Developing the attitude that all bodhisattvas are Teachers: Here Teacher refers to the supreme teacher, the Buddha. Sometimes referred to as “pure view”, this attitude serves as an antidote to the third black practice (of denigrating those who have entered the Mahayana path). Since the karmic consequences of criticizing bodhisattvas are heavy, one way to avoid doing so is by adopting the attitude that views all others (fellow bodhisattvas) as buddhas.

Helping sentient beings strive for perfect enlightenment: The main goal of bodhisattvas is to lead every sentient being to enlightenment. However, not all beings are inclined to pursue the Mahayana path. In such a situation, Bodhisattvas should at least try their best to show them that the paths of Listeners and Solitary Realizers are more limited in benefitting others and instead nurture sentient beings’ potential for full Buddhahood, so that sentient beings will choose to enter Mahayana path that will lead to enlightenment.

The method to restore bodhicitta if it does degenerate

- Giving up aspirational bodhicitta
- Mentally abandoning sentient beings

❖ Confess the faults using the four powers




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The above precepts are in relation to aspiring bodhicitta. Since one has not taken the actual bodhisattva vows at this stage, the violation of the precepts does not constitute breaking any vows. Except for giving up aspirational bodhicitta and mentally abandoning sentient beings, failing to observe the other precepts result only in committing non-virtue. Therefore, the remedy is to engage in the four opponent powers purification practice. Giving up aspirational bodhicitta and abandoning sentient beings result in losing bodhicitta.

Causes of losing bodhisattva vows

- Forsaking aspirational bodhicitta
- Committing one of the major transgressions
- Returning the vows



Generally, there is a difference between breaking/losing a vow and damaging a vow. To remedy a broken/lost vow is to re-take it, whereas a damaged vow can be remedied by purification practices.

We break/lose the bodhisattva vows in three situations: (i) When we give up bodhicitta. For instance, upon practicing Mahayana for a while, we feel that liberating all sentient beings as per the Mahayana is too tough a task and decide to seek only self-liberation and join the path of Listeners and Solitary Realizers. (ii) When we commit one of the 18 major transgressions. (iii) Finally, we lose bodhicitta vows when we return our vows. For instance, we say “I can no longer abide by the bodhisattva vows and hereby return the vows”. In order to avoid breaking the bodhisattva vows, we need to understand the 18 major transgressions so that we can abstain from them.

Taking bodhisattva vows involves avoiding the 18 major transgressions and 46 secondary misdeeds. Buddha taught these in various Mahayana sutras. There was no one sutra that listed all the major and

secondary offenses. The major transgressions and secondary misdeeds were compiled through the collected works of Arya Asanga, Chandragomi, Shantideva and Lama Tsongkhapa. Of the 18 major transgressions, 16 of them require the presence of four elements which is called “the four binding factors” but two of the major transgressions (holding wrong view and forsaking bodhicitta) do not require the 4 elements, as merely committing these two actions is sufficient for one to lose the bodhisattva vows.

Let’s first look at the four binding factors.

Four binding factors:

1. Not considering the action as wrong
2. Not giving up the desire to commit the act
3. Taking pleasure in the action & delighting in it
4. Feeling no shame or embarrassment

➤ **High degree (complete transgression)** – When all the four binding factors are present

➤ **Medium degree fault** – When “Not regarding the act of wrong” is present

➤ **Low degree misdeed** – When “Not regarding the act as wrong” is absent even the rest are present

The four binding factors determine whether a violation of a vow is a major transgression (that causes one to break/lose the vow) or whether it is only a damaged vow/secondary offence. The four factors are:

1. Not considering the action as wrong: This refers to the failure to acknowledge what one has done is wrong. Fishing or hunting for instance, are viewed by many people as hobbies and “faultless” activities. They do not think about the fear, pain and loss of life caused to another sentient being arising out of those hobbies. Recognizing the harmful consequences of one’s actions is as wrong is the first important step to progress. Without this, no thought of change will come about and thereby repeat the same mistake. This first binding factor can give rise to the subsequent factors.

2. Not giving up the desire to commit the act: This flows from the first one. When we fail to see our action as wrong, it is unlikely we will stop engaging in the act. Hence the second factor refers to continuing the action.

3. Taking pleasure in the action and delighting in it: This refers to enjoying engaging in the action and feeling satisfaction upon completing it. Let’s stick to the example of hunting. Instead of feeling sorry for the animals being hunted or remorse for one’s action, one derives joy and satisfaction upon carrying out the hunt.

4. Feeling no shame or embarrassment: In Tibetan we say, “Ngo Tsa Trel Mey” which is translated in English as feeling no shame or embarrassment. When we avoid engaging in something negative because of our status, it is called “Ngo Tsa Yoepa”, opposite of Ngo Tsa Trel Mey. For instance, we say, “I am a Buddhist and therefore I should not do this” or “I wasn’t raised this way,

so I should not do it”. In such instances, the consideration is given to oneself. “Trel Yoe’ (opposite of Trel Mey) is when we give consideration to others. For instance, “If I do this, it will hurt someone. Therefore, I should not do it” Or “My action will bring bad reputation to the Buddhist community. So, I should not do it”. When we fail to have such moral compass, our action is considered (Ngo Tsa Trel Mey) having no shame and embarrassment. Feeling of shame or embarrassment can help us avoid engaging in actions that are harmful to us or others.

When all the above **four factors are present** while committing one of the 16 offenses (note that two does not require the four binding factors) listed under the major transgression, we commit a complete transgression and therefore constitutes as a major transgression. However, it is a medium degree offence when the first factor (not considering the action to be wrong) is present even if the rest of the factors are missing. When the first factor (Not considering the action to be wrong) is absent and even all the rest are present, the offence is only a low degree misdeed. This shows the importance of recognizing the wrong action as wrong. When this awareness is present, the offense becomes lighter. Now let’s turn to the actual 18 major transgressions (i.e. when all 4 factors are present in the following actions):

| | | | |
|--|--|---|---|
|  | <p style="text-align: center;">18 Major Transgressions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Praising yourself and denigrating others 2. Refusing to give the Dharma or material assistance 3. Refusing to accept an apology 4. Giving up Mahayana 5. Stealing the property of the Three Jewels 6. Abandoning the pure Dharma |  | <p style="text-align: center;">18 Major Transgressions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Mistreating an ordained person 8. Committing any of the five immediate misdeeds (heinous crime) 9. Generating wrong view 10. Destroying towns and so forth 11. Teaching emptiness to those who are spiritually unripe 12. Causing others to turn back from supreme enlightenment |
|--|--|---|---|

1. Praising yourself and denigrating others: If out of attachment for material gain or honor, we praise ourselves and criticize others, we commit this transgression. The intention here is to gain material things such as food, clothing, money, etc. or respect and praise from others. The action taken to achieve this is by belittling others and praising oneself as a worthy recipient. When the four binding factors are present with this action, we commit a major transgression.

2. Refusing to give the Dharma or material assistance: When a needy person approaches us for Dharma or material assistance and we fail to accommodate their request despite being in a position to do so, we commit this transgression. This could happen out of miserliness or laziness. Suppose a beggar appears at your door asking for food (this is common in India) while we are having a nap and out of laziness, we ignore the beggar, we would commit this transgression. If the assistance sought is beyond our capability, we do not commit the transgression. In order to become a major transgression, the four factors must be present.

3. Refusing to accept an apology: Bodhisattvas should forgive others who sincerely ask for forgiveness. When others apologize for wrongs they have done and instead of forgiving them, we hold a grudge and scold or beat them, we commit this transgression. This transgression has two aspects. Refusing to accept an apology and continuing to resent the person. The presence of the four binding factors makes it a major transgression.

4. Giving up the Mahayana: Generally, Buddha's teachings are divided into two: Mahayana and Hinayana teachings. Mahayana teachings comprise of Sutras and tantra teachings. This transgression refers to rejecting the authentic Mahayana teachings. For instance, when we say "Mahayana teachings are not taught by the Buddha" or "Tantra teachings are not authentic teachings". Both actions of saying the words and believing them constitute giving up the Mahayana. When done with the four binding factors, we commit a major transgression.

5. Stealing the property of the Three Jewels: This refers to stealing anything that belongs to the Three Jewels i.e. anything that is offered to the Buddhas (on the altar), stupas as well as possessions of the Sangha community (ordained people) and those of an Arya being (one who has reached the path of seeing). When we take anything belonging to the Three Jewels without their permission, we commit this transgression. For instance, people may steal offering items such as water bowls and butter lamp offering sets that are made from silver or gold; taking home a monastery's prayer text without permission also constitutes stealing the property of the Three Jewels. When the act is committed with the presence of the four binding factors, we commit a major transgression.

6. Abandoning the pure Dharma/Giving up the Dharma: Here Dharma is not limited to the Mahayana teachings as with the fourth major transgression. Dharma in this context refers to all the teachings of Buddha – teachings of all the three vehicles. When we reject any part of the teachings, whether it be of Theravada or Mahayana teachings, we commit this transgression. There are various ways to abandon the Dharma. One common way is to say that "Mahayana teaching is far superior to Theravada teachings and therefore, there's no need to practice Theravada teachings" or "Tantrayana is the most efficient way to get to Buddhahood and Theravada teachings have no role". Adopting such an attitude is tantamount to committing the offence of giving up the Dharma. The practices prescribed in Theravada teachings are the foundation to Mahayana practice and therefore they are integral part of one's practice to reach Buddhahood. The presence of the four binding factors turns it into a major transgression.

7. Mistreating an ordained person: This transgression is often referred to as "taking the saffron robes" which means inflicting harms to those who wear the robes of ordination, regardless of whether they observe their vows purely or not. The harm includes taking away their robes, beating or imprisoning them or forcing them to give up their vows and become a layperson. When we engage in any of the above actions in relation to those who wear monk's robes, we commit the offense of mistreating an ordained person. Transgression occurs even when we mistreat an ordained person with a questionable or degraded ethics. This happens when we make a judgment based on a person's external behavior and decide that someone is not worthy to wear robes and thus force the person to be disrobed. This transgression is more likely to be committed by those who have authority to expel a monk from a monastery. When committed with the four factors present, it becomes a major transgression.

8. Committing any of the five immediate misdeeds (heinous crime): This refers to committing one of the five heavy negative karmas, namely, killing one's father, mother, an arhat, to cause schism amongst Sangha and drawing out the blood of a buddha out of malice. These are called immediate misdeeds or uninterrupted karma because committing any one of these will result in a birth in the hell realms immediately after dying. When committed any of the above five misdeeds with the presence of the four binding factors, we commit a major transgression.

9. Generating wrong views: This refers to rejecting the doctrine of karma, existence of past and future lives, the Three Jewels and so on. This transgression does not require the presence of the four binding factors. Whether the four binding factors are present or not, holding this kind of wrong view automatically becomes a major transgression. This is mainly because that when one rejects the concept of karma and the Three Jewels, one loses the moral compass and therefore will not see the purpose of cultivating virtue. The aspiration to achieve enlightenment degenerates when one does not believe in the existence of a fully enlightened being. So, holding wrong views is dangerous and the consequences are detrimental and far reaching.

10. Destroying towns and so forth: When explaining these transgressions, commentaries often refer to some transgressions as “kings’ transgression” and others as “ministers’ transgression”. This is because that some of the transgressions are more likely to be committed by those who hold power and authority. The present transgression is in relation to Kings. Kings have the authority to destroy villages, towns, cities, regions and even province. When one either bulldozes village or burns down a town, one commits this offense, and the presence of the binding factors makes it a major transgression.

11. Teaching emptiness to those who are spiritually unripe: This refers to teaching the view of emptiness to someone who has already generated bodhicitta but is not yet ready to receive teachings on emptiness. When such person hears about emptiness, he/she may misunderstand emptiness as nothingness and get frightened, resulting in his/her deciding that achieving enlightenment is too difficult and thereby give up bodhicitta. Emptiness should be gradually introduced after a firm foundation in dharma understanding is laid. One needs to first check the suitability of the person before giving any teachings on emptiness. When we fail to do so and preach emptiness to those who are not yet ready, we commit the transgression and the presence of the four binding factors makes it a major one.

12. Causing others to turn back from the supreme enlightenment: This refers to causing others to give up the Mahayana. When we say to a Mahayana practitioner “The Mahayana path is too difficult as it requires one to engage in the practices of the six perfections and therefore it takes a long time to attain Buddhahood. Instead, the path of the Listener and Solitary Realizer is swift and therefore should pursue them.” When a listener upon hearing our words such as these, gives up bodhicitta and decides to enter the paths of the vehicles of Listeners and Solitary Realizers, we commit this transgression. The four binding factors must be present to qualify as a major transgression.



18 Major Transgressions

13. Causing others to give up the Praktmoksha vows
14. Discrediting the Listeners' Vehicle
15. Falsely claiming to have realized the profound
16. Seizing the property of the Three Jewels
17. Establishing harmful rules
18. Giving up bodhicitta

13. Causing others to give up the Praktimoksha (individual liberation) vows: This is a reversal from the previous transgression. Here it refers to making others give up the Praktimoksha vows. For instance, when we tell someone who follows the Theravada tradition and observes Praktimoksha vows that he/she should not waste time observing vows of individual liberation as this will not get one far and that instead, he/she should develop bodhicitta which is so powerful in purifying negative karma. If upon hearing such words with the presence of the four binding factors, the person gives up the Praktimoksha vows, we commit this transgression.

14. Discrediting the Listeners' Vehicle: One commits this transgression when one truly believes and makes the assertion that engaging in the paths of Listeners and Solitary Realizers can never result in achieving nirvana. For instance, one may say, "No matter how long we train in the paths of Theravada tradition, we cannot eradicate mental afflictions and thereby will not achieve emancipation." Bodhisattvas cannot afford to hold such wrong views because in order to assist all types of sentient beings, bodhisattvas need to train in both Theravada and Mahayana paths. When we hold such views and make others subscribe to such views, we commit this wrongdoing and the presence of the four binding factors makes it a major transgression.

15. Falsely claiming to have realized the profound: This refers to making false claims which is the worst kind of lie. This lie is in relation to one's realizations. If out of the desire to gain material wealth or honor, we make others believe that we have realizations such as the direct perception into emptiness when we do not, we commit this transgression. This can be done through insinuation. For instance, one can say, "If you follow the instructions, just like me, you will also gain realizations." It is not a transgression if one really possesses such realizations.

16. Seizing the property of the Three Jewels: This is different from the fifth transgression (Stealing the property of the Three Jewels). While the fifth one entails all means of stealing, direct or indirect, this one is stealing indirectly only. This transgression is committed by a person with authority and therefore labeled as "Minister's transgression". As a means to acquire property belonging to the Three Jewels, a person in power imposes a hefty fine on an ordained monk. Out of desperation, a monk steals something belonging to the Three Jewels and hands it to the person in power. When the person in authority receives any type of possessions of the Three Jewels, he commits this transgression. The four binding factors are required to make it a major transgression.

17. Establishing harmful rules: This refers to enacting laws that harm monastics (monks and nuns). This is done through two ways. Taking the example of a monastery of monks, one way is introducing new laws that restrict monks from remaining in monastery and practice. For instance, currently in Tibet, only a fixed number of monks are permitted to join monasteries and if the authorities find them exceeding the prescribed numbers, the “excess” monks are expelled, and the monastery is punished. The second way is by depriving monks of their resources by purposeful misallocation. For instance, the funds and resources that are allocated for meditators are allocated to those who only read scriptures. This forces the meditators to leave their meditation. Both actions are targeted at hindering monks in their practices. When anyone commits the above with the presence of the four binding factors, one commits this major transgression.

18. Giving up Bodhicitta: This is another transgression that does not require the presence of the four binding factors in order to become a major transgression. The moment we forsake aspiring bodhicitta, we commit this major transgression. Giving up bodhicitta can happen when we are disappointed by a person and say, “I will never help this person again. I am tired of helping him”. Resolving not to help certain people constitutes forsaking bodhicitta and entertaining such a resolution will give rise to this major transgression. This completes the eighteen major transgressions. Let’s now look at the 46 secondary misdeeds.



7 Misdeeds contrary to the practice of generosity

1. Not making the three offerings to the Three Jewels
2. Following a desirous mind
3. Not respecting the seniors
4. Not responding to a question
5. Not accepting an invitation
6. Not accepting gold and the like
7. Not giving dharma to those who want it

The 46 secondary misdeeds are divided into two categories. The first 34 misdeeds are contrary to the ethic of collecting virtue and the remaining 12 oppose the ethics of working for the welfare of sentient beings. The first 34 misdeeds are further grouped into six sets that conflict with the respective practices of the six perfections. The first set of seven misdeeds are those that hinder bodhisattvas in their practice of generosity.

Not making the three offerings to the Three Jewels: The three offerings refer to the offerings of body, speech and mind. Upon taking bodhisattva vows, one is required to make physical offerings such as prostrations or gestures of respect, recollecting the qualities of the Three Jewels and verbally reciting praise. Apart from prostrations, making actual offerings of flowers, incense, lights and even water (water-bowl offerings) count as physical offerings. One commits this misdeed if not done on a daily basis.

Following a desirous mind: A strong attachment to one’s possessions, craving for more material things, the pursuit of fame and honor are common desirous thoughts. Giving a free hand to such

desirous thoughts can lead a bodhisattva-practitioner astray. Thus, bodhisattvas (or who have taken the vows) are required to apply the appropriate antidotes when strong attachment arises. Failing to do results in committing this misdeed.

Not respecting seniors: Here “senior” refers to those who have taken the bodhisattvas vows before oneself. This is not a matter of age. Seniority is based on the date that one took the Bodhisattva vows. Forms of showing respect to seniors include standing up (when one is sitting down) when a senior passes by, offering one’s seat and addressing the person with respect. One commits this misdeed when one does not accord the appropriate respect to senior bodhisattvas. These apply to “bodhisattva-practitioners” as well.

Not responding to a question: Question in this context does not need to be a Dharma related question. When someone asks us a question such as “how are you?”, one should respond accordingly. Failing to do so results in violating our vows and thereby commits this offense. There are several exceptions. There will be no misdeed if:

- one is in the midst of listening to a teaching
- when there is harmful intention behind the question
- when not answering serves a greater (virtuous) purpose

Not accepting an invitation: If out of pride, animosity or laziness, when we reject others’ invitation to a meal or special function, we commit this misdeed because we would be denying others the opportunity to practice generosity. However, there are exceptions such as when we are ill, we have accepted another invitation or we need to attend a dharma activity or there is a long term benefit in declining the invitation.

Not accepting gold and alike: It has been explained that accepting gifts sincerely given, whether gold or otherwise, enables the giver to practice generosity and thus bodhisattvas are allowed to accept such gifts. Further, these enable Bodhisattvas to help sentient beings materially as well. As such, if out of animosity, pride or laziness, we decline the offerings by others, we commit this misdeed. However, exceptions to this is where by accepting offerings such as gold etc, it will increase one’s own attachment or it will impoverish the donors or may cause to the donor to later regret the offering or the offering was stolen or already offered to another person or there is a greater purpose in refusing the offering.

Not giving dharma to those who want it: This refers to failing to accommodate a request for dharma teaching. In order to constitute a secondary misdeed, the refusal to teach must be motivated either by animosity, anger, pride or laziness. Below are several circumstances where it would not constitute this misdeed:

- The recipient is not yet suited for the requested teaching or has an ill intention in requesting the teaching
- The bodhisattva is ill or does not know the topic
- When there is a long-term benefit to declining, such as it will be more beneficial after some time passes

The above are the seven misdeeds that conflict with the practice of generosity. Now let’s turn to the second set of misdeeds that contradicts the practice of the perfection of ethical discipline.

9 Misdeeds contrary to the practice of ethical discipline

1. Abandoning those who have broken morality
2. Not training for the sake of others
3. Doing little for the benefit of beings
4. Not practicing with loving compassion
5. Accepting wrong livelihood
6. Acting frivolously out of exaggerated excitement
7. Thinking only about going through samsara
8. Not avoiding a bad reputation
9. Not correcting others despite their afflictions

Abandoning those who have damaged ethics: Bodhisattvas should not ignore or berate a person because he/she has broken a vow. When we do so motivated by anger, animosity, pride or laziness, we commit this offense. Exceptions include disassociating with the person aligns with specific monastic rules, or there is a greater purpose such as maintaining distance from the person for a period of time will help the person to improve himself/herself.

Not training for the sake of others: This refers to not observing the vows of individual liberation. It is so important to follow the rules according to the Praktimoksha vows to inspire others and uphold their faith. When we think that as a Mahayana practitioner, we do not need to strictly follow the Praktimoksha vows and thereby indulge in intoxicants and harmful actions, it will destroy others' faith in Buddha dharma. We need to abide by the vows of individual liberation if we have taken any of the Praktimoksha vows. Failing to do so is a misdeed.

Doing little for the benefit of others: This is in relation to following Vinaya in a narrow and rigid way. Generally, monks should not be involved in many activities. However, when the activities are beneficial to others, one is encouraged to do so. In such situations, bodhisattvas need not follow the rules as strictly as the Theravadans do, whilst being mindful of ethics and the other perfections at all times. When we fail to do something that is beneficial to others simply by citing a specific rule of individual liberation, we commit this misdeed.

Not practicing with loving compassion: Generally, one is to abstain from committing any of the ten non-virtues. However, in certain circumstances for instance when it serves a greater purpose of saving a great number of people, one is permitted to engage in the first seven non-virtues. The reason for this is that motivation determines whether the action is virtuous or non-virtuous. Therefore, subject to specific conditions and motivated by great compassion, even the extreme act of killing, may be beneficial. When Buddha was still on the path, one of his past lives was as a captain of a boat. He had to kill a sailor who was planning to murder all the 500 fellow sailors on board. In order to save the lives of the 500, as well as prevent the person from committing a hideous crime, the captain took the life of the perpetrator. Likewise, as a bodhisattva, sometimes for the greater good, they need to engage in non-virtues. However, great caution is required because it must be motivated by genuine compassion. Failing to take such drastic action will result in this misdeed.

Accepting wrong livelihood: Wrong livelihood refers to earning a livelihood that involves harming others. For instance, making money out of selling weapons, running a slaughterhouse, stealing and

engaging in deceitful means. Accepting offerings that are earned through such means constitutes committing this misdeed.

Acting frivolously out of exaggerated excitement: This refers to engaging in meaningless activities such as engaging in idle gossip, exaggerated excitement, singing and dancing with wild abandon as well. Offense is committed when one engages in such frivolous activities or persuade others to do so.

Thinking only going through samsara: Bodhisattvas are committed to helping sentient beings. They pledge to remain in samsara for as long as it takes until all sentient beings are liberated. Unfortunately, the bodhisattva's audacity to remain in samsara could be misinterpreted as enjoying the samsara and not seeking nirvana. That is not true. Bodhisattvas remain in samsara to guide and liberate sentient beings, not out of a wish for samsaric enjoyment. When one subscribes to such an erroneous view and says so, one commits this misdeed.

Not avoiding a bad reputation: It is important for us to be free from any bad reputation because scandals can sow doubts in the mind of others leading to mistrust. As a result, one's ability to serve others will diminish. As such, when there are scandals about us circulating, whether true or not, we should try to dispel such bad reputation. Failing to do is a secondary misdeed.

Not correcting others despite their afflictions: In order to help others, we need to adopt various methods to guide living beings. Sweet talk does not work all the time. Sometimes stern and assertive measures are necessary. If out of fear of conflict or hurting the feelings of the other person, one does not adopt the appropriate measure to correct that person who is acting under the influence of an affliction, one commits this misdeed. These are the nine misdeeds that clash with the practice of ethical discipline.

4 Misdeeds contrary to the practice of patience

1. Responding to scolding with scolding and the like
2. Ignoring those who are angry with you
3. Not accepting others' apology
4. Following thoughts of anger

Responding to scolding with scolding and the like: This refers to violating what is known as the practice of four virtues: We should not retaliate when scolded, beaten, criticized or shown anger. As a Buddhist practitioner, one is to practice **avoiding** the above four non-virtues. If instead of applying forbearance, we retort with abusive language and scolding, hit back, criticize back and get upset, these result in committing this misdeed. As before, when there is a special circumstance/greater purpose, not adhering to the practice of the four virtue will not amount to a misdeed.

Ignoring those who are angry with you: When others are angry at us, whether justifiable or not, we need to pacify the other person. If we have wronged them, we should sincerely apologize. If the situation was solely due to a misunderstanding, we should still try to clarify and dispel the misunderstanding. Failing to do so will end up committing this misdeed. Exceptions include the greater good or if we are certain that talking to the person or apologizing would worsen the situation.

Not accepting others' apology: When others offer sincere apology for their wrongdoings, we should graciously accept it. Refusing to and continuing to hold grudge completes this misdeed. When we are certain that an apology was not offered sincerely or there is an ulterior motive, our non-acceptance of the apology will not result in misdeed.

Following thoughts of anger: This refers to failing to apply appropriate antidotes to anger. Anger left unrestrained can be damaging and therefore, we need to counteract it the moment it arises. Here the fault lies in allowing anger to have its way and doing nothing about it. It is not a misdeed if our sincere attempts fail to curb our anger.



3 Misdeeds contrary to the practice of perseverance

1. Gathering a following out of desire for material wealth & honor
2. Not dispelling laziness and the like
3. Engaging in idle talk out of desire

There are three misdeeds in relation to the practice of perseverance.

Gathering a following out of desire for material and honor: We need to gather a following solely for the purpose of benefitting greater number of people. However, the intention must be for the purpose of giving Dharma to lead them to Buddhahood. If we gather a following simply to gain material wealth and honor for oneself, it is a misdeed.

Not dispelling laziness and the like: This refers to wasting time engaging in non-dharma activities such as sleeping, resting, relaxing etc. Of course, it does not mean that we should not sleep or rest. Here it refers to not applying antidote to laziness and sleep/rest too long. Failing to fight the appeal of sleep and engaging in non-dharma activity is likely to culminate in this misdeed.

Engaging in idle talk out of desire: If out of desire, we engage in meaningless conversations on topics such as politics, movies, scandals etc, we commit this misdeed. However, if there is a greater good in engaging in such activities, there is no misdeed.

3 Misdeeds contrary to the practice of concentration

1. Not seeking the meaning of single-pointed concentration
2. Not giving up the obstacles to meditation
3. Regarding the enjoyment of meditative states as good



Now we turn to the misdeeds that conflict with the practice of concentration.

Not seeking the meaning of single-pointed concentration: In order for us to effectively benefit sentient beings, we ourselves need to achieve the highest level of concentration – the calm abiding and receiving the practice instruction is imperative. When we, either out of pride or animosity or laziness, do not attend such teachings conducted in one’s vicinity, we commit this misdeed. However, there are several exceptions which includes when one is ill, one has received the instructions many times before and has studied the topic thoroughly, finding unease with the instructors etc.

Not giving up the obstacles to meditation: This refers to failing to eliminate the five obstacles to developing concentration. The five obstacles are (1) mental excitement and regret, (2) sleep and lethargy, (3) desire for sense objects, (4) malice and (5) doubt. *Mental excitement* is a wandering mind that jumps from one object to another which is one of the main hinderances to cultivating stable concentration. With *regret and malice*, one’s mind is busy conjuring up all kinds of past grievances and churning plans to get even with the other person and this is not conducive to concentration. Concentration not only requires focusing on the object but also a certain degree of mental firmness or strength. *Sleep and lethargy* weakens that ability. *Desire for sense objects* gives rise to a distracted and scattered mind. *Doubt* is an undecided mental state and speculative in nature and thereby not favorable to clarity and concentration. When we do not apply appropriate antidotes to these obstacles, we commit this secondary misdeed.

Regarding the enjoyment of concentration as good: When we achieve calm-abiding which is the king of concentration, we experience great bliss. Relishing or getting attached to the bliss of concentration can result in one remaining in that state for a long period of time which hinders progress in our path to enlightenment. As such, we should not focus on the pleasant sensations of concentration. Failing to guard against this kind of attachment results in committing this misdeed.

8 Misdeeds contrary to the practice of Wisdom

1. Abandoning the Listeners' Vehicle
2. Exerting effort in that (Hinayana) system despite having our own
3. Exerting effort in non-Buddhist treatises where no effort should be made
4. Having exerting effort, taking pleasure in (non-Buddhist texts) as well
5. Giving up the Mahayana
6. Praising myself and criticizing others
7. Not going somewhere for the sake of the Dharma
8. Scorning that One (the Lama) and relying on the letter

There are eight misdeeds in relation to the practice of wisdom.

Abandoning the Listeners' vehicle: Buddha gave various teachings depending on the followers' mental dispositions and these can all be classified as either the Theravada path or Mahayana path and their respective practices. However, the Theravada path serves as a foundation to the Mahayana path and is therefore an integral part of the teachings/practices to achieve Buddhahood. When we assert that the teachings of Theravada have no relevance to the Mahayana practitioner, we commit this misdeed.

Exerting effort in that (Theravada) system despite having our own: This is where a Mahayana practitioner overly indulges in the practice of Theravada, while ignoring Mahayana teachings and practices. As a Mahayana practitioner, our primary practice should be Mahayana practice. Exclusively devoting our time and effort on Theravada teachings despite having one's own system (Mahayana), will result in committing this misdeed.

Exerting effort in non-Buddhist treatise: Whilst it is useful to understand the views and beliefs of non-Buddhist treatises, a bodhisattva's main effort ought to be on the Mahayana treatises. When one has not yet cemented one's faith and understanding, there is the danger of losing one's bodhicitta and exiting from Mahayana tradition. Hence, the misdeed of putting excessive effort on non-Buddhist texts.

Having exerting effort, taking pleasure in (non-Buddhist texts) as well: In order to benefit others, we may need to be familiar with the philosophy and views of non-Buddhist traditions. However, one should not develop pleasure in doing so. We should view such endeavor as similar to taking medicine. Nobody enjoys taking pills but it is necessary when we are sick. The fault lies in finding enjoyment in it.

Giving up the Mahayana: This misdeed refers to criticizing any of the Mahayana sutras. Because of our failure to understand, we might for instance say, "This sutra sounds strange" or "This sutra has no real substance" or "This will not benefit sentient beings". When we reject any Mahayana sutra in this way, we commit this misdeed.

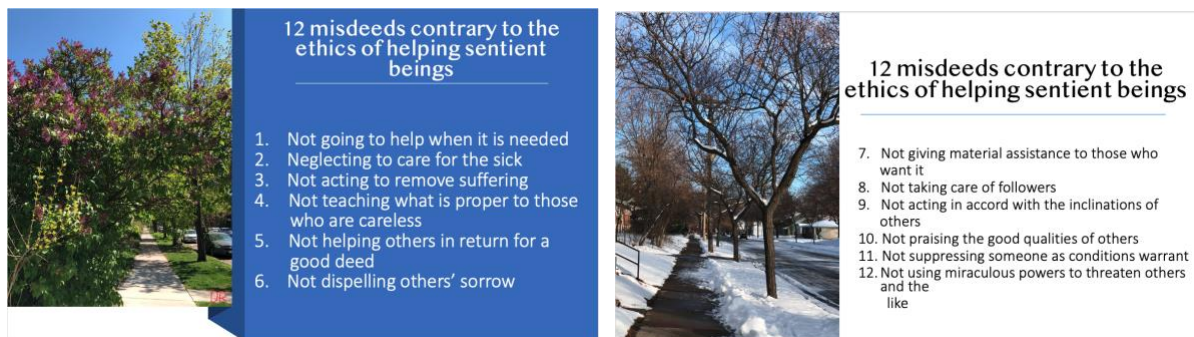
Praising oneself and criticizing others: If out of pride or anger, we praise ourselves and criticize others, we commit this misdeed. Motivation distinguishes this misdeed from the one under the

major transgression. While the one under the major transgression is motivated by the desire for material gain and honor, this one is propelled by anger or pride.

Not going somewhere for the sake of the Dharma: This refers to the refusal to attend dharma teachings either out of pride or laziness. When we are faced with challenges to get to a particular teaching venue, our laziness can choose comfort over attendance at the teaching. Sometimes it is our pride that deters us from attending a dharma teaching, for example, someone junior to us is giving the teaching and by virtue of thinking that we are senior, we feel shy to attend his/her talk. In such cases, we commit this misdeed.

Scorning that One (teacher) and relying on the Letter: The Guru devotion teachings advise us to view one's guru as buddha and accord respect accordingly. However, if we scrutinize our Guru's words instead of relying on their meaning and then criticize the Guru, we commit this misdeed. Buddha taught what is known as the Four Reliances. (1) Do not rely on person but on the Dharma: One should give importance to the content of the teaching rather than the teacher's status. (2) Do not rely provisional meanings but the definitive meanings: Provisional means requiring further interpretation and therefore cannot be relied upon as-is. (3) Do not rely on the ordinary mind but on the wisdom born of realizations: Wisdom born out of realization is more reliable than that of the ordinary mind and therefore reliance should be on wisdom. (4) Do not rely on the words (Letter) but on the meaning: Meaning is more important than the flowery words. This misdeed is in relation to this fourth reliance. Ordinary people tend to appreciate eloquent speech over the content and meaning of a teaching. As such, when a Guru lacks speaking skills, the tendency to criticize arises and thereby culminates in committing this misdeed.

The final 12 misdeeds are offenses that are contrary to the ethical discipline of helping sentient beings.



12 misdeeds contrary to the ethics of helping sentient beings

1. Not going to help when it is needed
2. Neglecting to care for the sick
3. Not acting to remove suffering
4. Not teaching what is proper to those who are careless
5. Not helping others in return for a good deed
6. Not dispelling others' sorrow

12 misdeeds contrary to the ethics of helping sentient beings

7. Not giving material assistance to those who want it
8. Not taking care of followers
9. Not acting in accord with the inclinations of others
10. Not praising the good qualities of others
11. Not suppressing someone as conditions warrant
12. Not using miraculous powers to threaten others and the like

The final 12 misdeeds are offenses that are contrary to the ethical discipline of helping sentient beings.

Not helping when it is needed: When we fail to provide help to others in the following eight situations, we commit this misfeed. (1) Deliberating an action: When someone needs our input to make a decision and out of laziness or afflictive emotions, we do not offer help, we commit this offense. (2) Accompanying on a journey: When a traveler seeks help and if we fail to do so when we are in a position to, we commit this misdeed. In olden days, there was no TripAdvisor and travelers relied on others' kindness in giving directions. Some parts of the route can be dangerous and therefore may require more than mere information, requiring the person offering help to accompany

the traveler to a certain point of the road. If one is able to help but fails to provide such assistance, we commit this misdeed. However, if we do not accompany a person from Minneapolis to Texas, I think we can be excused. Times have changed. In ancient times, manual help was the only way to ensure safe travel. Today, we have Uncle Google to help us. (3) Teaching a language: This refers to assisting others in linguistic skills. (4) Teaching a professional skill or means of livelihood: Helping others to do their job better. Whatever our own skill or expertise is, we should offer help to others who can be helped by our advice. For instance, if we see someone who is ignorantly engaged in a job that involves taking lives of animals, we can skillfully offer our sincere advice. (5) Protecting possessions: This refers to providing help in terms of protecting one's possessions. For instance, we may give advice on how to keep money safely at a bank instead of in a coffee can or advise others against actions that will cause the person to incur loss. Failure to do so results in breaching this commitment. (6) Resolving disputes between individuals: Helping as a mediator to settle disputes. My father was a well-known village mediator who was often approached to settle differences between villagers. I remember accompanying him on many occasions. When we have the ability to resolve disputes between individuals and if we intentionally decline to help, we commit a misdeed. (7) Helping organize celebrations or commemorations: This is very common practice in Tibetan community. Whether a happy celebration or a sad occasion, there are always volunteers. Back in the Tibetan settlement where I lived, whenever there is a death in a house, a team of volunteers from the neighborhood would arrive instantly and take full charge of the funeral preparations to assist the family stricken with grief. Such help is so crucial as family members of the deceased are in shock and often incapable of overseeing the preparations. I saw great virtue in this practice and suggested this manner of assistance to the people in Tibet where my monastery is located. It is now being practiced there. When we fail to provide help in such situations, we breach our bodhisattva vows. (8) Performing virtuous activities: This is another common practice in the Tibetan community. When a family is organizing a big puja, for instance, hosting 50 monks to recite some 30 volumes of sutras, the hosting family alone cannot successfully manage the event. Just cooking for 50 monks is a big feat. In such situations, the neighbors and friends will come to help. Not offering help when we are able to results in committing a misdeed.

Neglecting to care for the sick: When called to care for the sick, if out of anger or laziness, we fail to provide the necessary care, we commit this misdeed. The care includes providing medicine, food or assistance. Of course, if what is asked of or needed is beyond our means, there is no offence.

Not acting to remove suffering: The previous misdeed relates to alleviating the suffering of sickness. This misdeed is in relation to sufferings in general e.g. sufferings related to blindness, deafness and physical challenges. When we fail to alleviate others' sufferings, we commit a secondary offence. Our failure must be motivated by either anger or laziness.

Not teaching what is proper to those who are careless: This refers to guiding others who are ignorantly engaging in actions that are harmful to them in this life or in the future life. When we take the bodhisattva vows, we are tasked with pointing out or advising those who are on the verge of committing a mistake. We cannot say something like, "I can't be bothered to correct his/her conduct". When we fail to take action out of anger or laziness, we commit this misdeed. However, when one is living in a culture like the American culture, where everybody is expected to mind their own business, it can be difficult. One should try one's best and as skillfully as possible to do this but if it is beyond one's ability, there is no misdeed.

Not helping others in return for a good deed: Reciprocity is a noble gesture. One is expected to return favor that one has received in the past. If out of animosity or laziness, one intentionally refuses or fails to show gratitude or do anything in return, one commits this offense. One is exempted in situations such as when one does not have means or others do not wish reciprocation or there is a special, greater purpose.

Not dispelling others' sorrow: This refers to the failure to dispel others' sorrow from losing their loved ones or loss of property. The inaction must be motivated by animosity or laziness. In today's world, given the pandemic and the common occurrence of natural disasters, many people go through so much sorrow. Some of these victims might be people we dislike but if out of animosity, we fail to even attempt to alleviate their sorrow, we commit this misdeed.

Not giving wealth to those who desire it: When others seek assistance for basic needs such as food, drinks, clothing etc, we should help if that is within our ability. If out of animosity or laziness, we refuse to offer help, we commit this misdeed.

Not taking care of followers: As discussed earlier, we should gather a following so that more people can benefit from Dharma teachings. At the same time, we also have the responsibility of taking care of our followers. Followers may need material or spiritual assistance and when we do not provide such assistance out of animosity or laziness, we commit this offense.

Not acting in accord with the inclinations of others: One key to effective helping is adopting skillful means. In order to reach more people, we need to get along with people. No matter how different others' views conflict with ours, we may need to adjust our thinking to others and accommodate diverse views. If we fail to do so out of animosity or laziness, we commit this misdeed.

Not praising the good qualities of others: When we see others' qualities and good work, we should acknowledge and offer words of praise. Animosity and laziness can hamper us in acknowledging others' goodness. Failing to do so because of our animosity and laziness, we commit this offense.

Not suppressing someone as conditions warrant: As we are committed to helping others, we need to utilize various methods, which may involve taking forceful measures such as scolding, punishment and even expulsion of the offender from the group. If out of laziness or afflictions, we fail to take the appropriate actions concordant with the situation, it will result in committing this misdeed.

Not using miraculous power to threaten harmgivers and the like: This misdeed can be committed only by those who possess supernatural powers. When a situation calls for the use of miraculous powers in order to stop a wrongdoer and if one possesses such powers but fails to do so, it will culminate in committing this misdeed. This is by no means promoting violence. It is to restrain and deter others from taking harmful actions.

This concludes the 46 misdeeds. From the above, it is clear that all these are to help us keep up with the standards of good ethics and behavior in society. If we piously abide by them, our actions will accord with what we vowed to do as stated in the Bodhicitta generation prayer, "I shall act with supreme enlightened conduct". Actions that are propelled by selfish attitude is considered ordinary.

Actions motivated by bodhicitta is supreme conduct because they are aimed at others' welfare. In this way, our interactions and relationship with others will improve and thereby create happiness for us and those around us.

