

Refuge and Bodhisattva Vows



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2. The precepts of refuge

Having taken the refuge vows, one must train in the advice of the commitments of refuge:

- Having gone for refuge to the Buddha, one should not prostrate or make offerings to worldly gods.
- Having gone for refuge to the Dharma, one should abandon harming others.
- Having gone for refuge to the Sangha, one should not befriend those who harm your faith in the Three Jewels. These are the three commitments of what is to be avoided.

Also:

- Having gone for refuge to Buddha, one should make prostrations and offerings with faith and regard as an actual Buddha even a fragment of an image of the Buddha.
- Having gone for refuge to the Dharma, one should regard even one syllable as the actual Dharma. If one finds a syllable or letter in an unclean place, one should pick it up and put it in a clean place.
- Having gone for refuge to the Sangha, one must regard someone who is wearing even a piece of monastic robes as the actual Sangha and do prostrations and make offerings. These three are the commitments to be observed.

Additionally, one may have taken one or more of the lay vows:

- I undertake the rule of training to refrain from destroying living creatures
- I undertake the rule of training to refrain from taking what is not given
- I undertake the rule of training to refrain from unchaste conduct
- I undertake the rule of training to refrain from false speech
- I undertake the rule of training to refrain from distilled and fermented intoxicants which are the occasion for carelessness

3. Trainings of aspiring bodhicitta

After generating aspiring bodhisattva before the Spiritual Friend and the Three Jewels, one should observe eight precepts in order to protect one's dedicated heart from degeneration in this and future lives.

This has two parts:

a. The trainings that protect bodhicitta in this lifetime

1st. Training: recall the benefits of bodhicitta in order to increase the strength of your enthusiasm.

Advantages as explained in the scriptures

First: You consider the advantages of bodhicitta, studying the sutras or hearing them from your guru. Since they have been taught extensively in the Array of Stalks Sutra, they should be studied there. The quotation from it above says: “It is the seed of all the Dharma of the Buddha,” and all the conduct and aspirations of the bodhisattvas are summarized in it. Therefore, it is said to be like a brief presentation. Although the extensive explanation of the elements is boundless, since the brief presentation contains everything, the brief presentation, like a synthesis of them, teaches a synthesis that summarizes the essential points of all the paths of bodhisattvas.

As the advantages taught in Asaṅga’s Bodhisattva Levels concern aspiring bodhicitta, from among them, the two advantages of generating a stable mind generation are mentioned first.

The actual advantages are twofold:

- **Become a holy field.**

As stated in the scriptures, “the world with its gods and human beings will bow to you”, as soon as you generate this mind, you become an object of veneration for all sentient beings.

As stated in the scriptures you outshine the great arhats by way of your lineage as soon as you generate this mind. You become a guru or an exalted being.

You become a field of merit due to yielding limitless effects even through doing minor meritorious actions.

“Due to supporting the whole world, you are like the earth.” In accordance with that statement you become like a father of all beings.

- **Thoroughly hold the merit of non-harm**

Since you are guarded by twice as many protectors as protect a universal monarch, yakṣas and non-human primordial local guardians cannot harm you even when you are asleep, intoxicated, or careless.

You pacify calamities, harm, and infectious diseases with the words of secret mantra and knowledge mantra. If even things that cannot be accomplished in the hands of sentient beings will be accomplished when they come into your hands, what need is there to mention that other things will be accomplished? Due to this, the collection of activities, pacification and so forth, are shown to be easily accomplished in reliance upon the mind generation. Therefore, if you have that, you will also quickly accomplish the common siddhis.

Fear, famine, and harm from non-human beings will not occur in those places in which they have not occurred, and after transmigrating, you will have little harm, will be without illness, and so forth.

Due to being endowed with patience and a gentle disposition, you will bear harm that is done to you and will not return the harm and the like.

Also, it will be difficult for you to be reborn in the lower rebirths and, if it happens, you will quickly be freed. While there, you will have little suffering and thereby, as a result, become extremely disenchanted with cyclic existence. Also compassion for those sentient beings will arise.

If the merit of bodhicitta were to become form, it could not be contained in space itself. Making offerings of material things to the buddhas does not compare to it even partially. In Questions of the Householder Viradatta (Viradattaparipṛccha) it says:

*If the merit of bodhicitta
Were to have a physical form,
All the realm of space would be filled;
It would be surpassed by it.
Buddha fields as numerous as*

*The sand grains of the river Ganges,
Offered by someone, filled with jewels,
To the protector of the world—
If someone joins his palms and bows
To bodhicitta this is distinctly
Superior to that offering made.
As for this, it has no limit.*

Bodhicitta is praised by the holy beings

When the Great Elder circumambulated the Vajra Seat and thought about what to do to attain complete enlightenment quickly, the smaller statues stood up and asked the bigger ones: “What should those who want to quickly become a buddha train in?” whereupon the latter replied: “They should train in bodhicitta.” When, in the sky above the Gandhola statue, a young woman questioned an older woman, the latter made a similar reply. It is said that due to hearing this, his mind became very certain with respect to bodhicitta.

Exert yourself in this the supreme method

In that way, you should understand bodhicitta as the condensed essential point of all the Mahāyāna instructions, the great treasure of all siddhis, the distinctive feature distinguishing the Mahāyāna from the Hinayana, the supreme basis that exhorts one to the vast conduct of the victors’ children. You should increase the strength of your delight in meditating on it and act like someone thirsty hearing of water because when analysing the paths, the buddhas and their children, having made it more and more subtle by means of their marvellous exalted knowledge over many eons, saw it to be the supreme method for attaining buddhahood. Thus it also says in Engaging in Bodhisattva Behaviour:

*Having reflected thoroughly for many eons
The buddhas saw this above all as beneficial.*

2nd. Training: generate bodhicitta six times each day.

Maintain your aspirational bodhicitta

You have taken as your witness the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and teachers and, in their presence, committed yourself to liberate all beings who are not liberated, and so forth. If you then see that living beings are so numerous and their behavior is mean, or that the time wherein you must strive for many eons is

long, or that you must train in the two collections that are limitless and difficult to do, and you take this as a reason to become discouraged and to abandon your responsibility to develop bodhicitta, it is a sin greater than a cardinal transgression of the vows of individual liberation. The Verse Summary of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines states: ¹

*Though you practice the ten virtuous actions for ten million eons,
If you then generate the wish to become a pratyekabuddha arhat,
You damage and weaken your ethical discipline as a bodhisattva.
This breach of bodhicitta is far more serious than a cardinal transgression.*

Thus, it says that such a bodhisattva's ethical discipline is faulty. Restraint from Shravaka and pratyekabuddha considerations is the bodhisattvas' highest ethical discipline, so were bodhisattvas to weaken this restraint, they would destroy their ethical discipline. For, if bodhisattvas do not cast aside such restraint, then even were they to indulge in sensory pleasures, they would not destroy the attitude of restraint that is unique to the bodhisattva. Again, the Verse Summary of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines states: ²

*Though bodhisattvas enjoy the five sensory objects,
If they take refuge in the Buddha, the teaching, and the community of noble beings,
And fix their minds on omniscience, thinking, "I will attain buddhahood,"
Understand that these adepts keep the perfection of ethical discipline.*

If they give up their promised intention, they must wander for a long time in miserable rebirths. Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds says:

*It is said that once people decide
To give a small amount of a simple thing
And then do not give it,
They cause themselves a rebirth as a hungry ghost.*

*So how could you be reborn in a happy realm
If you deceive all living beings
After you have sincerely invited them
To unsurpassed bliss?*

¹ Ratna-guṇa-saṃcaya-gāthā.

² Idem.

Therefore it also says:

*Like a blind person finding a jewel
In a heap of garbage,
By chance bodhicitta
Has arisen in me.*

Think, “How very wonderful that I have attained something like this,” and never give it up. Devoting particular attention to this, vow over and over not to give it up for even an instant.

Increase aspirational bodhicitta

It is not enough merely not to give up the aspirational bodhicitta; increase it with great effort three times during the day and three times at night. If you can practice the aforementioned extensive ritual, do so. If not, visualize the field for accumulating merit and, after you make offerings, refine your love, compassion, and so forth. Then adopt bodhicitta six times, reciting the following ritual verse three times on each occasion: ³

*I go for refuge until enlightenment
To the Buddha, the teaching and the community;
By the merit of practicing the six perfections
May I achieve buddhahood in order to help living beings.*

3rd. Training: not to mentally abandon living beings.

Although this precept is not found in the pertinent sections of the Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment or Ritual Procedures for bodhicitta and the Bodhisattva Vows, in his Commentary on the Difficult Points of the “Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment,” Atisha says: ⁴

³ Bodhisattvadikarmika-margavatara-deshana (Teaching About a New Bodhisattva’s Entry into the Path).

⁴ Cf. Bodhi-marga-pradipa-pañjika.

By caring for and not abandoning living beings you maintain bodhicitta for the sake of its object, its benefits, the ritual for generating it, its general increase, and not forgetting it.

It is listed in this context and does not contradict the intended meaning of the root text so train in this also.

The measure of mentally abandoning living beings is when you produce the thought, “Now I will never work for this person’s welfare,” based upon some conditions such as unacceptable actions, etc.

4th. training: accumulate collections of merit and wisdom

After you have adopted the aspirational bodhicitta through its ritual, strive daily to accumulate the collections—making offerings to the three jewels, etc.—in order to increase bodhicitta. Although there is no authoritative source for this being a precept other than former teachers’ statements, it is nevertheless very beneficial.

b. The trainings that protect bodhicitta in future lifetimes.

The Kashyapa Chapter (Kashyapa-parivarta) of the Ratna-kuta Collection lists the four practices with respect to actualizing and not forgetting bodhicitta, not casting it aside until you reach enlightenment. They are presented as precepts of the aspirational bodhicitta.

Eliminating the four dark practices which weaken bodhicitta

Deceiving abbots, masters, spiritual friends, and Sangha members.

Understand this in terms of two approaches: the objects of your action and what you do to these objects. According to the explanation in Sthiramati’s Commentary on the Kashyapa Chapter (Kashyapa-parivarta-tika),⁵ the objects

⁵ The section on the four dark and four light practices cited in the following section is found in the Arya-maha-ratna-kuta-dharma-paryaya-parivarta-shata-sahasrika-kashyapa-parivarta-tika.

are abbots and masters (this is obvious), Spiritual Friends (those who want to help), and those worthy of offerings (though not included in the rank of the previous two groups, they have good qualities). What might you do to these objects that would be a dark practice? It is a dark practice if you consciously deceive any of them. With respect to how you deceive them, the Commentary on the Kashyapa Chapter says that when they compassionately explain transgressions, and you then confuse them about yourself with lies, it is “dark.” It says that whenever you try to mislead your Spiritual Friends about yourself with an intention to deceive, it is “dark.” However, it has to be misleading with lies—the deception which is not lying will be dealt with below. This is because its remedy is the first of the four light practices, and the Compendium of Trainings⁶ says that eliminating the dark practices is a light practice. Moreover, it is said that incorrigible students deceive their Spiritual Friends when they say one thing to the Spiritual Friend and secretly say something very different to others, who then say, “Careful, this will come to the teacher’s ears.”

Making others feel regret about something that is not regrettable.

This is understood through the same two approaches mentioned previously. The object is persons cultivating virtue without regret. What do you do to them? You intentionally make them regret something they should not regret. The Commentary on the Kashyapa Chapter explains that deceitfully misleading fellow practitioners with respect to a training’s wording when they are observing the training correctly is “dark.”

For these first two dark practices, it is said to make no difference whether or not you are able to deceive or whether or not you are able to cause regret. The Commentary on the Kashyapa Chapter concurs in this regard. The Commentary, however, takes the latter to be a case of misleading as well.

Speaking disparagingly, etc., to beings who have correctly entered the Mahāyāna.

What is done to these bodhisattvas is to speak disparagingly, with blame, with libel, and so forth. The assertion that what is said has to be motivated by hatred accords with the Commentary. But even though the Commentary says that the bodhisattvas to whom it is spoken are diligently seeking the teachings, and the words are spoken in order stop their belief in or wish to practice the Mahāyāna,

⁶ Shikṣa-samuccaya.

it seems to be enough if they understand the meaning of what is said. The Commentary explains that something disparaging is, for example, saying that he or she “has poor character,” wherein you do not mention any specific fault; blame is, for example, saying “He is not celibate,” wherein you are specific; and a libel is, for example, saying “In this or that way he engaged in sex,” making it more specific. The Commentary attaches the term “criticism” to these three.

There is great danger of this offense arising in us. Indeed, if bodhisattvas have even a despising thought toward other bodhisattvas, they have to stay in hell for as many eons as the moments of that thought’s duration. And the Sutra on the Magic of Final Peace (Prashanta-vinishcaya-pratiharya-sutra) says that no other action apart from slandering another bodhisattva can make a bodhisattva fall into the miserable realms.

The Verse Summary of the Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines says:

*If bodhisattvas who have not received a prediction of their enlightenment
Have an angry dispute with bodhisattvas who have received a prediction,
They must put on the armour of practice again
For as many eons as the moments of their coarse, faulty attitude.*

Thus it says that they must travel along the path, starting over again, for eons commensurate with their angry attitude; they become very far distant from their enlightenment. For this reason stop your anger on all occasions, and if it arises, immediately confess it and strive to restrain yourself. That same text states:

*Develop mindfulness, thinking, “This state of mind is not constructive,”
Confess each instance, and restrain yourself from doing it again.
Do not rejoice in it; train in the teaching of the Buddha.*

If you give hatred a chance, the love and compassion you have developed will weaken and it will be hard to develop any new love and compassion, even if you practice for a long time. Thus, you cut the root of bodhicitta. If you stop hatred—the unfavourable condition for love and compassion—and cultivate love and compassion according to the previous explanation, they then progressively increase and eventually become limitless. Dharmakīrti’s Commentary on the “Compendium of Valid Cognition” (Pramāṇa-varttika) states:

*If unharmed by that with which it is incompatible,
Love naturally comes into the mind.*

And also:

*As you familiarize yourself with
The attitudes of compassion and the like,
Which increase from the seeds of prior, similar experiences,
How could these attitudes remain the same?*

In an absence of sincerity, using deceit and misrepresentation to get the service of others.

With respect to an activity done out of deceit and shiftiness but without the extraordinary attitude, the object is any other sentient being. What one does to him is to act with deceit and misrepresentation. Deceit and misrepresentation are cheating while measuring with a scale and so forth. As Gyalwa Yenjung says, it is, for instance, like sending somebody to Dölung in order to get them to go to Ragma [a place far past Dölung], and later asserting that they might as well go on to Rag-ma. Asaṅga's Compendium of Knowledge (Abhidharma-samuccaya) says that both deceit and misrepresentation arise because of attachment to goods and services and are similarly included in the category of either attachment or ignorance. He says that deceit is to pretend that you have a good quality that you do not have, and misrepresentation is hiding your fault. Hiding means using some method to conceal a fault.

Adopting the four light practices that strengthen bodhicitta

Forsaking consciously lying to any living being whatsoever, in jest or even for the sake of your life.⁷

The object of the first of the four light practices is any living being. What you do is forsake consciously lying even for the sake of your life or even in jest. In this way, you do not deceive special objects of your actions—your abbot, master, etc.—with lies.

Not deceiving but remaining sincere to all living beings.

⁷ The names of the four light practices are not listed in the Tibetan but are imbedded in the Tibetan text. They are listed as headings here for the sake of clarity.

The object of the second of the four light practices is all living beings. What you do is not deceive them but maintain your sincerity; that is, remain honest. This is the remedy for the fourth dark practice.

Developing the idea that all bodhisattvas are the Teacher.

The object of the third light practice is all bodhisattvas. What you do is develop the idea that they are similar to the Teacher, and voice in the four directions praise of their character. We cultivate some small likeness of virtue, but find that it has no signs of increasing and has many signs of decreasing; this is simply the outcome of our hating, despising, or reviling bodhisattvas and friends. Therefore, it is said that if you are capable of eliminating the first two faults as well as the reviling of bodhisattvas, all the harm related to persons mentioned in the Compendium of Trainings will be averted. This is based on the consideration that you do not know who is a bodhisattva, so, as stated in the Kashyapa Chapter,⁸ you should train in the pure perception of all living beings that comes from developing the idea that all beings are the Teacher. You should praise bodhisattvas when there are listeners on hand, but you incur no fault if you do not go out into the four directions praising them. This is the remedy for the third dark practice.

Causing the living beings that you are helping to mature to not want the modest vehicle but to adhere to perfect enlightenment.

The object of the fourth light practice is the living beings that you are helping to mature. What you do to them is cause them to not want the modest vehicle [Hīnayana] but to adhere to perfect enlightenment. Moreover, from your perspective it is necessary for them to connect to the Mahāyāna path, but if your disciples do not develop the intention for it, you incur no fault, because you were simply unable to accomplish it. This light practice eliminates the second dark practice [making others feel regret about something that is not regrettable], because if you want from the depths of your heart for others to set forth toward the culmination of all happiness, you will not do something that brings about unhappiness in others so as to make them feel some regret about

⁸ Kashyapa-parivarta: The idea that all beings are the Buddha means to respect all beings just as we respect the Buddha, for both are equal in the sense that both help us to attain buddhahood.

their virtuous activity. The Sutra Requested by a Lion (Siṃha-paripṛccha-sutra) also says:⁹

*If you cultivate bodhicitta in all lives
And do not abandon it even in dreams,
What is the point of mentioning
Not abandoning it when you are not sleeping?*

*The Buddha said: “Cause to enter into enlightenment
The beings in villages and cities
Or in any other place they may dwell.
Then you will not relinquish bodhicitta.”*

Furthermore, the Array of Qualities in Manjushri’s Buddha-realm says that if you have these four—destruction of pride, elimination of jealousy, elimination of stinginess, and joy when you see the prosperity of others—you do not relinquish your aspirational prayer [aspirational bodhicitta]. Once you cultivate bodhicitta, you will not be separated from this precious attitude even in future lives. This is stated clearly in the Cloud of Jewels Sutra (Ratna-megha-sutra) of the Ratna-kuta Collection:¹⁰

*If you train in bodhicitta in all activities and if you preface any cultivation
of virtue with bodhicitta...*

and in the King of Concentrations Sutra:

*As much as people frequently examine
So much will their minds engage
Whatever they are thinking over.*

and in other sutras as well.

⁹ The Arya-siṃha-paripṛccha-nama-Mahāyāna-sutra. The citation is found in Shikṣa-samuccaya.

¹⁰ Shikṣa-samuccaya citing the Manjusri-buddha-kṣetra-guṇa-vyuha-sutra, the Arya-ratna-megha-nama-Mahāyāna-sutra, and the Samadhi-raja-sutra. Geshe Yeshey Tapkay has reconstructed this section to follow the Shikṣa-samuccaya, P5336:199.3.6-8. He has considered as Tsong-kha-pa’s own words the sentence skye ba gzhan du’ang sems rin po che dang mi ’bral ba ni. The last two lines of the Samadhi-raja citation—de la gnas pa’i nram par rtog pa des/ de lta de lta de la sems gzhol ’gyur—were added for clarity.

c. Restoring weakened bodhicitta

If you transgress the trainings, excluding the two transgressions of giving up the aspiring mind and mentally giving up sentient beings, as long as you do not have bodhisattva vows, there is no downfall from the point of view of a bodhisattva. However, since it transgresses the trainings of the promise of intermediate virtue, it becomes faulty conduct and therefore should be confessed by means of the four powers.

4. The engaging bodhisattva vows

The Eighteen Root Downfalls

1. Praising oneself and belittling others
2. Not sharing with others one's wealth and Dharma
3. Not forgiving even when others apologize
4. Doubting and denying the doctrine of the Great Vehicle
5. Taking offerings intended for the Three Jewels
6. Abandoning the doctrine through sectarianism
7. Causing ordained people to disrobe
8. Committing one of the five crimes of immediate retribution
9. Holding perverted views
10. Destroying places such as towns
11. Teaching emptiness to the untrained
12. Discouraging others from seeking full enlightenment
13. Causing others to break the vows of Individual Liberation
14. Belittling those who follow the path of Individual Liberation
15. Proclaiming false realizations such as realization of emptiness
16. Accepting gifts that have been misappropriated from the belongings of the Three Jewels
17. Laying down harmful regulations and passing false judgement
18. Giving up the pledge of altruistic aspiration

The Four Conditions

(Except for vows 9 and 18, four conditions are required to completely transgress the root vows:)

- a. Breaking a vow but one does not care or thinks it doesn't matter. Seeing the action as negative makes the transgression incomplete.
- b. Not abandoning the thought to commit the action again. If one wishes never to commit the action again, the transgression is incomplete.
- c. Rejoicing or admiring oneself for committing the action. If one regrets the action, the transgression is incomplete.
- d. Not caring about the consequences of one's action for oneself or for others.

The Forty-six Branch Vows

(Vows 1-7 are in connection with the perfection of generosity)

1. Not making offerings every day to the Three Jewels
2. Acting out of desire because of discontent
3. Not paying respect to those senior in ordination and in taking the Bodhisattva vows
4. Not answering others' questions even though one is capable
5. Selfishly not accepting invitations due to pride, the wish to hurt other's feelings or anger or laziness
6. Not accepting others' gifts out of jealousy, anger or to hurt others etc
7. Not giving the Dharma to those who wish to learn

(Vows 8-16 are in connection with the perfection of morality)

8. Ignoring, insulting or treating with contempt someone who has committed any of the five heinous crimes or defiled their vows of Individual Liberation
9. Not observing the precepts of moral conduct because one wishes to ingratiate oneself with others
10. Complying with the minor precepts when the situation demands one's disregard of them for the better benefit of others
11. Not committing one of the seven negative actions of body, speech and mind when universal love and compassion deem it necessary in the particular instance
12. Accepting things acquired through one of the five wrong livelihoods: flattery, hinting, bribery, extortion or blackmail, and hypocrisy
13. Wasting time on frivolous actions such as carelessness, lack of pure morality, dancing, playing music just for fun, gossiping and also distracting others in meditation
14. Misconceiving that bodhisattvas do not attempt to attain liberation and failing to view delusions as things to be eliminated
15. Not living up to one's precepts
16. Not correcting others who are motivated by delusions

(Vows 17-20 are in connection with the perfection of patience)

17. Parting from the four noble disciplines
18. Neglecting those who are angry with you
19. Refusing to accept the apologies of others
20. Acting out of thoughts of anger

(Vows 21-23 are in connection with the perfection of perseverance)

21. Gathering disciples out of desire for respect and material gain
22. Wasting time and energy on trivial matters
23. Being addicted to frivolous talk

(Vows 24-26 are in connection with the perfection of concentration)

24. Not seeking the means to develop concentration
25. Not abandoning the 5 obscurations that hinder meditative stabilisations
26. Being addicted to the joy of meditative absorption
27. Abandoning the path of Theravada as unnecessary

(Vows 27-34 are in connection with the perfection of wisdom)

28. Exerting effort principally in another system of practice while neglecting the Mahāyāna teachings that one already has
29. Without good reason exerting effort to learn or practise the treaties of non-Buddhists which are not the proper object of one's endeavour
30. Beginning to favour and take delight in the treaties of non-Buddhists although studying them for a good reason
31. Abandoning any part of the Mahāyāna thinking it's uninteresting or unpleasant
32. Praising oneself and belittling others because of pride or anger
33. Not going to Dharma gatherings or teachings
34. Disparaging the spiritual master

(Vows 35-46 are in connection with the perfection of the morality of helping others)

35. Not helping those who are in need
36. Not helping people who are sick
37. Not alleviating the suffering of others
38. Not explaining what is the proper conduct to those who are reckless
39. Not benefiting in return those who have benefited oneself
40. Not relieving the sorrow of others
41. Not giving material possessions to those in need
42. Not working for the welfare of one's circle of friends, students etc
43. Not acting in accordance with the wishes of others if doing so does not bring harm to oneself or others
44. Not praising those who have good qualities
45. Not acting with whatever means are necessary according to the circumstances to stop someone who is doing harmful action
46. Not using miraculous powers, if one possesses this ability, in order to stop others from doing unwholesome actions



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