

Commitments of the Aspiring Bodhisattva Vows (lightly edited transcript)
by Ven. Thubten Chodron©, at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle. 7 Jun 93

Contents (click on heading to view text)

- Two types of bodhicitta
 - *Two types of aspiring bodhicitta*
- How to protect our altruism from degenerating in this life.
 1. *Remember the advantages of bodhicitta again and again.*
 2. *To strengthen one's bodhicitta, generate the thought to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings three times in the morning and three times in the evening.*
 3. *Do not give up working for sentient beings even when they are harmful.*
 4. *To enhance one's bodhicitta, accumulate both merit and wisdom continuously.*
- How to prevent losing the bodhicitta in future lives: Abandon the four black actions and practice the four white actions
 1. *Deceiving the Guru, abbot or other holy beings with lies.*
 2. *Causing others to regret virtuous actions that they have done.*
 3. *Abusing or criticizing bodhisattvas or the Mahayana.*
 4. *Not acting with a pure selfless wish but with pretension and deceit.*

We're talking about the bodhisattva vows and the bodhisattva trainings. On the major outline, the heading is "How to take the bodhisattva vows." The subheadings are "Taking the bodhisattva vows if you haven't taken them before" and "Having taken vows, how to keep them pure and prevent degeneration." Contained within the second subheading, are topics describing the commitments of the aspiring bodhisattva and the engaged bodhisattva.

Having done some meditation on the bodhicitta, having engaged in the two techniques for generating bodhicitta, and having had some experience of it doesn't mean you will have that experience one hundred percent every time you turn your mind toward it. It doesn't mean that your mind goes, zap! "Yes, I'm going to become a Buddha for the benefit of sentient beings!" But you have some experience, some feeling, something in your heart from it. This is when it's very helpful to take the aspiring bodhicitta.

Two types of bodhicitta

Now, we can have two types of bodhicitta: aspiring bodhicitta (sometimes called wishing bodhicitta) and engaged bodhicitta. Shantideva gave the analogy that aspiring bodhicitta is like aspiring to go to Delhi or Dharamsala. You have the wish, you aspire to go, but you're still sitting here in Seattle and you don't even know what airlines go to Delhi, how much it costs, or what you need to take, but you really aspire to go. That's like aspiring bodhicitta – you want to become a Buddha for the benefit of others. On the other hand, engaged bodhicitta is not only learning which airlines go to Delhi and the prices, but actually buying a ticket, packing your bags, and getting on a plane. You're taking active steps to get there. Engaged bodhicitta is affirming to yourself, "I want to become a Buddha for the benefit of others, and I'm actually going to do something about it."

Engaged bodhicitta involves taking the bodhisattva vows, which are a very good framework for actually helping us to practice the six far-reaching attitudes, which are like the airplane that takes us to Delhi.

So first, one generates the aspiring bodhicitta, then later on one undertakes engaged bodhicitta and takes the bodhisattva vows.

To take the aspiring bodhicitta, it is sufficient just to have respect and admiration for bodhicitta and some kind of feeling about it. It doesn't mean one has the actual bodhicitta one hundred percent, all the time. However, to take the bodhisattva vows, one needs a stronger experience and a much deeper aspiration to actually do the trainings and practices. It's like the difference between sitting here saying, "Yeah, I want to go to Dharamsala," and having the energy and the strength to really start investigating and getting yourself on the plane.

Aspiring and engaged bodhicitta both have the same motivation. They are both bodhicitta. They both

involve the desire to become a Buddha for the benefit of others. The difference is in the action a person takes. Although aspiring bodhicitta is very wonderful, someone is not going to become a Buddha with it alone. We must go beyond the aspiring bodhicitta. But the aspiring bodhicitta is something that's quite good and we should rejoice at it.

Two types of aspiring bodhicitta

When Gen Lamrimpa was here last time he was explaining that when His Holiness gives the bodhicitta, he gives it in different ways. He gives aspiring bodhicitta and then engaged bodhicitta. There are two different types of aspiring bodhicitta. There's aspiring bodhicitta without precepts, which is "mere aspiring bodhicitta," and there's aspiring bodhicitta with a precept, which is "special aspiring bodhicitta." Following the two types of aspiring bodhicitta, one undertakes the engaged bodhicitta.

The mere aspiring bodhicitta is having the thought, "I want to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of others." The special aspiring bodhicitta with the precept is thinking, "I want to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of others, and I'm not going to give my bodhicitta up even if it costs me my life." So the special bodhicitta is seeing this altruistic intention as something very, very precious and very essential. It is something very deep in your own heart, something you love, and you're not going to give it up no matter what happens in your life.

Special bodhicitta also involves practicing the four white actions and abandoning the four black actions. I want to find different terms for that because that sounds like racist terminology to me. Here it's a direct translation, but I don't think we should carry on that kind of terminology.

There are ceremonies for generating the aspiring bodhicitta and the engaged bodhicitta. You can generate them on your own as well, but the ceremony, when you do it in front of your guru, in front of the Triple Gem, adds much more force to what you're doing, especially if you take the pledges, or you take the vows. The first time you take the pledges or vows you have to take it in front of a teacher. Following that first time, to renew your bodhisattva vows, you can do it simply with the visualization of the merit field, and take it.

There are two practices that are recommended:

- 1) To protect his or her bodhicitta, the altruistic intention, from degenerating in this lifetime.
- 2) To prevent the altruistic intention from degenerating in future lifetimes.

These are very, very practical guidelines. I think it pays for us to listen and try to practice as much as possible.

How to protect our altruism from degenerating in this life.

Once a person has generated the bodhicitta and wants to lead sentient beings to enlightenment, that's a pretty strong feeling. It's a worthwhile alteration in anyone's life. Doing this, a person can really put his or her energy, and life's purpose, in a totally different direction. It's like finally succeeding, making life very deeply meaningful. But it's not sufficient just to do that. One must protect it because our minds are so wishy-washy and so easily lose energy—just pooping out, wanting to sit in front of the TV and eat chocolate ice-cream.

We really have to keep the mind going and nurture the bodhicitta. That's why in our dedication prayer, we always say, "May the precious bodhi mind not yet born arise and grow; May that born have no decline, but increase forever more." This acknowledges that it's not sufficient just to have that feeling. We really need to nurture it and take care of it. It's not sufficient just to have your baby, you've got to take care of it so it grows into an adult.

1. Remember the advantages of bodhicitta again and again.

Remember at the beginning of this whole section, when we talked about bodhicitta, we went through the advantages of it? Remember, it helps you to purify your negative karma very quickly. It helps you to gain a vast collection of positive potential quickly. It protects you from spirit harms. You get the title "The Child of the Buddha." Even the Buddhas themselves show you honor and respect. You gain all the realizations quickly. You quickly become a Buddha. It's a good antidote to depression, despair, and

hopelessness. We talked about it at quite some length at the beginning. We need to remember these advantages again and again and again. The purpose of doing this is if you think about the advantages of bodhicitta, you will become enthusiastic about it. If you're enthusiastic about it, it's not going to degenerate during this lifetime.

Think about getting married to somebody. If you think about your spouse's good qualities again and again and again, you stay happy and want to stay married. But if you think, "Oh, it's sufficient I get married and that's it," then after a while, the mind gets fickle and changes and pretty soon, everything is falling apart. So it's really important with bodhicitta to think of its advantages and good qualities, so that you remain enthusiastic. Doing this will keep bodhicitta fresh, vibrant, and meaningful for you.

2. To strengthen one's bodhicitta, generate the thought to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings three times in the morning and three times in the evening.

The following recitation is meant to strengthen one's bodhicitta, and make it strong and vibrant, so it's highly recommended. When we get up in the morning, the first thing we should do is to generate the bodhicitta. When you get up in the morning, think, "I'm not going to harm others, I'm going to benefit them as much as possible. I'm going to do everything today with the intention to become a Buddha for the benefit of others." In a more technical way, in a fuller way, you then do the prayer of refuge and bodhicitta: "I take refuge until I am enlightened in the Buddhas, the Dharma and the Sangha. By the positive potential I create..." You do that three times in the morning and three times in the evening. That helps remind you of the altruistic intention. It makes it stronger and increases it in your mind.

Thinking about the bodhicitta is like planting seeds in the ground. The more seeds you plant, the more flowers will grow, and the fuller the field is going to be. Just repeating the prayer over and over leaves that imprint in your mind. So it's very important. Sometimes in our Dharma practice, we feel like, "I'm doing these prayers. It's all just words. I'm not getting anything out of it." Ever felt like that? No, I'm sure you haven't! You people are all just very vibrant and dedicated! It's only *me* that feels that! [laughter] So I'm the worst one! [laughter]

Recognizing that even if you're stuck in your practice in some way, at least you can still know something is going in at some level. Because you can see what's happening like when you watch TV. Have you ever dreamt about a program or some minor thing that happens during the day? This happens because those events put a powerful seed in your mind. Similarly, repeating the above prayer, like a TV program, plants a seed in your mind even though we don't think it does very much. Doing this, the bodhicitta is nurtured, and grows. So, you keep doing the prayers, keep on doing what you're doing, and something will happen.

3. Do not give up working for sentient beings even when they are harmful.

Working for sentient beings, even when they are harmful, is very difficult. It's so easy, when somebody is harmful, to not work for that person. I think sometimes, what's even more difficult, is when we're very close to somebody or we have a lot of hopes in somebody, and they betray our trust or they don't appreciate our kindness. I sometimes think this is one of the most difficult situations, rather than somebody who you meet from the very beginning, whom you like very much. Being patient with that person is often easier than being patient with somebody whom you really counted on, but harmed you afterwards.

We have to be very patient in all these situations, because it's so tempting when we receive harm, to say "Chuck it! There're all these other sentient beings out there, I don't need to break my neck over this guy. Forget him!" But in reality when we generate bodhicitta, it's for all the sentient beings, so the moment we exclude one, we've lost our bodhicitta.

That's why when I teach the Four Immeasurables, I always say the important word is "all." It's the same case with bodhicitta. It's really important to try and keep a handle on our temper. This demarcation of actually abandoning the bodhicitta can be seen when either we say "Forget it!" with all the sentient beings, because bodhicitta is too difficult, or we say, in regards to one sentient being, "This guy is just too much of a jerk! I'm never going to lead this one to enlightenment! I don't want to."

In order not to fall into that pitfall of abandoning the bodhicitta, it's really important not to give up working for others even when they harm us. It's for this reason that in Shantideva's text, [A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life](#), chapter six, a nice thick chapter, is the chapter on patience.

[Audience:] What can we do about doubting our ability to develop bodhicitta?

A doubt is different from a clear conclusion. Waffling can definitely lead you to losing your bodhicitta. If you waffle too much, you can start to have the deluded doubt that takes you over the edge. But I think it is natural sometimes to think, "Wow! I'm supposed to lead *all* sentient beings to enlightenment; that sounds daunting!" And you can feel sometimes like, "How am I ever going to do this?" and have some doubt. So I think it's really good to be mindful when you have that doubt, and not to nurture the doubt. But be aware that the Buddha said even flies can become Buddhas, can become enlightened. So if it's possible for a fly to become a bodhisattva, and to work for the benefit of all sentient beings, then it is possible for us to do it as well. So we should regain our self-confidence when this happens. Instead of nurturing the doubt, try to apply an antidote.

It can also be helpful, when we have doubt, to remember that the Buddha wasn't always a Buddha. The Buddha was once screwed up (excuse me! [laughter]) and confused like us. The Buddha was actually able to transform his mind, do the practice, and get the results. So it is possible to do that the way the Buddha did. That should reinvigorate us, giving us more confidence. Abandoning bodhicitta, however, is when you have not just doubt, but a clear conclusion: "I'm not working for sentient beings. This is it!"

[Audience:] If we're working for bodhicitta, can we still be angry at someone?

Just being angry at somebody is different from giving up the bodhicitta. Recognize the difference between, "I'm really ticked off at somebody, but I know I'm going to get over it eventually and I really am, underneath it all, working to become enlightened because I want to lead him or her to enlightenment," and, "I'm giving up on this guy."

[Audience: Inaudible]

It's good just to recognize "I'm angry. I'm upset. And I'm really feeling this. But it's also impermanent and I don't need to make any lasting decisions while I'm angry. I can wait until I've calmed down. I can apply the techniques and transform the anger. So I'm not going to make any big decisions while I'm angry." Then you take refuge. "HELP Tara!!" All the prayers, they're written so nicely and politely, but I think sometimes we can just go, "HELP!!!"

4. To enhance one's bodhicitta, accumulate both merit and wisdom continuously.

Remember I was talking about the two collections or the two accumulations? We have to accumulate positive potential. We have to accumulate wisdom. They're sometimes said to be the two sides of the path. The method side is composed of accumulating positive potential and cultivating bodhicitta, compassion, and the determination to be free. The wisdom side is meditating on emptiness and so on. They often say those are like the two wings of a bird that it needs to fly. In order to keep our bodhicitta going, we must try to accumulate positive potential and wisdom. In addition, we must also purify.

Just within these four points on how to keep our altruism from degenerating in this lifetime, there's a whole practice isn't there? It describes how to do a whole, full Dharma practice.

How to prevent losing the bodhicitta in future lives: Abandon the four black actions and practice the four white actions

When we've taken the commitment of special aspiring bodhicitta, and we've said, "I aspire to become a Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings and I'm not going to give it up even at the cost of my life," in order to keep that from degenerating in our future lives, we practice four constructive actions and we abandon four destructive actions. It's not sufficient to keep the altruism from degenerating in this lifetime; we have to protect it for future lifetimes. If we do okay in this lifetime but abandon it in the next lifetime, then we're back where we started. It's good to keep on going continuously, because bodhicitta is something we have to develop and practice continuously, over many, many lifetimes.

1. Deceiving the Guru, abbot or other holy beings with lies.

We've already decided much earlier on the path not to lie. But why is this one being pointed out specifically here at this point? If we want to develop bodhicitta and develop our bodhisattva practices,

we have to have a really honest relationship with our spiritual teacher and with other holy beings and the bodhisattvas and abbots. If we try to deceive them with lies, if we're dishonest, it's very difficult for them to guide us. And if they don't guide us, then our practice falls apart.

Also, because we're trying to become like them, if we lie to them, then again it defeats our whole purpose. Lying sets up an obstacle in our own practice. So that's why it's pointed out here specifically to abandon deceiving our spiritual teacher, the abbot (if you live in a monastery), and other holy beings with lies.

Antidote

The antidote to this is the first of the four constructive actions, namely: to *abandon deliberately deceiving and lying to spiritual teachers, abbots and so forth*. So just tell the truth. Very simple! Very difficult!

2. Causing others to regret virtuous actions that they have done.

This is a case where somebody has done something virtuous, maybe the person has made an offering, or begun to practice some of the bodhisattva's actions, and you discourage the person and make the person regret it and turn away from it.

This is very harmful, because if we ourselves are trying to lead other beings to enlightenment, then we should be encouraging them to act constructively and encouraging them in the Mahayana Path. By discouraging them, we're acting completely opposite to the bodhicitta because we're saying, "I want to become a Buddha for the benefit of others, to lead them to enlightenment," but what we're doing is leading other beings further away from enlightenment by making them regret their positive actions. When somebody regrets their positive actions, the positive karma they accumulated is lost. So somebody might have accumulated a whole lot of really good karma, making offerings or doing some kind of practice, generating bodhicitta, and then if they lose that, all that good karma is destroyed. What we've done is turn people away, made them further from enlightenment rather than bringing them closer to it.

Again this is something to be really sensitive to, because sometimes out of our own selfish interest, we do discourage people from doing virtuous things. For example, if somebody wants to go on a meditation retreat, and we say, "Oh, don't go on a retreat. I really need you around the house. We haven't spent enough time together, let's have a good time. Let's go to the movies. Don't go to that retreat. You can do that later."

It's really easy to discourage people from doing virtuous things. Another example might be when somebody makes an offering to a charity, or to a temple, or something, and you say, "What? You offered \$500? You offered \$1,000 to this charity? What's happened? How are we going to live? The family needs the money. What are you doing, giving this money away to other people?" Making somebody really regret an offering.

[Audience:] What if someone is using the Dharma to avoid looking at his or her own issues?

We have to ask ourselves, "Is that person doing something out of a good motivation and in a responsible way, or are they just being reckless and careless and inconsiderate and insensitive?" We have to feel our way through what's going on there. Maybe we could even ask the person some questions and get them to look at what they're doing.

But I agree with you because I've seen it happen sometimes. People run from one Dharma thing to the other Dharma thing, and sometimes I get the feeling they're not taking the Dharma and looking at their own mind and working out their problems and purifying. They're just keeping busy in order to not look at their confusion, and that happens.

You can bring somebody back to balance without making them regret the positive things they have done. The thing here is to not make people regret something positive. Even if somebody is behaving irresponsibly, you don't want to make them regret that they went to the retreat. You don't want to say, "Look, all that Buddhism stuff is junk, you're just running away from your issues. You shouldn't be talking about Buddhism. You should be in therapy. You're just so irresponsible and blah, blah, blah. And don't give your money away. . ." You don't want to do that. But if you say, "It's very good what you're doing. Buddhism is great. Making offerings is great. Going to retreats is great. And what will

help you do it even better, is if you can help get other things in your life in balance, so that when you go to a retreat, you're going with a clear motivation and not to avoid other things in your life." So you're encouraging them in the Dharma. You're not juxtaposing their life in the Dharma. You're putting the two in the same direction, and saying that to do the Dharma better, you also have to look at this stuff and get your act together, not that to get your act together, you have to abandon the Dharma.

[Audience:] What kind of virtuous actions should we encourage?

Any kind of virtuous action should be encouraged. If somebody helps a little old lady cross the street, and you say, "Why in the world did you do that? You should be helping *me* to cross the street!" [laughter] Virtue doesn't just mean externally religious things. It's any kind of positive action.

Antidote

The antidote to discouraging virtuous actions is the fourth of the constructive actions, which is to *assume responsibility oneself to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment*. It's taking upon ourselves the responsibility to lead them to enlightenment and, therefore, to encourage them in the Dharma, to encourage them in all the virtuous actions they can possibly do. That's the way to prevent and to heal this second destructive action of making others regret positive actions.

3. Abusing or criticizing bodhisattvas or the Mahayana.

Abusing or criticizing bodhisattvas or the Mahayana is so harmful. The bodhisattvas are working for the benefit of all sentient beings, so if we interfere with a bodhisattva's good deeds, we're really interfering with what's for the benefit of others. If we abuse and criticize a bodhisattva, we're disparaging the good he or she is doing for all the sentient beings; and our own bodhicitta and altruism will suffer as a result of it. That's not to say, "Don't criticize bodhisattvas because you're not supposed to." It's really saying that if we're trying to become a bodhisattva and do those kinds of deeds that we're criticizing, then it's only impairing us from getting there, because we're not respecting what we want to become. If we don't respect what we want to become, we're not going to become it.

The lamas often teach, when they teach this point, that since we don't know who is a bodhisattva and who isn't, we shouldn't criticize anybody. That is very good advice. The difficulty comes—and I'm saying this because it got brought up at the Teacher's Conference and it has been a sticky point for me for a long time—when the question arose for me: OK, you don't know who's a Buddha and who's a bodhisattva, so don't criticize anybody, and don't interfere with people's actions. Well, does that mean if I see John cheating Harry, that I shouldn't criticize John for doing it? That I shouldn't open it up and say, "Harry, John's cheating you," because maybe John is a bodhisattva? And if I criticize, I'm going to create all this negative karma and impede my own bodhicitta? Or maybe if I see two people on the street, and they're having a fight, and one guy's beating up the other one, I shouldn't intervene, because maybe one is a Buddha and he's just using these fierce actions to subdue the mind of somebody else? So does that mean I shouldn't intervene in that kind of situation?

I'm taking what the lamas tell us and carrying it to an extreme, and posing that question. It came up in the Teachers' Conference, and His Holiness said this great thing. He said, "In the teachings, we talk about not criticizing anybody because we don't know who's a bodhisattva and who isn't. So from that point of view, Mao Tse Dong could be a bodhisattva and I shouldn't criticize. So from that point of view, you don't criticize Mao Tse Dong. But," he said, "from the point of view of Tibetan independence and Tibetan religion, I have to criticize Mao Tse Dong, because he destroyed the country and he's threatening the existence of the Dharma."

So what His Holiness did, is he made this incredible distinction between what you hold in your mind, and how you act in the world. So in your mind, you might hold Mao Tse Dong as a bodhisattva, and so you don't disrespect Mao Tse Dong from the depth of your mind, but from the point of view of the actions, and how those actions are manifesting in the world and the effect they're having, you point out those actions and you criticize. So this whole thing has to be tempered.

[Audience:] Can you clarify or give us another example of the distinction His Holiness made?

You criticize the actions and not the person, but you don't have to be afraid to name the person doing the actions too, especially if you're doing it with a positive motivation. We heard these teachings—don't criticize anybody, because we don't know who's a bodhisattva—then maybe you go see Lama Yeshe

(this is in the early days when I used to live in the East) and Lama says, "Oh, I'm thinking of sending so and so to do this job at a Dharma center. What do you think of this person? Do you think they'll do a good job?" Now what do you do? Do you tell Lama the truth? Or do you say, "Well, maybe this person is a bodhisattva, so I won't tell Lama their mistakes. But Lama is asking me, but if I say it, maybe I'm breaking this..." It really comes down very much to your motivation, because if you have to avoid, "Oh, Lama asks me what I think of it, and now it's my turn, I can let out all my hostility and really get even." That's a really horrible motivation that would definitely be breaking this. If, on the other hand, the guy really has made some mistakes, and you have some doubts about his effectiveness in doing a certain job, then with a kind attitude, wanting to protect everybody in a potentially harmful situation, then it's OK to say that you have observed this person doing this and that in the past, and so you don't know in the future how predictable his actions will be. It really hinges on your motivation. But what I wanted to get clear, is that there has to be some commentary to this.

[Audience:] So we have to make sure and check that we're not criticizing from self-cherishing?

Right. That's a very good point. We have to see when we're criticizing an action, or something that happened, we have to check if it was really so bad, or if it's just that our pride was hurt because we wanted things done differently and they didn't agree with our opinion. That's a very good point.

[In response to audience:] And you could always say, "It appears to me," or "It seems to me that what this person is doing is harmful," instead of "This person is doing something harmful."

[In response to audience:] I can tell that too. Like whoever I'm with, I'm just looking for them to do something wrong. When this happens, I know I had better do retreat real quick. [laughter] It's like this is an emergency situation. Can I make it until retreat time? [laughter]

Antidote

And to counteract that is the third constructive action, which is to *generate the recognition of bodhisattvas as our teacher and to praise them*. That's really helpful. When we recognize other people's good qualities, it doesn't mean that we have to say, "That guy is a bodhisattva and I recognize his good qualities and praises." It doesn't mean that. It means we should praise people when we see any kind of good qualities in them, or when they seem to be good models for us. We should praise their actions and take them as a guide for ourselves. Again, that doesn't mean idolizing them. It doesn't mean putting them up on a pedestal and thinking that they are going to do everything perfectly. After all what does 'perfect' mean? It means they do what we want them to do when we want them to do it.

So we're not saying to idolize anybody. We're saying to really recognize people's good qualities, respect them, and praise them. If we can train our mind to do that, then instead of having this mind, like you were just saying, that's looking for the faults, it's training the mind that's looking for the good qualities. And the more we can see good qualities and respect them, the more we're opening ourselves to develop those same good qualities. That's why respect is a really important thing, and why giving praise to others is an important thing. Sometimes, people say, "Wait a minute. Why should I give praise? Isn't that increasing somebody else's ego?" That's not the point. The point is, that it's very helpful for us to learn to give praise. Because it is very easy to give criticism and it's a training to give praise.

To relate to this conference I just went to in Portland, one of the things we talked about was making "I" statements. These are ways of communicating information that aren't just assertive and pointing out when something has gone wrong, but also when you give praise, to use nice statements. In other words, if somebody did something that you really admire, that really helped you, instead of saying, "Oh, you're marvelous!" or "Thank you so much, you're just terrific!" That doesn't give anybody much information. This is especially so when you're bringing up kids, to say "Oh, you're good." What does that mean to a kid? That doesn't give us any information to tell us we're good or that we're marvelous. It doesn't let a person know what he or she did and how it influenced you or how you feel about it. It's just a vague statement of something positive. So the "I" statements are really good when you're giving praise. For example: "When I was sick and you brought me vegetarian chicken soup, I felt happy because I felt cared for." Something along that line is good. [laughter] You don't like vegetarian chicken soup? [laughter] What I'm getting at is when you use that kind of statement, you're telling people very specifically what the behavior was. You're telling them specifically how you felt and why you felt that way instead of just saying, "Oh, you're such a good friend!"

This is similar with children. “When Johnny slugged you and you didn’t slug him back, you backed off and let him cool down a little bit, I felt really happy because it showed me that you were very grown up.” You are telling the kid very specifically the kind of behavior that was beneficial, how it affected you, and why you liked it. “I felt very happy because then I knew I could trust you not to get into fights and hurt yourself and others.”

So when you praise others, really take time to do it well. This applies not only to praising others to their face, but talking about them in a good way. And this again, sometimes, is really a training to do, to get yourself to talk nicely about other people. Sometimes, even when they are people that you don’t particularly like who have done something that is really good, to overcome that part of us that doesn’t want to acknowledge that there’s anything good about this guy, it’s really beneficial to use praise in order to train the mind. Even though a person may have done 10,000 things we don’t like, to really point out the one thing that has been helpful, and not only to point it out to that person, but point it out to other people as well. This is very important.

[Audience:] Why does it feel so good to thrash somebody we don’t like?

I think one hypothesis is that we feel if we can make everybody else look bad, it must mean that we’re good. It’s this illogical logic that we use. I remember Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey saying to us (he was talking about idle talk), “You get together with your friend, and you thrash this one, thrash this one, thrash this one... and at the end of your conversation, your conclusion is that you’re the two best people in the world!” [laughter] I think it’s because sometimes we’re trying to get to that conclusion, but it’s the wrong way to do it.

4. Not acting with a pure selfless wish but with pretension and deceit.

Acting with pretension and deceit is like doing the right thing for the wrong reason. Not acting out of a pure wish means doing something not because you care about somebody, but because you want them to like you, because you want other people to look up to you, because you want to have a good reputation, because you want other people to think you’re generous, because you want people to think you’re wise, because you want approval. This is a big one for us. Instead of acting out of a genuine wish to benefit somebody, we do something kind basically because we want approval, because we’re attached to approval and praise. This can often lead us to acting very hypocritically—acting one way and thinking another way.

When we go through the mental factors, we talk about pretension and deceit. Pretension is pretending that you don’t have the negative qualities that you do have—really covering them up. And deceit is pretending you have positive qualities you don’t have. It’s putting on acts, isn’t it? The problem is that we’ve been taught a lot in our society that doing this is what you’re supposed to do to be polite; even if you don’t like that person, you do something nice for them. I’m not saying that if you don’t like that person, go beat them up. What I’m saying is, try and change your motivation so that you can actually be nice from a kind heart.

[Audience:] Does contravening these precepts have the same effect as breaking a vow?

These are trainings and advice for precepts. It’s not like breaking vows. They’re definite guidelines, advice and precepts. When you do counteract them, they have negative results. But it’s different from the bodhisattva vows.

Antidote

The antidote to this is the second of the four constructive ones, which is to *be straightforward without pretension or deceit*. This means being honest and clear with people, and if we don’t have a good motivation, then we must try and cultivate one. Being straightforward, without pretension and deceit doesn’t mean blowing up when somebody ticks you off and thinking, “I’m being straightforward with you. I’m not going to cover my anger and pretend that I’m not angry! You’re a jerk!” It’s not that. You can say to somebody, “Look, I’m having a big problem with my anger now and I need to cool off a bit.” That’s fine. But try to cultivate a good motivation when we’re acting towards people so that we act sincerely.

These are really important and they can really put a whole framework on our whole practice. This is the

whole framework of aspiring bodhicitta and how to protect and generate it. It's good to train in these things before we take the bodhisattva vows. Like I said, you can generate it in your practice and start following these guidelines, and then sometime, you can do the aspiring bodhicitta ceremony, e.g. when His Holiness comes, when he gives the Chenrezig initiation, he'll definitely be doing the aspiring bodhicitta during that time. So you can take it in the form of a ceremony at that time, and then practicing your aspiring bodhicitta, getting it really strong, and then generating the engaged bodhicitta and really wishing to engage in the practices of the bodhisattva. At that point, you start seriously practicing the six perfections, the six far-reaching attitudes, and you also take the bodhisattva vows, because the bodhisattva vows provide the framework for practicing the six far-reaching attitudes.

In contrast to pratimoksha vows like the monks' and nuns' vows, and the tantric vows, where you're not supposed to know what the vows are before you take them, you can know and study the bodhisattva vows before you take them. We'll start the bodhisattva vows next session. There are 18 root and 46 auxiliary bodhisattva vows. It's really interesting to study these because it gives you a much clearer concept of how to train your mind as a bodhisattva trains his or her own mind.

This teaching is based on the *Lamrim* or *The Gradual Path to Enlightenment*. Please refer to the following web-page for its outline and other transcripts or to listen to the audio recording of these talks: <http://www.thubtenchodron.org/GradualPathToEnlightenment/outline.html>