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Review

We've been going through the bodhisattva vows, so just to review the four that we did in the last session.

The first one is to abandon praising ourselves or belittling others out of attachment to receiving material offerings, praise, respect.

The second one - not giving material aid, or not sharing the Dharma with people who ask sincerely and who really need it, because of miserliness.

The third one - when others come and apologize to us for harms they have done, mistakes they have made, either not accepting their apology and not forgiving them, or retaliating instead, really dumping on them.

And then the fourth one – abandoning the Mahayana by saying the Mahayana texts are not the word of the Buddha or teaching what appears to be the Dharma but isn't. The first part of this is arrived at by, maybe hearing the Mahayana teachings and thinking, "Oh! The bodhisattva path is too hard! The six perfections are too much and I can't do that. It makes me shake too much to even contemplate having to change that much. The Buddha must not have really meant that. The Buddha didn't really mean to cherish others more than themselves. The Buddha really didn't mean to be that generous. All that stuff that they say the Buddha said, he didn't really say." You reject or abandon the Mahayana teachings, and then this leads to the second part, which is then making up your own teaching and passing it off as the Dharma. When what the Buddha said doesn't correspond with what our ego likes, we reject it, and we start teaching and believing what our ego likes.

The whole thing about the Dharma is that it definitely pushes our buttons. Sometimes we really don't like this, and so rather than look at our buttons and have the courage to work through the things that hearing the teachings bring up, we just reject it. This is quite different from having a good debate questioning and enquiring. That's a whole different ballgame. Don't confuse them.

Root Vow 5: (To Abandon) Taking things belonging to a) Buddha, b) Dharma or c) Sangha.

In this case, when we talk about the Buddha, we're talking about the fully enlightened being, or the different images that represent him, or her. When we talk about the Dharma, we're talking about the realizations of the path or the scriptures that represent them. When we're talking about the Sangha, we're talking about any single being who has full direct realization of emptiness on the path of seeing or alternatively, a group of four fully ordained monks and nuns. This vow is referring to stealing from any of those.

You might think "How can anybody possibly do that?" Well again, it's very easy, there are all these nice offerings on the altar and don't you just feel like having a banana now? [laughter] I mean the Buddha won't miss it. The greedy mind that takes things off the altar because it wants it. Or things that have been offered in good faith to the monastic community or to a shrine, we take it for our own personal use, our own personal welfare.

Now, somebody may offer cloth to make covers for the sutras and we say, "Well actually, that cloth, I could make a shirt out of it. Much more practical. I need a shirt. The scriptures, they don't need a shirt." We misappropriate things. We steal from the Triple Gem. We need to be careful of not taking the property of the monastic community. You go and stay in a temple or monastery, and they loan you a blanket or a pillow or something when you stay there, and then when you leave, you think, "Well, they have so many blankets and pillows and I really need these," and take it. We should not take as our own, things that have been offered to the monastic community, to the temple.

[Audience:] What about clearing the Buddha's shrine?

With the attitude that we're the caretaker for the Buddha's shrine, we take the offerings away simply because we're trying to keep it neat and clean and tidy. I find it also helpful, almost saying to the Buddha, "I'm taking these things off now, is that okay?" Just to make sure about our motivation for it.

Root Vow 6: (To Abandon) Abandoning the Holy Dharma by saying that texts which teach the three vehicles are not the Buddha's word.

The three vehicles are the Hearer's vehicle, the Solitary Realizer's vehicle – these both lead to nirvana – and the bodhisattva vehicle. These are three paths of training. Our mind doesn't like any of the sutras that explain these paths of training leading to nirvana, leading to full enlightenment, and we say it's not the Buddha's word. We don't like what it says as it pushes our buttons, so we abandon it and we say the Buddha didn't teach it.

[Audience:] Did you say "Hearers"?

Yes. They're called Hearers because they listen to the teachings and then teach them to others.

Things that the Buddha did talk about which are for our benefit to practice, we just say, "Well, actually the Buddha didn't teach those, and I don't need to practice them." You can see this happening. We hear people saying, "Well actually ethics isn't so important. We don't really need to do that. Right livelihood isn't so important, this is another culture." It is quite easy to do these things. That doesn't mean that what right livelihood meant 2500 years ago, we can practice in a literal way right now. We can develop our own Western livelihood. But just saying, "Right livelihood doesn't matter, ciao, goodbye," then it's abandoning the Dharma.

[From 28 Jul 93 teaching]

The fourth vow refers specifically to the Mahayana, saying, "Oh, the Buddha didn't teach the Mahayana teachings." This sixth vow is much more general. It's any of the Buddha's teachings, whether it's the teachings of the Hearer vehicle, the Solitary Realizer vehicle or the Bodhisattva vehicle. We say that because the teachings don't feel comfortable to us. The teachings don't make our ego feel good. They seem too difficult. We throw them out the window by saying that the Buddha didn't teach them, that there is no need to practice them.

Sometimes it is difficult to hear teachings. They press every button that we have. When this happens, instead of just throwing it out, it is helpful to do some research, "Am I listening to it through my Christian ears and projecting another meaning onto it that isn't there?" We may want to ask questions to figure out what this teaching is about. To ask ourselves, "Is this teaching culturally influenced?" If it is something that is culturally influenced, then it might be something that is interpretable for our situation. In this case, it's not a question of throwing the teaching out, but a question of interpreting it to apply to our situation more effectively.

Or does the teaching make us feel overwhelmed because we can't do it now? "Well, that's okay. I don't have to do everything perfect right now. The path is going to take me a few lifetimes and even a few eons. It is okay. There is some time to habituate with this and train like that. Some day or another, I will be able to do this."

What I am saying is that instead of fighting the teachings, getting into defensive mode and wanting to attack, we should do some exploration to see what is going on in our mind.

Root Vow 7: (To Abandon) With anger:

**a) depriving ordained ones of their robes, beating and imprisoning them, or
b) causing them to lose their ordination even if they have impure morality, for example, by saying that being ordained is useless.**

The seventh one refers to disrobing ordained people. This depends a lot on your motivation. With anger, with a nasty, evil, bad motivation, you beat somebody who's ordained or you rob something from them or you put them in prison, or you kick them out of the monastery, even if they've broken their vows, with a nasty motivation and a harmful intention. You deprive them of their robes. These kinds of things.

One example that one teacher used was, let's say, somebody breaks one of their four root monastic vows. Due to that, they're no longer a monastic. If you just forcefully kick, fling them out of the monastery, then that would be transgressing this vow. What you have to do is gently encourage them to change their clothes and go back to lay life, rather than just having an angry, harmful intention towards somebody. That's one way of breaking this one.

The second way is causing somebody to lose their ordination, making situations such that people break their ordination. For example, when the communists invaded Tibet, they went into the monasteries and nunneries and they made the monks and nuns have sex together in public. Or they made the monastic people go out and kill animals. These kinds of things, forcing people to break their monastic vows, is harmful. Or making somebody give up their monastic vows by saying it is useless being ordained, better be a lay person. That kind of thing.

[Audience:] What are the four root monastic vows?

They are the same as four of the first five (lay) precepts: not killing – so here to break it completely for the monastic, is killing a human being; not stealing something that you would be imprisoned for in the society; for the monastic, instead of unwise sexual behavior, it's a celibacy vow, avoiding intercourse; and then lying about one's spiritual attainments.

Root Vow 8: (To Abandon) Committing any of the five extremely negative actions:

**a) killing one's mother,
b) killing one's father,
c) killing an arhat,
d) intentionally drawing blood from a Buddha or
e) causing schism in the Sangha community by supporting and spreading sectarian views.**

These are sometimes called the five heinous crimes or another translation is the five acts of immediate retribution. This was mentioned when we went over the qualities of a precious human life previously. One of the reasons we have a precious human life is that we haven't done any of these heinous actions. The bodhisattva vows are again emphasizing not to do these because they're really negative and opposing the bodhisattva practice.

The five are killing one's mother; killing one's father; killing an arhat, a liberated being; intentionally drawing blood from the Buddha – Buddha's cousin, Devadatta did that; causing schism within the Sangha community, in other words, within the monastic community, making them fight and split into two groups, so that the monastic community gets hostile. That's really negative for the Dharma, for everybody practicing it.

Root Vow 9: (To Abandon) Holding distorted views (which are contrary to the teachings of Buddha, such as denying the existence of the Three Jewels or the law of cause and effect, etc.)

The ninth one refers to holding wrong views, or holding distorted views. This is very similar to the last one of the ten negative or destructive actions – wrong or distorted views. It doesn't mean wrong political views like liking George Bush [laughter]. It doesn't mean those kinds of views. It's talking about different philosophical views, that if you, with a tenacious, stubborn mind, full of misconceptions that doesn't want to listen to anything else, hold on to a wrong view such as saying, "Absolutely positively, there's no past or future lives, forget it!" Or "There is no such thing as a Buddha. It is impossible to become a Buddha. Human beings are innately evil. They are innately sinful and selfish, impossible to become a Buddha." It is denying the existence of enlightenment, denying the existence of the Triple Gem, "There is no such thing as the Buddha. There is no path to enlightenment. There are no beings who've seen reality. Emptiness is just a fraud." Stubborn wrong views where one just gets entrenched in them and doesn't want to listen to anything else.

Having doubts

This is very different from having doubts because when we come into the Dharma, we have lots of doubts. We doubt rebirth. We doubt Buddhahood. We doubt enlightenment. One way of looking at it is, doubt is a step in the right direction. Maybe before we came into the Dharma, we have definite wrong views. When we come into Dharma, we begin to have some doubts and though they're still inclined towards the negative things, it is something better. And then, if we work on the doubts, maybe we get to an equal doubt, a balanced doubt, and then maybe a kind of doubt that is inclined towards believing in reincarnation, the existence of the Triple Gem. We're still not sure. We're questioning, we're searching, we're asking people questions, we're debating about it. And then through that we get some understanding, we get a correct assumption and then we get some inferential understanding. In this way, our belief becomes clear. Instead of just following the negative doubt and making it into a wrong conclusion, we ask, we debate, we discuss, and then our own understanding increases.

Having doubts is very different from having wrong views. But at the same time we have to be careful that our doubts don't degenerate into wrong views. The reason that having wrong views is harmful is not because then you're a bad Buddhist, "You don't believe in your Buddha's catechism, you don't believe in rebirth, that's a sin, tsk, tsk, tsk." It's not like that. It is more because, for example, if we don't believe in the existence of past and future lives, then we're not going to take care of karma. If we don't take care of karma, who does it harm? If we deny the existence of the Triple Gem, that doesn't bother the Buddha. Buddha doesn't care from his side or her side, but if we deny the existence of the Triple Gem, the existence of enlightenment, then we are putting ourselves in chains because we are condemning ourselves to some hopeless cynical attitude of life without any kind of openness to progression and change and transformation. Again, who does that view harm? It is not a question of being a good Buddhist or a bad Buddhist. It is that having these views turns us away from the path to happiness, when happiness is what we want.

Root Vow 10: (To Abandon) Destroying a a) town, b) village, c) city or d) large area by means such as fire, bombs, pollution or black magic.

The tenth one refers to destroying any of these - a town, a village, a city or large area like a forest or a meadow, by means such as fire, bombs, pollution or black magic. This is something that is actually covered under the first precept of not killing, isn't it? But, here in the bodhisattva vows, it emphasizes the harmfulness of these things in the context of the bodhisattva practice because the whole idea of the bodhisattva practice is to make our lives beneficial to others. When we destroy towns or living places, or meadows or forests by arson, or bombs or things like this, then so many other beings get hurt. How can one do that kind of action and at the same time have a bodhisattva motivation? It becomes really

contradictory. This is something to look at: how many times do we burn yard waste and things where there might be a lot of sentient beings? Or chopping down trees, especially in the Northwest by burning the branches and the leaves and stuff. Many beings die in there.

Root Vow 11: (To Abandon) Teaching emptiness to those whose minds are unprepared.

The eleventh one refers to teaching emptiness to those who aren't qualified, those whose minds are unprepared. Somebody who doesn't know much about Dharma comes in and hears about emptiness. They are unable to understand the difference between emptiness and non-existence, the difference between emptiness and the emptiness of inherent existence. They think emptiness means non-existence. You see people in the West say, "Nothing exists. It's all illusion. Nothing exists. There is no good, there is no bad." How many times do you hear these kinds of things? If people misunderstand emptiness, then they tend to negate cause and effect. If they negate cause and effect, then they get harmed themselves. When we say, "Oh, emptiness means non-existence. There is no good. There is no bad. Therefore I can do anything I want." Then who gets harmed? Oneself.

If we teach emptiness to people who aren't prepared, who don't have a good foundation in understanding cause and effect, if we teach them emptiness and due to their own misconceptions, they misinterpret it and fall into a nihilistic view, we end up transgressing our bodhisattva vow. This kind of thing is harmful to others. That is why they always say before you teach emptiness, you're supposed to teach them about impermanence first, and loving kindness, karma, and the four noble truths.

One time one of my teachers was teaching us emptiness. He mentioned this vow and he said, "But I don't have to worry about you people falling into the wrong view, because I don't think you even approach understanding what we're talking about. [laughter]"

Actually, I remember one of the first times I was in Seattle, some of the people arranged talks for me. The first talk they arranged in the series of talks, was a talk on emptiness. They made the program and I went, "Urr, what am I supposed to do here because the first talk to all these people who are new to the Dharma, I'm talking about emptiness." Being stuck in that kind of situation, what I did was, I tried to speak about it, not in a really technical way but in a very basic way, like talking about money just being paper and ink, that the value of money is something that we give it. I was talking in a general way, emphasizing, "But things do exist, folks."

It is very important, if people who are new to the Dharma ask you what emptiness means, that you give them an answer that's very suited to their level, their present level. In other words, don't go into all the technical details about this and that. But talk about basic interdependence, and dependent arising. And if you explain emptiness to new people in the context of, "Look. The glass exists depending upon the person who made it, the silica, or whatever it is, and the mold. The glass comes into existence depending on all these things, therefore it doesn't exist independently. Therefore it is empty. If new people ask you questions about emptiness, try and explain it in this context of dependent arising. This minimizes the possibility of their misunderstanding things, and it really engrains in people the idea that things do exist but they don't exist in a rigid, inherent, concrete way.

[Audience:] What if one were teaching in a university to students who are learning it merely as a scholarly pursuit?

In that context of teaching at a university, people still have to be careful. It's true that maybe the students aren't really taking it to heart. The possibility of them misunderstanding it is less because they are not really taking it to heart as something to believe in themselves. But still, nonetheless, I think teaching emptiness at the university level through teaching dependent arising would minimize the danger of people misunderstanding. And also, in terms of teaching Buddhism at the university level, thank heavens now, it's getting much better. There're some incredibly good teachers. But sometimes, you read some of the books that Buddhist scholars have written about Buddhism, and you see that they don't understand emptiness. If you read Betsy Napper's book on dependent arising and emptiness, she spends quite a bit of time showing how a lot of modern scholars have misunderstood it. One has to be really careful. Jeffrey Hopkins is really top notch, and teaches it very well. Sometimes I've been invited as a guest speaker to comparative religious courses and the teacher who is teaching it, they don't really understand Buddhism at all. They're usually very grateful to have a guest speaker come in, because

they're teaching Buddhism just from what they've read in some book, and who knows if the person who wrote it understood Buddhism. This is something to be aware of. That's why I think it is really important when we study, to try and study with practitioners, rather than just scholars who don't put it into practice.

[Audience:] What about using the term 'voidness' to mean emptiness?

Alex Berzin uses the term "voidness." I don't especially like "voidness". The translation term "voidness" is fine but the translation term doesn't do much for me, and "emptiness", too is not a real good English translation and that's why in using the term, it's so important to explain the meaning instead of just saying things are empty.

[Audience:] What about 'suchness'?

"Suchness" in a way doesn't tell people much, and when I try and do my spell check on my computer, it always stops on that word. Nobody knows what that word means. Or "thusness" – sometimes it is translated as thusness. We are dealing with a lot of things here, where one word doesn't really convey the concept well and so it's very important that we take time to explain the concept instead of just using the word.

Let me just say one more thing about the eleventh one, about not teaching emptiness to unqualified people. If somebody comes and asks you a question about emptiness, if you say, "I'm not supposed to teach that to you, because I'm going to break my bodhisattva vows," that doesn't go over real well with other people. They then feel that you are not sharing the Dharma or you are being stingy or something like that. Again, just explain it in terms of dependent arising and give real simple examples like money. Money from its side doesn't have inherent value, just paper and ink. By the force of our society conceiving it in a certain way and giving it that label, therefore it has the value. But in and of itself, money doesn't have value. Or talk about things like manners. How good manners and bad manners don't have independent existence. They arise dependent upon the society and the group of people. Things like that. You're explaining emptiness, but in a real simple way in talking always about dependent arising, labeling, causes and conditions. So then people can get it.

Root Vow 12: (To Abandon) Causing those who have entered the Mahayana to turn away from working for the full enlightenment of Buddhahood and encouraging them to work merely for their own liberation from suffering.

Let's say there is somebody who is on the Mahayana path, who has a lot of regard for the bodhicitta, and who wants to become a fully enlightenment Buddha for others. You say something like, "Buddhahood is so high! It's so hard! It takes three countless great eons to attain full enlightenment. Do you know how long that is?" [laughter] "Why do you want to attain full enlightenment? It is just too long. It takes too much energy. Better just liberate yourself from cyclic existence and be satisfied with that. Don't develop a Messiah complex and want to liberate everybody. Just take care of yourself. Get yourself out of samsara and leave it at that." In this way, if somebody already had some feeling for the Mahayana path and bodhicitta and you convince them that working for others is not very beneficial, that achieving enlightenment is not very practical and instead it's just better to liberate themselves, then that's transgressing the vow. What's happening is you're indirectly denying all the people whom that one person could benefit when they become a Buddha. You are denying others access to that person as a fully enlightened being. It is not just the harm that is done to one person from turning them away from full enlightenment, but all the other people that this person could potentially benefit aren't benefited, because the person has switched paths and decided just to work for Nirvana.

[Audience:] What is the difference between becoming liberated and attaining full enlightenment?

Liberation or nirvana is when you are free from the afflictions of ignorance, anger and attachment, and the karma that causes rebirth in cyclic existence. But one hasn't necessarily eliminated the stains of those things from one's mindstream. Full enlightenment is when those stains have been eliminated. They say that these stains are like the onions in the pot. You can take the onions out, but you still have the smell. This is what needs to be removed -- the smell, in order to become fully enlightened.

Causing others to abandon the Mahayana, telling them it's too hard and difficult, is breaking the

bodhisattva vow. Saying it takes too long; better to concentrate on their own thing. I will give you an example. I've heard this story a few times. Somebody in Thailand or some place was doing a lot of Vipassana meditation. They were doing quite well, but they got stuck at some point in their practice and could not get any further. They could not realize emptiness. Their teacher had clairvoyant powers and saw that this person had previously taken the bodhisattva vows and vowed not to go into nirvana without leading others there. Because of this the person was impeded in realizing emptiness. The conclusion of the story was, don't take bodhisattva vows because it could impede your realization of emptiness and keep you from attaining liberation. If you say that kind of story to somebody who is involved in the bodhisattva practice, who had much regard for Buddhahood, and turn them away from that path, even though you mean well (that person who told that story definitely meant well), from a Mahayana viewpoint, that would be something that is harmful. Even though attaining nirvana's quite good, if somebody's aspiring for full enlightenment, don't turn them away from that.

Root Vow 13: (To Abandon) Causing others to abandon completely their vows of self-liberation and embrace the Mahayana.

The thirteenth one - causing others to completely abandon their vows of self liberation or individual liberation (the Sanskrit word is "pratimoksha"), and embrace the Mahayana. Pratimoksha vows or individual liberation vows are the vows of fully ordained monks and nuns. The vows of the novice monks and nuns, the lay precepts that you people take, the five lay precepts or the eight precepts that you take for one day (but not in the Mahayana ceremony)--all these are considered the pratimoksha vows. Anyone who is abiding in those vows and practicing them, should you come to them and say, "Why are you keeping those vows? Those vows are so simple. Those vows are so basic. You should be a bodhisattva. If you practice the Mahayana, you don't need to worry about keeping those pratimoksha vows because you are working for the benefit of all sentient beings." Do you see how it is possible that people misinterpret the Dharma and say these kinds of things? Demeaning the value of holding the vows of individual liberation by the reason of "Practice something that is much better, like the bodhisattva vows. And then you develop a good motivation, then you don't need to worry about stealing and lying and unwise sexual contact because you have a good motivation – these are just simple basic practices. The bodhisattva path is a much more advanced practice. You should do that."

You will hear things like this. Listening to what people say in the West, they will say the same thing about tantra. "Tantra is the highest practice. If you know about tantra, you don't need to worry about the five precepts. This is crazy wisdom. If you practice tantra, you transform everything. You don't need to take those precepts." This is a rationalizing, twisting mind at work, because actually, if you're really seriously engaged in the bodhisattva practice and the tantric practice, you will appreciate the pratimoksha vows even more. There may be certain times and certain instances where adhering strictly to a pratimoksha vow is actually something that can be harmful, where you have to go against the literal meaning of the pratimoksha vow, but you do so for the benefit of others. This will come later on in the bodhisattva vows. It is a completely different ball game. But many people don't understand that and they just say, "Bodhisattva practice is higher. Tantric practice is higher. Don't worry about the five lay precepts – that is baby practice. We are advanced practitioners, so we don't need that." People say it in the West. This attitude is something to be quite aware of. The reason why this is harmful is because when people negate basic ethical conduct with a twisted motivation, that harms them. They, in turn, harm other people by making people abandon their pratimoksha vows.

It can also be a harmful attitude of saying to somebody who is a monk or a nun, "Why are you ordained? This is really stupid. This is an archaic institution. It's hierarchical. It's sexist. It doesn't fit with our Western society." "Why are you a monk or a nun? You are not dealing with your sexuality. You are avoiding intimate relationships." I'm telling you this because people have said it. I'm not making things up. I hear it with my ears. [laughter]

Or telling people "Why are you keeping the five lay precepts? How stupid!" These kinds of comments are damaging to people. Truly harmful.

[Audience: Inaudible]

You obviously have some good understanding. [laughter] But there are some people who want samsara and nirvana at the same time. [laughter] And we all do to our own extent, maybe not to the

extent of breaking the five precepts. But some people actually want samsara and nirvana at the same time – they want to be high glorious practitioners but they don't really want to change their day-to-day behavior. They don't want to stop drinking or they want to screw around all they want. After all, you see all these books on tantric sex in the bookstore. I tell you, I stayed in somebody's house and they said, "Oh, did you see these new books? Do they really teach those in Buddhism?" And they pulled out a book on tantric sex. [laughter]

[Audience: Inaudible]

Somebody called me last year and said, "Where did you get those special Tibetan bells?" I said, "Tibetan bells?" "Yeah, I was reading about special Tibetan bells that you use when you make love to enhance sexual pleasure." [laughter] I'm going "Ai-yai-yai, what do I say to this person on the telephone?" They were really sincere. They were very disappointed when I said, "I can't help you." [laughter] It is quite amazing sometimes. People pulling out these books on tantric sex and saying, "Do you practice that? You are a Tibetan Buddhist, aren't you?"

I know I am going out of track. I went to Hong Kong to teach and not too long after I arrived, one man called and asked me out to lunch. He said he was interested in Buddhism. He took me some place to lunch and then in the middle of it, he started talking about all of his partners, and tantric sex, and do I do this kind of practice? I'm sitting there going, "I'm going to get out of here, fast!" I was glad I was in a public restaurant! [laughter]

[Audience:] What are the tantric vows? Don't they include the five precepts?

The vows are progressive. The pratimoksha vows are the easiest ones to keep. They are specifically designed to pacify our verbal and physical actions, dealing specifically with things we say and do, not so much with the mind. The next level is the bodhisattva vows. The purpose of these is to purify our self-cherishing attitude. Then a step above this are the tantric vows, and the purpose of these is to help us purify the subtle dualistic attitude and to purify the impure vision of seeing everything as very ordinary, polluted and contaminated.

You take each set of vows based on the previous set. It doesn't mean you have to have all five precepts to take the bodhisattva vows. It's nice if you do, but you don't have to. The tantric vows deal a lot with trying to eliminate the ordinary view and the different misunderstandings that apply to tantric practice. For example, people who are on a high level of tantric practice need to eat meat to keep the body healthy in order to do very technical meditations with the winds and the energy system. For that purpose, they eat meat, not because they enjoy the meat, not because they don't care about the animals, but because they are doing it as part of their practice, to keep the body healthy to attain enlightenment. They also say prayers and do blessings and things like that for the animals. This will override one of the earlier prohibitions about trying to be vegetarian.

[Audience:] Wouldn't it be problematic if beginners take tantric vows without a proper foundation in the Dharma?

Yes. Actually, to take the tantric vows, you have to have taken refuge first. If you take refuge, you automatically have the precept not to kill. Some people, at their first Dharma teaching, they take an initiation with tantric vows. That creates tremendous confusion. That is why His Holiness, at one conference, was saying that the highest class tantric initiations shouldn't be given to new people. This is not, by the way, the level of initiation that His Holiness is giving here [Note: His Holiness was going to give the Chenrezig Initiation in Seattle]. That is a lower class tantra and you don't take the tantric vows with that. But the highest class of tantra is a much more complicated practice and you have the vows. It is not real wise for new people to take that because they don't understand the four noble truths. They become confused. That's why it's better to go slowly.

[Audience: Inaudible]

From the side of the monk or the nun or Mahayana practitioner or whoever it is, their responsibility is to strengthen their own mind. Our responsibility is not to interfere with their process of strengthening their own mind. These vows here are talking about our responsibility towards others.

When we are somebody who holds the five lay precepts or any kind of pratimoksha vows, then our own responsibility is to strengthen our own mind. You are right. There're lots of people who are going to tell us we're nuts. If you believe everything everybody tells you, you are going to be real confused. This is not in anyway shifting the responsibility to somebody else. It's each person's own responsibility to be very sure about their own ethical standards and know why they are keeping them and develop a strong mind wanting to keep them, so that they are not dissuaded by these kinds of comments. But it is also our responsibility not to get in the way of other people who are doing well in their practice.

[Audience:] What if we transgress the bodhisattva vows?

If you've taken the bodhisattva vows and you transgressed them, your karma becomes much heavier. If you take them and you keep them, the karma is also much heavier. A lot of these actions, for example praising oneself and belittling others, are going to be negative whether you have a vow or not. The five heinous actions would be negative whether you have the vow or not. But the whole karma involved becomes much heavier when you have the vow. The advantage of having the vows is that every moment when you are not transgressing the vows, you're accumulating good karma. You get this build-up in wealth of positive potential in your mindstream that serves as a real good foundation for your meditation. The whole purpose of the vows is to benefit us.

Let's sit quietly for five minutes.

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>