

**Auxiliary Bodhisattva Vows No. 18 to 21** (lightly edited transcript)  
*by Ven. Thubten Chodron© at Dharma Friendship Foundation, Seattle. 3 Jan 98*

**Contents (click on heading to view text)**

- Auxiliary Vow No. 18: (To Abandon) Neglecting those who are angry with oneself by not trying to pacify their anger.
- Auxiliary Vow No. 19: (To Abandon:) Refusing to accept the apologies of others.
- Auxiliary Vow No. 20: (To Abandon) Acting out thoughts of anger.
- Auxiliary Vow No. 21: (To Abandon) Gathering a circle of friends or students because of one's desire for respect or profit.

---

Now we're going to go on to the four auxiliary vows that help us eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching attitude of patience, the third of the six far-reaching attitudes.

**Auxiliary Vow No. 17: (To Abandon) Returning insults, anger, beating or criticism with insults and the like.**

[Teachings lost due to change of tape.]

**Auxiliary Vow No. 18: (To Abandon) Neglecting those who are angry with oneself by not trying to pacify their anger.**

[Front part not recorded.]

...If that is the situation, it is very important to try and pacify that person's anger. What this is getting at is if somebody is angry with us, we can't just brush them off. We have to care about them. They're upset, miserable and creating negative karma by being angry; we cannot just brush them off.

On the other hand, this doesn't mean that you have to take all the blame yourself. Blaming the other or blaming ourselves are both extremes. It would be nice to look at conflict situations without the need to blame somebody. Instead, we could just look at, "Well, here is this dependent arising thing that happened. What can we do to resolve it?" It doesn't mean, "Well, okay, if I'm not going to blame them, then I'm going to blame myself." It doesn't mean that. It means caring about people if they are upset with us, doing what we can to try and pacify their anger, while also recognizing that we can't crawl into their mind and take the anger away. Sometimes we go to somebody and we try and talk with them about the situation, but they're still angry with us. Or the situation gets better for a few days but then it blows up again. Or maybe they don't want to talk to us. Our attempts to pacify their anger may not be successful. But we have to, at least in our heart, care about them, not brush them off, and do what we can in the situation to help.

**Auxiliary Vow No. 19: (To Abandon:) Refusing to accept the apologies of others.**

What is the difference between this vow and the third root bodhisattva vow? The third root vow is to abandon: 'Not listening although another declares his or her offence, or with anger blaming him or her and retaliating.' The two vows are similar in terms of refusing to accept the apologies of others. The difference is the root vow emphasizes rejecting others' apology out of anger, while this auxiliary vow is referring to not accepting others' apology for whatever motivation. What it is getting at is, if somebody is regretful of how they treated us, we should let go of our anger towards them.

Sometimes that's hard. Somebody comes and apologizes, but we are so hurt that we don't want to let go. When this happens, we have to go back to all the meditations on patience and do them, in order to try and let go.

This is the value of having taken this kind of precept. If you don't have this precept, you will be likely to just hold on to your anger and not feel responsible to let go of it. Whereas if you have this precept, it's right in your face, "I'm still very angry, but oh, oh, I made a promise [laughter] to the Buddha and I made a promise to myself that I was going to accept others' apologies. One part of me had made the determination before that I'm not going to hold on to grudges. Another part of me that's active right now

is wanting to hold on to grudges, so I'm not living according to my own principles here. There is some dissonance here. I should sit and look at my anger. I have to try and work things out in my mind so that I can get myself to let go of the anger."

It is a gradual process. It takes time to let go of our anger. But we have to try. This is what this vow is trying to achieve.

It only serves to benefit ourselves when we let go of our anger. Our anger hurts us, doesn't it? We sit there all knotted up in our anger, completely miserable. We hate someone because they were completely rotten. We want them to apologize, "We're not going to give in!" We get a lot of energy from this attitude. But we're not happy. We're totally miserable. Meanwhile the other person has gone on with their life, doing what they do. They are not making us miserable anymore. We are making ourselves miserable. We are not doing it intentionally, of course. Our anger just overruns our own mind. But when you have determined beforehand that you are going to work on your anger, then you will do something about it.

You work on your anger, doing it with an awareness that it's something that benefits you. Again, it's not like, "I promised the Buddha that I wasn't going to be angry at people and I was going to accept others' apologies. But this guy is such an idiot! I can't accept his apology. But since I have promised the Buddha I would, okay, I'll try." It's not with this kind of attitude. This is not the attitude to keep in precepts. You're doing the same thing we were talking about yesterday, projecting our own inner decisions as coming from an external authority which is then judging us. It is not what this is about.

But rather, what we are doing is we are saying, "In my moments of clarity, I decided that I didn't want to hold on to my anger and my grudges. Here, my mind is all muddled up. It hurts me in the long term and in the short term. It also hurts the other person. So, I am going to try and work on this." The attitude is completely different.

#### **Auxiliary Vow No. 20: (To Abandon) Acting out thoughts of anger.**

This one is tricky. Watch how our mind works when we are upset. The situation is like this, but you tilt it a little bit. You change your explanation of it a little bit so that what you are doing looks like it's the appropriate thing to do in the situation. It looks like we are being kind to the other person. But actually, our motivation for doing it is that we are angry. Or our motivation for doing it is we are protecting ourselves.

It is like a father beating his kid and saying, "This is for your own benefit. It hurts me more than it hurts you." That could be true. I'm sure for some parents, that is true. But for other parents, it's just a big excuse for venting their frustration. The words are there but the meaning can be very different, according to the person.

It is the same thing here. Sometimes we're angry. It's hard to admit to ourselves that we have anger, let alone admit it in the situation. We do something in the situation and attack the other person in an indirect way. It looks like we are not attacking the other person. It looks like we are doing what is reasonable, what is honest and what should be done. But our motivation is to attack them because we're mad. Often, we aren't even aware of it ourselves. This is a subtle level of acting out thoughts of anger.

Then there is the blatant level of acting out thoughts of anger. When we sit and meditate, we have the ninth of the ten destructive actions, which is maliciousness. We sit and do our mantra and plan very consciously how we're going to let the other person know that we're right and they're wrong. We plan very consciously how we can push their buttons because we know what they're sensitive to. So we go, "*Om Vajrasattva ...how can I push their button... samaya malu palaya ... this is going to really hurt them....dido may bhawa...oh lovely I'm so happy...suto kayo may bhawa...but I shouldn't look happy because then I wouldn't look like a good Buddhist...sarwa karma su tsa may...oh but it'd be so nice if I get my way...*" [laughter]

We have to be very careful of these two ways of acting out thoughts of anger. One is doing it consciously, having malicious thoughts. The other is not being honest with ourselves and holding on to the anger, and then going around the back door to get at somebody. For example, we created a lot of dissension among a group of friends. We talked to everybody in the group and tried to stir things up, or

we tried to stir things up in the office. But we didn't look like we were the ones stirring it up, because we only came along and pointed something out or started an 'innocent' conversation. We know how to do this, don't we?

The above vows have to do with patience. The next set of vows eliminate obstacles to the far-reaching attitude of joyous effort.

**Auxiliary Vow No. 21: (To Abandon) Gathering a circle of friends or students because of one's desire for respect or profit.**

An example would be if I come to Seattle to start a Dharma center because I want to be a big Guru. I want all of you to give me many gifts. Or maybe I don't wish to be a teacher, but I want to lead a group. In the back of my mind, my wish is that I want other people to respect me and I want to get some profit from this. I want a good reputation. Maybe they will write about me in Tricycle [laughter]. The ego takes the ball and runs.

It could be related to the Dharma, but it needn't be. It could just be with our friends. You could be teaching acupuncture. You could be teaching bowling, badminton or computers. Whatever you're teaching, part of the motivation is to gather a circle of people around you who adore you. Of course, we would not admit this is our motivation. It's not very polite to say it in company. But if we look in our mind, this is what is going on. We want other people to think well of us. We want a group of people on our team and by the way, they may give us some gifts.

Joyous effort is the attitude that takes delight in creating virtue. Here, it looks like you're creating virtue, because you're gathering a circle of friends or students around you to teach them something that would be helpful to them. It looks like you're doing something for the benefit of others. It looks like you're doing something virtuous. But the mind isn't taking delight in that virtue. The mind is looking for your own profit. This is why this vow is counteracting the far-reaching attitude of joyous effort. The mind is not taking joy in virtue, it is working for ego's benefit.

This points out how sneaky the ego is. How sneaky the self-centered attitude is. It comes up all over the place. That is why the precepts are here. They bring our attention to that. It doesn't mean that we are never going to have this attitude. It doesn't mean that from now on, these kinds of things are never going to pop up in our mind. It just means that by knowing this, we're aware and try to discern it when the thought does crop up.

Like I told you, when I first started studying the bodhisattva vows many years ago, I would think, "Who in the world would do this? Who in the world would gather a circle of friends or students out of a desire for respect and profit? That's totally opposite to the Dharma. Who would do that?" I understand now it's very easy to do that. Even though part of your mind is committed to the bodhisattva path, the other part of the mind is attached to the self-centered path.

**[Audience: Inaudible]**

What this is getting at is to shift our attitude for doing a business or for working at our job or other tasks. You have to work because you do need to earn a living. That's fair enough. But it's not just to earn a living. You are trying to do something that's going to benefit other people. When you wake up in the morning, think to yourself, "I'm going to my job because I want to do something that's going to benefit the people I come in touch with." You are involved in making an object or providing a service that will benefit people. You can think how you are going to benefit the people who are in the office with you. Or your clients. Or your employers. Or your employees. Whoever it is you're working with. In other words, you generate the motivation, "I want to benefit others and not harm them." You try and hold that as your motivation. Usually our motivation for going to work is desire for respect and profit. Here, we're beginning to change our motivation. This is good. We need to try and do this.

---

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>