The 18 Root Bodhisattva Vows

Background

A vow is a subtle invisible form on a mental continuum, which shapes behavior. Specifically, it is a restraint from an "unspeakable action", either one that is naturally destructive or one that Buddha proscribed for specific individuals who are training to reach specific goals. An example of the former is taking the life of another; an example of the later is eating after noon, which monastics need to avoid for their minds to be clearer for meditating at night and the next morning.

Of the two stages of developing bodhichitta, aspiring and engaged, only with the latter do we take the bodhisattva vows.

Taking bodhisattva vows entails promising to restrain from two sets of negative acts that Buddha proscribed for those training as bodhisattvas to reach enlightenment and to be of as much benefit to others as is possible:

1. Eighteen actions that, if committed, constitute a root downfall
2. Forty-six types of faulty behaviour

A *root downfall* means a loss of the entire set of bodhisattva vows. It is a "downfall" in the sense that it leads to a decline in spiritual development and hinders the growth of positive qualities. The word *root* signifies it is a root to be eliminated. For ease of expression, these two sets are usually called *root and secondary bodhisattva vows*. They offer excellent guidelines for the types of behavior to avoid if we wish to benefit others in as pure and full a way as is possible.

The late tenth-century Indian master Atisha received this particular version of the bodhisattva vows from his Sumatran teacher Dharmamati of Suvarnadvipa. Afterwards, he outlined their scriptural sources in his *Compendium of Training* and transmitted them to Tibet. All Tibetan traditions currently follow them, while the Buddhist traditions deriving from China observe variant versions of the bodhisattva vows.

The promise to keep bodhisattva vows applies not only to this life, but also to each subsequent lifetime until enlightenment. Thus, as subtle forms, these vows continue on our mental continuums into future lives. If we have taken the vows in a previous lifetime, we do not lose them by unknowingly committing a full transgression now, unless we have taken them freshly during our current life. Retaking the vows for the first time in this life strengthens the momentum of our efforts toward enlightenment that has been growing ever since our first taking of them. Therefore, Mahayana masters emphasize the importance of dying with the bodhisattva vows intact and strong. Their abiding presence on our mental continuums continues building up positive force (merit) in future lives, even before we revitalize them by taking them again.

Following the Gelug founder, Tsongkhapa's fifteenth-century commentary on the bodhisattva vows, *An Explanation of Bodhisattvas' Ethical Discipline: The Main Path to Enlightenment*, let us examine the eighteen negative actions that constitute a root downfall. Each has several stipulations we need to know.

The Eighteen Bodhisattva Root Downfalls

(1) Praising ourselves and/or belittling others

This downfall refers to speaking such words to someone in an inferior position. The motivation must contain either desire for profit, praise, love, respect, and so on from the person addressed, or jealousy of the person belittled. It makes no difference whether what we say is true or false. Professionals who advertise that they are Buddhists need to take care about committing this downfall.

(2) Not sharing Dharma teachings or wealth

Here, the motivation must be specifically attachment and miserliness. This negative action includes not only being possessive of our notes or tape recorder, but also being stingy with our time and refusing to help if needed.

(3) Not listening to others' apologies or striking others

The motivation for either of these must be anger. The first refers to an actual occasion when yelling at or beating someone and either that person pleads for forgiveness, or someone else begs us to stop and we refuse. The latter is simply hitting someone. Sometimes, it may be necessary to give rambunctious children or pets a smack to stop them from running into the road if they will not listen, but it is never appropriate or helpful to discipline out of anger.

(4) Discarding the Mahayana teachings and propounding made-up ones

This means to reject the correct teachings about some topic concerning bodhisattvas, such as their ethical behavior, and to make up in their stead a plausible yet misleading instruction on the same subject, claim it to be authentic, and then teach it to others in order to gain their following. An example of this downfall is when teachers who are eager not to scare away prospective students condone liberal moral behavior and explain that any type of action is acceptable so long as it does not harm others. We need not be a teacher to commit this downfall. We can commit it even in casual conversation with others.

(5) Taking offerings intended for the Triple Gem

This downfall is to steal or embezzle, either personally or through deputing someone else, anything offered or belonging to the Buddhas, Dharma, or Sangha, and then to consider it as ours. The Sangha, in this context, refers to any group of four or more monastics. Examples include embezzling funds donated for building a Buddhist monument, for printing Dharma books, or for feeding a group of monks or nuns.

(6) Forsaking the holy Dharma

Here the downfall is to repudiate or, by voicing our opinions, cause others to repudiate that the scriptural teachings of the shravaka, pratyekabuddha, or bodhisattva vehicles are the Buddha's words. *Shravakas* are those who listen to a Buddha's teachings while they are still extant, while *pratyekabuddhas* are self-evolving practitioners who live primarily during dark ages when the Dharma is no longer directly available. To make spiritual progress, they rely on intuitive understanding gained from study and practice conducted during previous lives. The teachings for both of them collectively constitute the Hinayana, or "modest vehicle" for gaining personal liberation from samsara. The Mahayana vehicle emphasizes methods for attaining full enlightenment. Denying that all or just certain scriptures of either vehicle derive from the Buddha is a root downfall.

Maintaining this vow does not mean forsaking a historical perspective. Buddha's teachings were transmitted orally for centuries before being committed to writing, and thus corruptions

and forgeries undoubtedly occurred. The great masters who compiled the Tibetan Buddhist canon certainly rejected texts they considered inauthentic. However, instead of basing their decisions on prejudice, they used the seventh-century Indian master Dharmakirti's criterion for assessing the validity of any material - the ability of its practice to bring about the Buddhist goals of better rebirth, liberation, or enlightenment. Stylistic differences among Buddhist scriptures, and even within a specific text, often indicate differences in time when various portions of the teachings were written down or translated into different languages. Therefore, studying the scriptures through methods of modern textual analysis can often be fruitful and does not conflict with this vow.

(7) Disrobing monastics or committing such acts as stealing their robes

This downfall refers specifically to doing something damaging to one, two, or three Buddhist monks or nuns, regardless of their moral status or level of study or practice. Such actions need to be motivated by ill will or malice, and include beating or verbally abusing them, confiscating their goods, or expelling them from their monasteries. Expelling monastics, however, is not a downfall if they have broken one of their four major vows: not to kill, especially another human being; not to steal, particularly something belonging to the monastic community; not to lie, specifically about spiritual attainments; and to maintain complete celibacy.

(8) Committing any of the five heinous crimes

The five heinous crimes are (a) killing our fathers, (b) mothers, or (c) an *arhat* (a liberated being), (d) with bad intentions drawing blood from a Buddha, or (e) causing a split in the monastic community. The latter heinous crime refers to repudiating the Buddha's teachings and monastic institution, drawing monastics away from them, and enlisting them in one's own newly founded religion and monastic tradition. It does not refer to leaving a Dharma center or organization - especially because of corruption in the organization or its spiritual teachers - and founding another center that still follows Buddha's teachings. Moreover, the term *sangha* in this heinous crime refers specifically to the monastic community. It does not refer to "sangha" in the nontraditional usage of the term coined by Western Buddhists as an equivalent of the congregation of a Dharma center or organization.

(9) Holding a distorted, antagonistic outlook

This means to deny what is true and of value - such as the laws of behavioral cause and effect, a safe and positive direction in life, rebirth, and liberation from it - and to be antagonistic toward such ideas and those who hold them.

(10) Destroying places such as towns

This downfall includes intentionally demolishing, bombing, or degrading the environment of a town, city, district, or countryside area, and rendering it unfit, harmful, or difficult for humans or animals to live in.

(11) Teaching voidness to those whose minds are untrained

The primary objects of this downfall are persons with the bodhichitta motivation who are not yet ready to understand voidness. Such persons would become confused or frightened by this teaching and consequently abandon the bodhisattva path for the path of personal liberation. This can happen as a result of thinking that if all phenomena are devoid of inherent, findable existence, then no one exists, so why bother working to benefit anyone else? This action also includes teaching voidness to anyone who would misunderstand it and therefore forsake the Dharma completely, for example by thinking that Buddhism teaches that nothing exists and is therefore sheer nonsense. Without extrasensory perception, it is difficult to know whether others' minds are sufficiently trained so that they will not misconstrue the teachings on the voidness of all phenomena. Therefore, it is important to lead others to these teachings

through explanations of graduated levels of complexity, and periodically to check their understanding.

(12) Turning others away from full enlightenment

The objects for this action are people who have already developed a bodhichitta motivation and are striving toward enlightenment. The downfall is to tell them they are incapable of acting all the time with generosity, patience, and so on - to say that they cannot possibly become a Buddha and so it would be far better for them to strive merely for their own liberation. Unless they actually turn their aim away from enlightenment, however, this root downfall is incomplete.

(13) Turning others away from their pratimoksha vows

Pratimoksha, or individual liberation vows, include those for laymen, laywomen, provisional nuns, novice monks, novice nuns, full monks, and full nuns. The objects here are persons who are keeping one of these sets of pratimoksha vows. The downfall is to tell them as a bodhisattva there is no use in keeping pratimoksha, because for bodhisattvas all actions are pure. For this downfall to be complete, they must actually give up their vows.

(14) Belittling the shravaka vehicle

The sixth root downfall is to repudiate that the texts of the shravaka or pratyekabuddha vehicles are the authentic words of the Buddha. Here, we accept that they are, but deny the effectiveness of their teachings and maintain that it is impossible to become rid of disturbing emotions and attitudes by means of their instructions, for example those concerning *vipassana* (insight meditation).

(15) Proclaiming a false realization of voidness

We commit this downfall if we have not fully realized voidness, yet teach or write about it pretending that we have, because of jealousy of the great masters. It makes no difference whether any students or readers are fooled by our pretense. Nonetheless, they must understand what we explain. If they do not comprehend our discussion, the downfall is incomplete. Although this vow refers to proclaiming false realizations specifically of voidness, it is clear that we need to avoid the same also when teaching bodhichitta or other points of Dharma. There is no fault in teaching voidness before fully realizing it, however, so long as we openly acknowledge this fact and that we are explaining merely from our present levels of provisional understanding.

(16) Accepting what has been stolen from the Triple Gem

This downfall is to accept as a gift, offering, salary, reward, fine, or bribe anything someone else has stolen or embezzled, either personally or through deputing someone else, from the Buddhas, Dharma, or Sangha, including if it belonged only to one, two, or three monks or nuns.

(17) Establishing unfair policies

This means to be biased against serious practitioners, because of anger or hostility toward them, and to favor those with lesser attainments, or none at all, because of attachment to them. An example of this downfall is to give most of our time as teachers to casual private students who can pay high fees and to neglect serious students who can pay us nothing.

(18) Giving up bodhichitta

This is abandoning the wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all. Of the two levels of bodhichitta, aspiring and involved, this refers specifically to discarding the former. In doing so, we give up the latter as well.

Occasionally, a nineteenth root downfall is specified:

(19) Belittling others with sarcastic verses or words

This may be included, however, in the first bodhisattva root downfall.

Maintaining Vows

When people learn of vows such as these, they sometimes feel they are difficult to keep and are afraid to take them. We avoid this kind of intimidation, however, by knowing clearly what vows are. There are two ways to explain them. The first is that vows are an attitude we adopt toward life to restrain ourselves from certain modes of negative conduct. The other is that they are a subtle shape or form we give to our lives. In either case, maintaining vows involves mindfulness, alertness, and self-control. With mindfulness, we keep our vows in mind throughout each day. With alertness, we maintain watch on our behavior to check if it accords with the vows. If we discover we are transgressing, or about to transgress them, we exercise self-control. In this way, we define and maintain an ethical shape to our lives.

Keeping vows and maintaining mindfulness of them are not so alien or difficult to do. If we drive a car, we agree to follow certain rules in order to minimize accidents and maximize safety. These rules shape our driving - we avoid speeding and keep to our sides of the road - and outline the most practical and realistic way to reach a destination. After some experience, following the rules becomes so natural that being mindful of them is effortless and never a burden. The same thing happens when maintaining bodhisattva or any other ethical vows.

The Four Binding Factors for Losing Vows

We lose our vows when we totally drop their shape from our lives, or stop trying to maintain it. This is called a root downfall. When it occurs, the only way to regain this ethical shape is to reform our attitudes, undertake a purification procedure such as meditation on love and compassion, and retake the vows. From among the eighteen root bodhisattva downfalls, as soon as we develop the state of mind of the ninth or eighteenth - holding a distorted, antagonistic attitude or giving up bodhichitta - we lose, by the very fact of our change of mind, the ethical shape to our lives fashioned by bodhisattva vows, and thus we stop all efforts to maintain it. Consequently, we immediately lose all our bodhisattva vows, not just the one we have specifically discarded.

Transgressing the other sixteen bodhisattva vows does not constitute a root downfall unless the attitude accompanying the act contains four binding factors. These factors must be held and maintained from the moment immediately after developing the motivation to break the vow, up until the moment right after completing the act of transgression.

The four binding factors are:

(1) Not regarding the negative action as detrimental, seeing only advantages to it, and undertaking the action with no regrets.

(2) Having been in the habit of committing the transgression before, having no wish or intention to refrain now or in the future from repeating it.

(3) Delighting in the negative action and undertaking it with joy.

(4) Having no a sense of moral self-dignity (no sense of honor) or care for how our actions reflect on those we respect (no sense of face), such as our teachers and parents, and thus having no intention of repairing the damage we are doing to ourselves.

If all four attitudes do not accompany a transgression of any of the sixteen vows, the bodhisattva shape to our lives is still there, as is the effort to maintain it, but they have both become weak. With the sixteen vows, there is a great difference between merely breaking and losing them.

For example, suppose we do not lend somebody one of our books because of attachment to it and miserliness. We see nothing wrong with this - after all, this person might spill coffee on it or not give it back. We have never lent it before and have no intention to change this policy now or in the future. Moreover, when we refuse, we are happy in our decision. Lacking moral self-dignity, we are shameless about saying no. We do not care how our refusal reflects on ourselves, despite the fact that as someone supposedly wishing to bring everyone to enlightenment, how could we not be willing to share any source of knowledge we have? Unabashed, we do not care how our refusal reflects on our spiritual teachers or on Buddhism in general. And we have no intention of doing anything to counterbalance our selfish act.

If we have all these attitudes when refusing to lend our book, we have definitely lost the bodhisattva shape to our lives. We have totally fallen down in our Mahayana training and lost all our bodhisattva vows. On the other hand, if we lack some of these attitudes and do not loan our book, we have merely slackened our efforts to maintain a bodhisattva shape to our lives. We still have the vows, but in a weakened form.

Weakening Vows

Transgressing one of the sixteen vows with none of the four binding factors present does not actually weaken our bodhisattva vows. For example, we do not lend our book to someone who asks, but we know it is basically wrong. We do not intend to do this as a policy, we are unhappy about saying no, and we are concerned about how our refusal reflects on ourselves and on our teachers. We have a valid reason to refuse lending it, such as a pressing need for the book ourselves or we have already promised it to someone else. Our motivation is not attachment to the book or miserliness. We apologize for not being able to lend it now and explain why, assuring the person we shall lend it as soon as possible. To make up the loss, we offer to share our notes. In this way, we fully maintain the bodhisattva form of our lives.

We progressively begin to weaken that form and loosen our hold on our vows as we come increasingly under the influence of attachment and miserliness. Please note that maintaining the vow to refrain from not sharing Dharma teachings or any other sources of knowledge does not rid us of attachment or miserliness with our books. It merely keeps us from acting under their influence. We may lend our book or, because of an urgent need, not lend it now, but still be attached to it and basically a miser. Vows, however, help in the struggle to exterminate these disturbing emotions and gain liberation from the problems and the suffering they bring. The stronger these troublemakers are, however, the more difficult it is to exercise self-control not to let them dictate our behavior.

We are progressively more dominated by attachment and miserliness - and our vows are progressively weaker - when, in not lending our book, we know it is wrong to do so, but we hold any one, two, or all three of the other binding factors. These constitute the minor, intermediate, and major levels of minor corruption of our vows. For example, we know it is wrong not to lend our book, but that is our policy and we make no exceptions. If we feel badly about that and are ashamed about how our refusal reflects on us and our teachers, the bodhisattva shape we are trying to put in our lives is still not too weak. But if, in addition, we feel happy about our policy and then, in addition, we no longer care what others think about us or our teachers, we are falling more and more prey to our attachment and miserliness.

An even weaker level of maintaining this shape in our lives begins when we do not acknowledge anything wrong in refusing to lend the book. This is the minor level of intermediate corruption. As we add one or two of the other binding factors, we weaken this shape even further, with major intermediate corruption and major corruption respectively. When all four binding factors are present, we commit a root downfall and completely lose our bodhisattva vows. We are now fully under the sway of attachment and miserliness, which means we are not engaged any more in overcoming them or realizing our potentials so that we can benefit others. In forsaking the involved stage of bodhichitta, we lose our bodhisattva vows, which structure that level.

Strengthening Weakened Vows

The first step to repairing our bodhisattva vows, if we have weakened or lost them, is to admit that our transgression was a mistake. We may do this with an expiation ritual. Such a ritual does not entail confessing our mistakes to some other person or seeking forgiveness from the Buddhas. We need to be honest with ourselves and with our commitment. If we already felt it was wrong when we actually broke a specific vow, we re-acknowledge our mistake. We then generate four factors that act as opponent forces. These four factors are:

(1) Feeling regret about our action. Regret, whether at the time of transgressing a vow or afterwards, is not the same as guilt. *Regret* is the wish that we did not have to commit the act we are doing or one we have done. It is the opposite of taking pleasure or later rejoicing in our action. *Guilt*, on the other hand, is a strong feeling that our action is or was really bad and that we are therefore a truly bad person. Regarding these identities as inherent and eternal, we dwell morbidly on them and do not let go. Guilt, however, is never an appropriate or helpful response to our errors. For instance, if we eat some food that makes us sick, we regret our action - it was a mistake. The fact that we ate that food, however, does not make us inherently bad. We are responsible for our actions and their consequences, but not guilty for them in a condemning sense that deprives us of any feeling of self-worth or dignity.

(2) Promising to try our best not to repeat the mistake. Even if we had such an intention when transgressing the vow, we consciously reaffirm our resolve.

(3) Going back to our basis. This means to reaffirm the safe and positive direction in our lives and rededicate our hearts to achieving enlightenment for the benefit of all - in other words, revitalizing and fortifying our refuge and aspiring level of bodhichitta.

(4) Undertaking remedial measures to counterbalance our transgression. Such measures include meditating on love and generosity, apologizing for our unkind behavior, and engaging in other positive deeds. Since acting constructively requires a sense of moral self-dignity and care for how our actions reflect on those we respect, it counters the lack of these that might have accompanied our negative act. Even if we felt ashamed and embarrassed at the time of the transgression, these positive steps strengthen our self-respect and regard for how others might think of our teachers.

Concluding Remarks

We can see, then, that the bodhisattva vows are in fact quite difficult to lose completely. So long as we sincerely respect and try to keep them as guidelines, we never actually lose them. This is because the four binding factors are never complete even if our disturbing emotions cause us to break a vow. And even in the case of holding a distorted, antagonistic attitude or giving up bodhichitta, if we admit our mistake, muster the opponent forces of regret and so on, and retake the vows, we can recover and resume our path. Therefore, when trying to decide whether or not to take the vows, it is more reasonable to base the decision on an assessment of our abilities to sustain continuing effort in trying to keep them as guidelines, rather than our abilities to keep them perfectly. It is best, however, never to weaken or lose our vows. Although we are able to walk again after breaking a leg, we may be left with a limp.

The 46 Auxiliary Bodhisattva Vows

Introduction

The secondary bodhisattva vows are to restrain from forty-six faulty actions. These faulty actions are divided into seven groups detrimental, one each, to our training in the six far-reaching attitudes (perfections) and to our benefiting others.

The six far-reaching attitudes are

1. Generosity,
2. Ethical self-discipline,
3. Patient tolerance (patience),
4. Joyful perseverance (positive enthusiasm),
5. Mental stability (concentration),
6. Discriminating awareness (wisdom).

Although the faulty actions are contrary to and hamper our progress toward enlightenment, committing them, even with the four binding factors complete, does not constitute a loss of our bodhisattva vows. The less complete these factors are, however, the less damage we do to our spiritual development along the bodhisattva path. If we happen to commit any of these faulty actions, we acknowledge our mistake and apply the opponent powers, as in the case of the root bodhisattva vows.

There are many details to learn about these forty-six, with many exceptions when there is no fault in committing them. In general, however, the damage to our development of the far-reaching attitudes and to the benefit we can give others depends on the motivation behind our faulty acts. If that motivation is a disturbed state of mind, such as attachment, anger, spite, or pride, the damage is much greater than if it is an undisturbed, though detrimental one, such as indifference, laziness, or forgetfulness. With indifference, we lack adequate faith or respect in the training to be bothered engaging in it. With laziness, we ignore our practice because we find it more pleasant and easier to do nothing. When we lack mindfulness, we completely forget about our commitments to help others. For many of the forty-six, we are not at fault if we have the intention eventually to eliminate them from our behavior, but our disturbing emotions and attitudes are still too strong to exercise sufficient self-control.

The presentation here follows that given by the fifteenth-century Gelug master Tsongkhapa in *An Explanation of Bodhisattvas' Ethical Discipline: The Main Path to Enlightenment*.

Seven Faulty Actions Detrimental to Training in Far-Reaching Generosity

Generosity is defined as the attitude of being willing to give. It includes willingness to give material objects, protection from fearful situations, and teachings.

Of the seven faulty actions that negatively affect our development of generosity, two harm our willingness to give others material objects, two our willingness to give others protection from fearful situations, two involve not providing the circumstances for others to cultivate and practice generosity, and one harms our development of the generosity of giving teachings.

Two Faulty Actions Detrimental to Developing the Willingness to Give Others Material Objects

(1) Not making offerings to the Triple Gem through the three gateways of our bodies, speech, and minds

Because of being in a bad mood, like being annoyed about something, or because of laziness, indifference, or we simply forget, failing to offer to the Buddhas, Dharma and Sangha, three times each day and three times each night, at least prostration with our bodies, words of praise with our speech, and remembrance of their good qualities with our minds and hearts. If we cannot at least be generous enough to offer these happily each day and night to the Three Jewels of Refuge, how shall we ever perfect our willingness to give everything to everyone?

(2) Following out our desirous minds

Because of great desire, attachment, or lack of contentment, indulging in any of the five types of desirable sensory objects - sights, sounds, fragrances, tastes, or tactile sensations. For example, because of attachment to delicious tastes, we nibble at the cake in the refrigerator even when we are not hungry. This is detrimental to our fight against miserliness. We soon find ourselves hoarding the cake, and even hiding it on the back of the shelf, so that we do not have to share it with anyone else. If we fully intend to overcome this bad habit but cannot yet control it because our attachment to food is so strong, we are not at fault in taking a piece of cake. Nevertheless, we try to increase our self-control by taking smaller pieces and not so often.

Two Faulty Actions Detrimental to Developing the Willingness to Give Others Protection from Fearful Situations

(3) *Not showing respect to our elders*

The objects of this action include our parents, teachers, those with excellent qualities and, in general, any persons with seniority or simply older than ourselves. When we fail to give them our seats on the bus, meet them at the airport, help carry their bags, and so on, because of pride, anger, spite, laziness, indifference, or forgetfulness, we leave them in a fearful and worrisome situation difficult to cope with.

(4) Not answering those who ask us questions

Because of pride, anger, spite, laziness, indifference, or forgetfulness, not happily answering others' sincere questions. In ignoring them, we leave them in a quandary with no one to turn to - also a fearful and insecure position.

As illustration of the type of detail found in Tsongkhapa's commentary to these vows, let us look at the exceptions when there is no fault in remaining silent or postponing our response. In terms of ourselves as the basis for this action, we need not answer if we are too sick or the person asking the question has purposely woken us in the middle of the night. Unless there is an emergency, there is no fault in telling the person to wait until we are feeling better or until the morning.

There are exceptions according to the occasion, for example when someone interrupts us with a question while we are teaching others, delivering a lecture, conducting a ceremony, speaking words of comfort to someone else, receiving a lesson, or listening to a discourse. We tell them politely to hold their questions until later.

Certain situations, by necessity, require silence or postponing the answer. For example, if we were to respond in depth to a question about hells during a public lecture in the West on Buddhism, we might turn many people off, causing a hindrance to their involvement with the Dharma. Silence is preferable if in answering someone's question, for example a bigot's inquiry about our ethnic backgrounds, we would cause that person to dislike us and therefore be unreceptive to our help. Silence is also better if it would cause others to stop acting destructively and lead them to a more constructive mode of behavior - for example, when

people psychologically dependent on us ask us to answer every question in their lives and we wish to teach them to make decisions and figure things out for themselves.

Furthermore, if we are at a meditation retreat with a rule of silence and someone asks us a question, there is no need to talk. Finally, it is best to conclude a question and answer session at the end of a lecture if, by continuing when the audience is tired and it is very late, we will cause resentment and anger toward us.

Two Faulty Actions of Not Providing the Circumstances for Others to Cultivate and Practice Generosity

(5) Not accepting when invited as a guest

If we refuse to go for a visit or a meal because of pride, anger, spite, laziness, or indifference, we deprive the other person of an opportunity for building up positive force (positive potential, merit) from offering hospitality. Unless there are good reasons to decline, we accept no matter how humble the home might be.

(6) Not accepting material gifts

For the same reasons as in the previous case.

One Faulty Action Detrimental to Developing the Generosity of Giving Teachings

(7) Not giving the Dharma to those who wish to learn

Here the motivation for refusing to teach about Buddhism, loan others our Dharma books, share our notes, and so on, is anger, spite, jealousy that the other person will eventually outstrip us, laziness, or indifference. In the case of the second root bodhisattva vow, we decline because of attachment and miserliness.

Nine Faulty Actions Detrimental to Training in Far-Reaching Ethical Self-Discipline

Ethical self-discipline is the attitude to restrain from negative actions. It also includes the discipline to engage in positive actions and to help others.

Of the nine faulty actions that hamper our development of ethical self-discipline, four concern situations in which our main consideration is others, three concern our own situation, and two concern both ourselves and others.

Four Faulty Actions That Concern Situations in Which Our Main Consideration Is Others

(1) Ignoring those with shattered ethics

If, because of anger, spite, laziness, indifference, or forgetfulness, we ignore, neglect, or put down those who have broken their vows or even committed heinous crimes, we weaken our ethical self-discipline to engage in positive acts and to help others. Such persons are in special need of our concern and attention since they have built up the causes for present and future suffering and unhappiness. Without self-righteousness or moral indignation, we try to help them, for instance by teaching meditation to interested prisoners in jail.

(2) Not upholding moral training for the sake of others' faith

Buddha has proscribed many actions that, although not naturally destructive, are detrimental to our spiritual progress - for example, laypersons and monastics drinking alcohol, or monastics sharing a room with a member of the opposite sex. Refraining from such behavior is training shared in common by Hinayana practitioners and bodhisattvas alike. If, as budding bodhisattvas, we ignore these proscriptions because of lack of respect or belief in Buddha's ethical teachings, or because of laziness to exercise self-control, we cause others seeing our behavior to lose faith and admiration for Buddhists and Buddhism. Therefore, with concern for the impression our conduct makes on others, we refrain, for example, from taking recreational drugs.

(3) Being petty when it concerns the welfare of others

Buddha gave many minor rules for monastics to train their behavior, for instance always to have our three sets of robes where we sleep. Sometimes, however, the needs of others overrides the necessity to follow this minor training, for example if someone falls sick and we need to stay overnight to take care of the person. If, because of anger or spite toward the person, or simply laziness to stay up all night, we decline on the grounds that we do not have our three sets of robes with us, we commit this faulty action. Being a rigid fanatic with rules hampers our balanced development of ethical self-discipline.

(4) Not committing a destructive action when love and compassion call for it

Occasionally, certain extreme situations arise in which the welfare of others is seriously jeopardized and there is no alternative left to prevent a tragedy other than committing one of the seven destructive physical or verbal actions. These seven are taking a life, taking what has not been given to us, indulging in inappropriate sexual behavior, lying, speaking divisively, using harsh and cruel language, or chattering meaninglessly. If we commit such an action without any disturbing emotion at the time, such as anger, desire, or naivety about cause and effect, but are motivated only by the wish to prevent others' suffering - being totally willing to accept on ourselves whatever negative consequences may come, even hellish pain - we do not damage our far-reaching ethical self-discipline. In fact, we build up a tremendous amount of positive force that speeds us on our spiritual paths.

Refusing to commit these destructive actions when necessity demands is at fault, however, only if we have taken and keep purely bodhisattva vows. Our reticence to exchange our happiness for the welfare of others hampers our perfection of the ethical self-discipline to help others always. There is no fault if we have only superficial compassion and do not keep bodhisattva vows or train in the conduct outlined by them. We realize that since our compassion is weak and unstable, the resulting suffering we would experience from our destructive actions might easily cause us to begrudge bodhisattva conduct. We might even give up the path of working to help others. Like the injunction that bodhisattvas on lower stages of development only damage themselves and their abilities to help others if they attempt practices of bodhisattvas on higher stages - such as feeding their flesh to a hungry tigress - it is better for us to remain cautious and hold back.

Since there may be confusion about what circumstances call for such bodhisattva action, let us look at examples taken from the commentary literature. Please keep in mind that these are last resort actions when all other means fail to alleviate or prevent others' suffering. As a budding bodhisattva, we are willing to take the life of someone about to commit a mass murder. We have no hesitation in confiscating medicines intended for relief efforts in a war-torn country that someone has taken to sell on the black market, or taking away a charity's funds from an administrator who is squandering or mismanaging them. We are willing, if male, to with another's wife - or with an unmarried woman whose parents forbid it, or with any other inappropriate partner - when the woman has the strong wish to develop bodhichitta but is overwhelmed with desire for sex with us and who, if she were to die not having had sex with us, would carry the grudge as an instinct into future lives. As a result, she would be extremely hostile toward bodhisattvas and the bodhisattva path.

Bodhisattvas' willingness to engage in inappropriate when all else fails to help prevent someone from developing an extremely negative attitude toward the spiritual path of altruism raises an important point for married couples on the bodhisattva path to consider. Sometimes a couple becomes involved in Dharma and one of them, for instance the woman, wishing to be celibate, stops sexual relations with her husband when he is not of the same mind. He still has attachment to sex and takes her decision as a personal rejection. Sometimes the wife's fanaticism and lack of sensitivity drives her husband to blame his frustration and unhappiness on the Dharma. He leaves the marriage and turns his back on Buddhism with bitter resentment. If there is no other way to avoid his hostile reaction toward the spiritual path and the woman is keeping bodhisattva vows, she would do well to evaluate her compassion to determine if it is strong enough to allow her to have occasional sex with her husband without serious harm to her ability to help others. This is very relevant in terms of the tantric vows concerning chaste behavior.

As budding bodhisattvas, we are willing to lie when it saves others' lives or prevents others from being tortured and maimed. We have no hesitation to speak divisively to separate our children from a wrong crowd of friends - or disciples from misleading teachers - who are exerting negative influences on them and encouraging harmful attitudes and behavior. We do not refrain from using harsh language to rouse our children from negative ways, like not doing their homework, when they will not listen to reason. And when others, interested in Buddhism, are totally addicted to chattering, drinking, partying, singing, dancing, or telling off-color jokes or stories of violence, we are willing to join in if refusal would make these persons feel that bodhisattvas, and Buddhists in general, never have fun and that the spiritual path is not for them.

Three Faulty Actions Concerning Our Own Situation

(5) Earning our living through a wrong livelihood

Such livelihoods are through dishonest or devious means, primarily of five major types: (a) pretense or hypocrisy, (b) flattery or using smooth words to fool others, (c) blackmail, extortion, or playing on people's guilt, (d) demanding bribes or exacting fines for imaginary offenses, and (e) giving bribes to gain something larger in return. We resort to such means because of total lack of a sense of moral self-dignity or reserve.

(6) Becoming excited and flying off to some frivolous activity

Because of being discontent, restless, bored, or hyperactive, and desirous for some excitement, running off to some frivolous distraction - like wandering in a shopping mall, flipping through the stations on the television, playing computer games and so on. We become completely engrossed and out of control. If we engage in such activities with others in order to calm down their anger or lift their depression, to help them if they are addicted to such things, to gain their trust if we suspect they are hostile toward us, or to strengthen old friendships, we do not harm our ethical training to discipline ourselves to act positively and to help others. However, if we run off to these activities feeling we have nothing better to do, we are deceiving ourselves. There is always something better to do. Sometimes, however, we need a break to help renew our enthusiasm and energy when we become tired or depressed. There is no fault in that, so long as we set reasonable limits.

(7) Intending only to wander in samsara

Many sutras explain that bodhisattvas prefer to stay in samsara rather than achieve liberation themselves. It is a fault to take this literally to mean we do not work to overcome our disturbing emotions and attitudes and achieve liberation, but just keep our delusions and work with them to help others. This is different from the eighteenth root bodhisattva vow of giving up bodhichitta, with which we fully decide to stop working for liberation and enlightenment. Here, we just consider it unimportant and unnecessary to free ourselves from disturbing emotions, which seriously weakens our ethical self-discipline. Although on the bodhisattva

path, especially when it entails anuttarayoga tantra, we transform and use the energies of desire to enhance our spiritual progress, this does not mean we give free reign to our desires and do not work to rid ourselves of them.

Two Faulty Actions Concerning Both Ourselves and Others

(8) Not ridding ourselves of behavior that causes us to fall to ill-repute

Suppose we like eating meat. If we are among vegetarian Buddhists and we insist on eating a steak, we invite their criticism and disrespect. They will not take our words about Dharma seriously and will spread stories about us, making others unreceptive to our help as well. As budding bodhisattvas, if we do not rid ourselves of such behavior, it is a great fault.

(9) Not redressing those who act with disturbing emotions and attitudes

If we are in a position of authority in an office, school, monastery, or household and, because of attachment to certain members or the wish to be liked, we fail to scold or punish those with disturbing emotions and attitudes who are acting disruptively, we damage the discipline and morale of the entire group.

Four Faulty Actions Detrimental to Training in Far-Reaching Patient Tolerance

Patient tolerance is the willingness to deal, without anger, with those doing harm, with the hardships involved in practicing Dharma, and with our own sufferings.

(1) Discarding the four positive trainings

These trainings are not to retaliate when (a) verbally abused or criticized, (b) made the target of others' anger, (c) beaten, or (d) humiliated. Since training ourselves not to retaliate in these four trying situations acts as a cause for our patience to grow, if we put this aside we damage our development of this positive trait.

(2) Ignoring those who are angry with us

If others are annoyed with us and holding a grudge, if we do nothing about it and do not try to assuage their anger, because of pride, spite, jealousy, laziness, indifference, or not caring, we hamper our perfection of patience because we allow the opposite of patience, namely anger, to continue unabated. To avoid this fault, we apologize whether or not we have offended or done anything wrong.

(3) Refusing others' apologies

The third root bodhisattva downfall is not listening to others' apologies when they plead for forgiveness at the moment when we are angry with them. Here, we do not accept their apologies after the occasion, when we are holding a grudge.

(4) Dwelling on anger

Once we become angry in any situation, we act contrary to our development of patient tolerance if we dwell on it, holding a grudge, without applying opponent forces to counter it. If we apply these forces, such as meditating on love for the objects of our annoyance, but are unsuccessful, we are not at fault. Because we are at least trying, we do not weaken our cultivation of patience.

Three Faulty Actions Detrimental to Training in Far-Reaching Joyful Perseverance

Joyful perseverance (positive enthusiasm) is taking joy in doing what is constructive.

(1) Gathering a circle of followers because of desiring veneration and respect

When we gather a circle of friends, admirers or pupils, or decide to marry or live with someone, if our motive is the wish for others to show us respect, give us love and affection, shower us with gifts, serve us, massage our backs, and do our everyday tasks, we lose enthusiasm for doing anything positive ourselves, such as helping others. We are attracted to an inferior mode of operation, namely telling others what to do for us.

(2) Not doing anything, out of laziness, and so on

If we give in to laziness, indifference, apathy, moods of not feeling like doing anything, or not being interested in anything at all, or addiction to sleeping long hours, lying in bed all day, taking naps, or lounging around doing nothing, we become addicted to this and lose all enthusiasm for helping others. Of course, we take rest if we are sick or exhausted, but it is a great fault to spoil ourselves by being too soft.

(3) Resorting to passing time with stories, out of attachment

The third obstacle hindering the growth of enthusiasm for helping others is wasting time in a meaningless fashion. This refers to telling, listening to, reading, watching on television or in the movies, or surfing the internet for stories about sex, violence, celebrities, political intrigues, and so on.

Three Faulty Actions Detrimental to Training in Far-Reaching Mental Stability

Mental stability (concentration) is the state of mind that does not lose its equilibrium or focus because of disturbing emotions, flightiness of mind, or mental dullness.

(1) Not seeking the means for gaining absorbed concentration

If, because of pride, spite, laziness, or indifference, we do not attend teachings on how to settle our minds in absorbed concentration when a master is giving them, how can we ever cultivate or enhance our stability of mind? If we are sick, suspect that the instructions are incorrect, or have already achieved perfect concentration, we need not go.

(2) Not ridding ourselves of the obstacles preventing mental stability

When practicing meditation to achieve absorbed concentration, we encounter five major obstacles. If we give in and do not try to eliminate them, we damage our development of mental stability. If we are trying to remove them, but are not yet successful, we are not at fault. The five obstacles are (a) intentions to pursue any of the five types of desirable sensory objects, (b) thoughts of spite, (c) foggy-mindedness and drowsiness, (d) flightiness of mind and regrets, and (e) indecisive wavering or doubts.

(3) Regarding the taste of bliss from gaining mental stability as its main advantage

Normally, we tie up a great deal of our energies in nervousness, worry, indecision, thoughts of longing or resentment, and so on, or weigh them down with dullness and sleepiness. As we concentrate and absorb our minds ever deeper, we release ever greater amounts of this energy. We experience this as a feeling of physical and mental bliss. The stronger that bliss, the further it draws us into absorption. For this reason, in anuttarayoga tantra, we generate

and use even more intense blissful states of mind than those gained merely from perfect concentration, in order to reach subtlest clear light mental activity and absorb it in the understanding of voidness. If we become attached to the taste of bliss we gain at any stage of developing mental stability, whether or not in conjunction with tantra practice, and we regard enjoying the pleasure we gain from that bliss as the main goal of our practice, we seriously hinder our development of far-reaching stability of mind.

Eight Faulty Actions Detrimental to Training in Far-Reaching Discriminating Awareness

Discriminating awareness (wisdom) is the mental factor that decisively discriminates between what is correct and incorrect, appropriate and inappropriate, helpful and harmful, and so on.

(1) Forsaking the shravaka (listener) vehicle

The sixth root bodhisattva downfall is to claim that the textual teachings of the shravaka vehicle are not Buddha's words, while the fourteenth is to say that the instructions in them are ineffective for eliminating attachment and so forth. The thirteenth is to tell bodhisattvas holding lay or monastic *pratimoksha* (individual liberation) vows - part of the teachings of the shravaka vehicle - that there is no need for them, as bodhisattvas, to safeguard these vows. For this root downfall to be complete, the bodhisattvas hearing our words must actually give up their pratimoksha vows. Here, the faulty action is simply to think or tell others that bodhisattvas have no need to listen to teachings from the shravaka vehicle - specifically concerning the rules of discipline of the pratimoksha vows - or to uphold or train themselves with them. No one need actually give up his or her vows.

In studying and keeping vowed rules of discipline, we increase our ability to discriminate between which types of behavior are to be adopted or abandoned. By denying the need to train ourselves with pratimoksha vows, we weaken our development of discriminating awareness. We also incorrectly discriminate the shravaka teachings as being essential for only shravakas, and worthless for bodhisattvas.

(2) Exerting effort in them while having our own methods

If we exert all our efforts on studying and upholding merely our pratimoksha vows, to the neglect of studying and training in the vast bodhisattva teachings concerning compassion and wisdom, we also weaken our discriminating awareness. When we exert effort in the teachings of the shravaka vehicle, we simultaneously work on the bodhisattva ones as well.

(3) Exerting effort in studying non-Buddhist texts when it is not to be done

According to the commentaries, non-Buddhist texts refer to works on logic and grammar. We can undoubtedly also include books for learning foreign languages or any topic from the modern educational curriculum, such as mathematics, science, psychology, or philosophy. The fault here is putting all our efforts into studying these subjects and neglecting our Mahayana studies and practice so that eventually we forget all about them. If we are extremely intelligent, able to learn things quickly, have a sound and stable understanding of the Mahayana teachings based on logic and reason, and are able to retain those teachings in our memories for a long time, there is no fault in studying non-Buddhist texts if each day we also maintain our Mahayana studies and practice.

Non-Tibetan students of Buddhism who wish to study the Tibetan language would do well to keep this guideline in mind. If they are able to learn languages quickly and easily, already have a strong foundation in Buddhism, and enough time to study both language and Dharma, they gain much benefit from learning Tibetan. They can use it as a tool for deeper studies. However, if they find the language difficult, have only limited time and energy available, and do not yet have a good understanding of Buddhism or a stable daily meditation practice, they

damage and hamper their spiritual development by studying Tibetan. It is important to discriminate our priorities.

(4) Even if able to exert effort on them, becoming infatuated

If we have the ability to study non-Buddhist material, such as Tibetan language, with all the stipulations as above, if we become infatuated with the subject matter, we may give up our spiritual practice and concentrate totally on this less vital topic. Mastering Tibetan or mathematics does not bring us liberation from our disturbing emotions and attitudes, nor the problems and suffering they engender. It does not give us the ability to help others as fully as is possible. Only perfecting bodhichitta and the far-reaching attitudes, especially discriminating awareness of voidness, can lead us to this goal. Therefore, to guard against infatuation with non-Buddhist topics - which may certainly be helpful to learn, but are not the main things upon which to focus - we study them soberly, keeping a proper perspective. In this way, we discriminate correctly what is essential and safeguard ourselves from becoming carried away with less vital matters.

(5) Forsaking the Mahayana vehicle

The sixth root bodhisattva downfall is claiming that the Mahayana texts are not Buddha's words. Here, we accept that, in general, they are authentic, but we criticize certain aspects of them, specifically texts concerning bodhisattvas' unimaginably extensive deeds and the inconceivably profound teachings of voidness. The former include accounts of Buddhas multiplying themselves into countless forms simultaneously helping numberless beings in myriad worlds, while the latter include collections of terse and pithy verses extremely difficult to fathom. We degenerate our discriminating awareness by repudiating them in any of four ways, that (a) their content is inferior - they speak sheer nonsense, (b) their manner of expression is inferior - they are bad writing that makes no sense, (c) their author is inferior - they are not the words of an enlightened Buddha, or (d) their use is inferior - they are of no benefit to anyone. By discriminating falsely like this, in a closed-minded and hotheaded manner, we damage our ability to discriminate anything correctly.

When faced with teachings or texts we do not understand, we remain open-minded. We think that even though we cannot appreciate or fathom them now, the Buddhas and highly realized bodhisattvas understand their words and, through realization of their meaning, benefit others in infinite ways. In this way, we develop firm resolve to try to grasp them in the future. There is no fault if we lack this firm resolve, so long as we do not belittle and denigrate the teachings. We at least maintain equanimity, acknowledging that we do not understand them.

(6) Praising ourselves and/or belittling others

The first root bodhisattva downfall is doing this motivated by desire for gain or jealousy. Here the motivation is pride, conceit, haughtiness, or anger. Such motivations arise when we falsely discriminate ourselves as better than others are.

(7) Not going for the sake of Dharma

The second root bodhisattva downfall is not giving the Dharma because of attachment and miserliness. Here, the fault is not going to teach, perform Buddhist rituals, attend Buddhist ceremonies, or listen to discourses because of pride, anger, spite, laziness, or indifference. With such motivation, we do not discriminate correctly what is worthwhile. There is no fault, however, if we do not go because of feeling we are not a teacher or being too sick, or because we suspect the teachings we would hear or impart would be incorrect, or we know that the audience has heard them repeatedly and knows them already, or we have received them in full and comprehended and mastered them completely so that we have no need to listen further, or we are already focused and absorbed on the teachings so need no reminder about them, or they are over our heads and we would only become confused by listening.

Further, if our teachers would be displeased if we went - such as if he or she told us to do something else - we certainly do not go.

(8) Relying on language to deride a teacher

We weaken our abilities to discriminate correctly when we judge spiritual teachers by their language. We ridicule and reject those who speak with a heavy accent, making many grammatical mistakes, even though what they explain is correct, and run after those who speak elegantly, but total nonsense.

Twelve Faulty Actions That Contradict Working to Benefit Others

(1) Not going to help those in need

Because of anger, spite, laziness, or indifference, not going to the assistance of any of eight types of persons needing help: (a) in making a decision about something positive, for example at a meeting, (b) in traveling, (c) in learning a foreign language we know, (d) in carrying out some task that has no moral fault, (e) in keeping watch over a house, temple, or their possessions, (f) in stopping a fight or argument, (g) in celebrating an occasion, like a wedding, or (h) in doing charity work. Declining to go, however, does not damage our efforts to help others if we are sick, have already promised our assistance elsewhere, send someone else who is capable of the job, are engaged in some positive task that is more urgent, or are incompetent to help. There is also no fault if the task is harmful to others, contradictory to the Dharma or unreasonable, or if the persons requesting our assistance are capable of finding help elsewhere or have someone reliable to find it for them.

(2) Neglecting to serve the sick

Because of anger, spite, laziness, or indifference.

(3) Not alleviating suffering

Also because of the same reasons. Seven types of persons afflicted with difficulties require special care: (a) the blind, (b) the deaf, (c) amputees and cripples, (d) tired travelers, (e) those suffering from any of the five obstacles preventing mental stability, (f) those with ill will and strong prejudices, and (g) those who have fallen from positions of high status.

(4) Not teaching the reckless in accordance with their character

Reckless persons refer to those who do not care about the laws of behavioral cause and effect and, consequently, whose behavior will bring them unhappiness and problems in this and future lives. We cannot help such people if we are self-righteously indignant and disapproving. To reach them, we need to be skillful and modify our approach to suit their specific situations. For example, if our neighbor is an avid hunter, we do not preach to him with outrage that he will burn in hell. The person will probably never have anything to do with us again. Rather, we befriend our neighbor by telling him what a kind service he provides for making game meat available for his family and friends. Once he is receptive to our advice, we slowly suggest better ways to relax and make others happy without taking lives.

(5) Not paying back help received

Not wanting to help others in return for the help they have given us, or not remembering or even thinking to pay anything back. There is no fault, however, if while trying to be of help in return, such as when they are repairing their cars, we lack the knowledge and ability, or are too weak. Moreover, if those who have helped us wish nothing in return, we do not force them to accept our offer.

(6) Not alleviating the mental grief of others

Because of spite, laziness, or indifference, if we fail to try comforting those who have lost a loved one, money, or prized possessions, we are at fault. Those who are upset or depressed require our sincere affection, sympathy, and understanding, but certainly not pity.

(7) Not giving to those in need of charity

Because of anger, spite, laziness, or indifference. If because of miserliness, it is a root downfall.

(8) Not taking care of the needs of our circle

It is a great fault to neglect, out of spite, laziness, or indifference, our circle of relatives, friends, co-workers, employees, disciples, and so on, especially when engaged in social work helping others. We need to provide for their physical needs and look after their spiritual welfare. How can we pretend to be helping all sentient beings if we ignore the needs of those closest to us?

(9) Not going along with the preferences of others

So long as what others wish us to do or what they like is not harmful to them or to others, it is a fault not to agree. Everyone does things differently or has individual tastes. If we do not honor this, because of spite, laziness, or indifference, we start petty arguments about things like where to eat, or we are insensitive to their preferences and arouse their discomfort or resentment when ordering the menu.

(10) Not speaking in praise of others' talents or good qualities

If we fail to commend others when they have done something well or concur with someone else's acclaim of them, because of anger, spite, indifference, or laziness, we weaken our interest and enthusiasm for them to continue to grow. If others are embarrassed to be lauded, either privately or in public, or would become proud or vain if praised to their faces, we hold back our words.

(11) Not enforcing punishment in accordance with circumstances

To help others, it is important to discipline them if they act in an unruly manner. If we fail to do so, because of emotional problems with it, or laziness, indifference, or not caring, we damage our ability to be effective guides.

(12) Not using such things as extraphysical powers or the ability to cast spells

Certain situations call for special methods to help others, such as using extraphysical powers. If we possess these means, but do no use them when they would be appropriate and effective, we damage our ability to be of help. We try to use whatever talents, abilities, and attainments we have to benefit others.

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