



# Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

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***Preventing Our Bodhichitta Aspiration from Degenerating***  
***4th Chapter, Stanzas 2-12***



BA4\_2-12 *Preventing our Bodhichitta Aspiration from Degenerating*  
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Teachings on the Bodhicharyavatara for the Online Shedra

So now we are on the second stanza of the fourth chapter of Bodhicharyavatara, on carefulness. Now we expand and describe in detail about the practice of the carefulness and there are three main points: first, to take into consideration of the training, training itself; second, to take into consideration the preciousness of the human life; and third, to take into consideration the importance of transforming the kleshas, the negative emotions.

Now first, to take into consideration the training in the bodhisattva's way of life so that we take care that the bodhichitta does not degenerate, there are two things. The first is to take care that our aspiration of the bodhichitta does not degenerate; and secondly, to take care that the diligence in working on that does not degenerate. Now the first one has several stanzas; actually it starts from stanza number two till the first two lines of stanza number twelve. So what it says here is:

*Whatever was begun without due heed,  
And all that was not properly conceived,  
Although a promise and a pledge were given,  
It is right to reconsider: Shall I act or not? [2]*

Now generally, if one makes a promise or gives you [his] word or makes a pledge to do something and then one does not do it, it's very bad. It shows that you are not a kind of dependable person, a good person, honest person. But sometimes, if we start something without thinking - without heed - and if we haven't kind of thought about it properly, scrutinised, and by just saying that I'll do it or make a start then it is kind of ok, it is proper to reconsider whether this is something good to do or not to do: should I act or should I not act? That's general.

But, he says:

*Yet, what the Buddhas and their heirs  
Have scrutinized in their great wisdom,  
I myself have probed and scrutinized.  
Why should I now procrastinate? [3]*

This bodhisattva's way of life, this action of the bodhisattva is something that the Buddhas, not only Buddha Sakyamuni, but all the Buddhas of the past, with their greatest wisdom, enlightened mind, scrutinised this, thought about this, have used this, got a result out of that: and all their heirs, all the bodhisattvas of the past and present have also scrutinised it, practised it, used it, and they found it very, very important, very, very useful, transforming and good for yourself and good for others.

And not only that, but I have myself, also, in all these last three chapters, scrutinised it, tried to find out, tried to understand, tried to look at it from every point and then I decided to work on it, to take up this way of life after all these considerations and thinking and study. So, now why should I procrastinate, why should I not do it, why should I delay, why should I not act on it? I should not have any doubts now whether I should actually work, actually act on this or not.

*For if I bind myself with promises  
But fail to carry out my words in deed,  
Then every being will have been betrayed.  
What destiny must lie in store for me? [4]*

Because now I have made a very strong kind of a promise, a very strong invitation to all the sentient beings that I will work towards the liberation and lasting peace and happiness of all the beings. And when I have made this promise to myself and to all the sentient beings and now I say that I'm not going to do it or I delay in doing it or I don't act on it, then it will be the greatest betrayal. I promised to work for the benefit of all the sentient beings and then if I don't do that, if I don't act on this, if I kind of back out from that then it's the greatest betrayal and I have done something really wrong - I should not do that.

So therefore, if I do that, if I betray all the sentient beings, then I would have created such a negative action and I would also feel so bad that I have made such a good, positive promise and then I'm now not doing anything about it. Therefore, what destiny lies for me? I've done the most negative thing. So therefore I should not do that, I should act, I should train, step by step maybe, of course but not go back, not stop doing; keep on doing, keep on training, keep on working, even if it is in small steps I must take each step ahead, not go back.

*If in the teachings it is said  
That those who in their thoughts intend  
To give a small and paltry thing but then draw back  
Will take rebirth as hungry spirits, [5]*

In the Buddha's teachings it is said - and it is said in many other places also - that if I have made a decision in my thoughts, in my mind, that I will give this to somebody - even if it is not a big thing, if it is a small thing - and then, even if I have decided to give it and I have made a mental note and a decision to give it but at the end I didn't do it, I didn't give that, do that positive thing, then it is said that, because of that, the breaking of the promise I could be reborn [as a] hungry ghost because of this, I must have done it because of my stinginess or some very negative kind of obstacle in my mind. So if that is the case:

*How can I expect a happy destiny  
If from my heart I summon  
Wandering beings to the highest bliss,  
But then deceive and fail them? [6]*

So if that is the case, then here it is not just a small thing I promised to give. I promised all the sentient beings and I have in my heart invited or made a decision to help all the wandering beings, all the sentient beings and to bring them to the complete enlightenment, to the highest bliss, the lasting peace and happiness, and after making this promise and making this decision then, if I do not deliver it, if I do not even try, if I do not take steps towards that action, then what rebirth will I have? What kind of repercussions would I have? It will be very bad. I would have broken my big, big, big promise. So therefore, I should not do that. I should keep this in my mind and keep on training and keep on working and living step by step in the bodhisattva's way of life.

*As for those who, losing bodhichitta,  
Lead others nonetheless to liberation,  
Karmic law is inconceivable  
And only understood by the Omniscient. [7]*

There are said to be some stories in the *Jataka* stories that some people, due to certain reasons, gave up bodhichitta and even then, afterwards, they become arhats and slowly, again become bodhisattvas. There are things like that, so it is not that once somebody gave up the bodhichitta then you can never recover, that's not the case. There are many different kinds of elements in the law of karma, there are lots of things, there are so many different aspects that it is very difficult to understand and explain unless you're kind of fully enlightened. But...

*This failure, for the Bodhisattva,  
Is the gravest of all downfalls.*

You know, to give up bodhichitta, to say that if this person, even when I can help them I will not help them: or if I take up the bodhisattva's vows and then I do not act on it this is the gravest, the most strongest, most negative downfall of bodhisattvas.

*For should it ever come to pass,  
The good of every being is thrown down. [8]*

Because if I make this promise, as I have made it, that I will work towards the elimination of all the sufferings of all the beings, and I should bring them the lasting peace and happiness, and then I decide not to do anything about that, then this is really like betraying the people; I have kind of drawn down, I have abandoned the good of every being. So, it's a very, very negative thing so I should never do it, there is no reason to do it and I should be very careful that I keep my promise and keep on working.

*And anyone who, for a single instant,  
Halts the merit of a Bodhisattva  
Wanders endlessly in evil states,  
Because the welfare of all beings is reduced. [9]*

It is said that if anybody, due to some reason, stops a bodhisattva's work, a bodhisattva's positive deeds, making an obstacle to the action of the bodhisattva, of the training of the bodhisattva, then that person will have very negative karma, will wander in the negative realms for a long time, because you have reduced, you have obstructed well-being to lots of beings by stopping this bodhisattva's work.

So therefore, if you give up or degenerate your bodhichitta, then you have done that, you have halted the activities of the bodhisattva, which is yourself. So it is a very negative deed, it's a very strongly grave, negative thing. Therefore, we should be very, very careful that our intention of bodhichitta is not degenerated. We should watch our minds, we should watch our aspirations and see that whenever there is a negative aspiration coming up, only a selfish motivation, only self-centred motivation, it's not that you cannot do anything good for yourself, of course you could do good for yourself too, but only yourself and at the expense of others or to stop training, stop working towards the benefit of others, benefit of all the beings, then you need to change it immediately, we need to stop it immediately, we need to let that go immediately and make our bodhisattva's aspiration very clear, very strong and unwavering. The bodhisattva's way of thinking, attitude, we should try to make it our natural attitude so therefore the bodhichitta does not

degenerate but grows.

*Destroy a single being's joy  
And you will work the ruin of yourself.  
No need to speak of bringing low  
The joy of beings infinite as space itself! [10]*

Generally, even if you destroy a joy or happiness of one single person that's a very bad thing, that's a very negative thing, it's not meritorious, but it's very unvirtuous, it's very bad. Therefore, if you break the bodhisattva's vows, if you degenerate the bodhisattva's aspirations, if you let go of your bodhisattva's aspirations, then you are breaking, destroying, indirectly the joy of all the beings that you have promised to bring them. So, how a negative deed, how heinous [it is] and how evil [this] thing [is], [how] bad it is. Therefore, thinking about that, understanding that we should see that we should be careful, that our aspiration is intact.

*And those who circle in saṃsāra,  
Mixing powerful downfalls  
With the power of bodhichitta back and forth,  
Will long be hindered from the Bodhisattva grounds. [11]*

But if you say that ok, I can break the bodhisattva's aspiration and then I can take it back again and then I can break it and then I can generate it again like that so there's nothing wrong, but that's not good. Although, if your bodhisattva's aspiration is gone and then you regenerate it again then it's also good. That way it's possible but if you do like that it will take so long [a] time because you are not going step by step, you are not going forward all the time, you go backward and forward and therefore it takes a lot of time and it becomes less powerful, less quick and so therefore it's not something good to do like that.

So, by understanding this, by thinking about that, we should make it sure that it never goes back. It can go forward, slowly with small steps, little by little but never go back. Never leave it, never break it.

*And so, according to my promise,  
I will act attentively. [12]*

So therefore, making all these considerations, thinking about all these things I should make it very important, I should make it very clear, I should make it extremely determined that I make a very strong, clear promise that the bodhichitta I have taken, the promise that I have made I will act on them, I will take actions on them, I will train in them, I will do something, I will take steps, one by one and go forward, never go backward.

So this is the first...to be careful, to take care that my aspiration does not degenerate. So, I'll stop here. Thank you very much.

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This is a transcript of a video talk given for the Bodhicharya Online Shedra by Ringu Tulku Rinpoche. The transcript has only been lightly edited and is meant to be used within the Online Shedra study context.