



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

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How to Work for the Benefit of Others. Part 1
5th Chapter, Stanzas 84-90



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So now we come to the third *shila* that is on how to help, or how to work for the benefit of other beings. And here there are 3 topics. The first one is stanza number 84.

*Therefore understand this well,
And always labor for the benefit of beings.
The Compassionate One farsightedly permits,
To this end, even what has been proscribed. [5:84]*

So what this says is that a bodhisattva needs to work on these two main things: 1) refraining from doing the negative actions, and, 2) with compassion and holding the benefit of other beings, trying

to accumulate more and more the positive deeds. We need to understand very well that a bodhisattva always labours and makes efforts to work for the benefit of other beings. And if somebody is really thinking, or working, only for the benefit of others, and there is no other motivation, other self-interest, or anything like that, then *“the Compassionate One,”* the Buddha (“Compassionate One” means Buddha), *“far-sightedly permits,”* with this great insight or far-sight, *“to this end, even what has been proscribed.”*

What this means to say is that if one is doing whatever one is doing only for the benefit of others and with a great benefit to others, then even if that person, that bodhisattva, is seemingly doing something negative, something wrong, that is encouraged, or allowed by the Buddha. So if one is really doing something that is really meant for the benefit of other beings, and without any other ulterior motivation, or selfish motivation, then if somebody is doing something seemingly negative, it’s also positive. That is what it is saying.

There is a story of the Buddha when he was a Bodhisattva and he was on a ship. He found there was one man who was going to kill all the people and take over the ship. So when the Bodhisattva realized that, he knew that if the man were to accomplish that, not only will all the people on the ship die, but also the man himself would eventually go to hell realm because he will have killed so many people, and will have done so many negative things. Out of compassion, and not caring what will happen to himself with this negative action of killing, the Bodhisattva went and killed the man. That killing actually accumulated a lot of positive deeds for him. Although, he also had to go through the karmic consequences of being killed or dying not due to natural causes for many lifetimes.

Then, in order to help beings, you really have to give; you have to give material things as well as Dharma, and share and help. So this is from stanza number 85 until stanza number 90.

Eat only what is needful;

Share with those who have embraced the discipline,

With those who are defenseless or have fallen into evil states.

Give everything except the three robes of religion. [5:85]

Try to eat what is needful – not too much, not too little – from what you have. And what is extra that you have, share it with those people who are practicing, who are in retreat, who are doing disciplined work, who are hermits, who are monks, and people like that. And also with those who are defenseless, people who are in a negative or poor state, who cannot defend themselves, who cannot feed themselves (whether it is human beings or animals), and beings like that. You have to try to feed them. And those fallen into evil states. I think it is not “evil” here; it means negative state. It is somebody who is in a very desperate situation. To them also, you should try to share and give.

You can give everything, if you have the capacity and if you have no regrets. Except the three robes, *chos gos gsum*. If you are a monk, then you need to keep your monk's dress. You cannot give everything, because you cannot go naked. You have to be decently covered. Other than that, if you wish it and if you have the capacity, you can give everything.

*The body, used to practice sacred teachings,
Should not be harmed in meaningless pursuits.
By acting thus the wishes of all beings
Will swiftly and completely be attained. [5:86]*

Now, when you say you can give everything, and you can give even your life, it is not to say you have to give away your life needlessly and wastefully. Your life is very precious. Your life is not only precious for yourself. Your life is also precious for others, because if you are practicing the sacred teachings, your body is like a wish-fulfilling jewel. And through your teachings, through your practice, you can probably benefit lots of beings – human beings as well as non-human beings. So without a big, big, big purpose, you should not allow your body to be harmed in meaningless pursuits. Either meaningless pursuits of your own interest or meaningless pursuits in order to do what other people want.

"By acting thus the wishes of all beings will swiftly and completely be attained." In this way, by protecting yourself, by doing things in a kind of wise and moderate way, by sharing, by giving, by doing positive things, by working, by keeping the interest of more people in your mind, then it will be great benefit for yourself and great benefit for other beings.

*They should not give up their bodies
Whose compassionate thoughts are not yet pure.
But let them be surrendered when, both now and in their future lives,
Great benefit is thereby gained. [5:87]*

So you might hear in the stories of Buddha's past lives, that the Buddha gave his body, his life to other beings in need, like feeding it to a hungry tiger, and many other ways of giving away the body. But this is only for very great bodhisattvas. When you are beyond any pain, beyond any regret; when your compassion is extremely strong, and your realization of wisdom is also extremely clear and strong. Before you have that much compassion and that much wisdom, if you are not that pure, you should not attempt to give your body or your life, even if it is for the sake of others. Because that would be not very useful. There would be regret. And you could create more problems than you really help.

"But let them be surrendered when, both now and in their future lives, great benefit is thereby gained." So if you know that even if you give your life, you have strong enough compassion and strong enough wisdom, and you know that it would give great benefit to lots of people, now and in the long run, then yes, you can even surrender your life. But not before that. So this is important to understand.

You should start with helping people as much as you can, as much as you feel you are happy with, that you don't regret afterwards. You have no negative feelings about that. You are willing and happy and joyful doing that. That much you give. When you become so compassionate, so wise, with so much wisdom, that you have no pain, and you have no regret, and you know that this is going benefit so many beings in a very big way, then yes – you can and you should even give away your life and body.

*Do not teach the Dharma to the disrespectful;
To those who, though not sick, wrap cloths around their heads,
To those who carry weapons, staffs, or parasols,
To those who are with covered heads, [5:88]*

"Do not teach the Dharma to the disrespectful; to those who, though not sick, wrap cloths around their heads." So you should give teachings, you should guide people, you should share your understanding to anybody and everybody. But not to those who do not want to receive Dharma. If they don't have any respect, then you should not give them, because then you are imposing Dharma on them, and they will not like it. They will not be benefited from it. So it is no use, so you should not do it.

And in the same way, *"to those who are not sick, wrap cloths around their head."* These are more cultural things. I think in certain cultures, if your head is covered, then it shows you have no respect. In certain other cultures, if the head is not covered, then it shows you have no respect. So these things I think we cannot take literally. They are about society to society, community to community, place to place, on how to show respect. For those in Tibet, or in certain part of India, if you cover your head, it is not considered respectful. If you carry weapons, or staffs or parasols, then you are not regarded as respectful. But this is not applied to everywhere. These things we have to see according to the culture, and to place to place. So it is not very useful here.

*To those upon the lower paths do not explain the vast and deep,
Nor tutor women unaccompanied by men.
And every Dharma, high or low,
Expound with equal reverence. [5:89]*

"To those upon the lower paths do not explain the vast and deep." Now this refers to the way of teaching. You have to teach what is useful, what is needed, what would be helpful to the people. Not what you know or understand or feel is good for you. It is not about yourself, it is about others. So if some people are not ready to understand or even to listen to the philosophy of emptiness or selflessness, or things like that, then you should not talk about that. If somebody is not interested or ready to listen to teachings about Vajrayana or about tantras, then you should not teach about that. You should teach what is useful, what is needed by the people.

"Nor tutor women unaccompanied by men." So if there is a danger that if a monk is teaching a single woman without anyone else around and there might be chances that there will be

difficulties arising out of this socially or otherwise, then one should not do that.

"And every Dharma, high or low, expound with equal reverence." Every Dharma, high or low. Of course, there is nothing called "high" or "low," but the Dharma or the teachings are supposed to be deeper or profounder or more general, all of which have to be taught, treated, and practiced with equal reverence. The general teachings or the common teachings are not less important, not less effective. They are actually sometimes much more useful, much more important, because without those teachings, without those practices, then there is no way to go higher or deeper. So we need to respect all the teachings of the Buddha. And not only all the teachings of the Buddha, but the teachings of every other school and tradition as well.

Those suited to the teachings of great scope

Should not be introduced to lesser paths.

The rules of conduct you should not neglect

Nor lead astray with talk of sutras and of mantras. [5:90]

"Those suited to the teachings of great scope should not be introduced to lesser paths." But at the same time, as you should not teach more profound and more difficult teachings to those who are not interested or who are more suitable for the general teachings, in the same way, to those whom you understand or know to be more capable of understanding and would be more benefited by higher and deeper explanations of in-depth teachings, you should not waste time in giving only general teachings, but also should explain and give them deeper and more in-depth teachings.

"The rules of conduct you should not neglect, nor lead astray with talk of sutras and of mantras."

You should not neglect the rules of conduct, the Vinaya – the 10 virtues, the 10 non-virtues, and things like that. You should very clearly, very strongly, very diligently live by these rules of positive actions, and refrain from negative actions.

Those people who are able to understand much deeper teachings, and understand in-depth or really the insight of the profound teachings, then you should not make them recite mantras, or say, *"Oh, you should only recite sutras."* *"You should just say mantras, and that is enough for you."* You should not say that. You should give them explanations, clear understandings of the nature of the

phenomena, of the nature of the mind, of profound teachings of the sutras, profound teachings of the Vajrayana and Mahamudra and things like that. Maybe I should not say this here, but it is said here.

The main understanding here is that taking into consideration of the needs of the people, you should give teachings as according to their needs and what would be helpful to them, not as only what you know and what you understand, and what you like or don't like. It is mainly focused on how to help people; it is for you to try to find out what would be more beneficial to them. And act accordingly. Whether you are teaching, whether you are helping them, whether through material things or other actions, that should be the main focus.

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