



Bodhicharya

AWAKEN THE HEART BY OPENING THE MIND

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Taking the Bodhisattva's Vows
3rd Chapter, Stanzas 23-24



BA3_23-24: Taking the Bodhisattva's Vows. 3rd Chapter, Stanzas 23-24.
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So, now we come to stanza number 23 of the third chapter of Bodhicharyavatara: and this is the actual taking of the Bodhisattva vows.

Now here, generally, when Bodhisattvas take the aspiration or the vows, according to their motivation, their kind of strength of motivation, there are three types of Bodhisattvas: somebody who's called the *king-like Bodhisattva*; the *captain-like Bodhisattva*; and *shepherd-like Bodhisattva*.

The king-like Bodhisattva is those who would say that, "*I would very much like to work for the benefit of all the sentient beings, would like to bring them all to the lasting peace and happiness.*"

So therefore, first I would like to get there, I would first get enlightened and then, as an enlightened being, I would help all the beings to get that experience of enlightenment, lasting peace and happiness."

This is like the king who first wanted to look after himself, make everything enjoyable, good, powerful, everything perfect, and then he would also like to help his subjects to become better. This is called the king-like Bodhisattva.

The captain-like Bodhisattva is those who say that, "I would like to bring all the sentient beings to the enlightenment, to lasting peace and happiness, and I would bring them together with me, I would become enlightened along with them." So, this is like the captain who takes the ship across the ocean and if he gets across the ocean then the passengers of the ship also get across the ocean: and if doesn't then nobody gets [across]. Therefore, it's called the captain-like Bodhisattva whose aspiration is much stronger, much more compassionate, that he wants to bring - or he or she wants to bring - every being together with him to the lasting peace and happiness.

Then there is the Bodhisattva called the shepherd-like Bodhisattva. This Bodhisattva says that, *"I would like to bring all the sentient beings without leaving anybody behind to the perfect enlightenment, to lasting peace and happiness. After I have done that, and after that only, I would like to become enlightened. I would not want to become enlightened unless and until I bring every being to the enlightenment."* This is like those shepherds who first want to see that all his or her sheep are safe and fed and in the kind of a barn and then only he goes to kind of sleep or take his meals and rest.

So whichever kind of Bodhisattva you would like to be doesn't matter: but when you take the Bodhisattva vows, usually it is said the best is to take it from a genuine teacher who has the Bodhisattva's vows, who keeps the Bodhisattva's vows and who is a kind of a genuine, trustworthy person, a teacher.

But it is not that you have to take the Bodhisattva's vows only from a person or the teacher. It is possible to take the Bodhisattva's vows also in front of images of the Buddha or Bodhisattvas; or even if there are no images or there are no representations of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, you

kind of think about all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas in front of you existing in front of you and then from them you can take the Bodhisattva's vows. It's about yourself. So therefore, you can take the Bodhisattva's vows yourself without any other person being there also; because it is your own aspiration, your own making the decision. There's no difference, actually, not too much difference. The only thing is that when you take it from a person then you have some kind of a... you can be a little bit aware and mindful, a little bit ashamed if you break it because you have taken it from your teacher.

Now, when you take the Bodhisattva vows, first of course you make all the right aspirations, you can make offerings and things like that, as much as possible, to make a very strong kind of preparation, prepare it nicely. Usually it is said, to clean the place, to decorate the place, to make a throne for the person from whom you are taking refuge, decorated with flowers and everything that's possible to make it a grand way, to make lots of offerings and things like that. So that you kind of accumulate lots of positive merits and positive deeds to make the act very powerful or to make it not something unimportant but very important for you, like if you make a marriage you make it very important, you make lots of expenses and celebrations in the same way. Then you also do the refuge three times and then the actual vows. There are two ways. One is what is sometimes called the *Manjushri* way or the *Nagarjuna* way where you take the aspiration Bodhisattva's vow and action Bodhisattva's vow together in one go. Another way is the *Maitreya* way or *Asanga* way which is [where] you take the aspiration Bodhisattva vows separately from the actual Bodhisattva vows. You have two ceremonies. So this is the Nagarjuna's way because Shantideva is following the Nagarjuna's tradition.

So here, in this stanza, the two stanzas, stanza 23, after saying the refuge three times:

*Just as all the Buddhas of the past
Have brought forth the awakened mind,
And in the precepts of the Bodhisattvas
Step-by-step abode and trained,*

Means that, as all the Buddhas of the past generated the bodhichitta - that means they brought forth the awakened mind, means they generated the bodhichitta - so now you know the

bodhichitta, so we can use the word bodhichitta. *“And in the precepts of the Bodhisattvas, step-by-step abode and trained”*. They first generated the aspiration bodhichitta, they kind of generated the bodhicitta that’s the aspiration, and then they trained in the Bodhisattva’s precepts of the Bodhisattva’s ways, like action Bodhisattva’s bodhicitta, like the six paramitas and things like that; and step-by-step means as possible, first a little bit, then a little bit more, then a little bit more, stronger and stronger. It is said that first you try to give a cup of curry if you have no problem with that; and then a little bit more and a little bit more and then once you get very accustomed to it, very used to it, then, if there’s a great benefit, you might even give your life for the sake of the people.

So in this way, not directly or not at the beginning do something that you cannot do, it’s not like that; but first try something that is easy and possible for you to do, and then getting better and better in terms of all the six paramitas - generosity, moral ethics or discipline – any of those paramitas – meditation, patience, wisdom – everything. That is step-by-step and gradually.

So likewise, this is what the great Buddhas of the past and Bodhisattvas generated and trained themselves on the Bodhisattva’s way, so in the same way,

Likewise for the benefit of beings,

for the benefit of all the beings including myself, for my benefit and for the benefit of every other being,

I will bring to birth the awakened mind,

This means, I would like to generate the bodhichitta in myself. This is the aspiration bodhichitta. This is to promise myself to generate the aspiration bodhichitta. I will bring to birth the awakened mind, I will generate the bodhichitta. I will bring the compassion, the wisdom with compassion, aspiration of the wisdom with compassion bodhichitta within myself: and then I will not only generate this motivation bodhichitta, but,

[and] in those precepts, step-by-step,

I will abide and train myself. [24]

This last one is *action Bodhisattva's* vows: I will not only generate the bodhichitta but also will train on that practically in action, step-by-step. Step-by-step I will abide by the actions of the Bodhisattvas and the six-paramitas and helping others do all those kinds of things, and there are many precepts of the Bodhisattvas; and all of them, all of them step-by-step, not everything together, but whatever I can at this stage, I will train on that, I will abide in that and then, when I can, a little bit more, a little bit more - that's what we call step-by-step - gradually, I will train in those kind of Bodhisattva's way of life, Bodhisattva's precepts, Bodhisattva's conducts, Bodhisattva's trainings and then become a better and stronger and greater and greater Bodhisattva.

So this is very, very important. When you take the Bodhisattva's vows, you are not promising something that you cannot do. You are just promising to train, start to train, in generating the bodhichitta first and then training in its way, in its precepts, in its way of life as you can, step-by-step and gradually. And basically, the most important thing is you want to bring the lasting peace and happiness to yourself, you want to bring the lasting peace and happiness to all the beings and this must be, this is very clear that I want to bring the lasting peace and happiness to myself, the lasting peace and happiness for all the beings. Therefore, I must bring an enlightened state of mind to me, I must develop my wisdom, my compassion, my ability to help and heal others and I must bring that to all other beings; that must be so, there's no two opinions. That I must do.

In order to do that then I would like to train myself, I would like to train myself and work for the benefit of others as much as I am able to, step-by-step, because the more I get trained in it, the more I get advanced in it, the more I become better in it, the more I can do.

So this is the actual Bodhisattva's vows. So I think today I'll stop here [with] stanzas number 23 and 24. Thank you!

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