

Bodhisattva

Activity & Conduct

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During the practice of Dzogchen, we should continually reaffirm our bodhisattva activities and conduct, since practitioners of the Great Perfection are always motivated by the resolve to liberate all sentient beings from the suffering of cyclic existence. All sentient beings deserve to discover their beautiful, innate nature, and become happy and joyful. Actually, Dzogchen is the practice of bodhisattvas, the practice of great love and compassion. For this reason, we must keep the bodhisattvas' vast view and conduct at the center of all our Dharma activities.

To actualize this bodhisattva conduct, we should extend our inspiration to practice for the benefit of all sentient beings, aspiring to lead each one of them to complete enlightenment. Furthermore, our aspirations should not be limited by borders or restrictions. Buddha Shakyamuni said this many times throughout his teachings, especially in the sutra teachings and in the very special prayer known as the *King of Aspiration Prayers: the Aspiration for Noble Excellent Conduct*, which comes from the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. He explained that as far as space extends, so too infinite sentient beings exist. Each and every one of them has emotions and karma, and is struggling through the difficulties of samsara and delusion. Therefore, our aspirations and prayers should be as limitless as space. This is very important to remember.

But what is the meaning of "aspiration"? It means we should open our hearts by developing love, kindness, and compassion for all living beings, without partiality or restrictions. On a deep level, this aspiration represents our courage, commitment, and willingness to continue along the path for the benefit of everyone. Although we currently do not have the capability to solve the problems of all beings, we can generate the willingness to do so. We are willing to help in whatever way we can, according to our capabilities. We are ready!

Even if we are unable to solve the problems and difficulties of others, at least we are developing the intention to be able to do so in the future, to bring them peace, happiness, and joy in the state of enlightenment. This is how bodhisattvas think and how they engage in beneficial conduct, and it also the goal, vision, and philosophy of Dzogchen practice.

Practitioners who maintain this vast view and willingness to work for the benefit of all sentient beings are known in the Mahayana teachings as "bodhisattvas." In Sanskrit, *bodhi* means "enlightenment" and *sattva* means "courageous." So, bodhisattvas are "courageous ones for enlightenment." The resolve and willingness to expand one's love and compassion is itself enlightenment, or awakened mind. We should maintain our motivation and intention even when we are disturbed by our ego-clinging and negativities.

The distinctions between Mahayana and Hinayana practitioners are not external; they do not relate with how a person looks, speaks, or dresses. The real difference between these two types of practitioners is in their vision, their ideas, and their willingness to attain enlightenment for the sake of beings. For this reason,

the Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings, as well as the Dzogchen tantras, all distinguish between Mahayana and Hinayana practitioners based upon their bodhichitta—their altruistic intention to attain enlightenment and work for the benefit of limitless sentient beings until everyone reaches the essence of enlightenment. This is the only distinction. Otherwise, both Hinayana and Mahayana practitioners are followers of the Buddha: both practice nonviolence and learn how to benefit others. What differs is the emphasis they place on the willingness to help all sentient beings.

If we practice Dzogchen meditation thinking only of ourselves, our practice is not rooted in the bodhichitta of the Mahayana path. It is incomplete, inauthentic “Dzogchen.” Practicing in this way, we are inserting the element of the ego of the Hinayana mentality into the Mahayana teachings. Thus, even though we may call ourselves Mahayana practitioners, by engaging in this type of practice we are, in reality, Hinayana practitioners.

For all these reasons, the willingness and openness of bodhichitta are extremely important. These qualities make us good people, genuine and beautiful beings. By practicing in this way, we will gradually develop courage and commitment in addition to patience and tolerance. Each of these is very important for practitioners as well as everyone else. “Patience” refers to being more open as opposed to being tight and twisted, afflicted by a narrow mind and the feeling of being cornered. If we carry this narrow mental attitude everywhere we go, we will always feel extremely rigid. Our heads will bounce in every direction!

On the other hand, when we have a more open and vast view, things can change and move. There is more room for our intelligence, wisdom, love, compassion, and goodness. The Buddha appreciated and emphasized the importance of courage and commitment, patience and tolerance. “Tolerance” means the ability to let things come and let them go. As stated in the Dzogchen teachings, liberating phenomena as they arise brings about perfect tolerance and patience. Nothing is going to last forever, since all is impermanent. Practicing with the support of these beautiful thoughts makes our meditation meaningful.

Glorious Conqueror Shakyamuni often taught that all practitioners should uphold and develop the “Eight Intentions of Great Beings.” Once again, we may not be able to immediately accomplish all these courageous intentions, but it is important to generate the willingness to engage in them. We should continue to open our hearts to these practices.

1 The first intention is the willingness in the heart of every practitioner to remove the suffering of all living beings. We should always keep this foremost in our awareness.

2 The second intention is the willingness to lead every living being to the ultimate state of prosperity and happiness, which is buddhahood.

3 The third intention is the willingness to use our bodies in the service of making good things for both ourselves and others. Instead of using our bodies for any and everything, we should use them to benefit all beings.

4 The fourth intention is to always keep in mind the suffering, difficulties, and troubles associated with the six realms. Among these realms, the inhabitants of the lowest three experience the most difficulty. Therefore, we should help and serve these beings as much as we can. Of course, more immediately we can help animals, since we share a strong connection and are in close contact with these beings. So, the fourth intention is to maintain the powerful thought in our hearts and minds that we are going to help dispel the suffering and solve the problems of all beings in the three lower realms, especially animals, as much as the situation allows.

5 The fifth intention that we as practitioners should always guard in our hearts and minds is to be instrumental in bringing happiness and peace to all living beings by removing their difficulties, not just

now, but throughout each of our future lives. Wishing and praying that throughout our lifetimes we will be able to continually help all beings through the actions of our bodies, speech, and minds is the fifth intention.

6 The sixth intention is that we are ready and willing to exchange our joy, peace, and happiness for the difficulties and troubles of others. We have the capability and opportunity to actualize this intention through the practice of tonglen. The openness and willingness to engage in these actions is the sixth intention.

7 The seventh intention is to be able to fulfill the wishes of every living being in answer to their needs. It is the wish that we may fulfill their hopes according to the Dharma, so that they will benefit and thus be able to benefit all other sentient beings.

8 The eighth and final intention is to achieve enlightenment—buddhahood—for the sake of all beings. Regardless of the title we give these intentions, whoever has the willingness to engage in these activities is a bodhisattva, a great and beautiful being. As you all know, the best foundation for these intentions is bodhichitta, which is filled with courage, commitment, and openness. By keeping and igniting these thoughts as much as we can, we will become beautiful followers of the Buddha. When we read the life stories of all the great ancient masters, we see that this is the same teaching they taught and practiced themselves, following in the noble footsteps of the Awakened One.

The essence of the Eight Intentions of Great Beings is one hundred percent unconditional love, compassion, and wisdom. Therefore, these intentions have no connotation of violence, negativity, deceit, or the intention to disturb or take advantage of others. Rather, they represent the authentic nature of the absolute Dharma, which is Dzogchen. We are practicing the Dharma whenever we are in touch with this willingness to benefit sentient beings as much as we can.

Cultivating these intentions is not just beneficial for others: these wonderful thoughts will also help remove our own obscurations, obstacles, and negativities. They will fulfill our own wishes and goals. For this reason, these bodhisattva intentions are known as methods to accumulate merit. Upon developing them, we build up beautiful energy in our mindstreams and physical systems. It is this energy that will bring about realization, which is based upon our accumulation of true merit. Finally, our realization and bodhichitta will naturally reflect to and benefit others.

Uniting these bodhisattva intentions with our practice of Dzogchen will establish a beautiful system of interdependent coordination that will ignite and accelerate our progress, thereby bringing benefit to all beings. We should never allow our Dzogchen meditation to stray from this foundation. By practicing in this way, our realization will flower and its fruit will ripen perfectly. This will make everyone, including ourselves, ever happy and joyful, and we will eventually become beautiful practitioners and great beings. Beginning our journey with this perfect foundation, we will conclude it in the same way, uncovering the innate liberated state in ourselves and all beings. ■

The audio recording of this teaching, entitled “Virtue in Mind and Action,” is available as part of the Morning Dawn Study Series.

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