Commitments of the Bodhisattvas

of the Bodhisattvas

Commitments
buddhas, bodhisattvas, and gurus, please listen to what I say now from the depths of my heart:

Just as all the buddhas of the past have developed the thought of enlightenment, true bodhichitta, then practiced its stages of graded development following the trainings of all buddhas' sons, so may I too, for the sake of all beings, develop bodhichitta and follow the trainings exactly as all bodhisattvas have done.

Colophon:
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44. Not praising those deserving praise, or not rejoicing in others who praise learned and realized beings.

45. Not preventing those doing harmful actions from continuing their actions by whatever means is necessary according to the circumstances. The boastful may need to be looked down upon; those who are46. If you possess psychic powers, not using them in a time of need, such as to frighten someone who is about to do a non-virtuous action so that he will stop, to enhance others' faith or to subdue those he is harming, or because you are lazy because you do not care about the harmful person himself or about the consequences of letting the person do something and not doing it to punish or frightening those who are non-virtuous. The person who has the authority to do so should use his powers to prevent others from doing it because it is harmful to others who are not harming him or her. Our present actions have a lasting effect; those committed in the past11  5

Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

The Bodhisattva Vows

Vows and Commitments

Vows and Commitments
37. Not working to alleviate suffering but instead avoiding to help eliminate it through anger, laziness, or negligence. This refers to people such as the blind, deaf, paralyzed, those with mental illness, those who are paranoid, who have lost their authority or position, or have been abused by others.

38. Through anger or laziness not exhorting, correcting, or activating a lazy person or a person who does not know virtuous from non-virtuous actions. If you see a person engaging in frivolous actions, you should try to stop them. However, even if others are helping to do things you want to help them do, you should not cavil. You cannot do these actions even if others intend to perform virtuous actions of body and speech into virtue. But if you do not tell the people to do it, you lose many bodhicitta points. If you have been bodhicitta meditation, it is different from not telling them to do it. The action that has been done can do harm according to their level of mind when you are capable of doing actions to the level of their mind when you are capable of doing actions of others. Thought of conditioning, you don't act.

39. Through anger or laziness not repaying the kindness of someone who has helped you materially or morally.

40. Through harmful intent or laziness not giving food, clothes, or other necessities to the poor and needy if you are asked and if you have enough to spare.

41. Through anger or laziness not working for the welfare of your disciples and attendants, or not giving teachings and/or materials.

42. Through hatred or laziness not working for the welfare of your disciples and attendants, or not giving teachings and/or materials.

43. Being self-assertive and not acting in accordance with the wishes of others.

44. Through hatred or laziness not working for the welfare of your disciples and attendants, or not giving teachings and/or materials.

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Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

28. Vows and Commitments

29. Making an unnecessary study of non-Buddhist scriptures, thus neglecting to study the Buddha’s teachings. Although such study is permitted and is advantageous for understanding and helping others, you should not use excessive time and energy in studying non-Buddhist tenets.

30. Favoring, becoming attached to, or cultivating interest in non-Buddhist teachings when you have to study them. You are allowed to study non-Buddhist texts so that you can refute wrong views; but instead of doing this, you become fond of these scriptures.

31. Casting aspersions on the Mahayana teachings, the guru, or the subject, such as saying a scripture is poor in subject matter, composition, or power to help sentient beings, or that the subject is boring.

32. Praising yourself or belittling others out of anger or arrogance.

33. Not attending discourses, debates, discussions, pujas, or ceremonies because of arrogance, laziness, or anger.

34. Not respecting but abusing the guru who gives teachings and shows the path, seeking only his words without contemplation of their meaning.

35. Not helping those in need of help when you have the capacity to do so. Eight types of sentient beings in need of help are specified:

1. Not helping someone doing substantial work who asks for help.
2. Not helping someone in need of help who asks for help.
3. Not helping someone in need of help when you have the capacity to do so.
4. Not helping someone in need of help who asks for help.
5. Not helping someone in need of help who asks for help.
6. Not helping someone in need of help who asks for help.
7. Not helping someone in need of help who asks for help.
8. Not helping someone in need of help who asks for help.

36. Not helping sick persons with materials or service because of hatred.
Vows and Commitments

20. Following your anger and not trying to abandon it; feeding your anger by thinking that you acted rightly. Instead, you should contemplate the disadvantages of anger.

(Vows 21-23 are in connection with the perfection of perseverance)

21. Giving teachings, having disciples, building monasteries, or gathering people for the purpose of receiving reputation, profit, or remuneration. You should have Dharma gatherings with the intention to benefit others and make them receive enlightenment.

22. Not eliminating laziness, procrastination, delusions of incapability, and sleep, which are detrimental to your practice, and wasting time and energy on the trivial matters of samsara. You should avoid sleeping late or irregularly.

23. Passing time by frivolously talking about objects of attachment.

(Vows 24-26 are in connection with the perfection of concentration)

24. Not making an effort to study the means of attaining samadhi through requesting the guru for teachings. If you desire to meditate, you must approach your guru for instruction. The transgression is to not do this because of laziness, evil intent, arrogance, or meditation on samadhi without teachings.

25. Not trying to eliminate the obstacles that hinder your attainment of samadhi. The five obstacles in particular are: attachment to the desire realm and the five sense objects, harmful intent, sleep and foggy-mindedness, regret and agitation, doubt.

26. Attachment to the bliss of remaining in samadhi without doing any deep meditation or concentration.

(Vows 27-34 are in connection with the perfection of wisdom)

27. Looking down on Hinayana scriptures and saying the study of them is not necessary for Mahayana practitioners.

28. Learning Hinayana discourses and practices if you have the time and ability to learn the Mahayana and are already engaged in those.

The Bodhisattva Vows
Taking Refuge in the Three Jewels

A short daily practice of taking refuge

Prayer of the Four Immanence:

May I attain the state of a Buddha in order to benefit all sentient beings. By the virtuous merit that I create by practicing giving and other perfections, may I attain the state of a Buddha.

Prayer of the Four Immeasurables:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to abide in equanimity, free of attachment and hatred, not holding some close and others distant. May they abide so. May I cause them to abide so. Please, Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do this.

How to take refuge in Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha in order to be completely liberated from suffering and its causes.

Vows and Commitments:

19. Refusing to accept the sincere apologies of others or of people who are not able to talk with their right mind.

20. Refusing to make charitable contributions to those who, if they are given money, are not able to use it properly.

21. Refusing to make charitable contributions to those who are not able to accept the merit of their offerings.

17. Correcting the deluded actions of others when you are capable of doing so, but not pointing out someone's negative habits of body or speech.

18. Not becoming angry and retaliating with your body, speech, or mind when you are insulted or blamed, beaten, the object of somebody's anger, or when your shortcomings are exposed to others.

19. Not refusing to accept the sincere apologies of others out of anger or laziness. This differs from the vow because the four conditions are not needed to transgress it. Refusing to accept the sincere apologies of others or of people who are not able to talk with their right mind.

20. Refusing to make charitable contributions to those who, if they are given money, are not able to use it properly.

21. Refusing to make charitable contributions to those who are not able to accept the merit of their offerings.

22. Not being satisfied by a bad reputation or not abandoning the bad habits of body or speech that are the cause of your bad reputation. This differs from the root vow because the four conditions are not needed to transgress it.
Vows and Commitments

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings had happiness and the causes of happiness. May they have these. May I cause them to have these. Please, Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do this.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from suffering and the causes of suffering. May they be free. May I cause them to be free. Please, Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do this.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were never separated from higher rebirths and liberation's excellent bliss. May they never be separated. May I cause them never to be separated. Please, Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do this.

Motivation for Life

The purpose of my life is to free all sentient beings from every suffering and to lead them to happiness, especially the sublime peerless happiness of full enlightenment.

Since the enjoyments in my everyday life—every past, present, and future happiness, including enlightenment—are dependent on other sentient beings, the happiness of these numberless sentient beings depends on me.

If I generate loving kindness toward sentient beings, then all sentient beings will receive no harm from me and instead will have peace and success. Therefore, if I have the desire to benefit all sentient beings, I must generate a strong and clear motivation to help them.

To help the lowest beings of the world, you have to develop Bodhicitta. Bodhicitta is the seed of all the virtues and the purpose of all the practices. If you have an opportunity to generate bodhicitta, you should not lose this. This is most important for the practitioner, who wants to achieve enlightenment. By generating bodhicitta, you are able to help many beings.

The Bodhisattva Vows

15. Having your main interest in the growth and flourishing of others, or such as dancing, playing sports, listening to music, etc.

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Dedication

It is best, if possible, to always dedicate the merit of any virtuous action right after doing it. If not, at least dedicate the merit of each day before going to bed. Dedicate your own past, present, and future merit and also that of the buddhas and bodhisattvas:

Due to this merit, may I soon

Attain the enlightened state of Guru-Buddha,

That I may be able to liberate

All sentient beings from their sufferings.

May the precious bodhi mind

Not yet born arise and grow.

May that born have no decline

But increase forever more.

May sentient beings who have all been my mother and father be completely happy, and may the lower realms be forever empty.

May all the prayers of the bodhisattvas, in whatever places they live, be immediately fulfilled.

May all the prayers of the bodhisattvas, in whatever place they live,

Be perfectly happy, and may the lowest realms be forever empty.

May sentient beings who have all been my mother and father,

And other beings whom I have cherished, be comfortable, happy.

But increase forever more;

When they have learned, no decline.

May the precious bodhi mind

And all sentient beings from their sufferings.

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And all sentient beings from their suffering.
What Is To Be Avoided

1. Having taken refuge in the Buddha, one should not take refuge from the depths of one's heart in worldly gods, such as Brahma and so on, and one should not prostrate to such objects. In particular, if you break the first vow to a teacher, it means that you have broken all your vows; you are not a buddhist. If you expect to be able to obtain the protection of the Buddha by prostrating to an idol, then your action is in conflict with the first vow, the action of taking refuge in the Buddha. For example, if you prostrate to a statue of the Buddha, you are declaring that you regard the statue as being actual Buddha and that you need not prostrate to the Buddha himself; you have broken both the first and the fourth vows.

2. Having taken refuge in the Dharma, one should avoid harming any being, either directly by oneself, or indirectly by making others do it. For example, if you cause someone to act irresponsibly, through your own ignorance, that is as bad as doing it yourself. In particular, one should not think of harming the Dharma by making others worship, for example, the spirits of nature or any other non-Buddhist gods. If you believe in the existence of such beings, you are breaking the vow of taking refuge in the Dharma.

3. Having taken refuge in the Sangha, one should avoid entrusting oneself to and keeping company with negative friends and followers of hedonism. For example, if you enter into the company of a friend or disciple who is himself an addict, you are breaking the third vow, the action of taking refuge in the Sangha. If you allow a disciple to keep a friend whom he breaks, you do not consider the consequences of your action to be bad.

What Is To Be Practiced

1. Having taken refuge in the Buddha, with a mind of respect toward those gone to bliss (the buddhas), one should regard even statues as being actual buddhas and should prostrate and pay respect to them. For example, if you prostrate to a statue of the Buddha, you are declaring that you regard the statue as being actual Buddha and that you need not prostrate to the Buddha himself; you have broken both the first and the fourth vows.

2. Having taken refuge in the Dharma, one should pay homage and respect by generating the recognition of all scriptural texts, or even just one syllable of the teachings, as being the actual rare sublime Dharma. For example, if you think of the teachings as being mere words, you are breaking the second vow, the action of taking refuge in the Dharma.

Vows and Commitments

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The Bodhisattva Vows

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2. Accepting as gifts material you know has been stolen or embezzled from the three jewels or from a bhikshu.

3. Taking material from someone who is meditating on calm abiding and giving it to someone who merely recites texts. Such an action may cause the meditator to abandon his or her practice.

4. Abandoning bodhicitta by thinking, "I cannot help sentient beings," or "I do not want to help this particular sentient being."

5. Accepting nothing or anything you know has been stolen or embezzled.

6. Abandoning the thought to do the action again. If you do not regret the action and generate the wish to avoid it in the future, or if you wish to never commit such an action ever again, then the transgression is complete. If you wish to never commit such an action ever again, then the transgression is complete.

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The Four Conditions

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In general, there are four points to the practice of Dharma.

1. One should rely upon holy beings, listen to the holy Dharma, and after correctly comprehending, follow the Dharma and practice it.

2. One should not let one's senses become excited (that is, one should control the senses when in danger of creating negative karma), and take as many vows as one is capable of keeping.

3. One should avoid a compassionate attitude towards sentient beings.

4. When eating or drinking one should make offer to the Triple Gem.

One should train well in all the advice concerning what is to be practiced, such as not even stepping over pieces of monastic robe or throwing them in dirty places, but instead placing them in clean places.

**General Advice**

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The Lay Vows

The five branch vows to be kept by a full upasika (Tib. ge-nyen, "nearing virtue") are to avoid:

1. killing
2. taking what has not been given
3. sexual misconduct
4. telling lies
5. drinking alcohol

Losing the Vow from the Root

One loses the vow from the root, and so should take it again, if one transgresses these vows:

1. killing a human being;
2. stealing an object that is valuable to another person;
3. engaging in sexual misconduct, that is, engaging in sexual activities with another’s partner, or using the mouth or anus of one’s own partner;
4. telling a supreme lie, that is, pretending one has attained realizations of the grounds and paths even though one has not.

The eighteen root vows

You must abandon:

1. Praising yourself or belittling others out of attachment to receiving offerings or admiration.
2. Even though you are able, not giving material aid to others through miserliness; or not teaching Dharma to those who are suffering and without a protector because you want to amass knowledge just for yourself.
3. Not forgiving others but harboring a grudge and holding it even when they apologize.
4. Abandoning the Mahayana teachings by saying that some baskets of the teachings (pitaka) are not teachings of the Buddha and propounding your own fabricated or perverted doctrine.
5. Taking back offerings to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha or taking them by robbery or devious schemes; using for your own purpose material dedicated to the Sangha.
6. Abandoning or despising the holy Dharma by criticizing the scriptures or practices of any of the three vehicles of the shravakas, the pratyekabuddhas, or the bodhisattvas. If you have an inclination for the Mahayana teachings, you should never despise the holy Dharma.
7. Harming an ordained person, inflicting violence on them, stealing their robes, or causing them to lose their vows.
8. Committing any of the five heinous actions (to kill your mother, your father, or an arhat; to cause disunity amongst the Sangha; to wound a buddha).

The Bodhisattva Vows

8. Wound a buddha.

Committing any of the five heinous actions to kill your mother, or any other harmful action, is to wound a buddha.

Harming an ordained person, inflicting violence on them, stealing their robes, or causing them to lose their vows is also to wound a buddha.

The sixteen practices that lead to the destruction of the bodhisattva vows.

1. Abusing or disparaging others out of malice and holding it even when they apologize.
2. Elevating yourself or belittling others in front of others without a protector because you want to amass knowledge just for yourself.
3. Not teaching Dharma to those who are suffering and without a protector, and not giving material aid to others through miserliness.

You must abandon:
Receiving a Downfall

Otherwise, one does not lose the vow from the root but receives a downfall, which must be confessed, if one transgresses the vows by:

1. killing a non-human, such as an animal;
2. stealing an object of no value;
3. engaging in sexual conduct at a holy place; at a special time (for example, on full moon day, on the eighth day of the lunar calendar, on Buddha’s special holy days, etc.); or engaging in sexual activity whilst living in the one-day eight precepts (nyen-ne, “near abiding”);
4. telling ordinary lies;
5. drinking alcohol.

So, one should confess and abstain precisely, which is the method of purification.

One should protect well and tightly with the mind the six remaining non-virtuous actions, which are similar in part to the previous negative karmas (that is, close to those heavy negative karmas), by avoiding slander, harsh words, gossip, covetousness, harmful intention, and wrong views.

Benefits of Protecting the Vows

The benefits of protecting the vows in this way are:

• you will not fall to the suffering lower realms (hells, animals, or hungry ghosts)
• temporarily, you will continuously achieve the body of a deva or human
• ultimately, you will achieve the state of liberation

Furthermore, the virtue of protecting these five vows increases constantly, even while one is asleep or unconscious, intoxicated and so forth.
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Also, in addition to these, the Founder (Guru Shakyamuni Buddha) will always think of you; the gods (protectors beyond sorrow, worldly protectors, devas) will praise and protect you; non-humans cannot harm you; your qualities will increase limitlessly; and at the time of death you will die without regret.

By avoiding killing, you will have a long life in all future lifetimes. By avoiding taking what has not been given, in future lives you will have great wealth.

By avoiding telling ordinary lies, in the future others will not cheat and blame you.

By avoiding sexual misconduct, in future lives you will meet with good friends and a perfect wife or husband who are harmonious exactly according to your wishes.

By avoiding alcohol, you will have a sharp and clear mind.

It is said in the sutra The Lamp of the Moon:

If, with a mind of devotion, one makes offerings of umbrellas, fan-flags, rows of lights, food, and drink to as many mendicants as one can, one acquires an inestimable merit of unending benefit to the poor, to the three jewels and merit by concentrating one’s mind on the offerings.

Do not give up bodhicitta because of the mischievous deeds of sentient beings. This happens when you think that you will not work for the welfare of a particular sentient being who has harmed you.

By avoiding alcohol, you will have a sharp and clean mind.

By avoiding sexual misconduct, you will have a harmonious, loving relationship with a good husband. By avoiding the mischievous actions of sentient beings and a general rule of conduct, your body will be free from harm and disease.

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The Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi
with additions from Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Lord Buddha, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is discord, unity.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is error, truth.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.

O divine master, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, pardon.
Where there is discord, unity.
Where there is doubt, faith.
Where there is error, truth.
Where there is despair, hope.
Where there is darkness, light.

May all beings effortlessly attain the transcendent blissful state of omniscient buddhahood.

The Bodhisattva Vows

WISHING BODHICHITTA

The commitments of having taken the vows to develop wishing bodhichitta are divided into two sections:

1. How to guard the vows from degenerating in this life
2. How to guard the vows from degenerating in future lives

The continuous rituals of having taken the vows to develop wishing bodhichitta

The continuous rituals of having taken the vows to develop wishing bodhichitta
Vows

The Bodhisattva Vows