

Maintaining the Bodhisattva Vow

By Kathy Wesley. Based on teachings by Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, 2015. Last revised 9.7.15

In his teaching on the Bodhisattva Vow at Karma Triyana Dharmachakra in 2015, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche, quoting from a text describing the Bodhisattva Vow, recommended that the vow be carefully maintained.

As the Bodhisattva Vow is a vow of training in Aspiration and Action Bodhicitta, the vow depends on maintaining a benevolent intention toward beings and an unselfish motivation in one's thoughts, words, and actions.

Therefore, practicing mindfulness and alertness regarding one's thoughts, words, and actions plays an important role in conscientiously maintaining the Bodhisattva Vow.

As the essence of the vow is maintaining a benevolent and helpful attitude toward others, the vow is damaged when we consciously hold ill will toward other beings or cause direct or indirect harm to other beings.

When this happens, the teachings say we must acknowledge our error, cultivate regret for our error, confess it as a fault and then repair the Bodhisattva Vow. It is important for bodhisattva vow holders to confess faults and repair the vow within 4 hours of a conscious transgression of the vow through one's thought, word, or action.

If one fails to regret and confess the downfall, and becomes aware that one has failed to regret and confess, then one should (ideally) confess the fault and retake the vow in the presence of a lama. If there is no lama available, Khenpo Rinpoche says one may confess in front of one's shrine and retake the vow by reciting the vow text in front of the shrine.

To confess faults and repair the vow, one brings to mind one's transgression, cultivates a feeling of sincere regret, and calls upon the 35 Buddhas to be the witness for one's admission and confession.

Khenpo Rinpoche says that since the Bodhisattva Vow comes from the sutra tradition, The Sutra of the Three Heaps (also known as "Confession before the 35 Buddhas") is the best prayer to recite.

After regretting one's faults and reciting the prayer, one then re-takes the Bodhisattva Vow, using the vow-taking text in one's Bodhisattva Vow booklet (also reprinted below). In this way, one maintains and repairs the Vow daily.

Khenpo Rinpoche recommends that Bodhisattva Vow holders maintain their vow by pausing three times a day during their waking hours and reflecting on their thoughts, words, and actions of the previous hours. This reflection should be followed by a recitation of The Sutra of the Three Heaps and the renewal of the Bodhisattva Vow through recitation of the vow text.

Daily Practice for Bodhisattva Vow Holders

Three times a day during your waking hours (morning, afternoon and evening), do the following:

1. Reflect on the your thoughts, words, and actions of the previous few hours. Ask yourself, "Did I hold thoughts of ill will toward others in the last few hours? Have I caused harm to other beings during the last few hours? Did I damage my bodhisattva vow?"
2. If you have not held ill will toward beings or harmed beings, rejoice and resolve to continue your bodhisattva practice.
3. If you have committed a downfall through holding ill will or harming beings, acknowledge the wrong and cultivate a feeling of regret. Resolve not to repeat the negative thought, word, or action in the future.
4. In either case, recite The Sutra of the Three Heaps (Confession Before the 35 Buddhas) as a way of purifying your thoughts, words, and actions.
5. Then renew your Bodhisattva Vow by reciting the Bodhisattva Vow text.

NOTE: Khenpo Rinpoche says beginners may chant their prayers in English to learn them and absorb the meaning. Eventually, it is good to recite the prayers in Tibetan.

Sutra of the Three Heaps

*Also called: Repentance in Front of the 35 Buddhas
Taken from the book, Taking the Bodhisattva Vow,
by Ven. Bokar Rinpoche, and Maintaining the Bodhisattva
Vow and the Bodhicitta Precepts, by Lama Lodro.*

Introduction

The Sutra of the Three Heaps (Sanskrit, Triskandharma Sutra; Tibetan, P'ungpo sum pai do), also called Bodhisattvas' Repentance of Transgressions, or Repentance in Front of the 35 Buddhas, is a practice that purifies the transgressions of vows in general and the transgression of the Bodhisattva Vow in particular.

Its origin is as follows. A group of 35 monks, having taken the Bodhisattva Vow, inadvertently provoked the death of a child when they were on their begging rounds. Wishing to purify themselves, they asked Upali, one of the closest disciples of the Buddha, to request from his master a method of appropriate repentance. The Buddha uttered a brief sutra, in which the 35 Buddhas are mentioned, relating to the 35 monks. It is said that at the moment Shakyamuni Buddha uttered this sutra, his body radiated a powerful light within which 34 Buddhas appeared and circled him in space. (Shakyamuni Buddha is counted as one of the 35 Buddhas.) The 35 monks prostrated, made offerings, awakened Bodhicitta within their minds, and took refuge in the Buddhas. They repented their faults, and by this very fact, attained the Bodhisattva's stages of enlightenment.

The recitation of this sutra is quite common among Tibetans. Tsongkhapa, the founder of the Gelugpa school of Tibetan Buddhism, is famous for having made 100,000 prostrations in front of each of the 35 Buddhas.

The "Three Heaps" contained in the sutra are:

- The Heap of homages
- The Heap of repentances
- The Heap of dedications.

The Sutra of the Three Heaps

Forever, I and all beings take refuge in the guru

We take refuge in the Buddha,

We take refuge in the Dharma,

We take refuge in the Sangha.

To Shakyamuni, the Perfect Buddha, the Conquerer, the Holder, the Transcendent One, the Thus-Gone, the One Victorious over the enemy, I pay homage. To the one who has fully conquered with the diamond essence, I pay homage.

To Jewel Radiating Light, I pay homage.

To Sovereign King of Nagas, I pay homage.

To Leader of Heros, I pay homage.

To Glorious Joy, I pay homage.

To Jewel Fire, I pay homage.

To Jewel Moonlight, I pay homage.

To Meaningful Vision, I pay homage.

To Jewel Moon, I pay homage.

To Stainless One, I pay homage.

To Glorious Giving, I pay homage.

To Pure One, I pay homage.

To Giving of Purity, I pay homage.

To Water Deity, I pay homage.

To God of Water Deities, I pay homage.

To Glorious Goodness, I pay homage.

To Glorious Sandalwood, I pay homage.

To Infinite Splendor, I pay homage.

To Glorious Light, I pay homage.

To Glorious One Without Sorrow, I pay homage.
 To Son of Nondesire, I pay homage.
 To Glory of Flowers, I pay homage.
 To Thus-Gone Clearly Knowing through the Play of Pure Radiance, I pay homage.
 To Thus-Gone Clearly Knowing through the Play of Lotus Radiance, I pay homage.
 To Glory of Wealth, I pay homage.
 To Glory of Vigilance, I pay homage.
 To Renowned Glorious Name, I pay homage.
 To King of the Victory Banner that Crowns the Sovereign, I pay homage.
 To Glorious One Who Fully Subdues, I pay homage.
 To Perfect Victor in Battle, I pay homage.
 To One Gone Beyond through Complete Victory, I pay homage.
 To Glorious Array Eternally Illuminating, I pay homage.
 To Lotus Jewel Who Fully Subdues, I pay homage.
 To Thus-Gone, Conquerer of the enemy, perfect Buddha who dwells on a lotus jewel, King of the Sovereign Mount Meru, I pay homage.
 To these and to all the Thus-Gone, the victors over the enemy, the perfect Buddhas, the Conquerors, the Holders, the Transcendent Ones who dwell and live in all the worlds of the universe extending in the ten directions, to all these conquering Buddhas, Holders, and Transcendent Ones, I request that they pay heed to me.
 During this life and lives that had neither beginning nor limit, in all the realms of existence of samsara that I have traveled through, I have accomplished negative acts; I have made others accomplish them, and rejoiced at causing others to accomplish them.
 I have stolen property belonging to stupas, to the sangha and property of the sangha in the ten directions; I have made others steal them, and have rejoiced at causing others to steal them.

I have committed the five acts of unlimited consequences; I have made others commit them, and I have rejoiced at causing others to commit them.

I have fully engaged the path of the ten unvirtuous acts; I have led others to engage it, and rejoiced at causing others to engage it.

Covered by these various karmic veils, I will go to the hells; I will go to the animal realms; I will go to the hungry ghost realms; I will be born in places far from the Dharma; I will be born as a barbarian; I will be born among the gods of long life; I will not have all the sense faculties; I will follow false views; I will not know to rejoice at the coming of a Buddha.

All the veils coming from these acts, in the presence of the conquering Buddhas, Holders, and Transcendent Ones, who have wisdom, who have vision, who are witnesses, who are truth, who know, who see; I acknowledge these acts, I do not conceal them, I do not hide them, and I promise to abstain from committing these acts from this time forward.

Conquering Buddhas, Holders and Transcendent Ones, I request your attention. During this life and during lives that had neither beginning nor limit, in all the realms of existence of samsara that I have traveled through, all the sources of virtues that I have obtained from giving, whether it is only a mouthful of food given to a being born in the animal realm, all the sources of virtue that I have obtained from the observance of ethics, all the sources of virtue that I have obtained from keeping pure conduct, all the sources of virtue that I have obtained from my own acts to make beings fully ripen, all the sources of virtue that I have obtained from generating sublime Bodhicitta, all the sources of virtue that I have obtained from unsurpassable wisdom, having gathered them, having brought them together, having accumulated them, I dedicate them to the unsurpassable, to the highest of the highest, to the best of the best, I completely dedicate them to the supreme and perfect Awakening.

In the same way as the conquering Buddhas, Holders, and Transcendent Ones of the past have accom-

plished perfectly their dedication, in the same way as the conquering Buddhas, Holders, and Transcendent Ones who have not yet come will accomplish perfectly their dedication, and in the same way as the conquering Buddhas, Holders, and Transcendent Ones of the present now perfectly accomplish their dedication, in the same way, I also accomplish the dedication perfectly.

I repent all negative acts; I rejoice in all merits. I address my exhortation and prayer to all Buddhas.

May I obtain the unsurpassable, sublime, and holy wisdom. Whoever are the sublime human beings, the victors who live now, whoever are those who have come and even those who will come, I praise their qualities. In front of them all like a limitless ocean, I join my hands, and completely place myself under their protection.

I confess each of all the ten unskillful actions I have done, be they the three physical, four verbal or three mental ones. I confess the ten unskillful actions and five acts of limitless consequences and all the negative actions I have ever committed while my mind has been overpowered by ignorance from time without beginning until this moment.

I confess each and every non-virtue I have committed with my body, speech and mind while overpowered by desire, hatred and bewilderment. By means of this presentation of the Confession of Faults, may the five acts of unlimited consequences and whatever other negative actions I have done while overpowered by ignorance, be completely purified.

All faults of all we sentient beings from our bad karma, being repented, may they never be done again. May all the veils of karma be completely exhausted.

By making prostrations, offerings, repentance, rejoicing in good deeds, by calling for the turning of the Dharma wheel and praying for the teachers to remain, whatever may be the portion of positive karma I accumulate thereby, I dedicate it all to enlightenment.

A Bodhisattva Vow Text

This wording for the Bodhisattva Vow is taken from a booklet published by Karma Triyana Dharmachakra in the 1980s. It can be recited in the morning and evening to renew the vow and repair any deficiencies.

THE VOW ITSELF:

*** JANG CHHUP NYING POR CHHI KYI BAR**

Until I reach the essence of enlightenment

SANG GYE NAM LA KYAP SU CHHI

I take refuge in all the buddhas,

CHHO DANG JANG CHHUP SEM PA YI

and likewise, in the dharma

TS'HOK LAANG DE ZHIN KYAP SU CHHI

and in the assembly of bodhisattvas.

JI TAR NGON GYI DE SHEK KYI

Just as the buddhas of the past gave rise to bodhicitta,

JANG CHHUP T'HUK NI KYE PA DANG

followed the bodhisattva path,

JANG CHHUP SEM PAY LAP PA LA

and, through progressive training, established themselves

DE DAK RIM ZHIN NE PA TAR

into the stages of the bodhisattvas,

DE ZHIN DRO LA P'HEN DON DU

Likewise, for the benefit of all sentient beings,

JANG CHHUP SEM NI KYE GYI ZHING

I, too, will give rise to bodhicitta,

DE ZHIN DU NI LAP PA LAANG

train in the bodhisattva path stage by stage, and gradually,

RIM PA ZHIN DU LAP PAR GYI

as they did, become proficient.

Recite The Vow Itself three times from.*

VERSES OF REJOICING:

DENG DU DAK TS'HE DRE BU YO

Today my life is fruitful.

MI YI SI PA LEK PAR T'HOP

I have obtained a precious human existence

DE RING SANG GYE RIK SU KYE
and am born into the family of the Buddha.

SANG GYE SE SU DAK DENG GYUR
Now I am a child of Buddha.

DA NI DAK GI CHI NE KYANG
From now on, I will only do

RIK DANG T'HUN PAY LE TSAM TE
activities appropriate to the lineage,

KYON ME TSUN PAY RIK DI LA
so that no stain will come

NYOK PAR MI GYUR DE TAR JA
to this pure, faultless, noble family.

DAK GI DE RING KYOP PA T'HAM CHE KYI
Today, in the presence of all those in whom we
take refuge,

CHEN NGAR DRO WA DE SHEK NYI DANG NI
I invite all beings to happiness

BAR DU DE LA DRUN DU BO ZIN GYI
until they have reached buddhahood.

LHA DANG LHA MIN LA SOK GA WAR GYI
May the gods, demi-gods and all other beings re-
joice!

JANG CHHUP SEM NI RIN PO CHHE
Bodhicitta is precious.

MA KYE PA NAM KYE GYUR CHIK
Those who have not given birth to it -- may they give
birth to it.

KYE PA NYAM PA ME PA DANG
Those who have given birth to it, may their bodh-
icitta not diminish,

GONG NE GONG DU P'HEL WAR SHOK
but increase more and more.

JANG CHHUP SEM DANG MI DRAL ZHING
May they not be separated from bodhicitta,

JANG CHHUP CHU LA ZHOL WA DANG
but be fully committed to bodhisattva actions.

SANG GYE NAM KYI YONG ZUNG ZHING
May they be accepted by the buddhas.

DU KYI LE NAM PONG WAR SHOK
May they abandon all negative actions.

JANG CHHUP SEM PA NAM KYI NI
May all the good wishes of bodhisattvas

DRO DON T'HUK LA GONG DRUP SHOK
for the benefit of sentient beings be accomplished.

GON PO YI NI GANG GONG PA
May the intentions of such protectors

SEM CHEN NAM LA DE JOR SHOK
bring happiness and prosperity to all beings.

SEM CHEN T'HAM CHE DE DANG DEN GYUR CHIK
May all sentient beings be happy.

NGEN DRO THAM CHE TAK TU TONG PAR SHOK
May the lower realms be emptied forever.

JANG CHHUP SEM PA GANG DAK SAR ZHUK PA
May the earnest aspirations of bodhisattvas

DE DAK KUN GYI MON LAM DRUP PAR SHOK
of all stages be accomplished.

THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES:

** SEM CHEN T'HAM CHE DE WA DANG
May all sentient beings have happiness

DE WAY GYU DANG DEN PAR GYUR CHIK
and the cause of happiness.

DUK GNAL DANG DUK GNAL GYI
May they be free from both suffering

GYU DANG DRAL WAR GYUR CHIK
and the cause of suffering.

DUK GNAL ME PAY DE WA DAM PA DANG
May they never be separated from the highest bliss,

MI DRAL WAR GYUR CHIK
which is without suffering.

NYE RING CHHAK DANG DANG DRAL WAY
May they come to rest in the great impartiality,

TANG NYOM CHHEN PO LA NE PAR GYUR CHIK
which is free of attachment and aversion to those
near and far.

*(Repeat The Four Immeasurables three times from the **)*

