

CHAPTER 15

The Five Moral Precepts

XV. CHAPTER 15: THE FIVE MORAL PRECEPTS

A. THE LAY BODHISATTVA CULTIVATES GOODNESS AND AVOIDS BAD ACTIONS

It is in this [above-discussed] manner that the lay bodhisattva becomes able to cultivate the karmic deeds of a good person while leaving far behind the karmic deeds of a bad person. In this connection, there is a verse:

One cultivates and brings forth the karmic deeds of a good person,
Accumulating wealth for one's use in a way consistent with Dharma.
Whatever one is capable of, one takes that on as a grave duty.
That of which one is not capable—one refrains from taking it on.²³²

As for “the karmic deeds of a good person,” to sum it up, the karmic deeds of a good person involve abiding in what is good and beneficial for oneself while also being able to facilitate the benefit of others.

As for “the karmic deeds of a bad person” these bring about descent into decline and anguish for oneself while also bringing about decline and anguish in others.

“Accumulating wealth for one's own use in a way consistent with Dharma” refers to not killing, not stealing, and neither deceiving nor cheating others. One devotes one's energies to accumulating wealth and then puts it to use in a way that accords with the Dharma by making offerings to the Three Jewels, by rescuing those fallen into misfortune, by aiding the old and the sick, and by carrying out other such deeds.

Whatever one can take on and can adhere to in practice—one regards that as a grave responsibility. As for what one would be unable to adhere to in practice, one does not take that on.

As for the works of the bodhisattva, whether it be those of this life or those of future lives, whether it be those concerned with self-benefit or those concerned with benefiting others, these are as discussed earlier and they are endeavors that definitely must be brought to a state of successful completion. If there are endeavors that one realizes one cannot yet carry out in practice, then one does not take these on.

B. ONE RELINQUISHES SELF BENEFIT, BENEFITS OTHERS & REPAYS KINDNESS

Furthermore:

One neither sorrows nor rejoices over worldly dharmas.

One is able to relinquish one's own benefit,
while always acting diligently for the benefit of others.

Being deeply grateful for others' kindnesses, one repays them doubly.

"Worldly dharmas" refers to profit and loss, ill-repute and esteem, praise and blame, and pain and pleasure. One's mind remains free of any tendency to become either dejected or joyful in response to any of these dharmas.

In "relinquishing one's own benefit," and "acting diligently for the benefit of others," the bodhisattva sets aside self-benefit to devote the good works he does to facilitating what is good for others, doing so even for those he has not yet befriended and even for those with whom he has no causal affinities.

C. Q: RELINQUISHING SELF-BENEFIT TO BENEFIT OTHERS IS WRONG

Question: As for [your recommending] "relinquishing self-benefit in order to work diligently for the benefit of others," this is wrong. As stated by the Buddha, "Although one might accomplish greatly beneficial works for others, one should not relinquish attention to one's own self-benefit."

This idea is reminiscent of the saying that: "One may have to sacrifice a person for the success of a clan, may have to sacrifice a single clan for the success of a village, may have to sacrifice a village for the success of a country, may have to sacrifice a country for the success of oneself, or may have to sacrifice oneself for the sake of right Dharma."

One first accomplishes self-benefit
and then, afterward, benefits others.

If one sacrifices self-benefit to benefit others,
later on, one will experience sorrow and regret.

If one relinquishes self-benefit to benefit others
while thinking to oneself that this constitutes wisdom,
this is something that in the context of the world
amounts to the foremost sort of stupidity.

D. A: NO. THIS IS GOOD EVEN IN WORLDLY TERMS & ALSO BENEFITS ONESELF

Response: Even from the worldly standpoint, seeking to bring about good for the benefit of others is regarded as good and as the mark of solid resolve. How much the more so is this true of the bodhisattva whose practice transcends worldly concerns. If one benefits others, that is just benefiting oneself. This is as described here:

Regarding matters pertaining to others, the bodhisattva
is neither inferior nor weak in the quality of his determination.

For whoever has brought forth the resolve to attain bodhi, benefit of others is just benefit of oneself.

The meaning of this has already been extensively discussed in the first chapter. Therefore, your statements on this matter are wrong.

As for “being deeply grateful for others’ kindnesses, one repays them doubly,” whenever others do good things for the bodhisattva, he should repay them liberally and also be deeply grateful for their kindnesses. This is the mark of a good person. Additionally:

One gives wealth to the poor
and bestows fearlessness on the fearful.
One engages in meritorious deeds of these sorts
until they become solidly and durably established.

As for “giving wealth to the poor,” there are those who, in previous lives, did not plant the causes of merit. Hence they now do not have the means to provide for their scarcity of life-sustaining necessities. As befits one’s capacities, one gives aid to such people.

As for “bestowing fearlessness on the fearful,” in all sorts of cases where beings are frightened, whether that be due to fear of enemies, fear of hunger, fear of floods, fire, cold, heat, or some other cause of fear—in the midst of these many fears, the bodhisattva instructs and guides these people, sees to their security and happiness, and thereby causes them to become free of fear.

Meritorious qualities such as these [are caused to become] the most solid and enduring. Finally:

For those beset with sorrow, one strives to rid them of their sorrows.
Regarding those lacking in strength, one practices patience and abandons arrogance, great arrogance, and so forth.²³³
One acts with deep reverence toward those who are venerable.
One always draws close to those who are learned and consults with the wise on matters of good and evil.
One always maintains right views with respect to one’s own practice.
In one’s relations with beings, one does not flatter them, deceive them, or make false declarations of affection.
One is insatiable in quest of goodness and one pursues the acquisition of immeasurably vast learning.
All of one’s endeavors are accomplished with solid resolve.
One always carries on one’s endeavors in the company of good people.
One maintains a mind of great compassion toward those who are evil.

Regarding both those who are good spiritual friends and those who are not good spiritual friends, one establishes a solid conception of them all as being one's good spiritual friends.

One maintains a mind of equal regard toward beings and refrains from stinginess in the dispensation of essential Dharma [teachings].

One expounds [the Dharma] for others in a manner consistent with what one has heard.

One realizes the import and flavor of all the Dharma teachings that one has heard.

Regarding the entertaining and pleasurable matters associated with the five types of desire, one contemplates them all as merely transitory.

One contemplates having a spouse (lit. "a wife) and children as comparable to abiding in the hells.

One contemplates the things required to sustain one's life as a source of weariness and suffering.

One contemplates matters having to do with carrying on a business as freighted with worry and distress.

One contemplates whatever one might seek to obtain as tending to destroy one's roots of goodness.

One contemplates abiding in the life of a householder as comparable to living in a prison.

One contemplates relatives, clan, and friends as comparable to jailers.

One contemplates one's persistent day-and-night thinking by inquiring, "What benefit is gained by this?"

One contemplates this non-enduring body as the basis for acquiring the body that does endure.²³⁴

One contemplates wealth that is not durable as capable of bringing forth the wealth that does endure.²³⁵

E. ONE SHOULD STEADFASTLY OBSERVE THE FIVE MORAL PRECEPTS

Additionally:

One's mind should steadfastly abide in observance of the five moral precepts of the layperson's Dharma.

The lay bodhisattva who relies on the three refuges as he practices the above meritorious qualities should steadfastly abide in the five moral precepts. The five moral precepts constitute the comprehensively encompassing standard for the layperson's Dharma.

One should abandon all thoughts of killing and maintain compassionate pity for beings.

One should know when enough is enough and not covet the possessions of others even to the point where one will not even take a blade of grass that has not been given.

One abandons sexual misconduct and become weary of and averse to the affairs of one's private chambers. One guards against and distances oneself from any outside sensual involvements and so does not gaze at others inappropriately. One is ever mindful of the body as something productive of repulsive outflows and thereby brings forth thoughts of renunciation while also fully realizing that the five types of desire all ultimately conduce to suffering.

If desire for one's wife comes to mind, one should dispel and relinquish it. One should always contemplate the body's unloveliness²³⁶ and nurture a fear of becoming someone driven along by the fetters. Hence one should abandon desire and not be attached to its objects. Always remaining aware of the world as suffering and non-self, one should bring forth this prayerful aspiration: "Oh when will I finally succeed in no longer giving rise to thoughts of desire?" How much the less would one actually engage in such physical actions.

One abandons false speech, takes pleasure in speaking truthfully, and refrains from deceiving others. One's speech reflects what is known by the mind and one's thoughts are a reflection of serene wisdom. What one says to others accords with what one sees, hears, senses, and knows. One naturally abides in a way so determined by the Dharma that, even at the cost of one's life, one would not speak in ways that mislead others.

Alcohol is the gateway to neglectfulness and a multitude of bad actions. One should always stay far from it and never let it pass one's lips. One will thereby refrain from acting crazy and deranged, will not become inebriated and confused, will not become agitated, will not become seized by fears, will not act shamelessly, and will not engage in inappropriate sorts of joking. Rather, one will always be able to single-mindedly distinguish between what is good and what is disgraceful.

Now, there may be times when this bodhisattva delights in giving everything and thus is moved to think, "To those who want food, I shall provide food, and for those who seek drink, I shall provide drink." If, as a consequence, one does provide alcohol, in doing so, one should reflect: "Now, this is an occasion in the practice of *dāna pāramitā* when one gives whatever is sought. Later, I will use skillful expedients to teach and coax them into abandoning alcohol altogether and into developing the mindfulness and wisdom that shall cause them to refrain from any such negligence."

Now, how can this be? It is because the essence of *dāna pāramitā* lies in fulfilling the wishes of others. Hence, in circumstances of this sort, the lay bodhisattva's provision of alcoholic beverages does not constitute a karmic offense.²³⁷

One dedicates the merit from upholding the five moral precepts to one's future realization of *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*. One guards and upholds the five precepts in the same manner that one would guard precious jewels and in the same manner that one protects one's own body and life.

1. Q: DOES THIS BODHISATVA ONLY OBSERVE THESE PRECEPTS?

Question: Does this bodhisattva only observe these five moral precepts while not upholding any of the other sorts of good actions?

2. A: UPHOLD THE 5 PRECEPTS & ALSO PRACTICE THE OTHER GOOD ACTIONS

Response:

The bodhisattva should steadfastly abide in these five general moral precepts.

The other [wholesome] actions of body, speech, and mind should all also be practiced as well.

We have already discussed the meaning of the layperson's five precepts. Having taken on these five moral precepts, one should steadfastly abide in their observance and, in addition, should cultivate the rest of the three types of good karmic deeds. Additionally, as for those dharmas that the lay bodhisattva should practice, [there are the following practices]:

a. HE SHOULD EXPLAIN DHARMA FOR BEINGS & PROCEED TO TEACH THEM

As befits those beings whom one should benefit,
one explains the Dharma and thus teaches and transforms them.

This bodhisattva is able to give to all beings in ways appropriately addressing any deficiencies they may have. No matter what country one lives in and no matter whether one is in a city, in a village, in the forest, or beneath some tree, one explains Dharma and teaches the beings there in accordance with whatever might benefit them. As it is said, one explains dharmas conducive to faith for those bereft of faith, explains propriety in etiquette for those who are disrespectful, explains dharmas conducive to extensive learning for those deficient in learning, explains the dharma of giving for those who are miserly, explains the dharma of harmoniousness and patience for those who are full of hatred, explains the dharma of vigor for those who are indolent, explains the stations of right mindfulness for those of chaotic mind, and speaks in a way conducive to wisdom for those who are foolish or deluded. In addition:

b. ONE SHOULD PROVIDE BEINGS WITH WHATEVER THEY ARE DEFICIENT IN

In accordance with whatever one finds to be deficient,
one should supply all such things in sufficient measure.

All beings have that in which they are deficient. One should provide all such things in sufficient measure. There are those people who, although wealthy, still have ways in which they are deficient. This may even be true of kings, for they too should have those things in which they are deficient. Hence, even though it was previously explained that one bestows wealth on the poor, it is now further stated that one provides in sufficient measure whatever beings are deficient in. Additionally:

c. THE BODHISATTVA TEACHES ALL SORTS OF EVIL BEINGS

There are all sorts of evil beings
who, in various ways, bring about troublesome circumstances
through flattery, deviousness, or unbridled arrogance,
through cursing, slighting, cheating, or deceiving,
or by turning their backs on kindnesses, leaving them unrequited.
Though the stupid and the base are difficult to instruct and transform,
because the bodhisattva's mind feels pity and sadness for them,
he valiantly redoubles his vigor [in teaching them].

d. WHEN EVIL BEINGS DISTURB HIM, HE MUST NOT THINK IN THESE WAYS:

Evil beings use many different sorts of evil behavior to attack and disturb the bodhisattva. Even in the midst of this, the bodhisattva's resolve does not withdraw in disgust. He should not think in these ways:

Who would be able to train such evil people as these?

Who would be able to instruct them?

Who would be able to exhort them, causing them to be liberated from *saṃsāra* so that they might reach nirvāṇa?

Who would be able to go and come in *saṃsāra* in the company of such beings,?

Who would be able to work together harmoniously with them?

As for all these evil deeds and such unprincipled behavior, who would be able to endure it?

My resolve is exhausted. I cannot engage in joint endeavors with them anymore.

I am going to leave them all far behind and never again participate in joint endeavors with them.

What's more, I am unable to even remain together with them at all.

These people, the most evil among the evil—there is no way I can have any interactions with them.

What is the use of any further involvement with people such as these?

e. HE SHOULD REDOUBLE HIS RESOLVE & ACT LIKE A GREAT PHYSICIAN

The bodhisattva knows and sees that it is difficult to rid beings of their evil karmic offenses. He should instead reflect in this manner:

These sorts of evil people are not few. It is through the application of vigor that they may be influenced to abide in dharmas such as they will delight in. For their sakes, I should intensify my resolve and exert myself to the utmost in diligent practice. I should redouble my practice in a million-fold application of vigor so that, later on, I will acquire great powers by which I will then be able to transform through teaching these most evil among evil beings who are so very difficult to awaken. I should be like the great king of physicians who, by resorting to some small circumstantial method, can cure beings' severe illnesses.

It is in this way that the bodhisattva does away with the disease of the afflictions and is then allowed to abide in whichever meritorious qualities he wishes. [He reflects]:

I should feel doubly strong pity for these extremely evil beings who are burdened by grave karmic offenses and so I should bring forth profoundly great compassion for them, doing so like that especially fine physician who is abundantly endowed with kindheartedness as he cures the many sorts of illnesses. For those who are seriously ill, he brings forth deep pity and then diligently invents skillful means by which he can seek out an especially fine medicine for them.

It is in this manner that the bodhisattva should feel pity for all beings beset by the disease of the afflictions. Thus, even for the most evil among the evil and those beset with the most serious afflictions, he still feels profound pity. Hence he is diligent in creating means through which, by intensifying his resolve, he is able to cure them. And why?:

f. FAILING IN THIS, HE WOULD BE WORTHY OF THE BUDDHAS' CENSURE

No matter where the bodhisattva abides,
if he fails to initiate the transformative teaching of beings,
thus allowing them to fall into the three wretched destinies,
he is deeply deserving of the censure of the Buddhas.

And so it is that the bodhisattva, no matter in what country he abides, and no matter whether he is in the city, a village, in the mountains, or beneath some tree—wherever he has the power through which to be able to benefit and teach beings—if he instead withdraws from them

in disgust, resents their covetous attachment to the pleasures of the world, and thus becomes unable to initiate their transformative teaching, he thereby allows them to fall into the wretched destinies. This bodhisattva thereby becomes deeply deserving of the censure of all buddhas now abiding throughout the ten directions before whom he ought to feel deeply ashamed and embarrassed, [knowing that they would demand to know], “Oh, how could you let such petty reasons cause you to abandon such a great endeavor?”

Therefore, if the bodhisattva does not wish to become someone deserving of the rebuke and censure of the Buddhas, even when faced with all sorts of deceitful and extremely evil beings, he should not let his resolve sink away. Rather he should benefit them in whatever way suits his power to help them. He should use all manner of expedient means and diligent resolve to begin their transformative teaching.

In this respect, he is like a brave military general. If the general’s troops encounter catastrophic losses, he is the one who will then be severely reprimanded by the king. Since the soldiers themselves had no way of knowing [how to avoid this defeat], the king would not reprimand them.