

Contents (click on any heading to view text)

- **Introduction**
- **No. 1-7: Vows to Eliminate Obstacles to the Far-reaching Attitude of Generosity and Obstacles to the Moral Discipline of Gathering Virtuous Actions**
 - *No. 6: Abandon: Not Accepting Gifts of Money, Gold or Other Precious Substances That Others Offer to Oneself.*
 - Justifiably Refusing or Returning Gifts
 - Our Motivation in Accepting and Refusing
 - Feeling Undeserving of Receiving Gifts
 - *No. 7: Abandon: Not Giving the Dharma to Those Who Desire It*
- **No. 8-16: Vows to Eliminate Obstacles to the Far-reaching Attitude of Moral Discipline**
 - *No. 8: Abandon: Forsaking Those Who Have Broken Their Moral Discipline: Not Giving Them Advice or Not Relieving Their Guilt*
 - *No. 9: Abandon: Not Acting According to One's Vowed Trainings as it Would Generate or Sustain Faith in Others*
 - *No. 10: Abandon: Doing Only Limited Actions to Benefit Sentient Beings, Such as Strictly Keeping the Vinaya Rules in Situations When Not Doing So Would Be of Greater Benefit to Others*
 - Complications with the Vinaya Rules
 - The Question of Changing Gender-Biased Vinaya Rules
 - *No. 11: Abandon: Not Doing Non-virtuous Actions of Body and Speech with Loving-compassion When Circumstances Deem it Necessary in Order to Benefit Others*
 - Knowing One's Motivation
 - *No. 12: Abandon: Willingly Accepting Things That Either Oneself or Others Have Obtained by Any of the Wrong Livelihoods of Hypocrisy, Hinting, Flattery, Coercion or Bribery*
 - Flattery
 - Hinting
 - Bribery
 - Coercion
 - Hypocrisy
 - Selling Dharma Items as Right Livelihood
 - *Cultural Considerations*
 - Prostitution and Right Livelihood

Introduction

We've been going through the bodhisattva vows and remembering that these are guidelines or suggestions from the Buddha about what to practice and what to avoid in our practice. Whether we have taken these vows or not, they can still be quite useful for us to gain an idea of productive ways to use our lives.

And studying the bodhisattva vows, too, gives an idea of the things that a bodhisattva does, and what a bodhisattva doesn't do. If we like the role model of a bodhisattva--if we think it's a pretty neat thing and we want to be like that--this shows us quite explicitly what things we can practice developing and what things to leave behind.

It's a very specific how-to thing or how to actually practice and live as a bodhisattva does. And when we see that, it gives us some encouragement rather than feeling we are down here and bodhisattvas are way up there and never the twain shall meet. We can see that if we start practicing like this and work especially on the same motivation that the bodhisattva has, we can become official bodhisattvas: stamped, certified bodhisattvas ourselves.

No. 1-7: Vows to Eliminate Obstacles to the Far-reaching Attitude of Generosity and Obstacles to the Moral Discipline of Gathering Virtuous Actions

Last time we talked about the first five bodhisattva vows that had to do with the far-reaching attitude of generosity. Once again, these are the first five vows:

1. Avoid not making offerings to the Three Jewels every day with our body, speech and mind. This vow involves showing respect physically by bowing, and making offerings with our speech by saying mantras and praises. We use the mind by remembering the qualities of the Three Jewels and visualizing them.
2. Avoid acting out selfish thoughts of desire to gain material possessions or reputation. Don't follow the mind that says, "I WANT, I WANT!" or, more deviously, "I NEED, I NEED!"
3. Avoid not respecting one's elders, i.e., those who have taken the bodhisattva vows before us or those who have taken monks' or nuns' vows before us, because if we consider their qualities it helps us develop these same qualities.
4. Avoid not answering sincerely asked questions one is capable of answering. In other words, if somebody asks sincerely and wants information, but we keep that information to ourselves or not respond to them due to laziness or anger or miserliness, then it's acting against this vow.
5. Avoid not accepting invitations out of anger, pride or other negative thoughts. So, when people invite us somewhere, if we have a good reason, we can refuse to go. But, if our refusal is out of conceit, for example, "Well, I am too good to be seen in those people's company," or "Those people treated me rotten so I'm going to refuse the invitation in order to get even," or something like that, then it's not a good idea to refuse an invitation on these kinds of grounds.

So, all of these things in the far-reaching attitude of generosity precepts are specifically for counteracting miserliness and attachment or the desire to hold on to things for ourselves.

Audience: Why are these vows expressed in a negative way?

Venerable: Why are they expressed in a negative way? Because in order to know what to practice as a bodhisattva, we have to be very clear in our mind what those things are that counteract what we are trying to achieve. So, by expressing the vows in the negative--to avoid this and this and this--we see very clearly the actions that counteract what we want to develop. And, by inference, we can see to avoid those and practice their opposites.

No. 6: Abandon: Not Accepting Gifts of Money, Gold or Other Precious Substances That Others Offer to Oneself.

We say, what is this about? Who would ever refuse money, gold or other precious things? [Laughter] "Give to me! More, more, more!" Why is there a precept like this? Usually our mind, when we accept money, gold and precious things, isn't really a mind of generosity or a mind of compassion for others. It's more a mind that wants things for itself.

So, often, to counteract that greedy, grasping mind we very deliberately try and simplify our lives. We get rid of as much stuff we don't use as we can. And we don't accumulate more, especially money and gold and riches and very valuable things, because we know it is something that would just create a lot of negativity in our minds. This is one level of practice, i.e., where we begin: to simplify and not accept precious things and not accept them out of a good motivation.

This vow addresses the situation of when people offer us things with a sincere attitude and they are practicing generosity, we should give them the opportunity to be generous and accept their gifts. What this is really touching on is that often when we start to practice really intensely--especially people who have monastic vows--we get rid of everything. So, this vow is stating that it is possible to accept things if we are doing it for the benefit of others. We don't need to cling tenaciously to the idea of not having money and gold and things like that.

What it is getting at is that it's okay to have those things and to accept them when they're offered to us as long as we are using them only for the benefit of others. So, if somebody is offering you stuff that you could re-distribute for the benefit of others, or somebody is offering to you and they want to create the good karma of being generous, then you should accept.

I'll share one example that pounded this home to me. It was many years ago when I was at one of my teacher's centers in southern California. Zong Rinpoche, one incredible master, was there giving teachings. Some people were going to take him to Disneyland and I thought, "Wow, how incredible to go to Disneyland with Zong Rinpoche," because this lama is, he is really a Buddha. And just what would he do in Disneyland? [Laughter] And I thought, "Wow, I would really like to do that," but I was totally broke. I didn't have much money at all.

They were planning the excursion to Disneyland, and somebody asked me and I said, "I am sorry, I can't go." Inside of me, I was thinking, "I want to go, I want to go, I want to go," you know, this real baby mind. [Laughter] But, I said, "No, I can't go." And then, one of the students came up and gave me twenty dollars and said, "This is so you can go to Disneyland with Rinpoche." And I said, "No, no, no. I can't accept it. I can't accept it," because I saw that I didn't have such a good attitude here. My teacher was sitting nearby and he came over to me afterwards and said, "You should take that." I said, "Geshela, I can't. My mind was not in such a good state." He said, "Change your mind! That person is trying to create some good karma by being generous and you should allow him to." So anyway, the person never offered again, and I wound up not going. [Laughter] But I got a real good story to tell and it made a strong imprint. When people offer, we should accept.

Justifiably Refusing or Returning Gifts

Now, there are certain situations where we can justifiably refuse: if you know the person giving you something is really poor and they need the item, or if you think the thing might be stolen, then you shouldn't accept it. Or, for some reason the person who gives you something is going to get into trouble, because they've given it away; or, if you know that you have a really horrible motivation for accepting the item and you're just going to use it for yourself; or, it's going to increase your own clinging, then, it's okay to refuse to accept it.

Another thing that I've often seen my teachers do is they'll accept something and then offer it back. Because, sometimes, you know people don't have much money yet they very much want to give and they feel really lousy when they offer something and you say, "No, I don't

want it." I often see my teachers accept something and then offer it back. The idea is that both people get the good karma of making an offering. You first accept the offering, and then offer it back. I remember one time when I was living in Italy there was a woman who wanted to give me something when I was leaving. She didn't have very much money and she gave me her watch. I knew she needed her watch so I gave it back to her.

Our Motivation in Accepting and Refusing

This vow is really challenging us to look at our motivation when we accept things from people and to really watch our minds. It's a challenge to watch the mind that goes, "Goody, somebody is giving me something," and also the mind that says, "Oh no, I can't take it because then I'll be obligated to the other person--I'll owe them something." It is a real selfish mind that refuses an offering because of the wish to not be in debt to that person. Or, another reason we often refuse things is because we feel we're undeserving: "Who am I? I am not worth very much, they shouldn't give anything to me."

These kinds of self-centered motivations which cause us to refuse other people's gifts hurts their feelings and prevents them from creating good karma. So, this vow is a call to watch very closely that motivation. The one that's attached: "Oh, good, I got something!" as well as the flip side: "No, I can't accept it because I am worthless."

It's quite interesting because in the West, we often have as much difficulty in receiving as we do in giving. Don't we? Sometimes it's very difficult for us when someone, just out of pure affection or generosity, gives us something. There's a part of our mind that says, "I'm worthless, how can they give me something? If they only knew who I really was they wouldn't give me this." So, we want to refuse. Or, the mind says, "Oh, I'll owe them something," getting into some kind of screwy something or other or a suspicious mind.

It's very difficult sometimes for us to accept gifts. It's also difficult for us sometimes to accept people's praise. When someone gives us the gift of praise, we often say, "Oh, no, no, no," which is kind of like telling the person they are a liar. Isn't it? They give us a compliment and we refuse it. It's hard for us to just accept it and say thank you, not with pride, but just to accept their gift of praise.

Feeling Undeserving of Receiving Gifts

This can extend to accepting people's affection or love. Sometimes we have incredibly hard problems with that. We all feel kind of lonely: 'nobody loves me enough.' That's kind of what we feel in our heart. But, then, when somebody tries to love us, we run the other direction. Somebody tries to give us love and affection--and I am not talking about romantic stuff--and, we think, "Oh God, I can't accept this. I am worthless." And so we push that away too.

Although this vow is addressing, in particular, valuable things like money and gold and riches, I think in our culture it's interesting to extrapolate on that and think of all the different nice and kind things--love, praise, and things that people offer us--we so often have difficulty receiving and accepting. It's quite interesting to look at that. There's so often a self-centered mind that won't let us receive. Isn't that so?

The other day someone asked me about low self-esteem, about the relationship between low self-esteem & self-centeredness. It seems that with low self-esteem, there's not much sense of self. But, actually there's a big sense of self, and there is a lot of self-cherishing and a lot of self-centeredness with low self-esteem. We make everything revolve around this 'me' who is horrible. Quite self-centered, isn't it? "I've really got to work hard to make

myself more important than everyone else so I am going to believe I am the worst person. That way I'm special from everyone else. I am more worthless than they are." [Laughter] This view of ourselves also prevents us from accepting things people offer us.

No. 7: Abandon: Not Giving the Dharma to Those Who Desire It

When people request the Dharma, they request us to give a teaching, to lead a meditation, or something like that, and if we refuse because we are lazy, or we feel we are too good to do it, or we are angry at the people or something like that, that would be counter to this vow. It doesn't mean that every time somebody asks you to give a teaching you have to give it, because if the teaching is not suitable for the person who is asking, for example, if an absolute beginner is asking for the highest yoga tantra teachings, then of course you can refuse. Or, better yet, what you can say is, "If you want that teaching, first I have to give you these." And then you prepare them.

You can also refuse if you don't have enough time or if you're doing something else that is quite important. Generally, it is okay to refuse if the subject is not suitable for them, if you're ill, if you don't have the time, or something like that. But, other than that, if somebody asks us, then we should try. Of course if we don't know the subject, then it's better to decline. In other words, we shouldn't accept to talk about something if we don't know what it is. But if we have some idea, then it's good to do.

I will tell you another story about this. You're hearing all my secrets. I have two memories of this event so it might have happened more than once. Lama Yeshe asked me to lead a discussion group for one of the big Kopan courses. I was a new nun and I just felt there was no way I could do it. I said, "Lama, I can't do anything. I don't know anything." He looked at me and said, "You are selfish!" [Laughter]

Audience: He said it in English?

Venerable: Oh yes, Lama Yeshe spoke English--quite clearly in English! [Laughter] This story really points out that if there is something we can do or give in some way, we should give it. Of course, like I said, if we really, sincerely don't know anything about the topic, for example, if someone asks you to teach a text you've never studied, then it's clear you should refuse. But if there is something we can do, it's good to do it.

Audience: If a friend asks you how to meditate, what should you do?

Venerable: I think in those situations, it's okay to teach them a very simple breathing meditation. You can teach them that and at the same time you can refer them also to books, teachers and retreats and explain, "What I'm teaching you is just a little bit, it's a little taste. But if you really want to get the flavor, then consider going to this class or a retreat." I think that's fine with your friends. You are not going to teach them Vajrasattva meditation, you're teaching them just breathing. That's fine, they breathe anyway. [Laughter]

Okay, so the above seven auxiliary vows have to do with the far-reaching attitude of generosity and counteracting the miserliness and attachment that prevent us from developing that.

No. 8-16: Vows to Eliminate Obstacles to the Far-reaching Attitude of Moral Discipline

Vows eight through sixteen have to do with eliminating the obstacles to the far-reaching attitude of ethics or moral discipline and they deal very much with the bodhisattva practice of ethics. Remember, as a prelude to the bodhisattva practice of ethics, we practice the

Pratimoksha level of ethics. These vows include the five precepts, the eight one-day precepts, and monks' and nuns' vows. These are all the precepts for attaining self-liberation, or Pratimoksha in Sanskrit. The Pratimoksha vows deal with very clear-cut situations and address verbal and physical actions: "Don't say this, don't say that, don't do this, don't do that." So, adding on to this basis of ethics, these vows show us how to practice ethics as a bodhisattva.

No. 8: Abandon: Forsaking Those Who Have Broken Their Moral Discipline: Not Giving Them Advice or Not Relieving Their Guilt

This vow is in reference to someone who has broken their ethical discipline--let's say a monastic who has broken their vows or a layperson with the five precepts who has broken their vows. We should not respond with, "Woo! YOU ARE A HORRIBLE PERSON, AN EVIL PERSON! You broke your vows and I don't want to be anywhere NEAR you! How could you have done such a horrible thing!" Having this type of uncompassionate attitude toward someone who's goofed is not recommended.

This vow is stating that when people have breached their ethics, it's really our responsibility to have a compassionate attitude towards them and help them. In other words, help them by encouraging them to do purification or go to their teacher or abbot and admit their mistake. Or, go in front of the sangha community and admit their mistake. So, instead of being disgusted with somebody and kicking them out with a real angry or self-righteous mind, really help them to purify and make amends.

This is very different than if someone has broken their vows and they are encouraging you also to break your vows. If that's the situation, then you have to be real clear with the person that you don't want to hang around them. But, if this is a situation where there is potential for positively influencing the person and helping them make amends, we shouldn't exclude them from our compassion nor belittle or not forgive or not help them.

This vow is really reproofing the self-righteous mind. We have a hard time sometimes accepting when other people make mistakes because we really want to put people up on pedestals--even our regular dharma friends--and then they break their vows and we get really angry at them. We might think, "I needed you to be on a pedestal. I needed you to be a good example. I needed you to be perfect. How can you let me down and not be perfect? Get out of here!" We can become very angry or self-righteous. We need to watch this, because I find that, especially in America, we love to put people up and then rip them down. We do it in politics and we do it in virtually everything.

No. 9: Abandon: Not Acting According to One's Vowed Trainings as it Would Generate or Sustain Faith in Others

When we have taken the five precepts, or other kinds of precepts, it's not good to neglect them anyway, but especially if it's going to harm somebody else and make them lose faith, then it's a double whammy, because we hurt ourselves and we hurt them as well. This precept is pointing out to us that when it's important for the faith of others, we should be really careful about our actions and, also, make sure we keep our precepts well.

So, in general, what this vow is encouraging us to do is to act and speak and do things in ways that generate faith in others. An example of this is if somebody is asking you for a particular teaching or a particular instruction, even though it might not be your favorite practice and even though it may not be a particularly bodhisattva practice, if it is something that would benefit that person and generate faith in them, then we should give it. But, if we

refuse and say, "That's not my favorite practice, so I am not going to teach you at all," or something like that, it would be counteracting this precept.

Another example involves very rude behavior: things that would make people lose faith in us. In situations, especially, where we are acting as representatives of the Buddhist community, if we go around huffing, puffing, slamming doors and being really bossy, it makes people lose their faith. So, we need to be aware of this and watch our behavior. This doesn't mean you have to get up-tight about it: "Oh gosh, I am representing the Buddhist community, am I doing it right?" We tend to get real up-tight about 'am I doing it right?' and get neurotic too. Buddha didn't need to instruct us how to do that. We are very good at doing that on our own. That is not what the vow is saying.

What the vow is saying is to be mindful of our behavior and how it influences others, and be aware that if we are acting really bossy and like a big mouth it's going to give people a certain view of maybe what Buddhism is, or what we are as practitioners of Buddhism. And, so, since in our heart we really want to be of service and benefit to others, we have to be aware of our behavior and act appropriately. Another example of unskillful behavior would be getting drunk: going somewhere, getting drunk and acting really boisterous. Or, smoking, womanizing, 'man-izing'--all of these are things that would cause people to lose faith.

No. 10: Abandon: Doing Only Limited Actions to Benefit Sentient Beings, Such as Strictly Keeping the Vinaya Rules in Situations When Not Doing So Would Be of Greater Benefit to Others

Whereas the ninth precept emphasizes the importance of keeping the Vinaya (the monks' and nuns' discipline) or Pratimoksha vows (which includes vows for lay people), this precept is saying that if you're in an extreme situation and there is a very small Vinaya rule versus a big benefit to others that could be done, it's more skillful to do the thing that benefits others. One of the classic examples involves the rule that monastics are not allowed to touch people of the opposite sex. So, if some man is drowning in the river, and I say, "I'm sorry, I can't save you, I am a nun," that is not very compassionate. It makes more sense for me to jump in and save him. (Hope he doesn't weigh too much!) Of course, the same thing would apply to a monk.

Another example of a Vinaya rule is to not ride in a vehicle. Now, if I kept that vow literally, it would be extremely difficult to benefit sentient beings. So, for this reason, I have to not follow it literally. The reason for the vow is because in ancient India, when you rode in a vehicle it was usually pulled by either a person or an animal. So it was something that caused others duress. Also in ancient India, when you rode in a vehicle, it was very easy to become proud because not many people rode in vehicles. So in order to prevent monastics from becoming proud, this vow was adopted. But, nowadays if I were to keep it very strictly, it would definitely impinge on my ability to benefit others. So what this vow is saying is that in these kinds of circumstances, the thing that's for the greater benefit is what we should do.

Complications with the Vinaya Rules

Audience: Why don't they change the vow?

Venerable: We Westerners look at things very differently from people in Asian society. At the time the Buddha was dying, he said to Ananda, his attendant, "You can change the minor vows if the congregation and the assembly of elders get together." Now, Ananda did not ask which were the minor vows and which were the major vows. So, because of that, all the future generations haven't wanted to goof and change something that might be a major vow. They feel it's better to keep it exactly the way the Buddha taught it. You will find in

Thailand, there are certain vows that are kept very strictly, but in China and Tibet, they're not. Even so, Thais don't keep all of the vows in the Vinaya completely literally. Ajahn Amaro, a monk in the Thai tradition, and I were talking about it. He rides in vehicles too.

So it is quite interesting. I saw a video once of a conference of western and eastern monastics and this specific topic came up. The Asian monastics were saying, "If you change this vow about riding in vehicles, then you're going to change this one, then you're going to change that one, and pretty soon we're not going to have anything left." And a western nun responded, "But the practicality of it is, if we keep the vows exactly the same and then people just interpret them differently amongst themselves and don't keep them literally anyway, you're developing in people's minds an attitude of, 'I don't have to keep these,' so then, you're going to break this one and you're going to break that one." She kind of gave the same argument from the opposite viewpoint.

So, what's basically happened is that everything has been kept as the Buddha laid it out, but then the various traditions interpret the Vinaya their own way. Even within particular traditions, different monasteries and different teachers interpret the rules differently. I think it'll be hard to change the rules.

Audience: Did the Dalai Lama say something about changing some of the rules in the Vinaya?

Venerable: He said we could call a conference of all the elders from all the traditions, which is what it would take to change the Vinaya. But, as that's kind of impossible, what His Holiness wanted to do was get some of the elders in the Tibetan tradition together and, of course, they would never change anything literally in the vows but they would talk about how to reinterpret things. And certain passages that were written later than the Buddha could be omitted. For example, gender-biased rules for ordination ceremonies were not developed by the Buddha. They came along later. So, the elders wouldn't be changing any vows, just reinterpreting them and omitting some of the things that were developed later.

The Question of Changing Gender-Biased Vinaya Rules

Audience: What would be the impact of omitting the gender-biased rules?

Venerable: I am hoping that, in the least, it would change the seating arrangement in the West. In the East, if the seating arrangement was changed, my personal feeling is that everyone would freak out. The nuns would never sit equal to the monks. They would feel incredibly uncomfortable with that. So, I doubt that it will change much in Asia. But whether or not they change, I think here in the West we have to change.

There again, when Western monastics visit Asia, I think, if anything, Westerners need to become a little bit more traditional. For instance, what usually happens when we all meet in Dharamsala is that among Asian monastics the monks sit first, then the nuns, and then the laypeople. In the Western section, the laypeople sit first and the monks and nuns just scatter anywhere they can squeeze themselves in. I think the Westerners need to become a little bit more traditional. [Laughter] It's not a thing of pulling rank or hierarchy. It's a thing of being practical. What's happened to me in Dharamsala is, I've had to sit at the back of a couple, and they were doing this and that and it was really distracting, and I was trying to listen to the teachings. So I could see the reason for these people sitting behind the monks and nuns. [Laughter] That makes sense to me. [Laughter]

To recap the points of this vow, remember what it's stating is that when there is a greater benefit to be achieved, if you keep strictly to small Vinaya vows, it goes against the bodhisattva's purpose.

No. 11: Abandon: Not Doing Non-virtuous Actions of Body and Speech with Loving-compassion When Circumstances Deem it Necessary in Order to Benefit Others

If there are certain situations where killing, stealing, unwise sexual behavior, lying, harsh words, divisive words or idle talk would be for the benefit of sentient beings, then, if you don't do that, you are breaking the bodhisattva vow.

The classic story that you've probably heard many times is about the Buddha when he was captain of a ship. There were 500 merchants aboard and one of them was going to kill the other 499. The Buddha knew it was much better for him to take the life of this one person with compassion for that person as well as for the 499 others. In other words, he knew it was better to do that rather than let the guy kill the other 499 people. This story is a good example of keeping this vow as it describes how in situations like this it would definitely be more advantageous to do a negative action in the service of benefiting many beings.

The glitch is that it's really hard to do these kinds of actions with a good motivation and, further, you can very easily take this vow, rationalize it and make it what you want it to be. In actual fact, I think it's only when you've achieved a certain level on the bodhisattva path that you can genuinely do this. I can't remember if it's when you have entered the path of accumulation at which point you would have spontaneous Bodhicitta, or it might even be higher on the path--I can't remember. But definitely, spontaneous bodhicitta needs to arise before you can genuinely do this.

But, there may be situations in our lives, for instance, let's say you were born into the situation where you could've killed Hitler and prevented all of that from happening. Maybe you don't have bodhicitta, but maybe you do the best you can and you say, "I am willing to accept the negative results myself with this action." But, then we have to be really careful about what we do. It's not just a matter of, "Well, I don't like this person because he is like Hitler, and so for the benefit of sentient beings I am going to kill." This is just a rationalization: making excuses and actually breaking a whole bunch of vows.

So, what this vow is getting at is that the ten non-virtues, or at least the seven of body and speech, are not hard and fast things, but that there might be some situations where, for the benefit of others, we have to do these things.

Knowing One's Motivation

Also, the motivation behind an action is very important. What is usually said in terms of action is that if something can produce a long term benefit (long term meaning in terms of the karma you create) and short term benefit, do it. If it produces a long term benefit and short term discomfort, it's still worthwhile doing, because the karma can be very powerful and the long term benefit is going to out-weigh the short term discomfort of doing it. If it's something that is of no long term benefit but does have a short term gain, it is better not to do it, because if it's of no long term benefit that's an indication that it's some kind of negative karmic action. Even though it might bring you short term benefit, the benefit is gone completely after awhile and you are left with the whole karmic result. And, if in the long term an action is of no benefit and in the short term it causes harm, then definitely don't do it.

Yesterday I was thinking about how in India, questions about life support and quality of life don't come up, because when you are in India or even in the Tibetan community in India,

there is no life support system for people to hook you up to for 50 million years. And when you get sick, your body collapses and you don't dwell on issues about quality of life. One of my teachers got stomach cancer and he died in a matter of months. And that was it. He went back to India, stayed in Dharamsala and died in a matter of months. In the West, he probably would have been hooked up to this machine and that machine and had chemo and blah blah blah. And then you'd get all these really difficult things going on. It's hard.

So, it's important to turn the observation eye in on our own self. We can look at others and say, "I don't know why they did that." They might have done an action with an incredibly compassionate motivation or they might have done it with a rotten motivation. But the action itself may not be one that I can do with a good motivation. So whether or not they do it with a good motivation is beside the point. If I can't do that same action with a good motivation I shouldn't get involved in it.

Audience: Are you saying that, for instance, using chemotherapy as a treatment for cancer isn't necessarily always the best approach?

Venerable: Right, it's completely up to the individual whether or not they want that kind of treatment. The success of chemotherapy doesn't just depend on the chemicals, it depends on one's whole attitude towards it too. If you don't have a good attitude you might actually be much better off not doing it. Every situation is dependent on so many factors that we can't judge what other people do. If we were in the situation, we have to look at what makes sense to us. My teacher who had stomach cancer could have chosen to stay in the West and get hooked up in some hospital. And he could have lived another year like that. But he didn't. He chose to go back to India and do his practice and die there. And I trust what he did.

No. 12: Abandon: Willingly Accepting Things That Either Oneself or Others Have Obtained by Any of the Wrong Livelihoods of Hypocrisy, Hinting, Flattery, Coercion or Bribery

This thing of acquiring things by wrong livelihood is a real interesting one. Besides the five that are listed there, which I'll describe in a minute, a wrong livelihood includes, for example, being a butcher, being a fisher person, being a prostitute or a pimp; also, selling Buddha statues or books for your livelihood or for profit, in the same way you would sell used cars; also, raising animals for slaughter, running a farm of animals that are going to be purchased for slaughter, or killing those animals; also, building bombs, weapons or other things of mass destruction. All of these kinds of things are considered wrong livelihood.

So again, as part of the bodhisattva's ethics, because these actions harm so many people, they need to be abandoned. In addition, we should not accept things from others who have obtained them by any of these five wrong livelihoods. We went over this at the beginning of the Lam Rim when we talked about making offerings to the shrine and not offering things that were obtained by the five wrong livelihoods.

Flattery

It's very interesting that the five wrong livelihoods listed in the title of this vow are often things we are specifically taught or encouraged to do here in the West. For example, when somebody has something we want, we don't come out and ask directly for it. What do we do? We flatter the other person by telling them how nice, kind and generous they are with the motivation that if I say all these nice sweet things, this person will give me the thing. This is wrong livelihood.

Hinting

Another thing we do when we want somebody to give us something is to make hints. Maybe they gave us something before: "Gee, that lemon pie you baked last year was SO GOOD." Hint, hint, hint. It means you're supposed to bake another one and bring it over. It's so interesting that these things which are considered wrong livelihood from the Buddhist viewpoint are considered as being courteous from the Western viewpoint.

Bribery

Another thing we do when we want people to give us things is to give them a small gift so they will give us a bigger gift. Don't we? Think of Christmas time--what do you do? It's kind of like: give Aunt Ethel something because she's loaded. So I'll give her a little gift and then she will give me a whole lot.

Coercion

Another thing we do is to put people in really difficult positions where they can't say no. This is a type of coercion, but we don't consider it to be coercion. Or we abuse our power or authority so that people can't say no or so that they are forced to give us something. Things obtained in these ways are wrong livelihood.

Hypocrisy

And then another thing we do is to act very hypocritically. But, we don't call it hypocrisy, we call it being polite. When people are around who can benefit us, we act very well and when those people aren't there we just go back to our regular, old behavior pattern. So in a Dharma circumstance, when your benefactor comes, then you look like model A-1 top-notch practitioner, and you behave really well. As soon as your benefactor leaves, you pull out the TV guide or the novels and turn on the stereo, put your feet up and get a beer. [Laughter] This type of action is very hypocritical.

This vow is a very interesting one to really meditate on. Spend some time thinking about and really looking over your life. In what situations have we gotten things by flattery or by praising people and saying nice things, while in the back of our minds, we're thinking, "I'll say this so that they'll give me something." Or, when there have been situations where we've kind of hinted to other people about what we need: "Oh gee, that's so nice," or, "You brought it last time, it was really helpful." Or, we give a small gift so that they will give us something big. Or, we put them in a situation where they can't say no. Or, we put on an act and pretend to be great and spectacular when the person who can help us is around, and when they aren't around we just act any old way. As an extension of this, it's very good to be aware of using hypocrisy, flattery or hinting not only to get material things, but also to get praise or a promotion, or to get to go on a business trip or other little things like this.

Selling Dharma Items as Right Livelihood

I'd like to add a few words about selling Dharma items such as statues and books. Technically speaking, what we're supposed to do is take the profit from the sales and use it for other Dharma works. For instance, the profit from all the books on sale here goes into a special account, then it's used for other Dharma things. I talked to someone who does that. He sells Dharma things and sells other stuff also. He uses the profits from the Dharma items to buy other Dharma items.

But it is a difficult situation in the West, because people here have a very different motivation for selling things. I think in ancient times, religious objects were made available free of charge and people who received them would make offerings. People would always offer something back unless they were really poor. So you wound up getting a livelihood because you were automatically supported by offerings, but you didn't have to actually sell things.

Nowadays in America, there are many people who are motivated to serve the Dharma and earn their livelihood at the same time. They feel that if they work in a Buddhist publishing company or sell Dharma items, they are helping the Dharma by spreading these things and earning their livelihood at the same time. Whereas, if they were to sell used cars, they would be earning a livelihood, but who would there be to print the Dharma books?

Cultural Considerations

I have debated this one up, down and across with several of my teachers. It seems to me that the motivation of Buddhist book publishers, for instance, is to serve the Dharma. That's why they are doing it and they are earning their livelihood as a secondary thing. This is the only way to do it otherwise you won't get these Dharma things out there, because our economy is completely different. If Snow Lion printed books and put them in bookstores for free distribution, who would make offering? Who would send money to Snow Lion? Our culture doesn't work that way.

But, when I talk about this with my teachers, they won't budge. Lama Zopa told Nick, who is from Wisdom Publications, that because he's making a business from Dharma books, his compassion should be so strong that if he has to go to the lower realms due to his wrong livelihood, he should be willing to do that, to benefit sentient beings. So it is pointing out to try and have a good motivation when we're doing this.

Audience: It sounds like we're almost in a no-win situation nowadays in that the Dharma needs to be sold in order for it to spread, yet selling it is considered wrong livelihood.

Venerable: Yes. It is so clear that Dharma things wouldn't happen unless people did this, because the economy now is completely different than it was in ancient times. And people nowadays are doing it for different motivations than past peoples would have done. So I don't know. At the Western Buddhist Teachers Conference, it was quite interesting hearing that most of the other teachers there who wrote books use the royalties from their books to live on. I was one of the few who doesn't. It's harder, particularly for monks and nuns, to get people to support them, so they may live off royalties.

I was talking with one Tibetan monk whom I know quite well. He uses the money he gets from royalties for his livelihood. But the money people offer for his Dharma talks he feels it's not okay to use, and so he gives that money away, because he said he felt he shouldn't earn his livelihood by teaching. Also, he didn't want thoughts of, "I am giving a teaching, I wonder how much money they are going to give me."

In contrast, the older lamas feel you can keep the money you're given when you give Dharma talks. But, I said to them, if you give a Dharma talk at the Center, and the Center charged people to come, what's the difference between that and selling a book? You're still selling the Dharma. That's okay, from their point of view--maybe because there was no exchange of physical material. But, anyway, this one particular Tibetan monk I know thought just the opposite: the money he received from giving talks he gave to the monastery and the money for the books he saw as more like a salary for his services and used it for his

livelihood. When you look at his motivation, I think he has quite a good motivation. So I think again it comes back to motivation.

Prostitution and Right Livelihood

I mentioned before the other thing I nearly flipped out over was that Genla says that from a Buddhist viewpoint, in ancient India, prostitution was okay. I think nowadays the prohibition against prostitution or being a pimp is definitely justified, I would think, because it humiliates people. Now, of course what ancient man thought about it, I don't know. I know what I as a woman think about it.

I think so often with prostitution, on one level, it's consent and on another level, it's not consent. I think if you talk to female or male prostitutes and ask them if that is their favorite career choice they would probably say no. It's probably because of the socio-economic thing that they are doing it. It's interesting because a lot of the things we are faced with now, people in the past were not. They didn't think about these things because they weren't faced with them.

Okay. Let's sit quietly for a few minutes.