

The Bodhisattva Vows

By Geshe Tsewang Samdrup, Tutor of the Tenth Dalai Lama

The Eighteen Root Downfalls

1. Due to attachment to material gain and respect, if one praises oneself and disparages others who have fine qualities, that is a root downfall of praising oneself and disparaging others.
2. When it would be appropriate to offer the Dharma and material goods to those who are suffering or without a protector, if due to avarice one does not do so, that is the root downfall of not offering the Dharma and material goods.
3. While someone courteously offers one an apology, if one does not accept their apology but instead responds hurtfully with angry words or deeds, that is the root downfall of not accepting an apology.
4. Having rejected the bodhisattva corpus of teachings, saying they are not the teachings of the Buddha, if one prefers some imitation Dharma and teaches that to others, that is the root downfall of rejecting the Mahāyāna and teaching an imitation of the holy Dharma.
5. While knowing that one has no right over some material goods that have been dedicated to the Three Jewels, if one takes possession of those goods either by taking it oneself or having someone else do it by stealth, robbery, or by devious means, that is the root downfall of stealing what belongs to the Three Jewels.
6. If one deprecates the three collections that reveal all the aspects of the Path, that is the root downfall of rejecting the holy Dharma.
7. If one malevolently robs, beats, imprisons, or causes to disrobe any ordained person, whether or not they are maintaining their ethical discipline, that is the root downfall of stealing the saffron robes and forcing someone to renounce their ordination.
8. If one commits any of the acts of killing one's father, mother, or an arhat, causing a schism in the saṅgha, or maliciously drawing the blood of a tathtāgata, that is the root downfall of committing a deed of immediate retribution.
9. If one holds that there are no karmic consequences of anyone's actions, that there are no former or later lives, and so on, that is the root downfall of holding false views.
10. If one destroys towns, cities, areas, or regions, that is the root downfall of destroying towns and so on.
11. If by teaching emptiness to those who are not suitable vessels but who have aroused the resolve to achieve perfect enlightenment and as a result, they become frightened, turn away from their resolve, and instead adopt the goal of the Hīnayāna, that is the root downfall of teaching emptiness to those who are mentally untrained.
12. If one says that if the Six Perfections are practiced with the resolve to achieve perfect enlightenment, it will not be possible to become a buddha, but if the resolve of a śrāvaka or pratyekabuddha is made, freedom from saṃsāra will be achieved, and as a result, that person turns away from their resolve to achieve perfect enlightenment, that is the root downfall of turning someone away from perfect enlightenment.
13. If one says to someone who is properly keeping the pratimokṣa ethical discipline that there is no point in purely abiding by such ethics, for one should rather arouse the resolve to achieve perfect enlightenment, convert to the Mahāyāna, and then all one misconduct

of the body, speech, and mind will stop, and as a result, that person gives up their pratimokṣa ethical discipline, that is the root downfall of abandoning the pratimokṣa.

14. If one deprecates the Śrāvakayāna or Pratyekabuddhayāna by saying that no matter how much it is practiced, it will be impossible to abandon all mental afflictions, and maintains that the realizations of the Śrāvakayāna or Pratyekabuddhayāna will not free one from saṃsāra, that is the root downfall of maintaining that attachment and so on cannot be abandoned by means of the “learners’” yānas.

While reciting, reading, and teaching the Mahāyāna [scriptures], due to one’s craving for material gain and respect, if one engages in praise and denigration by claiming to be a Mahāyāna practitioner who has no regard material gain or respect, while others do, that is the root downfall of denigrating others. This is subsumed under the first root downfall, so it is not counted as a separate downfall.

15. Although one has not directly realized emptiness, when teaching emptiness to others, if one says, “Meditate on this, and you will directly realize emptiness and thus become like me!”, when the other person understands what one is saying, that is the root downfall of speaking falsehoods.
16. If a king or some government official appropriates anything belonging to the Three Jewels or exacts payment as punishment to the saṅgha or any bhikṣu and offers it to oneself and one accepts it, that is the root downfall of accepting a gift that belongs to the Three Jewels.
17. Out of aversion to ordinary people who are meditators practicing meditative equipoise in śamatha, if one takes their possessions and gives them to those whose practice is recitation, that is the root downfall of discarding śamatha and giving the possessions of meditators to reciters.
18. If one rejects bodhicitta, that is the root downfall of discarding bodhicitta.

The Forty-Six Misdeeds

1. If a day passes without making offerings with one’s body, speech, and mind by physically paying homage, verbally praising, or mentally revering any of the Three Jewels, that is the misdeed of not making offerings to the Three Jewels with one’s body, speech, and mind.
2. If one does not put a stop to craving, such as having great desires, dissatisfaction, and attachment to being respected, that is the misdeed of following after a desirous mind.
3. If one fails to respectfully revere elders in the bodhisattva training with fine qualities who are worthy of respect, that is the misdeed of not revering one’s elders.
4. If a person addresses one honestly and pleasantly, but out of anger at their question or laziness, one refuses to answer appropriately, that is the misdeed of not answering those who come with questions.
5. In response to others’ invitation to accept food, clothing, and so on, due to pride, malice, hatred, or laziness, if one refuses, that is the misdeed of not accepting an invitation.
6. If a benefactor offers one various goods such as gold or silver, and one does not accept them due to malice, hatred, or laziness, that is the misdeed of not accepting such things as gold.

7. Due to malice, hatred, envy, or laziness, if one refuses to grant the Dharma to those who desire Dharma, that is the misdeed of not granting Dharma to those who desire it.
8. Due to malice, hatred, or laziness, if one rejects and dismisses someone on the grounds that they have faulty ethics because of having committed a deed of immediate retribution or a root downfall, that is the misdeed of rejecting those with faulty ethics.
9. If one does not engage in the practices of the vinaya like the śrāvakas in order to protect the minds of others, that is the misdeed of not practicing so that others may have faith.
10. Regarding vinaya misdemeanors, such as keeping a piece of cloth for ten days, if a bodhisattva practices like a śrāvaka when it is not necessary, that is the misdeed of trivial behavior for the sake of sentient beings.
11. For those who have bodhicitta and are properly engaging in the practices of the bodhisattvas, on occasions when there would be exceptional benefit for others if one engaged in any of the seven nonvirtues, such as killing, but one does not do so, that is the misdeed of not compassionately engaging in an offense.
12. If one adopts any of the five kinds of wrong livelihood—through pretense, flattery, hinting, force, or baiting—and does not apply their remedies, that is the misdeed of adopting wrong livelihood.
13. If one forgets oneself and engages in wild behavior and distracts oneself with fun and games and idle chatter and wants to encourage others to act likewise, that is the misdeed of forgetting oneself and losing control.
14. If one says that bodhisattvas do not delight in nirvāṇa, but turn away from it, are unafraid of mental afflictions and do not utterly disengage their minds from them, and they wander about in saṃsāra for three countless eons while seeing the need to achieve enlightenment, that is the misdeed of thinking one just has to travel through saṃsāra.
15. If one does not dispel and reject the unfounded bases for vile rumors or slanderous talk about the veracity or purity of one's speech or conduct, that is the misdeed of not rejecting such infamy.
16. In response to someone's physical or verbal misconduct, if one sees that one is able to forcefully correct them, but one fails to do so in order to maintain their good opinion of oneself, that is the misdeed of not correcting others despite their mental afflictions.
17. When one is scolded, despised, beaten, or criticized, if one reacts in the same way, that is the misdeed of departing from the four dharmas of virtuous conduct.
18. In cases when one has done something wrong to another person or they suspect that one has, if, due to malice, pride, or laziness, one does not explain oneself in a suitable manner, that is the misdeed of disregarding of those who are angry.
19. In cases when someone has done something wrong to oneself and they explain themselves in accordance with Dharma, but due to malice, harmful intent, or not wanting to respond, if one does not accept their apology, that is the misdeed of rejecting others' apologies.
20. In cases when hateful thoughts toward others arise and are appropriated, if one does not view this as a fault and embraces them, that is the misdeed of following after hateful thoughts.
21. If one gathers followers for the sake of having them honor, serve, or materially support one, that is the misdeed of gathering followers out of a desire for their veneration.

22. During the early and final periods of the night, if one gives into and does not dispel the pleasure of sleeping in, lying down, and staying in bed, that is the misdeed of not dispelling laziness and so forth.
23. If one wastes time out of attachment to distracting chatter about politics, crime, women, and so on, that is the misdeed of indulging in useless speech due to attachment.
24. In cases when one wishes to settle the mind in meditative equipoise, but out of malice or laziness, one does not go to receive practical instructions on samādhi, that is the misdeed of not seeking the point of samādhi.
25. If one embraces and does not dispel any of the five obscurations that obstruct the achievement of the dhyānas—namely, excitation and anxiety, malevolence, sleepiness and dullness, yearning for the pleasures of the desire realm, and uncertainty—that is the misdeed of not purifying the obscurations to the dhyānas.
26. If one craves the bliss of dhyāna and regards that experiential taste as its fine quality, that is the misdeed of regarding the taste of dhyāna as its fine quality.
27. If one regards listening to the collection of śrāvaka teachings, memorizing the meanings of its words, practicing them and so on while maintaining that although they are necessary, they are useless for bodhisattvas, and one expresses that view to others, that is the misdeed of rejecting the Śrāvakayāna.
28. While having the opportunity to apply oneself to the collection of bodhisattva teachings, if one discards them and applies oneself to the collection of śrāvaka teachings, that is the misdeed of applying oneself to them while possessing one's own tradition.
29. While having the opportunity to apply oneself to the teachings of the Buddha, but not doing so and instead applying oneself to the treatises of extremists, that is the misdeed of not applying oneself [to the Buddha's teachings] but instead applying oneself to non-Buddhist treatises.
30. For very good reasons, while it may be necessary to apply oneself to extremists' treatises, if one enthusiastically immerses oneself in them at the beginning, middle, and end, that is the misdeed of taking delight in them even while applying oneself to them.
31. Regarding any of the collection of bodhisattva teachings, if one speaks disparaging words such as, "This topic is inferior, this teaching is poor, this author is worse," or "This is of no benefit to sentient beings," that is the misdeed of rejecting the Mahāyāna.
32. Out of pride or hatred, if one praises oneself and belittles others, that is the misdeed of praising oneself and belittling others.
33. Out of pride or laziness, if one does not go to Dharma teachings, Dharma discussions, and so on, that is the misdeed of not going to hear the Dharma.
34. If one does not regard a person who teaches one the Dharma as an Enlightened Teacher, does not honor that person but rather scorns him, criticizes him, and focuses on his eloquence rather than on the meaning of his words, that is the misdeed of focusing on the vessels and letters.
35. On any of the eight occasions when it is appropriate to offer help—namely, (1) when there is a task to be done, (2) a place to go, (3) a language to be learned, (4) reproachless work to be done, (5) belongings to be guarded, (6) a split that is to be reconciled, (7) a festival to be held, and (8) virtue to be performed—out of hatred or laziness, if one does not offer assistance, that is the misdeed of not going to someone's aid when it is needed.
36. When it would be appropriate for one to serve and attend to the sick, but out of hatred or laziness one does neither, that is the misdeed of refusing to serve those who are ill.

37. Regarding any of seven kinds of individuals—namely, (1) someone who is blind, (2) deaf, (3) or handicapped, (4) a weary traveler, (5) someone suffering from the five obscurations, (6) someone suffering from thoughts of malice and so on, and (7) someone suffering from defeat by others—out of hatred or laziness if one does not take measures to alleviate their suffering, that is the misdeed of not relieving suffering.
38. If there is someone who is engaging in conduct that will be detrimental to them in this and future lives, but out of hatred or laziness one does not rationally show them how they can abstain from such vices, that is the misdeed of not rationally showing such conduct to be unscientific.
39. Due to malice or laziness, if one does not repay the kindness of someone who has been helpful, that is the misdeed of not returning a kindness.
40. Due to malice or laziness, if one does not relieve the misery of beings who are suffering due to the loss of loved ones or of possessions, that is the misdeed of not relieving others' misery.
41. Due to malice or laziness, if one does not give such things as food and drink to beggars, that is the misdeed of not giving to those who wish material goods.
42. Due to malice or laziness, if one does not give practical instructions to one's circle of disciples or seek, in accordance with Dharma, their physical necessities from faithful householders, that is the misdeed of not serving the needs of one's circle of disciples.
43. Due to malice or laziness, if one does not behave in a harmonious way with others, that is the misdeed of not getting along with others.
44. Due to malice or laziness, if one does not praise others' fine qualities or express appreciation for them, that is the misdeed of not praising others' fine qualities.
45. Due to one's mental afflictions or laziness, if one does not chastise, punish, or expel others when that is appropriate, that is the misdeed of not subjugating others when the occasion arises.
46. If one has paranormal abilities and various kinds of powers and it would be appropriate to use them to threaten or inspire others or to prevent people without vows from making use of offerings to the faithful, and if one does not do so, that is the misdeed of not using one's paranormal abilities to intimidate others and so on.

Translated by B. Alan Wallace