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Edited by Geoffrey Ashmore.

Compassion, the Language of a Bodhisattva

The practice of dharma involves certain possibilities. How these evolve into actual situations for the practitioner and how much is possible within these situations depends on the capacity of individual beings. It depends upon the level of teachings one is able to relate to, such as Mahayana or Hinayana. At this particular time in our lives, practice of the Mahayana teaching is possible. This teaching is precious and rare. Our concern for development and our sense of responsibility have placed us in a position to integrate the preciousness and rarity of the Mahayana teaching with our lives. Through it, there is the possibility of the experience of non-returning into samsara and the experience of ultimate bliss that is self-knowing and in which there are no doubts.

In the midst of the wandering of our minds we might sometimes fall into thinking that whether we practise or not the dharma will always be available. If you have that kind of notion, it is a very serious mistake. Any time, any brief moment you can use as an opportunity for dharma practice, you must use it. If you do not take this responsibility, if you do not show sincere respect for the Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings, there is a definite possibility of causing harm to yourself and to those spiritual friends with whom you are linked. Lack of attention to the responsibilities of the Mahayana path constitutes a breaking of the samaya principles. Therefore in whatever way you can hold to the teachings, you must sincerely do so.

If you think the teachings are negligible, it will be to your loss. The fact is that the teachings are very much hidden from you, so you cannot really speculate about them.

On the other hand, their validity has been evidenced by their effectiveness from the time of the Buddha to the present day. This is something to reflect upon. You must genuinely realise the sacredness of the teachings, to the point of understanding that there is nothing more important than the practice of dharma in this lifetime and in lifetimes to come.

Sense of importance

In worldly life, in the field of business, we know that the businessman develops a plan for a project, works out what it will cost and attends to every detail of the project with the utmost care; absolute importance is attached to such a project and a great deal of energy is put into bringing it to a successful conclusion. The point is that if someone expends such effort for a result that is of a temporary nature, why should we not put at least as much effort into a project that is going to bring about both our temporary and ultimate benefit? Whether you are receiving an empowerment or an explanation, if you are able to develop that sense of importance about the dharma then there is purpose in your relationship with the Mahayana teachings and, also, there is going to be fulfilment. If you have a genuine commitment to the teaching, you will be able to develop direct and meaningful trust and confidence in the teaching and sincere compassion towards beings. A true understanding of the universality of the working of karma, the nature of cause and effect, will arise.

The bodhisattva's aspirations and actions are powerful because from the very beginning when he embarks on the journey along the path to enlightenment he aspires to work for the benefit of all sentient beings with a very determined, definite and powerful intention. Because of

the sincere resolve that is within this aspiration, whatever actions need to be performed to benefit and liberate beings are performed with great power and tirelessness. Having undertaken such a profound journey by virtue of the aspiration to help beings, as the different stages of the bodhisattva are experienced one finds oneself increasingly capable of benefitting countless beings. That is how the bodhisattva first treads upon the path.

When the bodhisattva works for the benefit all beings with such appropriate aspiration and action, there is total fulfilment. The fulfilment is appropriate in the sense that there is no selfishness involved in the way of expectations, doubts, hopes, attachment or aversion with regard to gains and losses of any kind. The bodhisattva is completely pure and spotless, working incessantly and wholeheartedly for the benefit of beings. Not for a moment is there any hesitation or doubt, as these obstacles have been transcended.

Gentle ways

The ways of a bodhisattva are gentle, since all harmful actions and indulgences have been abandoned. Not only are harmful deeds themselves eliminated in a bodhisattva's life but also the creation of causes of future harmful situations. Work is done solely for the benefit of other beings, not only in direct deeds but in laying the foundations for future benefits to accrue. When these bodhisattvas initiate work, then, they are able to cause immeasurable benefit for beings; and they do so manifesting fearless generosity, without doubts or expectations: like the great bodhisattva of boundless compassion, Avalokiteshvara, or the bodhisattva of boundless power, Vajrapani, and others. For us, this means that the practice of compassion must at all times be in our awareness and at all times be performed.

Dignity

When you have bodhicitta, the enlightened attitude, you have a responsibility to the people around you: you care about them; you are inseparable from your practice, you seize opportunities to benefit others and you benefit them in whatever way you can. That includes having respect for your country and society. You were born here; this country has been an important place for you: you should therefore live a decent life, a dignified life that upholds the traditions of previous generations, that meets with the approval of society, your parents and yourself. Also, you have to set a decent and dignified example for future generations. If you are really going to serve this country and help its people, this seems a reasonable way to do so.

We do not need to belong to this or that party, or get involved in competitiveness and politics. As dharma practitioners, we do not have to deny and reject politics but we do not have to play those games either. It is not necessary, it is not important, it is not needed.

Taking responsibility

You definitely have to work and support yourselves. If you work maybe in a hospital, you can see how you might have the opportunity and responsibility to help people; in the same way, whatever work you do, there are people you can benefit. You should serve people, serve your society, not expect society to serve you. That is part of the practice of the dharma. Not working is not taking responsibility. If you are a dharma practitioner, practising the Mahayana teachings, you have something to be proud of, something to be worthy of, something to be decent about.

There are some people who go around like some kind of outcast. That is not in accordance with the teachings, to go around in rags, with long hair, unwashed, as if you were a drug addict or something. This is not the proper way to present yourself. You are not maintaining self-respect, you are not respecting the dharma you are practising, and you are not creating the

proper appearance that the dharma is worthy of. If you look like a misfit, this gives a very bad impression of the dharma centre you are involved with and also of yourself as a person.

This is the message to practitioners of the dharma: that they must be dignified internally and externally; and that their inner dignity must also be reflected outwardly. Wearing decent clothes and being a decent human being, serving your country and people, serving the dharma and, also, yourself – being a self-respectful person – is the dharma path. How can you help people if you look like a dropout from society? By presenting that appearance you are not being responsible or reflecting the enlightened attitude. If you are practising bodhicitta, you should naturally be able to attract people: so that seeing you people might think: yes, these seem to be decent people; I think I could relate to them; I could ask something of them; they might even be able to help me. You appear capable of giving help or at least capable of giving some direction towards help. We can be proud of ourselves as examples of the dharma.

These are certain points that before I leave I would like to offer to people. I hope that whoever hears them, whether they are a dharma practitioner or not, they will make some sense to them. What I say comes sincerely and truly, without any pretence or diplomacy – straight and clean. With integrity and sincerity you can serve beings; and as you work in the dharma you will serve many beings. That is the greatness of the Mahayana teaching and practice. You don't have to be a dropout from the community, from society or the family. You are not. You have dignity.