

Excerpt from
Advice on the Three Vows
by Geshe Tsewang Samdrub

How to protect the Bodhisattva Vows from degeneration:

Learn the foundations of the bodhisattva training by properly relying upon a sublime spiritual guide learned in the Bodhisattva Canon and its commentaries. In particular, you must know the eighteen root downfalls, and the forty-six secondary offenses.

First, the eighteen root downfalls:

1. If, out of attachment to material gain and honor, you praise yourself or belittle someone of good qualities, it is a root downfall of ***Praising oneself and belittling others***. This is divided into two root downfalls, praising oneself and belittling others.¹
2. If, out of miserliness, you do not give Dharma or material assistance to those who suffer or have no protector even though it is appropriate, it is a root downfall of ***Refusing to give the Dharma or material assistance***.² This is divided into two root downfalls, not giving Dharma and not giving material assistance.
3. When someone requests your patience and harmoniously apologizes, if you do not listen, but show anger through your gestures and speech, it is a root downfall of ***Lashing out at another without listening even though they have apologized***.³ There are two root downfalls, lashing out and not accepting an apology.
4. If you abandon something in the Bodhisattva Canon saying, ‘The Buddha did not teach this,’ and take joy in a false Dharma and proceed to teach that to others, it is a root downfall of ***Abandoning the Mahayana or Teaching false sublime Dharma***.⁴ There are two root downfalls, abandoning the Mahayana and teaching a false sublime Dharma.

¹ ‘Praising myself and belittling others.’

² ‘Not sharing my wealth or the Dharma.’

³ ‘Not forgiving even though others apologize’

⁴ ‘Doubting and Denying the Mahayana’

5. When you obtain by stealing, robbing, or through various means, something dedicated to the Three Jewels, it is a root downfall of ***Stealing the property of the Three Jewels***⁵, regardless of whether you yourself took it, or enlisted another to act on your behalf. There is a root downfall for property stolen from each of the Three Jewels, making three altogether.
6. If you disparage a path complete in all aspects saying, “This is not something the Buddha taught in the canons of Three Vehicles,” it is a root downfall of ***Abandoning the sublime Dharma***.⁶ This is divided into three root downfalls, one each for abandoning the canons of the three vehicles.
7. If, due to ill will, you steal the saffron robes, beat, imprison, or cause an ordained person - with or without ethical discipline - to fall from ordination, it is a root downfall of ***Stealing the saffron robes of the ordained and causing them to fall from ordination, and so forth***.⁷ This is divided into two root downfalls, that of stealing the saffron robes and so forth and that of causing the ordained to fall from ordination.
8. If you commit any of the following five acts: kill your mother, father or an arhat, cause a division in the Sangha, or draw the blood of the Tathagata with negative intent, it is a root downfall of ***Committing an act with no intervening period***.⁸ This is divided into the five root downfalls of the five acts (that produce a fully ripened result after death) with no intervening period.
9. If you hold that actions and their effects or past and future rebirths and so forth, do not exist, it is a root downfall of ***Holding wrong views***.⁹
10. If you destroy a town, a city, a region or a province, it is a root downfall of ***Crushing towns and so forth***.¹⁰ This is divided into four root downfalls, that of smashing towns, cities, and so forth.
11. If you teach emptiness to an unsuitable vessel for emptiness or if, by teaching emptiness, you instill fear in a sentient being who has generated the mind seeking complete enlightenment and he or she subsequently turns away from the mind of enlightenment to generate a Hinayana attitude, it is a root downfall of ***Teaching emptiness to an untrained mind***.¹¹
12. If a person who has generated the mind of supreme enlightenment turns away from that awakening mind because you have said, “You aren’t capable of training in the Six Perfections and attaining Buddhahood. If you were to generate the mind of a Hearer or

⁵ ‘Taking offerings intended for the Three Jewels’

⁶ ‘Abandoning the Dharma through sectarianism’

⁷ ‘Disrobing (monks or nuns).’

⁸ ‘Committing the five heinous crimes’

⁹ ‘Holding distorted views’

¹⁰ ‘Destroying places such as towns’

¹¹ ‘Teaching voidness to those untrained. ‘Untrained’ in the sense of being unprepared or spiritually unripe.

Solitary Realizer, you would be liberated from cyclic existence,” it is a root downfall of ***Causing others to turn away from supreme enlightenment.***¹²

13. When you cause someone, who abides correctly in the ethics of Individual Liberation, to turn away from those ethics by saying, “What’s the use of the ethics of Individual Liberation? Arouse the mind of supreme enlightenment, return to the Mahayana and all faults of the three doors will be stopped,” it is a root downfall of ***Causing others to abandon the vows of Individual Liberation.***¹³

14. If you denigrate the Hearers’ and/or Solitary Realizers’ vehicles, saying, ‘Regardless of how much you train in it, you will not be able to abandon all disturbing emotions without exception,’ and hold that the realizations of Hearers and Solitary Realizers do not free them from cyclic existence, it is a root downfall of ***Holding that attachment and the like cannot be abandoned by the Learner’s Vehicle.***¹⁴

Note: If, while reciting, reading, and teaching the Mahayana texts, you claim out of attachment to material gain and honor that, “I am a practitioner of the Mahayana unconcerned with gain and honor, but others are not,” you are praising yourself and belittling others, and thus it is a root downfall of ***Belittling others with deceptive words.*** This is not counted as a separate downfall since it is included within the first root downfall of ***Praising oneself and belittling others.***

15. If, even though you have not perceptually realized emptiness, you teach someone emptiness saying, ‘Meditate on this and you will perceptually realize emptiness and become like me!’ and he or she understands that, it is a root downfall of ***Making false proclamations.***¹⁵

16. If you accept the property of the Three Jewels, or the provisions and necessities of the Sangha and the fully ordained, that have been confiscated by kings, ministers and so forth as punishment, when you obtain these goods, it is a root downfall of ***Accepting the property of the Three Jewels.***¹⁶

17. If you take the resources of contemplatives who are settled in calm abiding with the thought, “I will rouse these ordinary beings from their practice,” and give it to those who merely recite prayers, it is a root downfall of ***Giving the contemplatives’ resources to the reciters and discarding calm abiding.***¹⁷

18. If you abandon the mind of enlightenment, it is a root downfall of ***Discarding the mind of enlightenment.***¹⁸

¹² ‘Discouraging others from full enlightenment’

¹³ ‘Causing others to break pratimoksha vows’

¹⁴ ‘Belittling those who follow the Hinayana’

¹⁵ ‘Proclaiming false realizations of voidness’

¹⁶ ‘Accepting gifts of what has been seized from the Triple Gem’

¹⁷ ‘Passing false judgment’ or ‘Establishing harmful rules’

¹⁸ ‘Giving up bodhicitta’

The Four Binding Factors do not have to be complete for this and the ninth root downfall of ***Holding Wrong Views*** to be incurred. However, the Four Binding Factors must be complete to incur the other sixteen root downfalls. The Four Binding Factors are: 1. Still wanting to engage in the misdeed 2. Lacking shame and a sense of propriety 3. Feeling happy and satisfied about the action 4. Not viewing the act as wrong.

If in addition to this last one, the other three are complete, it is a great binding affliction. If in addition to this last one, one or two of the remaining three are complete, or if it alone is complete, it is a fault of medium contamination. When not combined with the last one, the first three are faults of lesser contamination. Even though you perform a basic version of one of the sixteen root downfalls, if the four features of a great binding affliction are not complete, your action is only a secondary offense of lesser or medium contamination *included* within the category of root downfalls.

The Forty-Six Secondary Offenses:

1. If a day passes without worshipping any one of the Three Jewels with the three doors – that is, by prostrating your body, praising with your speech and having a clear mind recall their qualities - it is a secondary offense of **Not worshipping the Three Jewels with the three doors**.

2. If you do not act to arrest great desire, the lack of contentment or attachment to expressions of reverence, it is a secondary offense of **Following a desirous mind**.

3. If you do not show respect, such as esteem and so forth, to a senior practitioner of the mind of enlightenment who has good qualities and is worthy of esteem, it is a secondary offense of **Not respecting elders**.

4. If, out of anger or laziness, you do not respond with a relevant answer to another person's sincere and amicable question, it is a secondary offense of **Not responding to a question**.

5. If, due to pride, anger, laziness, or bitterness, you do not accept another person's invitation to food or clothing, etc., it is a secondary offense of **Not accepting another's hospitality**.

6. When a benefactor offers gold, silver, or some other precious items, if, out of bitterness, anger, or laziness, you do not accept it, it is a secondary offense of **Not accepting gold and the like**.

7. If, out of bitterness, anger, envy or laziness, you do not give Dharma to those who want it, it is a secondary offense of **Not giving Dharma to those who want it**.

*The above seven secondary offenses are incompatible with **Generosity**, which includes the giving of Dharma and virtue.*

8. If, out of bitterness, anger or laziness, you neglect or ignore¹⁹ someone with lapsed ethics on account of his or her having committed an act with no intervening period or incurred an ethical root downfall, it is a secondary offense of **Neglecting those with lapsed ethics.**²⁰

9. If you do not train like a Hearer in the Vinaya Trainings in order to protect others' minds, it is a secondary offense of **Not training oneself so that others may develop faith.**

10. If a bodhisattva trains in conformity to a Hearer where he or she need not, it is a secondary offense of **Doing little for the benefit of beings.** Such acts include the proscriptions related to keeping and abandoning Vinaya clothing for ten days.

11. If a person, who has a mind of enlightenment and properly trains in the bodhisattva trainings, does not engage that while performing one of the seven deeds of body and speech²¹ such as killing for the special benefit of others, it is a secondary offense of **Not practicing with loving compassion.**

12. If you willingly embrace any of the five wrong livelihoods and do not apply their antidote, it is a secondary offense of **Voluntarily accepting a wrong livelihood.** The five wrong livelihoods are to seek and acquire through pretension, flattery, intimation, coercion, and giving.²²

13. If you make a mockery and laugh, spout distracting babble or try to make others laugh and so forth, it is the secondary offense of **Making a mockery and joking excessively.**

14. If you feel or express that 'Bodhisattvas should not delight in nirvana, they should turn their backs on it. Bodhisattvas should not fear disturbing emotions, they do not need to completely isolate their mind from such things. After all, enlightenment must be attained after circling in samsara for three countless eons,' it is a secondary offense of **Thinking only about going through samsara.**

15. If you do not dispel the stains of not having kept your word or having a disreputable word, and do not try to abandon the grounds for such unpleasant remarks being made about you, it is a secondary offense of **Not avoiding a bad reputation.**

16. If, in seeing that a severe punishment would correct another person's faulty behavior and speech, you do not use those means to correct him just so you can avoid hurting his

¹⁹ also 'condescend'

²⁰ or 'Being indifferent to those who have violated ethics'

²¹ The seven deeds of body and speech are deeds the Buddha permitted bodhisattvas to perform even though they may be ostensibly negative or harmful. The rejoinder is that they must be performed out of loving compassion.

²² To seek and acquire through giving means to give something small in the hopes of getting something greater.

feelings²³, it is a secondary offense of **Not correcting others even though they are afflicted**.

*The nine secondary offenses from **Neglecting those who have violated ethics** up to and including this one, are incompatible with **Ethics**.*

17. If you respond in kind when another abuses you, becomes angry with you, beats you, or exposes your hidden faults, it is a secondary offense of **Being separated from the four qualities of a spiritual practitioner**.

18. If you commit a fault against someone, or suspect that he or she has committed one and, out of bitterness, pride or laziness, you do not apologize²⁴ in an appropriate way, it is a secondary offense of **Neglecting the angry**.

19. If, out of bitterness, ill will or not wanting to respond, you do not accept an apology from someone who has wronged you even though they try to make amends in accordance with the Dharma, it is a secondary offense of **Rejecting another person's apology**.²⁵

20. If you assent to the notion, "Its not a fault to hold on to angry thoughts that arise towards others", it is a secondary offense of **Following thoughts of anger**.

*The four preceding secondary offenses are incompatible with **Patience**.*

21. If you gather a circle of followers in the hopes of obtaining esteem, veneration, material gain and the like, it is a secondary offense of **Gathering a following out of desire for esteem and reverence**.

22. If, due to laziness or idleness, you embrace and do not try to dispel the pleasure of sleeping during the day – excepting the afternoon session – during the first and last parts of the night, or the pleasures of dullness, lying in bed, and so forth, it is the secondary offense of **Not acting to dispel laziness and the like**.

23. If you indolently pass the time, always attached to diversions and banter about politics, crime and women²⁶, it is a secondary offense of **Engaging in idle talk out of desire**.

*The preceding three secondary offenses are incompatible with **Enthusiastic effort**.*

²³ Lit. 'for the sake of conforming to the protection of his mind'. That is, not taking action that would benefit a person for fear that you upset him or her.

²⁴ According to the Great Dictionary, or *tshig mdzod chen mo*, the Tibetan word, *shad sbyangs*, carries a dual meaning. It can mean "to openly acknowledge one's own faults" but also "to educate someone with gentle speech so as to turn him or her away from faulty negative conduct."

²⁵ or more literally 'Rejecting another's stated confession'

²⁶ lit. 'the king and ministers, robbers and thieves, and women'

24. If you want to place the mind in equilibrium, but out of bitterness or laziness, do not go to others to receive personal instructions on absorption, it is a secondary offense of **Not seeking the meaning of absorption.**

25. If you embrace and do not try to dispel any one of the five obscurations that hinder concentration, it is a secondary offense of **Not acting to purify the obscurations to absorption.** The five obscurations that hinder concentration are: 1. excitement and regret 2. ill will 3. drowsiness and dullness 4. yearning for sensory objects and 5. doubt

26. If you crave the bliss of concentration and consider the experience and taste of it to be an important quality, it is a secondary offense of **Considering the taste of concentration to be an important quality.**

The three preceding secondary offenses are incompatible with Concentration.

27. If you have the view that, while Hinayana practitioners need to study, hold to and train in the words and meaning of the Hearers' Canon, Bodhisattvas do not, and were to propound that, it would be a secondary offense of **Abandoning the Hearers' Vehicle.**

28. If you neglect the Bodhisattvas' Canon while there are still things you should apply yourself to in it, and apply yourself to the Hearers' Canon, it is a secondary offense of **Applying yourself to that system despite having your own way.**

29. If, while there are things you should apply yourself to in the Buddha's teaching, you do not apply yourself to them but apply yourself to the *Tirthika* treatises, it is the secondary offense of **Exerting effort in non-Buddhist treatises where no effort should be made.**

30. Though there may be a need to apply yourself to the *Tirthika* treatises, if your delight in that remains throughout the beginning, middle and end, it is a secondary offense of **Delighting in the efforts made in non-Buddhist treatises.**

31. If you make disparaging remarks about any teaching in the Bodhisattvas' Canon to the effect that 'This teaching is inferior', 'The teaching of it is inferior', 'The teacher of it is inferior' or 'This will not benefit sentient beings', it is a secondary offense of **Abandoning the Mahayana.**

32. If, out of pride or anger, you praise yourself and/or belittle someone else, it is a secondary offense of **Praising oneself and belittling others.**

33. If, out of pride or laziness, you do not go to receive useful explanations and commentaries on the Dharma, it is a secondary offense of **Not going somewhere for the sake of Dharma.**

34. If, in failing to adopt the attitude that the person who propounds Dharma to you is a teacher and not showing him the proper esteem and so forth, you ignore him, scorn him

and rely only on his good words and not upon their meaning, it is a secondary offense of **Belittling that and relying upon the letter.**²⁷

*The preceding eight secondary offenses are incompatible with **Wisdom**. These 34 secondary offenses are incompatible with the **Six Perfections** of gathering virtuous dharmas.*

35. If, out of anger or laziness, you do not help someone by performing any one of the following eight helpful actions when it is appropriate to do so it is a secondary offense of **Not acting to assist one in need**. The eight actions are resolving the best course of action to take, accompanying someone on a journey, teaching a language, teaching them how to act flawlessly, guarding their resources, reconciling disputes between individuals, assisting in ceremonies and celebrations, and performing meritorious activities.

36. If, out of anger or laziness, you do not attend to and respect the sick when it is appropriate to do so, it is a secondary offense of **Not attending to those who are ill**.

37. If, out of anger or laziness, you do not try to alleviate the suffering of those who suffer in any one of the following seven ways, it is a secondary offense of **Not acting to alleviate suffering**. The seven types of suffering relate to a person being blind, deaf, physically handicapped, tired out by a journey, or suffering from the five obscurations²⁸, misconceptions²⁹ such as ill will and so forth, and being put down by others.

38. If, out of anger or laziness, you do not use whatever faultless reasoning is appropriate to properly instruct a sentient being engaged in an improper pursuit of aims focused on this and future lives, it is a secondary offense of **Not using reason to instruct the negligent**.

39. If, out of bitterness or laziness, you do not try to return the benefit others have extended to you, it is a secondary offense of **Not benefiting others in return for past actions**.

40. If, out of bitterness or laziness, you do not try to alleviate the sorrow of a sentient being mourning the loss of a loved one or possessions, it is a secondary offense of **Not acting to dispel another's sorrow**.

41. If, out of bitterness or laziness, you do not give food or drink to someone who asks for them, it is a secondary offense of **Not acting generously towards those seeking material assistance**.

42. If, out of bitterness or laziness, you do not give instructions to your followers or do not seek supplies for their welfare from wealthy laypeople in accordance with the Dharma, it is a secondary offense of **Not looking after the welfare of your followers**.

²⁷ 'That' can be understood to refer to the teacher or the words of the Dharma.

²⁸ see secondary offense 25

²⁹ i.e. superstitions or ideas

43. If, out of bitterness or laziness, you do not act in a way harmonious with the intentions of others, it is a secondary offense of **Not acting in accord with the minds of others.**

44. If, out of bitterness or laziness, you do not praise the qualities of another or do not give your approval to well-spoken words by saying ‘Good!’, it is a secondary offense of **Not expressing praise for the good qualities of others.**

45. If, due to disturbing emotions or laziness, you do not suppress, punish or banish someone when it is warranted, it is a secondary offense of **Not subjugating someone as conditions warrant.**

46. If you have miraculous powers and spells, and you do not use them to instill fear, confront or prevent a person who does not possess vows from taking that which is given out of faith when it is warranted to instill fear, confront or prevent a person who does not possess vows from taking that which is given out of faith, it is the secondary offense of **Not using miraculous powers to threaten and the like.**

*These twelve secondary offenses are incompatible with **The ethics of working for the benefit of sentient beings.***

In addition, the following faults contradict the advice and trainings of the aspirational mind of enlightenment. They are called ‘secondary offenses’ related to the aspirational mind of enlightenment.

1. Not extending Dharma and material goods to those who are worthy of being extended Dharma and material goods
2. Holding grudges against someone who causes harm and being biased and attached to some and averse to others.
3. Not teaching the sublime and discarding study, reflection and meditation
4. Not being influenced by the thought to benefit others while partaking of food and clothing
5. Not acting to influence all virtuous activities with the awakening mind

To avoid being separated from the mind of enlightenment in future lives, you must adopt the four white Dharmas and abandon the four black Dharmas. This is the way to do so:

1. The first black Dharma is to knowingly deceive a lama or object of worship and so forth. Its antidote, the first white Dharma, is to refrain from intentionally speaking deceptive falsehoods to all sentient beings, even for the sake of eliciting laughter.
2. The second black Dharma is to cause others to regret their virtuous actions. Its antidote, the fourth white Dharma, is to cause mature sentient beings to embrace complete enlightenment and not establish them in the Hinayana vehicle.
3. The third black Dharma is to express unpleasant things out of anger to bodhisattvas. Its antidote, the third white Dharma, is to cultivate the attitude that all sentient beings are Teachers, and train in pure perception.

4. The fourth black Dharma is to act with pretense and deceit, without the highest intention, toward any sentient being. Its antidote, the second white Dharma, is to be honest, without pretense and deceit, in your intentions towards all sentient beings.

You should assiduously train in this advice.

Thirdly, should they degenerate, the way to restore the vows is as follows:

You need to retake the vows when you incur a root downfall through **Discarding the aspirational mind of enlightenment, Holding wrong views** or performing a root downfall in which the Four Binding Factors are complete. Secondary offenses of medium contamination must be acknowledged in the presence of at least three people, while secondary offenses of lesser contamination and the Forty-Six Secondary Offenses must be acknowledged in the presence of one person. Any secondary offense other than those just mentioned are best acknowledged in the presence of another. Otherwise you should acknowledge them in the presence of a holy image while imagining that you are confessing it in the presence of the Conqueror and his children. You should also acknowledge these transgressions while going for refuge and practicing the mind of enlightenment, *The Confession of Downfalls*, *The General Confession*, and the meditation and recitation of Vajrasattva. The four Antidotal Powers must be complete when you engage in any one of these five external confession practices.

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