

Bodhicitta

Ringu Tulku Rinpoche

Any mistakes which have occurred here
are only due to a faulty transcription.

Please do not reproduce any part of this draft,
which has only been slightly edited,
without permission from Ringu Tulku or Bodhicharya.

Copyright 1999:
Venerable Ringu Tulku
BODHICHARYA

c/o Maria Hündorf-Kaiser
Armbruststr. 4
D-20257 Hamburg, Germany

**Dedicated to the Long Lives and Beneficial Activities of
His Holiness the Seventeenth Gyalwa Karmapa,
Orgyen Trinley Dorje,**

Venerable Ringu Tulku

&

Jamgon Kongtrul Chökyi Nyima Tenpey Drönme

Bodhicitta

Today I am supposed to talk a little bit about bodhicitta based on the very popular and classical textbook of mahayana Buddhism, which is called "The Bodhicharya-Avatara" written by Shantideva. I am sure you have already heard quite a lot about this book. It was so popular and studied so intensively in India that there are even a few dozen translations from the Indian languages into Tibetan of commentaries written on this text. On top of that, this book is treated as a main textbook of Buddhist practice in every monastery in Tibet and in every school of Tibetan Buddhism. There is almost nobody who thinks he or she is somebody who has not written a commentary on this book, even my previous Ringu Tulku. You know, the Ringu Tulkus were very dull people; they never wrote anything other than "A Commentary on the Bodhicharya-Avatara". So, that is how popular the book is.

The main theme of "The Bodhicharya-Avatara" is bodhicitta. Of course, most or all of you know that bodhicitta is the basic principle in the bodhisattvayana. As you know, in Buddhism -- especially from the Tibetan Buddhist point of view -- there are three yanas. From the mahayana Buddhist point of view, we speak about three yanas: the shravakayana, the pratyekabuddhayana and the bodhisattvayana. From the vajrayana point of view, we also speak about three yanas: the shravakayana together with the pratyekabuddhayana, the bodhisattvayana and the vajrayana. These different yanas are -- as you know -- based upon different sutras, which are teachings of the Buddha.

The main topic in the bodhisattvayana, sometimes called mahayana, and what mainly distinguishes it from the other yanas is bodhicitta, the bodhisattva principle. Even in the great Buddhist scriptures of the shravaka teachings, the term bodhisattva is mentioned. The Buddha is usually referred to as a bodhisattva before he became a buddha; before Buddha became a buddha, an enlightened person, he was always referred to as a bodhisattva. But questions such as what a bodhisattva is, how one becomes a bodhisattva and what the practices of a bodhisattva are aren't clearly mentioned. Those who uphold the teachings of the bodhisattvayana or the mahayana teach what mahayana Buddhism concerns: All the basic

principles, all the basic understandings of general Buddhism given in the sutras of what we call the first turning of the wheel of teachings presented by Buddha in Sarnath, like the four noble truths, etc., and in addition all principles of a bodhisattva.

Who is a BODHISATTVA? A bodhisattva is a person who has bodhicitta; anybody who develops bodhicitta is a bodhisattva.

And what is BODHICITTA? Bodhicitta is a Sanskrit word consisting of two words, *bodhi* and *citta*. The word bodhi derives from the root-word *bo*, which means to know, to understand, to realise; so an individual who has both is bodhi. So, bodhi is the realisation, the awakening, the understanding and maybe we can call it enlightenment and awakening also.

The word bodhi suggests and points to the basic concept of ignorance, that the fundamental cause of the disturbed mind, the disturbing and harmful emotions in beings, come from ignorance, not knowing, not seeing, not understanding fully and clearly "the way it is", the "way one is". That is the basic understanding from the Buddhist point of view. Therefore, bodhi or awakening is that which eradicates what is usually called ignorance, the misunderstanding, not knowing and unclarity. Citta in the word bodhicitta is the mind, the heart; you can call it the awakened heart. Bodhicitta is the realised and enlightened mind. This is a description of the name.

As you know, bodhicitta is usually described as consisting of two aspects, ULTIMATE BODHICITTA and RELATIVE BODHI-CITTA. But generally speaking, bodhicitta is regarded as compassion with a little bit of a difference. Ideally, compassion is described as unlimited compassion.

According to a bodhisattva's point of view, ideal compassion is unlimited from four angles, you can say. As we know, compassion is first very much based upon the understanding that "I do not want suffering, problems and pain and therefore I understand that other beings do not want this either. Therefore I wish and aspire to try to work in a way so that I can help eliminate all the sufferings, problems and pain in myself and others." This wish is the basis of compassion. The first point is wanting to get rid of all problems, all suffering and all pain, not just specific and minor problems, but every imaginable affliction.

Secondly, "I want to get rid of these problems, pains and misery of not only a few people, of not just the people in this world or of mankind, but of every being existing throughout space."

Thirdly, "I just don't limit my wish to all sentient beings" -- sentient referring to beings who are able to experience a sense of pleasure and pain, joy and unhappiness --, "that they be rid of all sufferings, but I wish that they have all imaginable positive things, all happiness, all well-being, the

highest, the deepest, whatever is possibly the best. I want all this for all sentient beings."

Fourthly, "I want all sentient beings to be free of all sufferings and to have all the best not only for a short time, but I want them to have that for all times."

This aspiration, which is based upon unbound and unlimited compassion, is regarded as relative bodhicitta and it is the ideal aspiration, the driving-force -- you know? -- that leads to becoming an enlightened being. This aspiration is made for our own sake and for that of all sentient beings. The main understanding from "The Bodhicharya-Avatara" is that we need to generate this aspiration.

The first chapter of "The Bodhicharya-Avatara" deals with what we call the praise of bodhicitta. It discusses the benefits of bodhicitta, how good this aspiration and such compassion is for ourselves and for others, how most of our suffering comes from our own egoistic and self-centred way of thinking, from our own small-mindedness, and how good and positive it is to be more compassionate and to have more bodhicitta.

The first three of the ten chapters of "The Bodhicharya-Avatara" show how those who have not generated bodhicitta can generate it. The next three chapters show how those who have generated bodhicitta do not lose it and how to maintain it. The next three chapters -- seven, eight and nine -- show how to increase bodhicitta. The tenth chapter is the dedication. So, the entire book deals with how to develop, maintain and increase bodhicitta.

As I mentioned earlier, first there is relative bodhicitta, which is compassion. But then, there is another aspect, ultimate bodhicitta, which is wisdom.

In Buddhism, wisdom means seeing things as they really are and being able to be what one actually is. Therefore, the understanding -- not the intellectual but the experiential under-standing -- means understanding what "it is", what "you are", what "things are", what "the nature is". That is ultimate bodhicitta.

Therefore, there are two aspects of bodhicitta: COMPASSION AND WISDOM. Bodhicitta is nothing but that: compassion and wisdom. Relative bodhicitta is based upon compassion and ultimate bodhicitta is wisdom. Yet, relative bodhicitta has both sides; they say it has an element of compassion and wisdom.

What is the element of compassion? The wish, "I want to liberate all sentient beings, including myself, from all sufferings, problems and grief."

What is the aspect of wisdom? My understanding that there is a possibility to do that and trusting, "It is possible that I can liberate all my problems and sufferings because they are my experience. My suffering is my experience, so when I experience something it is my experience, it is my way, it is my reaction. If I can transform my reaction, then I can transform my experience too." Wisdom is based upon this understanding, "Since the experience I have is partly due to my reaction, therefore if I change my way of reacting, then I can also change the way of my experience. If I eliminate those tensions, those misgivings ..."

I think that this is the main understanding from the Buddhist point of view: When I see something and react, then there are three possibilities. I can say, "This is very nice," or I can say, "This is not nice," or I can say, "I don't care." If I say, "I don't care," then my mind doesn't move to and become involved with the object of indifference.

If I say, "This is nice," then I want what I consider nice. And if I want it, then I have to run after it. And when I have to run after it, there is tension. I can only want something as long as I do not have it, therefore I have the problem of not having what I want.

If I say, "It is not nice," then I don't want it, consequently have aversion and want to get rid of what I don't want should I have it or avoid it should I not have it, consequently undergoing the fear of having it. Therefore I have a problem.

So, whether I have something or not, whether I want something or not, I have a problem. From the Buddhist point of view, such reactions are called the SAMSARIC WAY OF REACTING. If we can change, if we can see that whatever comes does so and goes, whatever experience comes does so and goes, then we find that we have an understanding or confidence that whatever comes is okay and whatever goes is okay. If we don't become overwhelmed by what happens and arises, then anything that comes is okay.

What I mean to say is that because we have the experience and understanding that the experiences of what I want and what I don't want come and go moment-by-moment, then I can have the confidence that unpleasant situations or emotions come and go and I will not be overwhelmed as a result, rather see them as okay. Nothing is harmful as long as there is such an experience and confidence. If I change my way of reacting, then I can change my way of experiencing too. And this way of reacting can actually be changed by seeing and experiencing "the way things are".

I think you will have heard about this during this series of lectures on the philosophy of interdependence, the philosophy of emptiness, the philosophy of egolessness. All these subjects belong to the aspect of wisdom: Seeing our true nature, seeing the true nature of things, how interdependent

things are, how what I refer to as "I myself" is not one solid and lasting entity. When I am able to see these things more clearly, then my way of experiencing is also changed. Based upon this, it is understood that it is possible to be liberated from all kinds of sufferings.

As I have mentioned, bodhicitta is the intention and aspiration that "I would like to help all sentient beings become relieved of all their sufferings, problems and pain and furthermore to help them attain the highest realisation, the highest form of well-being."

Now when this aspiration is made, one tries to put it into action. And that is what we call BODHICHARYA. Bodhicharya is the aspiration of bodhicitta put into action, i.e. we use bodhicitta in both ASPIRATION and ACTION.

As long as ones compassion is not strong enough to actually go into or resists going into action by not doing what is actually necessary to help oneself and others, then it is the bodhicitta of aspiration. Whereas resolving, "I want to do that and therefore I do this. I want to help all sentient beings, therefore I do this, therefore I do meditation, therefore I distribute disputes or I will do whatever I can" is bodhicitta in action.

This is the main understanding from the Buddhist point of view: For an individual to develop fully and also for all sentient beings to develop to the highest degree, which is buddhahood, enlightenment, he or she needs to try to develop bodhicitta. Then aspiration, action and understanding ultimate bodhicitta are the entire path.

From the Buddhist point of view, it is very important to encourage yourself and others to generate bodhicitta, compassion and wisdom, especially compassion. The more compassion there is, the better a person you become, and the more compassion there is in the world, the better a place the world becomes to live in. The more compassion increases, the nearer you come to total enlightenment, which is complete liberation. This is why it is the main understanding that this needs to be supported, propagated and praised; the benefit of compassion has to be discussed and made comprehensible to all beings. That is the practice.

One thing which I think I should mention is that from the Buddhist point of view, whoever has bodhicitta, compassion, is a bodhisattva. It doesn't matter what kind of life, which religion, social status or background somebody has -- those things aren't important --, rather those who have compassion are bodhisattvas from the Buddhist point of view, and whoever is a bodhisattva is working on the path of the Buddha.

In the "Jataka-Stories", the stories about the lives of Buddha Shakyamuni before he became a buddha, we find that most of the time he was not a Buddhist and that most of the time he wasn't even a human

being. This is the reason why the bodhisattva path isn't necessarily a so-called Buddhist path from the Buddhist point of view. Anybody who has a compassionate attitude is a bodhisattva and he or she continues being a bodhisattva, life after life.

This is the understanding from the Buddhist point of view: If we generate a little bit of bodhicitta now, then maybe the next life will be a little bit better and the next life also. That is how it is supposed to grow. It is never thought that generating bodhicitta is an easy thing from the Buddhist point of view. It is very difficult and isn't easy, but it is better to earnestly and sincerely try. That is the understanding. Thank you.

Questions & Answers

Question: "How can more equanimity and the wisdom of emptiness and interdependent origination lead to more compassion?"

Ringu Tulku: Would you repeat that?

Question: "For which reason does increasing equanimity and increasing realisation of emptiness and interdependent origination lead to more compassion?"

Ringu Tulku: Maybe it is not right to say that increasing equanimity will increase compassion. I think it is said that the more realisation of interdependence one has -- you can call it emptiness or understanding the way we are --, equanimity will reduce or liberate one's own aversion and fear. From the Buddhist point of view, aversion and fear are the main problem which make you smoke and only think about yourself. As long as I am always afraid and insecure, then I remain involved with myself and fear, "That person is not nice to me. That is not good for me." As long as I am afraid, I suffer and cannot have compassion for others.

Now, if we can liberate ourselves from attachment and aversion, fear and insecurity, then we don't think about ourselves all the time and can think about others. That is the reason why compassion increases, not only increases, but from that point of view compassion becomes real. It is not the case that one expects, "I will do this or that in order to get something," but knowing from one's own experience that all beings suffer but actually need not. They suffer because they have become habituated to seeing things wrongly. Therefore, one realises that they need not suffer. Such compassion is not a feeling of expecting something in return but is genuine compassion. Genuine compassion can only arise if you have less problems and fear. Therefore, it is working on that intention.

Question: "We should have equanimity as much as possible in our emotions. How can we then develop compassion while we feel the suffering of others?"

Ringu Tulku: This question is often placed and I think it is due to a little misunderstanding. From the Buddhist point of view, we say that the experience of enlightenment is beyond aversion and attachment and people then conclude that it is like equanimity, in which case one doesn't feel anything. I don't think this is what is meant.

As I said earlier, it is important to do away with fear and aversion, you can say. Aversion and attachment are seen as two sides of the same coin because when you say, "This is bad. I don't want it," you cling to something you hope will not happen. That is attachment. So aversion and attachment are more or less the same thing. When you don't cling to aversion and attachment and understand that there is no need to feel insecure, run away or cling to things, then every experience is a good experience, a positive experience, full of joy and bliss. Maybe you can call it equanimity because there is no bad or negative experience, no fear. But the understanding from the Buddhist point of view is that when you have the experience that there is no need to feel aversion and fear and that there is no need to be attached to something, whatever comes may come and go, then you are liberated from fear and attachment. Then, in a sense, you realise that there is no need to suffer and ask, "Why do others suffer," seeing that they are suffering needlessly and uselessly. That is the -- what can you say? -- state of mind which gives rise to compassion that sees, "There is no need to suffer but people seem to do so, just as I did before I understood. It is not necessary and that is the reason why I should help so that people don't suffer." That is compassion.

This is the understanding in Buddhism, although you understand that suffering and problems aren't real, have no reality, they are all the more useless because, although there is no reality, it is the illusion which causes suffering and makes people feel bad. I think this is the main understanding from the Buddhist point of view: Because you feel it is possible to be liberated from misery -- if you want to call it equanimity, you may because it is a state in which there is no aversion and attachment --, therefore you can feel compassion. Does that answer your question?

Student: "Yes."

Participant: "I'm not sure whether I followed all the details of the answer, but perhaps, generally speaking, one can say that in mahayana Buddhism equanimity is not at the top of the scale as an ideal, rather it is instrumental, it is an instrument which helps one get rid of desire, aversion and so on. But compassion has to be cultivated independently. Equanimity is not enough. Maybe it is a prerequisite. Say on the scales of ideals, it stands much lower than compassion. Compassion has to be cultivated in its own way, independently."

Ringu Tulku: Okay.

Question: "Can a Christian attain enlightenment or does he or she have to follow the Buddhist teachings?"

Ringu Tulku: As I said earlier, compassion and wisdom come, whether you call it Buddhist, Christian or whatever. If you are actually following the path

of compassion and wisdom, then from a strictly Buddhist point of view, you are a Buddhist, whether you call yourself a Buddhist or not. From that point of view, we can say, "Yes, you have to follow the Buddhist path," in a way. But it is not mentioned in any Buddhist text that you have to become a Buddhist only in order to get enlightened. Gautama Buddha was not a Buddhist; he was not a Buddhist but he got enlightened. Therefore, I don't think you can say that somebody has to be a Buddhist in order to become enlightened.

Question: "Is realising emptiness a prerequisite for being a bodhisattva?"

Ringu Tulku: I don't think so. The prerequisite for being a bodhisattva is the intention of compassion. Although I described ideal compassion, ideal bodhicitta, as limitless compassion, it is also said that it is not necessary to have limitless compassion at the start. You can become a bodhisattva by having very limited compassion.

There is a story in the sutras about how Gautama Buddha first embarked on the bodhisattva path and first became a bodhisattva. Buddha told this story himself. He said, "I generated bodhicitta when I was born in the hell realm the first time." He said that he had been born in the hell realm and had the horrible experience of being forced to drag a chariot made of solid iron over a burning ground along with another person. Because it was too heavy, they couldn't pull it. It was a merciless and pitiless situation -- you know? --, that's the hell realm: merciless, pitiless and filled with lots of suffering. At that time he thought, "This is a completely impossible situation. How can the two of us pull a chariot that even one hundred people wouldn't be able to pull?" He contemplated, "It is useless for both of us to suffer. Why not let my companion go?" He turned to the guard and said, "Please let my friend go away. I will do the work for both of us alone." Then it is said that the hellish guard became furious, took -- I don't know what -- something heavy and hit him on his head and then he fainted. It is said that to faint in the hell realm is the greatest pleasure. So the bodhisattva fainted and when he regained his consciousness he was no longer in the hell because his intention was too good for the hell realm to contain. Since he genuinely wished to help his friend and carry the problem alone, he became a bodhisattva. The Buddha said, "That's the first time I generated real bodhicitta and that is the first time my path started."

Question: "When acting out of compassion, is only the motivation of the one doing the action important or is the effect of the recipient's reaction towards that action also important?"

Ringu Tulku: Of course, the effect made upon the recipient is important. But I think it is like this: From the Buddhist point of view, it is very important to have good intentions and also to try to generate as much wisdom as possible so that what is done, based upon compassion, is not misdirected but actually helps. Of course, we human beings cannot always do what is right and cannot have that much wisdom. We can be more sure about our intention, though; we can look at our intentions and be more

certain about them. Therefore it is said that if we do something with a really good intention, then we will do our best to try to do the best for the benefit of someone else. In that case, if it benefits another person, then it is very, very good, and even if it doesn't benefit another person, it isn't bad but good enough because we can't do it better than them. That's the understanding.

Participant: "At this point, there is a little bit of a difference within the different groupings of mahayana Buddhism. If we distinguish between the yogachara on the one hand and the tathagatagarba on the other, the way they describe the activity of buddhahood in the world, then we see that according to the yogachara description of buddhahood the compassionate activity of the Buddha is intentional, i.e. there is perception of the other human beings suffering and there is an intention to help them and so on and so on. On the other hand, when we look at the sutras of the tathagatagarba -- let's say influence or direction --, then we don't have that, i.e. the flow of the compassion of the Buddha is spontaneous and it does not depend upon his perception of any living being suffering or any living being that needs help. It just goes out automatically. So, there are two different directions within mahayana Buddhism."

Question: "This is with respect to a buddha, not to normal persons?"

Participant: "That is with respect to a buddha. In the one case, there is a consideration of the result; in the other case, there is no consideration of the result. That is the question: Whether compassion also depends on the recipient, on the result of the action? In the one case, the recipient of compassion or the recipient of help comes into the question; in the other case, the activity of the Buddha is independent of the recipient, so to say.

As you remember, there are comparisons made of the Buddha's activities with the sun and rain. The sun doesn't really perceive that plants need light; the sun doesn't think, "I have to help the plants grow." Or the rain doesn't think, "The seeds need water now in order to grow." You know? In a way, it is an unconscious activity or at least it is an activity which does not take the result into consideration, does not take the recipient of compassion into consideration, but flows spontaneously, automatically."

Student: "I don't think you can say that this is an unconscious activity because that is per definition the quality of a fully developed buddha-mind. Because the wisdom side of the buddha-quality is fully developed, he always knows what is needed, so therefore he doesn't have to think about it because his wisdom is fully accomplished and therefore equanimity -- as you mentioned that in the mahayana equanimity is not that emphasised --, actually it is the other side of the coin. It's the wisdom part. Equanimity comes because wisdom is fully developed, so there is no difference between the equality of phenomena because there is the wisdom-eye, the fully accomplished buddhahood has the wisdom-eye to know what is needed, so compassion flows naturally because wisdom is sustaining compassion."

Participant: "When I say conscious or unconscious, I mean, is there a perception of the suffering within being that receives this compassion or not? That's what I mean."

Student: "Yes."

Participant: "So, in the case of the tathagatagarba, there is no perception of somebody that is being there who is receiving this help?"

Student: "I would like to ask Rinpoche."

Participant: "I didn't mean to say that there is no consciousness at all at buddhahood, but there is no consciousness of a certain recipient of compassion."

Student: "But then it would mean that the tathagata doesn't perceive suffering beings?"

Participant: "That's right. That's right."

Ringu Tulku: I didn't think that the question was placed from the point of a buddha. I thought the question was placed from the point of a being.

Participant: "It was, really."

Ringu Tulku: From the beings' point of view, you try to develop compassion and you try to work with compassion and wisdom. That's what I thought the question was about.

What you were saying, I think, is that what we call the activity of the buddhas -- you know? --, we say that the activity of the completely enlightened Buddha is spontaneous and ever-present; it is not the intention, "Now I would like to have ... Then after that ... No, I have no time now." You know, there is nothing like that. It is -- as you said -- like the sun; that's the traditional example. If you place a bowl of water in the shining sun, then the sun reflects in it, and if you put one hundred bowls of water in the shining sun, there will be one hundred reflections of the sun. So, there is no time limit. That's the activity, how a buddha's activities and compassion function. That's the main thing.

Concerning the question of whether a buddha has compassion because he sees or thinks about people suffering or not, this description ... I'm not really sure whether there is a difference between the different sutras or not. This is the main understanding, when a buddha sees people suffering, he sees the emptiness of himself and others or the interdependent nature of whatever and therefore a buddha doesn't see the person or the suffering, but this doesn't mean that he doesn't see the peoples' illusion of suffering. I'm not really sure whether it can be really said that a buddha doesn't see any suffering. In a way it is true that the Buddha doesn't see suffering as real, but the Buddha also sees because he said, "I see so many lifetimes before and I have so many lifetimes afterwards." He knows that there is no person as an actual thing, that this person will become like that and like that. This is a little bit philosophical. Anyway, this is not the question, so we don't need to get into it.

Student: "Would it be compassionate to punish or give somebody a hard time in order to incite him to become a better person?"

Ringu Tulku: Why not? If it is really for that, but if I take that as an excuse, then I don't know. From the Buddhist point of view, compassion doesn't mean just being nice; it is not just being nice. Compassion is wanting to help, wishing the best. Therefore if you are compassionate, it doesn't mean that you will necessarily be nice. Maybe you can be not nice if it is helpful. If you are really compassionate, you are not concerned whether people like you or not, you are more concerned about whether it is beneficial. So therefore, it is possible.

Participant: "Just very briefly. One of the perfections that a bodhisattva cultivates is the perfection of means, of what is called skilful means, the upaya. This means that the Buddha

applies different methods according to the different persons. According to what he thinks will be beneficial for this person may be different from one case to another."

Question: "If someone comes in an extremely violent and harsh way, an awful wrong-doing, and bearing in mind it is something I really don't want, how can I influence my way of experiencing and reacting and thus lessen my own suffering? How can I accomplish this?"

Ringu Tulku: Very difficult. I think this is one thing. Generally if somebody is very angry -- I mean, if he is violent, he must be angry --, then you must conclude that he is not happy, that he is suffering. No? Because if you are angry, it means that you are not feeling good. Nobody says, "Oh, yesterday I was so happy, so angry and had such a good time." Therefore, that person is having trouble; he is not feeling well and is in very bad shape. Therefore, this is the understanding, this is the reasoning we try to use: When somebody is very angry and violent, you have to understand that this person is not happy, is suffering, has problems and is almost sick. If you find somebody who is suffering and sick, then you don't feel angry at this person but you feel concerned, you feel sympathy. Then you don't necessarily become angry in return. Maybe you can help this person, maybe you can't, but at least you feel sympathy and therefore have compassion and want to help. I think that is very helpful, that is very helpful.

You know, you can't say that you can always have this because sometimes you cannot. Then you have to act in accordance with your best wisdom; that is the best thing to do -- sometimes a bit little rougher, as I said earlier. At least you don't develop the same anger. That's the antidote.

Student: "I think we will all have the opportunity to try this within the next days."

Question: "What value does the bodhisattva vow have in the school you follow and how is the ritual of taking the bodhisattva vow?"

Ringu Tulku: Actually, the different schools of Tibetan Buddhism don't have different bodhisattva vows. It is the same in all schools. There are two slight differences in the ways of doing it, one from Nagarjuna and one from Asanga, but they are all the same. The main value or use of performing what we call the bodhisattva's vow is to make the decision. You resolve, "I wish something good for myself and something good for all sentient beings. I wish to do something that is good for me and that is good for everybody. Therefore, I would like to learn to do something that is good for me and good for others and I would like to train in that. And that will be my direction, my direction for this life and all the lives to come, to try to achieve to be able to benefit and liberate all sentient beings from their sufferings in the long run, just like the bodhisattvas do, and whatever good I can do for myself and others in the short run. So this will be my way, this is my purpose in life. If this is my purpose in life, then I will make it -- what can you say? -- public, I will make it a time and a place at which I make this decision so that I can say that on this special day I chose to go in this direction, therefore I can remind myself."

All Buddhist traditions actually say that you can take the bodhisattva vows by yourself, imagining all the bodhisattvas of the past and the enlightened beings in front of you, saying, "From now on I take the bodhisattva vows." Or you can take it from somebody you respect by repeating in the ritual three times, "As the Buddhas of the past generated bodhicitta and trained on the path of the bodhisattva step-by-step and gradually, I too will develop bodhicitta and will also train on the path step-by-step and gradually." That is the bodhisattva vow I say three times.

It is not the case that you become a great bodhisattva when you take the bodhisattva vow, rather you resolve to start training and working on this. You see the value of generating this kind of mind and heart and you have a purpose for this life and for all lives, not just a little purpose but a great purpose, to help all sentient beings in the best way possible. It is the biggest project, so you can start on that.

Speaker: "I think that was a very good last sentence for this lecture and I really want to thank you for coming here and discussing with us a very interesting subject. I hope we will meet again here in the next years."

Dedication

All my chatter in the name of the dharma
has been set down faithfully
by my students of pure vision.

I pray that at least a fraction of the wisdom
of those enlightened teachers who tirelessly trained me
may shine through the mass of my incoherence.

May this help to dispel the darkness of unknowing
in the minds of all beings
and lead them to complete realisation, free from all fear.

With deep gratitude to the University of Hamburg for requesting and organising this lecture and to Rosi Findeisen and Maria Hündorf-Kaiser for administrating the tapes.

First draft transcribed and prepared by Gabriele Hollmann, Munich, 1999.