

On the Concluding Vajrasattva Practice for Emma Belle (Part 2)

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Why do we study, contemplate, and meditate? We should ask ourselves that. Of course it is the best way to increase our understanding of the Three Jewels, and, therefore, our faith in them will deepen. We should always study the dharma with joy, recognizing it as our opportunity to benefit ourselves most effectively. However, we should not limit our motivation to our own benefit alone. We should have the intention to benefit all beings: to benefit all beings equally, and to benefit them both in the short term and ultimately. Compassion, loving-kindness, and bodhicitta should of course also be cultivated on this scale. Not just for "My boyfriend!" or "My girlfriend!" alone. Not just for any one being, but for all sentient beings. That is what it says in all the teachings and practices, repeatedly: all sentient beings. This isn't some abstract idea. The teachings and practices don't speak of all sentient beings because they come from someone who was blind or spaced-out, speaking about something far away. "All sentient beings" means all the ones we know...and all the ones we don't know. It doesn't matter if they are from America, China, India, or any of the other millions of lands in existence. All are our objects of compassion and loving-kindness. All are the objects we focus on to cultivate bodhicitta. And likewise all are welcome to come and practice the dharma at any dharma center! Make them welcome!

Also, I want to tell everyone: If you need more reasons to respect each other, look at the Buddha. Look at all the buddhas! They only manifested in order to benefit beings--all beings. They all love and respect beings with supreme compassion. They only ever taught even a word of dharma so that it might be of benefit to all. Buddhas don't teach because they are hoping to get something to put in their own pocket, nor do they teach for just a few beings that they like. Their compassion and enlightened activity are never limited by favoritism or discrimination. Buddhas teach for all, regardless of color, personality, or any other characteristic.

The teachings say that buddhas do not become enlightened without relying on sentient beings as their objects of compassion, patience, and so forth. That is how they develop their qualities. How could a bodhisattva cultivate bodhicitta without realizing the suffering of beings? Therefore we must respect all beings as the objects by which all past buddhas and bodhisattvas gained realization and developed their qualities, and also as the objects by which we will be able to make progress on our paths, too. So respect each other and help each other!

Not to respect each other is a sign of not having understood the dharma. To fail to love and help each other is a sign of not having contemplated the teachings. We don't need to be like squabbling, lying politicians any more. We don't need to be like gossiping old ladies and old men. To benefit yourself, to benefit others, and to bring temporary and everlasting happiness, help and support each other! You all know this--it is easy to understand, you are all smart guys and ladies, and you have all heard such teachings many times. But it is not enough for teachers to say, "Respect each other." It is not enough for you to say, "Yes, I respect my brother and sister

sentient beings," either. You need to do it, not just say it. You need to be mindful and focus on treating each other well. That is real practice.

I have been here in the West for forty years, and I have seen such sectarianism, favoritism, and stinginess, it is shocking! Are these really followers of Buddha Shakyamuni? I don't think the Buddha taught his students to hoard everything, down to a cup or a chair: "My cup! My chair! My shoes! I don't want to share!" Or, "I don't want to share with those people, just with these people!" My goodness! It is one thing to keep everything mindfully, careful not to waste what belongs to the center and what was offered to the Three Jewels. That is a way to create and safeguard your merit without wasting it. It is quite another to hold everything too tightly, being uptight, our attachment and aversion making us stingy. Generally, we are motivated by our attachment and aversion, our likes and dislikes. We are blind, our only eyes the eyes of attachment and aversion. We have no hands with which to work except the hands of attachment and aversion, grasping at everything. We have no feet except the feet of attachment and aversion, carrying us here and there. Don't do that any longer! Those are the signs that a person has no faith, and no understanding of the dharma whatsoever. That is detrimental to your own well-being. You will never accumulate any merit that way. But I can guarantee that you will perfectly waste your precious human rebirth. Come on! You don't need to be stingy and blind like this, and waste your merit.

Instead of focusing like this on your attachment and aversion--which only makes them stronger and stronger in your mind--try to remember the Three Jewels. Try to remember their qualities and therefore to have faith in them. What is the essence of the Buddha's qualities? Wisdom and compassion. So try to have wisdom and compassion, yourself. If wisdom is difficult to cultivate, at least try not to be stupid. Many times we lie to ourselves and pretend we are far more stupid than we are. Even if you think you don't have wisdom, try not to do that. Be honest with yourself. Be compassionate and kind to others. What does it mean to be kind? You all know kindness, what it feels like. Try to do more of that, and be less concerned about yourself. There is no sentient being for whom you shouldn't have compassion. It is not the case that you should be kind or compassionate to some beings but not others. You should have compassion for all--all that you can see, hear, or touch, and even those you can't perceive at all. That is what it means to follow Buddha Shakyamuni. That is how vast his enlightened activities are. The bodhisattvas with inconceivable enlightened qualities, and the realized lineage masters, this is also how they act and what they teach. We say that we are following them. Are we actually going to, or do we just want to ignore them?

If we want to ignore them and go some other way, where are we going to go? Our own way? What is that, even? We don't even have a way that we follow. We just follow our self-grasping and the whims of our likes and dislikes. MY WAY doesn't exist! Your MY WAY doesn't have any reason or any explanation or any methods. It is just "whatever I want." That is a poor excuse for a path. That is no path at all, a path to nowhere but the lower realms. Please, don't take this path any longer. Slowly replace your self-concern with genuine loving-kindness and consideration for others. Be honest with yourself, and slowly replace your ignorance with wisdom.

Those with the greatest wisdom, the realized masters and enlightened beings, also have the greatest compassion and respect for all beings equally. As Buddhists, we are trying to follow them, not run the other way! So, follow these examples that you have. That means to help each other.

Make your formal practice part of how you help each other, too. Whatever dharma you do, remember it is for all sentient beings' sake that you are engaging in it. Even these Vajrasattva practices have not just been for our Emma Belle alone. You are all practicing for each other. It is your offering to each other. It is the best form of generosity. You practice because you have respect and compassion for each other. Compassion is not something far away. Whatever merit you create, before you can waste it by boasting or other negativity, remember other beings and dedicate the merit to them. Seal your practice, both the beginning and end, by remembering other beings with love and respect. Try to have that always be your motivation, whatever you are doing. If you all come to practice now for Emma, that is wonderful. It is wonderful for you. Don't waste any opportunity to cultivate wisdom and compassion, to really follow the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and lineage masters. Actually what we need to do when we practice for Emma is the same as what we need to do every day, every second. That means your mind needs to be a little bit more open, okay? Remember sentient beings, and remember to keep harmony and support each other, whether you are practicing because somebody passed away or not.

Okay, thank you everybody for practicing! No more blah blah blah now.

Tashi delek!

-Gyatral