

The Four Bodhisattva Vows

Dharma Talk by Maylie Scott; from the September 2000 AZG newsletter

Vows express our deepest desire for wholeness and arise from our true self. They are based on a sense of basic connectedness to one another and to the natural world. This sense of simple being is regularly fragmented by our self habit - the various patterns of attachment. The intention to turn from the desires of self interest towards liberation, the way of vow, is the fundamental turn of practice. Vow is like the strong current that flows in deep water. Surface conditions change with circumstances; we remember and forget, try and fail. The vows are impossible to keep, but the current is constant and, with persistent effort, increasingly powerful. Entering the stream of practice more deeply we are increasingly encouraged and supported.

Beings are numberless, I vow to awaken with them.

Awakening with a being - whether it is one of the myriad beings within the mind or without - means to acknowledge the being's presence and to appreciate the being's place. Whether we like it or not is not so important. How do we help? We are apt to try to understand and give advice. This can be useful, if we don't get fixated on our own advice. But what really helps is the willingness to be with another, just to be there, rooting for them; the good ally. This is bodhisattva work. It is generous, willing not to know the outcome. It is attentive, really respecting the nature of the being and patient, able to wait for as long as it takes. It is compassionate, having faith in the eventual healing ability of the being itself.

Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them.

A delusion is that which afflicts from within. It is rooted in greed, hate, or ignorance and separative in nature, distinguishing "me" from "other." Watching thoughts for just a minute or two, it is usually possible to note at least shreds of delusive thinking. We are normally not very vigilant, and delusions gain in force like a river that starts from small streams. There is no end to the mind's distortions and proliferations but still we vow to end them.

Dharma gates are endless, I vow to enter them.

There is an equal number of dharma gates and hindrances. This is where freedom lies. Each moment is an opportunity to acknowledge, and release. From this point of view life is gift. Rather than taking it personally and getting something, one identifies with the flow and benefit to all. Such an attitude protects against negative mind states and brings deep-seated composure.

Buddha's way is unsurpassable, I vow to become it.

The unrestricted mind includes everything. We sit zazen to rest; to allow the mind waves to come and go. Sometimes the mind is quite quiet. Other times it is busy or sleepy or preoccupied. But even within mind's activities we come to recognize a larger accepting ability. There is room for everything, even for what is painful. As we come to truly believe this our lives manifest harmony and appreciation.