

# The Way of the Bodhisattva

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"For those of you who do not know much about Buddhism, and those of you that have learned Buddhism from the Theravada perspective, you will not have had much opportunity to know about the Way of the Bodhisattva. I hope that by reading this, you can build up your confidence in Mahayana Buddhism or at least appreciate this Buddhist practice. I feel practising this way can help our society a great deal."

## Contents

Alternate ways of Buddhist Practice
Theravada and Mahayana differences
Virtues towards becoming a Bodhisattva
- Bodhicitta
- Compassion
- Confidence and faith
- Wisdom
Questions and answers
Glossary



## Alternate ways of Buddhist Practice

The Buddha lived more than 2530 years ago. After his enlightenment, he had the opportunity to enter Nibbana immediately. However, the Buddha chose not to, and instead travelled around India to spread the Dhamma. The Buddha's decision to remain in this world highlights a different approach than that of the Arahant. From his action, we can understand the Buddha's compassionate spirit.

In India at that time, most people tended to practise for their own salvation. For this reason, the Buddha emphasised the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination rather than teaching the way of the Bodhisattva. It would have been of no interest, or use to them. Also he taught how the Five Aggregates of self-awareness produced attachment and suffering, and to avoid these attachments.

The first group's outlook will be to adhere to the Five Precepts, practise the Ten Wholesome Actions, dana and meditation. The second group may practise the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination. The 3rd group will practise the Six Perfections; giving, living by the Five Precepts, accepting natural sufferings, making the right effort, meditating, and practising wisdom.

We cannot say that the people who take the Five Precepts and Ten Wholesome Actions are not practising Buddhism. We all have different interests and different spiritual understandings.

## Theravada and Mahayana differences

Theravada Buddhism emphasises self-salvation. These people think everything in this world is troublesome. They think it is best to have nothing; no possessions, and no attachments. Mahayana Buddhism accentuates Bodhicitta and helping other people. These people practise Buddhism not for themselves, but for others, and they think money is very good.

Different Buddha-Dhamma practitioners have different interests and standards. Some people think about Buddhism only for themselves and for their next life. They observe the Five Precepts and practise dana.

Other people practise the Four Noble Truths. They stay away from many of life's activities and observe the mundane life very well. They think this world is full of dhukka, and for this reason, wish to stay away from the next life.

Then there is another type of people who think it is better to be happy with others. When he or she sees friends who are suffering, they feel suffering. These people show great concern for the people around them.  
- This is the way of the Bodhisattva !



If we have nothing is that good for us? Is it good for our practice ? If we are poor, how can we practise Bodhicitta ? If you have no money how can you go to Darling Harbour and see fireworks with your friends ? To those that practise for self-salvation, money is a like a poisonous snake. Those that like Bodhicitta, like money. They like money in their bank account! The money is actually neither good nor bad, but their money is for the benefit of everyone.

An Arahant has nothing, while the Bodhisattva has many things. If the Bodhisattva asks an Arahant for help, the Arahant cannot give anything. Look at this teacup in front of me. - An Arahant would use it and leave it here, whereas a Bodhisattva might have, bring and give many teacups for everyone.

## **Virtues towards becoming a Bodhisattva :**

### **Bodhicitta**

What is Bodhicitta - a mind and a wish! - It is a wish to become enlightened like the Buddha, while at the same time wishing to help all other living beings. It is the highest ambition. To develop your Bodhicitta you need to cultivate your ambition, compassion, confidence, faith and wisdom.

### **Compassion**

If you want to become a great teacher, you must associate with students. If you want to become a Buddha, you must associate with sentient beings. They need compassion. If you have no compassion or loving, you won't value sentient beings. Only if you love beings can you help them.

If the Bodhisattvas see you in pain, they want to help you and take away your pain and replace it with happiness. How can you develop your compassion? Give dana. Do you think that it is easy? It is not easy at all. Many people think that if they give something extra, that they are giving. The poor cannot live on "extras". But money is only part of what you can give. For you students, you don't have much money. but you do have knowledge. Your English is better than mine. Why is my English so poor that I need my good friend Lim Yang to translate for me ? When you use everything you have, your time, enthusiasm, encouragement, knowledge, money, then this is giving dana.

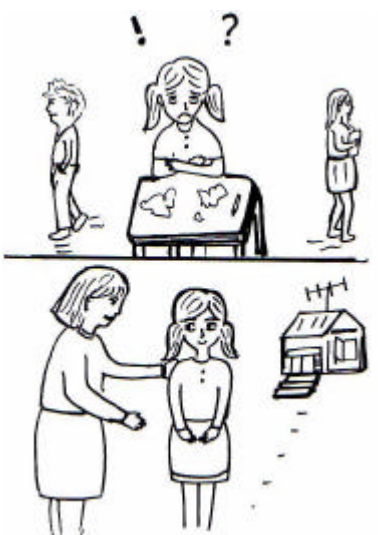
Many people think that the Unibuds President, Eric, is very busy. Many people abuse him. But how many people offer to do the job? The Bohdhisattva will do the job. Give your time, and your mind power.

Even if you are poor and not intelligent, you can still give dana by showing your concern and care for others. Do any of you have 24 hours of happiness? Therefore if you don't have money or education, whenever you see someone sad, alone, nervous, or with a long face, you can give encouragement and support. Give them confidence and your smile. The main point is that you should be concerned about the welfare of others. If you see any students who don't like study, you should try to encourage them.

Many parents do not know how to teach their children and nag and say how everything they do is wrong. Why do you have a boyfriend so early? Why do you talk on the phone so long? Why do you go out on Friday nights to attend the Dhamma talk?

They always nag whether they are right or wrong. Children don't like their parents when they nag too much. For the children who can control themselves, that is OK, but other children get worse with more nagging and pressure. All children like to improve themselves and be good. But a mother's nagging brings suffering to everyone. The Bodhisattva mothers prefer to encourage their children.

Helping others by giving loving speech is also the way of the Bodhisattva. My friend Venerable Yi-Ran is very good at this, and is particularly patient with me when I am in a bad mood! Can you do this when others are angry at you?



No-one has no self respect. Self-respect may be depressed, or hidden. Only through loving speech can self-respect come back and flower. Giving dana, loving speech, and working together are the techniques of the Bodhisattva. However these techniques are only useful when applied to the right person. If the person cannot appreciate your actions, then these techniques have no use, and you should not apply them.

### Confidence and faith

The next virtue needed to become a Bodhisattva, is confidence and faith. We must learn from the Buddha. We should always make a good wish to benefit everyone. This is how we can be of value to society.

You need to be confident in the Buddha's teachings, and the merits of the Triple Gem. People without confidence cannot be good Buddhists, and these people will not gain fruits in practising in the Way of the Bodhisattva. Confidence should be our main aim.

How can we gain confidence? We can read the autobiography of the Buddha and the Sutras and the biographies of leading monks. Bodhicitta without support or confidence will retreat very soon. Therefore the way to improve our confidence is to read the accounts of past sages and learn from them. To be successful, you must have strong confidence. When Galileo put forward the idea that the earth rotated around the sun, this conflicted with the beliefs of the time. He was ridiculed, but kept his belief until he died.

### Wisdom

Let us talk about wisdom. What is wisdom and what is knowledge? Knowledge has limitations, but wisdom (sila panya) has no limit. Common knowledge is only knowledge. Wisdom relies on our own self-realisation. One aspect of wisdom is to realise impermanence. The world is continuously changing, and

these changes take place because of causes and secondary causes. Can anyone here say that this is not true? The world is also full of suffering and dissatisfaction. Is this also not true?

The Buddha told us about his enlightenment. He also encouraged each and everyone of you not to blindly accept his theories but to prove it for yourselves. - Just like doing your maths homework! Recognising impermanence and the benefits of non ego-attachment are all answers "in the back of the book", but will remain a mystery to you until you calculate it for yourself!

When we give dana, we should not be attached to the giving itself, nor take too much pride, nor brag about our giving. Having wisdom will not give us too much conceit.

Only through cultivating wisdom can we cut off our mental defilements. I hope you all can practise the Perfections of loving speech, working together, helping others, and giving dana.

## Questions and Answers

### **Q1. What happens if a Bodhicitta dies poor?**

**A1.** It is not possible for a Bodhicitta to die poor. They have invested in this life. The more you give, the richer you will be. By rich I mean you will be rich in spirit, confidence, emotion, friends, knowledge, and experience, as well as materially. How can you not be rich? Those that give a lot must be rich! Those that are in constant need of others are the poorest.

A real Bodhisattva does not think about what he will get at the end of the day, but gives help with wisdom to those that need it.

### **Q2. Why do you emphasise money and money making in Buddhism?**

**A2.** We do not look down on money. We do not attach ourselves to it. This is the spirit of the Bodhisattva. Some people have the wrong understanding and think Buddhists should be totally non-attached and poor. This is not what the Buddha taught. If you think money cannot help others, how is that we can build schools and hospitals within society? How can society improve without paying for teachers, doctors, and temples?

Buddhists do not see making money as the end purpose, but rather as the means to help all in society. This is why I have given such examples this evening. I hope that you understand that Bodhisattvas are not limited to only giving away money. Look at the lives of older people. The older generation who have accumulated sufficient wealth do not want more money. They feel alone and only need your care, comfort and loving speech.

## Glossary

**Arahants** - One who has no more desire, illwill or ignorance.

**Bodhicitta** - The ambition of a Bodhisattva to become enlightened while at the same time wishing to help all other living beings.

**Bodhisattva** - A being who is fully capable of gaining enlightenment but who puts helping others before his own entry to Nibbana.

**Dana** - giving, generosity.

**Dependent Origination** - Everything arises from causes and secondary causes.

**Dhamma** - Teachings of the Buddha.

**Dhukka** - Dissatisfaction, imperfections and suffering of life.

**Five Aggregates** - The five characteristics of self-awareness. 1 Physical form, 2 Feelings, 3 Perception, 4 Free will, 5 Consciousness.

**Five Precepts** - Moral code 1 Refrain from harming living things, 2 Refrain from taking what is not given, 3 Refrain from sexual misconduct, 4 Refrain from wrong speech, 5 Refrain from taking drugs or drinks which cloud the mind.

### **Four Noble Truths**

1. Suffering is universal
2. The cause of suffering is craving
3. The cure for suffering is the elimination of craving.
4. The way to achieve the elimination of suffering is to follow the Middle Path, which is described in the Noble Eightfold Path

### **Noble Eightfold Path**

1. Right understanding
2. Right thought
3. Right speech
4. Right action
5. Right livelihood
6. Right effort
7. Right mindfulness
8. Right concentration.

### **Ten Wholesome Actions**

- |                   |                    |
|-------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Generosity     | 6. Patience        |
| 2. Morality       | 7. Honesty         |
| 3. Non-attachment | 8. Determination   |
| 4. Wisdom         | 9. Loving kindness |
| 5. Perseverance   | 10. Equanimity     |

**Mahayana** - Term applied to Buddhist schools in Northern Asia including China, Taiwan, Japan, Korea & Tibet.

**Nibbana** - The ultimate state of being, which is the goal of Buddhism. It involves extinguishing the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion.

**Sutras** - Collection of teachings, and sermons of the Buddha.

**Theravada** - Term applied to Buddhism as practised in Southern Asia including Thailand, Burma and Sri Lanka. It uses the Pali canon as its scriptures.

**Triple Gem** - The Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha

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