

## **Bodhicitta**

Dec. 30<sup>th</sup>, 31<sup>st</sup>, 2017

Good morning! This is the last weekend of 2017. It's the end of the year and beginning of a new year. As usual, each one of us will conclude this past year and plan for the coming year. This weekend, I would like to talk about Bodhicitta.

What is Bodhicitta? "Bodhicitta is a spontaneous wish to attain enlightenment motivated by great compassion for all sentient beings, accompanied by a falling away of an inherent existing self." "Bodhicitta, enlightenment mind, is the mind that strives toward awakening, empathy, and compassion for the benefit of all sentient beings."

The above definition may help you understand that Bodhicitta has two aspects, becoming enlightenment and benefiting all sentient beings. Or as we often say, "Become a Buddha as soon as possible and rescue all living beings."

The *Flower Adornment Sutra* says, "If one cultivates all kinds of good Dharma doors without Bodhicitta, then one is cultivating the evil way." The *Flower Adornment Sutra* also says, "Bodhicitta, the seed of all Buddhas, is where all Buddha Dharma is born."

So, for Buddhists, for cultivators, awakening Bodhicitta and bringing forth the resolve for Bodhi is the fundamental and primary thing to do. Every one should make the following vow:

Look up to pursue the supreme Buddha Bodhi; Look down to transform infinite living beings!

Living beings are countless; I vow to save them all.

Afflictions are endless; I vow to eradicate them all.

Dharma doors are measureless; I vow to learn them all.

Buddha Bodhi is unsurpassed; I vow to attain it.

Why is it important to awaken Bodhicitta and bring out the Bodhi resolve? I have a very simple analogy. Before we bring forth the Bodhi resolve, we are like flour before yeast is added. Bringing forth the Bodhi resolve is like adding yeast to the dough, so that it will rise and expand over time. What is the Bodhi resolve like? It is without any form or mark; it is only the enlightened Way. To be enlightened means to understand; to understand the principles of the Way. Yet we should not stop at understanding the principles; we must also cultivate the Way.

The Bodhi resolve can also be compared to a pagoda: no matter how tall a pagoda you plan to build, you have to start from the ground. The ground is analogous to our "mind ground." Just as we have to build a pagoda story by story from the ground up, the Bodhi resolve is similarly built up from the mind ground. Starting very small, it gradually grows greater and higher. And eventually, when we perfect our merit and virtue, we will become Buddhas. Bodhi resolve is the starting point to reach Buddhahood. This is only a very simple and rough analogy.

It's the same as anything else. If one wants to travel, then one can make the plan and go traveling one day. If one wants to learn to swim, then one can go and learn to swim. If one wants to have a big house, then he may work hard and one day he can buy a big house. This wanting or wishing is the seed from where to grow. So, if one wants to become a Buddha and rescue all living beings, one day, he or she will become a Buddha and rescue

countless living beings, even though it may be after countless kalpas.

Now you understand the reason I emphasize the Bodhi Resolve when the new year is coming, it is not only basic but also crucial. It decides the directions of your heart. It also decides what you will do in the new year.

For those people with wisdom, they often can bring forth great resolve for Bodhi due to a small cause and condition, and therefore tend to Buddha Bodhi. While for those lazy people, even if there is a great cause and condition, they are not willing to pursue Buddha Bodhi. We are Buddhists and we all learn from Buddha. Let's see how Buddha Sakyamuni brought forth the resolve for Bodhi.

The sutras mentioned several times when Buddha Sakyamuni brought forth resolve for Bodhi.

According to Buddha's Great Skillful Means of Gratitude Sutra, Ananda once asked the Buddha, "World honored one, you care Bhikkhus so much. How long has it been since you brought forth the resolve for Bodhi?" The Buddha said, "Countless kalpas ago, there were two persons who fell into hell due to the massive accumulated evil karma. In the hell, the jailer requested the two to pull a horse carriage without stopping and also he kept beating them with a big hammer. One of the two was too weak to pull and he was beaten to death and then came back again and was beaten again. At this moment, the other person became very compassionate to him and said to the jailer, 'I can pull the carriage myself. You must release him!' The jailer was very angry and raised the hammer and threw it to the person who showed compassion. After the person was hit to death, he was reborn in the thirty-third Heaven." Buddha Sakyamuni then said, "The person who showed compassion

in the hell was me. I first brought forth resolve for Bodhi for the living beings in the hell, and later I became compassionate to all living beings.”

According to Vinaya Sutra, once some Savaka dependent asked the Buddha about how to bring forth the resolve for Bodhi. The Buddha answered, “Long time ago, there was a king named Possessing Light. He had an elephant as white as a lotus. The elephant is very strong and dignified. The king handed over the elephant to an elephant trainer. After the trainer tamed the elephant, he returned it to the king. One day, the king and the trainer rode the elephant to the forest to hunt. After they entered the forest, the elephant sniffed the smell of a female elephant and then he started to run wild as fast as the wind. Both the king and the trainer were thrown upside down. The king was in great terror. He asked the trainer to control the elephant. The trainer said, ‘I have already tried the immortal mantra. Hood, rope and chains were also tried. Your Majesty, all these cannot tame the greedy hearts. For the so called greedy hearts, one aspect wanes, the other waxes and they never end.’ After the trainer had tried everything, he still could not calm down the elephant. The trainer then said to the king, ‘It seems that there is nothing to do now. Please hold on to branches and try to escape by all means. The king and the trainer grasped branches and the elephant ran all the way.

When they were safe, the king said to the trainer, ‘How can you give me an untamed elephant?’ The trainer explained, ‘I did have tamed it already. However, it just couldn’t control itself when it smelled the female elephant. There was nothing I could do. Nevertheless, it has been trained and it will come back itself soon.’

After seven days, the wild elephant returned to normal and it remembered how it was

trained before and went back to the palace. The trainer was happy to see it and reported its returning to the king. The king was still angry and said, 'It seems that you did not completely train the elephant yet.' The trainer vowed, 'I did have trained it. Your Majesty, if you don't believe it, you can test it. You only need to give a burning iron ball to the elephant and it will follow your order and swallow it.'

When the elephant was going to swallow the iron ball without hesitation, the trainer reminded the king, 'Your Majesty, if the elephant swallows the burning iron ball, it will die for sure.' The king asked unwillingly, 'If it has been trained, why would he still make so much trouble?' The trainer answered, 'Your Majesty, as I said before, What I could train is its body, not its heart. I am only a trainer who can train an elephant's body, not a tuner of a heart.' The king then asked him, 'In this world, is there anybody who can tame heart?' Under the heavenly beings' persuasion, the trainer blurted out, 'Your Majesty, only the perfectly enlightened Buddha can tame both body and heart. Due to the increasing greed, even though the worldly people cultivate diligently to calm down the greedy heart, most give up halfway. Even though I can tame the elephant's beautiful body with different skills, the subtle and formless heart can only be tamed by the Buddha's teachings. The Buddha is all mighty and has cut off all afflictions. The Buddha is a true hero. Anyone who turns himself to the Buddha, his invisible heart will be tuned to be very soft.'

When the king of Possessing Light heard that the Buddha has merits of diligence and might, he started to give generously to accumulate provisions. And he also vowed, 'May the merits of the generous giving, help all living beings obtain Buddha fruit. May all the living beings untamed yet, transformed and free from Samsara.' This was how the king

brought forth the resolve for supreme Bodhi and made the vow.” Sakyamuni Buddha then said, “The white elephant is Ananda in this life. The trainer is Sagittarius in this life and the king of Possessing Light in that life is me.”

These stories might have different versions. But you can see that one can bring forth the resolve for Bodhi due to a certain cause and condition.

Bodhicitta is the most precious resolve. It's the seed to become a Buddha. *The Way of the Bodhisattva* says, “Just like the most extraordinary materials for gold metallurgy, Bodhicitta may change our filthy body to the priceless Buddha body. So we should hold tight to Bodhicitta.”

Bodhicitta is the most rare and has the most merits. All cultivators who wants to cross the suffering sea should hold Bodhicitta firmly. Bodhicitta is the standard to distinguish between worldly people and Bodhisattva.

*The Sutra of an Upasaka's Precepts* says, “It is not difficult for a monk to bring forth the resolve for Bodhi, but it's inconceivable for a lay person to bring forth Bodhicitta. Why? Because most lay persons are trapped by the bad karma. If a lay person can bring forth the resolve for Bodhi, the four Heavenly Kings and other kings in the heaven will be pleasantly surprised and say, “I have a teacher of gods and human.”

Bringing forth the resolve for Bodhi can also eradicate evil karma quickly. From beginningless kalpas ago, due to greed, hatred, stupidity, pride and suspicion, boundless karmas have been accumulated. If karmas had form, then the whole void realm could not accommodate. While wise people know, if Bodhicitta is brought out, evil karma as big as Sumeru Mountain will be destroyed.

Bodhicitta is what all living beings can depend upon. Bodhicitta is what a cultivator should hold tight to. Bodhicitta will expand the heart. Bodhicitta is the seed and also shortcut to Buddhahood.

With Buddha in heart, one has nothing to be afraid of.

With Bodhicitta awakened, one has nothing to lose.

Have your Bodhicitta awakened? Have you brought forth the resolve for Bodhi?