

# Week 6 – Wisdom & Compassion

## *Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Wisdom – doctrinal Dharma*

### WISDOM & COMPASSION

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So far this course, have been looking at the wisdom aspect of Buddhism - could say the cognitive aspect. We'll round off with looking at the "other side of the coin" – the compassionate, loving or emotional aspect

We have all experienced the connection between understanding and metta – how greater understanding helps us to relate to others more warmly. This gets recapitulated as path progresses, so that increasing spiritual wisdom is associated with greater love and compassion. Such that Enlightenment is seen on one hand as complete awakening – wisdom aspect; but also as compassionate & loving.

We must not forget the metta aspect of Dharma. Metta bhavana not a kindergarten exercise – it's a practice that is an integral part of the path.

*Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so, let him cultivate a boundless heart towards all beings*

*Karaniya Metta Sutta, Sutta Nipata I.8*

This boundless heart that we cultivate is the same boundless heart that we cultivate through reflection & realisation of anatta, no-self.

*The idea is to gently but persistently expand the boundaries of your metta and therewith the boundaries of your own self. When metta is experienced in this fully expansive mode and is universal in its scope, there is no experience of a self that is separate from anyone or anything else. To speak of 'oneself' at this stage is almost a contradiction in terms. Just as a circle that has expanded to infinity is not really a circle any more, having gone beyond any distinguishable shape, so the mind that has expanded to embrace all beings has gone beyond definition. Forgetting the self as a reference point, no longer asking what any given situation means for you alone, you can go on indefinitely and happily expanding the breadth and depth of your interest and positivity. The self is replaced by a creative orientation of being.*

*Living with Kindness, Sangharakshita, p136*

As wisdom progresses, accompanied by metta, boundaries of the heart soften, & we're naturally more sensitive to the suffering of others.

### BODHISATTVA IDEAL & BODHICITTA

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But the tendency to egocentricity is so strong, it seems possible to practice for a long time with the notion of "getting Enlightenment for myself" and therefore escaping suffering, without having to be too bothered about everyone else. Maybe there was a somewhat individualistic streak that developed over the centuries following the Buddha's death.

One strand of the Mahayana developed in response to re-emphasise the altruistic dimension of practice – maybe the compassion aspect was restated very strongly to correct an overly egocentric form of practice that had developed. So emerged the Bodhisattva ideal.

Bodhisattva = "Awakening being" – someone set on Enlightenment, but without a simply personal motivation; the ideal Buddhist of the Mahayana.

Bodhisattva is characterised by the Bodhicitta – the heart of awakening. Full arising of Bodhicitta is mysterious thing – has the nature of the transcendentally erupting within us. Our own will blended with the will to Enlightenment. As an illustration:

*If you love someone very much, when they ask you to do something and you do it, is the carrying out of the task their volition or yours? You make their will your will*

*Sangharakshita, The Bodhisattva Ideal p. 38*

Bodhicitta represents a radical reorientation of volition: from seeking pleasure/avoiding pain to Enlightenment for the sake of easing suffering – whether it's mine or others isn't so significant. You see suffering and want to respond. It's the natural result of metta bhavana, fully realised.

Santideva's Bodhicaryavatara was a very strong evocation of the attitude of Bodhicitta:

*All those who suffer in this world do so because of their desire for their own happiness. All those happy in this world are so because of their desire for the happiness of others*

*Santideva, Bodhicaryavatara 8.129*

Can see the Mahayana as emphasising the spirit of the Buddha's teaching – maybe too much emphasis had been previously given to the word, with too little given to the implicit teaching of his actions – he taught tirelessly for 45 years, right up to minutes before his death. The Mahayana emphasised his compassion in doing so.

## Down to earth

Bodhisattva Ideal & bodhicitta are extremely lofty ideals, but we can relate to them simply in terms of not forgetting the other-regarding aspect of practice. It's very good that we want to get sorted out ourselves – we're a suffering living being and it's good to alleviate that suffering. But the bodhicitta-aspect of ourselves won't be content with that as our only concern – we have a natural outward-looking aspect, an intuition of interconnectedness.

Could we really be completely happy if we're in contact with other's suffering? Either we'd have to harden hearts – which feels bad in itself - or we'd feel involved in their suffering and want to respond.

## HOME PRACTICE

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Try to notice whenever possible your desire for the well-being of others; whether it is an urge to help, or a sense of compassion when things go badly for them, or happiness when it goes well for them. Don't worry about mixed motives, or darker emotions (jealousy, schadenfreude etc) – just notice when there is any germ of "bodhicitta" – eg. the urge to send someone a get well card, be hospitable to someone, congratulate them etc.

## RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

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*Living with Kindness*, Sangharakshita, Conclusion

*What is the Dharma?* Sangharakshita, ch 13

*Origin & Development of the Bodhisattva Ideal*, Sangharakshita chapter 1 in *The Bodhisattva Ideal* book, or CD 065.