

Week 6 – *Bodhicitta* – the Awakening Heart

Buddhism Level 2 – Ritual & Devotion

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Reading for the puja - could use the verses transcribed below from Bodhicaryavatara.

Offering for the puja

Copy of Bodhicaryavatara to show

Special shrine is nice – thinka of Avalokitesvara, a big jewel to symbolise Bodhicitta, maybe some glass beads on shrine

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Gain a feel for the Bodhicitta as the heart set on the welfare for all beings

Appreciate the overall aim of the puja as cultivation of this heart

Finish the module with a spacious, “special” puja

MEDITATION (15 MINS)

Lead through of a simple tonglen/Bodhicitta-type practice

INTRODUCTION TO SESSION

Reminder that the sevenfold puja text is extracted from the Bodhicaryavatara – “Guide to the Bodhisattva’s way of life”. As such the whole text (show copy) is trying to cultivate the Bodhicitta – the heart of the Bodhisattva, or the heart of awakening.

Whole altruistic underpinning Dharma

This becomes most explicit in the last stage of the puja – Transference of Merit & Self-surrender, which we’ll look at briefly tonight, before performing a full puja.

Previous class Review

TRANSCERENCE OF MERITS & SELF SURRENDER

Read through

Reiterate – these aren’t “our” words – how would it feel to mean them?

And they’re not doctrine, a path of practice – they’re evoking or expressing a particular mood

Transference of Merit

May the merit gained in my acting thus go to the alleviation of the suffering of all beings

Merit is the result of skilful, “meritorious” action. A kind of potential for happiness – an easy, joyful, inspired consciousness, that’s more susceptible to happy states arising. But it’s also a kind of spiritual power:

There is no more powerful way to accumulate merit than through the cultivation of compassion. Merit is spiritual power, and is the force empowering meditative practice for insight, purification and spiritual transformation.

Buddhism with an Attitude, B. Alan Wallace

You may remember the three-fold training – ethics, meditation, wisdom; so accumulating merit through ethical action is the indispensable basis of the remaining path.

Transference of merits sounds like a physical or magical process, but really it’s cultivation the intention to share with others your good fortune to have the means to cultivate merit – designed to counterbalance an easy smugness, “I’m alright Jack”, “why don’t you just get your act together?” attitude. We don’t identify so closely with our own field of experience.

Give examples: teaching meditation, talking where appropriate to others about the dharma. Ask for examples

Self surrender

My personality throughout my existences etc I give up without regard to myself

Not just merit but everything we give up, share out: personality, possessions – for the benefit of all beings – not just the ones I like.

Merit in all three ways: probably body / speech / mind.

Being of service

Just as the earth and other elements are serviceable in many ways...

This refers to the ancient division of our world of experience into elements:

- Earth – the solid, resistant component
- Water – the wet, fluid, flowing, oscillating component.
- Fire – the component of hot / cold
- Air or wind – the moving, gaseous component
- Space – the accommodating factor
- Consciousness – the perceptual field that experiences all of this

These elements don’t pick and choose who they assist; they indiscriminately “help” (and comprise) living beings in many different ways. So we cultivate the aspiration to simply be of service in whatever way seems appropriate.

Bodhicitta

These verses are cultivating the *Bodhicitta* - the “heart / mind of awakening”. It’s the most precious thing to an aspiring *Bodhisattva*, and the defining quality of a *Bodhisattva*: they are someone in whom the *Bodhicitta* has arisen.

When we practice *metta*, we may connect with how strongly we want other beings to be well and free from suffering; and yet realise that they are not, that there is so much suffering in the world.

The natural response to this is *karuna* – compassion. We really want to relieve that suffering. We realise that our wish “may you be free from suffering” is to wish those beings awakening – that is the only way to be free from suffering. And we can only help them achieve it by awakening ourselves.

What develops is the *Bodhicitta* – the strong heartfelt wish for Enlightenment, not just for myself, but for all beings; the wish to awaken so that others can also be helped to awaken. Within this, the delineation between myself and all beings softens: there’s simply the desire for well-being through awakening.

So precious often referred to as the “wish fulfilling jewel”, represented as a jewel. Point to jewel on shrine, jewel that Avalokitesvara holds to heart

This leads to a reorientation of priorities; instead of living life hoping to gain more pleasure than pain, we lead life in order to benefit beings – it’s seen as the only thing worth doing – and that the best way to do so is to awaken.

There’s different levels of fruition of *Bodhicitta*. We all have some connection with it: the basic level of *metta* we connect with in *metta bhavana* is an aspect of *Bodhicitta*; the desire for self-transcendence, for growth is as aspect.

We can make this conscious, deliberately connect with it and encourage it.

Eventually the *Bodhicitta* grows to such a point that the ego-centric tendencies are toppled by it, and one’s being is governed by it. Finally we fully realise it – “we” become the *Bodhi*.

Equally there are different levels of *Bodhisattvas*: we can call ourselves *Bodhisattvas* inasmuch as we’re trying to cultivate *Bodhicitta*. But depending on the degree to which we embody the *Bodhicitta*, to that extent we’re a *Bodhisattva* “proper”.

Grasp tightly the quicksilver elixir, known as the Awakening Mind, which must be thoroughly worked.

From the moment that he takes on that Mind to release the limitless realm of beings, with a resolve that cannot be turned back,

From that moment on, though he may doze off or be distracted many times, uninterrupted streams of merit like the bursting sky continuously pour forth.

Such a being, unprecedented, an excellent jewel, in whom there is born a concern for the welfare of others such as others have not even for themselves, how is he born?

That jewel, the Mind, which is the seed of pure happiness in the world and the remedy for the suffering of the world, how at all can its merit be measured?

Hoping to escape suffering, it is to suffering that they run. In the desire for happiness, out of delusion, they destroy their own happiness, like an enemy.

It satisfies with every happiness those starved of happiness, and cuts away oppressions from those oppressed in many ways.

I bow down to the bodies of those in whom that excellent jewel, the Mind, has arisen, and towards whom even harm will lead to happiness. To those mines of happiness, I go for refuge.

Extracts from The Bodhicaryavatara, Shantideva, ch 1, trans. Crosby & Skilton

Give examples of how you (leader) have experienced “down to earth” bodhicitta

Discussion in 3s

Talk over how you feel or have experienced what you feel is a sense of bodhicitta –did the meditation give you an inkling?

TEA BREAK

SEVENFOLD PUJA

Ensure good 40mins for a spacious puja – put away flipcharts, sit on cushions etc, make shift into ritual space.

Suggest have reading evoking the Bodhicitta. Verses 25-33 of Bodhicaryavatara ch 3 are good.

If there are jewel beads on shrine, suggest people could, after making offering, take one away home, represent their own aspiration to Bodhicitta, put on shrine.

FURTHER READING

Ritual & Devotion in Buddhism, Sangharakshita, Ch 12.

The Bodhicaryavatara, Shantideva