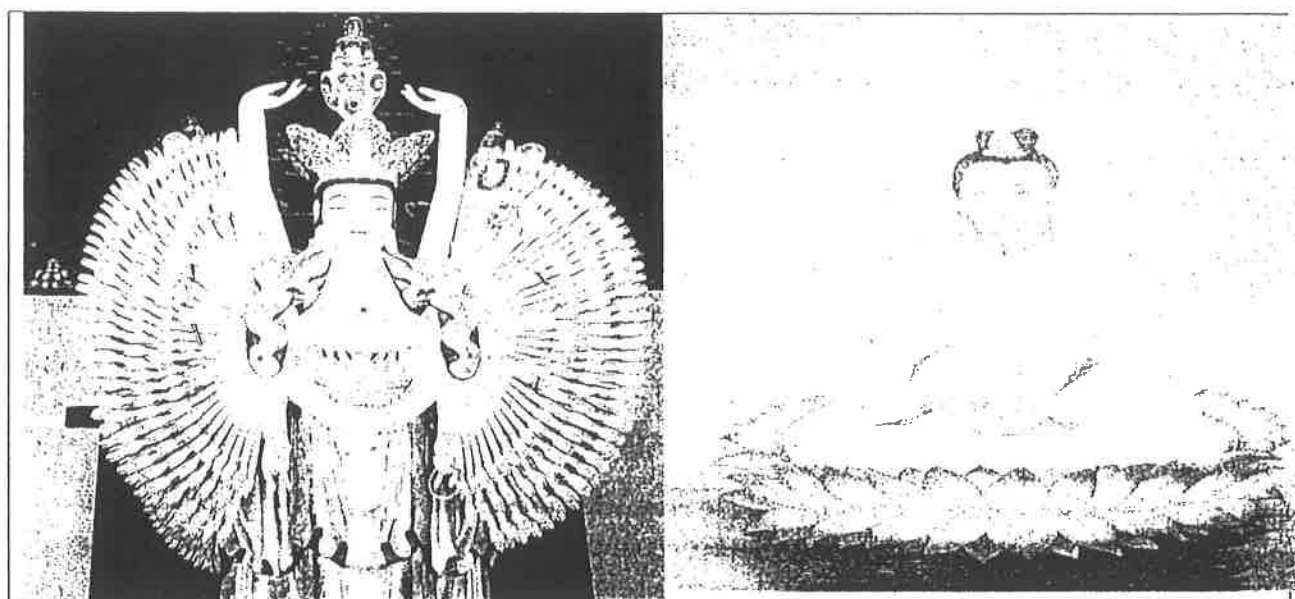


The Bodhisattva



From The Collected Works of Chögyam Trungpa, Volume Three, edited by Carolyn Rose Gimian. © 2003 by Diana J. Mukpo. Published by Shambhala Publications. Published in the November 2006 Shambhala Sun magazine.

The bodhisattva—the renowned ideal of Mahayana Buddhism—is not a god or deity but a way of being we can all aspire to. As CHÖGYAM TRUNGPA RINPOCHE explains, those who take the bodhisattva vow make one simple commitment: to put others first, holding nothing back for themselves. The bodhisattva vow is the commitment to put others before oneself. It is a statement of willingness to give up one's own well-being, even one's own enlightenment, for the sake of others. And a bodhisattva is simply a person who lives in the spirit of that vow, perfecting the qualities known as the six paramitas [perfections]—generosity, discipline, patience, exertion, meditation, and transcendental knowledge—in his effort to liberate beings.

Taking the bodhisattva vow implies that instead of holding our own individual territory and defending it tooth and nail, we become open to the world that we are living in. It means we are willing to take on greater responsibility, immense responsibility. In fact it means taking a big chance. But taking such a chance is not false heroism or personal eccentricity. It is a chance that has been taken in the past by millions of bodhisattvas, enlightened ones, and great teachers. So a tradition of responsibility and openness has been handed down from generation to generation, and now we too are participating in the sanity and dignity of this tradition.

The sanity of this tradition is very powerful. What we are doing in taking the bodhisattva vow is magnificent and glorious. It is such a wholehearted and full tradition that those who have not joined it might feel somewhat wretched in comparison. They might be envious of such richness. But joining this

tradition also makes tremendous demands on us. We no longer are intent on creating comfort for ourselves; we work with others. This implies working with our other as well as the other other. Our other is our projections and our sense of privacy and longing to make things comfortable for ourselves. The other other is the phenomenal world outside, which is filled with screaming kids, dirty dishes, confused spiritual practitioners, and assorted sentient beings.

So taking the bodhisattva vow is a real commitment based on the realization of the suffering and confusion of oneself and others. The only way to break the chain reaction of confusion and pain and to work our way outward into the awakened state of mind is to take responsibility ourselves. If we do not deal with this situation of confusion, if we do not do something about it ourselves, nothing will ever happen. We cannot count on others to do it for us. It is our responsibility, and we have the tremendous power to change the course of the world's karma. So in taking the bodhisattva vow, we are acknowledging that we are not going to be instigators of further chaos and misery in the world, but we are going to be liberators, bodhisattvas, inspired to work on ourselves as well as with other people.

There is tremendous inspiration in having decided to work with others. We no longer try to build up our own grandiosity. We simply try to become human beings who are genuinely able to help others; that is, we develop precisely that quality of selflessness which is generally lacking in our world. Following the example of Gautama Buddha, who gave up his kingdom to dedicate his time to working with sentient beings, we are finally becoming useful to society.

We each might have discovered some little truth, such as the truth about poetry or the truth about photography or the truth about amoebas, which can be of help to others. But we tend to use such a truth simply to build up our own credentials. Working with our little truths, little by little, is a cowardly approach. In contrast, the work of a bodhisattva is without credentials. We could be beaten, kicked, or just unappreciated, but we remain kind and willing to work with others. It is a totally noncredit situation. It is truly genuine and very powerful.

Putting such broad vision into practice requires that we relate to situations very clearly and perfectly. In order to drop our self-centeredness, which both limits our view and clouds our actions, it is necessary for us to develop a sense of compassion. Traditionally this is done by first developing compassion toward oneself, then toward someone very close to us, and finally toward all sentient beings, including our enemies. Ultimately we regard all sentient beings with as much emotional involvement as if they were our own mothers. We may not require such a traditional approach at this point, but we can develop some sense of ongoing openness and gentleness. The point is that somebody has to make the first move.

Usually we are in a stalemate with our world: "Is he going to say he is sorry to me first, or am I going to apologize to him first?" But in becoming a bodhisattva we break that barrier: we do not wait for the other person to make the first move; we have decided to do it ourselves. People have a lot of problems and they suffer a great deal, obviously. And we have only half a grain of sand's worth of awareness of that suffering happening in this country alone, let alone in the rest of the world. Millions of people in the world are suffering because of their lack of generosity, discipline, patience, exertion, meditation, and

transcendental knowledge. The point of making the first move by taking the bodhisattva vow is not to convert people to our particular view, necessarily; the idea is that we should contribute something to the world simply by our own way of relating, by our own gentleness.

One of the obstacles to bodhisattva discipline is an absence of humor; we could take the whole thing too seriously. Approaching the benevolence of a bodhisattva in a militant fashion doesn't quite work. Beginners are often overly concerned with their own practice and their own development, approaching Mahayana in a very Hinayana style. But that serious militancy is quite different from the lightheartedness and joy of the bodhisattva path. In the beginning you may have to fake being open and joyous. But you should at least attempt to be open, cheerful, and, at the same time, brave. This requires that you continuously take some sort of leap. You may leap like a flea, a grasshopper, a frog, or finally, like a bird, but some sort of leap is always taking place on the bodhisattva path.

There is a tremendous sense of celebration and joy in finally being able to join the family of buddhas. At last we have decided to claim our inheritance, which is enlightenment. From the perspective of doubt, whatever enlightened quality exists in us may seem small scale. But from the perspective of actuality, a fully developed enlightened being exists in us already. Enlightenment is no longer a myth: it does exist, it is workable, and we are associated with it thoroughly and fully. So we have no doubts as to whether we are on the path or not. It is obvious that we have made a commitment and that we are going to develop this ambitious project of becoming a buddha.

Taking the bodhisattva vow is an expression of settling down and making ourselves at home in this world. We are not concerned that somebody is going to attack us or destroy us. We are constantly exposing ourselves for the benefit of sentient beings. In fact, we are even giving up our ambition to attain enlightenment in favour of relieving the suffering and difficulties of people. Nevertheless, helplessly, we attain enlightenment anyway. Bodhisattvas and great tathagatas in the past have taken this step, and we too can do so. It is simply up to us whether we are going to accept this richness or reject it and settle for a poverty-stricken mentality.

The Bodhisattva Vow Here are some versions of "The Bodhisattva Vow" which Mahayana Buddhists who want to walk on the Bodhisattva Path will vow. There is a "bodhisattva ceremony" and they will also use the vows as a prayer and meditation often.

1) Here is the 1 that The Dalai Lama uses:

With a wish to free all beings
I shall always go for refuge
To the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha,
Until I reach full enlightenment.
Enthused by wisdom and compassion,
today in the Buddhas' presence I generate
the Mind for Full Awakening
For the benefit of all sentient beings.

As long as space remains,
~~As long as sentient beings remain,~~
Until then, may I too remain
And dispel the miseries of the world.

2) **Here is another Tibetan Bodhisattva Vow:**

May I be a guard for those who are protectorless,
A guide for those who journey on the road;
For those who wish to go across the water,
May I be a boat, a raft, a bridge.
May I be an isle for those who yearn for landfall,
And a lamp for those who long for light;
For those who need a resting place, a bed,
For all who need a servant, may I be a slave.
May I be the wishing jewel, the vase of plenty,
A word of power, and the supreme remedy.
May I be the trees of miracles,
And for every being, the abundant cow.
Like the great earth and the other elements,
Enduring as the sky itself endures,
For the boundless multitude of living beings,
May I be the ground and vessel of their life.
Thus, for every single thing that lives,
In number like the boundless reaches of the sky,
May I be their sustenance and nourishment.
Until they pass beyond the bounds of suffering

3) **Here is another translation of a Bodhisattva Vow from Taiwan Mahayana Buddhism:**

However innumerable sentient beings are, I vow to save them.
However inexhaustible the defilements are, I vow to extinguish them.
However immeasurable the dharmas are, I vow to master them.
However incomparable enlightenment is, I vow to attain it.
All beings, without number, I vow to liberate
Endless blind passions I vow to uproot
Dharma gates beyond measure I vow to penetrate
The way of the Buddha I vow to attain

Beings are numberless; I vow to awaken with them.
Delusions are inexhaustible; I vow to end them.
Dharma gates are boundless; I vow to enter them.
Buddha's way is unsurpassable; I vow to become it.