

THE INTANGIBLES: ENLIGHTENED HEART

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Buddhism brings with it some concepts new to most of us here in the west. We get it that Buddha was a human (like we are) who enlightened himself, and his method (how he did it) is called the dharma. And Bodhisattvas are those on their way to becoming Buddhas. But what about that other (and more mysterious) term Bodhicitta, pronounced "bōdhi-cheatah." What is that?

Bodhicitta is one of the more subtle of the Buddhist concepts, often difficult for beginners to grasp, and yet at the same time said to be the most important in practice. I don't claim to know that much about Bodhicitta, but I feel it is crucial for each of us to understand at least something about what it involves.

The Sanskrit word Bodhicitta translates to something like "Enlightenment Mind" or "Heart of Enlightenment," a dynamic rather than a static state, so perhaps a better translation is a "mind that strives for enlightenment for all beings." There is a compulsive element to the concept that is key here.

Strong Bodhicitta is a ceaseless and one-pointed striving to benefit others, a permanent attitude. "Enlightened Heart" is my favorite translation for the word Bodhicitta. We usually speak of the mind being enlightened, but the heart must be too. Bodhicitta is the heart center of enlightenment. It grasps us at the heart level and drives to help realize enlightenment for all beings, including ourselves. Bodhicitta is the deep urge to help others realize what they already are.

Bodhicitta is another of those concepts that (like recognition of the mind's true nature) we can only guess at what it means. Initially we have no direct knowledge of what Bodhicitta is like until it dawns on us, so there is a bit of a vicious circle here. Of course we read about it, hear it spoken of in teachings, and do our best to get a "sounds-like" idea of it going in our mind, but beyond that, the simple truth is that we just don't know that much about Bodhicitta when we first start out.

One thing we can know is that all of the great dharma teachers place Bodhicitta at the tip of the top of what we each need for enlightenment, so we can't just ignore it. The great lama Bokar Rinpoche, in my opinion, said it best:

"Bodhicitta is the electricity of spiritual practice. If it is cut, nothing works anymore. Animated with bodhicitta, all ordinary activity, all works in the world become a path to awakening."

So Bodhicitta is more of a drive or compulsion for enlightenment, not just for ourselves, but, of course, primarily for everyone else as well. We can make a patchwork quilt of ideas as to what Bodhicitta is, but the truth of it is that those ideas don't add up to

experiencing it. In this case, indeed, the whole is greater than the sum of the parts we put together in our head. So how then do we get it?

In my understanding, Bodhicitta is a direct result of the gradual process of detachment and the ensuing rise of compassion. Bodhicitta is a fruition of practice, not something we have in the beginning. And it seems that the arising of Bodhicitta is also a natural result of what is called "Recognition," glimpsing the true nature of the mind, a quite advanced realization.

Rather than frustratingly attempt to generate Bodhicitta or pretend compassion, IMO our time is better spent taking what steps we can toward realizing the true nature of the mind. However, this typically involves finding a teacher to guide us, learning basic Shamata meditation, and then have our teacher instruct us in Vipassana (insight) and finally Mahamudra meditation, which eventually involves the pointing out (until we get it) of the true nature of the mind. After that, Bodhicitta will arise of its own accord. This at least is, to my understanding, the quickest and most effective way to achieve true Bodhicitta.

Bodhicitta is the incandescence to full flame of the spark of compassion that naturally occurs when we realize that not only do we all have Buddha Nature, but all we have to do is remove our obscurations to actualize it. When we realize this, we can't help but be electrified (as Bokar Rinpoche puts it) and driven to share this good news. Indeed, it is the best possible news for all of us.

Bodhicitta, once arisen, gets us up in the morning, stays with us through the day, and makes us not want to waste time sleeping at night -- that idea.

[This graphic is a combination of the seed syllable of the heart chakra (Hung/Hum) along with its color, deep blue. In addition I include a symbol I came up with back in 1972 after a spontaneous Kriya-yoga experience. It has been the symbol for the Heart Center where we live since that time and represents the heart and the flame, the young and the old, the relative and the absolute, etc. in total symbiosis. As I grow older I realize it is an exact symbol for what I understand is Bodhicitta.]



