

Notes and Quotes for December 18, 2022 *Dharma Reflections*:

What's On the Path?

This month we will turn the light of our group discussion toward a foundational element of Mahayana Buddhism: the Way of the Bodhisattva. Surveying and traversing this territory will be our occupation, through most, if not all, of the year ahead. Our intention in taking up this project is to learn about Bodhisattvas, so as to better recognize and develop bodhisattvic qualities in our own lives. We'll call to each other in conversation—to recognize how we're already on this road, and to encourage one another—sharing our own failures and successes in harmonizing our lives with the practices of this profound path. Our intention is to have each of us grow in the direction of being able to confirm, "I am a lot more clear on where I'm headed, and why, and I will never feel alone, or be without something to do, again."

In the first dozen sessions of *Dharma Reflections*, we looked at the essential elements of the Buddha's Dharma shared by all schools of Buddhism: The Four Noble Truths; Dependent Co-arising; Self/no-self (and the other two "marks" of existence, *dukkha* and impermanence); Taking Refuge in The Three Jewels; and The Four Immeasurables (Brahma-Viharas).

Having undertaken those studies, we are now more certain that samsara is not a cool place to hang out unawares. We are more motivated, out of common sense and reflection, to want to be free. Our hearts have been touched, so that we want even more for all beings to be free from the unnecessary sufferings of samsara. We understand that like all beings here, we have (more or less) been living in ignorance. We have more confidence now that there is a wisdom available to us—the wisdom of realizing the way things actually *are*, which is the wisdom of our own mind's nature. Since the cessation of suffering (sometimes called nirvana) is possible, and since we have had a path to such an end to suffering marked out for us, we think it is a no-brainer: having done samsara since forever, we're tired of it, and now that we've heard about it, we've decided that we want to walk the alternative path, our own *unique* path—the one that leads to the liberation of all beings.

Part One: The View

Participants can expect that the moderator of this discussion will hold to be accurate, many, if not most, of the standard (across Asian history) ways of looking at the world lumped together as the common features of the Mahayana Buddhist View, to include—rebirth; "many realms;" a Sangha that is lead by an infinite host of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas; the powerful and indelible

force of causation (“karma”); the dependent co-arising (and hence also the emptiness) of all existents; the primacy of compassion; and the practical efficacy of daily zazen (and practices of devotion, intention, service, vow, repentance, and prayer, as fits the person and time).

However, no *Dharma Reflections* participant is expected to hold all, or even any, of these tenets in their own world view.

For purposes of our deliberations together, though, please do accept these ideas from time to time, in the context of the presentations, as “provisionally true” or as “working hypotheses.” Please experiment from time to time with looking at your world through these lenses—it may make things clearer, or it may not. It’s OK either way. It’s sort of like a visit to the optometrist: “Better at one, or better at two?”

Among the major philosophical presuppositions included in the Mahayana-viewed world we will be positing in our deliberations on the Bodhisattva Path:

- **Conditioned Existence is: Impermanent, Unsatisfactory, Essentially Empty**
- **The Mahayana Description of Samsaric Existence**
 - Beginningless
 - Arises out of Our Shared Fundamental Ignorance as Deluded Beings
 - End-able only through Nirvana (cessation)
 - Samsara and Nirvana are of One Nature
 - Realms of Samsara
 - Desire Realm (with six general categories of birth)
 - Form Realm
 - Formless Realm
- **A Mind-blowingly Vast and Extensive Cosmology**
 - Where there is space or time, you will find sentient beings (“Wherever you go, your Mind goes with you”... —Philip Kapleau Roshi in a teisho in the early 1970’s).
 - “Our” cosmos (the one purported to have started with the last Big Bang) is just one instance in an infinite (beginningless) display of an infinite variety of universes constantly having arisen, arising, and yet to appear. Realms beside/other than/in addition to these physical universes we are familiar with also abound.
 - The number of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas might as well be infinite.
 - The powers and abilities of such awakened and matured beings are inconceivable.
 - Such beings line up to help, in every way possible, other beings who are seeking the Way; they can assume any form whatsoever in their trying to help us in living the Dharma.

- All those Buddhas and Bodhisattvas were once like us, just as we all one day will be Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.
 - The sincere *wish*, felt just once, to fully awaken for the benefit of all beings, makes certain the *accomplishment* (already, right now) of that wish (“The gate to the oneness of cause and effect is thrown open”... Hakuin Zenji).
- **Summary of Why It Makes Sense to Want to: a) Escape Samsara, while b) Helping Others, by c) Traversing the Bodhisattva Path**
 - Pain Hurts
 - The Pain of the Many Beings Outweighs, and Then Is, My Pain
 - There is a Way Out of the Pain for All Beings
 - It is My Personal Responsibility to Find, then Walk, and then Show and Aid Others On, this Path
 - It is My Joy To Do So
 - I don’t have to worry about whether I can do it or not (“Setting out at last on our own and going, is how we develop the strength to go all the way.” —Rafe Martin Roshi, *A Zen Life of Buddha*, p. 35).
- **Sets of Teachings on How to Be A Bodhisattva**
 - *The Three Essentials* of Mahayana Practice: Sila, Samadhi, Prajna
 - *The Two Wings*: Compassion and Prajna/Jnana/Siddhi/Skillful Means
 - *The Indispensable Factor*: the Mind of Bodhicitta
 - *The Preliminaries* – Basic and Motivational
 - Chan (incl. Zen, Son, Thien and Western streams) Perspectives compared and contrasted with Vajrayana/Mantrayana Traditions (each of which have their foundations in The Teachings of the Elders [Theravada Tradition])
 - The “Nalanda Tradition”
 - Shantideva’s *The Way of the Bodhisattva*
 - Nagarjuna and the *Middle Way* philosophical approach
 - Mind Training (or *Lojong*) Practices (emphasizing *Tonglen*, “Giving and Taking”)
 - *Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*
 - The Six (or Ten) Paramitas
 - The Ten Bhumis (stages), Looking at Bodhisattvahood as a Developmental/Evolutionary (example: having the *Jataka Tales* included as part of the *Tripitaka*)

- Sources for Monthly “Notes and Quotes” This Year May Include:
 - *The Avatamsaka (Flower Ornament, or Kegon) Sutra*
 - *The Surangama Sutra*
 - *Complete Enlightenment—Zen Comments on the Sutra of Complete Enlightenment*, Ch’an Master Sheng-yen
 - Shantideva’s *The Way of the Bodhisattva* and commentaries thereon by The Dalai Lama, Ven. Pema Chodron, and others
 - Robert Aitken Roshi’s *The Practice of Perfection—The Paramitas from a Zen Buddhist Perspective*
 - Reb Anderson’s *Entering The Mind of Buddha—Zen and the Six Heroic Practices of Bodhisattvas*
 - Taigen Dan Leighton’s *Faces of Compassion—Classic Bodhisattva Archetypes and Their Modern Expression*
 - *The Library of Wisdom and Compassion* (volumes One through Eight), H. H. The Dalai Lama and Ven. Thubten Chodron
 - *Vast as the Heavens Deep as the Sea—Verses in Praise of Bodhicitta*, Khunu Rinpoche
 - *As It Is, Vol. II*, Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche
 - Longchenpa’s *Finding Rest in the Nature of the Mind (The Trilogy of Rest, Volume I)*
 - *Natural Liberation—Padmasambhava’s Teachings on the Six Bardos*
 - *Buddha Nature—The Mahayana Uttaratantra Shastra with Commentary* by Arya Maitreya/Asanga; and *Maitreya on Buddha Nature—A full Commentary on Asanga’s Mahayana Uttara Tantra*, Ken Holmes
 - *Treasures from Juniper Ridge—The Profound Treasure Instructions of Padmasambhava to the Dakini Yeshe Tsogyal*
 - *Moonbeams of Mahamudra*, Dakpo Tashi Namgyal
 - *Luminous Mind—The Way of the Buddha*, Kalu Rinpoche
 - *Vivid Awareness—The Mind Instructions of Kenpo Gangshar*, Khenchen Thrangu
 - *The Practice of Zen*, Chang Chen-Chi
 - Jigme Lingpa’s *Treasury of Precious Qualities—Vol. One: Sutra Teachings*
 - *The Collected Works of Dilgo Khyentse*
 - *Zen’s Chinese Heritage*, Andy Ferguson
 - *Empty Cloud—The Autobiography of Xu Yun*
 - *The Collected Works of Chinul*
 - Patrul Rinpoche’s *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*
 - *Nagarjuna’s Letter to a Friend*

(Tentatively) to be followed by:

Part Two: The Response to Suffering

Part Three: Intention, Motivation, Vow, and The Mind of Bodhicitta

Part Four: The Path: Its Principles and Practices

Part Five: Crowd-Favorite Bodhisattvas and Buddhas as Spiritual Exemplars

Part Six: Tips, Tricks, and Traps for Bodhisattvas; Living the Life

Possible Discussion Points:

1. What do you think of the theme (“What’s on the Path?”) for ’23?
2. What would you add or de-emphasize? Any additional resources to suggest?
3. What emotional responses are you noticing when you consider yourself to be a bodhisattva on the path?
4. What would make our discussions most practical for you? What are you hoping to get out of surveying the bodhisattva path?
5. What are you most interested in? What rings your bell?
6. What do you think is cool about being a bodhisattva? Can you think of anything better to do with your life energy?
7. What are your current challenges/obstacles/hindrances to leading your ideal spiritual life?