

What Is Bodhicitta?

The text in the 19th and 20th Vows states, "Upon hearing my name, one will bring forth his bodhicitta." In *The Annotations of the Larger Sukhavativyuha with Modern Language*, a great contemporary practitioner, Laity Huang Nian Zu said, "Bodhicitta is a heart combining great compassion, great aspiration, and great wisdom. It can indeed only be brought forth genuinely by bodhisattvas who have seen self-nature with a purified heart." Now, we are mortals and have not yet achieved great compassion, aspiration, and wisdom, we must learn from these bodhisattvas to give rise to a bodhicitta. Despite this bodhicitta being brought forth from our delusional minds, we yearn for it, it will still resonate with the *true heart*.

If we genuinely bring forth this kind of aspiration, as sutras state, "The moment we bring forth an initial aspiration, we have resonated with sambodhi." We are no longer mortals. The problem is that it is very easy for us to regress after having brought forth an aspiration. We cannot keep our initial aspiration.

In the Tang Dynasty, Master Yuan Xiao, a Korean Pure Land patriarch, categorized bodhicitta into two aspects in his *Doctrinal Essentials of The Infinite Life Sutra*, "Bringing forth bodhicitta in accordance with phenomena and in accordance with noumenon."

Bringing forth in accordance with phenomena is to bring forth the Four Universal Vows:

"All beings are countless, I vow to liberate them all.
Defilements are endless, I vow to eradicate them all.
Dharma Methods are measureless, I vow to learn them all.
Buddha bodhi is unsurpassed, I vow to attain it."

The Four Universal Vows is bringing forth the bodhicitta in accordance with phenomena, this bodhicitta is boundlessly vast as well. The most important vow of the Four Universal Vows is the first vow: All beings are countless, I vow to liberate them all. The other three vows—eradicating defilements, learning Dharma methods, and attaining Buddhahood—are telling us how to fulfill this first great vow. So, we do not seek our own comfort but only hope that all beings depart from suffering. We bring forth bodhicitta utterly for all beings.

Seeking Sukhavati Rebirth Is a Supreme Bodhicitta

All beings suffer, they need our help! Especially the beings in the six paths suffer the most, we need to help them transcend The Three Realms of desire, form, and formlessness, and attain Buddhahood. What method is the best? The Pure Land Method. We introduce Amitabha and Sukhāvātī to them, helping them "bring forth bodhicitta upon hearing the name of Amitabha." This bodhicitta is to seek Sukhāvātī rebirth!

Master Ou Yi said in *The Essential Annotations of Amitabha Sutra*, “Having faith and aspiration are bringing forth the bodhicitta.” If we have genuine faith and imperative aspiration to seek Sukhāvātī rebirth, we have brought forth supreme bodhicitta. So, how do we interpret bodhicitta? The simplest way is the teaching from Master Ou Yi—you truly believe and make a vow with imperative aspiration to seek Sukhāvātī rebirth. This is supreme bodhicitta!

Why do we say so? Because vowing to seek Sukhāvātī rebirth is the aspiration of becoming a Buddha, and we will undoubtedly attain Buddhahood without retrogression once attaining rebirth. What is the purpose of attaining Buddhahood? For pervasively liberating all beings. So, being reborn into Sukhāvātī includes all! We can fulfill all Universal Vows, there is no need to engage in the Four Universal Vows additionally when we seek Sukhavati rebirth. Therefore, even if we do not understand what bodhicitta is, when we are truly willing to be reborn into Sukhavati, our bodhicitta has been initiated. Once initiating the bodhicitta, we can attain Sukhavati rebirth with no doubt at all.

The Best Way to Safeguard Ourselves Is to Practice Mahayana

Bringing forth the heart of liberating all beings universally, this is the impetus for a bodhisattva’s cultivation. Why do we cultivate? Not for ourselves. For ourselves is Hinayana. The highest attainment of Hinayana is only arhat. And it is basically very difficult for us to attain it, because the contamination of society is too serious, the power of practicing Hinayana is not enough to guard ourselves against it. Hinayana depends on self-power. Using all kinds of methods to contemplate and cultivate, we will still not be able to eradicate our defilements. We cannot even eradicate the first level’s delusions—the delusions of view and cognition.

Ancients were able to eradicate it, but people nowadays can’t. During the Degenerate-Dharma-Era, we should propagate not only Mahayana Buddhism but also advocate Hinayana Buddhism. Because Hinayana is the foundation of Mahayana practice. Mahayana cannot depart from Hinayana. Without the foundation of Hinayana, we cannot achieve Mahayana either. But we absolutely should not only stay in Hinayana practice, we must bring forth the Mahayana bodhicitta of liberating all beings and use this impetus to facilitate ourselves to eradicate defilements.

The Four Universal Vows first emphasize “initiating bodhicitta” by vowing to liberate all beings then “eradicating defilements.” What method is the best way to eradicate defilements? That will be “delve deeply into one focus and immerse in practice for the long term.” We must practice dhyana, a state of mind of equanimity and awareness. It will be easier to eradicate defilements when we focus on one method. If we study many intermixed things, it will not be easy for us to attain dhyana. When we cannot attain dhyana, we will not be able to control our defilements. Even the big defilements like greed, resentment, and ignorance, we will not be able to control.

We have seen a lot of fellow practitioners who have studied for quite some years, but they have not eradicated greed, resentment, and ignorance. When seeing the conditions they like, they have greedy thoughts and feel happy; while encountering adversities, they give rise to resentment and throw a temper tantrum. They have arrogance, even jealousy. When seeing others who are better than them, they will be insubordinate and cannot let go of it. These are all big defilements which are the karmic causes of hell.

How do we eradicate these defilements? Sadly, we are not capable of eradicating them even if we are aware of these defilements. The reason is because we cannot concentrate enough to have sufficient power of dhyana. So, "delve deeply into one method" is to help us increase our power of dhyana, our mind will then be concentrated. When our dhyana reaches a certain level, those defilements will then subside and naturally not arise. At that time, our wisdom will gradually recover. We will find that "our defilements decrease and wisdom increases." This is about the "Initiating bodhicitta in accordance with phenomena," referring to the Four Universal Vows.

Next is the "Initiating bodhicitta in accordance with noumenon," this noumenon refers to the true fact of the universe and life. In Esoteric Buddhism, "Initiating bodhicitta in accordance with phenomena" is called "the bodhicitta by cultivation and aspiration," and the "Initiating bodhicitta in accordance with noumenon" is called "bodhicitta by ultimate truth."

This "ultimate truth"* (*Skt. [paramârtha, the highest reality](#)) is the truth of the first principle ([*paramârtha-satya](#)), the absolute truth. This ultimate truth, the truth of the first principle, is to let us understand that all the phenomena of the universe are as illusory as dreams. Prajna sutras state, "All dharmas are non-existent, ultimately empty; nothing can be obtained after all." *The Diamond Sutra* also states, "All "conditioned phenomena"* ([*saṃskṛta](#)) are like a dream, an illusion, a bubble, and a shadow. If we can believe, awake through understanding, or even attain enlightenment, then the bodhicitta we have initiated is the bodhicitta in accordance with noumenon. Why? Because we will no longer be deluded.

Why do people get deluded? Because we forget that the phenomena in front of our eyes are illusory. We regard it as real. Once regarding it as real, we then have afflictions. When people criticize me, I give rise to affliction in my heart, and even start to get revenge and bad-mouth them behind their backs. Look! We have created karma because we have forgotten all phenomena are illusory. Therefore it is important to immerse ourselves in sutra teachings, especially the teachings of prajna—direct insight into the truth of emptiness taught by the Buddha and a faculty required to attain enlightenment.

We must pay attention! "Upon hearing my name" is fundamental. After fully understanding the sutra and utterly comprehending the merits of Amitabha, we will definitely attain the following: bringing forth bodhicitta, cultivating all kinds of merits, and practicing the six paramitas respectfully. Why are we sure? Because this is Amitabha's Vow. Amitabha will bless us! He said in His Vow that He will not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi if we do not do so

upon hearing His name. This has made a prominent point of the inconceivable merit of “upon hearing my name.”

No need to worry that you have not yet brought forth bodhicitta, you only need to worry that you have not fully understood sutra teachings and not genuinely heard Amitabha’s name. Once you are truly “hearing the name,” you will surely bring forth bodhicitta. Because Amitabha would not procure Anuttara-Samyak-Sambodhi if you do not bring forth bodhicitta. So, our direction of making efforts is simply listening and learning sutra teachings in depth. What about reciting Amitabha? It is to help us purify our mind. A limpid and pure mind can help us to comprehend the sutra teachings. Comprehending the sutra teachings will help us recite Amitabha with an even purer mind. They complement one another.

Thanks for learning with us. Namo Amitabha!