

## For the Welfare of the Many

by Rodney Smith

“Then the Buddha said to his monks, walk over the earth for the blessing of many, for the happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the welfare and the blessing and the happiness of all.” - from the Vinaya Pitaka

I find this to be one of the most inspiring aspects of Buddhism. The Buddha did not reserve his teaching for the few but for everyone in all times and places. His teaching was not secret, cloistered, or exclusive. The invitation is forever extended to come and see for yourself. Over the course of practice we begin to understand why this proclamation is at the heart of Buddhist understanding. What emerges is an ever-growing aspiration to awaken for the good of the many, for the happiness and welfare of all. Whether we believe this is idealism or sense a deeper truth if we keep this intention our life changes in a positive direction. This intention focuses the journey of our heart's awakening and, over time, changes our view from division to interconnection.

Very early on we see how our effort toward self-kindness and understanding inevitably affects others. People respond differently when we carry that intention. Our focus becomes helping others by helping our self. The more we understand, the kinder we become, and the kinder we become the more others feel safe and open in our presence. We continue to work this equation of changing ourselves and benefiting others until a shift spontaneously occurs in our perspective. We suddenly find ourselves motivated to practice in order to benefit others. No longer are we the primary recipient of the intention. It is the dedication of our lives to the happiness and welfare of all.

This shift is the first stirring of Bodhicitta, a Pali word that means, “awakened heart.” Bodhicitta is the practice of eliminating barriers between our self and the rest of the world. Working on oneself spiritually means removing the obstacles of division and separation. Once those obstructions are released our hearts expand outward to include all things. From this expanded view, working on oneself is transformed into working toward the common good of all beings.

Aversion to pain has kept us contracted and self-protected. Through increased awareness of physical and emotional pain, our hearts are gently nudged toward Bodhicitta. As we become more open to feeling pain, our resistance to life diminishes. Our heart becomes tender because there are fewer barriers separating us from others.

We might begin by resolving each day to practice for the welfare and happiness of all beings. This intention stands in direct opposition to our tendency to contract and self-protect. It will show how we live in almost continuous opposition to the principles of inclusion. Our resolve will be tested again and again as we attempt to have a spiritual life and maintain self-protection. We will see that we cannot have it both ways.

Bodhicitta awakens us through empathy into compassion. Compassion is not merely a passive feeling of sweetness or warmth. It is an active engagement with the suffering of the world. The possibilities of how we engage are limitless. The key to initiating this opening is to set the intention and feed it throughout the day. Let us set this intention now and dedicate our lives to the truth of selflessness. May we quickly attain liberation for the welfare and happiness of the many.