

Winter Retreat 2018: Cultivating the Five Super Powers of Avalokiteshvara  
Dharma Post #6-A: Look of Good Will

Dear Thay,<sup>1</sup> dear brother Jerry, dear friends on the path,

**Sadaparibhuta: Never Disparaging<sup>2</sup>**

One time, many years ago, there was a bodhisattva-monk named Sadaparibhuta (Never Disparaging). This bodhisattva-monk lived during a time after the extinction of the Buddha King of Imposing Sound, when the Buddha King of Imposing Sound's True Dharma had perished, and his Counterfeit Dharma reigned. Now, a counterfeit of the true Dharma is described in the *Saddhammapatirupaka*<sup>3</sup> as having five down-leading qualities, which include living without respect or deference for: the Teacher, the Dharma, the Sangha, the Training, and concentration. These qualities, according to the sutra, lead to the confusion and "disappearance" of the true Dharma, because the four-fold sangha has abandoned the stability of respecting and following the Buddha, the Dharma, the Sangha, the Trainings and the practice of concentration. Thay might say that a counterfeit dharma is one that includes the four ignoble truths (for example, we think suffering is happiness, and happiness is suffering) and the path of eight wrong practices: wrong view, wrong mindfulness, wrong concentration, etc.

During his lifetime the Buddha King of Imposing Sound taught the *Lotus Sutra* to many beings, using expedient means to encourage them along the path to Buddhahood. But after his extinction and in the midst of his Counterfeit Dharma, there were many monastics "of overweening pride and great power." They enjoyed their elite position over the fourfold sangha. Many did not believe in the prophecies of Buddhahood taught in the *Lotus Sutra*. Instead, they thought they had reached the highest levels of practice that were possible and did not believe others could attain Buddhahood either. Then along comes the bodhisattva-monk whom they derisively named "Never Disparaging." Whenever he saw someone of the four-fold sangha, he would bow respectfully and say to them, "I profoundly revere you all! I dare not hold you in contempt. What is the reason? You are all treading the bodhisattva-path, and shall succeed in becoming Buddhas!" Even when he saw the fourfold sangha from afar he would praise them in this way.

This really irritated many of those practicing the counterfeit Dharma. They did not appreciate this monk. Some became angry and, with impure thoughts, would viciously put him down saying things like, "This know-nothing monk! Where does he come from that he can say such things? He says I do not hold you in contempt, and he presumes to prophesy to us that we will succeed in becoming Buddhas! Ha! We have no need for such idle prophecies!" For many years, the bodhisattva-monk was subjected to such abuse—some would even beat him with sticks, pieces of wood, tiles and stones. Still, he persisted without becoming angry himself. When necessary he would run off in the distance, but he still would yell out, "I dare not hold you in contempt. You shall become Buddhas!"

Finally, at the end of his life, he attained the stature of a great bodhisattva—receiving, accepting and fully understanding the teachings of the *Lotus Sutra*, which he began teaching to myriads of beings. At that time, all of those who had made fun of and dismissed him realized and accepted his teachings (something they thought they had never heard before ;) ), and became his followers. Finally, at the point of this bodhisattva-mahasattva<sup>4</sup> becoming a Buddha, we find out that he is none other than the former manifestation of Shakyamuni Buddha himself!

This chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*, and the revelation that Sadaparibhuta was the former manifestation of Shakyamuni Buddha, is significant in my eyes. Throughout the Buddha's historical life he was presented with many opportunities to disparage those who did not act in accord with the Dharma—princes, kings and others who treated the people poorly; started wars; plotted against others; caused their enemies hardship, death and destruction; amassed fortunes; and caused the death of some of his most beloved students. Yet the Buddha continued his practice of changing the hearts and minds of human beings through his mindfulness practice and his great heart of compassion and goodwill. Even when his cousin the Venerable Devadatta left the sangha, taking many inexperienced monks with him and plotting the overthrow of the king of his region, the Buddha persisted in his practice of teaching those who were open to hearing and putting into practice his message about suffering and the ways to put an end to suffering. He did not disparage those who caused suffering, but did seek to change their hearts and minds through his teachings and his example when the opportunity presented itself. When, at the end of his life, Devadatta came to the Buddha to take refuge once again, the Buddha put his hand to Devadatta's forehead in a sign of affection. Such was the depth of the Buddha's practice of goodwill and his faith in the ability of any one to become a Buddha. Then, in the *Lotus Sutra*, the Buddha prophesized Buddhahood for Devadatta—even praising him as a good friend, a seer who taught him the *Lotus Sutra*. Even Devadatta who derided and spoke poorly of the Buddha in his lifetime had the capacity to reach Buddhahood.

### **Good Will and Inclusivity**

The bodhisattva-monk turned bodhisattva-mahasattva Sadaparibhuta never gave up on anyone, and he was persistent in his message that everyone will be a Buddha. His constant practice of never disparaging, of good will, planted wholesome seeds in himself and others and his heart grew to be free of fear. From this fearless, open heart he was able to reach the hearts and minds of myriads of beings, using appropriate means, so that they could come to understand the true, empty nature of reality. Consequently, we learn that the True Dharma once again flourished throughout many worlds.

Just like Sadaparibhuta, we cannot give up on anyone either. On the bodhisattva path we cultivate a look of goodwill toward everyone and everything—even those who put us down, or are most difficult to be with—even ourselves. With a look of goodwill, how can we possibly see ourselves as superior to, inferior to, or even equal

to others? Looking with goodwill, with curiosity, with trust in the inherently Buddha nature of all that is, what can we possibly leave out? Looking with goodwill, we practice letting go of our judgments, our notions, our disparaging, our most deeply held beliefs, and open our arms wide to the endless possibilities of reality manifesting in this very moment—right here and right now.

## **Cultivating Goodwill**

There are probably at least 84,000 ways to practice looking with goodwill—every day (no kidding!)? One set of practices can be found in *The Discourse on the Five Ways of Putting an End to Anger*, offered by the Venerable Shariputra.<sup>5</sup> When I first came to practice in our tradition I didn't think I was ever angry. Hmmmmm. Yep, that's right. Hurt, frustrated, irritated at times maybe, but never angry. In my family of origin, children weren't allowed to be angry, only the parents. Anyway, I found this sutra helpful in how to approach people who, well, actually did make me angry. And at some point I was able to recognize and own that anger in myself. The sutra is lovely and gives examples for each of the five ways, but here are the basics, and we meditate on whichever one is relevant to wisely put an end to our anger:

1. If there is someone whose bodily actions are not kind but their words are kind, we should not pay attention to their unkind actions, but only be attentive to their kind words.
2. If there is someone whose words are not kind but their bodily actions are kind, we should not pay attention to their unkind words, but only be attentive to their kind actions.
3. Then, if there is someone whose bodily actions and words are not kind, but they still have a little kindness in their heart, we should not pay attention to their actions or words, but to the little kindness in their hearts.
4. And if there is someone whose bodily actions and words are not kind, and in their heart there is nothing that can be called kindness, we should give rise to the thought, "Someone whose words and bodily actions are not kind and in their heart is nothing that can be called kindness, is someone who is undergoing great suffering. Unless they meet a good spiritual friend, there is no chance for them to transform and go to realms of happiness." Thinking like this, you will be able to open your heart with love and compassion toward that person. You will put an end to your anger and help that person.
5. Finally, if there is someone whose bodily actions are kind, whose words are kind, and whose mind is also kind, give your attention to all of their kindness of body, speech and mind, and don't allow your anger or jealousy to overwhelm you. If you do not know how to live happily with someone who is as fresh as that, you cannot be called someone who has wisdom.

Another method of cultivating goodwill can be found in Thay's book, **Touching the Earth**. He offers a beautiful earth touching ("Rescuing All Beings") to help us cultivate the energy of Kshitigarbha, a great bodhisattva who made a deep vow: He would not stop the work of rescuing beings from the hell realms until they were empty. Another name for Kshitigarbha is Earth Store Bodhisattva. He exemplifies the qualities of stability, expansiveness, and the capacity to contain and embrace all things. The Earth Touching in part, goes like this:

Just as suffering and afflictions have no limit, the bodhisattva's deep aspiration also has no limit. For as long as there is suffering, there are afflictions that cause suffering. The bodhisattvas do not cease rescuing beings from their suffering. Our own planet Earth needs people like the bodhisattva Kshitigarbha, and I myself want to help this bodhisattva. I see that the hell realms of misunderstanding, hatred and violence exist everywhere. And yet, everywhere I can find bodhisattvas who are striving to dismantle them.

The Buddha taught that the earth is not proud when she is showered with gifts and she doesn't feel anger, hatred or shame when people pour unclean, polluted or bad-smelling substances upon her. "The earth has the capacity to receive, embrace, and transform everything." Bodhisattva Kshitigarbha has the energy of solidity and inclusiveness like the earth, "and therefore the bodhisattva is able to embrace and transform everything." The Earth Touching continues,

We all have painful feelings of shame, sadness, and apathy. I touch the earth so that the earth can embrace me along with my shame, sadness, weariness, and pain. With the help of the earth, I vow gradually to transform this shame, apathy, and pain, so that in time to come the fruits of love and joy may appear on this Earth and in my own heart.

With the support of the earth, we offer good will toward ourselves, toward our practice, toward all that we carry and all we have transformed. And we practice offering good will toward others. Sometimes goodwill is hard to come by, but with practice it becomes easier and more spacious. At times we may even surprise ourselves! As Brother Phap Ho might say, sometimes looking with a mind of goodwill is a practice and sometimes it is a realization.

## **Our Hero**

For me, the basic inclination of good will is lightheartedness and trusting in the truth of Buddha nature. It is an everyday practice with practical applications. It can change our outlook and change our life. As I was creating the outline for this winter retreat, my dharma brothers Jerry Braza and John Malcomson sent me a song performed by Zen teacher Alan Senauke, from Upaya Zen Center, on his album entitled **Everything is Broken**. The song is called "Our Hero" and he writes: "Our Hero was written by Greg Fain and Ben Gustin at Tassajara Zen Mountain Monastery in 2001. It is a wonderful retelling of the classic parable of 'Bodhisattva Never

Despise' from chapter 20 of the Lotus Sutra. Actually I like their version of the story better than the ancient text. Jon Sholle—acoustic guitar; Eric Thompson—mandolin; Kate Brislin—vocal; Suzy Thompson—vocal; Alan Senauke—guitar, bass, vocal."

It is a fun, lively song with a twang that you can carry with you throughout the day, especially the chorus, to encourage a mind, a look of goodwill. I hope you enjoy it! It can be found on YouTube at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_7lup5me5JY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7lup5me5JY)

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<sup>1</sup> "Thay" is the affectionate term Thich Nhat Hanh's student call him. The term means teacher.

<sup>2</sup> This teaching is found in "The Bodhisattva Never Disparaging" chapter of the *Lotus Sutra*.

<sup>3</sup> From the Kassapasamyutta 13, which can be found in **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha A Translation of the *Samyutta Nikaya***.

<sup>4</sup> Mahasattva is defined as a great being, a great bodhisattva who has practiced for a long time and reached a very high level on the path to awakening (bodhi).

<sup>5</sup> Which can be found in **Chanting from the Heart**, Thich Nhat Hanh.