

Manifesting the Bodhi Mind

Page | 1 Good morning, everyone! This is today's Dharma Espresso on manifesting the Bodhi mind.

Several years ago, around 1990, I met a man who used to go to a temple in Los Angeles. After 2 or 3 encounters, he asked me: "Master, I used to go to other temples on Saturdays and Sundays. I brought my wife, and we made offerings, or helped in the kitchen, or other chores. We were very sincere and we tried our best to support the temples, with offerings and hours of volunteer work. Today, as I listened to your lecture, I have a question. At the other temple, the master told me: '*You should try to awaken the Bodhi mind (bodhicitta).*' I think that when I am doing volunteer work weekly at the temples, that means that I have already awakened the Bodhi mind. Why did the master say I haven't? When I asked him, he gave me a book entitled *How to Awaken the Bodhi Mind* and told me to read it. I read it but still do not understand. The master also said that if we want to awaken the Bodhi mind, we have to always remember to request the Buddha's teachings from above and educate the people below. I think that presently, I work during the week to raise my children and do volunteer work for the temples on weekends; doesn't that mean I am already awakening my Bodhi mind? The master said if we do not activate the Bodhi mind, even when we do good deeds, it's just the work of demons (meaning it's Mara's deed or demonic karma, not true Buddha's work). I don't understand why it is so. I am really sincere. I light incense every day at home and do all kinds of good deeds. Whenever and wherever people need help, I'd help them."

I remembered that I asked him whether he was a vegetarian. "No, I am not a vegetarian. I only eat vegetarian food when there is an opportunity." He did not use the expression "vegetarian by chance" (*chay đùng* used by the Vietnamese) because he is Taiwanese. What he meant is that whenever there is a vegetarian meal, he will eat; if not, he will eat meat. I talked to him explaining a lot of things, but he was not quite satisfied with my answers. After a few times talking to him, I lost contact with him.

This is a question that made me ponder a lot: how to explain to you what awakening the Bodhi mind means and what are its signs.

For more than ten years, since I came out of seclusion in 2002, I have said that I would develop the Bodhisattva Path, and I always consider awakening the Bodhi mind the most important task. I use the model of transcending worldliness and engaging with the world to develop both the Bodhisattva Path and the Bodhi mind.

Recently, when I went into seclusion, I translated the chapter on Ten Practices in the Avatamsaka Sutra. While translating and writing explanations, I was studying the structure of

the sutra as well as looking for references on the patriarchs' thoughts on the practice of the Bodhisattva Path. I was very happy to find that the solution to my inquiry lie in the Avatamsaka Sutra.

Page | 2 Awakening the Bodhi mind is to initiate and nourish the resolve to elevate oneself spiritually and to open one's compassionate heart more and more every day. It is to cultivate the mental ability and knowledge to understand people and be able to improve our life and others' lives. It is to always improve oneself. That's why I often say that to cultivate is to constantly evolve.

But the most important manifestation of activating the Bodhi mind is that we should have a mission. We cannot live without a mission. Without a mission, we live selfishly, always for ourselves. Sometimes our mind is so calculating, so over analyzing, meaning I should do this, not do that, etc. Calculating people won't get any help from heaven; sometimes they won't have luck because of over calculating. When we always try to protect ourself or think of our own interest, always calculating and manipulating, we can never let go to open up our heart. Calculating people are not usually mission-sensitive people. Mission-sensitive is a feeling that we live with a noble objective.

This noble objective inspires us to always improve our past unwholesome deeds. It makes us reflect right away when we begin to act improperly. When we begin to gossip or slander, we immediately reflect upon ourselves and feel ashamed. We are not perfect and also make mistakes and errors, so why do we badmouth others? If we begin to do something harmful to people, right away we will ask ourselves, "Why do we want to harm people? Are we happy when they are harmed?" When we overindulge ourselves, we will feel ashamed since we know there are a lot of people living in harsh conditions. Thus, we should live less wastefully.

With this awareness of living with a mission, we do not want to live a selfish life. We feel the urge to do something to bring smiles and happiness to others.

So having a mission is really wonderful. It gives our life a direction, and every day when we wake up, our *ikigai* (reason for being) is really clear. We wake up to do something, not to drink, play, party, or satisfy our own desires. We wake up with the sense that our life is meaningful. Our actions are to bring happiness to others, not to satisfy our adventurous spirit or narrow-minded selfish thoughts. We think that we live because we have a true mission in life.

This is the first manifestation of awakening the Bodhi mind, but underneath there are many more mysterious concepts which I will tell you tomorrow.

Awakening the Bodhi mind is expanding in three directions: spiritual growth vertically, expansion of goodness horizontally, and expansion of knowledge and skillful means spirally. We have a model showing how to develop this Bodhi mind.

Page | 3 I hope that in the last week of April, when I resume the Bodhisattva Path program, you will come to learn, and I will review the methodology of the Bodhi mind. How to cultivate to develop our Bodhi mind so we don't go awry, and at the same time, we will cultivate the Six Hands of Kwan Yin step by step.

If you wonder what you can bring with you when you die, the only thing you can truly bring with you is your karma. We have to bring along the karma that we have generated. However, if we don't want to bring our karma with us, we should create merits, and samadhi (deep meditative state). These cannot be lost and they will follow us to the other world.

Thus, we can now choose our path. Either we create merits, blessings, deep concentration, and samadhi, or continue to create karma.

Thank you for listening. I wish you a peaceful day.

Dharma Master Heng Chang

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