



# THE LOTUS BUD

Magazine of Mindful Living ~ Issue No 61, June 2014

## Dear Sangha,

In this edition of *The Lotus Bud* we explore the concept of the Bodhisattva. In a Mahayana Buddhism the ideal of practice is to become a Bodhisattva who strives to liberate all beings from the cycle of birth and death. The Bodhisattva Vows are vows taken formally by a Buddhist to do exactly that. The vows also are an expression of bodhichitta, the desire to realize enlightenment for the sake of others. 🙏



Image by Roberto Tofani

## The four Bodhisattvas

You may believe that the four Bodhisattvas are outside of us. If you practice steadily, you will see that you are also that Bodhisattva because you also have all of those qualities. Historians may not believe that there was ever a 'real' Avalokitesvara or Manjushri; they are not historical personalities. We cannot say that they were born in such and such a year and died in such and such a year.

But you must know that the name, Avalokitesvara is a symbol of deep listening and compassion. Compassion and deep listening truly exist everywhere, but where is everywhere? You must see that deep listening and compassion exist in at least one person. When you see such a person you know that that person is not the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara although they are manifesting the qualities of that

Bodhisattva, and so you will feel that you will be able to do it also. I also have compassion and deep listening. Maybe my compassion and deep listening are not as strong as the other person's is, but I will train myself to increase this ability to love. Therefore, it is not important whether Avalokitesvara is an historical personage... if the qualities of love, compassion and deep listening exist so then must Avalokitesvara. 🙏

The Bodhisattva Manjushri (Great Understanding) is another manifestation of the qualities of the Buddha. When you pay your respects to the qualities of wisdom and great understanding in the Buddha, you are paying respect to Manjushri also and vice versa. At the same time, you are also paying homage to those qualities in yourself. So although there are many disagreements between the Theravada and Mahayana traditions

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over whether these Bodhisattvas exist or not, we know that this is not so important. The important thing is that the qualities of great understanding and wisdom exist around us and within us. To a practitioner, it is not even important whether the Buddha was a historical person or not. More importantly, he embodies compassion, great understanding, wisdom and love so he must be a very great personality. Without such a great personality how could he have built understanding wherever he goes? 🙏

The Bodhisattva Samantabhadra is the Bodhisattva of great action. Universal goodness, and goodness of action. Samantabhadra works hard and has the will to help.

Ksitigarbha (Earth Store Bodhisattva) who vowed to save all living beings in hell embodies truly great qualities of the Buddha. Ksitigarbha vowed that he would never abandon you. If you are caught in the condition of hell, even, he has vowed not to abandon you. Wherever there are people suffering the most, there also is Ksitigarbha... he is in jail; she is being tortured so I will not abandon them. In this very world there are hells where people undergo the utmost suffering. We decide never to abandon them, rather we try our best to approach and to support them. Ksitigarbha is these qualities of not abandoning. He never abandons anyone even if that person is horribly difficult.

The key point is for us to be in touch with these four Bodhisattvas within ourselves by using the energy of mindfulness.

By reflecting on the qualities of these four Bodhisattvas we will see that mindfulness has four aspects.

The first aspect is compassion and loving-kindness. If Shakyamuni Buddha has no love then he is no longer a Buddha. In order to be a Buddha, a person must have a lot of love. S/he can love the lovable but also the unlovable.

The second aspect of mindfulness is great understanding. Without great understanding (maha Prajna) Gautama Buddha is no longer our Teacher. A Buddha must have great understanding and wisdom.

The third and fourth aspects are action and vows. When you are able to see clearly, you can only love. You cannot abandon the person that you love. They may be horrible, difficult people but you cannot abandon them because they are in hell and they need us. 🙏

When you love, you have to act. If you say that you have a lot of love but you don't do anything then that is not love that is merely lip service. The great vow of Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva is, "until the hells are empty I will not become a Buddha. I will remain until every sentient being is liberated.

To vow to go to the darkest places to help beings is perhaps the greatest of vows because sometimes these places are horrible. You will not abandon those who suffer. The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara illustrates the first aspect, love. Manjushri Bodhisattva represents great understanding. Samantabhadra is Great Action and Ksitigarbha Bodhisattva the Great Vow. In Mahayana temples usually the ears represent Avalokitesvara, Manjushri by the eyes and Samantabhadra by the hand.

For these reasons, we are able to say that these Bodhisattvas existed in the past, exist now and will exist also in the future. They don't need to be historical fact. Rather they are a reality, that ability to love, to understand, and act, save people and vow not to abandon those who suffer. These qualities exist in us we cannot deny it. They are truly in you, in those around you... in your teacher in the teacher of your teacher... so you may say that, " I don't care whether Avalokitesvara is a historical person... the truth is that the qualities of love, understanding and deep listening are within me and also you and that is more than enough. 🙏

*Thich Nhat Hanh [Online source](#)*

#### **Vows of the Bodhisattvas:**

*Creations are numberless, I vow to free them  
Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to transform them*

*Reality is boundless, I vow to perceive it  
The awakened way is unsurpassable, I vow to embody it.*

## The Bodhisattva

The bodhisattva—the renowned ideal of Mahayana Buddhism—is not a god or deity but a way of being we can all aspire to. As Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche explains, those who take the bodhisattva vow make one simple commitment: to put others first, holding nothing back for themselves.

The bodhisattva vow is the commitment to put others before oneself. It is a statement of willingness to give up one's own well-being, even one's own enlightenment, for the sake of others. And a bodhisattva is simply a person who lives in the spirit of that vow, perfecting the qualities known as the six paramitas [perfections]—generosity, discipline, patience, exertion, meditation, and transcendental knowledge—in his effort to liberate beings. 🙏

Taking the bodhisattva vow implies that instead of holding our own individual territory and defending it tooth and nail, we become open to the world that we are living in. It means we are willing to take on greater responsibility, immense responsibility. In fact it means taking a big chance. But taking such a chance is not false heroism or personal eccentricity. It is a chance that has been taken in the past by millions of bodhisattvas, enlightened ones, and great teachers.

So a tradition of responsibility and openness has been handed down from generation to generation, and now we too are participating in the sanity and dignity of this tradition.

There is an unbroken lineage of bodhisattvas, springing from the great bodhisattvas Avalokiteshvara, Vajrapani, and Manjushri. It is unbroken because no one in that lineage, through generations and centuries, has indulged himself in self-preservation. Instead these bodhisattvas have constantly tried to work for the benefit of all sentient beings. This heritage of friendship has continued unbroken up to the present day, not as a myth but as a living inspiration. 🙏

The sanity of this tradition is very powerful. What we are doing in taking the bodhisattva vow is magnificent and glorious. It is such a wholehearted and full tradition that those who have not joined it might feel somewhat wretched in comparison. They might be envious of such richness. But joining this tradition also makes tremendous demands on us. We no longer are intent on creating comfort for ourselves; we work with others. This implies working with *our* other as well as the *other* other. *Our* other is our projections and our sense of privacy and longing to make things comfortable for ourselves. The *other* other is the phenomenal world outside, which is filled with

screaming kids, dirty dishes, confused spiritual practitioners, and assorted sentient beings.

So taking the bodhisattva vow is a real commitment based on the realization of the suffering and confusion of oneself and others. The only way to break the chain reaction of confusion and pain and to work our way outward into the awakened state of mind is to take responsibility ourselves. If we do not deal with this situation of confusion, if we do not do something about it ourselves, nothing will ever happen. We cannot count on others to do it for us. It is our responsibility, and we have the tremendous power to change the course of the world's karma. So in taking the bodhisattva vow, we are acknowledging that we are not going to be instigators of further chaos and misery in the world, but we are going to be liberators, bodhisattvas, inspired to work on ourselves as well as with other people. 🙏

[Online source](#)



Image by ww ningty

## WHO WE ARE

The Communities of Mindful Living are inspired by the Buddhist teachings of Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh (pictured).



We aspire to live fully in each moment for the peace and happiness of ourselves and all beings. We meet regularly to observe the art of mindful living and to foster a supportive community of practitioners. 

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[www.lotusbudsangha.org](http://www.lotusbudsangha.org)

Online sources for articles in this issue

<http://www.buddhist-canon.com/PUBLIC/PUBNOR/NHATHANH/1998%20Jan%20>

[http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=3001](http://www.shambhalasun.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3001)

We would love to hear from you.

We want the The Lotus Bud to be a place for sharing our experiences and building the Sangha; so why not write a short piece about your experiences with mindfulness ?

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## Reading bell

As you read this magazine you have an opportunity to go back to the present moment.

You will notice a bell:  throughout the magazine.

When you come to each bell, you may like to stop reading, clear your mind and return to your breath before continuing.

## Our activities

Wednesday Mindfulness  
Meditation  
Sydney, Inner West

We welcome all to come join us for meditation practice. We meet at 7:30 pm each Wednesday at the Buddhist Library, Church St, Camperdown, Sydney.

Meditation and monthly  
Mindfulness Days at  
Canley Heights

Southwest Sydney - 7.30pm  
Friday Night Meditation and  
Monthly Mindfulness Days.  
49 Ferngrove Rd Canley  
Heights.

Mindfulness Days at Nhap Luu  
(Entering the Stream)  
Meditation Centre  
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