

Cultivating the Noble Heart in 2020:

Buddhist Meditation Techniques & Insights for Compassion, Kindness and Positive Aspiration

Key qualities of a “noble heart – what are they?

Motivating our lives from the deepest levels of positive aspiration and intention

Motivation/intention/aspiration are regarded as a tangible type of action in Buddhism which influences what happens on many levels. We usually are on automatic pilot about awareness of our motivation, intention or aspiration. Become aware of motivation/intention/aspiration. Connect more deeply to your heart and mind, and decide on a beneficial intention. Ask what matters most. Then consciously make it bigger, brighter, and closer to the way you truly want to be as a human being in the community of life.

“May I....”

“Connection to one’s really strong intention is a kind of love.” (Sharon Salzberg)

Bodhicitta – Bodhisattva Vow

In Buddhist thought, the noblest aspiration of heart and mind is to awaken completely (become truly happy and free from suffering) in order to be of utmost benefit to all other beings. This is called the heart-mind of bodhicitta. Bodhi (Sanskrit) means our ‘enlightened essence’ and citta means ‘heart’ or ‘mind.’ It is sometimes translated as ‘the heart of enlightened mind’ or ‘mind of awakening.’ One who is motivated by bodhicitta, and who makes this altruistic motivation the basis for their meditation practice and life, is called a Bodhisattva or is said to be following the Bodhisattva path. In the Mahayana and Vajrayana Buddhist traditions, there are many prayers, practices and formal ceremonies for developing bodhicitta. There is also a tradition of formally committing to live with a Bodhisattva Vow.

Pema Chödrön - on Bodhicitta

<https://www.lionsroar.com/bodhicitta-the-excellence-of-awakened-heart/>

Bodhisattva Vow – what does it mean in practice?

<https://www.lionsroar.com/awakening-the-bodhisattva/>

From a Buddhist point of view, absolute bodhicitta is the realization of the ultimate nature of all phenomena, leading to unlimited wisdom and compassion. It is naturally related to relative bodhicitta, which includes the compassionate wish to awaken completely for the benefit of all beings, as well as the actions of mind, speech, and body that make that possible. Relative bodhicitta consists of aspiration bodhicitta - meditating upon and cultivating the four immeasurable qualities of love, compassion, joy and equanimity - and application bodhicitta, performing actions that bring benefit to others, such as generosity, patience, ethical behavior, kind speech, etc.

Applying bodhicitta practices to cultivating a noble heart in 2020

We can cultivate a noble heart right here and now through 1) connecting with and prioritizing our unique heartfelt aspirations; 2) meditative techniques that expand loving kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity; and 3) external actions that are non-harming and of benefit to self and others.

What can change and what cannot: Buddhist understanding of suffering and freedom from suffering

The relationship between suffering and practices of love and compassion that support a noble heart

In my experience it is necessary to find a balance in meditative practice between honestly being with the truth and pain of the way things are (as we experience them) and cultivating the capacity to be present to suffering in a way that is workable, beneficial and sustainable over time.

Practices – compassion and loving kindness practices always include elements of concentration and mindfulness

- *Aspiration*
- *Bathing oneself in compassion – benefactors or embodiments of unconditional well-wishing*
- *Having compassion for what is too much to bear – something to hold our suffering*
- *Self-compassion exercises/meditations*
 - *Soften-soothe-allow*
 - *I hear you*
- *Recognizing we are not alone in experiencing pain and expanding to include others*
 - *Common humanity – aspiration to relieve others of similar pain*
 - *Breathing in suffering – breathing out comfort/relief (tonglen)*
- *Traditional forms of using phrases or a prayer as a form of generating loving kindness (metta) or compassion*
- *Connecting to the energy and inspiration of transpersonal/spiritual symbols of compassion*
 - *Hearing the cries of the world – Kwan Yin*
 - *Mantras: Om Mani Padme Hung (Avalokiteshvara); Om Tare Tutarre Ture Soha (Tara)*

Meditation resources - some recommended books/websites/guided meditations

John Makransky: *Awakening Through Love*; <https://foundationforactivecompassion.org/media/tag/guided-meditations/>

Pema Chodron: *Welcoming the Unwelcome*; <https://pemachodronfoundation.org/>

Teachings on compassion and pain: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gzMOY1AI_M

Tara Brach: *Radical Compassion*; RAIN (recognize, allow, investigate, nurture):

<https://www.tarabrach.com/selfcompassion1/>; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wm1t5FyK5Ek>

Christopher Germer and Kristin Neff: *The Mindful Self-Compassion Workbook*

<https://centerformsc.org/practice-msc/guided-meditations-and-exercises/>

<https://chrisgermer.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/SoftenSootheAllow.mp3>

Mindful self-compassion 3 elements: self-kindness vs. self-judgement; mindfulness vs. over-identification; common humanity vs. isolation;

Loving kindness (metta) - guided meditation

https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mpeg/05_Loving_Kindness_Meditation.mp3 (9 min)

https://dharmafeed.org/talks/audio_player/637/56772.html (18 min.)

Choiceless awareness with warmth – guided meditation

https://dharmafeed.org/talks/audio_player/637/57240.html (14 min.)

<https://dharmafeed.org/talks/>: search by words like “metta” or “suffering” or “compassion” through hundreds of talks and guided meditations from Insight Meditation teachers and retreat centers in the US.

Four Immeasurables Prayer of Bodhicitta (Brahmaviharas)

May all beings have happiness, and the causes of happiness; (loving kindness)

May all be free from sorrow, and the causes of sorrow; (compassion)

May all never be separated from the sacred happiness which is sorrowless; (sympathetic joy)

And may all live in boundless equanimity, without attachment and without aversion (equanimity).

Bodhicitta Prayer

May the precious supreme Bodhicitta

Be awakened in those in whom it has not arisen

And for those in whom it has been awakened,

May it not decline, but ever increase.

Traditional metta phrases

(Design your own heartfelt ones)

May I (you, we, all beings) be happy.

May I (you, we, all beings) be at peace.

May I (you, we, all beings) live with ease.

May I (you, we, all beings) be free from suffering.