

# Compassion in mahayana buddhism



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In the Mahayana Buddhism perspective compassion is an essential virtue. In a pursuit to minimize suffering and obtain inner peace, having compassion for nature, and the every other living being is a course to enlightenment due to the belief that all things are connected.

Because of an unselfish perspective the belief of Mahayana Buddhism ensures that all reach enlightenment. Buddhism is one of the world's religions. It is based on the teachings and experience of Siddhartha Gautama who became known as the Buddha or the Awakened One. Siddhartha is the son of King Suddhodana, the leader of the Shakya tribe, his mother died shortly after his birth. Siddhartha's father had hopes that his son would follow in his footsteps.

Siddhartha lived in great luxury and was kept from the knowledge of religion and human suffering. He married at a young age and trained to become a warrior. At the age of 29 Siddhartha disobeyed his father and left the royal grounds to visit a nearby town. It was here that he learned of the suffering of ordinary life.

He was shocked by what are now called the Four Passing Sites. He saw an old man and was shaken by the signs of old age. He saw a sick man who was exhausted by the burden of his illness. He also saw a corpse being taken for cremation.

Lastly, he saw a holy man who though, without possessions, seemed to be at peace. Siddhartha returned to the palace but came to realize that his life had been nothing more than a pleasant prison. One night he left this life to begin his quest for enlightenment. He rode to the edge of the palace grounds

where he cut his hair, changed into plain clothes and left his horse with a servant. Siddhartha spent many years seeking answers to his questions by traveling from teacher to teacher.

He learned that the teachers didn't all agree on the answers to his questions so with the company of five followers he set out to find the answers he needed. He lived on very little food, drink and sleep with the hopes that he would find insight. After collapsing from weakness Siddhartha decided to assume a path of moderation, seeking common ground between self-indulgence and severe simplicity. After an entire night of meditation in which it is said that he entered an increasingly profound state of awareness, in which he saw his past lives and made sense of the laws of karma. He said that he was a person who had now woken up.

His new name, the Buddha, the awakened one is taken from a word meaning "to wake up". Buddha spent the rest of his life teaching his way of life. He did not teach of what he learned after reaching enlightenment, instead he taught how to realize enlightenment themselves. (Malloy, 2008, 2005, 2002, 1999) Buddhism is based on what is generally referred to as the Three Jewels, Sanskrit, also the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. The Buddha is the thought of as the ideal human and all others should work to be like him. The Dharma is the meaning of all the Buddha's teachings about how to view the world and live.

The Sangha is the community of Monks and Nuns. Buddhism has since divided into three branches, Theravada, Mahayana and Vijrayana. Because of the topic of this paper, I will only be discussing the Mahayana perspective.

Mahayana Buddhism has a large scope which can accommodate a large group of people, from the most devoted monk who is fairly detached from family life to the non-monk, women and the married.

Not all practices of early Buddhism worked to fulfill the needs of the layperson. In Mahayana the human body and the material realm are viewed positively. Mahayana grew as the senses and emotions were increasingly viewed as means of spiritual transformation. By welcoming the everyday person to religion there was an increase in the number of people who lived a life seeking self awareness and enlightenment. (Malloy, 2008, 2005, 2002, 1999) In Mahayana, wisdom remained an important goal, but the combination of wisdom and compassion was central to its teachings. Compassion is important in all branches of Buddhism, but is particularly emphasized in Mahayana.

Karuna is the term for compassion which became an essential virtue of Mahayana. Karuna which may also be translated to empathy, sympathy or kindness is different from the Western idea of kindness in which one person out of generosity gives to another individual. Karuna implies that we all are a part of the same universe. The individual is not really different from anyone or anything. “ To be kind to others is to be kind to oneself. ” With the opinion that all things are related compassion comes naturally.

It is common practice to mentally project a wish to the world each day that all creatures be well and happy, this is also known as the prayer of Buddhist compassion. (Malloy, 2008, 2005, 2002, 1999) Generosity is a key part to Mahayana Buddhism. The belief that merit can be transferred to another

person creates accountability and the desire to live your best life for the good of all. This creates a release from the thought that all people are for themselves and a release from personal suffering. Instead it creates a goal of salvation for all humanity.

In Mahayana Buddhism the bodhisattva or enlightened being is a person of deep compassion. Because a bodhisattva embodies such compassion it is said that they will refuse to fully enter nirvana in order to help others on their path to enlightenment. These people may take vow to be reborn until all are enlightened. This could be considered an ultimate sacrifice, a very exact example of compassion. A person would set aside their own well being in an attempt to afford all people the same opportunity. To believe that there is a chance of bringing others to enlightenment is a gesture without selfishness.

(Malloy, 2008, 2005, 2002, 1999) With compassion for nature and all living things Mahayana Buddhism is the belief that all things can reach enlightenment. It is the goal of those with this belief to generously sacrifice themselves for the good of all. Compassion is an essential virtue for everyone, without discrimination.