

With a Heart of Great Compassion, Constantly Accord with Living Beings

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Those of us who are cultivating the Buddhadharma and want to learn how Bodhisattvas like Kuan Shih Yin, Universal Worthy, Earth Store, and Manjushri practice Great Compassion, can investigate Chapter 40 of the *FLOWER ADORNMENT SUTRA*, the chapter on Universal Worthy's Conduct and Vows. In particular, the ninth vow, that of "Constantly According with Living Beings," elucidates how a Bodhisattva complies with the various classes of living beings at all times.

First, Universal Worthy lists the many kinds of living beings which exist throughout the Dharma Realm: those born from womb, egg born, moisture born, transformation born, as well as those who rely on the elements of earth, water, fire, and air for their dwelling. Of all those beings who abide in the form and formless realms, limitless species and genres of them, Universal Worthy says,

I will accord with and take care of all these many kinds of beings, providing all manner or services and offerings for them. I will treat them with the same respect I show my own parents, teachers, leaders, arhats, and even the Thus Come Ones. I will serve them all equally without difference.

Showing living beings respect as one would one's own parents is to be harmonious with them at all time and not to contend or become afflicted with them. And the Bodhisattva does this equally without discrimination. That is to say, he doesn't discriminate between living beings, saying, for example, "you're my friend, so I'll treat you extra special," or "you're my family--my own kin--so I'll pay special attention to you." The Bodhisattva doesn't play favorites; he regards all beings equally.

The text goes on to say,

I will be a good doctor for the sick and suffering. I will lead those who have lost their way to the right road. I will be a bright light for those in the dark night, and cause the poor and destitute to uncover hidden treasures. The Bodhisattva impartially benefits all living beings in this manner.

There are 84,000 kinds of living beings, and the Bodhisattva has perfected his skill in curing their 84,000 illnesses.

Kuan Yin Bodhisattva perfected the Dharma-door of Returning the Hearing to hear the self-nature; she can observe the sounds of the world--all the sounds of suffering. With her great compassionate heart she can rescue and pull living beings out of their anguish. Because Kuan Yin perfected the 42 Hands and Eyes, she attained the thousand hands and eyes enabling her to

"Lead those who have lost their way to the right road" and allowing her to act as a "bright light for those in the dark night," causing "the poor and destitute to uncover hidden treasures." So when we recite Kuan Yin's name with sincerity, we establish affinities with her and when the time comes when we need aid, she's there to help us.

The text continues,

Why is this? If a Bodhisattva accords with living beings, then he accords with and makes openings to all Buddhas. If he can honor and serve living beings, then he honors and serves the Thus Come Ones. If he makes living beings happy, he is making all Thus Come Ones happy. Why is this? Because all Buddhas, Thus Come Ones, take the mind of Great Compassion as their substance. Because of living beings, they bring forth Great Compassion. From Great Compassion the Bodhi-mind is born; and because of the resolve for Bodhi, they accomplish Equal and Proper Enlightenment.

This passage says that by according with living beings, the Bodhisattva makes offerings to all Buddhas. Why is this? Because the mind, Buddhas, and living beings are not different. By honoring and serving living beings, the Bodhisattva honors and serves the Thus Come Ones, and makes them all happy. The Buddhas are happy because the Bodhisattva isn't going around harassing other people or vexing them. At all times, in all places, the Bodhisattva is in harmony with living beings, and so the Thus Come Ones are pleased. Buddhas and living beings are the same in substance. Buddhas are living beings who have become Buddhas, and living beings have the potential to become Buddhas, but haven't done so yet. The mind of Great Compassion is the substance of all Buddhas. The Venerable Abbot has said that "compassion arises on its own as you understand more. As you grow up, it flows from your self-nature, because you are able to really see." A person can't be a Buddha if he's filled with greed, hatred, and stupidity. Only when the three karmas of the body, mouth, and mind have been purified and one no longer has outflows, can one really attain the Great Compassionate heart, because Great Compassion comes from the purification of the self-nature. When one is pure defilements are all gone, so how can a person NOT be compassionate at that point?! "From Great Compassion the Bodhi-mind is born." At this time, the mind of enlightenment arises. "And because of this resolve for Bodhi, they accomplish Equal and Proper Enlightenment."

What is this like? The text goes on to say,

It is like a great king of trees growing in the rocks and sand of a barren wilderness. When the roots get water, the branches, leaves, flowers, and fruits will all flourish. The Bodhi Tree King growing in the wilderness of birth and death is the same. All living beings are its roots; all Buddhas and Bodhisattva are its flowers and fruits. By benefitting all beings with the water of Great Compassion, one can realize the flowers and fruits of the Buddhas' and Bodhisattvas' wisdom.

This process is likened to the time when a tree is watered. Its branches and leaves will flourish and the flowers and fruits will be fragrant and sweet.

We are included in the living beings spoken of here who are caught in the wilderness of birth and death. The Bodhi Tree King is Shakyamuni Buddha who obtained the Way beneath this tree. He

is like the king of trees described in this passage. "All living beings are its roots." What is the relationship that living beings have with the Buddhas? Living beings are like the roots of the trees and "all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are its flowers and fruits." They are like the flowers and fruits that ripen on the tree. So when one "benefits all beings with the water of Great Compassion, then one can realize the flowers and fruits of the Buddhas' and Bodhisattvas' wisdom." When one practices the Bodhisattva Path one benefits oneself by benefitting others; one takes others across and takes oneself across. So the flowers and fruits of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas can be perfected due to the wisdom-water of compassion.

The text goes on,

Why is this? If all Bodhisattvas benefit living beings with the water of Great Compassion, they can attain Anuttarasamyaksambodhi. Therefore, Bodhi belongs to living beings. Without living beings no Bodhisattva could perfect the Unsurpassed, Proper Enlightenment.

If we can cultivate the Four Unlimited Minds of kindness, compassion, joy and renunciation, then we can gather in and liberate living beings by bestowing upon them the sweet dew of compassion. Here at the City of Ten Thousand Buddhas when we recite the Great Compassion Mantra on Saturday afternoons, we too, are benefitting living beings with the water of great compassion. In imperceptible ways, the power of this mantra, which is also recited by the Great Bodhisattvas, is able to dispel calamities throughout the world.

Kuan Yin constantly dispenses sweet dew from her vase and so those of us who can recite her name along with the Great Compassion Mantra, can greatly benefit from these practices, while at the same time benefit others.

With a mind of compassion, then it's for sure one will "attain anuttarasamyaksambodhi." In order to "perfect the Unsurpassed, Proper Enlightenment spoken of here, one must benefit living beings by going to their aid and teaching and transforming them. This is an important point because "Bodhi belongs to living beings," and without them--if their weren't any living beings,--"no Bodhisattva could perfect the Unsurpassed, Proper Enlightenment."

Living beings provide a place in which Bodhisattvas can create merit and virtue. Living beings create merit and virtue before the Triple Jewel, and Bodhisattvas create merit and virtue before living beings. This is to be mutually harmonious and unobstructive of one another; thus in this way, they can bring benefit to one another.

So the passage concludes,

Good man, you should understand these principles in this way: When the mind is impartial towards all living beings, one can accomplish full and perfect Great Compassion. By using the heart of Great Compassion to accord with living beings, one perfects the making of offerings to the Thus Come Ones. In this way, the Bodhisattva constantly accords with living beings.

Even when the realm of empty space is exhausted, the realm of living beings is exhausted, and the afflictions of living beings are exhausted, I will still accord endlessly, continuously

in thought after thought without cease. My body, mouth, and mind never weary of these deeds.

Bodhisattvas can cause living beings to leave suffering and attain bliss, to turn away from confusion and go towards enlightenment, and to end birth and death. In this way, one is according with living beings and is thus able to fulfill this ninth vow of Universal Worthy.