

Five Aspirations

A Buddhist Guide to Spiritual Practice

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Introduction

May my action turn the Wheel of the Dharma,
May my action be grounded in fearlessness,
May the earth be witness to my action,
May my action benefit all beings,
May my action be centered in the heart.

Reciting these five aspirations while performing the accompanying mudras requires approximately fifteen seconds. These fifteen seconds could be called a "guide to practice." They can enrich any endeavor -- spiritual or secular. They focus on five actions: turning the Wheel of the Dharma, the achieving of fearlessness, the earth bearing witness, the benefiting of all beings, and a centering in the heart. The word aspiration implies breathing. In this case, we breathe in the aspiration and it becomes a part of us. We breathe out and the aspiration becomes a gift to others. Aspiration also implies desire and, as Buddhists, we are taught that desire is linked to suffering. However, I think of the aspirations as "light desires," ones that come from learning to desire without desiring.

These five aspirations start with the Dharmachakra mudra of turning the wheel of the Dharma. The second aspiration, "may this action be grounded in fearlessness," is linked to the Abhaya mudra. The Bhumisparsha mudra, the third, is associated with the aspiration, "may the earth bear witness to this action." The third aspiration, "may this action benefit all beings," is associated with the Varada mudra of giving. And finally, "may this action be centered in the heart" is recited with the Dhayana mudra. These aspirations, all rich in meaning, are associated with five major events in the historic Buddha's life: his birth, the overcoming of Mara and the forces of evil, the accomplishment of the Way, the first teaching of the Dharma in the Deer Park at Sarnath, and finally, his death or Parinirvana.

This schema, or organization, is adaptable to many situations. For example, for the blessing of a meal we might say, "may this meal help us in turning the Wheel of the Dharma, may this meal nurture us so that we may face the future with fearlessness, may the earth bear witness to this meal, may this meal, through us, benefit all beings, and may this meal help us to be centered in the heart." It's wonderful to go through the day and apply these aspirations to different situations. Sometimes after an especially vexing day, as I am preparing to sleep at night, I may say, "may my dreams turn the Wheel...etc."

As children in elementary school, we usually learned first by seeing something on a blackboard. Then we heard it and recited it. Next we wrote it down. And when we had done all that, the information had become more certainly ours. Similarly, I've found that doing the mudras has become an important part of my total learning. It's rather like the physical action of writing something down. It helps me to internalize the teaching completely.

Now I generally am a shy person, one who would not make a public display, especially when it comes to actions I think others might find odd. Generally I'm very conservative in public, even around people I know. So the last thing I would do, when I go out to eat, is to sit down and perform these mudras before the meal. However, in my quiet, private moments this practice has been of great benefit to me. I've always thought that Jesus' advice to go into one's room and shut the door to pray was not taken seriously enough.

The aspirations may also be used as an outline for action in difficult situations. Sometimes when I visit the sick in a hospital, I am at a bit of a loss. What do I do? What do I say? It's good to have an idea in mind. This doesn't mean I have to stick to an inflexible plan, forcing it on someone else in a mechanical fashion. I might begin by asking the patient if he or she can see any possibility how the illness might be used to learn more about cause and effect. This is turning the Wheel of the Dharma in a very deep sense. The next step might be to discuss ways that one might overcome fear. The third step might be to say something related to the idea of the earth bearing witness. This is the ecological part of Buddhism, the acknowledgment of the interconnectedness of everything. It is an opportunity to help people understand they are not alone in their illness. The next step in my visit might be to help the person search for any possible good that might come out of the illness. And, as we all know, good can emerge from difficult situations. Sometimes it takes a heart attack to get one's life headed in a more positive direction. And the final step is the focus on the heart. Taking the ideas that these steps represent, I can walk into a hospital room with something in mind; I am not at a loss as to why I'm there and what I might be able to do. This application of the five aspirations gives me a road map for my visit.

Another way to look at these aspirations is to examine how they relate to the so called "turnings of the Wheel of the Law." The first turning is associated with earliest Theravada Buddhism and the tradition of the Elders. The two aspirations, turning of the wheel of the Dharma and the earth bearing witness to actions, are very much part of this first turning of the wheel. It is this phase of Buddhist history that brings us the most basic of teachings: the three jewels, the four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, and the overcoming of evil. This first turning contains the Dharmachakra and Bhūmisparśa.

The second turning of the Wheel of the Law is related to Mahayana Buddhism and the Bodhisattvas, beings dedicated to the benefit of other beings. Recitation of the third aspiration, "may my actions benefit all beings," lays the groundwork for action that might benefit others. This way of thinking is what liberates us from the prison of self, turning us away from an unhealthy preoccupation with our own lives.

The third turning of the wheel, associated with Vajrayana Buddhism, encompasses fearlessness and the heart.

It is my belief that all profound religious insights must be universal in application, able to be recast into secular terms that are no less powerful. To approach the aspirations from a secular perspective we see them expressed as empirical method, ecology, charity, courage, and love. To embrace such values is to engage in a very powerful transformation, spiritual or secular.

First Aspiration

"May my action turn the Wheel of the Dharma"



The Dharmachakra Mudra

The first aspiration comes from one of the five transformational Buddhas. Each of these five is associated with certain negative characteristics that can be transformed into specific positive characteristics. We recite the aspiration with the Dharmachakra Mudra associated with Vairochana Buddha, the Buddha of the center. The mudra is the gesture of turning the wheel of the Dharma. This Buddha is associated with the transformation of anger to a more beneficial path. The successful transformation results in full awakening.

Turning the Wheel of the Dharma requires the development of the awareness of the Law of Cause and Effect in each moment of our lives. This awareness requires a constant discipline enhanced by the practice of meditation. It is a taking of responsibility for our own lives in the profoundest of ways. It is nothing less than rigorously applying modern scientific method to the understanding of the effects of our actions and the actions of those around us.

The term Dharma has several different meanings. Today, in Thailand, there is a major Buddhist movement that associates the Dharma with Nature itself. However, the most common definition refers to the most basic teachings of Buddhism: the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and the three Refuges. Today there is also a growing association of the word Dharma with western scientific method. His Holiness the Dalai Lama and many other Buddhist leaders have said that there is no conflict between Buddhism and modern science. Once the Dalai Lama was asked, "What if science came up with something that disagrees with some Buddhist belief? His immediate response was, "We would change our beliefs." Dharma is the study of cause and effect. It is the best process for determining why something happens as the result something else. This search for cause and effect is at the very basis of the historic Buddha's meditation, which resulted in his first sermon, known as the Four Noble Truths.

Buddhism teaches us, that we must apply "skillful means" to our spiritual practice. A practice either works or it doesn't. Practice is the cause and a transformed life is the effect. If our practice does not produce effects that are consistent with the highest aspirations of humanity, we should try a different path.

If my practice cannot liberate me from closed in, trapped, habitual thinking in this lifetime, what hope have I at the end of this life to escape rebirths? This whole business of getting caught on the Wheel of Rebirth is about being trapped, helplessly repeating ourselves, like playing an audiocassette over and over again. We all have heard "So and so really knows how to press my buttons." What does that mean? It means, in the technobabble of our day, that when a certain person interacts with us in a certain way, it's like pressing the play button on a tape recorder. Only what plays, in this case, is a little tape of behavior. It is as though the one whose "buttons" are being pushed has no choice but to behave repeatedly in the same way. This, of course, is the behavior of somebody in prison.

Buddhism is about getting out of prison in this lifetime. Are you worrying about the next life? If so, get out of prison in this lifetime, and the next life will take care of itself. That's the task at hand. If all of your effort in this lifetime hasn't done anything for you in this lifetime, what hope have you for the future? If you haven't succeeded in this life, you may have to go back to kindergarten at some point and do a little more work.

The Buddhist term, "skillful means," refers to the employment of the best method in the most efficient way to bring positive change in our lives. This best method, called "Turning the Wheel of the Dharma," is the process of becoming more mindful of cause and effect in our own lives and in the lives of those around us. Liberation from the prison of being trapped in repeated behaviors comes from practice of awareness. This practice of awareness of cause and effect accelerates our spiritual growth and expands our awareness beyond our selfish interests.

Manshi Miyozawa saw our spiritual growth tied to our expanding awareness. This was his view on the pursuit of happiness:

Unless
the whole world is happy
there is no happiness for me.
A person
as he grows becomes aware
first of himself, then of family
and society,
and at last, of the entire universe.
This growth of awareness was explained
by the Buddhas long ago.
They themselves grew in this
outward direction.
Our new age
is going in this direction too;
the whole world is becoming
one world, one being.
To live strongly and righteously

you must discover the galaxy within yourself,
and remain aware of it.
Let us seek the happiness
of the whole world:
the seeking of the Way
is itself
The Way.

Second Aspiration

"May my action be grounded in fearlessness"



The Abhaya Mudra

We recite this aspiration with the Abhaya mudra of fearlessness associated with Amoghasiddhi, the Buddha of the North. This Buddha represents the successful transformation of jealousy to equanimity and unobstructed accomplishment.

The Abhaya mudra is also connected with the mythos of the historic Buddha's birth. It is said that at the moment of his birth, he took seven steps in each of the four cardinal directions, with his right hand in the Abhaya mudra and said, " In the heavens and on earth, only I am the Venerable One."

If we visualize a single point in space with an expanding sphere around it, we might imagine this single point to be the center of our being, while most of our conscious life is playing out on the expanding surface of the sphere. As we grow older, the surface expands to accommodate our new experiences and relationships. Life becomes fuller, busier, and more demanding.

Unfortunately, as this life on the surface occupies more and more of our energy, it also increases the distance from the center of our being.

A vague uneasiness, a precariousness begins to take hold. Disconcerting moments of emptiness arise. Sometimes these feelings are manifested in so-called "mid-life crises."

While this busy "surface" life is the principal arena of our learning and development, there are moments of fear that paralyze and threaten our well-being. On the other hand, we also experience moments of courage and wholeness. It is interesting to note that the word courage comes from the Latin root *cor* meaning heart or center. The mantra *Hridayam* draws our attention to this "heart center." Part of the wondrous genius of the Buddhist tradition is the discovery that these moments of fear and courage can be hypostasized into images of meditation and objects of spiritual practice.

Hypostasis, a wonderfully descriptive word, comes to us from the Greek *histanai*, "to cause to stand." It points to the process of assembling parts or principles to make a very real creation that can stand on its own. Mythological beings and events have, indeed, through this process, come to stand on their own. The Kuan Yin and events of spiritual mythology such as the Buddha's birth, through this process, have become very real. They stand above our lives and beyond the surface of the sphere. Yet they are available to us and we view them as real. They become objects of our spiritual practice, providing a mirror in which we may see through our surface selves to those very qualities residing at that innermost point in the center of our being. It is in this process that we are able to identify, to reconnect with, and to nurture those highest qualities in the innermost self.

Let's look again at the story of the birth of the Buddha. Birth represents a beginning with the maximum of future potential. The Zen Master Shunryu Suzuki spoke of a state of mind he called "Beginner's Mind." It is a positive, childlike openness to life. Yet it stands on the shoulders of the wisdom and experience of an adult. What is there to fear in a new moment? Without preconceptions there are only possibilities.

In connecting with the story of Buddha's birth, we are practicing at being "Born Again Buddhists" born again in every moment, facing each direction of the universe, and stepping forward with our hands raised in the mudra of fearlessness. The story provides us with a "Practice Mirror" to touch our center and reconnect. Pushed by the past, pulled by the future, a life of constant birth is one reconnected with the Hridaya, or Heart Center. When fear is replaced by courage, the possibilities are unlimited.

Looking in a mirror,
Seeing beyond self,
Courageous Buddha
Stepping out
On a sunny day.

~Gyoshin

Third Aspiration

"May the Earth bear witness to my action"



The Bhumispharsa Mudra

We recite this aspiration with the Bhumispharsa Mudra, the gesture of hand touching the earth, associated with Akshobhya, the Buddha of the East. This Buddha relates to the transformation of ignorance to a perception of expansive space. The successful transformation results in all-encompassing wisdom.

In the Sutta-nipata, one of the earliest Buddhist texts, the story is told of Shakymuni meditating under the Bodhi tree, resisting the temptations of Mara. The last temptation, self-doubt, came in the form of a suggestion from Mara that he really wasn't entitled to call himself enlightened and therefore shouldn't be sitting in the place of enlightenment. He could not seem to convince Mara otherwise. Then Gotama touched the Earth with the tips of the fingers of his right hand in the Bhumispharsa Mudra. This touching the Earth was a request that the Earth bear witness to his merit and his consequent right to this spot. We are told that the Earth trembled and shook and the Goddess of the Earth appeared, her long hair dripping wet, to take up the argument over Gotama's right to sit in that place. From her hair she wrung a flood of water accumulated from the formalization of all of Gotama's past deeds accompanied by the ritual pouring of water. The Earth had been the recipient of his good deeds and had held them all in her embrace. She then said to Mara, "Gotama has a perfect right to sit here. His merit is firm – I bear witness to it." Mara fled.

This feminine principle, the Goddess of the Earth, essentially said, "Look, I'm the Earth; I have been around as long as here has been here. I have watched it all come and go: evolution, mountains rising and falling, rivers flowing and changing, and many beings undertaking spiritual voyages. Because I've been here all this time, I am the ultimate witness and I am here to tell you that Shakymuni is entitled to sit in exactly the same place where all of the Buddhas have sat." I think it significant that in this early Buddhist story the Goddess of the Earth is portrayed as the ultimate authority.

The Earth is witness to enlightenment itself. We are all better able to meet the final challenge of self-doubt successfully when we learn to listen more attentively to the Earth.

Our relationship with the earth takes on greater importance when we realize that it is somehow interconnected to our own individual spiritual growth. This is Eco-Buddhism.

"Bearing witness" requires, at least, three things: that the witness be heard, that the testimony be relevant, and that it be understood. These requirements of a good witness apply to the Earth itself. If we cannot hear the Earth "speak," then it cannot bear witness. We must open ourselves to the voice of the Earth or we will not receive the testimony. If the testimony is not relevant to our lives, then it is meaningless. And in hearing the testimony, we must expend the effort to understand it. In a way, because of its age, the Earth carries the traditional authority of our elders. When we are interacting with trees, rocks and hills, we are in the presence of our elders. These elders bear the messages that the Earth has to convey. However, until we can interact with respect and deep listening, the Earth will not affirm our right to be in this spot, nor will the elders sing songs of our past accomplishments.

Respect arises from the acknowledgement that the Earth has intrinsic value rather than merely instrumental value. It is not something just to be used or, more specifically, to be used up. Deep listening is required because we have journeyed far away from our "place" and have to reacquire the skills necessary to hear the Earth sing.

David Barnhill writes in an essay in the recent book *Buddhism and Ecology* about a conversation between the two poets, Gary Snyder and Lew Welch, that took place in the mountains. A discussion developed about whether or not the rocks were paying attention to the trees, and Welch said, "The trees are just passing through." His comment inspired Snyder to write this poem:

As the crickets' soft autumn hum
is to us
so are we to the trees
as are they
to the rocks and the hills.

The authority of the Earth as witness comes from its temporal preeminence. The very rocks are singing. Perhaps they are singing only one note every million years or so. If that is the case, we will have to be patient to make out the tune. However, Right Meditation coupled with Right Mindfulness will result in the patience and the opportunity not only to get the message but to hear the song and understand it.

Robert Aitken Roshi has pointed out that the Bodhisattva Kuan Yin, who hears the cries of the world, is formed by those very cries of suffering and joy. Her compassion is seen in the way she is portrayed, a being with a thousand arms, each with a different instrument of work. Aitken Roshi says, "She has allowed the world to cultivate her character and has mustered herself to develop the skills to make her character effective. She is the archetype of Right Livelihood: one who uses the tools of the workaday world to mature all beings and turn the Wheel of the Dharma."

In every moment we have a choice: be egocentric and imagine that only humans are in need of compassion, or become ecocentric. If we choose to be ecocentric, we side with the sutras. They are very clear on this matter. They tell us that the cries of the whole world - not just those of humans - are heard by Bodhisattva Kuan Yin. In sharing Kuan Yin's Ten Vows, we work together with other people, as well as trees, plants, rocks, and hills, to assist in her compassion for all. Thich Nhat Hanh has coined a wonderful term to express this ecocentric Buddhist view of our place in the cosmos: "Interbeing." Through interbeing, the teachings of the Buddha are revealed. One of his daily prayers, one taken with the first step of the morning, is this:

The green Earth
is a miracle!
Walking in full awareness
The wondrous Dharmakaya is revealed.

One night in the eleventh century the Chinese poet Su Tung p'o was awakened by the sound of a mountain stream. He wrote:

The sound of the Valley Stream is itself
the Vast Eternal Tongue;
Are not the colors of the mountains the Pure Body?
Since evening, eighty four thousand verses;
Another day, how could I quote them to others?

In our present age we have not been awakened to ecological values through the roots of our spiritual traditions, but rather by the world of science. James Lovelock, the world renowned atmospheric scientist, writing in *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, (1982) said:

"The entire range of living matter on Earth, from whales to viruses, and from oaks to algae, could be regarded as constituting a single living entity, capable of manipulating the Earth's atmosphere to suit its overall need and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its constituent parts. "

This ecological awakening, brought to us by modern science, has prompted us to journey to the wellsprings of our various spiritual heritages in search of that which we have missed. It is my belief that within the heart of the Buddhist tradition, more than any other, are the greatest spiritual treasures to give fuller meaning and sustenance to what ecology is now telling us. For example, in the *Sutta-Nipata*, the Buddha directly challenges us to pursue the study of ecology:

“Know the grasses and the trees. Know the worms, and the moths, and the different sorts of ants. Know also the four-footed animals both small and great, the serpents, the fish in the water, and the birds in the air. Know their similarities and their differences so that you may know their families and species and their numbers.”

Whenever I recite the aspiration, "May the Earth bear witness to my action," I am gently reminded of the interconnectedness of all beings. I am reminded that ecology is a sacred word, that "place" is important, and that one must listen deeply to the songs of the Earth.

When I touch the Earth,
Ancient songs of Elders
Whisper in distant places.

~Gyoshin

Fourth Aspiration

"May my action benefit all beings"



The Varada Mudra

We recite this aspiration with the Varada Mudra, the gesture of presenting gifts to others, associated with Ratnasambhava, the Buddha of the South. This Buddha relates to the transformation of the yellow paint of miserliness and arrogant pride into the gold of generosity. This generosity develops in tandem with a holistic view of the universe as an organized totality. The successful transformation results in equanimity.

Acting in such a way as to benefit all beings is impossible without the underlying understanding of interconnectedness. Even then it may still be improbable. However, while the "impossible" paralyzes us, the "improbable" challenges us. (Lotteries offer proof of this.) The wish to benefit all beings is the natural, outward increasing inclusiveness of a healthy, developing consciousness. This challenge to overcome the improbable transforms the individual. Conversely, all so-called "social problems" are a result of the arresting of this natural development.

The history of the progression from aspiring to benefit the "me" being, to benefiting "some" beings, to benefiting "all" beings, is similar to the history of the development of legal "rights." The expansion of these "rights" has, over time, progressed from rights of only the male human elite to include those of servants, slaves, women, different ethnic groups, children (New England had to pass laws against killing one's own children for disobedience), animals, and now plants. The definition of the Buddhist community, or Sangha, has similarly expanded over time, i.e., originally including only the monks, then householders. The Sangha is now seen by some to include the ecosphere of the Earth. From this view, nature and other beings are no longer seen as other, something to be cared for, as in the concept of stewardship, or exploited, as in the concept of self-benefit. Rather, nature is to be looked at as a part of a community; partnership with all beings is evoked as the very ground of our being. The Maha or Great Sangha becomes, in other words, the Maha Prajnaparamitta itself.

Do we really want to benefit all beings? Some of the prominent thinkers in the deep ecology movement seem to say yes. The idea that all nature has intrinsic worth has led them to what ultimately becomes an untenable position of seeing an equality of

biospecies. In their book *Deep Ecology: Living As If Nature Mattered*, Devall and Sessions speak of this equality in the following manner: "All things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization."

Unfortunately, any one of a number of exotic viruses, if encouraged "to live and blossom," could put a quick end to the human race. Do we really want to include them in our aspiration of benefit for all beings? Such inclusiveness would likely cut short good Buddhist practice. We do not eliminate them from equal treatment out of obvious self-centered reasons, but because when we look at the functioning human body, we perceive a whole system and see health as a holistic issue. The Buddhist approach is to be constantly on the alert to broaden one's perspective, to see the larger picture, to embrace the paradigm of community. When we say, "may this...benefit all beings," we are exercising this stretching of consciousness to be more inclusive and to develop a more holistic perspective. We are not simply and blindly adding more critters to our good wish list. The person who would wish all bacteria to thrive is just as ignorant of the larger picture as the person whose goal it is to eradicate all bacteria. If the former were to succeed, we would all soon be dead. If the latter were to succeed, we would all die more slowly from terminal cases of indigestion.

The historic Buddha teaches us in the *Dhammapada*, "All that we are is the result of what we have thought...." Our being and our becoming both result from thought. Thoughts come from many sources: our individual uniqueness, from others, from Amida's vow, from the Kuan Yin at work. If we plant these thoughts as part of our Buddhist practice, it is not necessary, at present, to "do" anything further. The doing will inevitably result from what we have thought.

The practice of the aspiration "May this action benefit all beings" plants seeds that will bear fruit in teaching us about interconnectedness, the nature of community, and the achievement of personal serenity.

At first I thought that it was all about me;
It wasn't.
Then I thought it was all about others;
It's not.
Finally I wondered what it really was all about:
Good start.
One day, in passing,
Without thinking,
I wished a pine tree well.
It seemed the right thing to do.

~Gyoshin

Fifth Aspiration

"May my action be centered in the heart"



The Dhyana Mudra

The Fifth Aspiration relates to Amitabha, the Transformational Buddha of the West. His mudra is the Dhyana mudra of meditation. This Buddha is associated with the successful transformation of delusion and attachment to true, loving compassion.

A point is sometimes made about the Chinese meaning of heart being really heart/mind. This heart/mind essence is the core of our being. It is the center in all things. It wasn't so much that the Chinese recognized that one couldn't divide consciousness into simple compartments. Rather, they thought that the heart, not the brain, was the seat of consciousness. The Chinese character for heart/mind even looks like the physical heart in the human body. We westerners have come a long way from our earlier notion that consciousness resides totally in the brain. But while we recognize that bulldogs and German shepherds are both dogs, we still find it useful and not misleading to distinguish one from another. I concede that the intellect and the emotions are not really separable. Yet sometimes the distinction is useful.

Let's look at some of the various common-sense meanings of heart. It is the center or essence of something. Our ordinary language gives clues as to what we mean: "the heart of the matter," "the heartland." Even the word core comes from Latin core meaning heart. "The heart of the matter" means the essence. The Heart or Hridaya Sutra is so-called because the sutra presents the core of Buddhist teaching. Hridaya is Sanskrit for heart. The mantra Hridayam, sometimes used in our meditations, has the further implication of a movement toward the heart.

The heart is also the source of feeling or emotion. Again, we look at our everyday language for clues as to what we mean. We say something was "heart felt," "in my heart I believe," or an experience was "heart rending." To do something "with all one's heart" means to do it with earnestness. In all these sayings the heart is a metaphor for the emotional rather than the intellectual.

The heart is further the source of courage, "to have heart," or "brave heart." Finally, it represents our ability to know thoroughly, as in memorize or "learn by heart." In summation, I would say that the heart represents a centering on the importance of our feelings, making them part of our self-knowledge and doing so with courage.

In the West it is important to understand that we generally do not arrive at the Buddha Dharma through emotion, but rather through the intellect. We didn't come to Buddhism in the emotional experience of a tent revival. We did not become Buddhists because we were caught up in a wave of emotion and found ourselves reciting the three jewels in front of a congregation. We read a book, took a course, visited a museum, or heard a lecture.

However, it is from the heart that "Engaged Buddhism" emerges. Too often spiritual journeys begin in the heart and never make it to the intellect. The result is a faith of shadows uninformed by the light of intellect. For those so unfortunate, the battle between science and religion never ceases. Starting with the heart and never allowing the brain to play its role is a prime source of the damage done by ignorant fanatics. Buddhism teaches that ignorance is the cause of suffering. However, when religion starts in the brain, as it often does with western Buddhists, it often doesn't make it to the heart, and the result is the damage done by cold, intellectual indifference to the cries of the world. Both heart and brain must be engaged.

Wisdom lights the Path;
The Heart makes the journey worthwhile.

~Gyoshin

Epilogue

The Five Aspirations represent a movement from head to heart, from wisdom to compassion. Centering in the heart becomes the end of a process that begins in the mind. Starting with correct knowledge (may my actions turn the Wheel of the Law), I will not be afraid (sustained by fearlessness), acknowledging my connection to the Earth (may the Earth bear witness to my actions), reaching out to others (may my actions benefit all beings in my journey to the heart). Whenever we have the opportunity to practice the Five Aspirations, we are planting and nurturing seeds in our consciousness. The love of truth, the love of the earth, the love of others, and the courage to walk the path of the heart: these are the fruits of this practice. These five aspirations are easy to remember. I recommend them for all spiritual practice.

Glossary

Bodhisattva: One who has vowed to put all other beings first in the journey to enlightenment. The personification of Compassion

Buddha: A title that is not the name of a specific person. It is derived from the Sanskrit word budh, "to be awakened." It means one who knows in the sense of having become one with the Supreme Truth

Dhammapada: One of the earliest sutras

Dharma: The teachings of the Buddhas. Also the law of cause and effect

Hridaya: Sanskrit for heart or essence

Hridayam: A mantra that has the sense of movement toward the heart or essence

Hypostasis: The projection of inner states or processes

Kuan Yin: A female personification of Compassion especially popular in China

Mahayana: A school of Buddhism that developed from early Theravada and is primarily found in Tibet, China, Korea, and Japan

Mantra: A sound used as an aid to meditation

Mara: The personification of the forces of evil

Mudra: A hand gesture that is symbolic of states of consciousness

Parinirvana: Death, with the final achievement of full enlightenment

Prajnaparamitta: The most profound wisdom

Roshi: Japanese term for an old and respected Zen teacher

Sangha: The Buddhist community

Siddhartha Gautama: The given and clan name of the historic Buddha who was born around 550 BCE

Sutras: Buddhist texts

Theravada: "The Doctrine of the Elders" who formed the first Buddhist Council immediately at the passing of the Buddha. The earliest form of Buddhism found principally in the southern parts of Asia

Vajrayana: A form of Buddhism that found its greatest development in Tibet

Wheel of the Dharma: A figurative term expressing the process of learning and teaching of the Dharma

For further study:

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