

Samantabhadra Bodhisattva

Meditation~ Terry Cortés-Vega

Breather Meditation, "Who do you think you are?"

Settle into a comfortable meditation position..

Enjoy your breathing: In. Out.

Count to four as you breathe in; pause a moment then count to four as you breathe out.

What is breathing? Your lungs? Your ribs? Your heart? Your kidneys? Your belly?

Release control of your breath and just observe your breathing in, breathing out.

Just be a detached observer of your breath. As soon as we try this our mind jumps in to control our breath.

So what is breathing?

Your lungs? Your mind?

Breathing in I am only aware that I am breathing in.

Breathing out I am only aware that I am breathing out.

With my instructions is it I who is breathing for you?

Who is breathing?

Become aware of everyone in this room breathing in, breathing out.

Be aware of all people on Earth breathing in, breathing out.

You are breathing. Who is the you who is breathing?

Become aware of the trees and flowers and weeds outside our windows, breathing in, breathing out.

Be aware of all plants on Earth breathing in, breathing out.

You are breathing. Who is the you who is breathing?

Be aware of the river (or lake, ocean nearby) breathing in, breathing out.

Be aware of all bodies of water on Earth, breathing in, breathing out.

You are breathing. Who is the you who is breathing?

Be aware of all mountains rocks, beaches, soil on our planet Earth, breathing in, breathing out.

You are breathing. Who is the you who is breathing?

Be aware of all birds, fish, insects and other animals on our earth breathing in and breathing out.

You are breathing. Who is the you who is breathing?

Become aware that you are breathing in, breathing out with all people, animals, plants and minerals living on our mother, the earth.

You are breathing. Who is the you who is breathing?

Breathe in and out with the cosmos. With all stars. Suns. Moons. Planets. All heavenly bodies. Breathing in. Breathing out.

One cosmic in-breath. One cosmic out-breath.

In. Out.

You are breathing. Who is the you who is breathing?

Who is breathing?

Who do you think you are?

Song: “Faith and Love” ~ Brian Kimmel

Homage to Thich Nhat Hanh ~ Erin Ray

Dear friends, we offer our respect and gratitude to our teacher, Thay, whose wisdom and insight is already present in each one of us, in our teachers – Terry, Antonio and BK – and in the collective sangha body, the beloved community, gathered here to study and practice together.

We’re here this weekend because each of us, in one way or another, has directly experienced the powerful medicine of the Buddha’s teachings through Thay’s effort to translate and make them relevant for our cultures and times. The walls we’ve built up around our hearts are cracked and the light of compassion is shining through.

Thank you, dear Thay, for your skillful, artful, poetic, and insightful ways of bringing these teachings to us. Because of your wisdom and compassion, we have a path to understanding and happiness – the Five Mindfulness Trainings – that is immediately applicable to our own

lives. And we have the example of your life, your true teaching, which shows us how to be love in action.”

Dharma Talk~ Terry Cortés-Vega

We have met Bodhisattva Manjushri who reminds us to stay young at heart and who offers us six ways to manifest the wisdom of prajnaparamita—interbeing-- in our lives.

We’ve met Avalokiteshvara who teaches that because we are all one, it is important to be compassionate with ourselves and all beings.

Today we meet the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra.

Samanta means “universally extending.” *bhadra* means “great virtue.” So he is Bodhisattva “**extending great virtue universally,**” usually called **The Bodhisattva of Great Conduct**, or, in our tradition, the **Bodhisattva of Great Action**.

Bodhisattva Samantabhadra carries a lotus in one hand (which we remember symbolizes wisdom or understanding) and in the other hand, a wish-fulfilling jewel (symbolizing compassion). So we see right away that this Bodhisattva is one with Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara.

Like Manjushri, Samantabhadra was an assistant to Sakyamuni Buddha. Sometimes the three are called the Sacred Trinity.

Samantabhadra rides a white elephant with 6 tusks which represent overcoming *attachment* to the 6 senses (which Avalokita warned us about) and the cultivation of the 6 prajnaparamitas (which Manjushri taught us).

Samantabhadra taught that in order to “wake up” you need to cultivate both Manjushri’s wisdom and Avalokiteshvara’s compassion. If you develop only the compassionate part of yourself, neglecting the wisdom—you may become a goodhearted fool. If you develop only the intellectual side of yourself and neglect the compassionate, you may turn into a hard-hearted intellect.

Samantabhadra taught that understanding and compassion are never an end in themselves; they have value *only* when they *benefit* you and all beings.

So the way Samantabhadra teaches Prajnaparamita is by *combining* understanding and compassion into five concrete noble conduct practices—five things you can do, you can be, in

order to wake up, to be happy. These practices are the “discipline” that we found in the second of Manjushri’s six prajnaparamitas and they are the focus of the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

Thay says: [The Five Mindfulness Trainings are some of the most concrete ways to practice the Buddha’s teachings. They are nonsectarian, and their nature is universal. They are true practices of compassion and understanding. All spiritual traditions have their equivalent to the Five Mindfulness Trainings.](#)

In each of the five trainings we are asked to become aware of a particular suffering, and to make specific vows for taking action to put an end to the suffering.

The first noble conduct mindfulness training, “[Reverence for Life,](#)” addresses the particular suffering of violence. The vows we make are to protect life and to decrease violence in ourselves, our families and in the world.

In the late 1960s we wanted to protect life and decrease violence so we organized a lot of what we called Peace Rallies. I thin we invented the yell, “What do we want?!!” “Peace!!” “When do we want it?!!” “Now!!” We were *fighting* for peace. But we wanted *them*—the soldiers, our government—to be peace. And as you know quite well our strategy didn’t work: the violence, the killings, the wars, the discriminative thinking have continued.

The Bodhisattva Samantabhadra offers a prajnaparamita way to work for peace. A way that’s based on the understanding and compassion.

We don’t yell and fight for peace. We don’t wait for others to make peace. We be peace. We train ourselves to live peace. To do this we vow to do what we can to protect the lives of all plants and minerals and animals. And people.

We begin by cultivating respect and reverence for our own life; to remember to value ourselves, appreciate our intentions, respect our efforts, even when we mess up.

Several years ago my grandbaby, Chase, taught me a good strategy for honoring my efforts. He said, “Oma, you know how when someone says something cool we give ‘em a high five? So if you do something cool, like tell a joke and no one laughs, you can give yourself a self five!

Not long after he taught me that, I was in the grocery store when my phone rang. It was Gustavo’s mom, Ita, calling from Mexico. Ita is a little bit deaf and she only speaks Spanish. I

was in a noisy grocery store and speak horrible Spanish. Usually I would let the phone ring then call Gustavo to tell him to call his mama. But this time I answered and listened best I could, responded to her request best I could, told her I'd ask Gustavo to call, said "*Saludos a todos, cuidate mucho*—like Gustavo always does— and hung up. I put my phone in my pocket and right there in the HEB gave myself a self five.

Building on our compassion for ourselves, we learn to cherish the lives of our loved ones and friends.

Then because this is a training that teaches us to eliminate violence not only in ourselves and our loved ones, we expand our compassion to include valuing the lives of strangers and even difficult people, people we don't like.

Thay adds:

It is not just by not killing with your body that you observe the First Mindfulness Training. If in your *thinking* you allow the killing, the violence, to go on, you also break this training. We must be determined not to condone violence including killing, even in our minds. When you believe, for example, that yours is the only way for humankind and that everyone who follows another way is your enemy, millions of people could be killed because of that idea.

How do we ever learn to develop the compassion needed to protect the lives of mass shooters or those responsible for starving millions of children and driving people from their homes in Iraq or Syria or Yemen? Honduras, El Salvador? We can't even understand how our neighbor votes for a different political party.

Thay gives us the answer: "*Peace in Oneself, Peace in the World.*"

To practice nonviolence, he says, we must first learn ways to deal peacefully with ourselves. If we create true harmony within ourselves, we will know how to deal with family, friends, and associates. To deal with animals, plants and minerals.

About Reverence for Life, Thoreau said,

Every creature is better alive than dead, men and moose and pine trees, and he who understands it aright will rather preserve its life than destroy it.

The second of the noble conduct mindfulness trainings is “[True Happiness](#).” The particular suffering the training addresses is stealing—taking something that’s not ours, something that’s not freely offered to us. Also, taking more than our share of the resources.

We steal, we crave, we grasp, because we want to avoid the discomfort we feel when we don’t have something we want.

Thay says that what *destroys* craving and greed is “[knowing how to feel satisfied with few possessions. This helps us to avoid buying unnecessarily and becoming part of an economic system that exploits others.](#)”

Because we are afraid that we won’t have enough for ourselves if everyone has what they need, we allow poverty and hunger to exist.

Our craving encourages the market to find ways to persuade us to consume more—which means factories produce more, which means they need more resources, which leads to the destruction of the environment—to the pollution of water, soil, and air.

And...because of our cravings, governments invade other countries and people are killed as we grasp for more natural resources like oil, lumber, and cheap labor.

Stealing, then, takes the forms of exploitation, social injustice and oppression.

So the suffering caused by my craving does not only affect me. My craving hurts you, other people, animals, plants, air, water—the Earth.

The antidote to craving, to taking more than our share, is generosity. Which we remember is the first of the six prajnaparamitas.

According to the Buddha there are three kinds of gifts. The first is the gift of our stuff. To give our money or our things away for others to enjoy. To consume less. To live simply with few possessions.

The second kind of generosity is to help people rely on themselves, to offer them the Dharma, the technology, the know-how in order to stand on their own feet so *they* can transform their fear, anger, and depression: Thay says, “[The Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara is someone who practices this extremely well.](#)”

The third kind of generosity is the gift of non-fear. Thay says, “[We are afraid of many things. We feel insecure, afraid of being alone, afraid of sickness and dying. To help people not be destroyed by their fears, we practice the third kind of gift giving.](#)” Listening deeply—to

ourselves and others— is this kind of generosity. Having the courage to stay open-hearted to others in the midst of fear and pain. Being willing to be present to others, not out of a sense of duty, but because we realize that our heart is part of a larger cosmic heart.

If we are generous with 1)our stuff, 2)our know-how and 3) our presence, we can put an end to stealing, grasping, craving.

About this training on generosity, Mr. Rogers said, “The greatest gift you ever give is your honest self.”

Thay says: When you practice one precept deeply, you will discover that you are practicing all five. The *First* Precept is about taking life, which is a form of stealing -- stealing the most precious thing someone has, his or her life. When we meditate on the *Second* Precept, we see that stealing-- killing slowly by exploitation, by maintaining social injustice, and by political and economic oppression are acts of killing. We see the "interbeing" nature of the first two precepts. This is true of all Five Precepts.

Our teacher named the third Great Conduct training, “True Love.” The particular suffering it addresses is the kind of sexual energy that hurts ourselves and others. Sexual energy that 1)manipulates, 2) exploits, 3) controls, or 4) establishes power over someone.

The noble conduct training calls on us to recognize when we’re reaching out to people from “true love” and to differentiate that from when we’re caught up in craving, loneliness, or self-absorption.

The training doesn’t judge sex as good or bad, but it does ask us to commit to learning appropriate ways to take care of our sexual energy, to look at our motivation and intentions around our sexual energy and to respond to our human urges, cravings, hopes, and fears with wisdom and compassion.

We *could* respond to our sexual cravings with denial and suppression, turning against ourselves and our human appetites.

Or we could respond with indulgence and addiction, turning away from the *consequences* of our actions for ourselves and others.

Or we can respond with the *middle path* by *accepting* our humanness and *using* it to cultivate True Love.

The Buddha taught that there are 4 aspects of True Love: kindness, compassion, joy and freedom.

Before Gustavo and I were married, we went to Mexico so his family and I could meet. I was really nervous. I am tall and white and old; I don't speak Spanish and I am from the U.S. I thought those were good reasons for them not to like me. So I was nervous. Tense. Gustavo saw this and made extra efforts to be attentive to me. He was offered me the four aspects of True Love: Kindness and compassion which are the first two elements. He helped me enjoy him and his family and myself: the third aspect of True Love which is joy. And he offered me the fourth aspect of True Love which is freedom and safety: unconditional love where we feel taken care of, appreciated, safe, free.

This learning how to understand and skillfully express our sexuality and our desire for intimacy is a life-long journey.

They says, "In Buddhism, the teaching of love is crucial. Loving kindness, compassion, joy and equanimity are the elements of true love, and we can practice them every day. But love is different from sexual pleasure. If the act of sexuality takes place without deep love, commitment, and mutual understanding, it can bring a lot of suffering and destruction. When there is deep understanding and communication, happiness becomes possible. With mindfulness, with the practice of understanding and compassion, sexual life can be beautiful and holy."

About this training, Barry Magid, Zen teacher and founder of Ordinary Mind Zendo in New York says: To be in a real relationship, a loving relationship, is simply to be willing to respond and be there for the other person without always calculating what we are going to get out of it.

The particular focus of the fourth noble conduct mindfulness training is the suffering caused by unmindful, unskillful speech and the inability to listen well to others.

We vow to learn Avalokitea's practice of loving speech and deep listening. To speak and listen with all of our attention and openheartedness, without prejudice, without judging or reacting; to listen in order to really understand what is being said and not said.

As Bodhisattvas-in-Training, we have the intention to listen like that but if, for example, someone criticizes us and we feel angry, or hurt or shamed it is hard to listen deeply and speak lovingly. Instead, we may either shut down— or tell the other person just how angry we are— even though we know this “let the angry truth be told” strategy never stops criticism or blame or anger nor does it put an end to our unhappiness.

Thay says, “Sometimes we speak clumsily and create internal knots in others. Then we say, “I was just telling the truth.” It may be the truth, but if your way of speaking causes unnecessary suffering, it is not Loving Speech. Words that damage or destroy are not Loving Speech. You must tell the truth in ways that others can accept. If you are not able to speak calmly, then don't speak that day. You have to train yourself to be able to do this.”

I listened to a Ted Talk on 10 Ways to be a Good Listener. Number 1 on that list: Be present; be prepared to be amazed by what others say. 2. Don't preach. 3. Be interested in others; ask open ended questions. 4. If something in the conversation reminds you of one of *your* stories, let your story go. 5. If you don't know, say so. 6. Don't equate your experience with their's; it's not about you. 7. Don't repeat yourself. 8. Stay out of the weeds—don't go into lots of detail. 9. Listen with the intent to understand instead of with the intent to reply. 10. Be brief.

Here are 3 tips that might help with your practice of **Deep Listening and Loving Speech**: Use the acronym HALT to help you recognize 4 of the possible reasons you might *pause* before speaking (or not speak at all):

H A L T: Are you: Hungry Angry Lonely Tired?

OR

Use the acronym WAIT: W A I T: Why Am I Talking?

OR

Ask yourself, “Does what I have to say *improve* on the silence?”

About the 4th Noble Conduct Training, HAFIZ said:

What

We speak

Becomes the house we live in.

Who will want to sleep in your bed

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If the roof leaks

Right above It?

Look what happens when the tongue

Cannot say to kindness,

“I will be your slave.”

The moon

Covers her face with both hands

And can't bear

To look.

The fifth noble mindfulness training focuses on the suffering caused by mindless consumption.

In the training we promise to do our best not to cover up our suffering with *consumption*. We promise to look deeply into how we nourish or harm our body and mind.

The training lists many examples of how what we consume can harm our body and mind as well as harm our family, friends, society and the earth: gambling, using alcohol and drugs; spending time on certain websites, electronic games, TV programs, and movies; listening to music that is toxic; reading certain magazines and books; participating in conversations that are harmful.

That's what the training teaches, but when we talk about the training on consumption, we usually get caught up in whether we can have a glass of wine with dinner or a beer or margarita with friends.

The training doesn't really answer this for us.

Instead, it asks us to avoid things that foster mindlessness. In other words, to avoid being careless, inattentive, mechanical.

So the training is not about whether an occasional glass of wine makes you a bad Buddhist. It is about whether you have a glass of wine or a bottle of beer or a margarita in order to escape, to distract yourself, to hide from reality, to be “cool,” to “fit in” or out of habit. *And* it is about what happens to your body and mind; how alcohol affects the way you think, speak and act.

The training is also about what happens in the *world* when we drink alcohol.

For example, what happens to the Earth when we use so many of our resources to raise grapes or hops or agave for alcohol.

I remember years ago, Brian, a young Ordained Order of Interbeing member in our Sangha who said, "I don't have addiction issues but I have friends who do, so I don't drink wine or beer because that way they will have a friend who supports them.

The training does not just ask us to reflect on the affects of *alcohol* on ourselves and our society. We're also asked to reflect on what *else* we consume that harms us, other people and the Earth. What happens to you when when you consume violence in conversations, movies, on-line, music or in video games? When you read books, newspapers and magazines containing violence? What happens to our children? grandchildren? Other people? What happens to the media industry when we consume violence?

Thay says that "[Consumption is not happiness.](#)"

So what is happiness? In one of his commentaries on the fifth noble conduct training, Thay says:

[The Fifth Precept tells us to find wholesome, spiritual nourishment, not only for ourselves but also for our children and future generations. Wholesome, spiritual nourishment can be found in the moon, the spring blossoms, or the eyes of a child. The most basic meditation practices of becoming aware of our bodies, our minds, and our world can lead us into a far more rich and fulfilling state than drugs or alcohol or aggression could ever do. We can celebrate the joys that are available in the simplest pleasures.](#)

About the training on mindful consumption and healthy living Daniel Ladinsky, poet who also interprets the poems of Hafiz and others said:

*like a child at a circus,
i am in awe
of the postman driving by
and people walking past
and that squirrel on a limb
and the sound of a pot in the kitchen
and the water sprinkler
and my own breathing*

Reading the Five Mindfulness Trainings and doing what we can to put them into practice, we are the continuation of the Bodhisattva Samantabhadra, joyfully *practicing*—not just *studying* but *living*— understanding and compassion.

That is the prajnaparamita teaching of Samantabhadra, the Bodhisattva of Great Action. Our work is to cherish and nurture the perfect noble conduct that lives within us.

Touching the Earth~ Antonio Brunner

[BELL]

Please rise.

Invoking the Bodhisattva Samanthabhadra, I bow deeply or Touch the Earth with gratitude,

[BELL]

I let go of my attachment to my belief that my six senses are the beacons of actual reality,

I let go of my attachment that my possessions are the measures of my self-worth,

I let go of my attachment that I am somebody because I help lessen injustice in the world,

I let go of my attachment that it's up to me to save the world or anyone.

Dear Mother, with your energy, please help me become a Bodhisattva Samanthabhadra to universally extend great virtue.

Here and now, I vow to water the seeds of Bodhisattva Samanthabhadra in me so they may grow into strong manifestations of great action.

I aspire to practice with the eyes and heart of compassion,

To bring joy to one person in the morning and to ease the pain of one person in the afternoon.

I aspire to continually remember that the happiness of others is my happiness.

I aspire to practice joy on the path of service, and to bring happiness to others with my every word, look, action, and smile.

I aspire to practice wholeheartedly and become an inexhaustible source of peace and joy for my loved ones and all beings.

I now boldly and wholeheartedly vow to integrate my intellect with my understanding, and to unite my compassion with my wisdom

I aspire to NOT work for peace but BE peace. To cherish the lives of my loved ones,

To eliminate violence,

To share my resources, especially the resource of time.

To help people rely on themselves so we can all remain open-hearted to others in the midst of

fear and pain.

To be aware of my sexual cravings in order to cultivate True Love.

To enjoy my loved ones and help them enjoy themselves.

To offer unconditional love so that we can feel taken care of, appreciated, safe and free.

To speak and listen with all of my attention and open heartedness, without prejudice, without judging or reacting.

To listen in order to really understand.

To really care about what happens in my body and what happens in the world.

Samantabhadra

I hereby extend your great virtue in me and through me!

I hereby cultivate my very own understanding perspective...

And my very own nurturing and gracious heart...

And I offer my most-tender form of humanity...

By vowing to diligently keep my faith in True Love.

[BELL]

Please rise and then be seated for a few moments of silent reflection.

__()__ May the fruit of our study of the life and teachings of the Bodhisattvas, including Bodhisattva Samantabhadra who teaches the concrete prajnaparamita practices of the Five Mindfulness Trainings benefit us— which includes our teacher and all beings.