

# Hold the Grief of the World

Sept 15-17, 2001  
Shambhala Mountain Center

It is very easy to become confused in this world and think that either things are hopeless or that they are okay. We can be distracted for days or even weeks and months at a time, and forget about working on ourselves at all. Then something like September 11 suddenly happens, and you realize that life could end at any second for any of us. It did end for some people who, from a materialistic point of view, were at the top of the world. All of a sudden, you see how fragile the whole thing is. We need to take this to heart.

Our job as practitioners is to hold the grief of the world as well as its confusion and aggression. Our job is not to judge it, but to hold it within our awareness, within our hearts. That takes a tremendous amount of patience. When we hold something in that way, eventually, we come to understand it. True understanding is not something you can rush or force. What happened on September 11 calls for an enormous amount of patience on our parts. At this moment, we simply need to hold the world and wait. Without that, we have no chance whatever of being really helpful.

This is the most fundamental instruction of the Buddha. After he achieved enlightenment, he surveyed the world and saw how lost everyone is. He saw how beings from the top of samsara to the bottom are swimming in darkness, creating endless suffering for themselves and others. He saw that the world has its own karmic momentum, and that, from a certain point of view, you can't judge it. From a certain point of view, there is nothing to be done. You just have to let it be.

Seeing all this, he felt completely and utterly hopeless. He had no idea what could be done. He just remained in that space, for seven weeks, so we are told. And out of that, something very extraordinary occurred. He listened to the cries of sentient beings and felt the full extent of their pain. And out of that depth, spontaneous compassion arose for all of the beings of samsara. And it was out of that unpremeditated compassion that we have the birth of the Buddha's dharma, his teaching.



The Buddha's great gift was that he waited. He didn't try to come to any conclusions. His hopelessness was his greatest strength. He had no hope of helping anyone, but he also had no hope of dismissing the world, walking away from it, and getting himself off the hook. He simply remained in that space with the chaos of the world before him, allowing his mind to rest without any movement whatever. And then, out of that, a way for him to be helpful showed itself. In the chaos after September 11, we need to do the same thing, we need to cultivate the Buddha's patience. We need to cultivate his unmoving mind and wait for his unpremeditated compassion and resourcefulness, which are hidden right now, to make themselves obvious.

The more we hold the madness of the world in our awareness, strangely enough, the more workable it becomes. The more insanity heightens in our culture, the more we need to practice and open our awareness to accommodate it and go through it with everybody else. But of course, as practitioners, we go through it in a different way. Let's not require the world to be different from what it is. Let's not require people to be sane. Let's let them be whatever they are, because they're going to be that way anyway. Let us practice and make our mind so big that we can accommodate everyone and everything, no matter how dark.

That is how it goes. In the practice of meditation, you sit in the morning, which is more working with awareness itself, even though you might feel like you are just working with your own

discursiveness. You are actually cultivating your deeper awareness when you are doing this. This is ultimate bodhichitta. Then, you get up and live your day. That is relative bodhichitta, coming out of your practice and engaging the world in some kind of way. You go on retreat, then you are working with ultimate bodhichitta for maybe a whole month. When you come out of retreat, you find the world is waiting for you. It needs you and finds a way to make its claim on you. September 11 is no different, only now, because the engagement required is deeper, we need to practice more.

Go into retreat in Timbuktu. Rest your mind in the nature of awareness itself and, sooner rather than later, the suffering world will find you. Go to the top of Mt. Everest, and the world will find you. Even if you go to the bottom of the ocean, the world, in its own mysterious way, will sense how you are and will find you even there. Wherever you go, you will be found.

And it is always a question of who is finding whom. Of course, the world will be finding you because it needs your state of being, it needs your freedom and openness, and your warmth. Somehow the world, in its utter confusion, knows that this is what it needs. But, at the same time, you are lost and you need the world to find you. You are lost because, as long as you are resting in ultimate bodhichitta alone, something else is needed. From one point of view, resting in the nature of the awakened state itself, there is no such thing as unfinished business. But, from another point of view, the fact that there is no unfinished business is itself unfinished business. In other words, the more free our minds are, the more the world needs our engagement. And, from our side, only when we heed the call to engage will we fulfill the purpose of our practice and the purpose of our lives.



From the ultimate point of view, it is acceptable that there is life and death, chaos as well as clarity, suffering as well as happiness. It is not only acceptable, but it is and always has been the basic texture and pattern of life itself and of the path to awakening. From the ultimate point of view, everything that goes on in the universe is okay in the sense that it is what it is, there are endless reasons for its being just this way, and there is no outside viewpoint from which to judge it. But touching this enables us to be open enough to be called to help in all kinds of situations. The call comes. You cannot stay at the place where everything is okay. That is not our karma, because we have this relative situation and this heart of relative ash. So, we touch this level and we rest in that, and in that resting we are preparing to be called upon by others and to heed that call.

All of us are interested in the relative world in some way or other, whether we are talking about making a living, raising children, or whatever it might be. Helping other people. We want to know how to work with the world in a way that is effective. The only way to do that is from the viewpoint of awareness itself. There is no other way to work with relativity. You can't do it based on agendas and projects. It doesn't work. The reason that it doesn't work is that it is not accurate, and everything you do creates more karma for yourself and others. Whereas if you relate to situations based on resting your mind in the nature or resting your mind in awareness or at least having a relationship with awareness in a meditation practice, that is different. Your actions liberate themselves. You do things and let go. You let go because your reference point is not relativity but, rather, the awareness itself. One important thing about this teaching of ultimate bodhichitta, this resting in the nature of this awareness, is that all relativity is somewhat fraudulent. If any of us longs for a day when we can become a real dharma practitioner, that is never going to happen. Or if we are going to become real bodhisattvas, that is never going to happen. Or real anything. What we do is that we rest and then we try something out. We respond and then, at a certain point, our activity, our response starts to become an ego thing.

Then, at that point, we have to let go because it is becoming fake. It is starting to become solid. Trying to be too good or trying to be too holy or trying to be too perfect a dharma practitioner and constantly pushing oneself is a real trap. It is a real dead-end. This is dangerous, because we live in a culture where you are supposed to be good. It is not that you act in a way that is compassionate — you have to actually be good. This doesn't work. Whenever we start to

try to become something legitimate, something undermines us. Something undercuts it. At this point, our training is that we actually rest in the nature. We appreciate the ground being pulled out because we can go back to that basic awareness. When things don't work out or the rug gets pulled out, you might just rest your mind. Your mind is already naturally resting at that point anyway. Let it be that way. Just take that as an opportunity.

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