



THE BODHISATTVA IDEAL APPLIES IN THE REAL WORLD

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ABSTRACT :

When it comes to the Bodhisattva ideal, Mahayana Buddhism must be mentioned. In Mahayana Buddhism, the most prominent doctrine is the Bodhisattva doctrine. With the building of the ideal Bodhisattva image, along with the principles of practice and vows to save sentient beings. The Bodhisattva's essential nature is great compassion, and all sentient beings are the object of that compassion. And the nature of the great compassion that forms one of the important characteristics of the Bodhisattvas is to never leave suffering beings behind on their journey.

Therefore, Mahayana Buddhism manifests itself as a religion that upholds the spirit of active incarnation from the time of the Buddha to the present day. For today's society, the more science and technology develops, the more human morality degrades, people are often indifferent to everything around them. Bodhisattvas always go along with all difficulties, make great vows to stay in the world to save sentient beings, and preach the Dharma with all skillful means, depending on people and circumstances.

Keywords: Bodhisattva ideal, Mahayana Buddhism, six perfections, three types of Dharma giving, benefits of practicing them in real life.

Introduction :

When it comes to the Bodhisattva ideal, Mahayana Buddhism must be mentioned. In Mahayana Buddhism, the most prominent doctrine is the Bodhisattva doctrine. With the building of the ideal Bodhisattva image, along with the principles of practice and vows to save sentient beings. The Bodhisattva's essential nature is great compassion, and all sentient beings are the object of that compassion. And the nature of the great compassion that forms one of the important characteristics of the Bodhisattvas is to never leave suffering beings behind on their journey. Therefore, Mahayana Buddhism manifests itself as a religion that upholds the spirit of active incarnation from the time of the Buddha to the present day. During the Tran Dynasty in Vietnam, the Bodhisattva ideal was clearly outlined through Cu Tran Lac Dao Phu:

*“Live in the world and be happy with Buddhism, follow sentient beings,
Eat when hungry, sleep when tired.
There is treasure in the house, stop looking for it,
For a mindless scene, don't ask for meditation”.*¹

Buddha Emperor Tran Nhan Tong always reminds us to live in the world according to the ideal of Bodhisattvas. Therefore, in real life, everyone in society can have Buddha in their hearts, because Buddhism is the process of finding the truth. Truth lies not in Buddhism but in real life. When one has realized the truth, it is the time when people can realize their nature and become a Buddha in real life. When people realize Buddhism and fulfill their duties to society, they are still happy with Buddhism in life. It is not necessary to shave off the hair of monasticism, just realize the reason of the five aggregates is not, the true mind has no form, then you can enter life in a relationship with an appropriate attitude, dedication to life is also to Buddhism. Since then, with an open Buddhist mind, it is possible to practice the Bodhisattva ideal completely and joyfully.

1. The origin and ideal of the Bodhisattva

In Buddhism, a Bodhisattva, romanized: Bodhisattva² or Bodhisattva is a person who is on the path towards Bodhi (awakening) or Buddhahood.³ Bodhisattva (Pāli: Bodhisatta- Sanskrit: Bodhisattva) means a being who earnestly attains enlightenment,⁴ or an enlightened being (bodhi-being).

¹ Le Manh That, (2000), *Tran Nhan Tong Complete Volume*, Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House, p. 248.

² "Bodhisattva". *Collins English Dictionary*.

³ Skilling, Peter (2021). *Questioning the Buddha: A Selection of Twenty-Five Sutras*, Introduction, Simon and Schuster.

⁴ Vien Tri, (2011), *The concept of Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara*, General Publishing House, Ho Chi Minh City, P. 60.

In the Pali Canon, the Bodhisattva teaching has its roots in Theravada Buddhism. Bodhisattva is a general term referring to a being (human) who is walking on the path towards enlightenment: “*And so, Bhikkhus, was I before enlightenment, when I had not attained perfect enlightenment, when as a Bodhisattva, oneself being born again seeks what is born, being oneself old again seeking what is old, oneself ill... one's own death, one's own sorrow, one's own defilement, one's self seeking what is defiled*”.⁵

So we see clearly before enlightenment that Buddha was also an ordinary person who was also affected by birth, old age, sickness and death...just like us. We now need to establish that the word Bodhisattva is not only the exclusive thought of Northern Buddhism but has appeared in the Pali Nikayas.

Such as the Jataka and the Bālapandita sutta recount the countless previous lives of Gotama Buddha. “*When the Bodhisattva gives away his head, eyes, bones, brain, palace, wealth, wife and children, the Bodhisattva gives with joy in mind.*”⁶ He spent countless lifetimes practicing, showing all manners of life, the Buddha appeared in many different bodies to teach sentient beings. In the Lotus Sutra it says: “*If there are sentient beings in any land who are worthy to use the body of Buddha, sravaka (Savaka), Brahma King, Bhikkhu, Bhikkhuni, layman... to save them, then Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara will immediately appear that body for them to speak the Dharma*”.⁷

The Bodhisattva ideal has been applied to many different situations and levels to suit the environment, time, space, and depending on each person's ability to benefit them.

Zen master Thich Nhat Hanh said: During the war there were monks who came into life, to fight for peace, opened a school for young people to serve... Or during the war many monks and nuns listened to the call of the mountains and rivers, take off the monk's robe and leave it at the temple, typically, 27 monks volunteered to take off their robes to go to war at Co Le Pagoda, Nam Dinh, on February 27, 1950, some sacrificed themselves for the country, some after completing their high service, they returned to continue their monastic life. Speaking of this, we cannot forget Bodhisattva Thich Quang Duc, an immortal heart in the midst of life. He burned himself on June 11, 1963. The main purpose is to demand Ngo Dinh Diem's government to implement the 5 aspirations of the country's Buddhism. Along with that is ending the policy of religious discrimination. That is their noble Bodhisattva ideal.

The Mahayana view is that everyone has the potential to become a Buddha. Mahayana's policy is to enter the world, to participate in benefiting society. Thus everyone can be a Bodhisattva, always actively working in the service of sentient beings. According to Mahayana, a Bodhisattva is not necessarily ordained or Buddhist, but Bodhisattvas include all kinds of people. A Bodhisattva is truly a Bodhisattva when he no longer clings to anything and always has a mind of letting go of all, including his own happiness, practicing the six perfections. That is the true Bodhisattva ideal.

Bodhisattva's good conduct and the benefits of practicing them in real life

When we are enlightened and peaceful by ourselves, we must share that happiness with everyone and benefit everyone, then that is the ideal of a Mahayana Bodhisattva. The practice of Bodhisattva Conduct is the practice of the Six Perfections.

The six perfections are states of mind that lead the way to liberation and enlightenment. As antidotes to some of our biggest mental obstacles: anger, greed, jealousy, laziness, and more. Six attitudes that work together to help us cope with everything life throws at us. By developing these attitudes, we can slowly but surely realize our full potential, to the greatest benefit of ourselves and others.

The Prajñāpāramitā sūtras and a large number of other Mahāyāna texts list six perfections:^{8, 9}



1. **Dāna pāramitā:** generosity, giving of oneself, the perfect gift.¹⁰

Almsgiving is giving, sharing, giving. There are three types of Dharma giving:

⁵ *Majjhima Nikaya, (Collection of Middle Length Discourses) Vol I*, The Vietnamese Tripitaka, Translated by Most Venerable Thich Minh Chau, (1993), Vietnam Institute of Buddhist Studies published, p 366.

⁶ Translated by Thich Hanh Binh and Thich Tue Hai, (2019), “*Study on the concept of Arahant in Indian Buddhist history*”, Hong Duc Publishing House, p. 586.

⁷ *Saddharma Puṇḍarīka Sūtra, (The Lotus Sutra), the 25th volume of the Bodhisattva Avalokitesvara*, Most Venerable Thich Tri Tinh translated, (2011), Religion Publishing House, Hanoi, pp. 540-543.

⁸ Wright, Dale Stuart (2009). *The Six Perfections: Buddhism and the Cultivation of Character*. Oxford University Press. pp. contents.

⁹ Bodhi, Bhikkhu (2007). *The Discourse on the All-embracing Net of Views: The Brahmajāla Sutta and Its Commentaries*. Buddhist Publication Society. p. 300.

¹⁰ Tran Nguyen Trung, (2008), *Vietnamese-English Buddhist Dictionary*, Hanoi Religious Publishing House, p. 50.

- a) **Wealth giving:** is given with money, food, clothing, effort. . .
- b) **Dharma giving:** is to bring your own learning and practice to guide and admonish others to follow the right path.
- c) **Fearless giving:** is to help people be less afraid, less anxious in words or deeds, by listening to the confide so that others can reduce their anxiety and fear.

As we have witnessed, in recent times, the whole world has suffered from the Covid -19 epidemic, suffering and suffering in all aspects... there are many people who have sacrificed themselves in hospitals or isolation centers for care and support, give spiritual comfort to the sick, others provide material support of all kinds. Or natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes and tsunamis in the world, as well as storms and floods in Central of Vietnam every year, mourning for the loss of people... The whole world joins hands to contribute materially as well as spiritually to support them. Through these actions, we can see that everyone's Bodhisattva spirit is great. That is the ideal of the Bodhisattva to be respected and indeed the perfection of giving. Almsgiving is both beneficial to others and self-beneficial. Buddha taught:

*“As a top alms
Is to give the mysterious Truth to each other,
Like the supreme taste
Long-lasting sweet taste of Truth
Treat it as a top pleasure
The joy of Truth penetrates wonderfully,
One who has eliminated craving
Overcoming afflictions, far away from suffering”.*¹¹

The benefits of giving: Gives us a sense of self-worth that we have something to contribute to others, helps us to overcome craving, misery and stinginess, helps us to avoid or get rid of self-doubt problems and depression.

1. **Śīla pāramitā:** Keeping the commandments¹², virtue, discipline, proper conduct, perfection of morality, discipline, precepts training.

Precepts are keeping precepts. Precepts are things that are forbidden to do and should not be done in order to protect the moral character of a practitioner. The things that should not be done must be decided not to do. The things that should be done must be done to the best of their ability. Buddhism aims to bring people to enlightenment. So the precepts, the dogma of Buddhism, of course, have a value and use. The Perfection of Precepts is a practice by strictly keeping the precepts that the Buddha taught.

“Those who have enough faith in the Dharma, strictly observe the precepts, and have talents and virtues will be respected and honored wherever they go”:

*“Whose heart is filled with faith
Again keep the noble virtues
Have more abundant virtues
Wherever you go, you are greeted with respect.”*¹³

The Buddha taught: “Bhikkhus, after the Tathagata's extinction, you should respect and respect the pure precepts, just as the blind can gain light in the eyes, the poor can gain gold and jewels. Must know that the pure precept is the great teacher of the teachers. If the Tathagata was in the world, it would be no different from the pure precepts.”¹⁴ By keeping the precepts arises meditation, and wisdom has the power to destroy suffering.

The benefit of keeping the precepts: It helps us to avoid all the troubles that arise from harmful actions, words, and thoughts. It forms the basis of trust in others, the foundation of true friendship, and provides a calmer, more stable mind. Prevent yourself from harming others.

1. **Kṣānti pāramitā:** Patience under insult,¹⁵ tolerance, forbearance, acceptance, endurance, perfection of patience, bear, capacity to receive. Is the ability to endure difficulties without anger or sadness, all obstacles through time to overcome suffering can be achieved, as the story of the Bodhisattva Patience in the Jātaka. Because of realizing the great and precious merit of patience, the ancients had a strong message to the world as follows:

“Patience, patience, patience (forbearance in body, forbearance in mouth, forbearance in heart). Then all the wrongdoings from here will end. Forbearance, forbearance, forbearance (forbearance in body, in mouth, in mind), the infinite fairy realm is also achieved. Stop, stop, stop (body, mouth, mind all stop) then the world's famous names are no longer free.”

Benefits of patience: Helps us to be able to avoid all bad situations, helps us to overcome anger, impatience and tolerance, which are depressed moods. We can stay calm in the face of difficulties. Allow yourself to help others in a better way.

1. **Virya pāramitā:** Zeal and progress.¹⁶ Perfection of effort, energy, diligence, vigour, effort.

¹¹ *The Dhammapada 354*, translated by Most Venerable Thich Minh Chau, 1969, Hong Duc Publishing House.

¹² Tran Nguyen Trung, (2008), *Vietnamese-English Buddhist Dictionary*, Hanoi Religious Publishing House, p. 170.

¹³ *The Dhammapada 303*, translated by Most Venerable Thich Minh Chau, (1969), Hong Duc Publishing House.

¹⁴ Thich Vien Giac, (1997), *The Sutra of Diocese summary*, Part 4, The Last Words of Encouragement and Teaching. Saigon Publishing House.

¹⁵ Tran Nguyen Trung, (2008), *Vietnamese-English Buddhist Dictionary*, Hanoi Religious Publishing House, p. 170.

¹⁶ Tran Nguyen Trung, (2008), *Vietnamese-English Buddhist Dictionary*, Hanoi Religious Publishing House, p. 170.

Diligence is perfection of effort in doing all good deeds. The ancients used to say: *“On the road to success, there are no footprints of the lazy”*. It means that we must be courageous, not give in to adversity, but continue to strive persistently to succeed. Therefore, in everything including helping others, we must also be diligent and determined to be able to help others perfectly.

Especially in the current 4.0 technology era, there are many conveniences, but there are also many advantages if we do not have the will and energy, it is difficult to overcome difficulties in life. Those who practice the Buddha's teachings are like those who row a boat upstream, but without trying, they will be swept away by the current, not be discouraged, not be discouraged; but must make every effort to row the boat to the shore of liberation.

Benefits of effort: It gives us the strength to do well what we set out to do. Help me overcome feelings of weakness and laziness. Helps us to be able to complete the most difficult tasks, prevents us from giving up halfway, and helps us to diligently do good deeds to benefit others more.

2. **Dhyāna pāramitā:** Perfection of meditation, one-pointed concentration, contemplation.

Meditation is contemplation, concentration of thoughts on an object. Meditation helps the inner mind not to run after the outside, keeping the mind pure and free from the storms of life. *“Bhikkhus, always be one-pointed, and make every effort to seek the wisdom of liberation. The whole universe, whether dharmas are fluctuating or dharmas are unmoving, is an unstable and disintegrating state”*.¹⁷ Or meditation is a practice that helps to bring peace of mind and body through the practice of counting the breath, through comfortable, light walks, through periods of sitting relaxed and focusing on the good.

The practice of that good is based on mindfulness that each person must realize and act on his/her own: *“Live by yourself as your own island, rely on yourself, not depending on anyone else. Let's take the Dharma as an island, take the Dharma as a refuge, not depending on anyone else.”*¹⁸

Benefits of mindfulness: It helps us focus on what we are doing, avoid mistakes and accidents, avoid drowsiness and agitation, overcome stress, anxiety and excitement, lethargy or excitement motion. Allowing us to focus on the words and behavior of others, so we will better understand how to best help them.

3. **Prajñā pāramitā:** Wisdom, the power to discern reality or truth.¹⁹ Perfection of Wisdom, understanding, insight.

The wisdom of Prajnaparamita is a transcendent wisdom, capable of helping us to understand all things, all events to be able to *“cross over to the other shore”*, a happy shore, liberation and enlightenment.

Buddhism builds a peaceful and happy life with wisdom, not with mere belief. The essence of Buddhism is to take wisdom as a career to practice to achieve liberation. Therefore, in the Sutra of the Buddha's Last Teachings, the Buddha taught:

*“Bhikkhus, having wisdom, one is free from passion, always self-awakening and self-inspecting, not allowing mistakes to be made, so that in the true Dharma of the Tathagata, one is able to realize it. True wisdom is the surest boat to cross the sea of birth, aging, sickness, and death, the brightest light for the darkness of ignorance, the panacea for all sick people, the sharp hammer to cut down the tree of affliction. That's why you should use the wisdom of self-realization to gain self-improvement.”*²⁰ *This is the last teaching of the Buddha.*

Benefits of wisdom: That we see clearly and rightly what to do and how to behave in any particular situation, preventing us from doing things we will regret later. It helps us to overcome hesitation and confusion, to be able to accurately assess the situation of others, to know what we must say and do in order to best benefit everyone.

Conclusion :

The sole purpose of the Buddhist teachings is to save suffering and bring joy. The Bodhisattva ideal is one of the teachings that embodies this characteristic in a career for the benefit of all sentient beings. With this in mind, in the Lotus Sutra the Buddha taught: *“Sariputra, how do you say that the World-Honored Buddhas appear in the world only through a great predestined? The Buddhas, World Honored Ones, because they want to teach sentient beings to enter the Buddha's knowledge and understanding, appear in the world.”*²¹ He wanted to benefit sentient beings, so he appeared in this world. It is also to remind us that living in the world know how to love and care for each other, when the world is in trouble, we have to help out, *“mutual affection”*, *“one piece of food while hungry equals a big basket of food while full”*, *“good leaves cover torn leaves”*...

As mentioned, the Bodhisattva's essential nature is great compassion, and all sentient beings are the object of that compassion. And the nature of great compassion is one of the important characteristics of Bodhisattvas, which is to never give up on suffering beings.

For today's society, the more science and technology develops, the more human morality degrades, people are often indifferent to everything around them. Bodhisattvas always go along with all difficulties, make great vows to stay in the world to save sentient beings, and preach the Dharma with all skillful means, depending on people and circumstances.

More than ever, we as practitioners of the Buddha's work, as messengers of the Tathagata, must apply the Buddha's words to transform our bodies and minds, and cultivate the Precepts- Concentration-Wisdom. Practice the six perfections for perfect accomplishment. The six practices of Prajna Paramita are not difficult, let's start practicing right now. Six practices will change our body and mind, when we practice these six practices, we will feel peaceful and happy.

¹⁷ Thich Vien Giac, (1997), *The Sutra of Diocese summary*, Part 4, The Last Words of Encouragement and Teaching. Saigon Publishing House.

¹⁸ *Majjhima Nikaya, (Collection of Middle Length Discourses) Vol I*, The Vietnamese Tripitaka, Translated by Most Venerable Thich Minh Chau, (1993), Vietnam Institute of Buddhist Studies published, p.133.

¹⁹ Tran Nguyen Trung, (2008), *Vietnamese-English Buddhist Dictionary*, Hanoi Religious Publishing House, p. 170.

²⁰ *Sutra of the Buddha's Last Teachings*, Translator: Most Venerable Thich Tri Quang. The Sutra of the Buddha's Brief Teachings as He neared Nirvana.

²¹ *The Saddharma Pundarika sutra (The Lotus Sutra), The Second Media*, translated by Most Venerable Thich Tri Tinh, (2011), Religious Publishing House, Hanoi, p. 65-66.

The Buddha taught to take his teachings as a guideline, as the core to practice the path of liberation: “*The teachings of the Tathagata are immeasurable, but only one taste is the one taste is liberated.*”²² We have to rush into life, to benefit sentient beings. While working, if you encounter a situation against your will, you must not falter, but must resolutely overcome and complete the job well. Now we are determined to immediately practice this Bodhisattva ideal, without having to repent, regret and suffer later.

Finally, those who practice Paramitas is practicing Bodhisattvas' practice. According to the tradition of Northern Buddhism, Bodhisattva practice (Bodhisattva's practising) comprises of to vow to devote the mind to bodhi (bodhicita); to practise the four immeasurables.

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²² Thich Tam Thien, (2000), *Buddhist Philosophy*, Ho Chi Minh City Publishing House.