

You Are a Bodhisattva
Class Handout
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The theme for this meditation and exercise is *You are a Bodhisattva*. It has also been called *Bodhisattva Check-In*. It is an exercise in thinking completely out of the box, and at the same time the purpose of it is to be completely genuine and *not to invent anything*.

Unlike people who have never encountered the dharma, something has drawn us toward the aspiration of being a bodhisattva, but we may feel that we do not quite measure up to it, and we may even aspire to be a bodhisattva in our next birth if we are a believer in rebirth. The exercise we are about to do turns this way of thinking upside down, and it works just fine whether we believe in rebirth or are not so sure.

Instead of asking about what comes next, I am going to ask you a series of questions about what has already happened. You will be asked to answer each question as honestly as you can, but only to yourself silently. Do not invent or try to revise the past in any way. It has already happened. (After the exercise, I will distribute the questions and have them posted, and you may share your response only if you wish to do so.)

We live in a time of great fear and anxiety. Our senses and our media tell us that all over this planet humans are being terrorized, driven from their homes, murdered, or have witnessed members of their family tortured or killed. The ecology of the entire planet is being shredded, and we have no idea whether the climate will change beyond what humans can bear, what other species may not survive, or whether there will be mass starvation. If we are older, we may fear that we may die not knowing if the next generation has any way to cope with the messes we have left to them.

Any exercise related to lojong is based on reversing our habitual pattern of thinking, and that is what we will be doing right now. Our habitual way of dealing with time is to ask where we are going, or what will happen to me next. So instead, we reverse this by asking how we arrived at the particular birth or embodiment which we have, which is different for every person in this room. And we will answer truthfully. It has already happened, and you may not revise it or wish it were different. This is not an exercise in reinventing the self. There is too much of that already.

Choosing to be born at this time is an act of great bravery. It is a hard decision to make. We have no guarantee that our mission in this lifetime will be successful. We may feel completely alone. As each of us arrived at a different moment, we cannot even be sure that we will wake up and remember why we chose to be born.

Please relax now, and respond to each question with a truthful answer that does not revise anything about yourself.

Step into the time and place of your conception. Where and when were you conceived?

What skin color and ethnicity did you choose for this body? Did you choose to be born into wealth? Poverty? Somewhere in between? Did you choose an intact family? A broken family? A palace? A comfortable home? A refugee camp?

How did privileges or poverty affect your birth? Did poverty, great wealth, modest affluence, or alternations in these affect who you are now?

What sort of landscape did you first see because of the choice you made?

Were you born into a particular faith tradition? Were you raised with belief in some religion? Into skepticism and doubt? Did you grow up with stories and myths because of your family environment? Did you revolt against them?

What gender did you choose for this incarnation? What sexual orientation? How did these choices and the way the society around you responded to these shape your life as it now is?

Into what family did you choose to be born? What man is your father? And what woman is your mother? Were you born into an intact or broken family? An orphanage, foster care, or adoption? Did you experience love and care, or neglect? How have these shaped who you are? What strengths did you develop because of these?

Are you an only child or do you have siblings? Did you experience companionship? Competition? Loneliness? Autonomy?

What disabilities came with this life that you chose? Did these challenges bring their own strengths and resilience? What talents and gifts came with this life? How have they supported your life work?

Finally, if you are able, what mission did you come into this life to perform? (If you cannot see this clearly, do not fake it. Be patient.)

Now look around you! Here are some of your fellow bodhisattvas who have miraculously arrived at this time and place with you.

This handout is for you and will also be placed on our web site. You may use it any way you like. Please do anything you wish -- Make any proclamation, comment, or ask any question you wish. Share anything you wish or keep silent.

Here is a home exercise if it interests you: If you feel that you have insight into some historical person, say Louis Armstrong or Jesus of Nazareth, try to answer these questions for that person.

Derived from *Bodhisattva Check-In* by Joanna Macy and revised by Molly Brown. See workthatreconnects.org