

The first slogan for developing absolute bodhicitta (and the second of the fifty-nine slogans) is:

2. See everything as a dream.

The training suggested in this second point of mind training is the cultivation of all three of these capacities: empathy, sympathy, and compassion. The technical term for this training in Mahayana Buddhism is development of bodhicitta, which means, literally, the impulse or desire for spiritual awakening. This doesn't sound much like compassion or sympathy. Yet implicit in the Mahayana Buddhist understanding of spiritual awakening is the thought that spiritual awakening means awakening to a heartfelt concern for others, since any selfish effort, even with a goal of wisdom or enlightenment for one's self, would never lead to real awakening; it would always lead to more narrowness. Spiritual awakening is exactly dropping the sense of one's narrow separateness; it is essentially and profoundly altruistic. So cultivating bodhicitta means cultivating true and heartfelt concern for others in a way that is not clingy or arrogant but is based on the accurate wisdom that none of us is alone, we all need each other and are closely related to each other. As they say in Japanese Zen, "We all belong to the same nose hole society." In our culture, intelligence and caring seem to be quite different from each other. A highly intelligent person may often be a little arrogant or abstract; a deeply feeling person may appear to be a fuzzy thinker. But in Buddhist thought true intelligence and real caring always go together. They are like the two wings of a noble bird that must be activated together in flight, in perfect harmony and rhythm. Buddhism assumes that true intelligence and true altruism always merge. To be sure, Western culture and religion also value empathy, sympathy, and compassion, as all human beings do, but we do not link these feelings to intelligence and we have no concept that one could train in them. We take it for granted that we will be capable of caring or we won't, depending on our personal character and upbringing, and that if we are not capable of it now, perhaps we will at some point in our lives be inspired or turned around by something that happens to us, or by a person who influences us, and will suddenly see the light. While Buddhism certainly appreciates such possibilities, it adds to them the sense that the impulse to altruism if absent can be encouraged to appear, and if present, can be extended and strengthened with training.

Everything is always passing away. That's just how it is in this world. As soon as something appears, in that same moment, it's already gone. Everything that exists in time is like this, appearing and disappearing in a flash. That's what we mean when we say "time is passing." Things do certainly seem to be here, I am here, you are here, what you see outside your window is there—but the closer you look, the less clear this is. The me of today must be slightly different from the me of yesterday and the me of tomorrow because I know for certain that the me of fifty years ago is quite different from the me of today, almost completely different. The me of fifty years ago is completely

gone, and no trace of him can be found anywhere. He must have disappeared decade by decade, year by year, day by day, and moment by moment. But how? It really doesn't make sense. Now it is today. Where did yesterday go, and where is tomorrow now? You can't say. Nor is it really clear where today—where now—is. As soon as you try to figure it out, it is already gone. Since this is so, you have to wonder whether it was ever really here to begin with, in any hard-and-fast way. Things are always slipping gradually away. If we thought about it even for a moment, we would have to agree. But this is more than a thought. It is also a feeling. If we stop for a moment our busy activity and actually take stock of ourselves as we really are right now, feel our life at this instant, we can note a wistful sense of unease at time passing; we can actually feel this as an underlying mood or sense about life. It is quite unmistakable.

The important thing about this slogan, the effect it is trying to coax us into, is relief. The same relief that comes when you wake up from that nightmare and your whole body suddenly relaxes because you realize that the dire situation you seemed to be in a moment ago is actually okay, it was just a dream. Your anxiety disappears, and you immediately lighten up and relax. Even the worst things can exude some lightness: "Yes, this is terrible, this is not what I wanted, not what I'd hoped for, not what I'd worked for, maybe even what I had feared. But also it's not that bad. It is like a dream. It's happening and not happening. Soon it will be in the past. So I can look at it differently, I don't need to validate all of these dire thoughts that only make matters worse. Maybe I don't need to be so worked up about it. Maybe I can just figure out how to deal with it without that extra measure of anxiety and freak-out." This is not a gimmick. Everything really is like a dream. When you train in this slogan, meditate with it, repeat it to yourself, apply it in your daily experience, it begins to change things for you. When you find that you are upset or angry, when you are having a day when you are mad at yourself or someone else and you are hammering on yourself or complaining about someone else for some reason, you can remember to See everything as a dream, and your mind will snap into a more alert presence and you will find that you can lighten up to some extent. Everything is passing; every problem, no matter how tough, is already solved, even as it's developing.