

Bodhi

Definitional Essay

Theosophy Trust

Bodhi means awakening or enlightenment: the realization of wisdom that transforms the way consciousness knows and lives. In the Theosophical sources, its ethical setting is the bodhisattva path of compassionate service. *Bodhi* names awakening; *Buddhi* names a spiritual principle in the human constitution; *Bodhichitta* names the seed or aspiration of enlightenment. Keeping these related terms distinct helps us understand how the possibility of wisdom may become a living concern for others.

The Sanskrit root *budh* means to awaken, know, perceive, or become enlightened. From it come *Bodhi* and Buddha, the Awakening and the Awakened One. *Bodhi* also stands near *Buddhi*, the spiritual soul or intuitive discernment in the human constitution. The two should not be confused, but they belong to a single luminous family. *Bodhi* is the awakening of wisdom; *Buddhi* is the spiritual principle by which *Manas* becomes receptive to that wisdom.

Professor Iyer's "Enlightenment" describes *Bodhichitta* as the precious seed of enlightenment latent in every human being. It also cautions that the limited mind cannot comprehend awakening merely by projecting a greater version of its present experience. The possibility is universal, but a verbal definition is not realization. These two emphases belong together: confidence in the possibility of wisdom, and humility about the distance between understanding a teaching and embodying it.

The Voice of the Silence gives the beautiful image of resting beneath the *Bodhi* tree, "which is perfection of all knowledge," and becoming the Master of *Samadhi*, the state of faultless vision. The *Bodhi* tree is therefore not only the historical tree of Gautama Buddha's enlightenment. It is a universal symbol of perfected knowledge, inward steadiness, and the awakening of faultless spiritual sight.

Yet *Bodhi* is not personal self-glorification. When The Voice says, "thou art thy Master and thy God," it does not mean that the personality becomes divine in an inflated sense. It means that the separative self has become transparent enough for the deeper Self to be recognized. The seeker no longer seeks an external object of salvation; the Light is realized within consciousness itself.

Bodhi must also be distinguished from intellectual knowledge. A person may know doctrines, quote scriptures, classify principles, and still remain bound by pride, fear, resentment, and self-

concern. Knowledge may prepare the way, but *Bodhi* is not the mind's possession of truth. It is truth's illumination of the mind.

Nor is *Bodhi* psychic vision. Psychic experience can be vivid and still be clouded by desire, vanity, fear, or illusion. *Bodhi* is faultless vision because it is free from the distortions of *Kama-Manas*. It does not seek sensation. It sees through appearances into law, compassion, and the emptiness of separative selfhood.

The *Bodhi* tree offers an image of knowledge that has become living shelter. A living tree offers shelter because its roots and branches have grown into a coherent whole. In the Heart Doctrine, knowledge and compassion likewise belong together. The awakened understanding described in these sources is not indifferent to the lives around it. The question of what wisdom makes possible for others grows from the very meaning of awakening.

This gives study a practical direction. We can ask whether a newly understood idea helps us attend more faithfully to the circumstances before us. Merely repeating a doctrine about unity may leave a habit of contempt intact. Testing the idea in a relationship shows where the distance between understanding and conduct still needs patient work.

Love becomes educable under *Bodhi*. Personal love often begins mixed with need, fear, attachment, and the desire to be mirrored. *Bodhi* does not condemn this mixture; it illumines it. Love grows wiser when it asks whether a relationship is teaching patience, truthfulness, tenderness, non-possessiveness, and reverence for the soul of another.

Consider a student who has understood an explanation of prejudice but still dismisses a neighbour by a familiar label. A conversation reveals a history the student did not know. The new facts matter, but the more difficult recognition is inward: a category had been allowed to replace a person. The student can ask a sincere question, correct an unfair statement, and notice the same habit when it appears again. This is an ordinary exercise in learning to see; it should not be inflated into a claim of enlightenment.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception brings the neighbour's circumstances into the field of attention without surrendering judgment about particular actions. A larger view may reveal a genuine wrong more clearly, while preventing the wrong from becoming the whole identity of the person who committed it. This conjunction of discernment and compassion gives the doctrine a demanding usefulness. Understanding should help us respond more accurately, rather than merely feel more generous about ourselves.

Suffering too becomes transmutable, though never sentimentalized. A wound may reveal where the heart has closed. A failure may uncover pride. A loss may deepen tenderness toward all

beings who lose. *Bodhi* helps suffering become part of awakening without using doctrine to excuse cruelty or indifference.

Bodhi is inseparable from the Bodhisattva ideal. The Bodhisattva is one whose essence has become Wisdom, yet who remains in *samsara* to serve and help humanity. This is the decisive test of awakening. Wisdom that turns away from the suffering world is incomplete. *Bodhi* matures into vow, presence, teaching, and aid.

Bodhichitta, the seed of enlightenment, is latent in every human being. This gives *Bodhi* its compassionate foundation. No human being is spiritually disposable. However obscured or wounded a person may be, there remains a hidden possibility of awakening. To see others in the light of *Bodhi* is not to excuse harmful action, but to refuse to reduce any being to present ignorance.

This doctrine supports Human Solidarity and Universal Brotherhood. Humanity is not a mass of separate egos competing for survival. It is a field of awakening, uneven and karmically burdened, but sacred in potential. The same Wisdom that shines through Buddha is latent, however faintly, in every heart. The path is open because the seed is present.

Bodhi also requires reverent stewardship of consciousness. Thoughts affect the subtle atmosphere. Words carry influence. Actions either conceal or reveal the possibility of wisdom. If *Bodhi* is the flowering of wisdom, then every moment of attention is part of the garden. To protect attention, refine motive, and practice compassion is to tend the seed.

Beauty belongs to this stewardship. The *Bodhi* tree is an image of living beauty, rootedness, shelter, proportion, and patient growth. A truthful word, a restrained reaction, a peaceful room, a task done carefully, or a generous interpretation can become a small expression of awakened order.

The distinction between capacity and realization also protects hope. A seed does not become a tree because someone praises it, and poor conditions can delay its growth. Yet difficulty does not prove that growth is impossible. Ethical discipline, sustained attention and willingness to learn supply conditions that admiration alone cannot provide. In this sense, the teaching joins confidence in human possibility to responsibility for cultivating it.

The *Bodhi* tree itself gives a living image. A tree grows slowly. It needs root, soil, water, light, and protection. The seed of enlightenment likewise requires ethical life, meditation, humility, devotion, study, and service. *Bodhi* may appear sudden, but the ground has long been prepared.

The *Bodhi* tree offers shelter through the life that has grown within it. We need not claim its full flowering in order to tend the conditions of awakening. Study can become less possessive,

attention more exact, and care less dependent upon personal preference. The seed is honoured when we make room for its growth in ourselves and refuse to deny its possibility in another being.

Glossary

Absolute — Unconditioned reality, beyond the limitations and relations of manifested existence.

Absolute Abstract Space — The boundless, non-relational symbol of the Absolute; neither astronomical emptiness nor a container outside the things it contains.

Avidya — Fundamental ignorance or mistaken identification, from which the other afflictions arise.

Bodha-Bodhi — Wisdom-knowledge; the compound used in Blavatsky's quoted glossary entry.

Bodhi — Awakening or enlightenment; spiritual wisdom. The sources distinguish the realization of wisdom from merely knowing a doctrine.

Bodhichitta — The seed or aspiration of enlightenment; Professor Iyer relates it to wisdom sought for the welfare of beings.

Bodhisattva — A being on the path of awakening and compassion. The sources distinguish human, metaphysical and hierarchical uses of the term.

Buddha — An awakened one; the title refers here particularly to Gautama and, more broadly, to perfected spiritual wisdom.

Buddhi — The spiritual soul or vehicle of *Atman*, associated with intuitive discernment and the illumination of *Manas*.

Budh — The Sanskrit root associated with awakening or knowing, from which *Bodhi* and *Buddha* are derived.

Conditioned — Dependent upon particular limits, relations, causes, or instruments of experience.

Consubstantial — Of the same essential nature or substance; the quotation relates the seed of enlightenment to the highest planes of cosmic substance.

Consummation — Completion or fulfillment; here, the culmination of spiritual development.

Dhyani Buddha — A contemplative or celestial Buddha in Theosophical cosmology; the expression has a metaphysical rather than ordinary personal meaning.

Drawing a Larger Circle of Conception — Widening the frame of understanding to include more relations, perspectives, and responsibilities.

Ego — A center of self-reference; personal appropriation is distinguished from the higher or spiritual Ego in the cited passages.

Heart Doctrine — The teaching of inward realization joined to compassion, distinguished from a merely external grasp of spiritual forms.

Human Solidarity — Shared human dignity and interdependence, expressed through considerate responsibility for others.

Immutable — Not subject to change; the quotations use it for resolve or reality according to context.

Kama-Manas — The personal or lower mind in association with desire; also written *kama manas*.

Latency — A condition in which a possibility or power is present without differentiated expression; latent is the related adjective.

Mahat — Universal Mind or cosmic intelligence in Theosophical philosophy.

Manas — The thinking principle or self-conscious mind; its higher individuality and lower personal ray are distinguished. Manasic means pertaining to *Manas*.

Manifestation — The expression of reality through differentiated forms, relations, and conditions.

Manushi Buddha — A human or terrestrial Buddha, distinguished in the sources from a celestial *Dhyani Buddha*.

Maya — The relative or conditioned character of manifestation; appearance becomes misleading when mistaken for independent, absolute reality.

Metaphysics — Inquiry into the fundamental principles and relations of reality beyond immediate appearances.

Motive — The inward purpose of an act, distinct from its outward appearance or the praise it receives.

Mulaprakriti — Pre-cosmic root-substance or root-nature; the veil through which the Absolute is approached and the ground of differentiated nature.

Nirvana — Spiritual liberation; the quoted teaching considers its relation to *samsara* and the continuing practice of compassion.

One Life — The universal living ground expressed through diverse forms and beings in Theosophical teaching.

Parabrahm — The unconditioned, Secondless Reality, also written Parabrahman or *Parabrahmam*; distinguished from every relational expression within manifestation.

Personality — The temporary personal constitution, memories, and roles of a particular life, distinguished from the enduring individuality.

Philos — Greek for loving or friend; Professor Iyer pairs it with *sophia* in his philosophical description of enlightenment.

Plane — A level or mode of being or consciousness; not necessarily a location in physical space.

Prakriti — Nature or the field of material and mental transformations; distinguished from *purusha* in *Sankhya* and Yoga.

Pralaya — Dissolution or a period of non-manifestation.

Psychic — Pertaining to personal and subtle awareness shaped by impressions and desire; not by itself equivalent to spiritual wisdom.

Rootless Root — A symbolic name for the Absolute as the ground of all manifestation without a prior source of its own.

Samadhi — Meditative absorption; a discipline with gradations culminating in spiritual cognition.

Sambodhi — A term paired with *Bodhi* in the quoted glossary entry for receptive intelligence.

Samsara — Conditioned cyclic existence, understood in relation to karma, rebirth, and suffering.

Sat — Truth, Reality or Be-ness; Professor Iyer invokes it in the quoted discussion of enlightenment beyond illusion, ignorance and death.

Sattva — Lucidity, harmony, or balance; one of the three *gunas*.

Sophia — Greek for wisdom; paired with *philos* in the quoted discussion of enlightenment.

Subject and object — The perceiver and what is perceived; a central distinction within conditioned consciousness.

Tathagata — A title of the Buddha; the cited passage speaks of awakened predecessors as exemplars of compassion.

Tautologically — By restating the same meaning; Professor Iyer uses it for the phrase realization of the Real.

Unconditioned Consciousness — Consciousness beyond the limiting subject-object relations of manifested experience; symbolized by Absolute Abstract Motion.

Universal Brotherhood — The spiritual kinship of beings, expressed ethically through care extending beyond personal or sectarian boundaries.

Vidya — Knowledge or wisdom; here, spiritual understanding or illumination.

Quotes for Meditation and Self Study

1. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 17.

“And now, rest 'neath the *Bodhi* tree, which is perfection of all knowledge, for, know, thou art the Master of *SAMADHI* — the state of faultless vision. Behold! thou hast become the Light, thou hast become the Sound, thou art thy Master and thy God. Thou art THYSELF the object of thy search: the VOICE unbroken, that resounds throughout eternities, exempt from change, from sin exempt, the seven sounds in one, THE VOICE OF THE SILENCE.”

Meditation thought: The *Bodhi* tree joins perfected knowledge with an inward realization beyond the searching personality. Let the image encourage preparation without turning aspiration into a claim of attainment.

2. H.P. Blavatsky, “The Two Paths”, *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 18.

“And now, O Teacher of Compassion, point thou the way to other men. Behold, all those who knocking for admission, await in ignorance and darkness, to see the gate of the Sweet Law flung open! The voice of the Candidates: Shalt not thou, Master of thine own Mercy, reveal the Doctrine of the Heart? Shalt thou refuse to lead thy Servants unto the Path of Liberation?”

Meditation thought: The teacher is asked to open a way for others. Consider whether what you have understood is becoming easier for another person to approach.

3. H.P. Blavatsky, “The Two Paths”, *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 18.

“The Paths are two; the great Perfections three; six are the Virtues that transform the body into the Tree of Knowledge.”

Meditation thought: The tree of knowledge grows through transformation. Intellectual interest gains depth when the virtues begin to shape the conduct through which knowledge is expressed.

4. H.P. Blavatsky, "The Two Paths", *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 25.

"To live to benefit mankind is the first step. To practise the six glorious virtues is the second."

Meditation thought: Benefit to humanity is placed at the beginning of the path. A small useful act can give today's study a direction beyond personal accumulation.

5. H.P. Blavatsky, "The Seven Portals", *The Voice of the Silence*, p. 54.

"Can there be bliss when all that lives must suffer? Shalt thou be saved and hear the whole world cry? Now thou hast heard that which was said. Thou shalt attain the seventh step and cross the gate of final knowledge, but only to wed woe — if thou would'st be *Tathagata*, follow upon thy predecessor's steps, remain unselfish till the endless end."

Meditation thought: The cry of the world enters the question of liberation. Contemplate what freedom would mean if its purpose included remaining available to suffering beings.

6. R.N. Iyer, "Enlightenment", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 237.

"In order to ameliorate this condition, H.P. Blavatsky devoted considerable attention, in *The Secret Doctrine*, to the emerging phases of manifestation from the long night of *Pralaya*. Whilst these considerations are so abstract as to be of immediate interest only to the highest Adepts, they nevertheless have a direct relevance to all who seek to enter the path. If absolute abstract Space, unconditioned Consciousness and boundless Duration are the fundamental terms in the equation of manifestation, then they must also be the ultimate factors in any adequate conception of self-reference, self-regeneration and self-realization. Through meditation upon *Mulaprakriti* and *Prakriti*, *Parabrahm* and *Mahat*, boundless Duration and conditioned Time, the mind can be balanced and brought into proper orientation to the problem of Self and non-self. As this inner posture is steadied by devotion, entry onto the path will come through intuition and a strengthening of the heart."

Meditation thought: Metaphysical reflection is joined to the strengthening of the heart. Study becomes fruitful when a wider conception corrects the narrow assumptions governing an ordinary response.

7. R.N. Iyer, "Enlightenment", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 236.

"That enlightenment has no specific ground, is not a state and is no event. Tautologically, it is the realization of the Real. Philosophically, it is the consummation of *philos* in *sophia*, the two becoming one, the extinction of divisions between subject and object. Inaccessible through mere affirmation or even negation, it is the One Truth (SAT) beyond all illusion, ignorance and death."

Meditation thought: The Real is not an event to be collected among personal experiences. Let the passage loosen the wish to turn awakening into a remembered possession.

8. R.N. Iyer, "Enlightenment", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 236.

"Ultimately, there can be no true comprehension of enlightenment or of the path outside of enlightenment itself. Mortality cannot judge of immortality; *avidya* cannot conceive of *vidya*. The insubstantial self of mayavic matter cannot encompass the boundlessness of the Real. The shadow cannot comprehend the light that casts it."

Meditation thought: The limits of present understanding need not be concealed. Humility allows an exalted teaching to guide inquiry without pretending that its full meaning has been realized.

9. R.N. Iyer, "Enlightenment", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 236.

"Nonetheless, there is latent in every human being the precious seed of enlightenment, *bodhichitta*. Consubstantial with the highest planes of cosmic substance, it is the core of that consciousness perfected by Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. It is the immutable ground of immortality, inseparable from the One Life or the Rootless Root of all manifestation."

Meditation thought: The seed of enlightenment belongs to every human being. This gives patience a foundation deeper than approval of another person's present behaviour.

10. R.N. Iyer, "Enlightenment", *The Gupta Vidya*, Volume III, p. 237.

"If unmanifest wisdom is without antecedent, it is also without residue. Typically, however, human beings conceive of enlightenment as some sort of real change – a contradiction in terms. Put crudely, they suppose either that eternal wisdom has somehow become real, or that the unreal realm of *maya* has somehow become non-existent. Too objective a mind will produce the first misconception, too subjective a turn of mind will produce the second. In either case, the theoretical and, what is the same thing, the practical possibility of enlightenment is obscured."

Meditation thought: The passage questions our pictures of enlightenment as a change imposed upon reality. Examine the assumptions carried by the very image of attainment you prefer.

11. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 61.

"*Bodha-Bodhi* (Sk.). Wisdom-knowledge. *Bodhi* or *Sambodhi* (Sk.). Receptive intelligence, in contradistinction to *Buddhi*, which is the potentiality of intelligence."

Meditation thought: Related words need not mean the same thing. Distinguishing receptive intelligence from its potentiality gives study greater precision and keeps a familiar sound from replacing understanding.

12. H.P. Blavatsky, *The Theosophical Glossary*, p. 62.

“Bodhisattva (Sk). Lit., "he, whose essence (*sattva*) has become intelligence (*bodhi*)"; those who need but one more incarnation to become perfect Buddhas, i.e., to be entitled to Nirvâna. This, as applied to *Manushi* (terrestrial) Buddhas. In the metaphysical sense, Bodhisattva is a title given to the sons of the celestial *Dhyâni Buddhas*.”

Meditation thought: The entry distinguishes human and metaphysical uses of bodhisattva. Care with context lets reverence remain exact instead of flattening every spiritual designation into one meaning.