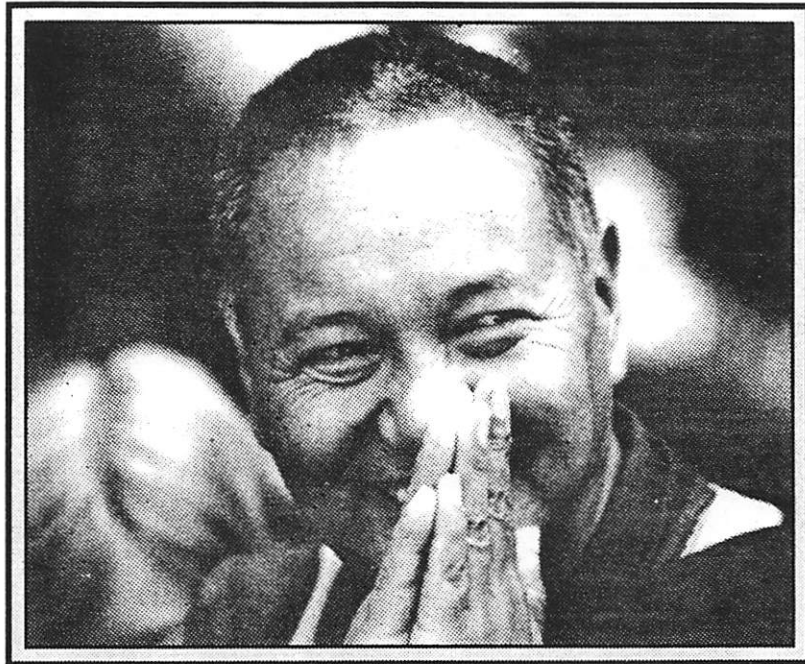


Essays On Bodhicitta -

by Various Authors

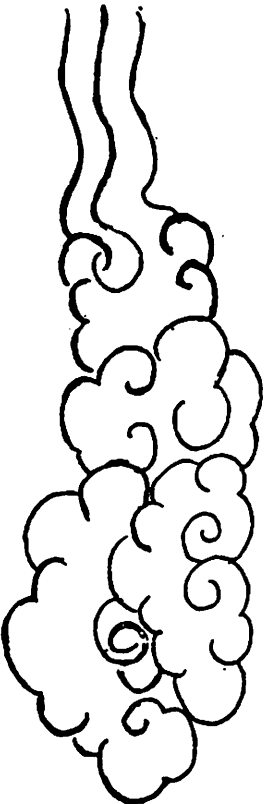
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"Dwelling deep within our heart and within the hearts of all beings without exception, is an inexhaustible source of love and wisdom. And the ultimate purpose of all spiritual practices, whether they are called Buddhist or not, is to uncover and make contact with this essentially pure nature." Lama Yeshe

To the sublime kings of the human beings : Those who are living in the present time, those who have lived in the past, and those who have not yet descended, to all those who have knowledge as vast as an infinite ocean, with hands folded in the mudra of prostration, I go for Refuge.



V. Stabilizing in the Bodhimind*

In the spiritual energy that relieves
The anguish of beings in misery and
Places depressed beings in eternal joy,
I lift up my heart and rejoice.

In the goodness producing illumination
I lift up my heart and rejoice.

I rejoice in the beings who have gained
Eternal liberation from suffering,
And I rejoice in those attained to Buddhahood
As well as in their offspring, the noble Bodhisattvas.

In the ocean-like virtue of the bodhimind
That brings joy to all beings
And in accomplishing the well-being of others,
I lift up my heart and rejoice.

To the Buddhas of the ten directions
I join my hands in respect.
Let blaze the light of Dharma's truth
For the beings lost in darkness.

To the Buddhas considering parinirvana
I join my hands in prayer.
Do not abandon the beings in sorrow
But remain and teach for countless ages.

May any spiritual energy thus generated
By my devotion to the enlightened ones
Be dedicated to dispelling the misery
Of living beings without exception.

(38)

As long as diseases afflict living beings
May I be the doctor, the medicine
And also the nurse
Who restores them to health.

May I fall as a rain to increase
The harvests that must feed the living beings
And in ages of dire famine
May I myself serve as food and drink.

May I be an unending treasury
For those desperate and forlorn.
May I manifest as what they require
And wish to have near to them.

My body, every possession
And all goodness past, present and future
Without remorse I dedicate
To the well-being of the world.

Suffering is transcended by total surrender
And the mind attains to nirvana.
As one day all must be given up,
Why not dedicate it now to universal happiness ?

My bodily powers I dedicate
To the well-being of all that lives.
Should anyone wish to kill, abuse or beat me,
The responsibility is purely their own.

Should anyone wish to ridicule me
And make me an object of jest and scorn,
Why should I possibly care
If I have dedicated myself to others ?

Let them do as they wish with me,
So long as it does not harm them.
May no one who encounters me
Ever have an as insignificant contact.

(39)

Regardless of whether those whom I meet
Respond toward me with anger or faith,
May the mere fact of our meeting
Contribute to the fulfillment of their wishes.

May the slander, harm
And all forms of abuse
That anyone should direct toward me
Act as a cause of their enlightenment.

May I be a protector of the helpless,
A guide to those travelling the path,
A boat to those wishing to cross over;
Or a bridge or a raft.

May I be land for those requiring it,
A lamp for those in darkness,
May I be a home for the homeless,
And a servant to the world.

In order to fulfill the needs of beings
May I be as a magic gem,
An inexhaustible vase, a mystic spell,
A cure-all medicine and a wish-granting tree.

May I act as the mighty earth
Or like the free and open skies
To support and provide the space
Whereby I and all others may grow.

Until every being afflicted by pain
Has reached to nirvana's shores,
May I serve only as a condition
That encourages progress and joy.

Just as all previous Buddhas
First gave rise to the precious bodhimind
And just as they then carefully followed
The stages of the Bodhisattva disciplines,

(40)

Likewise for the sake of living beings
Do I now myself generate the bodhimind,
And likewise will I myself train
In the disciplines of a Bodhisattva.

(Do these two verses three times.)

They who out of wisdom
Have seized the supreme bodhimind
Praise, glorify and rejoice in it,
That it may grow to fulfillment.

From today I will reap the fruit of life ;
Having well won the state of man,
Today I am born in the Buddha-Family
And am now a child of the Buddhas.

Thus in future I should make every effort
To live in accord with the Bodhisattva Ways,
And never should I act as would bring shame
To this noble, faultless family.

Like a blind man fumbling in garbage
Happens to find a rare and precious gem,
Likewise have I discovered
The jewel of the precious bodhimind.

Thus was found this supreme ambrosia to dispell
The Lord of Death, destroyer of life ;
An inexhaustible treasure able to cure
The poverty of all sentient beings.

It is the highest of medicines
To quell the ills of the living,
And it is a tree giving shade
To those wandering on the paths of life.

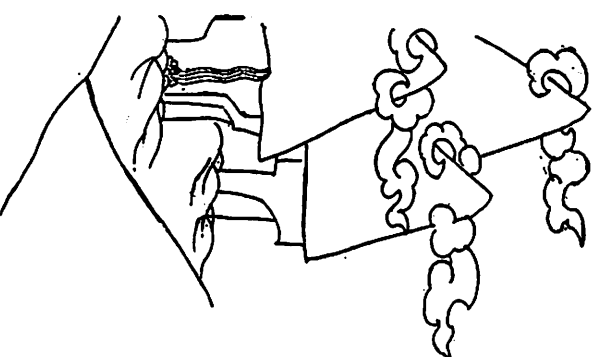
It is a strong and mighty bridge
By which beings can cross from misery,
And it is a moon to shine in the mind
To clear away the pains of delusion.

(41)

The bodhimind is a great radiant sun
To disperse the darkness of unknowing,
And it is the very essence of butters
Gained from churning the milks of Dharma.

For all guests on the roads of life
Who would taste the very substance of joy,
Here is the actual seat of true happiness,
A veritable feast to satiate the world.

Thus today in the presence of all Awakened Ones
I invite every living being to this festival
Giving both immediate and lasting joy.
May the gods and all others rejoice.



Eight Verses On Training The Mind

With a determination to accomplish the highest welfare
for living beings,
who each surpass even a wish-fulfilling jewel
in their preciousness,
To contribute as much as I can to their having
every pure temporary and ultimate happiness,
I will learn to hold them all supremely dear

When among others
I will think of myself as the lowest among all
and will hold others to be supreme,
from the very depths of my heart

I will learn to search into my mind,
and long before an afflictive emotion
or mistaken conception appears,
endangering self and others,
I will firmly face and avert it

When meeting with those who have
particularly strong sins and sufferings
I will regard them as precious to me,
I will do all I can for them, continually,
I will give them everything I have

When others treat me badly, with slander, abuse and so on,
I will accept all loss, think nothing of it,
and always offer all victories to them

When one I have benefitted hurts me
I will learn to see that one as my own Supreme Guru

In short, I will learn to offer all help and happiness,
all health and peace to all beings,
both directly and indirectly,
and at the same time I will remove,
completely and permanently,
as much suffering as these beings may have

I will keep these practices undiminished by the usual
worldly preoccupations
and by knowing appearances as insubstantial,
I will be without the limitations that accompany
ego-grasping

Making space

Bodhichitta is the essential, universal truth.

This most pure thought is the wish and the will to bring all sentient beings to the realization of their highest potential, enlightenment.

The bodhisattva sees the crystal nature that exists in each of us, and by recognizing the beauty of our human potential, always has respect.

For the disrespectful mind human beings are like grass, something to be used. 'Ah, he means nothing to me. Human beings are nothing to me.'

We all try to take advantage of someone else, to profit only for ourselves. The entire world is built on attachment. Big countries overwhelm small countries, big children take candy from small children, husbands take advantage of their wives. I make friends with someone because he can benefit me. It is the same with the rest of the world. Boyfriends, girlfriends. Everybody wants something.

The desire to make friends only for the other person's benefit is extremely rare; however, it is very worthwhile. Buddha explained that even one moment's thought of this mind dedicated to enlightenment for the sake of others can destroy a hundred thousand lifetimes' negative karma.

We have attachment which makes us tight and uncomfortable. But even a tiny spark of bodhichitta's heat makes the heart warm and relaxed.

Bodhichitta is the powerful solution, the atomic energy that destroys the kingdom of attachment.

Bodhichitta is not emotional love. By understanding the relative nature of sentient beings and seeing their highest destination, and by developing the willingness to bring *all* beings to that state of enlightenment, the mind is filled with love born from wisdom, not emotion.

Bodhichitta is not partial. Wherever you go with bodhichitta if you meet people, rich people or poor people, black or white, you are comfortable and you can communicate.

We have a fixed idea; life is this way or that. 'This is good. This is bad.' We do not understand the different aspects of the human condition. But, having this incredible universal thought our narrow mind vanishes automatically. It is so simple; you have space and life becomes easier.

For example, someone looks at us, at our home, at our garden and we freak out. We are so insecure and tight in our hearts. Arrogant. 'Don't look at me.' But with bodhichitta there is space. When someone looks we can say, 'Hmm. She's looking. But that's O.K.' Do you understand? Rather than feeling upset you know it is alright.

Bodhichitta is the intoxicant that numbs us against pain and fills us with bliss.

Bodhichitta is the alchemy that transforms every action into benefit for others.

Bodhichitta is the cloud that carries the rain of positive energy to nourish growing things.

Bodhichitta is not doctrine. It is a state of mind. This inner experience is completely individual. So how can we *see* who is a bodhisattva and who is not? How can we *see* the self-cherishing mind?

If we feel insecure ourselves we will project that negative feeling onto others.

We need the pure innermost thought of bodhichitta; wherever we go that will take care of us.



6 *Opening the Heart*

SELFISHNESS OR DEDICATION TO OTHERS?

So far the spiritual path has been described in terms of our own fulfillment. As we realize that our accustomed way of relating to desirable objects has been keeping us trapped in a circle of perpetual dissatisfaction, we become more and more motivated to activate a deeper level of our being. Our purpose is to experience a type of peace and happiness that is stable and reliable, unruffled by changing circumstances and uninfluenced by the passage of time. But even this higher aspiration to win release from the frustrating cycle of desire and dissatisfaction is still incomplete. Why? Because it is primarily concerned with only our own welfare.

Before, perhaps, our desires were limited to the possession of sensory objects, while now – through the development of some renunciation – they are directed towards the realization of our deepest potential. But the emphasis still remains, 'I want this, I don't want that.'

This narrow concern for our own happiness and our own liberation makes it impossible for us to realize the vast potential of our human mind and heart. Such self-centred concern values the welfare of just one being – myself – over the welfare of the countless others who share life's problems with us. This extremely restricted view inevitably causes our heart to close. Then, even if we do not say so consciously, it is as if we feel, 'I am the most important person in the world. The problems that others have are of no concern to me; it is only my own happiness that counts.'

As long as we remain so tightly focused upon our own happiness, whether temporal or ultimate, we will never experience the expansiveness of a truly open heart. The only way to achieve the total vision of complete enlightenment is to free ourselves from the restrictions of this narrow, self-cherishing attitude. In the teachings of all the highly evolved men and women of the past it is clearly stated that this narrow, self-cherishing habit of mind brings us nothing but spiritual suffocation. If we truly wish to fulfil our highest potential – or even if we only want to achieve a certain mundane satisfaction in our daily life – then we must overcome this self-cherishing and dedicate ourselves as fully as possible to the welfare of others. This is the only way to achieve a completely opened heart, the only way to experience lasting happiness.

Dedication simply means that, having created a certain atmosphere of positive energy within yourself, you determine to share this happiness with others as much as possible. According to buddhist psychology, if you do not have a dedicated attitude to some extent, you will never be totally satisfied. Instead, you will remain bored and lonely. As the Panchen Lama says in his tantric text entitled *Offering to the Spiritual Master*, 'Self-cherishing is the cause of all misery and dissatisfaction, while holding all mother sentient beings dearer than oneself is the foundation of all realizations and knowledge. Therefore, inspire me to change my self-cherishing into concern for all others.' This is not some complex philosophical theory but a very simple statement. To see whether or not our self-cherishing is the cause of all our confusion and frustration all we have to do is look at our own life's experiences.

The Panchen Lama goes on to suggest that we take a good look at what Shakyamuni Buddha did with his life. He gave up all his self-attachment, dedicated himself completely to the welfare of others and as a result attained the unsurpassed bliss of complete enlightenment. Then look at us. We are obsessed with me, me, me – but the only thing we have

gained is unending misery and disappointment. This is a very simple, straightforward comparison and we do not need to rely on the authority of the Panchen Lama or anyone else to see the truth it is pointing to. All the evidence we need is available in our own life and in the lives of others. Check up carefully and it will become clear that narrow selfishness always leads to disappointment and equally clear that open-hearted dedication to others brings about happiness and a sense of well-being.

THE OPEN-HEARTED BODHICITTA MOTIVATION

We have already seen how our habitual attachment to sense objects prevents us from experiencing the happiness and satisfaction we all want. If we are sincerely intent on achieving the highest human pleasure, therefore, we must give our mind space by developing an attitude of renunciation. That is, we must renounce our habitual grasping after pleasure so that we can experience *true* pleasure. Similarly, as long as we remain obsessively concerned with our own happiness alone, we will never experience the supreme happiness of a fully enlightened mind. In other words, if we wish to reach the highest possible destination we must cultivate the highest possible motivation for following the spiritual path.

In buddhist terminology this supreme motivation is known as *bodhicitta*. It is the impulse to achieve full enlightenment (*bodhi*, or buddhahood) in order to be of the most benefit to others. Only through dedicating ourselves to working for the happiness of all beings – in other words only by cultivating the open heart of bodhicitta – can we ever experience supreme happiness ourselves.

The dedicated attitude of bodhicitta is the powerful energy capable of transforming our mind completely. This can be shown to be true through our own experience; it is not something we have to believe in with blind faith. When you have developed bodhicitta in your heart all the good things in life are magnetically attracted to you and effortlessly pour

down upon you like rain. At present, because our heart is filled with self-cherishing thoughts, all we seem to attract is misfortune. But with bodhicitta we automatically attract good friends, good food, good everything.

As the Dalai Lama has said, if you are going to be selfish, at least be *wisely* selfish. What he means by this peculiar-sounding advice is that in a way bodhicitta is like a huge selfish attitude: when you dedicate yourself to others with loving-kindness, you get back far more happiness than you could ever experience otherwise. Ordinarily, we get so little happiness, and it is easily lost. So if we want to be as happy as possible, the only thing to do is to dedicate ourselves wholeheartedly to the welfare of others.

LIBERATION FROM SELF-CHERISHING

We should not think that bodhicitta is a 'religious' attitude, something that we have to believe in and accept on faith alone. This supremely compassionate outlook is a direct result of clear insight into our own essential reality and the reality of others. Whenever we are concerned just with ourselves, our problems seem insurmountable. Preoccupied with thoughts of me, our mind is filled with worry and anxiety. 'Maybe I'm not good-looking enough,' 'Maybe others won't like me,' 'I wonder if I will succeed.' And so on. Everything related to this 'I' becomes a problem, a worry, a threat to our well-being and security.

The only way to break free from this neurotic obsession with ourselves is by opening our hearts to others. When we are truly concerned with the welfare of someone else we automatically cease to be so concerned with our own problems, at least for a while. And as compassion for others replaces pity for ourselves, we discover hidden treasures of strength and wisdom within us. It can be said that merely possessing this compassionate bodhicitta is a type of enlightened experience. As we create this open space in our

consciousness, we take on a much more universal character. Instead of being confined in our own petty reality, we move into the larger sphere of universal concern. This automatically liberates us from most of our problems.

So often we make such a fuss of insignificant events in our life that we turn minor difficulties into major problems. As we develop the universal view of bodhicitta, however, these small concerns become unimportant and no longer bother us. As this burden of self-concern drops from our shoulders, we experience a small taste of the complete freedom that comes with full spiritual fulfillment. Experiences like this are encouraging because they demonstrate so convincingly the practical, day-to-day value of training and transforming our mind.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT BODHICITTA

When some people first hear about bodhicitta they confuse it with a sentimental, highly emotional state of mind: 'Oh how I want people to be happy! I cannot stand to think of their suffering.' They feel so overwhelmed by the needs of others that their mind becomes depressed. But true bodhicitta is not at all like this; it has nothing to do with such an upset and paralyzed state of mind. Instead, it is clear and easy going, possessing a calm wisdom as well as a deeply felt compassion. It is an attitude of opening our heart completely and leaving it open as much as we can.

There is another mistaken idea that many people have when they first hear teachings on bodhicitta. Because it is necessary to develop our own inner potential to the full in order to benefit others in the deepest, most complete way, they believe that they cannot do *anything* to help others until they finally become a buddha. 'First I must study hard for many years,' they think, 'and then I can begin the practice of mental training. After a long time I might develop renunciation and bodhicitta and then, some time in the distant future

when I become enlightened, I can begin to benefit others.

Such an attitude is completely mistaken; we are only burdening ourselves with a rigid conception of how our spiritual life can develop. It is just another restraint, another fantasy. If we believe strongly in such a fixed program for our life, before we know it our death will come and we won't even have started!

The fact is, while we are cultivating love, compassion, wisdom and all the other insights that lead to enlightenment, we can be helping others continuously. First of all, merely by living a simple life with a heart dedicated to overcoming self-cherishing, we automatically benefit others. And secondly, each stage of spiritual development, from the first to the last, has its own power and ability; depending on which level we have reached, we can help others to that extent. To be realistic, we should help others to the limit of our present capacity. The thought that we cannot do anything until we are enlightened is in fact egotistic and ignorant and reflects a basic misunderstanding of what spiritual training is all about.

This misunderstanding is related to an attitude we have had throughout our lives. At school, for instance, we thought, 'I must study these boring subjects now so that eventually I can pass my examinations, receive my degree, get a good job, make a lot of money, and *then* I will be happy.' All this emphasis on the future – 'When I have enough money,' 'When I own my own home,' 'When I retire' – is easily transferred to our spiritual practice: 'When I have finished practising,' 'When I am enlightened.' But to think in this way is quite deluded. This dream fantasy of an unreal future makes our present actions unrealistic as well.

It is important to understand that true practice is something we do from moment to moment, from day to day. We do whatever we can, with whatever wisdom we have, and dedicate it all to the benefit of others. We just live our life simply, to the best of our ability. This in itself will be of

enormous benefit to others; we don't need to wait until we are buddhas before we can begin to act.

DEVELOPING EQUANIMITY: THE FOUNDATION FOR UNIVERSAL COMPASSION

If you have a clear and simple understanding of the philosophy and psychology of bodhicitta and try to act accordingly in everyday life, experimenting with this open-hearted dedication to others in all your actions, that is a sufficient spiritual practice. That is good enough. Of course, the development of the actual bodhicitta – the state of mind in which we are automatically more concerned for others than we are for ourselves – is a profound realization, and we have a long way to go before we achieve it. We do not develop a completely opened heart merely by wishing for it; there is a long and gradual training to be engaged in.

In my mind, one of the beauties of Buddhism is that it offers us a practical training for our mind. It does not say, 'Bodhicitta is fantastic because Buddha said so!' Instead, it gives us the methods for developing such an attitude and we can then see for ourselves whether it works or not, whether it is fantastic or not.

According to these methods, the first thing we need is a sense of equanimity, or equilibrium. Just as level ground is the basis on which you build a house, so too is equanimity – an unbiased attitude towards all other beings – the foundation for cultivating bodhicitta. The experience of past mediators is that when you have achieved such equilibrium, you can cultivate bodhicitta quickly and easily. However, because our habit of discriminating sharply between friends, enemies and strangers is very deeply rooted within us, such even-mindedness is not easy to achieve. With our tremendous grasping desire we become attached to and cling to our dear friends, with aversion and hatred

we reject those we do not like, and with indifference we turn a blind eye to the countless people who appear to be neither helpful nor harmful to us. As long as our mind is under the control of such attachment, aversion and indifference, we will never be able to cultivate the precious bodhi-citta in our heart.

Equanimity is not an intellectual concept; it is not just another thought or idea to be played around with in your head. Rather, it is a state of mind, a specific quality of consciousness or awareness to be attained through constant familiarity. For this to happen you have to exert a great deal of effort. In other words, you have to train your mind and transform your basic attitude towards others. For example, when I first encounter a group of new people at a meditation course, say, I feel the same towards each of them. I have not met any of them before – they seem to have suddenly popped up like mushrooms – and I have not had time to develop attachment or aversion towards any of them. They all seem to be equal to me. If I take this unbiased feeling of equality that I have towards these new, unknown people and apply it both to my dear friends to whom I am attached and to my enemies and critics whom I dislike, I can start to develop true equanimity towards everyone.

There is a detailed meditation technique for the full cultivation of such equilibrium. In brief, you imagine yourself surrounded by three people: your dearest friend, your worst enemy and a total stranger. One way is to visualize your friend behind you and the enemy and stranger in front with all other beings in human form massed around you. Having surrounded yourself in this way, you carefully examine the feelings you have towards each of the three people and analyze why you have categorized them as you have.

When you ask yourself, 'Why do I feel close to just one of these people and not to the others?' you will probably discover that your reasons are very superficial, based on a few selected events. For example, perhaps you call the first person a friend because whenever you think of her you

remember instances of her kindness or affection. And the second person appears to be your enemy because you remember some particularly nasty things he has done or said to you. As for the third person, the reason you call him a stranger is that you have no memory of his having ever helped or harmed you.

Your reasons for these different reactions are in fact arbitrary. If you search your memory honestly you are certain to find many instances when the three people you are thinking about did not fit comfortably into the categories you have so rigidly placed them. You may very well recall times when the enemy you now despise so much acted kindly towards you, when the friend you now care for so much provoked anger from you, and even when the person you are now indifferent to once meant a great deal to you. If you really think about this there is no way you can continue to see these people in the highly prejudicial way you do now. And when you reflect that each living being has, over beginningless past lifetimes, done the same kind and unkind things to you as the friend and enemy of this life, you will come to see that *all* are equal in having been friend, enemy and stranger to you over and over again.

By training your mind in this way, your feelings of attachment to your friend, aversion to your enemy and indifference to the stranger will begin to subside. This is the sign that you are beginning to experience a measure of equilibrium. Hold onto this feeling, and eventually, with practice, it will become an integral part of your mind.

Meditating on equilibrium is the best way of producing good mental health. Instead of paying a hundred dollars an hour to a therapist, meditate on equilibrium! Close your eyes and ignore all physical sensations. Abandon the five sense perceptions and allow yourself to sink deeply into intensive awareness of your mind's experience of equilibrium. You will definitely become more balanced, open and peaceful. After even ten minutes of this type of meditation you will come out into a different world.

There is a common misconception about the development of equilibrium. Some people think that it means becoming indifferent to everyone. They are afraid that if they lessen their attachment to their family and friends, their love and affection will disappear. But there is no need to worry. With true equilibrium there is no way we can close our heart to anyone.

The more we train ourselves to see the basic equality of everyone — having overcome our habitual tendency to stick them rigidly into categories of friend, enemy and stranger — the more our heart will open, increasing immeasurably our capacity for love. By freeing ourselves from prejudicial views we will be able to appreciate fully that everyone, without exception, wants and deserves to be happy and wishes to avoid even the slightest suffering. Therefore, from the basis of equilibrium we will be able to cultivate universal love, compassion and eventually the full realization of bodhicitta: the open heart dedicated totally to the ultimate benefit of all.

BODHICITTA IS NECESSARY FOR PRACTISING TANTRA

As a prerequisite for the successful practice of tantra, the development of bodhicitta is absolutely necessary. It has been said by all masters that to be properly qualified to practise tantra, we must possess a very strong bodhicitta motivation. Truly qualified tantric practitioners wish to follow the speediest path to enlightenment, not with the desire to gain quick liberation, but because they have unbearable compassion for others. They realize that the longer it takes them to achieve enlightenment, the longer everyone who needs help will have to wait. The lightning vehicle of tantra is therefore intended for those who wish to help others as much as possible, as quickly as possible.

Although it is true that bodhicitta is the most important prerequisite for tantric practice, in fact, it is more accurate to

say that the opposite is true: that the purpose for practising tantra is to enhance the scope of one's bodhicitta.

There are so many tantric deities — Avalokiteshvara, Manjushri, Tara and the rest — into whose practice you can be initiated; there are so many deities you can meditate upon. But what are all these deities for? What is the purpose of all these practices? It is nothing other than developing and expanding the dedicated heart of bodhicitta. There is really no other reason for all these deities. In fact, all tantric meditations without exception are for the sole purpose of developing strong bodhicitta.

Take the practice of thousand-armed Avalokiteshvara, for example. The whole reason for having your consciousness manifest as a divine light-being with one thousand arms is so that you can lend a hand to one thousand suffering beings. What other reason could you have for wanting so many arms? And, if you do not feel comfortable manifesting in this way, you can always relate your meditation to your own culture and manifest your inner being as Jesus, Saint Francis, Kwan Yin or any other holy being.

What we have to understand is that Avalokiteshvara and Jesus, for example, are exactly the same; the essential nature of each is complete selfless devotion in the service of others. Therefore, when we try to be like them, through the practice of tantra, prayer or any other method, it is only to be able to serve others in a similarly selfless way. This selfless dedication to others is the true meaning of bodhicitta and that is why bodhicitta is not only the major prerequisite of tantra, it is also the most important fruit of this practice.

TWELVE

Compassion: The Wish-Fulfilling Jewel

CARING FOR THE DYING makes you poignantly aware not only of their mortality, but also of your own. So many veils and illusions separate us from the stark knowledge that we are dying; when we finally know we are dying, and all other sentient beings are dying with us, we start to have a burning, almost heartbreaking sense of the fragility and preciousness of each moment and each being, and from this can grow a deep, clear, limitless compassion for all beings. Sir Thomas More, I heard, wrote these words just before his beheading: "We are all in the same cart, going to execution; how can I hate anyone or wish anyone harm?" To feel the full force of your mortality, and to open your heart entirely to it, is to allow to grow in you that all-encompassing, fearless compassion that fuels the lives of all those who wish truly to be of help to others.

So everything that I have been saying up until now about caring for the dying could perhaps be summed up in two words: love and compassion. What is compassion? It is not simply a sense of sympathy or caring for the person suffering, not simply a warmth of heart toward the person before you, or a sharp clarity of recognition of their needs and pain, it is also a sustained and practical determination to do whatever is possible and necessary to help alleviate their suffering.

Compassion is not true compassion unless it is active. Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Compassion, is often represented in Tibetan iconography as having a thousand eyes that see the pain in all corners of the universe, and a thousand arms to reach out to all corners of the universe to extend his help.

THE LOGIC OF COMPASSION

We all feel and know something of the benefits of compassion. But the particular strength of the Buddhist teaching is that it shows you clearly a "logic" of compassion. Once you have grasped it, this logic makes your practice of compassion at once more urgent and all-embracing, and more stable and grounded, because it is based on the clarity of a reasoning whose truth becomes ever more apparent as you pursue and test it.

We may say, and even half-believe, that compassion is marvelous, but in practice our actions are deeply uncompassionate and bring us and others mostly frustration and distress, and not the happiness we are all seeking for.

Isn't it absurd, then, that we all long for happiness, yet nearly all our actions and feelings lead us directly away from that happiness? Could there be any greater sign that our whole view of what real happiness is, and of how to attain it, is radically flawed?

What do we imagine will make us happy? A canny, self-seeking, resourceful selfishness, the selfish protection of ego, which can, as we all know, make us at moments extremely brutal. But in fact the complete reverse is true: Self-grasping and self-cherishing are seen, when you really look at them, to be the root of all harm to others, and also of all harm to ourselves.¹

Every single negative thing we have ever thought or done has ultimately arisen from our grasping at a false self, and our cherishing of that false self, making it the dearest and most important element in our lives. All those negative thoughts, emotions, desires, and actions that are the cause of our negative karma are engendered by self-grasping and self-cherishing. They are the dark, powerful magnet that attracts to us, life after life, every obstacle, every misfortune, every anguish, every disaster, and so they are the root cause of all the sufferings of samsara.

When we have really grasped the law of karma in all its stark power and complex reverberations over many, many lifetimes, and seen just how our self-grasping and self-cherishing, life after life, have woven us repeatedly into a net of ignorance that seems only to be ensnaring us more and more tightly; when we have really understood the dangerous and doomed nature of the self-grasping mind's enterprise; when we have really pursued its operations into their most subtle hiding

places; when we have really understood just how our whole ordinary mind and actions are defined, narrowed, and darkened by it, how almost impossible it makes it for us to uncover the heart of unconditional love, and how it has blocked in us all sources of real love and real compassion, then there comes a moment when we understand, with extreme and poignant clarity, what Shantideva said:

*If all the harms
Fears and sufferings in the world
Arise from self-grasping,
What need have I for such a great evil spirit?*

and a resolution is born in us to destroy that evil spirit, our greatest enemy. With that evil spirit dead, the cause of all our suffering will be removed, and our true nature, in all its spaciousness and dynamic generosity, will shine out.

You can have no greater ally in this war against your greatest enemy, your own self-grasping and self-cherishing, than the practice of compassion. It is compassion, dedicating ourselves to others, taking on their suffering instead of cherishing ourselves, that hand in hand with the wisdom of egolessness destroys most effectively and most completely that ancient attachment to a false self that has been the cause of our endless wandering in samsara. That is why in our tradition we see compassion as the source and essence of enlightenment, and the heart of enlightened activity. As Shantideva says:

*What need is there to say more?
The childish work for their own benefit,
The buddhas work for the benefit of others.
Just look at the difference between them.
If I do not exchange my happiness
For the suffering of others,
I shall not attain the state of buddhahood
And even in samsara I shall have no real joy.²*

To realize what I call the wisdom of compassion is to see with complete clarity its benefits, as well as the damage that its opposite has done to us. We need to make a very clear distinction between what is in our ego's self-interest and what is in our ultimate interest; it is from mistaking one for the other that all our suffering comes. We go on stubbornly believing

that self-cherishing is the best protection in life, but in fact the opposite is true. Self-grasping creates self-cherishing, which in turn creates an ingrained aversion to harm and suffering. However, harm and suffering have no objective existence; what gives them their existence and their power is only our aversion to them. When you understand this, you understand then that it is our aversion, in fact, that attracts to us every negativity and obstacle that can possibly happen to us, and fills our lives with nervous anxiety, expectation, and fear. Wear down that aversion by wearing down the self-grasping mind and its attachment to a nonexistent self, and you will wear down any hold on you that any obstacle and negativity can have. For how can you attack someone or something that is just not there?

It is compassion, then, that is the best protection; it is also, as the great masters of the past have always known, the source of all healing. Suppose you have a disease such as cancer or AIDS. By taking on the sickness of those suffering like you, in addition to your own pain, with a mind full of compassion you will—beyond any doubt—purify the past negative karma that is the cause, now and in the future, of the continuation of your suffering.

In Tibet, I remember hearing, there were many extraordinary cases of people, who when they heard they were dying of a terminal illness, gave away everything they had and went to the cemetery to die. There they practiced taking on the suffering of others; and what is amazing is that instead of dying, they returned home, fully healed.

Working with the dying, I have experienced again and again, gives all who do so a direct opportunity to practice compassion in action, and in the situation where it is probably most deeply needed of all.

Your compassion can have perhaps three essential benefits for the dying person: First, because it is opening your heart, you will find it easier to show the dying person the kind of unconditional love I have spoken about, and which they need so much. On a deeper, spiritual level, I have seen again and again how, if you try to embody compassion and act out of the heart of compassion, you will create an atmosphere in which the other person can be inspired to imagine the spiritual dimension or even take up spiritual practice. On the deepest level of all, if you do constantly practice compassion

for the dying person and in turn inspire them to do the same, you might not only heal them spiritually, but perhaps even physically too. And you will discover for yourself, with wonder, what all the spiritual masters know, that *the power of compassion has no bounds*.

Asanga was one of the most famous Indian Buddhist saints, and lived in the fourth century. He went to the mountains to do a solitary retreat, concentrating all his meditation practice on the Buddha Maitreya, in the fervent hope that he would be blessed with a vision of this Buddha and receive teachings from him.

For six years Asanga meditated in extreme hardship, but did not even have one auspicious dream. He was disheartened and thought he would never succeed with his aspiration to meet the Buddha Maitreya, and so he abandoned his retreat and left his hermitage. He had not gone far down the road when he saw a man rubbing an enormous iron bar with a strip of silk. Asanga went up to him and asked him what he was doing. "I haven't got a needle," the man replied, "so I'm going to make one out of this iron bar." Asanga stared at him, astounded; even if the man were able to manage it in a hundred years, he thought, what would be the point? He said to himself: "Look at the trouble people give themselves over things that are totally absurd. You are doing something really valuable, spiritual practice, and you're not nearly so dedicated." He turned around and went back to his retreat.

Another three years went by, still without the slightest sign from the Buddha Maitreya. "Now I know for certain," he thought "I'm never going to succeed." So he left again, and soon came to a bend in the road where there was a huge rock, so tall it seemed to touch the sky. At the foot of the rock was a man busily rubbing it with a feather soaked in water. "What are you doing?" Asanga asked.

"This rock is so big it's stopping the sun from shining on my house, so I'm trying to get rid of it." Asanga was amazed at the man's indefatigable energy, and ashamed at his own lack of dedication. He returned to his retreat.

Three more years passed, and still he had not even had a single good dream. He decided, once and for all, that it was hopeless, and he left his retreat for good. The day wore on, and in the afternoon he came across a dog lying by the side

of the road. It had only its front legs, and the whole of the lower part of its body was rotting and covered with maggots. Despite its pitiful condition, the dog was snapping at passers-by, and pathetically trying to bite them by dragging itself along the ground with its two good legs.

Asanga was overwhelmed with a vivid and unbearable feeling of compassion. He cut a piece of flesh off his own body and gave it to the dog to eat. Then he bent down to take off the maggots that were consuming the dog's body. But he suddenly thought he might hurt them if he tried to pull them out with his fingers, and realized that the only way to remove them would be on his tongue. Asanga knelt on the ground, and looking at the horrible festering, writhing mass, closed his eyes. He leant closer and put out his tongue . . . The next thing he knew, his tongue was touching the ground. He opened his eyes and looked up. The dog was gone; there in its place was the Buddha Maitreya, ringed by a shimmering aura of light.

"At last," said Asanga, "why did you never appear to me before?"

Maitreya spoke softly: "It is not true that I have never appeared to you before. I was with you all the time, but your negative karma and obscurations prevented you from seeing me. Your twelve years of practice dissolved them slightly, so that you were at last able to see the dog. Then, thanks to your genuine and heartfelt compassion, all those obscurations were completely swept away, and you can see me before you with your very own eyes. If you don't believe that this is what happened, put me on your shoulder and try and see if anyone else can see me."

Asanga put Maitreya on his right shoulder and went to the marketplace, where he began to ask everyone: "What have I got on my shoulder?" "Nothing," most people said, and hurried on. Only one old woman, whose karma had been slightly purified, answered: "You've got the rotting corpse of an old dog on your shoulder, that's all." Asanga at last understood the boundless power of compassion that had purified and transformed his karma, and so made him a vessel fit to receive the vision and instruction of Maitreya. Then the Buddha Maitreya, whose name means "loving kindness," took Asanga to a heavenly realm, and there gave him many sublime teachings that are among the most important in the whole of Buddhism.

THE STORY OF TONGLEN AND THE POWER OF COMPASSION

My students often come to me and ask: "My friend's or my relative's suffering is disturbing me very much, and I really want to help. But I find I cannot feel enough love actually to be able to help. The compassion I want to show is blocked. What can I do?" Haven't all of us surely known the sad frustration of not being able to find in our hearts enough love and compassion for the people who are suffering around us, and so not enough strength to help them?

One of the great qualities of the Buddhist tradition is its development of an array of practices that can really help you in situations like this, that can truly nourish you and fill you with the power and the joyful resourcefulness and enthusiasm that will enable you to purify your mind and unblock your heart, so that the healing energies of wisdom and compassion can play upon and transform the situation you find yourself in.

Of all the practices I know, the practice of *Tonglen*, which in Tibetan means "giving and receiving," is one of the most useful and powerful. When you feel yourself locked in upon yourself, Tonglen opens you to the truth of the suffering of others; when your heart is blocked, it destroys those forces that are obstructing it; and when you feel estranged from the person who is in pain before you, or bitter or despairing, it helps you to find within yourself and then to reveal the loving, expansive radiance of your own true nature. No other practice I know is as effective in destroying the self-grasping, self-cherishing, self-absorption of the ego, which is the root of all our suffering and the root of all hard-heartedness.

One of the greatest masters of Tonglen in Tibet was Geshe Chekhawa, who lived in the eleventh century. He was extremely learned and accomplished in many different forms of meditation. One day when he happened to be in his teacher's room, he came across a book lying open at the following lines:

*Give all profit and gain to others,
Take all loss and defeat on yourself.*

The vast and almost unimaginable compassion of these lines astounded him, and he set out to find the master who had written them. One day on his journey he met a leper, who told him that this master had died. But Geshe Chekhawa

persevered, and his long efforts were rewarded when he found the dead master's principal disciple. Geshe Chekhawa asked this disciple: "Just how important do you think the teachings contained in these two lines are?" The disciple replied:

"Whether you like it or not, you will have to practice this teaching if you truly wish to attain buddhahood."

This reply astonished Geshe Chekhawa almost as much as his first reading of the two lines, and he stayed with this disciple for twelve years, to study this teaching and to take to heart the practice of Tonglen, which is its practical application. During that time, Geshe Chekhawa had to face many different kinds of ordeals: all sorts of difficulties, criticism, hardships, and abuse. And the teaching was so effective, and his perseverance in its practice so intense, that after six years he had completely eradicated any self-grasping and self-cherishing. The practice of Tonglen had transformed him into a master of compassion.

At first Geshe Chekhawa taught Tonglen to only a few close disciples, thinking that it would only work for those who had great faith in it. Then he began to teach it to a group of lepers. Leprosy at that time was common in Tibet, and ordinary doctors were unable to treat or cure it. But many of the lepers who did Tonglen practice were cured. The news of this spread fast, and other lepers flocked to his house, which began to seem like a hospital.

Still Geshe Chekhawa didn't teach Tonglen widely. It was only when he noticed the effect it had on his brother that he began to give it out more publicly. Geshe Chekhawa's brother was an inveterate skeptic, who derided all forms of spiritual practice. However, when he saw what was happening to the lepers who were practicing Tonglen, this brother could not help being impressed and intrigued. One day he hid behind a door and listened to Geshe Chekhawa teaching Tonglen, and then, in secret, started doing the practice on his own. When Geshe Chekhawa noticed that his brother's hard character was beginning to soften, he guessed what had happened.

If this practice could work on his brother, he thought, and transform him, then it could work on and transform any other human being. This convinced Geshe Chekhawa to teach Tonglen far more widely. He himself never ceased to practice it. Toward the end of his life, Geshe Chekhawa told his students that for a long time he had been praying fervently to be reborn in the hell realms, so as to be of help to

all the beings suffering there. Unfortunately, he added, he had recently had several clear dreams that indicated he was to be reborn in one of the realms of the buddhas. He was bitterly disappointed and begged his students, with tears in his eyes, to pray to the buddhas that this would not happen, and that his passionate wish to help the beings in hell would be fulfilled.

HOW TO AWAKEN LOVE AND COMPASSION

Before you can truly practice Tonglen, you have to be able to evoke compassion in yourself. That is harder than we often imagine, because the sources of our love and compassion are sometimes hidden from us, and we may have no ready access to them. Fortunately there are several special techniques that the Buddhist "training of the mind" in compassion has developed to help us evoke our own hidden love. Out of the enormous range of methods available, I have selected the following ones, and have ordered them in a particular way so as to be of the greatest possible use to people in the modern world.

1. *Loving Kindness: Unsealing the Spring*

When we believe that we don't have enough love in us, there is a method for discovering and invoking it. Go back in your mind and recreate, almost visualize, a love that someone gave you that really moved you, perhaps in your childhood. Traditionally you are taught to think of your mother and her lifelong devotion to you, but if you find that problematic, you could think of your grandmother or grandfather, or anyone who had been deeply kind to you in your life. Remember a particular instance when they really showed you love, and you felt their love vividly.

Now let that feeling arise again in your heart, and infuse you with gratitude. As you do so, your love will go out naturally to that person who evoked it. You will remember then that even though you may not always feel that you have been loved enough, you were loved genuinely once. Knowing that now will make you feel again that you are, as that person made you feel then, worthy of love and really lovable.

Let your heart open now, and let love flow from it; then extend this love to all beings. Begin with those who are closest to you, then extend your love to friends and to acquaintances, then to neighbors, to strangers, then even

to those whom you don't like or have difficulties with, even those whom you might consider as your "enemies," and finally to the whole universe. Let this love become more and more boundless. Equanimity is one of the four essential facets, with loving kindness, compassion, and joy, of what the teachings say form the entire aspiration of compassion. The all-inclusive, unbiased view of equanimity is really the starting point and the basis of the path of compassion.

You will find that this practice unseals a spring of love, and by that unsealing in you of your own loving kindness, you will find that it will inspire the birth of compassion. For as Maitreya said in one of the teachings he gave Asanga: "The water of compassion courses through the canal of loving kindness."

2. *Compassion: Considering Yourself the Same as Others*

One powerful way to evoke compassion, as I have described in the previous chapter, is to think of others as exactly the same as you. "After all," the Dalai Lama explains, "all human beings are the same—made of human flesh, bones, and blood. We all want happiness and want to avoid suffering. Further, we have an equal right to be happy. In other words, it is important to realize our sameness as human beings."³

Say, for example, you are having difficulties with a loved one, such as your mother or father, husband or wife, lover or friend. How helpful and revealing it can be to consider the other person not in his or her "role" of mother or father or husband, but simply as another "you," another human being, with the same feelings as you, the same desire for happiness, the same fear of suffering. Thinking of the person as a real person, exactly the same as you, will open your heart to him or her and give you more insight into how to help.

If you consider others just the same as yourself, it will help you to open up your relationships and give them a new and richer meaning. Imagine if societies and nations began to view each other in the same way; at last we would have the beginnings of a solid basis for peace on earth and the happy coexistence of all peoples.

3. *Compassion: Exchanging Yourself for Others*

When someone is suffering and you find yourself at a loss to know how to help, put yourself unflinchingly in his or her place. Imagine as vividly as possible what you would be going

through if you were suffering the same pain. Ask yourself: "How would I feel? How would I want my friends to treat me? What would I most want from them?"

When you exchange yourself for others in this way, you are directly transferring your cherishing from its usual object, yourself, to other beings. So exchanging yourself for others is a very powerful way of loosening the hold on you of the self-cherishing and the self-grasping of ego, and so of releasing the heart of your compassion.

4. *Using a Friend to Generate Compassion*

Another moving technique for arousing compassion for a person who is suffering is to imagine one of your dearest friends, or someone you really love, in that person's place.

Imagine your brother or daughter or parent or best friend in the same kind of painful situation. Quite naturally your heart will open, and compassion will awaken in you: What more would you want than to free them from their torment? Now take this compassion released in your heart and transfer it to the person who needs your help: You will find that your help is inspired more naturally, and that you can direct it more easily.

People sometimes ask me: "If I do this, will the friend or relative whom I am imagining in pain come to some harm?" On the contrary, thinking about them with such love and compassion can only be of help to them, and will even bring about the healing of whatever suffering and pain they may have gone through in the past, may be going through now, or have yet to go through.

For the fact that they are the instrument of your arousing compassion, even if it is only for an instant, will bring them tremendous merit and benefit. Because they have been responsible, in part, for the opening of your heart, and for allowing you to help the sick or dying person with your compassion, then the merit from that action will naturally return to them.

You can also mentally dedicate the merit of that action to your friend or relative who helped you to open your heart. And you can wish the person well, and pray that in the future he or she will be free of suffering. You will be grateful toward your friend, and your friend might feel inspired and grateful too, if you tell the person that he or she helped you to evoke your compassion.

So to ask, "Will my friend or relative I am imagining in place of the sick or dying person come to some harm?"

shows that we have not really understood how powerful and miraculous the working of compassion is. It blesses and heals all those involved: the person who generates compassion, the person through whom that compassion is generated, and the person to whom that compassion is directed. As Portia says in Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*:

*The quality of mercy is not strained,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath: it is twice blessed;
It blesseth him that gives, and him that takes . . .*

Compassion is the wish-fulfilling gem whose light of healing spreads in all directions.

There is a very beautiful story that I love that illustrates this. Buddha once recounted one of his previous lives, before he became enlightened. A great emperor had three sons, and the Buddha had been the youngest, who was called Mahasatva. Mahasatva was by nature a loving and compassionate little boy, and thought of all living things as his children.

One day the emperor and his court went to picnic in a forest, and the princes went off to play in the woods. After a while they came across a tigress who had given birth, and was so exhausted with hunger that she was on the point of eating her little cubs. Mahasatva asked his brothers: "What would the tigress need to eat now to revive her?"

"Only fresh meat or blood," they replied.

"Who could give his own flesh and blood to see that she is fed and save the lives of her and her cubs?" he asked.

"Who, indeed?" they replied.

Mahasatva was deeply moved by the plight of the tigress and her cubs, and started to think: "For so long I have been wandering uselessly through samsara, life after life, and because of my desire, anger, and ignorance, have done little to help other beings. Here at last is a great opportunity."

The princes were walking back to join their family, when Mahasatva said: "You two go on ahead. I will catch you up later." Quietly he crept back to the tigress, went right up to her, and lay down on the ground in front of her, to offer himself to her as food. The tigress looked at him, but was so weak that she could not even open her mouth. So the prince found a sharp stick and cut a deep gash in his body; the blood flowed out, the tigress licked it, and grew strong enough to open her jaws and eat him.

Mahasatva had given his body to the tigress in order to save her cubs, and through the great merit of his compassion,

he was reborn in a higher realm, and progressed toward his enlightenment and his rebirth as the Buddha. But it was not only himself he had helped through his action: The power of his compassion had also purified the tigress and her cubs of their karma, and even of any karmic debt they might have owed to him for saving their lives in the way he did. Because it was so strong, in fact, his compassionate act created a karmic link between them that was to continue far into the future. The tigress and her cubs, who received the flesh of Mahasatva's body, were reborn, it is said, as the Buddha's first five disciples, the very first to receive his teaching after his enlightenment. What a vision this story gives us of how vast and mysterious the power of compassion truly is!

5. *How to Meditate on Compassion*

Yet, as I have said, evoking this power of compassion in us is not always easy. I find myself that the simplest ways are the best and the most direct. Every day, life gives us innumerable chances to open our hearts, if we can only take them. An old woman passes you with a sad and lonely face, swollen veins on her legs, and two heavy plastic bags full of shopping she can hardly carry; a shabbily-dressed old man shuffles in front of you in line at the post office; a boy on crutches looks harried and anxious as he tries to cross the street in the afternoon traffic; a dog lies bleeding to death on the road; a young girl sits alone, sobbing hysterically in the subway. Switch on a television, and there on the news perhaps is a mother in Beirut kneeling above the body of her murdered son; or an old grandmother in Moscow pointing to the soup that is her food for today, not knowing if she'll even have that tomorrow; or one of the AIDS children in Romania staring out at you with eyes drained of any living expression.

Any one of these sights could open the eyes of your heart to the fact of vast suffering in the world. Let it. Don't waste the love and grief it arouses; in the moment you feel compassion welling up in you, don't brush it aside, don't shrug it off and try quickly to return to "normal," don't be afraid of your feeling or embarrassed by it, or allow yourself to be distracted from it or let it run aground in apathy. Be vulnerable: use that quick, bright uprush of compassion; focus on it, go deep into your heart and meditate on it, develop it, enhance, and deepen it. By doing this you will realize how blind you have been to suffering, how the pain that you are experiencing or seeing now is only a tiny fraction of the pain of the world.

All beings, everywhere, suffer; let your heart go out to them all in spontaneous and immeasurable compassion, and direct that compassion, along with the blessing of all the Buddhas, to the alleviation of suffering everywhere.

Compassion is a far greater and nobler thing than pity.

Pity has its roots in fear, and a sense of arrogance and condescension, sometimes even a smug feeling of "I'm glad it's not me." As Stephen Levine says: "When your fear touches someone's pain it becomes pity; when your love touches someone's pain, it becomes compassion."⁴ To train in compassion, then, is to know all beings are the same and suffer in similar ways, to honor all those who suffer, and to know you are neither separate from nor superior to anyone.

So your first response on seeing someone suffer becomes not mere pity, but deep compassion. You feel for that person respect and even gratitude, because you now know that whoever prompts you to develop compassion by their suffering is in fact giving you one of the greatest gifts of all, because they are helping you to develop that very quality you need most in your progress toward enlightenment. That is why we say in Tibet that the beggar who is asking you for money, or the sick old woman wringing your heart, may be the buddhas in disguise, manifesting on your path to help you grow in compassion and so move towards buddhahood.

6. *How to Direct Your Compassion*

When you meditate deeply enough on compassion, there will arise in you a strong determination to alleviate the suffering of all beings, and an acute sense of responsibility toward that noble aim. There are two ways, then, of mentally directing this compassion and making it active.

The first way is to pray to all the buddhas and enlightened beings, from the depths of your heart, that everything you do, all your thoughts, words, and deeds, should only benefit beings and bring them happiness. In the words of one great prayer: "Bless me into usefulness." Pray that you benefit all who come in contact with you, and help them transform their suffering and their lives.

The second and universal way is to direct whatever compassion you have to all beings, by dedicating all your positive actions and spiritual practice to their welfare and especially toward their enlightenment. For when you meditate deeply on compassion, a realization dawns in you that the only way for you to be of *complete* help to other beings is for you to gain

enlightenment. From that a strong sense of determination and universal responsibility is born, and the compassionate wish arises in you at that moment to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all others.

This compassionate wish is called Bodhicitta in Sanskrit; *bodhi* means our enlightened essence, and *citta* means heart. So we could translate it as "the heart of our enlightened mind." To awaken and develop the heart of the enlightened mind is to ripen steadily the seed of our buddha nature, that seed that in the end, when our practice of compassion has become perfect and all-embracing, will flower majestically into buddhahood. Bodhicitta, then, is the spring and source and root of the entire spiritual path. That is why in our tradition we pray with such urgency:

*Those who haven't yet given birth to precious Bodhicitta,
May they give birth,
Those who have given birth,
May their Bodhicitta not lessen but
Increase further and further.*

And this is why Shantideva could praise Bodhicitta with such joy:

*It is the supreme elixir
That overcomes the sovereignty of death.
It is the inexhaustible treasure
That eliminates poverty in the world.
It is the supreme medicine
That quells the world's disease.
It is the tree that shelters all beings
Wandering and tired on the path of conditioned existence.
It is the universal bridge
That leads to freedom from unhappy states of birth.
It is the dawning moon of the mind
That dispels the torment of disturbing conceptions.
It is the great sun that finally removes
The misty ignorance of the world.⁵*

THE STAGES OF TONGLEN

Now that I have introduced you to the various methods of evoking compassion, and to the importance and power of compassion itself, I can give you the noble practice of Tonglen most effectively; for now you will have the motivation, the understanding, and the tools to do it for your greatest benefit

and the greatest benefit of others. Tonglen is a Buddhist practice, but I strongly believe that anyone—anyone at all—can do it. Even if you have no religious faith, I urge you simply to try it. I have found Tonglen to be of the greatest possible help.

Put very simply, the Tonglen practice of giving and receiving is to take on the suffering and pain of others, and give them your happiness, well-being, and peace of mind. Like one of the methods of meditation practice I explained earlier, Tonglen uses the medium of the breath. As Geshe Chekhawa wrote: "Giving and receiving should be practiced alternately. This alternation should be placed on the medium of the breath."

I know from my own experience how hard it is to imagine taking on the sufferings of others, and especially of sick and dying people, without first building in yourself a strength and confidence of compassion. It is this strength and this confidence that will give your practice the power to transmute their suffering.

This is why I always recommend that you begin the Tonglen practice for others by first practicing it on yourself. Before you send out love and compassion to others, you uncover, deepen, create, and strengthen them in yourself, and heal yourself of any reticence or distress or anger or fear that might create an obstacle to practicing Tonglen wholeheartedly.

Over the years a way of teaching Tonglen has developed that many of my students have found very helpful and therapeutic. It has four stages.

THE PRELIMINARY TONGLEN PRACTICE

The best way to do this practice, and any practice of Tonglen, is to begin by evoking and resting in the nature of mind. When you rest in the nature of mind and see all things directly as "empty," illusory, and dream-like, you are resting in the state of what is known as "ultimate" or "absolute Bodhicitta," the true heart of the enlightened mind. The teachings compare absolute Bodhicitta to an inexhaustible treasury of generosity, and compassion, when understood in its profoundest sense, is known and seen as the natural radiance of the nature of mind, the skillful means that rises from the heart of wisdom.

Begin by sitting and bringing the mind home. Allow all your thoughts to settle, neither inviting them nor following

them. Close your eyes if you wish. When you feel really calm and centered, alert yourself slightly, and begin the practice.

1. *Environmental Tonglen*

We all know how the moods and atmospheres of our mind have a great hold on us. Sit with your mind and feel its mood and atmosphere. If you feel your mood is uneasy, or the atmosphere is dark, then as you breathe in, mentally absorb whatever is unwholesome; and as you breathe out, mentally give out calm, clarity, and joy, so purifying and healing the atmosphere and environment of your mind.

This is why I call this first stage of the practice "environmental Tonglen."

2. *Self Tonglen*

For the purposes of this exercise, divide yourself into two aspects, A and B. A is the aspect of you that is whole, compassionate, warm, and loving, like a true friend, really willing to be there for you, responsive and open to you, without ever judging you, whatever your faults or shortcomings.

B is the aspect of you that has been hurt, that feels misunderstood and frustrated, bitter or angry, who might have been, for example, unjustly treated or abused as a child, or has suffered in relationships or been wronged by society.

Now, as you breathe in, imagine that A opens his or her heart completely, and warmly and compassionately accepts and embraces all of B's suffering and negativity and pain and hurt. Moved by this, B opens his or her heart and all pain and suffering melt away in this compassionate embrace.

As you breathe out, imagine A sending out to B all his or her healing love, warmth, trust, comfort, confidence, happiness, and joy.

3. *Tonglen in a Living Situation*

Imagine vividly a situation where you have acted badly, one about which you feel guilty, and which you wince to even think about.

Then, as you breathe in, accept total responsibility for your actions in that particular situation, without in any way trying to justify your behavior. Acknowledge exactly what you have done wrong, and wholeheartedly ask for forgiveness. Now, as you breathe out, send out reconciliation, forgiveness, healing, and understanding.

So you breathe in blame, and breathe out the undoing of harm; you breathe in responsibility, breathe out healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

This exercise is particularly powerful, and may give you the courage to go to see the person whom you have wronged, and the strength and willingness to talk to them directly and actually ask for forgiveness from the depths of your heart.

4. *Tonglen for Others*

Imagine someone to whom you feel very close, particularly someone who is suffering and in pain. As you breathe in, imagine you take in all their suffering and pain with compassion, and as you breathe out, send your warmth, healing, love, joy, and happiness streaming out to them.

Now, just as in the practice of loving kindness, gradually widen the circle of your compassion to embrace first other people whom you also feel very close to, then those whom you feel indifferent about, then those you dislike or have difficulty with, then even those whom you feel are actively monstrous and cruel. Allow your compassion to become universal, and to fold in its embrace all sentient beings, all beings, in fact, without any exception:

*Sentient beings are as limitless as the whole of space:
May they each effortlessly realize the nature of their mind,
And may every single being of all the six realms, who has each been
in one life or another my father or mother,
Attain all together the ground of primordial perfection.*

What I have been giving in this section is a complete preliminary practice to the main Tonglen, which, as you will see, involves a much richer process of visualization. This preliminary practice works with your attitude of mind and heart, and prepares, opens, and inspires you. Not only does it, in its own right, enable you to heal the environment of your mind, your own suffering, and the pain of the past, and to begin to help, through your compassion, all sentient beings; but it also establishes and makes you intimate and familiar with the process of giving and receiving that finds its complete expression in the main practice of Tonglen.

THE MAIN TONGLEN PRACTICE

In the Tonglen practice of giving and receiving, we take on, *through compassion*, all the various mental and physical sufferings of all beings: their fear, frustration, pain, anger,

guilt, bitterness, doubt, and rage, and we give them, *through love*, all our happiness, and well-being, peace of mind, healing, and fulfillment.

1. Before you begin with this practice, sit quietly and bring your mind home. Then, making use of any of the exercises or methods I have described, whichever one you find really inspires you and works for you, meditate deeply on compassion. Summon and invoke the presence of all the buddhas, bodhisattvas, and enlightened beings, so that, through their inspiration and blessing, compassion may be born in your heart.

2. Imagine in front of you, as vividly and as poignantly as possible, someone you care for who is suffering. Try and imagine every aspect of the person's pain and distress. Then, as you feel your heart opening in compassion toward the person, imagine that all of his or her sufferings manifest together and gather into a great mass of hot, black, grimy smoke.

3. Now, as you breathe in, visualize that this mass of black smoke dissolves, with your in-breath, into the very core of your self-grasping at your heart. There it destroys completely all traces of self-cherishing, thereby purifying all your negative karma.

4. Imagine, now that your self-cherishing has been destroyed, so that the heart of your enlightened mind, your Bodhicitta, is fully revealed. As you breathe out, then, imagine that you are sending out its brilliant, cooling light of peace, joy, happiness, and ultimate well-being to your friend in pain, and that its rays are purifying all their negative karma.

Here I find it inspiring to imagine, as Shantideva suggests, that your Bodhicitta has transformed your heart, or your whole body and being itself, into a dazzling, wish-fulfilling jewel, a jewel that can grant the desires and wishes of anyone, and provide exactly what he or she longs for and needs. True compassion is the wish-fulfilling jewel because it has the inherent power to give precisely to each being whatever that being most needs, and so alleviate his or her suffering, and bring about his or her true fulfillment.

5. So at the moment the light of your Bodhicitta streams out to touch your friend in pain, it is essential to feel a firm conviction that all of his or her negative karma *has* been

purified, and a deep, lasting joy that he or she has been totally freed of suffering and pain.

Then, as you go on breathing normally, in and out, continue steadily with this practice.

Practicing Tonglen on one friend in pain helps you to begin the process of gradually widening the circle of compassion to take on the suffering and purify the karma of all beings, and to give them all your happiness, well-being, joy, and peace of mind. This is the wonderful goal of Tonglen practice, and in a larger sense, of the whole path of compassion.

TONGLEN FOR A DYING PERSON

Now I think you can begin to see how Tonglen could be directed specifically toward helping the dying, how much strength and confidence it could give you when you come to help them, and how much actual, transforming help it could offer them.

I have given you the main Tonglen practice. Imagine now, in the place of your friend in pain, the person who is dying. Go through exactly the same stages as in the main Tonglen. In the visualization in part 3, imagine every aspect of the dying person's suffering and fear gathering into the mass of hot, black, grimy smoke, which you then breathe in, and consider too that by so doing, as before, you are destroying your self-grasping and self-cherishing, and purifying all your negative karma.

Now, as before, imagine, as you are breathing out, the light of the heart of your enlightened mind is filling the dying person with its peace and well-being, and purifying all his or her negative karma.

At every moment in our lives we need compassion, but what more urgent moment could there be than when we are dying? What more wonderful and consoling gift could you give to the dying than the knowledge that they are being prayed for, and that you are taking on their suffering and purifying their negative karma through your practice for them?

Even if they don't know that you are practicing for them, you are helping them and in turn they are helping you. They are *actively* helping you to develop your compassion, and so purify and heal yourself. For me, every dying person is a teacher, giving all those who help them a chance to transform themselves through developing their compassion.⁶

THE HOLY SECRET

You may be asking yourself this question: "If I take in the sufferings and pain of others, won't I risk harming myself?" If you feel at all hesitant, and feel that you don't yet have the strength or courage of compassion to do the practice of Tonglen wholeheartedly, don't worry. Just *imagine* yourself doing it, saying in your mind, "As I breathe in, I am taking on the suffering of my friend or others, and as I breathe out, I am giving him or them happiness and peace." Just simply doing this might create the climate in your mind that could inspire you to begin practicing Tonglen directly.

If you feel at all hesitant or unable to do the full practice, you can also do Tonglen in the form of a simple *prayer*, deeply aspiring to help beings. You might pray for example: "May I be able to take on the suffering of others; may I be able to give my well-being and happiness to them." This prayer will create auspicious conditions for the awakening of your power to do Tonglen in the future.

The one thing you should know for certain is that the only thing that Tonglen *could* harm is the one thing that has been harming you the most: your own ego, your self-grasping, self-cherishing mind, which is the root of suffering. For if you practice Tonglen as often as possible, this self-grasping mind will get weaker and weaker, and your true nature, compassion, will be given a chance to emerge more and more strongly. The stronger and greater your compassion, the stronger and greater your fearlessness and confidence. So compassion reveals itself yet again as your greatest resource and your greatest protection. As Shantideva says:

Whoever wishes to quickly afford protection

To both himself and others

Should practice that holy secret:

The exchanging of self for others.⁷

This holy secret of the practice of Tonglen is one that the mystic masters and saints of every tradition know; and living it and embodying it, with the abandon and fervor of true wisdom and true compassion, is what fills their lives with joy. One modern figure who has dedicated her life to serving the sick and dying and who radiates this joy of giving and receiving is Mother Teresa. I know of no more inspiring statement of the spiritual essence of Tonglen than these words of hers:

We all long for heaven where God is, but we have it in our power to be in heaven with Him at this very moment. But being happy with Him now means:

*Loving as He loves,
Helping as He helps,
Giving as He gives,
Serving as He serves,
Rescuing as He rescues,
Being with Him twenty-four hours,
Touching Him in his distressing disguise.*

A love as vast as this cured Geshe Chekhawa's lepers of their leprosy; it could also perhaps cure us of a disease even more dangerous: of that ignorance, which life after life has hindered us from realizing the nature of our mind, and so of attaining liberation.

Chapter One

Aspirational Bodhi Mind

When we begin any spiritual practice, we must first examine our motivation. In order to practice the Mahayana Path, our motivation should not be for ourselves alone; we must seek to obtain Buddhahood for the sake of all living beings. Without this vast motivation, the practice becomes just another worldly activity.

In order to have this motivation we must first generate Bodhi Mind. Bodhi Mind has two aspects, aspirational and operational. We will explore aspirational Bodhi Mind first by studying its five components.

The first component of aspirational Bodhi Mind is the non-abandonment of living beings, which insures that the Bodhisattva Vow is not lost or degenerated. The Buddha has said that if we understand this one dharma, or teaching, we will understand all the dharmas. Let us say we have been repeatedly bothered and harmed by a certain person, in fact so often that we reach the point where we think that if there were ever a chance to help this person we would refuse to give help. If harm actually came to them and in some way we could stop it and we did not, then that is what is called abandoning a living being. We must strive never to do this.

The Buddha taught that the world could become a won-

derful place if we could always feel love and concern towards any beings that caused us harm and that we should actually increase our feelings of compassion towards those beings. The nonabandoning of any other living being is the very basis of the Bodhi Mind. If we were to practice all the great deeds of the Bodhisattvas with extreme effort and diligence, the practice would not be proper if this first aspect were not kept. If at some point such a feeling should arise in us, it must immediately be acknowledged as an error so that the Bodhisattva Vow will not be degenerated and so that the cultivation of the Bodhi Mind is not hindered.

The second component of aspirational Bodhi Mind is the benefits that are associated with it. In one of the scriptures Maitreya speaks of the 130 different benefits of the Bodhi Mind. These may be abbreviated into four categories: first, the Bodhi Mind is like the seed of dharma; second, the practice of the Bodhi Mind alleviates the miseries of samsara and in this way it achieves our own purposes; third, the Bodhi Mind is the refuge for living beings and provides for the purposes of others rather than our own; and fourth, the Bodhi Mind is like a great general who defeats the enemy, the negative, afflicted emotions.

If we truly understand these benefits, we will actually have no difficulty in generating the Bodhi Mind and maintaining it. Since the Bodhi Mind has the benefit of achieving all positive things, it is compared to the wish-fulfilling gem which grants what one desires from the deepest part of one's heart. It is also compared to the Wonderful Vase. There is a tradition that the gods possess an extraordinary vase that grants the wishes and desires of anyone who wishes upon it. All living beings desire happiness and because the Bodhi Mind bestows happiness it is compared to the Wonderful Vase.

The third component of aspirational Bodhi Mind is the accumulation of merit and wisdom. *Merit* is accumulated

through virtuous activities of the body, speech, and mind. Prostrations and circumambulating develop the virtues of the body, recitation of mantras and sutras accumulate the virtues of speech, and developing the power of samadhi through visualizing the deities produces the virtues of the mind. In generating aspirational Bodhi Mind, practicing the first five of the six paramitas (all the paramitas excluding Wisdom) are included in the Accumulation of Merit.

Wisdom is accumulated by the activity of dedicating merit to the ultimate perfection of all living beings. We do not hold on to accumulated merit for ourselves but give it over to each and every living being. When this is done, we make an effort to realize the emptiness of the three spheres which are: ourselves who are dedicating this merit; the merit which is being dedicated; and the object of the dedication, mainly living beings. Through meditation we realize these three spheres to be empty and devoid of any intrinsic reality. They are like an illusion, a dream. When the accumulation of merit and wisdom are perfected, we come to the point of realizing the true nature of all phenomena to be devoid of any natural, intrinsic existence. Being freed from this great delusion of the reality of substances, the great energy arises which powers the activities of the Bodhi Mind.

The fourth component of aspirational Bodhi Mind is the repeated practice of its various elements, the causal, the substantive, and the active. The causal element involves continually contemplating or meditating on compassion and loving kindness for all living beings. After taking the Bodhisattva Vow, we practice the creation or development of this great compassion and loving kindness for all beings three times when we get up in the morning and three times when we go to bed at night.

The substantive element is the repeated practice of generating Bodhi Mind with the motivation of attaining the

state of perfect Buddhahood in order to best serve all living beings. There are many different prayers and ceremonies involved in the generation of this wish. Atisha taught the brief prayer which also can be said three times during the day and three times during the night. In Tibetan, that prayer is:

Sanggye chö dang tsok kyi chok namla.
 Jangchub bardu dak ni kyab su chi.
 Dak gi jin sok gyi pei sönam kyi.
 Dro la pen chir sanggye drub par shok.

The translation of this prayer in English is, "In the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha I take refuge until I reach Enlightenment. By the merit of this practice of generosity and so forth, may I achieve Buddhahood for the benefit of all beings."

The active element involves continually dedicating our own body, our pleasures, and virtues to the benefit of others. We must always be mindful of our behavior, our sins, and our conflicting emotions.

The repeated practice of these three elements serves to increase the development of Bodhi Mind. As the Bodhi Mind increases from great to greater, selfishness and the ego become less and less. Finally when selfishness and the holding to ego has been reduced to the point of elimination, at that very moment, we achieve liberation.

The fifth and final component of aspirational Bodhi Mind is abandoning the four negative practices and cultivating the four positive practices. The four negative practices to be abandoned are: to abandon any deception of our lama, our teacher or any person we honor, such as our parents or those responsible for our training; to abandon rejecting the virtues of others; to abandon criticizing another being; and to abandon the deception of other beings, including attributing to others our bad actions or claiming others' good actions as our own. Because of the nature of these four negative practices, their repetition will inevitably cause the

wearing away and finally the total destruction of the Bodhi Mind.

The corresponding four virtues which must be cultivated are: to cultivate not telling lies; to cultivate the practice of welcoming and even exhorting other people to practice virtue and especially to practice the Mahayana path; to cultivate respect for those beings who have generated Bodhi Mind as though they were the Buddha himself, announcing this quality to the Ten Directions; and to cultivate honesty and sincerity toward all beings and avoid deceiving other beings.

The aspirational Bodhi Mind is summed up in these five components and should be carefully studied and understood. If we go over them again and again in our minds and become aware of all the different subtle qualities involved in each of the components, we can easily generate the aspirational Bodhi Mind. We must always remember that the most important component is the first one, the non-abandonment of any living being. The development of the Bodhi Mind is the very heart and soul of the Mahayana path. It is the very essence of the path to Buddhahood which cannot be attained without it.

When we hear about the Vajrayana, the Vehicle of the Secret Mantra, we must not neglect the cultivation of the Bodhi Mind, because the Vajrayana can never be practiced until the Bodhi Mind has been cultivated and thoroughly developed. In the Vehicle of the Secret Mantra, there are many deities in the wrathful form which must be visualized and meditated upon and this can be very dangerous if we have not first perfected Bodhi Mind. Once we have developed Bodhi Mind, the practice of the Vajrayana comes naturally and we succeed in it. We become able to relieve not only our own sufferings but also those of other beings. Besides guiding ourselves to the place of liberation, we become the object of refuge for living beings and are able to

free them from miseries as well as guide them to liberation.

It is vital to remember that these teachings are not given just to inform us, but are the point of departure for our active practice. If we do not carefully contemplate and investigate this teaching for ourselves, as well as put it into practice, then it is meaningless.

Questions

If we are angry with someone, are we abandoning them?

There are many different degrees of anger. If we feel anger towards another being, it does not necessarily mean that we are abandoning them. For instance if a child does some bad thing and the parent gets angry at the child, it is not abandoning the child. The abandoning we are speaking of is when, from the depth of our hearts, we wish to harm another being or wish to see some difficulty or trouble come to them.

Quite often we get angry with another being just because we are involved with them and wish to help them. We feel frustrated when they do something wrong, but this anger comes from our concern with helping them and is not what is called abandoning. Let us say we have a young child that plays hooky and hangs out smoking cigarettes and drinking beer. If we respond to his actions with very gentle words and say, "Oh, that's all right. You're a good boy. Do whatever you want," then within the child's lifetime he will certainly suffer greatly because of this pattern of behavior. On the other hand, if we make a show of great anger and force the child to clean up and go to school and behave properly, great benefit will come to the child because of that. Of

course we also must be careful of going to the other extreme and showing great anger carelessly when it is not motivated through concern and loving kindness.

The only way you can tell if a person is in truth abandoning a living being is by looking at their heart and mind to see what they really desire. In one of the sutras the Buddha stated, "Only I and those who are like me, that is, those who have attained completely perfected Buddhahood, can accurately see into the minds of other beings." Based upon this we can see how wrong it is to blame or accuse other beings when we do not know what is truly in their hearts.

The great teacher Nagarjuna compared looking into the heart and mind of others with a certain type of fruit. This fruit is very deceptive. Sometimes the outside looks ripe but it is not ripe inside; other times the inside is ripe but the outside looks unripened. Then at times, the condition of the fruit is accurately reflected by the skin. Just as we cannot judge the true ripeness of this fruit by its skin, so we also are unable to judge the nature of another's motivations by appearances alone. We must have true insight into the situation.

How do we meditate on compassion?

The meditation consists of sitting down and thinking about all living beings. Consider their misery and generate within yourself compassion and a concern to both alleviate their misery and establish them in a state of perfect happiness. It is a mental practice. What you are aiming for is a sincere development of this feeling in your mind. With meditation and prayer it is the mental quality that is important. If you are sincerely thinking about obtaining perfect enlightenment for the sake of helping living beings, then this thought will automatically arise even when you are sleeping. This way it develops day and night and each day it is stronger than the day before.

Can you combine this meditation and Atisha's prayer?

You may combine them in the sense of doing them at the same time but you should recognize the separate aspects of what you are doing. In other words you are first developing the feeling of overwhelming compassion to alleviate the misery of living beings; second, wishing to establish them in a state of happiness; and third, reciting the prayer of Atisha.

Could you explain what the emptiness of the three spheres is?

This is the process of dedicating the merit which has been accumulated. It cannot remain as an accumulation because that would be doing something with a very dualistic mind. There would be myself who has accumulated the merit and other living beings who receive it, and because of that distinction it is very dualistic, that is, it assumes the reality of self and other. The emptiness of the three spheres means dedicating the merit and cultivating the awareness that these distinctions are not real but mere illusions. These illusions are caused by our own ignorance when we think that there is a self that is dedicating this merit, or that there is some intrinsic substance of merit, or that there is some intrinsic existent being to whom the merit is being dedicated. All three are empty and lack any intrinsic existence.

Where is merit accumulated? How do we know if we are accumulating it?

Accumulating virtue is effortless. Even the smallest virtue can be accumulated if we dedicate the merit. This is just like when we put money in the bank and it accumulates interest without us having to worry about it. It just naturally accumulates. The "merit bank" is empty space. This is the big bank, completely inexhaustible. As long as you are dedicating the merit, you don't have to be concerned with accumulating. Your mind, your body, and your view of the external world will tell you whether virtues are being accu-

mulated. Everything will become more beautiful, peaceful, and gentle as the virtues make the nonvirtues powerless. If you cling to your virtues and do not dedicate them, they will be exhausted. Anytime your emotions come, you can say "good-bye" to your merit if you are holding to it. If you have a very fine crystal glass, you are always careful not to break it. However, if you hold on too tightly, a little bump can shatter the glass instantly. If you are virtuous and do not cling to the virtue, but do not dedicate it either, no merit is accumulated. The virtue will last only as long as the deed.

You mentioned we must have pure motivation in our practice. How can we maintain a pure motivation all the time?

First of all you must understand that what we are talking about is the high motivation of the Mahayana and that we are undertaking this practice, or whatever religious practice, for the sake of actually obtaining enlightenment ourselves in order to help all sentient beings. We generate this motivation very strongly, very purely, without any doubt whatsoever that we will attain Buddhahood and thus gain the power to alleviate the miseries of every last being. This is pure motivation.

There are three parts to any religious practice. There is the preparation, the reason for undertaking the religious practice; there is the actual practice; and there is the concluding practice. Whenever you do any work, be it religious or not, you set about it with some purpose in mind. This is your motivation and once you have it, you act upon it. When you meditate, you meditate; when you are saying a prayer, you just say the prayer; when you are doing some Bodhisattva activity, you just do it in a total unity of mind and purpose, because you are involved in an activity that was begun with pure motivation. The practice of the Buddhist religion, and in particular the Mahayana practice, always has these three parts: the Bodhisattva motivation,

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the actual practice, and the conclusion, which is the dedication of merit.

What do we do when we break our Boddhisattva Vow?

Confession of any degeneration of the Bodhisattva Vow is necessary again and again. Once you have taken the Bodhisattva Vow from your spiritual teacher, you must take it again every morning. There are specific prayers for confessing any faults you have in the degeneration of your vow, in particular the Confession before the Thirty-five Buddhas. This can be found in the pamphlet *Maintaining the Bodhisattva Vow and the Bodhicitta Precepts* (KDK Publications, 1984). In particular it is important to confess before your lama and also to the Bodhisattvas.

View, Meditation, Action

With compassion for all beings, recite the six-syllable mantra.

The "thought of enlightenment," *bodhicitta* in Sanskrit, is the wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Bodhicitta has two aspects, the relative and the absolute. Absolute bodhicitta is the recognition of the Buddha-nature inherently present in each being and can be grasped only by those who realize the void nature of all phenomena, since it is not easy to understand fully, we usually begin with the practice of relative bodhicitta, which is less difficult.

Relative bodhicitta is also divided into two: aspiration and application. The first is the wish to attain enlightenment for the sake of all beings, and the second is putting this wish into action through the practice of the six pāramitās. In other words, aspiration bodhicitta is what identifies the goal, and application bodhicitta is the means by which the goal is attained. The key point of the Mahāyāna is that both aspiration and application are directed not toward oneself but toward all sentient beings, for however long saṃsāra may last.

How does one start to generate aspiration bodhicitta, the feeling of compassion for all beings that inspires in us the wish to attain enlightenment for their sake? First, take Chenrezi as a witness of your determination to attain realization in order to benefit others. Next, try to overcome the attitude of only wanting to help those close to you while rejecting the needs of people you dislike. This becomes possible when you realize that, in all your infinite previous existences, every being, without exception, must have been your mother or father at least once. Each one of those beings, down to the smallest insect, wants only to be happy and not to suffer; but what none of them know is that suffering is caused by negative actions and happiness is generated by a virtuous mind. When you think about all those beings who are sinking hopelessly in suffering like blind people lost in

THE THOUGHT OF ENLIGHTENMENT

Having realized the importance of faith and of taking refuge, we now come to the essence of Mahāyāna, the thought of enlightenment.

25. The basis of the Mahāyāna path is the thought of enlightenment;
This sublime thought is the one path trodden by all the Buddhas.
Never leaving this noble path of the thought of enlightenment,

The Heart Treasure

a vast desert, you cannot help but feel great compassion for them all.

To develop this compassion further, imagine yourself in the realms of hell; suddenly, before your eyes, your own parents are dragged in by the henchmen of Yama, the Lord of Death,⁴⁰ who savagely beat them, slash them with sharp weapons, scald them with molten bronze, and crush them beneath slabs of red-hot iron. Watching their terrible agony, would you not feel overwhelming compassion and the irresistible urge to rush immediately to their rescue? When this strong feeling of compassion arises clearly, reflect a little. Your loving parents are only two out of the vast infinity of living beings. Why should the infinite number of other beings not deserve your compassion too? Realizing that in fact there is no real reason, gradually try to extend your compassion, first to your closest friends and relatives, then to everyone you know, to the whole country, the whole earth, and finally to the infinite number of sentient beings in the three realms of saṃsāra. Only when your compassion really reaches this vast extent can it be called true compassion.

All sentient beings are the same in wishing to be happy and not to suffer. The great difference between oneself and others is in numbers—there is only one of me, but countless others. So, my happiness and my suffering are completely insignificant compared to the happiness and suffering of infinite other beings. What truly matters is whether other beings are happy or suffering. This is the basis of bodhichitta. We should wish others to be happy rather ourselves, and we should especially wish happiness for those whom we perceive as enemies and those who treat us badly. Otherwise, what is the use of compassion?

To feel compassion for all beings is the starting point. You then have to be able to translate your wishes and aspirations into action. But, as Lord Atisha said, "It is the intention that counts." If your mind is always filled with the intention to benefit others, then, no matter what your actions may look like on the surface,

View, Meditation, Action

the application bodhichitta will take care of itself. If you can maintain this attitude of bodhichitta, not only will you never stray from the path, you will also definitely make progress along it. When your body, speech, and mind are completely saturated with the wish to help all sentient beings, when your aim both for others and for yourself is perfect Buddhahood, then even the smallest action, a single recitation of the mani or a single prostration, will swiftly and surely bring the fulfillment of your goal.

The six syllables of the mani, the essence of Chenrezi's being, are the six pāramitās in the form of mantra. When you recite the mantra, the six pāramitās spontaneously arise and the application bodhichitta is accomplished.

It is said that when those who are afflicted in the prison of saṃsāra generate the thought of enlightenment, they are instantly adopted by the Buddhas as their sons and daughters, and they are praised by both men and gods. The whole of their existence takes on a new meaning. This is all due to the measureless power of the jewel-like bodhichitta. Bodhichitta is the essence of the eighty-four thousand sections of the Buddha's teachings, but at the same time it is so simple, so easy to understand and practice, even for a beginner.

Absolute Bodhichitta is the inseparability of voidness and uncontrived compassion. It is the simplicity of the natural state, beyond all concepts and intellectual limitations, out of which spontaneous, objectless compassion arises, benefiting all sentient beings.

As you make progress in your practice, the two aspects of bodhichitta reinforce one another. To catch even a glimpse of the absolute nature of mind gives you the proper perspective to practice relative bodhichitta, and, in turn, the practice of relative bodhichitta broadens your realization of absolute bodhichitta.

Notes from 'The Door to Satisfaction',
by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche

The thought of bodhicitta is unbelievable. It makes everything other than working for sentient beings boring and unsatisfying. There is no real interest or enjoyment in life apart from this. Anything else is meaningless, essenceless.

Real happiness and satisfaction start when you begin to live your life for others. You retreat for others, practice Dharma for others, study for others, work in the office for others, cook for others. When your attitude is transformed so that you do everything for others, to pacify their suffering and obtain their happiness, there is real satisfaction and peace in your heart.

When you are cherishing yourself, thinking only of yourself- 'How can I be happy? How can I be free from problems?'- there is no happiness in your heart, only worry and fear. You see only problems, and your mind is not relaxed. But in the next moment, when you change your object of concern to another sentient being- even if it is only one other sentient being- suddenly your heart is released from self-cherishing, like limbs released from chains.

As soon as your object of concern changes from yourself to someone else, your heart is released from the bondage of the self-cherishing thought. As soon as you change the object of your cherishing, there is suddenly peace in the very depths of your heart. Right in the very moment that your mind changes from self-cherishing to cherishing others, there is liberation, freedom from the tight bondage of the selfish mind.

Realizing that miserable conditions come from the superstitions of their own unsubdued minds, Dharma practitioners use these conditions to destroy their own superstitions. You don't have to accept what the self-cherishing thought gives you.

You can take the sufferings and problems of others upon yourself. Instead of blaming someone else so that you can feel happy and comfortable, instead of letting someone else experience the suffering, loss, discomfort, unhappiness, hardships, bad reputation, criticism, punishment, or whatever, you take all these difficulties upon yourself and give the victory to others. This is the very practical Mahayana teaching of exchanging self for others, renouncing the self and cherishing others.

(like using one thorn to remove another thorn)

In order to achieve ultimate happiness, we must destroy our delusions. The Dharma, the path, the Buddha, the guru, for example, all these are meant to destroy your delusions, to hurt your self-cherishing thought and to subdue your mind.

Receiving criticism, disrespect, or bad treatment also hurts your self-cherishing thought, your thought of the eight worldly dharmas. This is not bad, but good.

Normally in our daily life we interpret someone treating us badly as negative, but actually it is positive. It becomes a remedy for our selfish mind and worldly concern. The person who is treating us badly is helping us to destroy our delusions, our self-cherishing thought, worldly concern, and desire, just like the Dharma does.

By doing something opposite to our wish, the person interferes with the comfort we are seeking out of worldly concern, so he or she harms our worldly concern. This is exactly the same as Dharma. Their action becomes the real medicine to cure the real inner chronic disease of the three poisonous minds.

Instead of seeing anything that harms your self-cherishing thought and worldly concern as negative, look at it as positive. Use it to destroy your delusions and to achieve liberation and enlightenment. (111, 112, 113)

In the practice of *chod*, you purposely create a terrifying situation and invoke terrifying spirits in order to slay your ego. For highly realized practitioners who are successful at *chod*, it is very easy in such a situation to see clearly the object to be refuted, the truly existent I. The more quickly you recognize it, the more quickly you are able to realize the ultimate nature, the emptiness, of the I, the aggregates, and so forth.

However, you don't have to depend upon *chod* to create a situation in which you can try to realize emptiness. Any miserable situation- being ill, being criticised or harmed by someone- is exactly the same. The people who bother you in your everyday life are the same as the spirits you ask to disturb you when you are practicing *chod*.

Instead of using these difficult people to develop your anger or jealousy and create negative karma, you can use them to recognize the object to be refuted and realize emptiness. You can use the everyday situations that you are already experiencing to realize emptiness and to practice bodhicitta, which means destroying self-cherishing.

Since people who bother you destroy your self-cherishing and other delusions just as the Dharma, the Buddha, and the guru do, they are actually not harming but helping you. Like a mirror, they show you your mistakes and thus help you in the most essential way. By showing you your delusions and helping you to eliminate them, by destroying your delusions and worldly concern in this way, they are giving you ultimate happiness.

By destroying your self-cherishing, these people give you enlightenment, because the main obstacle to achieving enlightenment is the self-cherishing thought.

The person who destroys your worldly concern is as great and as precious a teacher as Buddha. Why not cherish the person who helps you to practice Dharma? This person is unbelievably precious, just like the guru, Buddha, and Dharma. There are infinite reasons why you should cherish such a person. (114, 115)

All others are just like you in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. Their wishes are exactly the same as yours. Each one is as important and precious as you are.

Moreover, you should consider how you are just one person, while others are many. When you compare yourself with one hundred or one thousand or one million people, or numberless sentient beings, and you are just one, of course the many are more important.

Think in detail of each realm, of each type of creature. Just like you, all these beings want happiness and do not want suffering. So, there is nothing more important in your life than working for sentient beings: pacifying their suffering and giving them happiness. There is nothing more important than this. Anything other than living your life for other sentient beings is meaningless, empty.

The altruistic thought to achieve enlightenment for all sentient beings is an incredible attitude. When you generate bodhicitta, you include everybody in your thought to benefit. No matter what problem they have, no matter where they are- in the East, the West, the Middle East, another world- everybody is included. Not even one sentient being is left out. (115, 116, 117)

Each sentient being has a different level of mind and different characteristics, and you have to know the exact method to fit each one. You should be able to say one word at the same time to millions of people and suit each one.

Each one will hear something different according to their different level of mind, their different karma; what they hear should guide them on the right path, to liberation and to enlightenment.

To lead sentient beings gradually to happiness and enlightenment, one has to see every single karma, every level of mind and characteristic of every sentient being, and all the various methods that are suited to each of them. And that only comes with omniscient mind.

Therefore, to work perfectly to benefit all sentient beings, one has to achieve the state of omniscient mind- no matter how many eons it takes, no matter how hard it is. Achieving enlightenment is the most meaningful thing one can do to benefit oneself and to benefit other sentient beings.

(117, 118, 119)

Even though they may not know that they can achieve such a thing as enlightenment, in our daily lives we all wish to get the best. Even though there may be no knowledge of enlightenment, there is a concept of peerless happiness. It is only because of lacking the Dharma wisdom-eye that people are not aware that enlightenment is the main thing missing in their lives, and is what they need to achieve. What everyone needs is the peerless happiness of full enlightenment, the state free of all obscurations and complete in all realizations.

Having received a perfect human rebirth, met a virtuous teacher to lead us on the path to liberation and enlightenment, and met the Buddhadharma- especially the Mahayana teachings- each of us has the opportunity to free all sentient beings from all obscurations and sufferings and lead them to the fully enlightened state. We have this opportunity to help because we have received all the necessary conditions to develop our mind, to generate the graduated path to enlightenment, and to achieve omniscient mind, which has great compassion for all sentient beings and the capacity to guide them. Therefore, we are responsible for freeing all sentient beings from suffering and its causes, the obscurations, and for leading them to the fully enlightened state.

I often use this example: If you saw a blind person walking towards a cliff, you would immediately grab them before they fell over the precipice. It wouldn't matter whether they asked for help or not. If you have all the necessary conditions- eyes to see, limbs to grab, voice to call- then you are capable of helping the blind person.

Simply by having these, you are responsible for helping the person who is in danger of falling off the cliff.

If someone who had the capacity to help saw the situation and didn't lend a hand, it would be very cruel and shameful. Somehow it wouldn't fulfill the purpose of having eyes and limbs, which is to use them to help others.

In the same way, if now while we have all the necessary conditions we don't develop the capacity to guide sentient beings, but instead always live with the self-cherishing thought, thinking of nothing but our own happiness, how wrong this would be. In reality, we are completely responsible for leading all sentient beings to enlightenment. (119, 120, 121)

Cherishing yourself is an obstacle to the development of the mind, to the generation of the realizations of the path. If you cherish yourself, there is no enlightenment, but if you cherish even one sentient being, there is enlightenment.

This is why living your life for others- dedicating your life to even one sentient being- gives the greatest happiness and the most interesting life. Real happiness in life starts when you cherish others. Living your life for others, cherishing them with loving kindness and compassion, is the door to happiness, the door to enlightenment.

(122)

III. GREAT SCOPE

The main practice of the man of great scope is the development of Bodhichitta. In this development, one needs first to attain equanimity (blang-snyoms) towards all sentient beings, and for this there are two methods: One may visualize in succession a person hated, another loved, and one to whom one feels indifferent, or visualize all three at the same time, the hated one visualized on the right, the loved one on the left, and the one to whom one feels indifferent in the centre. The latter method has been found more effective by meditators in Tibet. When you turn your attention to the one you hate, let your aversion arise. Then ask yourself, "Why should there be this feeling?"

The person may have treated you poorly in this life but been very kind to you in a former one. There are no grounds for such a partial reaction towards him. Now recall the one whom you love and let all your attachment for him become manifest. Likewise, contemplate that in a former life, this person may have inflicted you with unbearable suffering, but because this is lost from memory, you only know how he has treated you in this life. By such contemplation, equalize your feelings towards these two people. View your reactions towards them with detachment, realizing how absurd they are. And finally, meditate on one towards whom you are indifferent and recall that in your countless previous lives, he has been both your friend and enemy. Thus, there is no reason to feel any differently towards him than you do towards your enemies or friends of this life. This quality of change in relationships with others from one life to another is also very evident during one lifetime.

Equanimity towards all creatures is the basis of Bodhichitta, and it is impossible for Bodhichitta to be generated without it. As you practise these contemplations, apply them to your daily life, first towards your neighbours, then towards your community and keep expanding as you become more and more skilled. Recognize that your immediate reactions towards others are due to karmic forces from recent lives. It is a mistake to let your feelings towards others depend upon what they have done to you, for you thereby blindly react to their more recent actions, utterly ignoring the fact that both you and they are in constant state of change.

Atisha had one hundred and fifty-seven Gurus, but only one of them taught him Bodhichitta. To receive this teaching, he spent thirteen months at sea sailing to the Golden Island in Indonesia. Whenever he heard the name of this Guru, he felt deeply moved and filled with gratitude.

Shantideva wrote, "Even if all Bodhisattvas assembled to determine the best means to guide sentient beings, they would say that Bodhichitta is most important." Bodhichitta is

essential for the attainment of all Bodhisattva Levels and Enlightenment, and there is no Bodhisattva or Buddha who has lacked it.

Equanimity must be developed first, then develop the attitude of thinking of all sentient beings as being your own mother (mar-shes). You must not simply let your mind remain indifferent towards others, but rather develop love, then greater love, towards all living beings. Tracing your stream of consciousness back in time, you see that since there was no beginning to your previous lives, you have had countless mothers. Understanding the nature of past lives is necessary in order to see this and having done so, you also realize that all sentient beings have at one time or another been your own mother. To think of yourself as having but one mother is to be of very limited mental scope. Nagarjuna wrote, "If you were to take all the evergreen seeds in the world and then remove one representing your present mother, the number of the remaining seeds would not equal the number of mothers you have had." When thinking in this way, "I am only one, and there are countless other beings in the universe. How could they all possibly have been my mother?" imagine how many times since beginningless time you have been born as an insect, bird human, etc., and it will more easily be seen how all living beings really have been your mother.

The mind is at first inflexible and tough, and it is hard to realize this. If this is the case, go to a lonely, secluded place and call out, "My mother! My mother!" Another method is to imagine that you have *no* mother—then it will be especially clear that you do have a mother. Following this, try to realize that your father has been your mother in a past life, then further broaden the scope to include all living beings. Atisha once told a disciple to hurry to a certain place, as his mother was in great trouble. The disciple went and found a pony strangling on a cord. Such an attitude towards other beings is what you wish to strive for.

Although you may think that this present body is your own, in actuality the blood came from your mother and the

bones from your father. This feeling about the body is natural, and the feeling that all beings are your mothers should be equally so.

Meditate next on the kindness of mothers (*drin-dran*), remembering first your own mother, then the kindness of all mothers. Worldly love is mixed with attachment and passion, but the love that arises through remembering this kindness is free of these Kleshas. If you think your mother has not been kind to you, it is because now you are an adult, but you should always remember that she carried you in her womb for nine months and cared for you as an infant. All mothers treat their infant children with tenderness and compassion.

All the teachings you have received should be used for the development of Bodhicitta. A most important scripture is *ṛGyu'bras man-ngag bdun*, the oral tradition of Maitreya-buddha to Asanga, which deals with the six causes and fruits of Bodhicitta.

If you have not developed the attitude of holding all beings as your mothers, remembering the kindness of mothers is not effective in developing Bodhicitta. The kindness of mothers can be seen even among animals; for example, a mother bird stays with her young even if danger approaches, and she is willing to give her life for their protection.

Your mother carried you and bore you, raised you and made your present existence possible, so never hold a grudge for the few unkind things she may have done to you. Doing something fine, you may think, "I have done this", feeling very independent, but whatever has been accomplished has resulted from your mother's kindness.

As an infant you were like an earthworm, but your mother had great joy in you and lovingly cared for you. You could not speak, but your mother talked and laughed with you continually, never leaving you alone unprotected. Your mother slept irregularly and lightly when you were young, always thinking of your welfare. When you are older, she taught you to walk, speak, eat, and so forth, and later on

she was concerned with your education, growth, occupation and marriage. Nearly all mothers are like this.

A mother dog vomits up food for her pups, a mother bird constantly fetches worms for her chicks, but when the young are grown, they forget their mother. If you do likewise, you will not be different from animals. A mother's love and care arise naturally, effortlessly.

Realizing your mother's love, turn to your father and see that his love is the same, the only difference being that he is not your mother in this life.

The attainment of Enlightenment is due to the kindness of others and is impossible without it. Following the Paramitayana, or Path of the Bodhisattvas, requires one's own effort, but also the help of other beings. Without others, one could not practise the Ten Virtuous Acts, attain a Fully Endowed Body, or meditate on love and mercy.

Not only is there motherly kindness, but also the kindness of living beings towards each other. All superficial pleasures, such as the happiness of receiving praise, are due to the kindness of others. When eating just a handful of rice, consider the difficulties undergone by others to make this possible—sowing the seed, watering, fertilizing, harvesting, packing and sending the rice, and finally selling it. All the people involved thus worked for the benefit of others.

Shantideva wrote that spiritual attainment is half due to the kindness of all sentient beings and half due to the Gurus and Buddhas.

In Tibet there was a famous bandit who made a practice of raiding caravans. Once while so engaged, he accidentally struck a mare with his sword, and her foal emerged from her womb. Even as she was dying, she tried to get up and lick her foal dry. Seeing this, the bandit quit robbing and followed the Dharma. One should strive to realize such love.

The next point of contemplation towards the development of Bodhicitta is called "repaying kindness" (*drin-gzo*). After realizing that all sentient beings are suffering due to the Three Poisons, it is shameful if one then does nothing to help them. The present situation is like seeing

one's blind mother about to walk off a cliff and doing nothing to save her. Living beings do not know what is virtuous and non-virtuous action and are ignorant of the results. Every moment they walk closer to death and rebirth in the lower realms. It is our duty to help them, guiding them on the Path to liberation from suffering.

To the charge that his wearing such scanty clothes was crazy, Milarepa replied that those who are wandering endlessly in Samsara are the truly deluded ones. Although even his enemies pitied his extreme poverty, the Buddhas rejoiced in his wonderful attainments. Milarepa attained Bodhicitta within eleven months, and when he told Marpa of his experiences, his Guru was delighted and said, "You have lived up to my great expectations of you."

There are many ways of repaying kindness. Giving material assistance such as food to beggars and help to those in need is beneficial, but this is not the best means. To guide and liberate all beings from suffering is the true repayment of kindness, for although beings have experienced all types of birth and living situations, they still wander in Samsara.

Thus it is necessary to first attain Enlightenment ourselves and then lead others to it.

The next stage of this meditation is immaculate love for all living beings (yid-ong byams-pa). If one has meditated extensively on the three preceding points, further meditation here is not necessary, for this love arises naturally. Having realized this great love, all beings (even worms and insects) are pleasing, for one knows that all have been of aid in attaining that state.

Relate the contemplations of the man of small scope to this meditation. If, having met with the opportunity of developing Bodhicitta, you were to die before taking advantage of it, it would be a great misfortune. All beings, including animals, appreciate love and mercy.

One night when Nagarjuna was reciting a text, a pigeon listened to him all night long. In its next life it was born as his chief disciple and was able to recite the entire text. There are many such examples. When a person turns his mind to

the Dharma, it is the start of his happiness.

Love (byams-pa) arises through wishing that others may always have happiness, and mercy (snying-rje) arises from the wish to raise others from their present state of suffering. Develop love first and mercy will naturally follow, for the more one likes someone, the less one can endure his suffering. For beginners, just a moment of meditation on love is worth vastly more than hours spent on other practices. If one is filled with love, one will be loved by others. This is an example of the working of the Law of Cause and Effect. Meditation on mercy for just a few hours lays a great foundation for further understanding and spiritual attainment.

All the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are products of mercy. In a treatise, one sage paid homage to mercy, saying that in doing so, he was paying homage to all the Buddhas, for it is the cause of their attainment. He drew the analogy of a farmer who first needs seed, then heat and moisture to reap a bountiful harvest. Likewise mercy, as first a motivator, then as a source of perseverance, inspiration and encouragement, is needed in order to attain the full fruit of Buddhahood. It is also due to their mercy that the Buddhas go on teaching until all beings are enlightened.

One's strength of Bodhicitta corresponds to one's power of mercy. There is a Jataka account about three brothers who, while walking in a forest, came upon a starving tigress about to devour her cubs. The youngest brother felt such great mercy that he lay down in front of her and offered his own flesh. He was later to become Shakyamuni Buddha, and his two brothers were incarnations of Maitreya and Manjushri.

The only suitable motivation for practising Tantra is mercy for all sentient beings and the corresponding wish to attain Enlightenment as soon as possible in order to guide them from their suffering. If a child were to fall into a fire, it would take a very strong person to jump into the fire himself to save him.

Re-ch'ung, the disciple of Milarepa, was for a time lax in

his spiritual practice, so Milarepa took him many times to a place where animals were butchered. After that his practice was intense. This is an effective method which may be used today.

If a country has skilled and efficient representation in the United Nations, its inhabitants may be at ease and without worry. One is likewise a representative as one approaches Enlightenment. Other beings depend upon such a one, for there are more karmic ties among those now living than with the Buddhas of the past. It often happens that a disciple of a Guru can establish greater communication with a fellow disciple than can the Guru himself. Only by finding the Guru with whom one has close karmic ties can one achieve rapid progress.

Seek any circumstances which help to develop mercy. While observing animals being butchered, reflect that goats and sheep are surviving simply to be killed later. Then expand your awareness and clearly realize that there are many people now who are not using the great opportunity of human existence. This is the one Path to Enlightenment—there is no way except with mercy. Exert all efforts towards the attainment of the man of great scope and let mercy grow until it becomes Great Mercy (snying-rje chen-po).

In order to develop Bodhicitta, one needs first to develop equanimity towards all beings, otherwise the further stages of this meditation are like sowing seed in uneven ground. When meditating, concentrate primarily on one point, then at the end of the meditation, glance over the rest of the points.

The sixth stage of this meditation is the Pure Wish "thag-bam namdag). Whereas during the foregoing stages, concentration was placed on love and mercy along with the wish for the happiness of others, now one comes to the intention to act for their welfare. The previous stages were like bargaining for something and here is the actual purchasing. The meditator realizes that he must attain Enlightenment and that this can only come through his own efforts. He thus takes the responsibility of the liberation of

all sentient beings onto his own shoulders.

At this stage, one reviews what powers or qualifications one now has to lead others from their suffering and, recognizing that oneself is not capable, searches through all beings for another who does have that ability. Finding that no one in Samsara is able to know the needs of each type of person or each individual, that only the Buddhas have this power, one realizes the necessity of attaining this state. When one has a natural, spontaneous longing to attain Enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings, Bodhicitta (byang-chub-kyi seems rin-po-che) has been attained, and one has become a Mahayanist. Maitreya Bodhisattva has cultivated the wish to become a Universal Teacher, destined to enter the world during an era when the lifespan is long and people are happy and most Bodhisattvas think there will be little chance for propagating the Dharma.

The most important scriptures on Bodhicitta are :

1. *mDo phal-cher*, a collection of six Sutras.
2. *Rin-chen phreng-ba*, one of the six main works of Nagarjuna.
3. *sPyod-jung*, *Bodhisattvacyogavatara* by Shantideva.
4. *bSlab-btus*, a supplement to the *Bodhisattvacyogavatara*, which should be studied with it.

One must have at least some development of Bodhicitta before practising Tantra, for without this, even the highest tantric practice is a waste of time. Tzong-k'a-pa likened Bodhicitta to the threshold of a house—if one stands on the threshold of Bodhicitta, it is the same as entering the Mahayana way of life; but if Bodhicitta is lacking, one stands on the outside. Far more than reading Mahayana scriptures, it is important for the person himself to be a Mahayanist. When Atisha first came to Tibet, many people requested initiations, but he replied, "Without Bodhicitta, what good are they?" There are beings in the three lower realms who have practised high Tantra, but without Bodhicitta. No

matter how profound one's meditation may be, without Bodhichitta, full Enlightenment remains beyond one's reach. But if the disciple has developed Bodhichitta, initiations become very effective.

One should subdue the mind and develop Bodhichitta, a practice which can be done even during sleep. One famous Guru proclaimed, "If one professes how high his practice is but lacks Bodhichitta, plaster his mouth with human excrement." One who has attained Bodhichitta—even though it may be an animal, which is possible under certain circumstances—is called a "Prince of the Buddhas." This development is the highest Dharma practice, and is sometimes known as "the Diamond," for even a slight amount is precious. Developing spontaneous love and mercy is a prime means of eliminating one's Kleshas and a most important preliminary practice for Tantra.

Asanga meditated upon Maitreya for twelve years, seeking a vision of him, but without success. He then left his cave and while walking along a road, saw a wounded red dog covered with worms. Great compassion arose in him and while seeking to relieve the dog of its misery without harming the worms, he bent down to remove them with his tongue. At that moment Maitreya appeared before him.

Recognizing that the small and middle scope contemplations are mere branches, and the understanding of Bodhichitta the main trunk of Dharma practice, use all contemplations to aid this understanding. Even if one has no other positive qualities, after developing only a little Bodhichitta, one becomes an object of refuge and reverence. It does not come in a short time, but requires much effort, and one must be willing to undergo any hardship in order to attain it. If even a layman has developed Bodhichitta, he is worthy of the reverence of Bodhisattvas. After its attainment, all other goals are achieved naturally without great effort. Just as meat lying in the sun naturally attracts flies, so Bodhichitta is naturally sensed by others. Thinking ahead about the advantages of having attained Bodhichitta leads to the motivation to develop it.

The Buddha said that just as bowing to the new moon is automatically bowing to the full moon, so respecting one who has attained Bodhichitta is honouring the Buddha. This is because Bodhichitta is the immediate cause of full Enlightenment. One must take very good care of one's cultivation of Bodhichitta, which is like a young fruit tree.

In order to attain Buddhahood, one needs a full collection of physical and mental merit, and Bodhichitta is a prime means for collecting these two. Merit must be increased until its fulfillment and perfection.

Bodhichitta eliminates mental and physical obstacles and its cultivation is thus the best initial practice. Like a chemical that transforms all metal into gold, it turns the impurities of the human body into the three Bodies of the Buddha. It is because people have not developed Bodhichitta that they still have an impure human form. The rate of this development depends upon one's own effort.

With Bodhichitta one's collection of merit is always increasing but without it the collection is uncertain. There are three stages of collecting merit, the first beginning during the Path of Collection (tsogs-lam), the second during the Path of Insight (mthong-lam), and the third at the Eighth Bodhisattva Level. Giving a handful of rice with the motivation of Bodhichitta to one person has more merit than feeding millions without it. Any virtuous action done with Bodhichitta motivation has the degree of merit corresponding to the number of beings one seeks to benefit. There is great merit in wishing to relieve one person from suffering; so much more for all beings.

When in pain, consider the suffering of all sentient beings and develop the wish to carry this burden in order to deliver them from misery. This will lead to the end of your own sufferings.

Whatever meritorious action one performs (such as meditation), Bodhichitta should be the motivation. It should be cultivated with sincerity, not merely as a ceremony for it is an important stage of the practice. Before stealing, one has a motivation to steal. Likewise one should make Bodhichitta

one's motivation, or reason, for doing any virtuous act. When beginning meditation, it is a mistake to think, "I wish I could attain freedom, Enlightenment, etc." Guard the mind. All humans make a great mistake in that they are very concerned about external enemies, which can only harm them in this life, yet they cherish their internal enemies—primarily self-grasping and self-cherishing—which harm them for countless lives. One should be less concerned with one's environment and more concerned with the motivation to deliver all beings from suffering. To attempt to develop Bodhicitta for the sake of one's own progress is still very selfish.

Shantideva wrote that the development of Bodhicitta destroys mental and physical obstacles like the great burning at the end of the world. People are eager to achieve great attainments with the least effort, and the best means for this are Bodhicitta and understanding Shunyata. One must not even entertain the idea that Buddhahood may be attained without Bodhicitta. Bodhicitta should always accompany one like one's own shadow.

After developing Bodhicitta, one experience no fear during Bar-do or even in the lower realms. One goes with confidence. Performing the tantric preliminary practices with Bodhicitta motivation for just one day is worth far more than doing them for one hundred years without Bodhicitta. While working for the benefit of others, one need devote no effort to the fulfillment of one's own wishes, for this comes naturally. Developing Bodhicitta is a prime means for bringing others to Enlightenment.

Some people recite Mantras for sixty years in order to attain powers for selfish reasons, but with no success. On the other hand, there is no level of attainment that cannot be reached if one's practice is joined with Bodhicitta. With it one may attain tantric powers with no external physical aids.

In the last chapter of the *Perfection of Wisdom Sutra of Eight Thousand Shlokas*, there is the account of the Bodhisattva Sadaprarudita and his great Bodhicitta, his self-sacrificing devotions to his Guru Dharmadgata and the powers

he attained. One needs constantly to receive fresh inspiration for one's spiritual practice and this Sutra may be of great help.

For six years, Milarepa stayed with Marpa and instead of receiving teachings, endured many hardships. He later said, "To think that I was a Buddha in my past life is a great insult to Tantra. Buddhahood is not something of the past but rather is always with you like your shadow—you simply do not realize it." With great effort and skilful guidance, Enlightenment may be attained in this life-time.

The attainment of Bodhicitta itself may confer great powers. One of the Gandan Tr'i-pas (a succession of Lamas who act as representatives for Je Tzong-k'a-pa), turned back a flood outside Lhasa wholly by the power of his Bodhicitta. With Bodhicitta one is protected and able to achieve any goal with no obstacles.

There were once three meditators in Tibet, all of them seeking Buddhahood in this life. One had developed Bodhicitta, and the earth spirits could give him nothing. To one of the others they gave a pen, and he became a great poet, and to the third they gave a bag of medicine, and he became a skilled doctor. Only the one with Bodhicitta was left with an unobstructed path to Enlightenment. Let all your efforts be directed here, for Bodhicitta must be attained while still on the first of the Five Paths (tsogs-lam) towards Enlightenment.

Only mental merit is gained through contemplation on Shunyata, but Bodhicitta balances this with physical merit. The possibility of attaining Buddhahood in this life depends on one's development of Bodhicitta, and this is why Buddhist Tantra is unique. Simply hearing about Bodhicitta leaves a great impression on one's stream of consciousness, and much more so if one actually develops it. Make Bodhicitta the framework of your practice. Shantideva wrote, "If you stir milk, its essence, butter, appears. Likewise, if you stir all the teachings, the development of Bodhicitta appears."

The source of happiness on all levels from Arhatship down is the direct and indirect teaching of Buddhas, and this source

is compassion. All the Buddhas have first been Bodhisattvas, and this will be the way of all future Buddhas.

Just before his death, Atisha said, "Those people in the future should not regret not meeting me. My essence is the practice of Bodhicitta, and when one is developing this, it is the same as meeting me." Begin every morning with contemplation on equanimity and follow this with the other steps towards Bodhicitta become well acquainted with them. These steps are the practice found to be most effective by Atisha.

Another method of attaining Bodhicitta is given by Manjushri in the words of Shantideva. Its essence is the cherishing of others before oneself. At first, very few people received this oral tradition and they were required to meditate on it three times each day. One reason this teaching was kept relatively secret was that it should be taught only to those of high intelligence and broad mental scope. It is very difficult and is thus given to those with a great desire to receive such a special teaching. There are different methods of developing Bodhicitta. The previously explained six steps (rgyu-'bras man-ngag bdun) form the common path, and this latter method of Manjushri (bdag-gzhan myam-b'ye), meaning "to treat with equanimity oneself and others," is the more exclusive and effective.

Though one's motivation may actually be selfish, one derives enjoyment from saying, "I shall do this for the benefit of all living beings." Examine what good this self-centredness has done for you and recognize the truly bad side of this trait. Because of the inborn defilement of self-cherishing all strife is born. Tension and conflict arise as soon as our self-desires are crossed, and all suffering is due to this self-cherishing. We only need to examine our own life for examples—they need not be listed here.

Shantideva wrote, "Look to the Buddhas and others who have reached high attainments and to the self-cherishing and see where it has brought you." This self-cherishing attitude eats up one's potential powers for spiritual attainment like a worm in the stomach. Change the object of cherishing: let yourself become less important and make others more so.

Always be the loser, never the winner. The Kadampa Geshe Long-ri 'ang-pa, who composed the "Eight verses of Training the Mind," once saw a line in a small book: "Whenever in an argument, lose. Whenever there is profit to be gained, let others have it." After reading this, he sought further teaching on the subject, and subsequently studied for nine years with the Lama who had written the line. This Lama told him, "You need this mental attitude whether it pleases you or not."

After fully realizing the negative aspects of self-cherishing and the advantages of cherishing others, practise "tong-len" (written: glong-len), giving all your merit to others and taking all the sufferings of others upon yourself. First visualize a black spot in the centre of your body, representing selfishness, and when inhaling, imagine taking in all the sufferings of the world—all of them converging upon and destroying this black spot. When exhaling, send out your virtue and merit to all sentient beings for the sake of their happiness. This is a great method for increasing your own merit. If one is very competent in this practice, it is possible to transfer another's suffering to oneself, providing there is a close karmic relationship between the two beings (both the mediator and the other being must have committed a virtuous act together in some lifetime, both of them having the desire to take on the sufferings of others). Once while the Yogi known as "the Compassionate One" (Byams-pa'i rnal-'byor) was giving a discourse, someone nearby hit a dog with a stone. The Yogi cried out in pain, and a bruise appeared on his body. The dog had been relieved of its suffering. The main object of "tong-len" however is not to relieve another individual of his suffering immediately, but rather to attain Bodhicitta. Likewise, the greatest blessing of the Buddhas is not their power to relieve individual suffering, but the deliverance of the Dharma.

This practice is the greatest means for collecting merit. During each meditation one comes closer to Buddhahood without even realizing it. If at first it is difficult to imagine taking all the suffering of the world upon yourself, imagine

taking on just your *own* suffering which you will experience tomorrow. As you progress, imagine in one meditation period taking on all the sufferings of your whole life, then the suffering of a small group of people and further expand your scope. At first this seems very difficult, but after one becomes acquainted with the practice, it is easy. You can be sure that this will be a direct cause of attaining Buddhahood, and that there is no other way.

When beginning the practice of "tong-len," do not do it with your breathing, but rather use only your imagination. First imagine taking on all the sufferings of others, then send away your virtues and happiness. Likewise, for a man whose body is on fire you would not first offer him a piece of candy, but would put out the fire and then give him something pleasing. In the full meditation, take on the sufferings of all beings from the lowest hell to the Tenth Bodhisattva Level, but exclude the Buddhas and your own Guru. The tenth level Bodhisattvas have no suffering, but as they still have instinctive Kleshas, relieve them of it. When accepting suffering, visualize a sharp black line piercing your black spot of selfishness and utterly destroying it.

The main enemy of Bodhisattvas is self-cherishing, and it is at this that the anger of the wrathful deities is directed. When practised, this visualization will decrease self-cherishing. One Bodhisattva said, "I show my side (in attack and defence) to all Kleshas, and my front (in compassion) to all sentient beings." If you perform this meditation thinking that it will not work, it will not be effective, but if you have trust in it, it will be very beneficial. Signs of success are a feeling of heaviness in the area of your heart and a feeling of fear during the meditation.

When accepting suffering, imagine the misery of the six realms coming to you and destroying your selfishness. However, this may be difficult at first, since you have no experience of the other realms. In this case, it may be more effective to sit by a sick person and imagine taking on his suffering.

When practising the second part of this meditation, ima-

gine sending your body, wealth and virtuous actions to others. Transform your body into rain or cool air for those in the hot hells, and into a warm breeze for those in the cold hells. Imagine giving your body so that others may attain a human body. To the Pretas give your body as food and to animals give your body in the form of wisdom. Because humans are greedy, transform your body into all the things that fulfil people's desires. For the anti-gods (who are always at war), transform your body into armour, and for the Devas, into the objects of the five sense desires. And finally to the Buddhas and your Gurus, you may transform your body into offerings. For all these, imagine giving your body and wealth of the present and future but not of the past, and give your virtue of all the three times.

Important scriptures on this "tong-len" practice are *sPyod-'jug*, by Shantideva: and the two Sutras, *sDong-po bkod-pa'i mdo*, and *rd-rje rgyalo mtshan-gyi-mdo*.

After attaining confidence in the "tong-len" practice using just your imagination, do it with your breathing as well. You then will not waste your breathing throughout the day. Tzong-k'a-pa's disciple, K'ay-dr'ub, commented that if even your breathing is used to develop Bodhicitta, all your actions will naturally follow suit. This is the theory—now it needs to be put into practice in your daily life. You cannot expect to attain the goal in a few weeks or a month. Shakyamuni attained Enlightenment through perseverance—he did not start out perfect.

It will be helpful to read verses on Bodhicitta, either your own or those of others, before meditating. The following lines were widely used by mediators in Tibet.

"Therefore (having recognized the fruitlessness of self-cherishing and the great benefits of cherishing others) I request the Adhisthana (blessing and power) of my compassionate Guru, enabling me to bring all living beings to permanent joy by means of my practice of sending all my virtues and happiness to others. May all sufferings, obstacles and defilements of all the motherly beings fall upon me this very moment."

Most verses in Tibetan have only four lines, but this has five, giving added emphasis to the importance of "Tong-len." Reciting this verse is like a preliminary practice to developing Bodhicitta, and some meditators have recited it one-hundred thousand times.

The practice which follows "tong-len" is the changing of all unfavourable circumstances to favourable ones and using them to develop Bodhicitta. Understanding and spiritual growth are like precious jewels, and we follow the practice in order to protect them from obstacles and hindrances. This training of the mind is called "the Siddhi of Happiness." Through meditation, even physical suffering ceases to be a hindrance.

There are many obstacles to the development of Bodhicitta, including having a high, profitable position or wealth, as well as sickness or physical handicaps. Especially during this degenerate age, or "Age of the Five Dregs", these must be carefully guarded against. The Five Dregs (snyig-ma lnga; or that which remains after all the good has been taken out) refer to: the characteristics of humans, Kleshas, ideas, lifespan, and time. The body, speech and mind of humans are very resistant and not easily subdued. Ordinary peoples Kleshas are in their roughest form and are very difficult to abandon. The prevailing, or generally-accepted, ideas and philosophies are full of delusion and because people's minds are set on them, they are difficult to correct. The average lifespan decreases, and the time is now one of war and new kinds of sicknesses.

This Kalpa, or world age, began with the Age of Completion, a time when everyone practised the Ten Virtuous Acts. There was little sickness or war, and people did not need the light of the sun or the moon, for they radiated their own light. At that time, the earth's surface was smooth, but as virtue decreased, it became rough.

Now the practice of the Dharma is vanishing, and at such a time, the merit of practising just one of the Ten Virtuous Acts is almost equal to that of practising all ten during a more favourable era. The maximum lifespan will continue to

decrease until it reaches the limit of ten years. At that time, people will have large heads and small bodies like children and will be filled with much anger. Maitreya will then appear, having a very small, pleasing body, and people will admire him and seek to know how he became that way. He will then teach them virtue. He will be one of the manifestations of Maitreya, but not the final one, in which he will take on the Nirmanakaya form and become a Universal Teacher. Because of the five degenerated conditions, many distractions and obstacles to spiritual practice arise. This makes it all the more important to make use of all circumstances, making them causes for one's further growth. Whenever any misfortune such as sickness or harm from enemies arises, one always tends to blame it on others, but one should rather blame it one one's own self-cherishing. One must train oneself to blame all misfortune on self-cherishing, for misfortune would not arise without it. If one is traveling and someone steals all one's wealth, one blames it on the thief, but one's sorrow is actually due to self-cherishing.

Whenever any misfortune arises, try not to let it affect your practice, but rather be glad that this evil Karma has ripened. Atisha once said that sickness and misfortune are brooms that sweep away Kleshas and obstacles. Bodhisattvas prefer being sick than well, for even a slight headache may be an effective means for removing obstacles. When they experience suffering, they wish for yet more in order to relieve others of their misery. Such people never have mental suffering, and they use their physical sufferings to remove their Kleshas. They are grateful to experience such suffering, but otherwise they remain unaffected by it.

One follower of the Dharma had leprosy and was therefore cast out from human society. He used this rejection and by intensive practice gained high spiritual attainment. In ancient India there was a Bhiksuni who had leprosy, but instead of succumbing to depression, she intensively followed the Dharma. By doing so, she made oral contact with Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara, developed Bodhicitta and regained her health.

Misfortunes are actual teachings which remind us to collect merit in order to avoid suffering. They are also of great benefit because without them we would not seek a way out of delusion. There are many examples of this. When people are poor and helpless, they seek the Dharma, but as they grow wealthy and self-assured, they abandon it.

With inner peace, one can be happy anywhere, but, as Milarepa said, without it all is misery even in the best of external circumstances. There are many ways of changing all circumstances to favourable ones, and the possibility of this depends solely on one's own attitude. Whenever experiencing harm, let this be an opportunity to practise the Dharma, and remember that one's true enemy is self-cherishing. One who is accustomed to exchanging self for others holds the key to all spiritual practice and attainment.

This concludes the discussion on changing one's mental attitude, and now we turn to ways of action conducive to the growth of Bodhicitta. Once again it should be stressed that there is no higher practice than developing Bodhicitta, which is the main structure of the Mahayana.

There are four types of action which should be followed in order to cultivate the growth of Bodhicitta:

1. Collecting all different kinds of merit. Before doing any virtuous actions, one should correct one's motivation, i.e. one should always work towards Enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.
2. Applying the Four Opponent Powers. One should eliminate all obstacles and apply these powers to even the smallest unvirtuous deed.
3. Seeking the assistance of the Dharmapalas (chos-skyong). Some people seek their aid for worldly gain, but the true function of the Dharmapalas, or Protectors of the Dharma, is to help people attain spirituality, and towards this end they use their abilities to remove obstacles. One may offer food to them, perhaps one's own meals.

4. Offering food to the Pretas. One does this by setting aside food with the strong intention of giving it to them. When going through a hazardous area, one is very careful where one steps, and one should be all the more careful to protect one's growth of Bodhicitta from obstacles. While developing Bodhicitta, be neither very rich nor very poor, but be strong enough to face either of those extremes if they arise, using them to intensify your practice.

Know that whatever occurs is a result of one's own black and white Karma. While seeking happiness, one uses up one's past collection of good Karma. There are only two kinds of merit that cannot be used up: that which is dedicated to attaining Enlightenment and Bodhicitta.

A Bodhisattva welcomes abuse and dislikes praise, for the latter increases pride and self-esteem. Abuse may help one discover one's Kleshas and eliminate them. There was once a very virtuous man living near Lhasa. Everyone praised him highly, and he never had arguments or conflicts with anyone. The result was that although he did not become proud, he failed to do anything with his life. When he recognized this as an old man, he bemoaned the praise that had been heaped upon him.

Bodhisattvas always think of themselves as the lowest among living beings. Holding high position satisfies one's pride, but it confines one and takes away one's freedom. Whereas, if one takes the lowest position, one lives in harmony with all beings.

Through understanding Shunyata one comes to realize the non-self existence of others whom one thinks of as being harmful, and one gains insight into one's own void nature. Again, make every effort to change all circumstances to favourable ones. If during this era of degeneration, one does not develop strong will-power and strength over depression, there is no way to attain higher states. Shantideva wrote: "Even suffering has its good qualities. Experiencing one's own suffering increases one's longing for freedom, and see-

ing the suffering of others aids the growth of mercy."

Teaching others of Bodhicitta will drive to the source of the world's problems, such as pollution and war. There is little that can be done if one deals only with the outward manifestations of suffering. The best thing to do is first to tame our own minds, then guide others.

Je Tzong-kapa formed a method to aid the growth of Bodhicitta which combines the two previous methods, called the Eleven-Round Contemplation (dmigs-skor bcu-gcig). The steps of this meditation are as follows:

1. Equanimity (btang-snyoms).
2. Holding all beings as one's mother (mar-shes).
3. Remembering the kindness of one's mothers, both one's present mother and all living beings (drin-dran and (drin-dran khyad-par-pa).
4. Repaying the kindness of one's mother (drin-gzo).
5. Cherishing others above self by remembering that all beings, like oneself, seek happiness (bdag-gzhan myam-pa).
6. Contemplating the many disadvantages of cherishing oneself more than others (bdag-gces 'dzin-gyi skyon-sgo du-ma-nas bsam-pa).
7. Contemplating the advantages of cherishing others (gzhan-gces 'dzin-gyi yon-tan sgo du-ma-nas bsam-pa).
8. With forceful contemplation on mercy, accepting the suffering of others (snying-rje'i dmigs-pa rtzal-du bton-te de-dang sbrags-nas len-pa).
9. While meditating on love, sending forth one's virtue and joy (byams-pa'i dmigs-pa rtzal-du bton-te de-dang sbrags-nas gtong-ba).
10. Generating the pure wish to take on the burdens of others (gzhan-don khur-du 'khyer-ba'i thag-bsam).
11. Developing Bodhicitta, seeking Enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings (gzhan-don-du rdzogs byang thob-'dod-kyi seems-bskyed dngos).

The teaching of the oral tradition on this contemplation is

no more elaborate than this. How detailed one makes it and how effective it is depends on the individual. When practising, spend equal time on all eleven points and, at the end, imagine yourself to be a Buddha, sending a clear light of wisdom out from your heart, enlightening all beings. The meditation should end in great joy. This teaching is found only in the oral tradition and was not previously found in books.

Nagarjuna wrote that one short meditation period on Bodhicitta has more merit than even the Buddhas can estimate. We are like the only son of a loving mother (the Buddha), and as we grow and ripen, she is very pleased and relieved. Simply forming the intention to help others has great merit, but actually doing so even in minor ways, has very much more.

Previously, this meditation was taught only to disciples prepared to practise it three times daily, and the Lama would first test each disciple to see if he was fit to benefit from it. Now, because of the disappearance of the Dharma, it is openly taught here.

When meditating, do not look at Bodhicitta; rather transform your mind into Bodhicitta. Let there be no gap between the two. If after performing this meditation for a few days, you do not feel any difference, do not be discouraged, but simply continue. Tame the mind especially with regard to Bodhicitta, for this is the direct remedy for self-cherishing. To one who gains a deep realization of one point of the Dharma such as Bodhicitta, understanding of all the other subjects will come easily. However, if one flits from one subject to another, it will lead only to discouragement, not insight. After having developed Bodhicitta, one will be able to use all of Buddha's teachings towards higher attainment. It is like a mirror, reflecting all images and leading to an understanding of any apparent contradictions in the Dharma.

It is primarily in tantric practice that one visualizes oneself as a Buddha before the actual attainment, as is practised during the eleventh round of this meditation. This method

is called "sem-kye dr'a-bul lam-ky'er" (written: sems-bskyed 'bras-bu'i lam-'khyer), or "bringing the goal into the practice." Thus, the Paramitayana is called the Vehicle of the Cause, and the Tantrayana, the Vehicle of the Effect. It is in the latter that both cause and effect develop simultaneously.

If by performing this meditation, Bodhicitta is even slightly developed, one is fit to receive tantric teachings. It is Bodhicitta which makes tantra so high and exclusive.

When practising the main points of the Dharma, such as Guruyoga, do not continually rely on notes or texts. Internalize the teachings and make them your own. Especially when practising this Eleven-Round Contemplation, do not simply follow the notes, counting each point off one by one. One needs Bodhicitta from the beginning of one's practice to its fulfillment, and it must accompany one throughout like a shadow.

The following are five methods of practising the Dharma in its most condensed form in one lifetime (tse-gci-gi nyams-len bsgri-las ston-pala stobs-linga).

1. The power of the benefiting intention ('phan-pa'i stobs). Remembering the value of the Fully Endowed Human Body, decide to make full use of it this year, this month, and especially today. Wishing to take the fullest advantage of this opportunity for the benefit of all sentient beings is the proper motivation, and it should be present from morning till night. All acts, whether killing an insect or deciding what to have for lunch, are determined by one's motivation. All the actions of those who do not follow the Dharma are directed towards ego-gratification. The benefiting motivation is as rare as a star seen in the daytime. A string tied to a finger or belt may help to remind one of the proper motivation. In many caves in Tibet such phrases as "Don't let your mind wander!" are written all over the walls. Form a strong determination never to abandon Bodhicitta or the path to Enlightenment.

2. The Power of the White Seed (dkar-po sa-bor-gyi stobs). Direct whatever is done through body, speech or mind towards the development of Bodhicitta, rather than to benefits in this present life. Even if one is a great solitary mediator, one's practice is not so intense without this power.
3. Complete disgust with one's self-cherishing attitude (rnam-par bsun-'byin-pa'i stobs). This is the same as the second of the Four Opponent Powers and includes disgust with all unvirtuous actions along with an intention to refrain from them in the future. If a snake enters the room, one immediately jumps up and drives it away. One's reaction to self-cherishing as soon as it arises should be the same, even to the extent of actually jumping up or waving one's arms if this helps.
4. The power of acquaintance (goms-pa'i stobs). To become acquainted with Bodhicitta, strong and continuous effort, even during sleep, needs to be given for its development. One should not be discouraged if now one is unable to follow the practices of the great Bodhisattvas. Do what is possible and pray for greater ability in the near future. There is both relative and ultimate development of Bodhicitta. The relative is compassion, and the ultimate is based on the understanding of Shunyata.
5. The power of prayer (smon-lam-gyi stobs). At the end of each day, one should look back on one's actions, recognizing faults, applying the Four Opponent Powers, and rejoicing in one's virtue. Then just before sleep, dedicate the merit gained that day to one's Enlightenment for the sake of delivering the world from suffering. As with giving, it is not the outward prayer that is authentic, but rather one's state of mind. All actions should be devoted to the growth of Bodhicitta.

These five methods are the way to attain Bodhicitta in one lifetime. Most people would not even like to hear these teachings on Bodhicitta, so recognize your present great

opportunity and make full use of it. Bodhichitta may be attained in months or years, depending on one's effort. But even if it is not fully attained in this life, the practice will lay a foundation for the next, and it will easily be attained then. One needs to maintain a strong intention to use one's entire life towards developing Bodhichitta and to do so even during the B'a-d'o, for this is the best means for transferring one's consciousness.

Death and the uncertainty of one's life-span is something one cannot doubt, and only one's practice of the Dharma can be of help at the time of death. There are five corresponding practices to be performed at the time of death, and in order to perform them successfully, one needs control and intimate acquaintance with them. So begin now. If one wishes to die without regret, one needs to practise during this life. It is by following these simple methods that the great sages of the past, such as Naropa and Marpa, attained their wisdom.

1. One needs to come to the firm decision to benefit others and increase Bodhichitta even during the B'a-d'o and in the next life.
2. It is extremely important not to be attached to one's possessions, relatives, or even to one's Guru or to a statue of the Buddha at the time of death, for this would lead to rebirth in one of the lower states. It is a custom in Tibet to make offerings to the poor after a person has died, but it would be better for that person giving during his lifetime.
3. It is good to try to receive initiation just before death, for one has probably not kept the vows of previous initiations as closely as one should. If this is not possible, then apply the Four Opponent Powers, for it is important to purify oneself from non-virtuous actions before death.
4. The force of acquaintance should already have been gained through one's life practice.
5. At death do not make ordinary wishes for high rebirth

but wish only for the growth of Bodhichitta and Enlightenment. One Geshe died on his throne while giving teaching on Bodhichitta, and in his next life, even as a child, he thought only of the welfare of others. When a person is about to die, it is best that he is alone so that he may keep his mind on virtue. It is best then not to give him medicine, but rather to read the scriptures and let him die in peace. Bodily position is also important, the best being the horizontal posture of the Buddha when he entered Parinirvana.

Only by putting the five forces into daily practice will they be effective at the time of death. If one wishes to make the Dharma a living tradition, one must develop strong will-power and perseverance. Look at the examples of the great Bodhisattvas of the past, but rather than simply admiring their attainments, carefully examine the paths they followed. The essential practice is to control and cultivate the mind and develop Bodhichitta. Between the age of thirty-six and forty-eight, Je Trong-k'a-pa lived with twelve of his disciples in caves, meditating and eating only meditation pills. At the end of this time, they sold all their belongings in order to build a temple for Maitreya, but their possessions were so few that they only received three sho (a few cents) for them. All those who are highly attained have totally abandoned worldly desires for this life, having their minds focused on the goal beyond. If one feels that one's Bodhichitta meditation is lessening one's self-cherishing attitude, the practice is successful. For Dharma practice one must have both the internal witness, one's own mind, and the external witness, other people. If others say that one's conduct is good, look inwards and see if one's thoughts, too, are virtuous. Of the body and mind, the mind is the chief, and must be constantly watched and guarded.

Whatever spiritual progress is attained should be kept private—don't tell others of it. Because these are degenerate times, to do so would only create hate and jealousy. Shantideva, who had fully developed Bodhichitta, was known to

others as one who did nothing but eat and sleep. Through our Dharma practice there should be a noticeable change in one day, or if not, in one month, or at least in one year. If within one year, there has been no definite change, our practice has not been effective.

The Thirteenth Dalai Lama, Thubten Gyatso, taught on the subject of the awakening mind as follows:

There are many ways to cultivate the bodhimind. However, the basis of all is the cultivation of love and compassion, and the aspiration to highest enlightenment as the most effective means of benefitting the world.

As the principle Mahayana endeavour is the cultivation of the Bodhimind, in the beginning of each action we should think, 'May this work produce benefit and illumination for the sake of all living beings.' This transforms all activities into Bodhisattva deeds. During the action we should meditate upon the bodhimind spirit of enlightenment, and when the activity is complete, we should seal it with the dedication, 'May this action produce happiness and illumination for the uplifting of the world.'

We should try to dwell constantly in the Bodhisattva spirit of love, compassion and the wish for enlightenment as a supreme means to benefit the world.

The practices to be accomplished are collectively known as the 'Dharma'. It is said that the Buddha, seeing that the living beings were afflicted by 84,000 delusions and emotional disturbances, expounded 84,000 aspects of Dharma as a remedy to these.

(One way to consider the Doctrines of Buddha is under the headings of individual liberation teachings, and the teachings on universal enlightenment, or enlightenment that is for the benefit of all. The latter are often called the Mahayana teachings.)

The Mahayana Vehicles take as their main gateway the altruistic bodhimind, the aspiration to gain enlightenment as the best means of benefitting the world. For all Mahayanists, the bodhimind is the key point in practice.

When Jowo Atisha was asked about his teacher Ser-ling-pa, he touched his hands together in a gesture of reverence, tears came to his eyes and he replied, 'Whatever Mahayana spirit I have attained is due only to the kindness of that great guru. Even when I would see him ten times in a day he would each time ask me, 'Is the spirit of enlightenment, the bodhimind blended in with your thoughts?' His emphasis upon the cultivation of the bodhimind was always first and foremost.

Thus, although the Buddha taught 84,000 practices, we as Mahayanists should always make our foremost concern the cultivation of the bodhimind, the Bodhisattva spirit of

enlightenment, the mind of equality of view, love, compassion and empathy, that seeks full omniscience for the benefit of all living beings. Progress in all other Mahayana practices depends upon progress in the cultivation of the bodhimind.

Shantideva said:

Just as the alchemist's stone turns base metals into gold, when this impure body is touched by the awakening mind, it becomes the body of an Awakened Being. Therefore firmly hold onto this awakening mind.

Concerning the nature of the bodhimind, the text *Seven Points for Training the Mind*, which embodies the oral tradition given by Ser-ling-pa to Atisha, states,

The bodhimind is like a diamond sceptre,
The sun and a medicinal tree.

In spiritual training, the bodhimind is like a diamond. Just as a diamond can eradicate poverty and fulfill all needs, the bodhimind eradicates spiritual poverty and fulfills all spiritual needs. Just as a fragment of a diamond outshines all other ornaments, even a partial development of the bodhimind surpasses more complete achievements in lesser practices. A tiny piece of diamond is far more precious than a large piece of a lesser gem.

The bodhimind is like the sun in dispersing darkness. When the sun rises, how can darkness remain? A sun rising over an entire continent illuminates the entire land. In the same way, the generation of the Bodhisattva spirit within ourselves is like the rising sun of the mind.

The bodhimind is also likened to a medicinal tree. The tree as a whole is an effective antidote to all 404 types of diseases, and also its individual components such as leaves and berries have their own individual healing abilities, their unique powers to cure specific diseases. Similarly, if we develop the bodhimind within ourselves we become cured of every spiritual affliction, thus attaining to full enlightenment. Even if we only develop a few small branches of the Bodhisattva spirit, these will have their own spiritually reviving effects.

The bodhimind has the inherent ability to remedy the inner darkness of emotional afflictions and delusions, such as falsely grasping at the nature of the self and phenomena. As it has the power to cure the mind of the roots of cyclic suffering- the product of delusion and compulsive karmic

patterns- it is indeed a supreme medicine, having both conventional means for curing conventional afflictions and ultimate means for dealing with deeper spiritual problems.

This is what is meant by the expression 'method and wisdom combined'. There is the training in the conventional bodhimind practices of patience, love, compassion, and so forth; and also the training in the ultimate bodhimind, which is the wisdom of emptiness that realizes the most profound and essential nature of the mind, body and world around us.

When we accomplish the ultimate bodhimind, we attain everlasting emancipation from the imperfect world of suffering and confusion. We then become an *Arya*, a High One, a transcended being who is free from samsara's claws. When this is achieved on the basis of a training in the conventional bodhimind, we go on to actualize fully omniscient knowledge and the complete powers of a Buddha's body, speech and mind. This provides us with the ability to fulfill the Bodhisattva spirit by manifesting in the world as is most effective in the uplifting of sentient life, while ourselves retaining complete abilities to maintain absorption in the vision of the highest truth. Thus the bodhimind is a most precious method, and one should make every effort to accomplish it in its two aspects of conventional and ultimate.