

Metta and
Readings on the Mahayana

Jason Espada, editor

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{About these selections:

The Traditional teachings in this collection are my own versions;

and the the texts and prayers offered here have been edited, and in some places revised, according to my understanding. In these cases, I have done my best to be true to the meaning.}

Introduction

There is a natural connection that exists between the teachings on metta, from the Theravada Tradition, and the Mahayana. When we cultivate loving kindness and compassion, at some point we can realize that what all our loved ones need is inner freedom, the peace and well being that come from the realization of their true nature. Then, organically, effortlessly and without contrivance, we dedicate our practice to accomplishing the temporal and ultimate aims of both ourselves and all those we care for, in this whole ten directions world.

Tracing out the teachings historically, we'll surely find many examples of criticism, back and forth, between the Theravada and Mahayana, and I'll leave that for others to sort out, if they want to try to do that¹.

As for myself, I find it more fruitful now to focus on what each of these two great traditions offer to the world, as best exemplified in our precious teachers. I also find it very useful to work with the practices that cultivate love and compassion as they've been passed down to us from each lineage, strengthening the foundations of all we would do in this world. When we do this, we may find, as Je Tsong Khapa said, that

*Upon realization,
all teachings prove to be without contradiction...*

* * *

¹ For just a few thoughts on this subject, see the essay titled *Practicing the One Vehicle*.

*Especially now,
May we all be blessed by the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,
Saints and Sages,*

*May we all practice well,
accomplishing the result of lasting peace and well being,
freedom and joy,
and share that with all our family,
and all the world*

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When one cultivates the meditations on loving kindness, ideally what one's doing is taking the emotional tone of the heart as the object of meditation, as opposed to the discursive element... One maybe starts in that way, but the object of attention, the focus of attention is the actual feeling within the heart.

- Ajahn Pasanno

Teachings on Metta, by Thich Nhat Hanh

Metta Meditation

Metta meditation is a practice of cultivating understanding, love, and compassion. This is done first for ourselves and then for others, by looking deeply. Once we love and take care of ourselves, we can be much more helpful to others. Metta meditation can be practiced in part or in full.

Just saying one line of the metta meditation will already bring more compassion and healing into the world.

To love is, first of all, to accept ourselves as we actually are. That is why in this love meditation, to “Know thyself” is the first practice of love. When we practice this, we see the conditions that have caused us to be the way we are. This makes it easy for us to accept ourselves, including our suffering and our happiness at the same time.

Metta means “lovingkindness” in Pali. We begin this with an aspiration:

{such as, May I be safe, healthy, happy and at peace...}

Then we transcend the level of aspiration and look deeply at all the positive and negative characteristics of the object of our meditation, in this case ourselves.

The willingness to love is not yet love. We look deeply, with all our being, in order to understand. We don't just repeat the words, or imitate others, or strive after some ideal. The practice of love meditation is not autosuggestion. We don't just say, “I love myself. I love all beings.” We look deeply at our body, our feelings, our perceptions, our mental formations, and our consciousness, and in just a few weeks, our aspiration to love will become a deep intention. Love will enter our thoughts, our words, and our actions, and we will notice that we have become “peaceful, happy, and light

in body and spirit; safe and free from injury; and free from anger, afflictions, fear, and anxiety.”

When we practice, we observe how much peace, happiness, and lightness we already have. We notice whether we are anxious about accidents or misfortunes, and how much anger, irritation, fear, anxiety, or worry are already in us. As we become aware of the feelings in us, our self-understanding will deepen. We will see how our fears and lack of peace contribute to our unhappiness, and we will see the value of loving ourselves and cultivating a heart of compassion.

In this love meditation, “anger, afflictions, fear, and anxiety” refer to all the unwholesome, negative states of mind that dwell in us and rob us of our peace and happiness. Anger, fear, anxiety, craving, greed, and ignorance are the great afflictions of our time. By practicing mindful living, we are able to deal with them, and our love is translated into effective action.

* * *

This is a metta - loving kindness meditation adapted from the Visuddhimagga (The Path of Purification) by Buddhaghosa, a 5th-century systematization of the Buddha’s teachings.

To practice this love meditation, sit still, calm your body and your breathing, and recite it to yourself. The sitting position is wonderful for practicing this. Sitting still, you are not too preoccupied with other matters, so you can look deeply at yourself as you are, cultivate your love for yourself, and determine the best ways to express this love in the world.

May I be peaceful, happy, and light in body and spirit...

May I be safe and free from injury...

May I be free from anger, afflictions, fear, and anxiety...

(or)

May I be safe... healthy... happy... peaceful...

...

Begin practicing this love meditation on yourself ("I"). Until you are able to love and take care of yourself, you cannot be of much help to others. After that, practice on others ("he/she," or "they") - first on someone you like, then on someone neutral to you, then on someone you love, and finally on someone the mere thought of whom makes you suffer.

Practice in this way:

May they be peaceful, happy, and light in body and spirit.

May they be safe and free from injury.

May they be free from anger, afflictions, fear, and anxiety.

(or)

May they be happy... safe... healthy... peaceful...

According to the Buddha, a human being is made of five collections, called skandhas in Sanskrit. They are: form (our body), feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness. In a way, you are the surveyor, and these elements are your territory. To know the real situation within yourself, you have to know your own territory, including the elements within you that are at war with each other. In order to bring about harmony, reconciliation, and healing within, you have to understand

yourself. Looking and listening deeply, surveying your territory, is the beginning of metta loving kindness meditation.

From Teachings on Love, by Thich Nhat Hanh, Chapter Two - Love Meditation

The Buddha offered many meditations on love. When a group of monks told him that the spirits living near their forest monastery were causing others to suffer, the Buddha taught them the Metta Sutta, also known as the Discourse on Love:

“He or she who wants to attain Peace should practice being upright , humble, and capable of using loving speech. He or she will know how to live simply and happily, with their senses calmed, with out being covetous and carried away by the emotions of the majority. Let him or her not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones. And this is what he or she contemplates:

“May all beings be happy and safe, and may their hearts be filled with joy.

“May all living beings live in security and in peace, beings who are frail or strong, tall or short, big or small, visible or not visible, near or far away, already born or yet to be born. May all of them dwell in perfect tranquility.

“Let no one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one, out of anger or ill will, wish anyone any harm.

“Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate boundless love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos. We should let our boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below, and across. Our love will know no obstacles, our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity. Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying down, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living.

"Free from wrong views, greed, and sensual desires, living in beauty and realizing perfect understanding, those who practice boundless love will certainly transcend birth and death."

After several months of reciting and practicing the Metta Sutta, the monks came to understand the sufferings of the troubled spirits. As a result, the spirits began to practice, also. They became filled with the energy of love, and the whole forest was peaceful.

The Buddha also offered many specific exercises to help his disciples practice and realize the Four Immeasurable Minds:

When your mind is filled with love, send it in one direction, then a second, a third, and a fourth, then above, and then below. Identify with everything, without hatred, resentment, anger, or enmity. This mind of love is very wide. It grows immeasurably and eventually is able to embrace the whole world. Practice the same way with your mind filled with compassion, then joy, then equanimity.

With his mind filled with love, the monk permeates one direction, and then a second, a third, a fourth, above, below, and all around, everywhere identifying himself with all. He permeates the whole world with his mind filled with love, wide, far, developed, unbound, free from hatred and ill will. He does the same with his mind filled with compassion, joy, and equanimity...

When the energy of love is strong in us, we can send it to beings in all directions. We may imagine our love as being like waves of sound or light, or like a pure white cloud that forms slowly and gradually spreads out to envelop the whole world. But the love meditation is not only an act of imagination. A true cloud produces rain. Sound and light penetrate everywhere, and our love must do the same. We have to observe whether

our mind of love is present in our actual contact with others. Practicing love meditation in the sitting position is only the beginning.

Metta meditation is an important beginning. We sit quietly and look deeply into ourselves. With practice, our love will increase naturally, becoming all-inclusive and all-embracing.

As we learn to see with the eyes of love, we empty our mind of anger and hatred. As long as these negative mental formations are present in us, our love is incomplete. We may think we understand and accept others, but we are not yet able to love them fully...

Mindfulness is the energy that allows us to look deeply at our body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, and consciousness and see clearly what our real needs are, so we will not drown in the sea of suffering. Eventually love fills our mind and our will, and all our actions from that time on manifest love. Speech and actions are the fruits of will, so when our will is permeated by love, our speech and actions are also suffused with love. We speak only loving and constructive words and act only in ways that bring happiness and relieve suffering.

...

We practice not only to give rise to the Four Immeasurables in our mind, but also to bring them into the world through our words and actions. When we practice love meditation, we don't merely visualize our love spreading into space. *We touch the deep sources of love that are already in us, and then, in the midst of our daily lives, in our actual contact with others, we express and share our love.* We practice until we see the concrete effects of our love on others, until we are able to offer peace and happiness to everyone, even those who have acted toward us in ways that are most unlovable.

...

In the Itivuttaka, the Buddha says if we gather together all the virtuous actions we have realized in this world, they are not equal to practicing metta meditation. Building practice centers, making Buddha figures, casting bells, or doing social work cannot bring about one-sixteenth of the merit of this practice. If we collect together all the light from the stars, it will not be as bright as the light of the moon. In the same way, practicing metta is greater than all other virtuous actions combined.

Practicing loving kindness meditation is like digging deep into the ground until we reach the purest water. We look deeply into ourselves until insight arises and our love flows to the surface. Joy and happiness radiate from our eyes, and everyone around us benefits from our smile and our presence.

If you take good care of yourself, you help everyone. You stop being a source of suffering to the world, and you become a reservoir of joy and freshness. Here and there are people who know how to take good care of themselves, and who live joyfully and happily. They are our strongest support. Everything they do, they do for everyone. That is the meaning of Mahayana Buddhism. That is loving kindness meditation.

The Buddha said that if a monk practices metta meditation, even if only for the length of time it takes to snap one's fingers, that monk is worthy of being a monk:

"He will not fail in meditative concentration. He will realize the teachings given by teachers on the path. The food offered to him as alms will not be wasted. There is no greater virtue than practicing metta loving kindness meditation every day."

*May all beings be happy and at peace,
and may their hearts be filled with joy*

The Metta Sutta

This is what should be done
by those who are skilled in goodness,
and who know the path of peace:

Let them be able and upright,
humble and not conceited,
contented and easily satisfied,
unburdened with duties
and frugal in their ways.

Peaceful and calm,
and wise and skillful,
not proud and demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing
that the wise would later reprove.

Wishing: in gladness and in safety,
may all beings be at their ease.

Whatever living beings there may be,
whether they are weak or strong,
omitting none,
the great or the mighty,
medium, short or small,
the seen and the unseen,
those living near and far away,
those born and to-be-born –
May all beings be at their ease!

Let none deceive another,
or despise any being in any state.

Let none through anger or ill-will
wish harm upon another.

Even as a mother protects with her life
her child, her only child,
so with a boundless heart
should one cherish all living beings;

radiating kindness over the entire world,
spreading upwards to the skies,
and downwards to the depths,
outward and unbounded,
freed from hatred and ill-will.

Whether standing or walking,
seated or lying down,
free from drowsiness,
one should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.

By not holding to fixed views,
the pure-hearted one,
having clarity of vision,
being freed from all sense desires,
is not born again into this world.

A Loving Kindness Meditation, by Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, from *The Heroic Heart - Awakening Unbound Compassion*

To begin, we sit and quiet down the surface of the mind and send loving thoughts to ourselves. Traditionally we think to ourselves,

May I be well and happy...

May I be free of suffering...

May I be peaceful and at ease...

Recite any verse that speaks to you, and visualize sending loving thoughts to yourself, maybe in the form of light...

When you think, "May I be happy" you are sending loving-kindness, and when you think, "May I be free from suffering," you are sending compassion. Even though at first this may seem artificial and contrived, gradually we begin to feel a kind of peacefulness and warmth inside ourselves...

We can start by befriending ourselves and being a little more tolerant of ourselves, and that will help us be friendlier and more tolerant of others...

When we give loving-kindness and compassion to ourselves, then naturally this is also going to spread out toward others...

After that, we send thoughts of loving kindness to somebody whom we feel particularly loving toward, wishing that they might be well and happy, and imagining them well and happy, and free from suffering. This is the easiest part- to wish happiness to people (or to animals) we really care for...

Then we spread this goodwill to somebody we feel neutral about, whom we don't care about one way or the other- the mailman, for example, whom we see every day but usually don't give a thought about. Now, just imagine really wishing them to be happy and free from suffering...

Everybody in their heart of hearts wants to feel well and not suffer- as the Buddha said, "To each one, his own self is most dear", and we wish that for them. Imagine them being happy, imagine all their problems solved, and see them free from suffering, their children attending good colleges and marrying nice people, and their partner staying healthy. Everything is really nice; all their worries and problems are resolved, and they are just filled with happiness; Imagine it...

Then we visualize someone whom we don't like or with whom we have problems. Just think of that person and recognize that if people create difficulties for others it is because inside they are not really at peace with themselves.

Wish them to be well and happy, imagine everything they want being fulfilled for them, and all their worries and anxieties, all their problems fading away. They're just happy. Feel pleased for them...

Then just gradually expand that sense of goodwill around the world, thinking of all the many beings out there- not just human beings, but animals, insects, birds, fish, all the beings who inhabit this planet, and then all those who inhabit the other realms that we can't even see...

Imagine that all these beings finally experience having all their worries and anxieties melt away, to be replaced by great happiness and joy and satisfaction...

May it be so!

Loving-Kindness Meditation, by Ajahn Brahm

The Buddha's word for loving-kindness is *mettā*. It refers to an emotion, to that feeling of goodwill that can sustain thoughts wishing happiness for another, and that is willing to forgive any fault.

My favorite expression of *mettā* is encompassed by the words “the door of my heart is fully open to you, forever, whoever you are and whatever you have done...”

Mettā is love without a self, arising from inspiration, expecting nothing back in return, and without any conditions.

The Buddha compared *mettā* to a mother's love for her child (Sn 149). A mother might not always like her child or agree with everything it does, but she will always care for her child and wish it only happiness. Such an openhearted, non-discriminating, and liberating kindness is *mettā*.

In *mettā* meditation you focus your attention on the feeling of loving-kindness, developing that delightful emotion until it fills the whole mind. The way this is achieved can be compared to the way you light a campfire. You start with paper or anything else that is easy to light. Then you add kindling, small twigs, or strips of wood. When the kindling is on fire you add thicker pieces of wood, and after a time the thick logs. Once the fire is roaring and very hot, you can even put on wet and sappy logs and they are soon alight.

Mettā can accurately be compared with a warm and radiant fire burning in your heart. You cannot expect to light the fire of loving-kindness by starting with a difficult object, no more than you can expect to light a campfire by striking a match under a thick log. So do not begin *mettā* meditation by spreading *mettā* to yourself or to an enemy. Instead begin by spreading loving-kindness to something that is easy to ignite with loving-kindness.

I prepare myself for mettā meditation by grounding my mindfulness in the present moment, establishing stage one of the meditation method described in chapter 1. Then I initiate mettā meditation by imagining a little kitten. I like cats, especially kittens, so my imaginary kitten is to loving-kindness as gas is to a flame. I only need to think of my little kitten and my heart lights up with mettā.

I continue to visualize my imaginary friend, picturing it as abandoned, hungry, and very afraid. In its short span of life it has only known rejection, violence, and loneliness. I imagine its bones sticking out from its emaciated body, its fur soiled with grime and some blood, and its body rigid with terror. I consider that if I don't care for this vulnerable little being then no one will, and it will die such a horrible, lonely, terrified death. I feel that kitten's pain fully, in all its forms, and my heart opens up releasing a flood of compassion.

I will care for that little kitten. I will protect it and feed it...

I imagine myself looking deeply into its anxious eyes, trying to melt its apprehension with the mettā flowing through my own eyes. I reach out to it slowly, reassuringly, never losing eye contact.

Gently, I pick up that little kitten and bring it to my chest. I remove the kitten's cold with the warmth from my own body, I take away its fear with the softness of my embrace, and I feel the kitten's trust grow. I speak to the kitten on my chest:

Little being, never feel alone again. Never feel so afraid. I will always look after you. I will always be your protector and friend. I love you, little kitten. Wherever you go, whatever you do, my heart will always welcome you. I give you my limitless loving-kindness always...

I feel my kitten become warm, relax, and finally purr.

This is but an outline of how I begin my meditation on mettā. I usually take much more time. I use my imagination and thoughts to paint a picture in my mind, to create a scenario where the first flames of mettā can arise. At the end of the mental exercise, my eyes still closed, I focus the attention on the region around my heart and feel the first warm glow of the emotion of loving-kindness.

My kitten is like the paper that you use to start the campfire. You may not like kittens, so choose something else, a puppy or a baby perhaps.

Whatever you choose as your first object of mettā, make it an imaginary being and not a real one. In your mind you can make a kitten or a puppy or a baby into anything you like. You have more freedom to generate mettā when you make use of a fantasy creature rather than one from the real world. My imaginary kitten for example purrs at just the right time...

Having chosen your first object, use your powers of imagination to create a story around that being that arouses your loving-kindness. With practice this innovative method becomes one of the most successful and enjoyable ways to begin mettā meditation.

Some years ago a female student complained to me that this method did not work for her. She regarded small animals, especially mischievous kittens, as little pests, nor did she like crying and wailing nappy-soiling babies. She had a severe case of what I now call "metta-block."

She went on to tell me that in her apartment in Sydney she had been growing some flowers in pots. So I suggested that she choose one of her plants as her first object of mettā. She imagined a seedling so delicate and tender. It was so fragile that it needed all her care, love, and protection to survive. She directed all her motherly instincts to that vulnerable little potted plant, nurturing and feeding her friend until it burst from its bud to repay her kindness with a beautiful, fragrant flower. She really took to that method.

That was the first time mettā meditation worked for her. During the retreat when this happened, she said it was the only session when she wasn't waiting for me to ring the bell.

After the first flames of mettā have been established in this way, let go of your imaginary creature and put in its place a real person, someone very close to you emotionally such as your partner, a well-loved relation, or even your very best friend. It must be someone for whom it is easy to generate and sustain loving-kindness. In the metaphor of the campfire, they will be the thin pieces of wood called kindling.

Once again use your thoughts, words and images, to paint a picture around them in your mind. They too need your friendship and love. They are also emotionally vulnerable, subject to the disappointments and frustrations of life. Think along these lines and say to yourself:

Dearest friend, I sincerely wish you happiness. May your body be free from pain and your mind find contentment. I give you my love with no conditions. I'll always be there for you. You will always have a place in my heart. I truly care for you...

- or similar words of your own design. Use whatever phrases arouse the warm glow of mettā in your heart. Stay with this person. Imagine they are right before you until the mettā grows bright and constant around them...

Now briefly place your attention on your body near your heart and feel the physical sensation associated with mettā. You will find it feels delightful.

Let go of the image of that person and substitute that of another close acquaintance, creating the feeling of mettā around them by using your thought and feeling in the same way:

May you live in happiness...

Imagine them right before you until the mettā glows bright and constant around them.

Next substitute an entire group of people, perhaps all the people who live in your house. Develop the caring glow of mettā around them in the same way:

May you be well and happy...

In the simile of the campfire, you are now putting on the logs.

See if you can imagine mettā to be a golden radiance emanating from a beautiful white lotus flower in the middle of your heart. Allow that radiance of loving-kindness to expand in all directions, embracing more and more living beings until it becomes boundless, filling up all that you can imagine.

May all living beings, near or far, great or small, be happy and at peace...

Bathe the whole universe in the warmth of the golden light of loving-kindness... Stay there for a while...

In the simile of the campfire, the fire is now roaring and very hot and can now burn the wet and sappy logs. Think about your enemy. Visualize someone who has hurt you badly. You will be astonished that your mettā is now strong enough for you to forgive them. You are now able to share the healing golden glow of loving-kindness with them as well:

Friend, whatever you have done to me, revenge will not help either of us, so instead I wish you well. I sincerely wish you freedom from the pain of the past and joy in all your future. May the beauty of this unconditional loving-kindness reach you as well, bringing you happiness, peace, and contentment...

When the fire of mettā burns strong, nothing can withstand it. Next, there is one final “wet and sappy stick” to be tossed into the fire of mettā. Most meditators find that the hardest person to give loving-kindness to...is themselves.

Imagine that you are looking at yourself in a mirror. Say with your inner speech and with total sincerity:

I wish myself well. I now give myself the gift of happiness. Too long the door of my heart has been closed to me; now I open it. No matter what I have done, or will ever do, the door to my own love and respect is always open to me. I forgive myself unreservedly. Come home. I now give myself the love that does not judge. I care for this vulnerable being called 'me.' I embrace all of me with the lovingkindness of mettā...

Invent your own words here to let the warmth of loving-kindness sink deep inside of you, to the part that is most frightened. Let it melt all resistance until you are at one with mettā, unlimited loving-kindness, like a mother's care for her child.

Before you end the mettā meditation, pause for a minute or two and reflect on how you feel inside. Notice the effect that this meditation has had on you. Mettā meditation can produce heavenly bliss.

To bring the meditation to an elegant conclusion, once more imagine mettā as a golden glow radiating from the beautiful white lotus located in your heart.

Visualize the golden radiance being drawn back into the lotus, leaving the warmth outside. When the golden glow becomes like a condensed ball of incandescent energy in the center of the white lotus, imagine the petals closing around the ball of mettā, guarding the seed of loving-kindness within your heart, ready to be released again in your next mettā meditation. Then, open your eyes, and get up slowly...

The Meaning of Metta Bhavana, by Sayadaw U Indaka

Bhavana means development or cultivation. Therefore, metta bhavana refers to the repeated cultivation of metta in our own hearts and minds to make it firm and strong. With the practice of metta meditation, we have to develop a genuine wish for our own happiness and the happiness of others. When we develop metta for all beings by wishing them good health and happiness, then our hearts and minds will feel happy and peaceful.

Because we are practising metta meditation, we experience this happiness and peace ourselves. As we develop and strengthen the quality of metta in our hearts and minds by wishing all living beings good health and happiness, there is no more desire to hurt or create suffering for other living beings. This is *mano-kamma* metta or metta in mental actions.

We also do not use any words that cause suffering or harm other living beings. This is *vaci-kamma* metta or metta in verbal actions.

And we do not do anything that hurts or causes suffering to other living beings. This is *kaya-kamma* metta, metta in bodily actions. In this way, other living beings do not suffer because of us, and if they do not suffer, they are happy.

When we practise metta meditation and live in the tranquil shade of metta, this subtle happiness and peace is at first not very distinct or obvious. The serene and peaceful quality of metta is not always evident, so we may not understand the true value of metta. Only when we have to spend time with an angry person, do we come to appreciate and savour the serene taste of metta. Living in the shade of a person with metta, we feel serene and peaceful...

At such a time, we come to know and clearly understand the serene and peaceful quality of metta, which is radiated by the person who is

developing metta. Then we fully understand the true value of metta. This is the benefit that can be experienced by a being to whom metta is radiated.

The Spirit of Metta, by Sayadaw U Indaka

The spirit of metta is the wish for the welfare and happiness of all living beings. There is never a wish for anything that is not beneficial.

In the spirit of metta, we always work for the benefit of other living beings. We never work to create unwholesome results or to inflict suffering.

The spirit of metta is always and forever peaceful and cool; it never burns.

The spirit of metta is always loving-kindness; it never turns to hatred.

The spirit of metta is always soft, gentle and subtle; it is never rough and harsh.

The spirit of metta is always clear and fresh; it never withers.

The spirit of metta only sees and looks at the good side; it never sees and looks for faults.

The spirit of metta is always forgiving; it is not oppressive or controlling.

The spirit of metta is only concerned with helping; it is completely free from any destructive impulses.

The spirit of metta works only for the benefit of others; it doesn't work for our own benefit {alone}.

The spirit of metta is free from entanglement; it is always accompanied by a spirit of independence.

Anointing with the Waters of Benevolence, from Duties of the Sangha, by
Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo

When one has seen with the power of intuitive understanding that a person is ready to receive the Dhamma, one should spread thoughts of good will, dedicating the fruits of one's merit to that person. This way of spreading the Dhamma can be done both in public and in private, with those who are near and those who are far away. It can help certain human and divine beings, and inspire conviction in those whose dispositions lie within the net of the Dhamma, all without having to say a word.

This has been termed "anointing with the waters of benevolence." The good will that lies in the heart is like a cooling current. Wherever this current is directed through the power of a radiant heart, it can draw other beings, both human and divine, to become inspired to develop the qualities of their hearts in line with their varying dispositions. Even if we have yet to meet them, and have simply heard news, we can still cause their hearts to become cool and refreshed, contributing to their welfare and happiness.

Spreading the Dhamma in this way is beneficial both to us and to others. To be able to do this, though, we must first give rise to sufficient quality in our own hearts. If the quality isn't yet there, then build it and dedicate it first of all to those to whom you owe "kamma debts." Spread this goodness to fill the body. Spread this goodness to fill the mind. This sense of fullness is what is meant by rapture (*piti*) — i.e., full of what is skillful. Goodness fills the heart, refreshing it with what is skillful.

When goodness fills the body and mind, it is like water filling a tank or saturating the earth. Wherever the earth is saturated with water, there the trees and vegetation flourish. But if we don't have enough goodness within, we're like a tank without any water: No matter how far the faucet is opened, only wind will come out. The coolness of wind and the coolness of water are two very different things. The coolness of wind can cause trees to wither and can send dust clouds flying, but the coolness of water is useful

in many ways: It can be used to wash clothes, to bathe the body, to drink, or to sprinkle on the ground, nourishing plants and softening the earth. Not only that, it can also give a deep sense of refreshment. In the same way, people who practice the Dhamma, even if they don't speak a word but simply spread thoughts of good will, can be of great benefit to people at large. This is termed "*metta-parami*" — the perfection of benevolence.

So when goodness arises within us, we can work for the welfare of others even when we sit with our eyes closed, perfectly still. But it's the nature of ignorant people to believe that such a person is simply saving his own skin. They haven't looked deep inside.

The teachers of the past thus made a comparison with thunder and rain. Some people can teach others, but they themselves have no inner goodness. Such people are called *thunder without rain*. They can cause others to feel awe and respect, but can give no sense of cooling refreshment.

Some people are like *rain without thunder*. They rarely speak, but spread thoughts of good will, dedicating their merit to others. They have received their own full measure of inner goodness and so can give goodness and inspire conviction in the hearts of others even when simply sitting still. Those who find peace and calm in the shelter of such an influence will, in turn, feel the highest form of respect.

Some people are like *rain with thunder*, and others, *rain with thunder and wind to boot*: This, for those who are able, is the best of all. Such people, after having developed their own inner goodness, are able to teach others, spreading the Dhamma by thought, word, and deed, giving results in many ways: People who are stubborn and fixed in their opinions will be able to soften in an instant, just as giant trees bend before the wind. At the same time, teachers of this sort can be an example to others through their behavior and the kindness of their hearts, feeling no envy for the goodness of others, but only compassion, providing the shelter of mental peace to all

sorts of people. This is the way to spread the Dhamma fully and completely, causing the religion to prosper in the true and proper way.

The Method of Developing Metta, by Sayadaw U Pandita

The method for developing metta is much the same as the methods for the other brahmacariyas. We will explain metta bhavana, then, as a basic example; and we will also briefly describe the theme of protective meditations.

The basic method for metta bhavana is simple. One deliberately generates wishes for others' welfare and happiness. Identifying one's own wish to be happy, one recognizes that others feel just the same way. A desire to help them arises; and so one goes out and does whatever helpful things one can.

Helpful actions are a form of metta, known as *kaya-kamma metta*, friendly actions performed with the body. True lovingkindness includes kaya-kamma metta and two other forms of metta: *vaci-kamma metta*, verbal acts of metta; and *mano-kamma metta*, friendly mental actions.

Four Kinds of Loving Speech

To speak friendly words, recite suttas, give good advice, or simply to speak in a friendly, beneficial manner - all are forms of vaci-kamma metta.

The specific teachings on skillful speech, vaci-sucarita, indicate that for speech to be skillful it must be motivated by lovingkindness. Thus, to practice skillful speech is vaci-kamma metta.

The first type of skillful speech is truthful speech. One wishes to inform the other person honestly, so he or she may have correct understanding and knowledge. This is a wholesome, kind intention. Honesty is a form of lovingkindness.

Second, one chooses words that are unifying rather than divisive. Not only is the intent based in metta but the result of such speech is sure to be a further expression of lovingkindness.

Third, we choose words that are sweet and pleasing, not rough, harsh language. We want to make people happy when they hear us talking. At the same time, we guard against deceit and flattery, which contain an element of dishonesty.

The fourth type of vaci-sucarita is speaking of meaningful, essential things. Not wanting to waste the other person's time, we offer worthwhile information and understanding...

People who love to gossip and pass around divisive tidbits often claim they just want to be kind and helpful, but this is untrue. Similarly, rough, coarse language and frivolous time wasting chatter reveal a dearth of metta. In general, ill intentioned speech, vaci-duccarita, turns people away. People are attracted to speech that is truthful, meaningful, unifying, and friendly.

Vaci-sucarita, skillful speech, and vaci-kamma metta verbal acts of lovingkindness, are beneficial for everyone. The more one practices them, the more power one will have to gather others together into a respectful and supportive group. The kind intentions must be genuine, though.

Mental Kindness

The third and final form of metta is mano-kamma metta- acts of lovingkindness performed by the mind. Essentially this means wishing others to be well and happy. Mano-kamma metta can be radiated at all times, in all postures.

It can occur as a spontaneous wish or a deliberately repeated phrase like "May she (or he, or they) be happy."

To recite verbal formulas silently in the mind is the method of formal metta meditation, which can develop one's lovingkindness to an extraordinary level. It will be described extensively below.

Loving Kindness as a Protective Practice

Metta bhavana has two possible goals. It can be used to gain the jhanas, or absorptions, states of very strong concentration; or it can be used as a Guardian Meditation, leading to freedom from danger and enmity.

The technique for developing jhanic concentration has many fine points that we will not go into here, since our emphasis is on developing the insight knowledges through satipattthana vipassana meditation. Sufficient moment to moment concentration arises in satipathana vipassana practice to fulfill the Noble Eightfold Path and lead to freedom from the defilements.

The protective form of metta bhavana is extremely beneficial. It generates wholesome mental states, guards against inner and outer dangers and disturbances, and develops the perfections according to the example of the Buddha.

There are enemies, *vera*; and there is also fear, *bhaya*. The two are related, for if we are not free from enemies we endure danger and fear. We already distinguished outer and inner enemies - *puggala vera*, the enemy that comes in the form of a person, and *akusala vera* and *kilesa vera*, unwholesomeness and mental defilements. Outer enemies are encountered relatively rarely, while the inner enemies attack us night and day, unless we protect ourselves with meditation.

Dosa (aggression) is an internal enemy, as is *raga*, or lust, which so often poses as metta. When *dosa* and *raga* arise in the stream of consciousness they disturb it; they also have the potential to bring disaster to oneself and others. Hatred, when indulged, hardens into resentment. Lust too can grow into a destructive passion. Whenever a destructive mental state is present, the mind becomes rough, coarse, wild, heavy, doped, disgusting, and dreadful. In contrast, a mind filled with metta is peaceful, lovable, light, and open.

The First Wish of Metta Meditation

To be free from hatred and lust is *avera*, to lack an enemy. This wonderful state is the first wish we generate toward others in formal metta bhavana. "May he or she be free from enemies," we say to ourselves, thinking of both inner and outer enemies.

(It is all right to vary the verbal formula slightly, as long as the essence of the wish remains. For instance, the phrase you use could be "May he or she be free from danger" or "May he or she be free from enmity, danger, and fear.")

People often ask, When one meditates by radiating metta to other beings, will these others become peaceful? This is not certain. What is certain is that one's own internal enemies, *dosa* and *raga*, will be pacified and one will become peaceful oneself.

If we practice lovingkindness, it will certainly arise. If we keep at it, our metta will gradually increase, growing powerful enough to quell the internal enemies of hatred and greed. Once these enemies are subdued, one is no longer so quick to respond to others in an angry or self centered way - for example, by immediately forming negative judgments of those we meet, or by feeling jealous and suspicious of family members.

Generally if one does not radiate metta, or if one's practice is weak, one remains easy prey for hatred, greed, lust, and so forth. One can end up violating the precepts by killing, stealing, verbal unkindness, sexual misconduct, or intoxication.

Protection from Inner and Outer Danger

Wrongdoing results from a tormented mind; it also leads to further dangers. By protecting us against inner enemies, metta bhavana also averts the dangers that result from wrongdoing. These dangers are:

1. *Attanuvadabhaya*, the fear or danger of self-blame, feeling ashamed and guilty about what one has done.
2. *Paranuvaddabhaya*, the fear of censure by others, losing the respect and support of people who have good judgment. Kind, ethical people tend to avoid those who habitually indulge in wrongdoing.
3. *Dandabhaya*, fear of punishment by the authorities. If one kills, steals, lies, takes intoxicants, and is generally unruly, sooner or later this will lead to conflict with the secular authorities.
4. *Duggatibhaya*, fear of being reborn in an unfavorable existence. Just as eating unsuitable food leads to an upset stomach, anytime one acts on a defiled intention one will suffer the consequences.

Clearly, no happiness arises in the mind of a person who is facing guilt, punishment, torture, and unfavorable rebirths.

The Formula for Reciting Loving Kindness

The wish we are emanating, for others to be free from enemies or danger, is expressed in a short, simple phrase that encompasses all possible problems a being can face: outer and inner enemies, wrongdoing, and all of its future consequences. If this wish were to come true, the being toward whom we're directing it would be perfectly happy and calm. Since we're wishing them to be freed from inner enemies, we are also wishing they might reach ultimate liberation of mind, perfect peace and freedom.

So, as we mentally recite the formula "May this person be free from enemies," we're emanating a pure volition for their happiness. Though it's uncertain what the result of this will be for the recipient, great joy will develop in one's own mind. One begins to understand what it is like to be freed from inner enemies, oneself.

Metta practice bestows the power to overcome *kodhum-mattaka*, mental madness based on hatred, colloquially called blind rage. Gripped by *kodhum-mattaka*, one goes berserk, out of control, and barely knows what one is doing. With metta bhavana, one's knee-jerk responses become gentler, toned down; one's thoughts are less distorted, more humane.

People with strong metta no longer wish disadvantages upon others. They genuinely hope for others' happiness. They can put up with being insulted; they can forgive and forget. They let go of grudges and can sacrifice their own benefit for the sake of other beings. These wise, kind, beautiful qualities all arise due to lack of hatred in the mind.

As metta grows stronger, the beauty of the mind increases. A generous, tolerant, unselfish person will also tend to be loved by others; he or she will be relatively free of *puggala vera*, enemies in human form. Thus, the protective quality of metta bhavana works inwardly and outwardly. It gradually tames the mind and behavior. As one's own little world is pacified, peace arises in the surrounding world.

Radiating Metta

To wish others to be free from enmity and danger is an efficient, focused way of radiating metta. The wish, in the form of a phrase, is radiated repeatedly. Metta can also be radiated spatially, first to those within one's home, then to those in the immediate neighborhood, and progressively to all beings in one's village, township, state, country, world, and universe.

If one's wishes are dedicated wholly to the welfare and happiness of others, metta reaches the level of *metta-parami*, the perfected lovingkindness of a buddha. Each and every time one radiates lovingkindness, either to individuals or groups, one is protecting oneself, developing metta-parami, gaining merit, and sowing a beneficial kammic seed that will bear fruit someday. By radiating metta hundreds or thousands of times, one protects

oneself, develops metta-parami, and gains merit hundreds or thousands of times~quite a matter for rejoicing...

After radiating lovingkindness mentally, we must also express it in verbal and bodily actions. Anytime we relate to other beings, we should do so with threefold lovingkindness– mental, verbal, and bodily acts of metta. This point should be well noted.

Self Esteem and Human Status

Most people hold themselves in high esteem; this is why they so easily lose patience. Impatience is a form of anger based on pride and conceit, or *mana*. Conceited ill will causes one to lose one's tolerance and humanity.

One may continue to look like a human being from the outside, but one's mind and behavior resemble a hungry ghost's. If one remains just as irritable and impatient after radiating metta, the practice has been superficial. It is a sign that one needs to practice more. Maybe then one will start being a little bit more generous and succeed in rising up to human status and eventually become a distinguished, even an outstanding human being.

In human life it is quite possible to fulfill one's social duties, be generous, and improve one's mental states through meditation. If one can do all this, one will not be just a human being, and not just a distinguished human being, but a true human being. As such, when relating to others one will feel happy, cool, and peaceful.

Unselfishness, the Perfection of Loving Kindness

Since we are practicing metta along the direction of developing paramis, it is good to delve into the meaning of this term.

Parami translated as "perfection," but it means "noble becoming" or "the business of a noble person."

When performing wholesome deeds of generosity, *dana*, when observing morality (*sila*), and especially in metta bhavana it is extremely important that there be no selfish interest involved. This is the meaning of the term "noble." It has nothing to do with social class - or, rather, it expresses the Buddha's definition of what is valuable and respectable in human affairs.

When performing a generous deed, it should be done entirely for the benefit of others. Only then does it qualify as true generosity. This is fairly obvious, since selfishness and generosity are contradictory.

The commitment to maintain *sila*, too, can be altruistic, since a refined morality includes the recognition that others are just as worthy of good treatment as oneself. Likewise, when radiating lovingkindness we can do so entirely for the welfare and happiness of others.

Wholesome acts of morality, generosity, and kindness do not, however, lead to assurance in the Dhamma. Only the insight knowledges attained in satipatthana vipassana meditation can give that ultimate assurance--the assurance that one has understood the truth of existence and will no longer be subjected to suffering. We have been talking about the importance of selflessness in the metta practice. However, metta practice does not by itself lead to the ultimate understanding of the Noble Eightfold Path, to liberation of the mind from suffering, or to what is called "assurance in the Dhamma."

When it comes time to practice the Dhamma to attain stream entry, we may feel motivated by a profound wish for release from the suffering we experience in ourselves. To have a certain degree of self-interest here is fine. The texts say that this desire is perfectly legitimate. So, when practicing the Dhamma to attain stream entry, one will be working hard in hopes of being freed from wrong views, doubt, and the danger of rebirth in states of loss.

There's nothing wrong with harboring some hope of success, and no harm is done to others either. We've already discussed how one's own insight meditation practice benefits other beings.

In all other areas besides this, one should guard strenuously against selfish interest and instead focus on benefiting others. This is a noble aim; a person who undertakes such noble activity is also called parami. Persons worthy of the title parami will act from genuine loving-kindness and compassion. They are not hoping to gain name and fame or a long life nor even to be freed from the cycle of birth and death, samsara. Their motivation is altruistic.

Detailed Explanation of Metta Bhavana

The Instruction for Practice

Traditional metta bhāvanā consists of silently repeating the following four phrases again and again:

Sabbe sattā averā hontu

Avyāpajjhā hontu

Anighā hontu

Sukhi attānam pariharantu

May all beings be free from inner and outer danger

May they be free from mental suffering

May they be free from physical suffering

May they care for themselves happily

When we wish to carry out a session of metta meditation practice, the texts suggest a structure of four phrases. We begin with the phrase discussed earlier, "May all beings be free from enmity and danger." This is a clear and simple wish for others' welfare, happiness, peace, and safety.

The second line, "May all beings be free from mental suffering." offers a new twist. Again we are wishing that others may be freed from suffering, but this time we're focusing on the internal level. We wish all beings to have happiness and peace by no longer undergoing the pangs of difficult thoughts and emotions, or mental suffering in any form.

Vyāpajjha means the pain of anger in the mind, the anger that often arises when circumstances are difficult or unpleasant. This includes all worries, all sadness, fears, grief, and separation from near and dear ones, which can bring sorrow or lamentation. Included here, too, are all the sorrows arising from worldly troubles, like businesses that fail.

In order to be truly freed from all mental suffering, beings must be freed from the internal enemy, kilesa vera. The second metta phrase addresses this issue. We're hoping not only that beings never have to suffer pain within their minds, but also that they shall experience liberation from all the causes of mental suffering, namely, the internal afflictions.

The kilesas are also the causes of destructive behavior, so by extension we're wishing that all beings could maintain ethical, cultured, compassionate behavior. Sweeping implications are condensed into a brief phrase. We're also really intending all this for the benefit of others, not hoping that the rest of the world will start behaving more civilly toward us and give us what we want.

The third line expresses a desire for all beings to be free from physical suffering. This covers all the gradations of bodily pain, anything sharp or unpleasant. We wish others to be free from diseases, wounds, pains, aches, accidents, and so on. Again there is no selfish aspect to this, no secondary hope for one's own health somehow to improve as a result of this meditation.

The final line is a wish for others to be able to look after themselves happily, to be able to bear the burdens of life with ease, to meet the requirements of their bodies and minds without hardship. It can also be translated as wishing for others to meet with supportive circumstances. Taking care of one's own body and mind is a demanding task, and we hope that all beings will receive whatever they need to sustain their lives and even leave them with enough time and mental ease so they can devote themselves to meditation practice. To speak colloquially, we want everyone to have it really good.

The Metta Sutta, version three, as found in *Metta - The Practice of Loving-Kindness As the Foundation for Insight Meditation Practice*, by Sayadaw U Indaka, revised

First Version

{1./2. By the power of this sutta, the yakkhas do not show fearful visions, and a person who makes effort regarding this sutta day and night sleeps comfortably. When he sleeps, he does not have bad dreams. Good people, let us recite this protective sutta, which is endowed with these qualities and others as well.}

3. He or she who wants to dwell penetrating the state of calm (nibbana) and who is skilled in virtue should practise the three kinds of training. He should be capable, frank, extremely honest, obedient, gentle, and not conceited.

4. He should be contented, easy to take care of, have few activities, have few possessions, and be controlled in his senses. He should be wise, and respectful, and not be greedily attached to anything at all.

5. He should not commit the slightest wrong, by doing which he might be censured by the wise. (Then he should think) May all beings be happy and safe. May their hearts be happy.

6./7. Whatever living beings exist; be they feeble or strong, long or big, or medium or short, small or bulky, seen or unseen, dwelling near or far, born or yet to be born, may all beings without exception be happy.

8. Let none deceive another, or despise any person in any place. Let him not wish any harm to another person, with insult or ill will.

9. Just as a mother would protect her only child at the risk of her own life, even so let him cultivate a boundless loving heart towards all beings.

10. Let his thoughts of boundless love pervade the whole world, above, below, and all around; making them unrestricted, free of hate and free of enmity.

11. Whether he is standing, walking, sitting or lying down, as long as he is awake, he should develop this mindfulness. This is the Noble Living here (in the dispensation of the Buddha), they say.

12. Not holding onto wrong views, being virtuous and endowed with vision (the first path knowledge), and removing greed for sensual pleasures, such a one will surely transcend birth and death.

Prayers for Children, for their Whole Lives, from a full heart

May all the children of this world grow up healthy and strong
May they have many good friends, and wonderful experiences

May they have kind teachers who treat them gently,
with respect and appreciation,
who encourage and delight in them,
and teach them well

May they always know they are loved by their parents,
siblings, and friends,
and have wonderful, loving relationships with them all,
for their whole lives

May their parents spend abundant time with them,
and always find ways to communicate their love,
and may these beautiful relationships flourish for their whole lives

May all the children of this world grow up in a safe environment,
free from harm, poverty, disease, and war,
and with a healthy mother earth, our home,
to support them, and for them to delight in:

with clean air, and water,
fertile fields, and abundant orchards,
with green valleys, and glorious mountains

May this earth always be a safe,
thriving and beautiful place for them,
and for future generations

May all our children be free from all outer and inner harm -
may they be free from all negative emotions,

such as fear, greed,
insecurity, anger, and sadness

May they learn early in their lives
how to take care of themselves well,
and may they grow up happily, with joyful minds,
supported, encouraged, and cherished

May they treat all others with kindness their whole lives,
and deeply appreciating all that they have,
may they be able to express their gratitude and love
for parents, teachers, friends and family,
other species, and this whole great world of ours

May they grow up, year by year,
with beautiful values,
as moral young people,
being respectful, gentle, and considerate to all,
with kindness and compassion,
May they live generously,
with joyful hearts always

May they not be too quick to grow up,
but, day by day, thoroughly enjoy their childhood,
their natural vitality, creativity,
wonder, and discovery

May they, in time, find subjects that engage them deeply,
and that they find deeper rewards in studying

May they then grow to be fine men and women of character,
considerate, loving, with good friends, and stable relationships

May they have ethical, fulfilling and balanced livelihoods,
and may they care for those in their immediate and extended families,
with joy and affection

May they be healthy and happy their whole lives
May they always be safe,
and may they always know they are loved

May they give ample time to their inner life
May they connect with one or more spiritual teachers
early on in their lives
May they develop their wisdom,
and know how to live well,
in peace and harmony with others

May they find freedom, the highest happiness within themselves,
and may they then joyfully share the great benefits
of their insight and ease
with their family, friends, and Tradition,
with all others in our human family,
and other species, and this earth,
for all generations

Loving Kindness Practice

Introduction

There is a light in the mind when we love selflessly, no doubt about it. Love is what lets us see beauty. Delighting in others is a kind of enlightenment, we could say, and that light is sustenance; it brings happiness and well being to the heart and mind.

If you are interested in this as a formal Buddhist practice, see *Living in Beauty - Buddhist Loving Kindness Practice*. I'm also very glad to be able to recommend the website called dharmaseed, which is a great treasure trove of audio talks on many aspects of Dharma practice.

What a time to be alive!

On the next pages you will find two versions of the Metta Sutta, the teaching on Loving Kindness taught by the Buddha, followed by two traditional methods for cultivating Metta, the second with some personal variations added, of course. They are essentially the same meditation.

The first method offered here I received in 1998, at a monastery in Thailand called Wat Asokaram, from a Western monk there named Phra Ingo. It uses a simple visualization.

The second method uses phrases to generate loving kindness, to guide the mind and keep it on track. These can be combined, of course, whatever works best.

Sometimes I feel like, 'enough with words!' At these times, just bringing an image to mind is enough to enjoy this meditation.

When we practice metta, we're doing something very simple. We're getting in touch with and awakening the heart's innate capacity for love. So there's

no need to make it complicated, or to have any doubt that this is something we can all do.

Then, when it comes to using metta phrases for the cultivation of loving kindness, some teachers say that the fewer phrases the better, but this is something we can experiment with for ourselves, and see what works best for us.

Whatever method we use, I think Ajaan Pasanno explained the aim of metta practice very well when he said:

'In reality, the cultivation of loving kindness is not the actual repeating of the words – I mean, you use those words and phrases, but it's about the feeling, that feeling of loving kindness, the feeling of warmth, the feeling of acceptance, the feeling of openness, the feeling of the heart, including and concerned for the happiness of oneself or others, and that's about generating the feeling.'

'In terms of meditation, it's that – directing attention to the feeling, or emotion, that sense of kindness, well-wishing, and then finding ways to support that, and to shore that up, and allow that to become stable, and then to start to suffuse one's own being, and then allowing that to spread out... and that requires mindfulness, and attention...''²

However we approach it, this is such a worthwhile practice. Don't you agree?

The Buddha taught that, 'Having seen that all beings, like ourselves, have a desire for happiness, one methodically develops loving kindness for all beings.'

² From the recording of the 2008 Metta Retreat, available from Abhayagiri Monastery

This Buddhist loving kindness practice naturally leads us to what are called The Four Brahma Viharas, or Divine Abidings, of Universal Love, Compassion, Delight in the good, and Peace and balance of mind born of the strength of dedication, also called Equanimity, so I've also included a few verses that express this.

Enjoy! May all beings benefit!

The Metta Sutta

This is what should be done
By those who are skilled in goodness,
And who know the path of peace:

Let them be able and upright,
Straightforward and gentle in speech,
Humble and not conceited,
Contented and easily satisfied,
Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways,
Peaceful and calm, and wise and skillful,
Not proud and demanding in nature.
Let them not do the slightest thing
That the wise would later reprove.

Wishing: in gladness and in safety,
May all beings be at ease.

Whatever living beings there may be;
Whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,
The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,
The seen and the unseen,
Those living near and far away,
Those born and to-be-born—
May all beings be at ease!

Let none deceive another,
Or despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will
Wish harm upon another.

Even as a mother protects with her life
Her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart
Should one cherish all living beings;
Radiating kindness over the entire world,
Spreading upward to the skies,

And downward to the depths;
Outward and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.

Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down,
Free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection.
This is said to be the sublime abiding.

By not holding to fixed views,
The pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
Being freed from all sense desires,
Is not born again into this world.

The Discourse On Love {Thich Nhat Hanh translation}

He or she who wants to attain peace should practice being upright, humble, and capable of using loving speech. He or she will know how to live simply and happily, with senses calmed, without being covetous and carried away by the emotions of the majority. Let him or her not do anything that will be disapproved of by the wise ones.

(And this is what he or she contemplates:)

May everyone be happy and safe, and may their hearts be filled with joy. May all living beings live in security and in Peace - beings who are frail or strong, tall or short, big or small, visible or not visible, near or far away, already born or yet to be born. May all of them dwell in perfect tranquility. Let no one do harm to anyone. Let no one put the life of anyone in danger. Let no one, out of anger or ill will, wish anyone any harm.

Just as a mother loves and protects her only child at the risk of her own life, we should cultivate Boundless Love to offer to all living beings in the entire cosmos. We should let our boundless love pervade the whole universe, above, below and across. Our love will know no obstacles, our heart will be absolutely free from hatred and enmity. Whether standing or walking, sitting or lying down, as long as we are awake, we should maintain this mindfulness of love in our own heart. This is the noblest way of living.

Free from wrong views, greed and sensual desires, living in beauty and realizing perfect understanding, those who practice Boundless Love will certainly transcend Birth and Death.

Metta Bhavana - Loving Kindness Meditation

To begin with, I sit upright, and relax. I close my eyes and allow myself to settle, becoming more calm, relaxed and harmonious.

I let go of thoughts, feelings, and sensations.

I observe how the breath is flowing in smoothly, and flowing out easily; free and harmonious.

Now I see a wonderful sun over my head, shining with warm, golden light.

This bright light of loving-kindness is streaming throughout my entire being. I can feel it; I feel well, and I am happy.

I. First person: Now I imagine one person who I love the most.

I see the warm, golden light of loving-kindness streaming to that person.

This wonderful bright light is flowing through this person. This beloved person is surrounded by this light of higher love and kindness.

I can see the smile on their face. This beloved person feels well, and is very happy.

II. Second person: Next, I imagine one person who I like and respect.

... (as above)

III. Third person: Next I can see one person toward whom I have a neutral relationship. ... (as above)

IV. Fourth person: The last person I think of is one whom I have had difficulties, or someone who I dislike. ... (as above)

Now I see all four persons together, with the sun above them, and I see them all receiving the same amount of this warm golden light of loving-kindness.

They all feel well; they are all smiling, and they are all shining, and happy.

Then I let them go in peace and happiness.

Now, once more I see the warm sun above my head, and once again I am filled with feelings of happiness and well-being.

(optional:)

If necessary, at this point, I practice equanimity meditation:

Now, I allow myself to feel calm, and peaceful.

To conclude, I take a deep breath, and exhale slowly. I come back to the here and the now, and slowly open my eyes.

May all beings be happy.

Metta - loving kindness practice

Traditionally, metta practice is first done toward oneself. Then one cultivates metta for one's parents, family, friends and benefactors, including teachers, to neutral ones, or those we don't know, seen and unseen by us, to those we've had some difficulty with, and then to all beings. The general principle is that we start with what is easy, and go from there, and that we go patiently, and gradually.

In general, fewer words are better, but we should have a clear idea of what the words we use mean to us. For different people or groups, different lines may seem more appropriate to reflect on. You're welcome to select from these, to use lines from other sources, or to write your own metta phrases. Sometimes one or two lines are enough. Here is a model. Use your intelligence and skill to adapt meditation, as you see fit. The feeling is the important thing, and the clear intention.

Phrases for metta loving kindness practice

Here are two versions of the traditional phrases that are used:

May they be happy
 May they be healthy
 May they be peaceful
 May they live with ease

...

May they be safe
 May they be healthy
 May they be happy
 May they know they are loved

....

Ani Tenzin Palmo offers this way of expressing metta that has a very nice rhythm to it:

*May they be well and happy,
peaceful, and at their ease...*

The following was offered by Ajaan Pasanno. Beginning with oneself, it can be adapted to the different categories of people.

May they be well, happy, peaceful, and prosperous.

May no harm come to them.

May no difficulties come to them.

May no problems come to them.

May they always meet with spiritual success.

May they also have the patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life.

May they have the qualities that will allow them to see those through.

And here are my own phrases (slowly)

May they be entirely well and at their ease.

May they have every happiness.

May they always be safe and protected

May they always know themselves to be greatly loved and cared for

May their heart be open to all the beauty and wonder of life.

May they have all they need and wish for

May they have every blessing

May they have all of the good things that this life has to offer,
every success and all joys.

May they have happiness
May they be healthy
May they have peace,
happiness and harmony in all their relationships

May they know freedom,
the highest happiness, and fulfillment.

As I mentioned earlier, you can also write your own metta phrases – and I encourage you to do so. Make the practice your own. These are just offered as an example. You are welcomed to use whatever works best for you.

Two more traditional methods

There are many ways to develop loving kindness. Two more ways that have come down to us are the spatial extension of metta, and developing metta for different categories of people. In each case, we are aiming to gradually become more inclusive in our love.

In the spatial extension of metta, we begin with where we are physically, and extend goodwill in front of us, to the left and right, in all directions, step by step, further and further, as much as we like and feel comfortable doing. We can begin where we are sitting and extend the light of metta to those in our own room, household, building, block, neighborhood, city, state, country, continent, hemisphere, world, universe, and beyond....

Another, simple application of the spatial extension of metta can be when we look from our window, we can extend well-wishing to the people we

see pass by in the street. When we go out, we can offer metta to those on public transportation, or in line at the grocery store, or to a room of people, such as at work, at the bank, at the doctor's, or at a bar, genuinely wishing them all well.

In developing metta for different categories of people, we have a model in the suttas, and we are encouraged to be creative with it as well. We can develop kindness and well wishing for the young and old, for the rich and poor, for those near and far away; for the happy and the troubled in spirit; for those living in ease, comfort and safety, and those in difficult circumstances, and so on. We can develop this quality of care and support for people of different political views, and for those of different races, for different species and stages of development, and those who live in other worlds. Truly, there is no limit to its application.

The Four Brahma Viharas

Metta practice is done step by step, through the different categories, understanding their purpose, and then all together, as taught, until one reaches the Four 'Brahma Viharas' – the 'Divine Abodes', also called the Four Limitless States. These are Universal Love, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity, which in this context is the strength and balance of mind that comes from love.

The Four Brahma Viharas can be expressed, and reflected on in a number of ways, including this four line prayer, adapted from the Tibetan Tradition:

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness...

May all beings be free of suffering and the causes of suffering...

*I rejoice in all that is beautiful and right in the world,
in all virtue and positive action,
and in all happiness and good fortune...*

and abide in the immutable strength of love...

You may like to pause a while between practices, to allow metta the time and space to unfold.

A metta meditation, written out, and my own versions of the traditional teachings, 'The Cultivation of Loving Kindness', and 'The Suffusion with the Divine Abidings' follow.

A Metta Meditation

I.

May **my loved ones** be safe
May they be healthy
May they live long
May they be happy, and at peace.

May they always feel very well loved and cared for,
truly appreciated, valued and respected
May they have everything they need and wish for,
both materially and spiritually,
and May they realize perfect freedom,
the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

II.

May **all the precious children of this world** always be safe
May they be healthy,
May they be happy, and at peace.

May all the children of this world always be very well loved and cared for,
each and every one of them
May they all have everything they need and wish for,
both materially and spiritually
May they enjoy an abundance of good things in this life,
and May they all realize perfect freedom,
the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

III.

May **all our revered, venerable elders** be safe
May they be healthy

May they live long
 May they be happy, and at peace.

May each one of them feel loved and deeply cherished, every day
 May they each have everything they need and wish for,
 and May each one of them realize perfect freedom,
 the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

IV.

{For teachers}

May **all my supremely kind teachers** enjoy the best of health,
 May they live long
 May they have an abundance of resources,
 and May all their noble wishes be fulfilled.

{Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo, Ringu Tulku, Lama Lodro Rinpoche, His Holiness
 the Dalai Lama, Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche, Matthieu Ricard,
 Sakya Trizin, Jetsunma Chimay Luding, Lama Kunga, Khenpo Tsultrim
 Gyatso Rinpoche, Garchen Rinpoche, Bhante Gunaratana, Bhikkhu Bodhi,
 Venerable Rene, Payutto Bhikkhu, Piya Tan, Khenpo Sodargye, Ajahn
 Pasanno, Ajahn Amaro, Rav Dovber Pinson...}

V.

May I be safe,
 May I be healthy
 May I live long
 May I be happy, and at peace.

May I always feel very well loved and cared for,
 May I have everything I need and wish for to accomplish my aims,
 and May I realize perfect freedom,

the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment

May my life be most fruitful for living beings!

VI.

May **all my dear friends** always be safe

May they be healthy

May they live long

May they be happy, and at peace.

May they all feel very well loved and cared for each and every day

May they have everything they need and wish for,

and May each one of them realize perfect freedom,

the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

VII.

May **all the precious animals** in this world be very well cared for

May all of them be safe from all harm

May all their living environments be protected,

and may they all know they are loved

VIII.

May all **neutral ones**,

those who are known, and those who are unknown by me,

near and far away,

always be safe

May they be healthy

May they live long

May they be happy, and at peace.

May they all always feel very well loved and cared for,
truly appreciated, valued and respected
May they have everything they need and wish for,
and May they all realize perfect freedom,
the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

IX.

May all **honored guests** -

politicians, the oppressed and the oppressors, those who suffer, and
those who cause suffering; those who are doing well;

those I have had difficulty with; those I have harmed, and those
who have harmed me, or those close to me; those I have
disrespected, rejected, or neglected, and those I have felt
disrespected, rejected, or neglected me; those I have disappointed,
and those who have disappointed me;

those towards whom I feel attachment, aversion, indifference, or
resentment; strangers, my relatives, and friends; friends in the past,
employers and co-workers, past and present; my neighbors, my
teachers, my mother and sister, and myself; the one who is before
me now, and the one I will meet tomorrow

May all my honored guests be safe
May they be healthy
May they live long
May they all be happy, and at peace.

May they all always know they are deeply loved and cared for,
truly appreciated, valued, and respected
May they all have everything they need and wish for
May they enjoy an abundance of good things,

and May each and every one of them realize perfect freedom,
the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

X.

and **all beings**...

young and old,
rich and poor,
male and female,
realized and ordinary people,
near and far away,
already born and to be born...
animals,
humans,
spirits,
ordained and laypeople...

family and friends,
myself, my teachers,
neutral ones, known and unknown by me,
and honored guests -

May *all beings* always be safe,
May all beings be healthy
May they live long
May all beings be happy, and at peace.

May they all feel very well loved and cared for
May they all have everything they need and wish for,
and May all beings realize perfect freedom,
the highest happiness, peace, and fulfillment...

The Cultivation of Loving Kindness

Having seen that like oneself
all beings seek for happiness,
one patiently then cultivates love for all beings

May all the precious children of this world
be entirely well and at their ease...

May I be happy, healthy, and peaceful
May I be free from suffering

May my family, friends,
neutral ones, and all honored guests
have every happiness
May they be all be completely free from all suffering
May they be completely free from all danger, and all difficulty

Within the boundaries of this town,
may all beings have happiness
Likewise those in other places,
in other cities, and countries,
in all places,
may they all have happiness, health and peace

All creatures and all breathing things,
all persons and all entities...
men, women and children,
the Noble Ones, the unawake,
Devas, and unhappy ones
who in the ten directions dwell -

*May all beings be happy and at peace,
and may their hearts be filled with joy!*

Suffusion with the Divine Abidings

{I. Loving Kindness}

I will abide
 pervading the world
 with loving-kindness,
 all around and everywhere,
 and to all as to myself

I will abide
 pervading this all encompassing world
 with loving-kindness,
 that is abundant, exalted, immeasurable,

with unconditional love,
 warmth, and gentleness,
 gratitude,
 appreciation and respect,
 supreme well-wishing,
 and encouragement for all!

May all beings be happy,
 May they all be healthy,
 May they all dwell in safety, comfort and peace,
 May they all know that they are loved

I will abide
 pervading the world
 with loving-kindness -

May all beings be entirely well
 and at their ease! -

From the insects on the ground, and under the ground,
to the birds in the trees, and in the sky,
the fish in the waters,
animals,
and people everywhere,

young and old,
rich and poor,
male and female,
realized and ordinary people,
near and far away,
already born and yet to be born –

May they all be entirely well and at their ease!

May they all be safe,
healthy,
happy, and fulfilled
May they all always know they are loved and cared for

May they have all that they need and wish for in their lives
May they all surely enjoy an abundance of good things!

All around and everywhere,
and to all as to myself –

May all have supreme happiness,
health, and peace!

I will abide
pervading this all encompassing world
with loving-kindness,
that is abundant, exalted, immeasurable,

with unconditional good-will,
warmth, and gentleness,
gratitude,
appreciation and respect,
supreme well-wishing,
and encouragement for all!

{II. Compassion}

I will abide
pervading the world
with compassion,
all around and everywhere,
and to all as to myself

I will abide
pervading this all encompassing world
with compassion,
that is abundant, exalted, immeasurable,

with a heart of complete solidarity with all those who suffer in any way,
with engagement with them
and with support and tender care

May I always be there for them

young and old,
rich and poor,
male and female,
realized and ordinary people,
near and far away,
already born and yet to be born –
May they all be free from all their suffering,

and the causes of suffering
May they all be healed
May they all be completely safe and protected

I will abide with compassion,
courage, joy,
and real strength...

{III. Joy}

I will abide
pervading the world
with a heart that rejoices in the good,
everywhere it is found,

in the arts,
in children,
in the natural world,
in myself and in others,
in teachers, and in healers,
in kind and caring people,
in cherished elders, ancestors,
family and friends

I celebrate all that is beautiful and right in this world,
I rejoice in all kindness, virtue, and positive action,
and in all success, happiness, and good fortune...

I will abide
pervading this all encompassing world
with joy and celebration
that is abundant, exalted, immeasurable

{IV. The Immutable Strength of Impartial Love, also known as its
Equanimity}

And I will abide
pervading the world
with the immutable strength of impartial love
stable, and dedicated
all around and everywhere,
and to all as to myself

With all people
and in every circumstance,
steadfast, loyal,
courageous, and reliable,
with the power of love's own committed equanimity,
its unchanging nature,
patience, peace and strength

I will abide
pervading the all encompassing world
with this stable, impartial love,
that is abundant, exalted, immeasurable,

at all times with a heart that is steady, joyful,
even, and serene

Suffusion with the Divine Abidings

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with compassion, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with compassion; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with gladness. likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with gladness; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with equanimity; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

Sublime Abiding Places for the Heart

Adapted from a workshop given by Ajahn Pasanno at Abhayagiri Buddhist Monastery with the Sati Center for Buddhist Studies, May 1999

The *Brahmaviharas* are the qualities of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. What is often not sufficiently emphasized is that the *brahmaviharas* are fundamental to the Buddha's teaching and practice. I shall begin with the chant called *The Suffusion of the Divine Abidings*. I find this chant very beautiful. It is the most frequent form in which the *brahmaviharas* are mentioned in the discourses of the Buddha.

Here is the *Divine Abidings* chant:

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

The chant continues similarly with the other three qualities:

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with compassion, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with compassion; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with gladness. likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with gladness; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

I will abide pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with equanimity, likewise the third, likewise the fourth; so above and below, around and everywhere; and to all

as to myself. I will abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with equanimity; abundant, exalted, immeasurable...

Last February I was asked to be the spiritual advisor to a Thai man who was to be executed at San Quentin, and I spent the last few days until his death with him. He touched many people and had many visitors, but in the capacity of spiritual advisor, I was the only person allowed to be with him in the last six hours of his life. So some of his friends asked me what they should be doing in those final hours to help Jay as well as themselves. I asked them to chant this *Divine Abidings* chant. That's what they did during the final hours of Jay's life, sending forth these thoughts of loving-kindness, compassion, gladness, and equanimity. They are powerful emotions to evoke at a time when one could be stuck in anger, regret, and self-pity. It is very empowering to be able to bring forth these qualities of the heart, to turn the mind away from negativity towards that which is wholesome and positive.

The Buddha's Discourses on the *Brahmaviharas*

The word *brahmavihara* is translated in many different ways—divine abidings, divine abodes, sublime attitudes. “*Brahma*” means great, holy, supreme, sublime, exalted, and divine. “*Vihara*” is a place, an abode, and also an attitude of mind. When put together, “*brahmavihara*” means the psychological abiding place of the spiritually developed, of those who are exemplary. In the Commentaries, the religious life, the holy life, is called *brahmacariya*. One of the explanations for this term is that the holy life is a life dedicated to developing the *brahmaviharas*.

These qualities of the mind and heart are qualities that the Buddha himself cultivated and abided in. In a discourse (A 1.182), the Buddha addresses a brahmin thus:

Herein brahmin, I am dependent on a certain village. Setting mindfulness in front of me, I abide suffusing one quarter of the world with a heart possessed of loving-kindness, likewise the second....

He goes through the phrases we just chanted,

...the whole world I suffuse with a heart grown great with loving-kindness, free of enmity, and untroubled. Likewise with a heart possessed with compassion, possessed with sympathy and gladness, possessed with equanimity. If I walk up and down, my walking is sublime; my standing, my sitting is sublime. This is what I mean when I say it is a sublime abiding place.

So even the Buddha, a completely enlightened being, still directed his attention to these four *brahmaviharas*.

There is a discourse (M 55) given to Jivaka, the Buddha's physician, where the Buddha addresses the duty of a monk living in dependence on a lay community:

Herein Jivaka, a religious seeker depending on alms lives in a certain village or town. He abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, likewise the second," and so forth. Namely, it is a duty of such a bhikkhu¹ to live cultivating the brahmaviharas towards the lay community.

He continues,

That bhikkhu goes into that village for alms, and what do you think? Would such a monk cultivate these for the sake of his own affliction, for the sake of another's affliction, or for both?

Jivaka answers,

No, venerable sir.

Someone cultivating these qualities of the brahmaviharas becomes sensitive to the suffering they create for themselves and for others. They are qualities that develop the heart. By cultivating and abiding in them, one leans towards that which would bring happiness to others and to oneself. This is a fundamental truth. As your heart becomes sensitive and open, you realize that suffering is painful and do not want to abide in it.

In another discourse (A 5.294), the Buddha again points to the development of the heart and to the fact that these wholesome qualities create a fullness of the heart. He says,

Monks, those noble disciples, thus freed from covetousness, freed from malevolence, not bewildered, but self-possessed and concentrated, with hearts possessed of amity [also translated as loving-kindness, friendliness, and so on] abide radiating one quarter and then the second, the third and the fourth with loving-kindness, pervading the whole world with a heart immeasurable, grown great, and boundless, free from enmity and untroubled.

After going through the rest of the *brahmaviharas*, the Buddha says that they come to know that

Formerly this heart of mine was confined, it was not made to grow, but now my heart is boundless, well made to grow. Moreover my heart was limited to a certain range, but now it is not confined, it stays not in that range.

“Well made to grow” is translated from the Pali word with the same root as *bhavana*, meaning meditation or mental development. It means therefore that these qualities enable the development of the mind.

Also as a result of this practice, feelings and thoughts that formerly were limited and constricted become boundless. The results permeate all aspects of one’s life. Similarly, when one does something in a small-minded way, the results are limited. That’s the way it works.

The Buddha ends the discourse thus:

The heart's release by loving-kindness is conducive to non-returning for the monk with insight but who has not yet penetrated to the truth.

The stages of enlightenment are stream-entry, once-returner, non-returner, and *arahant*². Here the Buddha says that even for those who are still practicing and training, the cultivation of the *brahmaviharas* is conducive to attaining higher levels of the Path.

The *Brahmaviharas*: Their Nature and Characteristics

As one continues to practice and study Buddhism, it is very useful to familiarize oneself with some of the Pali terms. For example, when working with computers, you have to learn some technical terms to deal with certain concepts or operations, or when studying music, you learn the related technical terms. With Buddhism, there is a range of technical terms in Pali for the qualities of the heart that are helpful to know.

Metta, for instance, is often translated in English as “loving-kindness”. Although two words are used, they still don't quite get it right, so other words are used, such as amity or friendliness, in an effort to convey its meaning. *Metta* is characterized as being connected to happiness or welfare. Its function is to generate welfare or well being. It is manifested as the removal of annoyance. Its proximate cause is seeing the lovable-ness of beings, or the good qualities and that which is pleasing in others.

Metta succeeds when it causes ill will to subside and fails when it brings about affection. Using the word *metta* is more useful as it does not have the connotations of affection and attachment that the word loving-kindness has. *Metta* is a selfless wishing of happiness and well being for others.

The *brahmaviharas* have so-called near and far enemies—obstructions to their correct development. The near enemy of *metta* is greed or attachment, since

happiness and well being could become coveted. That leads to pain and sorrow and could even turn into a defilement if not correctly understood.

When we experience something pleasing, we tend to want it, but to really practice *metta* is to wish for the well being of others and not to try to possess them. The same goes for cultivating *metta* towards oneself, to try not to cling to feelings of joy and well being generated by the practice of meditation. So the near enemy to *metta* is when the heart moves too close to something and then it shifts from being loving-kindness to greed and grasping.

The far enemy of *metta* is anger. Bearing anger, ill will, or aversion is, of course, inimical to loving-kindness, but it is far enough away to recognize such feelings. Being more insidious, the near enemies are more dangerous. When you are angry, you try to deal with it or try to remove it, but when you are delighting in something, your mind tends not to be clear enough to see that you have come too close to the object. In terms of cultivating loving-kindness, you have to know and be aware of these aspects that are related to and define the quality of *metta*, and to use them as boundaries to work within.

Karuna is the quality of compassion. It is characterized by the wish to help alleviate suffering in others. Its function resides in the inability to tolerate suffering, so it motivates the desire to help when others suffer. Compassion does not allow complacency in the face of suffering. One is moved into action. Compassion manifests as non-cruelty, and its proximate cause is seeing the pain and helplessness in those disadvantaged or overtaken by some misfortune. Then the heart responds with the wish to help.

The far enemy is cruelty, and compassion succeeds when it makes such feelings subside. The word cruelty sounds very strong, but the wish to harm, to hurt, to be cruel can come out in many ways. One could be quite cruel in one's speech without in fact beating up someone. Making a

cutting comment or put-down is being cruel. When there is compassion, the tendency to lash out subsides.

Compassion fails when it causes sorrow. When faced with suffering, if one is overwhelmed by grief or heaviness of heart, then that is not being compassionate. The quality of compassion is then tainted and not functioning properly. When the heart is drawn towards boundlessness, it is not dragged down by suffering. Instead, it is uplifted. It is important to recognize that. The heart could be weighed down by sorrow and grief in response to a tragic event or situation, and one could think that that is being compassionate. But that is not compassion, even though the etymology of the word (in English) is “to suffer with”. That is not the way the Buddha defined compassion.

If one’s mind is affected by grief, then one is not able to respond in a clear and open-hearted manner. It is important to recognize that. This is why sorrow and grief are characterized as the near enemy of compassion. Both responses can spring from seeing suffering in others, but grief has a depressive effect, while compassion has a positive and uplifting quality.

Mudita is translated as gladness in the *Divine Abidings* chant, but the term commonly used is sympathetic joy. *Mudita* is characterized as a gladdening at others’ success, a delighting in the success, the goodness, and the well being of others. Its function is being unenvious, not being jealous of the good fortune of others.

Most of us, I think, find loving-kindness and compassion beneficial and good to practice. When it comes to sympathetic joy, we do not think too much about it and tend to dismiss it as either abstruse or unreal. When you start watching your mind however, you see the pettiness over and over again. The unwillingness to rejoice when someone does something good is seen in the snappy remark or the clever little synopsis of a person or situation, which are a part of daily life in our interrelations with people but which tend to be based in negativity or cynicism. Such responses do not

come from a place of gladness but very much from a sense of self. One attempts to lift oneself up by putting down someone else.

By cultivating *mudita*, the sense of self is undermined. There is a letting go of the attachment or fixation to self. This enables us to delight in the wellbeing and good fortune of those around us. A great deal of joy is generated when one is able to tap into this quality. *Mudita* is manifested as non-aversion, and its proximate cause is seeing the success of others. It succeeds when it causes a sense of coolness of the heart, an acceptance. It fails when it causes merriment, a frivolous delighting in things that agitate the mind, which is not a pure-hearted delight.

Equanimity in Pali is called *upekkha*. It is characterized as that quality which brings about a sense of neutrality or an evenness of heart towards all beings. Its function is in maintaining a steadiness of mind and not allowing differences—whether physical, intellectual, spiritual, or whatever—to detract or influence our perception of those with whom we come in contact. Its proximate cause is understanding the nature of karma—recognition that our actions bear results which affect us and, in effect, that we create our own future world or experiences.

Another factor to recognize regarding karma is that we are not able to take on the results of other's actions and deeds. Equanimity is therefore understanding how the basic laws of nature work, the recognition that our lives are governed by the way we conduct our lives. Where the suffering of others is concerned, we recognize that by making ourselves suffer, we do not decrease or take away the suffering of others.

We can work to alleviate another's suffering or delight in another's good fortune, but there is a point where one has to exercise equanimity, being aware of one's own wellbeing. To try to take on someone else's life and carry it around is not equanimity. Equanimity is not taking on more than what is actually necessary or beneficial.

Equanimity succeeds when it is aware of the movement of the mind—the wanting and not wanting, approval and disapproval—and one is able to establish an evenness of mind, a clarity that sees things for what they are. Equanimity fails when it causes indifference, not caring. Indifference could arise due to a lack of attention or clarity, or to being unwilling to deal with a situation because too much effort is required. Indifference is the near enemy of equanimity.

True equanimity does not hinder compassion or action, but rather enhances it by developing the discernment that knows how and when to engage. The far enemy is aversion and greed: the liking and disliking, approving and disapproving that occurs within our minds.

Equanimity is the quality not shaken by the movement of the worldly dhammas or the ways of the world.

A Foundation for One's Practice

Cultivating the *brahmaviharas* means bringing these qualities, of *metta*, *karuna*, *mudita*, and *upekkha* into consciousness. It is like exercising muscles that have not been used. As you develop these qualities, you have to consider whether your mind is getting clearer or more confused. The correct practice of the *brahmaviharas* always leads to increased clarity and joy. That is the nature of these qualities of mind.

The whole point of the Buddha's teachings is to cultivate mental qualities in order to gain happiness of mind. And the *brahmaviharas*— a prime source for creating happiness— can thus lay the foundation for the entire practice.

Most of the terms the Buddha uses regarding the developing of practice are those that describe states of well being. We see this in a sequence he sets out to illustrate the development of the mind.

Anavajjasukha is the state of mind resulting from abiding by the moral precepts- the happiness of blamelessness or harmlessness, the happiness of non-remorse.

Abhyasekhasukha is the happiness that ensues from training in sense restraint- the composure one finds when one is not bent on gratification or excitement of the senses.

Pamojja means the delight that results from being free of the five hindrances that hinder meditation, sensual desire, ill will, sleepiness or drowsiness, restlessness, and skeptical doubt. *Pamojja* also refers to the happiness that meditative states of tranquility can bring—an unalloyed kind of happiness. It also includes the delight that arises from skilful reflection on the true nature of things. *Pamojja* leads to *piti*, joy. *Piti* leads to *passadhi*, the state of tranquility.

When there is tranquility, *sukha*, happiness arises, and because of *sukha*, *samadhi* arises. *Samadhi* is the firm meditative state of mind. The Buddha says in many discourses that the happy mind is easily concentrated.

We see that happiness brings about *samadhi*, whereas usually we approach it the other way round. We often think, “If only I could get my meditation together, then I would be happy,” whereas it should be: “How do I gain true happiness so that my heart could be at ease?” It is a very important truth that the Buddha points to in this sequence of shades of happiness culminating in *samadhi*.

The result of *samadhi* is summed up in the recurring phrase “seeing things as they truly are.” This is a description of a mental state where the mind steps back from the sense of self. This state prepares the mind to be truly still and unshakeable. When that happens, the mind moves into *nibbida*. Sometimes this word is translated as boredom or disgust or revulsion, but

that does not really get it. It means a cooling of the heart and turning away from things, leading to *vimutti*, freedom.

Happiness plays a great role in the development of the whole sequence, and the *brahmaviharas*, which generate happiness, can serve as a powerful foundation for one's practice.

Similarly, the Four Noble Truths, while often characterized as a means to investigate suffering, also result in the cultivation of happiness. The qualities of happiness and joy are necessary for mental development. This is seen in many aspects of the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha very explicitly uses the Four Noble Truths as a tool. Over and over again he says,

I teach only two things, suffering and the cessation of suffering.

Some could say this is a miserable teaching, dwelling on suffering, but when you investigate the teaching, you see why the Buddha sets it out like that. Suffering is a very tangible quality. We can investigate it. It is something that we know and do not want. The whole range of sentient existence is subject to suffering, and the wish to escape from it is universal.

Many positive qualities are brought into being and are involved when one is engaged in cultivating the boundless qualities of the *brahmaviharas*. They lead to a sense of ease, security, and fearlessness. The Pali word for fearlessness is *abhaya*. In Thai, it also has the connotation of forgiveness.

Developing the *brahmaviharas* engenders forgiveness, particularly in the practice of loving-kindness and compassion. To open one's heart to these qualities, one needs to be forgiving. The holding of past grievances- the constant refrain of "he did this; she did that; I did this; I can't forgive myself"- is swept away. There is no room in the divine abodes for holding grudges and enmity towards oneself or others.

Generosity, or *dana*, is another natural result of the desire to promote happiness and alleviate suffering. Three kinds of *dana* are mentioned: the giving of material things such as food or money, the giving of Dhamma, and the giving of forgiveness or fearlessness. Often we do not pay much attention to the little things, such as our perceptions of ourselves and others. We have to learn to really forgive so as to open our hearts to these boundless qualities.

For instance, during that experience I had with Jay Siripongs, I asked him if there was still anybody he had not forgiven. This was during the last six hours leading up to the execution. We had spent the previous four and one-half hours or so talking, chanting, meditating, laughing, and generally having a buoyant time. Jay paused for a while and quietly said, "I don't think I've quite forgiven myself." That's not just him. All of us are in that position. So it is very important to bring up into consciousness areas where we have not forgiven ourselves and where we have thus created limitations and constraints for ourselves.

Practicing the *Brahmaviharas*

As we have seen, the *brahmaviharas* are a means of uplifting the mind, for brightening and bringing it joy. However, if the practice causes confusion, then something is wrong in the practice. You have to review it and look for the reason. This is where investigation comes in.

The "near enemies" and "far enemies" are terms to aid you when reviewing your practice. They are guidelines to reflect back on the mind. The Buddha instructs us to examine our minds to see the real nature of the qualities and feelings. For instance, is it loving-kindness or affection? This questioning is fundamental in the Buddha's teaching. It can be so skilful and useful to keep using the reflective capacity of the mind to penetrate and understand how the mind works. He gives us the basis for investigation- the Four Noble Truths are one skillful investigative tool.

Whichever practice one is cultivating, developing mindfulness, the *brahmaviharas*, or any other meditation, ask, “Is there suffering or freedom from suffering that results from my practice? How does it work for me?” That is always the bottom line in the Buddha’s teaching. “Am I happier, or am I experiencing suffering? Is my mind clearer or more confused? Is it peaceful or agitated?” These are the guidelines.

All of these qualities, the *brahmaviharas*, *dana*, and so forth, are thus important tools of investigation in reflecting and understanding what remains to be done in the task of purifying the mind. This teaching of the *brahmaviharas* was something the Buddha taught everyone, regardless of societal divisions. In the Buddha’s time, caste was an important factor in Indian society.

Pointing out the universality of these qualities to a brahmin who had come to argue with him, the Buddha asks,

What do you think, brahmin? Is only a brahmin capable of developing loving-kindness without hostility and ill will? Can a merchant or worker not be able to do so?

No, Master Gotama, a merchant, nobleman, brahmin, or worker is capable of developing loving-kindness, without hostility and without ill will.

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This practice is accessible to anyone, regardless of gender, age, position in society, or status as ordained or not.

The success of this practice depends on how you direct your mind, how you experience and engage with the world, on your ability to assess the benefit or the lack of benefit of this practice and then make use of it for yourself. Don’t wait for these qualities to develop on their own. You have to investigate your practice, recognize the results that you experience, and

then take whatever remedial measures are necessary. This practice empowers us to change and develop ourselves. I would encourage you all to take these *brahmaviharas* and experiment with, learn from, and delight in them.

Notes:

1. A bhikkhu is a Buddhist monk. Literally, it indicates one who lives on alms.
2. The first stage of enlightenment, "Stream-entry", results in a return to the human realm no more than seven times, and one is guaranteed not to be born as an animal, as a ghost, or in hell; the second stage, "Once-return", leads to no more than one more birth as a human; the third stage, "Non-return", entails rebirth only in the high heavenly realms; and the fourth stage is that of enlightenment, *Arahantship*, which results in no more birth in any state of being.

The Precepts of Love

There is so much contained in love at it's best that I thought it would be worthwhile to write a few words about it this morning. I highlight love 'at its best' to distinguish it from the fleeting, partial, or limited kinds of affection or attachment we all know so well. The love I would like to talk about is the kind we look to when we want to remember who we truly are and who we can become.

We're living in a time when there is so much disconnect, hostility, fear and aggression. With our defenses raised, we are often but one step removed from striking out, in word or action. I was talking with a friend and coworker the other day about how far this is from our natural state. We don't talk about love often enough, and so I told him what I feel needs to be said, that rather than training in and fostering anger, we should have zero aggression in us. Zero, and less than zero. I told him, this is more in line with our true nature which is naturally gentle. Our real nature is love, but how could we ever know this if we are just endlessly reactive, hitting back or preparing to do so? We have to start somewhere, and I suggested to him that it is right here, simply, that: *Love begins with non-harming*. This is how we can start to know our real selves.

We have it in us also to create peace through our bodily actions, words, and thoughts, and the root of these is love. If we begin with non-harming, which is essentially knowing how we would want to be treated, and then acting with an even a modicum of wisdom, we naturally become gentle, respectful, and conscientious.

Once we face in that direction, then no matter how wrong or careless or hurtful we might have once been, right away we experience a change of heart and mind. From our heart, our love goes out, and it extends peace everywhere.

To adopt an attitude of non-harming naturally creates the feeling of safety and comfort. It removes fear, and it is soothing.

Love begins there, and yet it goes beyond such mere restraint. *In the very character of love that we all carry with us at all times there is the willingness to remove suffering, now and in the future.*

My friend asked me, oh, can we really do that? and I immediately said, Yes! We do it all the time - like when someone puts their hand on a friend's shoulder when they need it, or when someone just shows up, or says a kind word just at the right time. It's easier to see how we remove one another's suffering if we think of it happening by degrees instead of all at once. We do quite often care for and comfort each other, and this is one of the beautiful, precious qualities found in our inherent capacity for love.

If we go further with this, we see there is the movement to relieve suffering in the moment, and there is also what we do for one another to help prevent future suffering.

In Buddhism we have this prayer,

*May all beings be free of suffering,
and the causes of suffering*

and in this we see the wish to remove the hurt and needs of the moment, and then also to prevent future discomfort or unhappiness. Love contains all of this motivation and the spontaneous movement to see its aims fulfilled.

Starting with non harming and going on to removing suffering, we can tell that there is even more to love than this. *Love naturally brings joy to others, now and in the future.*

The prayer of loving kindness says

*May all beings have happiness
and the causes of happiness*

The first part of this expresses the natural quality inherent in love of bringing light, joy, inspiration, freshness and peace, everywhere it goes, and the second line refers to looking ahead with the union of love and far-seeing wisdom.

We plant trees that will flower and bear fruit in future times, long after we are gone, and we do this out of love and wisdom, looking ahead.

We seek a remedy, and give food today, and we also build a home for our family, for their future safety, comfort and happiness.

We need to look into causes, both of misery and health and happiness. Then we can sow the causes for the life we most naturally want for ourselves and our loved ones. We can see far into the future and then act out of love.

Love naturally expands. It wakes us up, and it reaches out in this way, more and more. Such is its nature.

This one quality we call love at its best has such richness to it. Don't you agree? We can certainly speak of it as inherently not wishing ourselves or others any harm at all, and we can then mention its function of removing suffering and bringing happiness to ourselves and others more and more, now, and with wisdom, into the future. But there is one more more facet that deserves to be mentioned when speaking of the naturally occurring qualities of love. It should be said here that *when someone is causing suffering, love would have us respond to them with even greater love and compassion and wisdom.*

This is the basis of the Lojong, or the Thought Training teachings in Tibetan Buddhism.

Thich Nhat Hanh said, When someone is suffering enough, his or her suffering will spill over, and they will cause others also to suffer. Responding to them with *even more kindness and compassion and skill* is the only thing that will eventually remedy the situation, but how far that is from how most people, groups and governments respond to violence, aggression, and acts of provocation. The usual response is one of retaliation, but its clear that this only furthers the cycle of violence. We lock people up, declare war, reject ourselves and others and start battles that go on for generations without end.

We use a cliché like 'their act was a cry for help' to describe some errant, hurtful action, but it is more than this - more precisely, it is a call for deeper attention, for more energy, wisdom and love. If we don't heed these messages, then we turn away from giving help where it is most needed.

A doctor runs *towards* the sounds of suffering, not away; he or she does not neglect the least sign that something is wrong. If we are to heal self, our relationships, family, community, and especially those who are lost and causing harm to themselves and others, we do so need this precept. It is the highest expression of love, at its most caring and far seeing.

These are the precepts of love, ever available for those who would pick up on them and bring greater light, peace, health, harmony and joy to our lives together, and to this whole ten direction world.

Part Two - Readings on the Mahayana

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2. Knowing the Equality of Self and Others
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11. From the Preface to The Discourses of the Buddha from the Pali Canon
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31. Liberating Words - On Bodhicitta - by Lama Yeshe

32. How to Love Like a Mother, by Rev. Anne Sutherland Howard
33. On Bodhicitta - from The Twenty - One Taras, by Lama Yeshe
34. Who is my neighbor?
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39. Bodhicitta- The Perfection of Dharma, by Lama Yeshe
40. The Bodhisattva Vows, by Lama Yeshe
41. The Bodhisattva Vow - Traditional
42. Dedication from the Bodhicharyavatara
43. Verses for generating the mind of enlightenment

Metta, the Four Brahma Viharas and Bodhicitta – The Thought of Enlightenment

Metta practice is done step by step, through the different categories, understanding their purpose, and then all together, as it is taught, until one reaches the Four Brahma Viharas – or the Divine Abodes, also called the Four Limitless States. These are of Universal Love, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity, the strength and balance of mind that comes from love.

The Four Brahma Viharas can be expressed in a number of ways, including this four line prayer, adapted from the Tibetan Tradition:

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness flourishing...

May all beings be free of suffering and the causes of suffering...

*I rejoice in all that is beautiful and right in the world,
in all virtue and positive action,
and in all happiness and good fortune...*

and abide in the immutable strength of love...

What Then Must We Do?

When we say 'May all beings be happy', and, 'May all beings be free from suffering', it's not enough just to wish these for them and then sit back and say, 'Well, now you're on your own'. Of course not, that wouldn't be metta, loving-kindness, or karuna, compassion. Naturally, we should practice both the wish, and all of the actions that fulfill our intention.

Along with loving kindness there has to also be the knowledge of what we and all others need. This is essential. Along with every provision, what we need, as Sayadaw U Pandita says, is ultimate liberation of mind, perfect peace and freedom.

This is taking the long view, seeing the ultimate aim. Without this, problems are potentially endless.

With an understanding of the Four Noble Truths, and the possibility of complete liberation from samsara, then our love and compassion naturally become bodhicitta, which is the dedication to helping others through our realization of the path.

Lama Yeshe said:

To generate bodhicitta we must feel unbearable great compassion for all sentient beings, irrespective of their species, race, nationality, or philosophical and religious beliefs. As well, we must have the strong, enthusiastic will to lead them to perfect enlightenment, taking the responsibility for doing so upon ourselves alone.

It's said that:

When your reflection on the suffering of sentient beings has made it impossible for you to not act on their behalf, and the aspiration for enlightenment for their sake arises without effort, then you have realized the supreme precious awakening mind

Verse one of the Eight Verses for Training the Mind expresses this thought of enlightenment with the aspiration prayer:

*May I always cherish all my loved ones
with the determination to myself accomplish for them the highest good
that is more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel*

This is like eating, so that one can feed others; like stepping onto the shore of freedom, in order to help others to safety; taking medicine, and *becoming* medicine so that one can heal others. This is done with the aim to provide for them all that they need and wish for. *May this motivation, uncontrived, unfabricated, arise in my being*

*May the supreme jewel, bodhicitta,
arise where it has not arisen,
Where it has arisen, may it not diminish,
May it ever grow and flourish*

Verses for Refuge and generating bodhicitta - the awakening mind

For the sake of all who struggle and suffer,
all those who have not yet reached the highest state of freedom and peace,
to relieve their suffering and to bring them happiness,

I take refuge in the Buddha,
the Great Compassionate Teacher,
I take refuge in the Dharma,
in all the Liberating Teachings,
and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha,
the Accomplished Spiritual Community

By this practice,
just as my teachers before me have done,
May I realize the state of Peace,
Perfect Freedom, and happiness,
and Great Love, ~ the Mind of Enlightenment,
and may I bring all others to that very same state

The concerns of others are my concerns,
is that not so?

For their sake, then

May I accomplish this Path,

and,

May all temporal and ultimate aims be fulfilled

The Traditional Verse for Taking Refuge and generating bodhicitta is

*I take refuge,
until I attain enlightenment,
in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly
By the merit I have accumulated
through Generosity and other Virtues,
may I accomplish Buddhahood for the sake of all beings*

Knowing the Equality of Self and Others

There are two different kinds of equanimity taught in Buddhism. They differ in their causes, and in their results, as I will outline here.

The first kind of equanimity, as taught in the Theravada, is in the Four Immeasurables - of universal love, compassion, sympathetic joy, and a balance of mind that is unshaken by whatever it meets.

A verse that is often referred to at this point is

*All are owners of their karma,
heirs to their karma;
they abide supported by their karma,
and whether they experience happiness or suffering
depends on their their own actions...*

Out of love and compassion, we can certainly aim to uplift, care for, and share our knowledge of the Way with others, but no one can do the work for another, as hard as this may be to accept at times.

If someone could do the work completely for others, after all, it would only have taken one wise and compassionate person in history, like the Buddha or Jesus, and all our problems would have been solved, but this is not the case. The way that enlightened beings help us is to give us teachings, and all the encouragement and inspiration we need. Ultimately then, it's up to the individual. *Practicing correctly is your own responsibility*, as they say.

To clarify, Ajahn Pasanno said

True equanimity does not hinder compassion or action, but rather enhances it by developing the discernment that knows how and when to engage.

A certain equanimity comes from knowing this. It is a wise and balanced state of mind, a real accomplishment of understanding how practice works.

It's taught that, following mindfulness, investigation, energy, enthusiastic joy, peace, and concentration,

Equanimity is the culminating point of the Factors of Enlightenment.

One is non-reactive, or unshaken by whatever arises, and there is acceptance and clarity, going forward.

The way that equanimity is taught in Tibetan Buddhism is a bit more of a challenge to explain, but this is necessary if we are going to understand and practice the teachings as they have come down to us from this Tradition.

Although there is peace, and a steadiness of mind that we generally call 'equanimity', here it has different causes, and very different applications, going forward.

Equanimity in the Tibetan Tradition means seeing the equality of self and others. It comes from reflecting deeply on the ways we are essentially the same. This can be quite challenging, because, what do we see being emphasized all around us, especially these days? It is our differences, and discrimination based on race and class, gender, and sexual orientation; it is our differences in nationality, religious or political beliefs, being rich or poor, or having more or less of an education. When this is almost all that we see and hear about, we feel separate from each other, without any sense of our common interests, or responsibility for one another.

So what *do* we have in common? All of us without exception want to be free from suffering, and to find lasting happiness. We all have the right to this, and according to Buddhism, we all have this potential.

In addition, what so many people do with the aim of finding happiness, such as using drugs or living a hedonistic lifestyle, in fact leads to only more suffering and confusion.

As Shantideva said:

*Although wishing to be rid of misery,
They run towards misery itself.
Although wishing to have happiness,
Like an enemy they ignorantly destroy it*

Isn't this so? Just look around...

When we see the equality of self and all others, the way we view our own life changes, and the scope of our practice broadens *immeasurably*. We know how we would want to be treated, and how we would want our beloved family to be treated. In the teachings they call this 'the exchange of self for others', something we're universally familiar with. It's there in every religion and code of ethics.

Seeing the equality of self and others, we feel a kinship with them. There is the feeling that -

*These are my very own family crossing rivers,
crossing oceans on poor, overcrowded boats,
they are crossing deserts, leaving everything they have ever known behind
to escape hardship;*

*these are my family under bridges, with almost nothing
and sleeping in parks, and on sidewalks...*

*They are infinitely precious to me...
infinitely precious... infinitely precious...*

- and how far this is from the disconnect and callous indifference that is so common these days!

We waste millions on the military, and on superficial entertainments, while there are such needs here on our streets, and in other places.

Why is there so much inequality? Why is there hunger? Why is there so much poverty and lack, when these things really could be changed?

Where is our heart?

High and low, young and old, rich and poor, educated, uneducated, male and female, people of all races and nationalities everywhere- we are all companions here. This naturally leads to wanting others to be free from all dangers and difficulties, and to enjoy every happiness. It naturally leads to wanting to care for and support all others - known and unknown to us - in any way we can. We are all fundamentally equal.

It's said that a person who understands this deeply will react the same way to a person on one side showering them with praise, and someone on the other side hurling abuse. We can call this loving equanimity *an even tempered impartiality* towards people or situations. It is being without bias, or indifference.

As Buddhists, or people of any faith tradition, or simply as people who think and feel deeply, and have some insight into problems and their resolution, of course we then feel we have something precious to give others. Naturally, we want to share whatever has been most helpful to us in our own lives.

From the mind and heart that sees the equality of self and others arises the sense of responsibility to do what we can for them. How can we ever turn away from those who, just like ourselves, seek only happiness?

And when a person at last sees, or even just hears about a way out of the round of samsara, {this uncontrolled cycle through various realms with so much sorrow}, naturally we see ourselves and our practice in relation to others. What is then called *the Special Intention* in the Tibetan Tradition is an awakening of a clear and strong feeling of responsibility for others. Our motivation matures, as it would for someone with a family, aiming to provide for them, and we practice inclusively for self and others, without any separation.

As part of the Four Immeasurables, of universal love, compassion, and sympathetic joy, equanimity or impartiality here sees that,

All are equal in deserving our respect, our love and our care

and there is so much need.

The peace and stability here, that unshakable quality of mind, is also born of our dedication to caring for others in the best of ways.

*For as long as it takes,
no matter what it costs,
no matter how difficult it may be...*

Having universal love and compassion, giving equal love and care to every person and living being brings composure and inner strength. We are all in. We can call this a kind of equanimity, with these causes, and these results.

* * *

Knowing the equality of self and others is a fundamental practice, and is the basis for much that follows in the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition. Without it, the all inclusive Mahayana - Great Vehicle motivations and practices are not complete. This needs to be meditated upon deeply.

They say that before we can awaken the heart mind of bodhicitta - the mind intent on enlightenment for the sake of all, we need to have this realization. Without it, practice would be biased towards friends and helpful people, and neglectful towards those who either don't do anything for us personally, or who oppose us in some way.

I'm thinking now that, of course, this vital point of the equality of self and others should always be clear.

This is not talked about often enough these days, so I thought to write out these few thoughts on the subject.

*May I think of all beings with great love and compassion,
and generate the supreme awakening mind
May I think of them all as my family, and care for them all as my own*

*May all beings have happiness
and the causes of happiness flourishing...*

*May all beings be completely free from suffering
and the causes of suffering...*

*I rejoice in all that is beautiful and right in this world,
in all kindness, virtue, and positive action,
and in all success, happiness, and good fortune...*

and abide in impartial love and compassion...

*May all beings everywhere,
all precious ones,
receive everything they need to become liberated
from all problems and difficulties,
and may each and every one of them enjoy lasting happiness,
freedom and peace*

On The Potential Power of Vows

A vow is a kind of commitment. It can become the strongest commitment you can make. *It can be something you feel with every fiber of your being.*

When they speak of *vow power* in Chinese Buddhism, this is what is meant. It is a sacred commitment that is immutable, fierce, indomitable. It overcomes everything, and nothing overcomes it.

When you make a vow, it's something you think about all day and all night. If you wake up in the middle of the night, it's there, and when you get up in the morning, if not the words of the vow, then the feeling of it is present.

It's that powerful an intention.

It projects forward from where we are now to where we want to go.

There are vows we can make for a set period of time, for example, for twenty four hours, a week, a month, or a year; and those that can last for our whole life, or for lifetimes, until we accomplish our aim.

*Even if the heavens fall,
or the earth opens up,
through conflagrations,
and floods sweeping everything else away,
vows endure, unchanged,
pristine, illuminating the way forward*

If there is no intensity to your vows yet- then keep working.

How do we make our vows stronger, more enduring, unconquerable? It is through deep reflection, and coming to decisive conclusions about what matters most in our lives.

We distill the essence of medicine in the same way, slowly, in jars or in beakers, under a slow fire, carefully, diligently, with time, maybe weeks or months or years, until what we have remaining is concentrated, potent, life changing.

In vows, there is nothing superfluous. Nothing is in excess, and nothing is missing. They are as straightforward as we can make them, and for that reason they speak to us on a deep level.

They say that vows are the spark of compassion. *They come from knowing what is urgently needed in our life, and in the lives of the world.*

In Buddhist mythology, it's said that Avalokiteshvara, the archetype of compassion, is overcome by the immensity of suffering, and his head splits into pieces from the intensity of his emotion. Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light, comes to comfort him, telling him he'll help him accomplish his compassionate aims, and puts him back together in his thousand-armed form. White and Green Tara spring from his tears, and vow to help him liberate beings ceaselessly.

All this comes from the strength of his emotion - from all of his sorrow, from all of his rage, from all of his grief, and principally from all of his insight, great love and determination.

What is the power that overcomes the world, with its individual and collective delusion, and the weight of its history behind it? What could possibly change our hearts and the course of our lives?

Shantideva wrote:

*Just as a flash of lightning on a dark, cloudy night
For an instant brightly illuminates all,
Likewise in this world, through the might of an awakened one,
A wholesome thought rarely and briefly appears.*

*Hence virtue is perpetually weak-
and delusion strong,
And except for a Fully Awakening Mind
By what other virtue will it be overcome?*

This is vow. It is most serious thing we can do in our life. It is also the most joyful, and brings the most energy.

When you love someone, it's natural to want to protect them, and if there is some danger, we do everything we can to overcome it. When there is love, this goes deep, and changes everything.

*May I clearly see that what I and all others need,
{all of these infinitely precious ones}
is ultimate liberation of mind, perfect peace and freedom,
and that in taking care of myself, I am taking care of all of us
With an understanding of the Noble Truths,
may my love and compassion become the dedication to helping others through my
realization of this path*

*For the sake of all who struggle and suffer,
all those who have not yet reached the highest state of freedom, and peace,
to relieve their suffering and to bring them happiness*

*I vow to accomplish each of the stages of liberation
and enlightened understanding and activity,
and help bring all others, without a single exception,
to these very same states.*

A vow is then at once both a result, and a cause.

Vows are really potent psychologically.

- Venerable Robina

In this process of making powerful vows, as time goes on, and with experience, we become crystal clear that our aim is truly worthwhile. It is the most important thing in our life, and it is something we yearn for, and are determined with all our heart and soul and with all our strength to achieve.

The word 'vow' then is much stronger than to simply hope, or to have a wish, or an aim, or an aspiration, and here is the key:

In order to make a vow powerful, we must invest it great energy.

We have to have the utmost clarity, and then make our vows with true firmness and resolve. They can become like a diamond, like a vajra thunderbolt.

The Riverside Chan Meditation Group has said that: We must give our vows the full energy of our mind and heart. Never underestimate the importance and the force of a vow...

You must set your mind clearly on your path so that you will continually remember your intention, and provide it with force...

{This is like Don Genero, in the Teachings of Don Juan, crossing a precipice on the strength of one intention}

We must give our vows power so that they carry into the future...

And the Buddhist teacher Jung Hong Lu has said, Vows guide the life of a Buddhist practitioner; and,

Your life's direction is formed by your vows.

We can see how this is true.

So often in the West the buddhist term “bodhisattva” is misunderstood as a being who merely has love and compassion. But this is not what bodhisattva means.

A bodhisattva is a being who has love and compassion for all sentient beings without exception, and from that positive state of mind they have given rise to the purest and greatest motivation of all - bodhicitta - the mind of enlightenment - the heartfelt loving and compassionate wish to become a buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings without exception. Their mind is absolutely focused on attaining enlightenment, and that is the direction that their mind will go towards. Once bodhicitta has sincerely arisen, one becomes a bodhisattva.

The stronger your bodhicitta becomes, the weaker your conceptual boundary between self and other. Therefore, ethical conduct arises effortlessly, and the easier it will be for you to experience the wisdom of emptiness, and therefore the closer you will be to becoming a buddha. The more this happens, the more your energetic momentum in this direction is built up, and you are then truly on the path, your energetic direction and force becomes unstoppable, and guaranteed you will become a buddha.

So may your bodhicitta arise and not diminish, but increase more and more. May you quickly become a bodhisattva on the path to buddhahood for the benefit of all sentient beings.

~ Chamtrul Rinpoche

Seeing the world of sentient beings,
 so full of afflictions,
 bodhisattvas arouse their energy,
 thinking,

'I should rescue and liberate these beings;
 I should purify and emancipate them;

I should lead them,
 direct them,

make them happy,
 develop them,
 and cause them to reach perfect peace.'

Thus dedicated to the salvation of all beings,
 the bodhisattva reflects thus,

'By what means can these beings,
 fallen as they are into such misery,
 be lifted out of it?'

and it occurs to these bodhisattvas,

'The means to do this is nowhere else
 but in the knowledge of liberation...'

The bodhisattvas thus devote themselves
 to their realization of the Buddha's Way,

From The Avatamsaka Sutra - 722

Please understand that all sentient beings, all our parents, want nothing but happiness. Unfortunately, through their negative actions they only create the causes for further pain and suffering. Take this to heart and consider all our parents, wandering blindly and endlessly through painful samsaric states. When we truly take this to heart, out of compassion we feel motivated to achieve enlightenment to truly help all of them. This compassionate attitude is indispensable.

~ Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche

On The Four Immeasurables and Bodhicitta

From The Door to Inconceivable Wisdom and Compassion by Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche

...There was a very famous Dzogchen master in the thirteenth century Tibet named Longchenpa who taught that the entire conduct of the bodhisattva can be summarized into two aspects: (1) aspirational bodhichitta and (2) actualizing bodhichitta.

Longchenpa went on to explain that the aspirational bodhichitta is actually based on the Four Immeasurables: (1) Immeasurable Love, (2) Immeasurable Compassion, (3) Immeasurable Joy, and (4) Immeasurable Equanimity.

Because sentient beings are as limitless as space, our practice of these four virtues must also be immeasurable. We can begin developing these in our heart by making aspirational prayers such as,

*May all beings have happiness
and all the causes of happiness flourishing...*

*May all beings be completely and permanently free from all suffering
and all the causes of suffering...*

*I celebrate all that is beautiful and right in this world,
in all kindness, virtue, and positive action,
and in all success, happiness, and good fortune...*

and abide in the immutable strength of love, its unchanging nature

The aspirational bodhichitta is mainly applied at the levels of mind and speech. Through practice, it becomes the cause of the actualized

bodhichitta. Once we accomplish this, we can perform actions with the confidence arising from our intention to benefit others.

The first of the Four Immeasurables is loving-kindness. Presently our loving-kindness is very partial, because we just love ourselves and our close friends, family members and relatives. Love is something we can experience quite easily, and therefore through practice it can become profound and vast...

When you really love, you feel respect for the person or beings who are the object of your love. This attitude of loving-kindness expands and increases by seeing and appreciating their good qualities. True love is based in pure perception and a respectful attitude toward yourself and others.

If you decide to be loving, you can easily develop the other three immeasurables: compassion, a joyful attitude, and equanimity. So it is important that we know the value of love before we begin the other practices.

The benefit of love is a very powerful and special. As soon as you generate an attitude of loving-kindness, you will start feeling more calm and peaceful, and naturally share this feeling with other beings. Your whole field of perception will be changed into something beautiful.

When you radiate true love, in that moment you will feel that everyone is your friend. Another power of loving-kindness lies in its ability to overcome serious obstacles. When Buddha Shakyamuni sat beneath the bodhi tree before his enlightenment, hundreds of demons were attacking him, but he conquered all of them by not getting angry. By simply meditating on loving-kindness, he transformed each one into an ornament of his enlightenment.

Being open to the value of loving-kindness, one can easily develop the precious attitude of compassion because its nature is the wish to remove

the suffering of all beings. Love moves you to offer them some assistance to get through and free them from misery...

You have good reason to feel compassion for others, because every being is suffering. Although their intentions are quite normal and similar to your own - to be happy, joyous, and peaceful, their aspirations and what is actually happening are at variance. We would like to be happy, but often, if not constantly, we are facing many difficulties, misfortunes, and hardships.

Sentient beings normally act with good intentions. Even in trivial activities we are trying to achieve some joy, peace, and freedom for ourselves, either directly or indirectly. Animals are doing this as well. In running, flying, digging, and moving, by day or night, their final goal is to achieve some kind of comfort according to their understanding. In this way, the common goal of all sentient beings is the same. We have similar desires and objectives, yet we do not achieve what we want all the time. Why not? The major obstacle is ignorance.

{The lack of knowledge of what will achieve their aims}

It is as Shantideva said:

*Although wishing to be rid of misery,
They run towards misery itself.
Although wishing to have happiness,
Like an enemy they ignorantly destroy it.*

...People often wonder why there are such great benefits associated with practicing bodhichitta. To account for this, Buddha Shakyamuni gave four reasons.

The first reason given to account for the immeasurable power associated with the practice of bodhichitta: the infinity of the objective focus - *all sentient beings*.

The second reason given is that, when considering the experience of all sentient beings, you feel from the bottom of your heart that you would like to remove their misery. This is the inconceivable power arising from *the aspiration to relieve all of their suffering*.

The third power is related to the fact that you would like to establish them in the unceasing happiness and joy of enlightenment. This is called *the power of giving, the great aspiration to share happiness with all beings*.

And the fourth reason there are such great benefits in practicing bodhicitta is because of *its tireless endurance*. As we have already mentioned many times, the bodhisattva's endeavor is not just for one or two days. His or her commitment perseveres until every single sentient being is totally free from suffering and realizes ultimate enlightenment.

On the basis of these four great factors, bodhisattvas accumulate great power to remove the troubles and obscurations of self and others...

The Nature of Relative Bodhicitta, by Ringu Tulku

Bodhicitta is this kind of compassion:

That

I wish all beings to be free from all kinds of sufferings

All beings means: not leaving anybody out; not excluding *anybody-everybody* is included.

That is the first limitlessness.

Second:

It's not just that I wish all sentient beings to be free from suffering, but *every kind* of problem and suffering.

Sometimes, you know, we feel compassion for people who are in very bad situations, who are suffering a lot, where it's much worse than our own situation, but, for some people who are doing better than us - then we don't have this same wish;

'Aah, They are doing much better - they don't need anything...'

You know?- Not like that, because they have their own problems.

So, I wish all beings to be free from all kinds of problems and difficulties, however small, or large

So, second.

All sentient beings, without leaving anybody behind;

and,

All the sufferings and pain;

and then,

I don't wish them *just* freedom from suffering, but

I wish them all the best, and the highest possible happiness;

It's not that I wish myself the best, and then others, just an okay kind of happiness, so that they don't have too many problems;

As much as as I wish for myself, I wish for everybody the best, and the highest kind of happiness;

So that's the third one.

And the fourth is that-

I wish that all beings be completely free from every suffering and every problem;

and I wish that they have the best joy and happiness;

and, not only for a short time- not just like a picnic, or a vacation-

I want them to have that *all the time*.

So these four limitlessness- there can't be anything better, or a more positive wish than that;

And if somebody genuinely has that kind of aspiration, then, that's bodhicitta.

When somebody has that aspiration, or that wish, or that prayer, or that intention, that motivation -

not only that I wish that, but *that will be my ultimate goal.*

If somebody asks me, What is it that you really want?

Then you say,

I want *this* to be attained. I want *this* to be achieved, and I would like to do something to make this happen, because that's the best thing that could happen, the most important thing, and that's something that really *needs* to be done, because there is so much suffering, there are so many problems, there are so many difficulties that are experienced by everybody...

So this kind of compassion, this kind of way of thinking of what is really the most important thing for you, there is wisdom in it...

The more we feel this, and the more we work on this, it makes our life feel very purposeful, and meaningful.

From At this time

So much more than for my own sake alone, then,
millions of times, billions of times more,
uncountable times more than for my own sake alone,

for all my family, who are precious to me,
for those who have never even heard of liberation and enlightenment,
for those who have heard but who have no opportunity to practice,
and for those who practice, but who have not yet attained the full result

for all of their sake, because of all their suffering now
and the possibility of all their suffering in the future,
due to their not having completely realized their true nature,

and because of all their potential for happiness,
that is not yet realized, and that would otherwise go unrealized,
it is most urgent,

To be able to fulfill their needs,
May I realize the Teachings,
and my prayers
to do all I can
to accomplish the aims of living beings

Bodhichitta is Most Eminent, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Kyabje Khunu Lama Rinpoche, from whom I received many teachings, said in his Praise to Bodhichitta,

That which eliminates all the mistakes of every single sentient being,

- that means every single one.

There are numberless hell beings, so every single hell being. There are numberless hungry ghosts so every single preta. There are numberless animals, so every single animal. Even the mosquito who bothers you [by buzzing] next to your ear, that makes you angry and irritated, that you want to do like that (Rinpoche shows slapping it) to put it away, the tiny insect that bites you, the ant or whatever- including that.

Then every single human being; there are numberless human beings. Every single hungry ghost, suras and asuras, eliminating all the mistakes of every single sentient being.

And wishes to generate infinite qualities,

- infinite qualities in each one, in each sentient being, the wish to bring this about, that is bodhichitta, the supreme thought of enlightenment."

I will read the complete verse from Praise to Bodhichitta (v. 21):

That which eliminates all the mistakes of every single sentient being

And wishes to generate infinite qualities in each one

Is the supreme thought of enlightenment.

Among that which is eminent, it is the most eminent.

There are many eminent teachings, there are many eminent teachings, qualities of the mind, realizations, but,

“Among those eminent, bodhichitta, the supreme thought of enlightenment, is the most eminent.”

What causes to eliminate aaaaaaaall the mistakes of every single sentient being, and causes them to generate infinite qualities, is bodhichitta.

As I mentioned yesterday, each time you meditate on lamrim, and you meditate on renunciation, with bodhichitta in order to have the realization,

even besides the realization, when you are just attempting to transform your mind into bodhichitta with effort, even that is incredible, unbelievable, [because] what it does is it helps every sentient being.

It is so amazing, amazing, amazing. Wow, wow, wow.

Any sentient being, suffering, obscured sentient being, that exists, you are benefiting them, wow, wow, wow, by generating bodhichitta, with the motivation of bodhichitta. Wow, wow, wow, wow, wow, wow. Amazing, amazing.

It becomes the process for collecting skies of merit, then it leads to the realization of bodhichitta. Oh, that.

Among the eminences,

the teachings, the eminent realizations, this one,

*among the eminent ones,
this supreme thought,
the thought of enlightenment,
is most eminent.*

So actually, as a practitioner of Mahayana Buddhism, you can see it is most unbelievable.

As I mentioned yesterday, this is the quick way to achieve enlightenment.

You see, you look at the suffering of sentient beings. But (with this illness, covid)... Some recover, but the recovery doesn't mean forever, of course; it is temporarily, until you actualize of the four noble truths, the true path, the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, until you achieve the arya path...

An arya bodhisattva who has achieved the arya path, the wisdom directly perceiving emptiness, then that arya bodhisattva then totally has abandoned rebirth, the suffering of rebirth, old age, sickness, and death. [An arya bodhisattva] has a body, a spiritual body, so they don't suffer.

Seeing this world suffering, how many people die in a day, so many hundreds, or thousands, wow, wow, wow, even if this is the most developed country in the world. The whole world looks at China, very powerful, or America- everybody follows their example, it is like that, but in those countries there is *so much* suffering.

*So as I mentioned, if you develop compassion, strong compassion, that makes very strong bodhichitta, the need to achieve enlightenment, yes, to free the numberless sentient beings from the oceans of samsaric sufferings and bring them to full enlightenment, the total cessation of obscurations of the mind and the completion of all realizations.

Therefore, again I want to say how we are extremely fortunate we are, having met the lamrim teachings and the teachings on bodhichitta. Wow, wow, wow. That you can [develop this]...

If you see sentient beings suffering, then stronger compassion you can develop. Wow, wow, wow.

So that, as I mentioned before, makes it quicker to achieve enlightenment for you and quicker to liberate, to free them from the oceans of samsaric sufferings and bring them to enlightenment.

That is the second time I repeat it, to emphasize it.

Then,

“The purpose of my life is not just to achieve ultimate happiness, liberation from samsara, for myself. It is to free the numberless sentient beings from the oceans of samsaric sufferings and bring them to full enlightenment by myself alone. Therefore, I must achieve full enlightenment. Therefore, I’m going to listen to these teachings.”

Any miserable condition, any unhappiness, anything - we can see it in the positive way, [and utilize it] on the path to enlightenment.

Just temporary happiness, aaaah, not just temporary happiness, not just only today, only a few minutes, not like that- no, not like that- ha-ha- how to utilize it on the path to enlightenment.

Can you imagine? Wow, wow, wow. That is the most amazing, the most beneficial for sentient beings.

Here it is mentioned by Kyabje Khunu Lama Rinpoche, in the Praise to Bodhichitta, Praise to Bodhichitta (v. 143):

*With bodhichitta, the delusions,
with bodhicitta, the fear of suffering,
with bodhicitta, sickness and death,
are transformed into the path to enlightenment.*

“With bodhichitta, the thought of enlightenment,” the effective mind,

*with bodhicitta, delusion,
with bodhichitta, the fear of suffering,
with bodhichitta, sickness, and death,
are transformed into the path to enlightenment...*

That means “my” bodhichitta. Ah-hah.

So the fear of suffering, the virus, even death, all those are transformed into the path to enlightenment. Even the cause, delusion, with bodhichitta, you utilize these on the path to enlightenment.

From the Preface to *The Discourses of the Buddha from the Pali Canon*

I remember one of my teachers, Thich Nhat Hanh, saying that while writing his biography of the Buddha, *Old Path, White Clouds*, he wanted to show how all of the Buddhist teachings we are familiar with now across traditions can be found in the original, Pali sources.

Without saying so explicitly, he was addressing the split that developed centuries ago between the lineages that draw on these sources and their commentaries, from those that feature the Bodhisattva Vow, and the Path as set forth by later accomplished Buddhist teachers. *All of these teachings, we should know, have their basis in the teachings of the Historical Buddha.*

These are teachings that uplift and inspire, that affirm the possibility of liberation, and greatly empower the Mahayana View. They very clearly show us the best way we can care for ourselves and for one another.

The Dalai Lama has taught that this possibility of the cessation of suffering, the Third Noble Truth- is an *immense* help for compassion. Because compassion is a desire to remove suffering, once we see this possibility, then our concern becomes something realistic. We know it can be done. Now, how wonderful is that?

Notes from Being Pure - The Practice of Vajrasattva, by Ringu Tulku Rinpoche

Bodhicitta in practice is actually compassion, and usually we say 'compassion with wisdom.'

This is the heart of the whole Buddhist practice, especially the Mahayana path. Usually they say that the main thing in Mahayana Buddhist practice is this aspiration to enlightened understanding and activity, and that in Buddhism there is actually there is nothing more, or anything other than this.

The great Tibetan master, Patrul Rinpoche, said that everything in Dharma practice actually relates to this motivation. He was one of the most learned Lamas of Tibet, ever. And he said,

'In Buddhism I have not found anything more than Bodhicitta. All other teachings are either a preliminary to Bodhicitta; or something that is helping to generate Bodhicitta itself; or something that is a result of Bodhicitta.'

The Buddhist understanding is that suffering is something we can be free from. And everyone, whether you are a good person or a bad person, wants this... Everybody wants to be free from pain and suffering and problems, and have lasting peace and happiness, however you describe that.

**When I see that this is what I want and what everybody wants, then the most important thing becomes trying to find a way to bring this about, for myself and for others. This is what I need to dedicate my life to, and I need to dedicate all my life to it...*

If someone really genuinely says this, then they have Bodhicitta.

So there are two things here. One is that, the more you understand that there is this possibility of freedom from suffering, the more strong and realistic you become about it. This is wisdom.

And the more I understand this, the clearer I become about it, the stronger my conviction becomes. So therefore, wisdom and compassion are together here.

When I feel the presence of, or know the possibility of enlightened beings, and then I want to work on this path, then I am generating Bodhicitta.

The more I renew this understanding or this choice of direction or way of understanding, the more clear and directed I am.

They say that, when you generate Bodhicitta, you are on the way to Buddhahood. This is how it becomes very important. It is also compassion-*practical compassion*. It is not all soppy- nice, nice only- it is about really wanting to work on that direction and do something beneficial.

So we connect with this wish, and generate the mind of Bodhicitta by reciting:

*Until I reach enlightenment's essence,
I go for refuge to the Buddhas,
to the Dharma,
and the assembly of Bodhisattvas too I go for refuge*

*Just as the Sugatas of the past
aroused the mind of Bodhicitta,
and just as they then followed, step by step,
the training of the Bodhisattvas,
so too, shall I,
to benefit wanderers,*

*arouse the mind of Bodhicitta,
and so too shall I follow, step by step,
the Bodhisattva's training*

{This is aspirational and engaging bodhicitta}

'Wanderers' here refers to all beings wandering in samsara. This is Bodhicitta, and these are the vows of the Bodhisattva.

Even just having this aspiration is a very positive and a very compassionate practice, in itself. It is also a very open minded and spacious minded practice, because you are making a decision to work for all beings...

From *The Lesser, the Greater, the Diamond, and the Way*, by Ajahn Amaro

I had an interesting experience recently. Normally my personality is of a friendly, generous, outgoing type, and I've always had quite a fondness for the Mahayana Buddhist teachings. However, I found toward the end of last year that certain nihilism was creeping in. The abiding tendency was one of "I've had enough of this; I want out." This was really quite unusual for me and it started to come on very strongly. The idea of living into old age and having to cope with human existence and the trivialities of life and the tedium of a boring monastic routine was NO FUN. It all started to look incredibly uninviting. It was like being stuck out in the middle of a salt flat with no horizon visible. It was a strong, grinding negativity. I didn't feel friendly toward anyone, I felt no inspiration toward monastic life. The whole thing was a tedious rigmarole.

Every two weeks we have a recitation of our monastic rules and it takes about 45 minutes to chant. This is the regular refreshment of the spirit of monastic community—renewing our aspiration and our dedication to our discipline and our life-style. And I'm sitting there reciting these rules and my mind is saying, "What a total farce, what a waste of time this is"—and... trying to remember the words I'm supposed to be chanting at the same time.

Also, this was at the beginning of the monastic winter retreat that I was supposed to be helping to teach; I thought, "This is really....going to be difficult." I was supposed to be inspiring these young monks and nuns and my mind was going through this very negative state. I was watching this, but there seemed to be a lot of justification for thinking in this negative way. I thought, "Well, maybe I had it wrong all these years, maybe I was just being an empty-headed, overly optimistic fool and maybe being a bored cynic was actually the right path all along."

Then one night I had a very vivid dream, in full color. In this dream I ate my hands, finger by finger. I pulled off my thumb and then each finger and

ate them. It was so vivid I could taste them and it was even a bland taste. I ate the whole of my left hand then started on my right hand, and I ate the first three fingers until there was only my index finger and thumb left. Then something in me said, "Wake up!" I woke up and there was a very, very clear memory of this dream.

Instantly I realized what I had been doing. Out of heedlessness I had been destroying those very faculties that were my most helpful friends and assistants. The negative and self-destructive attitudes were covering up and burning away all of the good qualities. The spiritual qualities that were there were being destroyed. It was really a shock to the system, and I realized I had been taking the wrong track.

Then something else happened spontaneously. I had not really been thinking about Mahayana Buddhism or the Bodhisattva ideal, but what happened was that I started to say to myself,

"Well, I don't care whether I feel even one moment of happiness for myself in this life; I don't care if I have to be reborn ten thousand million times. If I can just do one kind act for one other being in a thousand million lifetimes, then all that time will not have been wasted."

Thoughts like this began to come up spontaneously in my mind, and I suddenly felt an incredible joy and happiness, and a feeling of relief; which is strange if you think about it rationally: ten thousand million lifetimes of ineffective activity and complete pain and boredom. But the result was a vibrant joy and delight. It was the breaking out of the prison of self-concern.

When the mind goes into that kind of death-wish mentality, just waiting for it all to be over, then all you're concerned about is yourself. You become blind and immune to other people. Even if you don't want to be, you find that you're building all sorts of walls around yourself.

I could see that this was very much the cause of the spirit of the Mahayana tradition and teaching: to arouse that unselfishness, that readiness, even if it is a pointlessly vast task, to take it on anyway. It then releases the natural altruism and affinities we have for other beings. We recognize our interconnectedness with all other beings, all other lives, and out of respect for that, one feels a sense of joy in being able to give, to help and to serve.

It is interesting that, at about that same time, someone gave me a book which showed me that this principle was found not only in the Buddhist tradition. The author was talking about this principle and gave examples from both the Hindu and the Judaic traditions. He told the story of Sri Ramakrishna and how, before he and Swami Vivekananda were born, he had tracked down Vivekananda (who was his chief disciple) up in one of the high Brahma heavens, where he was absorbed in meditation, utterly uninterested in the world, "Close to the mountain of the Absolute." What a great phrase!

Anyway, Vivekananda was seated there, totally enraptured in bliss. Then Ramakrishna took on the form of a little child; he wove the body of a golden child out of the atmosphere of this high realm and he started to sing and play in front of this sage. Eventually, after some time, the sage's attention gets caught and he opens his eyes and sees this incredibly charming little child, playing and cavorting in front of him. And finally, with his eyes completely opened, he is looking at the child, and the child says to him, "I'm going down; you come with me." So, Vivekananda went down and joined him.

The other example was of a Rabbi named Rabbi Leib. He was telling some of his disciples, "Before this life I did not want to be born; I did not want to come here. This human world is so full of foolishness and crazy, idiotic people. I had had enough of the whole thing and just couldn't be bothered with it. One day this fellow who looked like a peasant came along, with a shovel over his shoulder, and he said to me,

'Haven't you got anything better to do than to lie around here all day just enjoying the bliss of eternity? I work non-stop just trying to bring a little happiness, a little more joy, into the lives of other people, and what are you doing? You're just hanging around!'

The Rabbi said that he was so touched by this person that he agreed to go along. The fellow with the shovel was the Baal Shem Tov, one of the founders of the Hassidim. It is said that he roams around the upper realms of the cosmos looking for likely characters whom he can dispatch down to earth to take care of the likes of us. So, it is interesting to see that this same principle exists in human experience in different traditions.

Self-concern takes us into a desert experience - even when we notice that the more coarse defilements of mind have abated or have worn themselves out, when we're not possessed by too much anxiety or lust, greed, aversion, jealousy, or whatever, and the mind is quite peaceful. As you may be aware, now that you've been a week into the meditation retreat, you can be sitting therewith your mind quite concentrated, quite still and, rather than feeling rapture or a sense of wholeness and totality, the feeling is one of, "So what? Is this really what the Buddha built his teaching around, this blank mental state, with nothing much happening?"

With nothing much in the way of thoughts and feelings, no great passions to wrestle with, it's like being in some little grey room. It's not disturbing in any way, but it seems a pretty tame experience to build a world religion around.

You think, "This is a rip-off! I've been struggling away for five or six years with fear and lust and so on, and now I get to the free space - here we are out in the open - and it's a desert. This is not...right!" But then, what you realize is that this is not what the Buddha was pointing to as the goal of the holy life, because even though one can't see any out-standing objects causing obstruction or defilement, what is there is you ... , or in this case, me.... There is the sense of I ... - someone here experiencing - there's a

person. This sense of identity, even though it is not outstanding, leaping out making itself vivid, is a constant presence. The ego is a psychological structure that is there like a wall around us, like a prison. And because we are so caught up with life in the prison, we don't notice that we are actually hemmed in. It is only when everything has cooled down and one has a chance to look around and take in the surroundings that one has a chance to feel the sense of limitation, barrenness; there's a boredom, it's just BLEAAGGHH!

Even in Mahayana Buddhism - which is outgoing, geared toward altruism, generosity, compassion, developing a spiritual life for the sake of all beings - if our practice stops at the state of, 'Me giving my life to help all others', even if this is highly developed, at the end of it there's still ME and YOU - me who is helping all sentient beings.

Even in that respect, even though there can be a lot of joy, you still find this barrier, a sense of isolation or meaninglessness. There's a separation there. So, it is important to use the meditation practice to not just absorb into altruistic thoughts and feelings, because, if you notice, a lot of the Buddha's teachings revolve around selflessness, around emptiness, like the teachings on Anatta ... If there is no self who is it who's going to be radiating kindness over the entire world? If there's no self, then who is sending Metta ... and who is there to send it to?

One then sees that there is a level of understanding, of being, which is beyond that which is tied up with self and other. No matter how high, refined and pure our aspiration might be, unless we go beyond that sense of self-identity and division in that respect, then there will always be that feeling of incompleteness; the desert experience will creep in.

So, if we pass through that grand-hearted attitude of mind, then we realize that which pertains to the wisdom of ultimate understanding, of Ultimate Reality; that which is called the Vajra teachings. Vajra ... means diamond or

thunderbolt, indestructible, supremely powerful, the adamantine Truth.
This is the understanding of selflessness.

Untying the Knot of the Ego

One cannot rely on the dualistic, deluded mind to undo its own delusions (which is using the same kind of mind that created the problems)

Finally, it is the non-deluded, noncompounded, nondual, ultimate reality itself that has the real power to remove delusions...

- Shenpen Hookham, from *The Buddha Within*

The ego (wrong view) dissolves naturally through deep insight into the nature of mind... until then it is the self, the ego that walks the path...

- Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo

Passionate convictions, strong feelings and motivations, deep remorse or high aims can accomplish one of two things. They can either lead to the realization of our goals, or they can cause a person to get stuck.

When it comes to Buddhism, the aim of all the teachings and practices is to become free from suffering, and to attain greater peace for ourselves, and for all others. If any part of our practice does not accomplish this, clearly something is lacking.

Vows can also be based on self grasping, a wrong view about ourselves and others and this world. The Diamond Sutra addresses this in its first declaration, where the Buddha says

However many species of living beings there are we must lead all these beings to perfect peace and freedom. And when this innumerable, immeasurable, infinite number of beings has become liberated, we do not, in truth, think that a single being has been liberated.

Why is this so? If a bodhisattva holds on to the idea that a self, a person, a living being, or a life span exists, that person is not an authentic bodhisattva.

The aim in Buddhism is freedom and true beneficial action, and so this right view is essential.

There is a prayer by Mipham Rinpoche where he says

*May I realize the absence of a self nature, by seeing that,
even though there is an appearance, it is not truly existent...*

And the Seventh Dalai Lama wrote:

*At the crossroads of diverse perceptions,
Are seen the hazy dualistic phenomena which are baseless.
There is a magical show that is by nature, deceptive.
Don't believe it to be true,
but view it as having the nature of emptiness.*

*Don't let your mind go astray,
but place it in the nature of appearance-emptiness.
Through not losing mindfulness,
hold it in the nature of appearance-emptiness...*

We meditate and then carry the practice into our lives in this way, by seeing through our concepts in all situations, cutting through appearances. This is the key point in Buddhism, and what all the practices should lead to.

As Jetsunma Tenzin Palmo said,

The ego (wrong view) dissolves naturally through deep insight into the nature of mind... until then it is the self, the ego that walks the path...

I recently had an analogy come to mind for knowing whether I am practicing in a way that leads to either the continuation and increase of suffering, or to its resolution.

The image is of a knot. When presented with a challenge, we need to handle it carefully, with patience, and gentleness, love and attention. If we were instead to take it up without skill, it can be like we are pulling the two ends of a rope in opposite directions, and tightening the knot. Slowing down, with great care and attention, we can look deeply into a challenge, and find a way to resolve it, to loosen and untangle the knot.

We especially need this practice when there are strong feelings.

I identify feeling upset, or afraid, or restless, or enthusiasm, generally, as turmoil, or agitation, and whatever meditation practice we do, whether it is cultivating qualities, or calmly directing attention, or investigation, these should all gradually bring more ease, and lead to freedom.

Check up and see whether of agitation or peace are present, and ultimately, if self grasping and suffering are continuing or increasing, or decreasing? Examine all the teachings carefully and see if you feel they are complete in this way, as the Buddha taught - they should be integrated with the wisdom that leads to an end of suffering. Look into refuge, metta, purification, calm abiding, ethics, study, prayer, mantra and visualization, and see for yourself.

Some practices by themselves go only so far, as it's said explicitly in the metta and calm abiding teachings. If we do not know this, progress can be blocked, for some indefinite time. Practice should always be onward leading.

To make this clear, my own rendering of a teaching poem by Khandro-la reads:

*The worldly wisdom of good and bad,
and all the compassion and collections of virtue of ordinary sentient beings
cannot become causes for liberation.
If you fail to give rise to non-referential compassion,
liberation and enlightened understanding and activity cannot be attained.*

and in A Direct Meditation on the Graduated Path, it says:

*In dependence upon higher rebirth,
even if we achieve the levels of a deva or human,
we will still have to experience endless suffering in samsara
because of not having completely abandoned from their root
ignorance and the afflictive emotions.*

*Therefore, I will look deeply into the nature of all of samsara,
and continuously follow the unified path of the Three Trainings,
of Sila, Samadhi, and Prajna,
the way to peace, nibbana,
true and lasting health and happiness.*

We can see the purpose of the provisional, and that at last we need is the freedom that is experienced and actualized with wisdom.

As the Aspiration Prayer for the Attainment of Mahamudra says,

In the moment of love, the empty essence nakedly dawns...

On Wisdom and Compassion Together

From The Continual Practice of Right View I

In Buddhism, the cause of suffering is a self grasping ignorance that is habitual, and pervasive, and reflexive. When this is seen through, or seen for what it is, we experience ourselves and others and our world differently...

Grasping at a self unconsciously cuts us off from our ancestors, our teachers, from one another and from our natural world. Removing this false view, we awaken to our connectedness, and inner treasures, joy, compassion, and peace. We enter into a dynamic, creative involvement with all our family and world.

* * *

When teachings speak of non-referential compassion, there is an immediacy that is referred to, a newness, and resourcefulness, and timeliness.

* * *

When we can begin to see with the eyes of the spirit, we are not separate from one another, or our own depths.

This is referred to at times as non referential compassion, seeing in a way that is not separate, dynamic and resourceful, and naturally responsive to every need.

As Suzuki Roshi said,

Strictly speaking, there are no enlightened people, there is only enlightened activity.

And as the Thai Forest Master, Ajahn Maha Boowa said,

For an enlightened being, there is no other response to the human condition, than compassion.

How then can we wish happiness for ourselves or another if they don't exist as we imagine?

The way we can have both wisdom and compassion present in our mind then is explained by the Eighth century saint, Shantideva, in his Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, where he asks,

'If no beings exist [in ultimate reality], toward whom should we have compassion?

and he answers:

'To attain the result [of buddhahood, which is to be achieved only through the awakening of great compassion], one should direct one's compassion toward whatever it is that unenlightened beings call 'beings'.

The modern day Tibetan teacher, Deshung Rinpoche, also taught on this same subject, when he said:

'On the conventional level of reality, beings do not exist as they are perceived by other unenlightened beings. The bodhisattva realizes that, in ultimate reality, there are no beings who exist as unenlightened beings think, but he directs his mind toward those beings as they perceive themselves.

'On the ultimate level, he sees no beings, but he realizes that on the conventional level, beings think they exist and do experience suffering. Out of objectless compassion, therefore, he directs his mind toward them.'

In the Diamond Sutra, The Buddha said:

So, Subhuti, all the bodhisattva mahasattvas should give rise to a pure and clear intention in this spirit. They should give rise to their intention without relying on

form, nor should they rely on sound, smell, taste, touch, or objects of mind... They should give rise to an intention with their minds not dwelling anywhere.

From The Continual Practice of Right View II - in the Vajrayana

We can represent *our motivation and Right View* to our minds symbolically in practices that use visualization.

The following is adapted from a teaching by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche:

(In Vajrayana) We aspire to a nonconceptually performed practice, free from grasping or clinging. This means that when we practice or meditate, we should not relate to our visualization as if it were a solid object.

Our visualization must be experienced as a dynamic display of the true nature, like a transcendent wisdom rainbow body. We must understand that the visualization is totally empty of inherent existence, yet totally full of dynamic energies of love, compassion, and wisdom.

Here is where we can use meditation to integrate our understanding. We train in seeing the world we live in as translucent, made of light, and holy, and that we are upheld by countless Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, Saints and Sages, ancestors, and the sacred powers of the earth, sky, water, and fire. In this way, the tantras affirm that divine help is always available in abundance. Visualization in this way is the expression of Right View.

We can familiarize ourselves with the way things actually are by the practice of seeing ourselves and others and this world as transparent like a rainbow, with light shining through, appearing and yet ungraspable. What's more, when we realize our inherent worth and the preciousness of ourselves and others and this world, we can intentionally visualize all this as being divine in nature, poetically adorned with jewels, exalted, and uplifting to behold in every way.

With this Right View and a pure motivation, as we recite verses of refuge and aspiration prayers, meditate, and recite mantra, we visualize that we receive blessings from the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and from all the Bodhisattvas and Devas in the form of light and nectar. These dissolve into ourselves, and into all those we see as being with us now, our family and friends, those we don't know, and those who are experiencing any difficulty at all...

We visualize that the light and nectar heals and calms, and nourishes, and inspires us all.

May all share in these blessings.

May all beings receive all they need to awaken and be free.

May all beings have happiness, and all the causes of happiness flourishing.

Meditate like this... Make prayers of aspiration...

Before dedication - A preceding reflection from the teachings of Lama Zopa Rinpoche:

'All phenomena – including the I, the action of dedicating, the merits that are dedicated, the goal of enlightenment to which they are dedicated, and the sentient beings for whom they are dedicated – are completely empty of existing from their own side. With the continual awareness of this, I now impute labels, and dedicate...'

In the words of the Avatamsaka Sutra:

*To all internal and external worlds
Bodhisattvas have no attachment at all,
Yet do not abandon works beneficial to sentient beings;
The great ones cultivate this kind of knowledge.*

*In all lands in the ten directions
They do not depend or dwell on anything;
They do not grasp things, such as livelihood,
And do not arbitrarily create distinctions.*

*They engage with all sentient beings
In all worlds in the ten directions;
Observing their essential nature,
They practice dedication reaching everywhere.*

May all beings have happiness, and all the causes of happiness flourishing.
May all beings enjoy an abundance of positive conditions,
well being, and peace.

From The Bodhisattva Vow

There is a way of orienting ourselves to the world that many people over time have found to be greatly life-affirming. Based on universal love and compassion, and understanding the source of problems and their resolution, it is the intention to help others as much as possible by awakening and freeing ourselves from suffering, and then bringing all others to that same state. In traditional Buddhist language, this dedication to helping all others with both wisdom and compassion is called 'the Bodhisattva Vow'. Bodhisattva means, literally 'an awakening being'.

There are ceremonies for taking the Bodhisattva vow, but the true vow comes from our own heart. When we have this motivation, it is a breakthrough, no matter how many times it happens. It's the dawning of a new awareness. Finding the Bodhisattva vow in ourselves, re-affirming and strengthening that can give a person much courage and energy for their whole life. It clarifies everything, and helps us to have a feeling for our place in this world.

When we hear the cries of the world, we must be engaged -
Mahayana Buddhism

The term 'Maha-yana' in Mahayana Buddhism means 'Great Vehicle', and this refers to the aim, to work for the benefit of all. Being Buddhist in origin, the Bodhisattva vow includes *the thought of enlightenment*. In this and other religious traditions, the cause of our many problems is seen as ignorance, and the remedy is wisdom, or insight, which taken to its furthest point, is enlightenment. The vow is then taken to cultivate the highest wisdom, and to lead each and every one to that same state. *Quite the expression of love, compassion and understanding of what we all need!*

Two Traditional Verses

In the Zen Tradition, the Mahayana motivation takes the form of the Four Great Vows:

*Beings are numberless, I vow to save them;
Delusions are inexhaustible, I vow to end them;
Dharma gates are limitless, I vow to enter them
The Buddha's way is unsurpassable, I vow to become it*

And in the Tibetan Tradition, a verse for taking refuge and generating the highest motivation, bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment, is recited before many of their diverse practices:

*I take refuge, until I attain enlightenment,
in the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly
By the merit I have accumulated by practicing Generosity and other Virtues,
may I attain Buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings.*

Here, the phrase, Generosity and other Virtues, refers to what are called the Six Perfections. These are the path of the Bodhisattva, as described in Tradition. They are Generosity, Ethics, Patience, Joyful Effort, or Diligence, Meditation, and Wisdom.

This Vow is the vibrant central principle of the Mahayana Path.

Yes, but how much can one person really do for another?

It has been asked many times – how much can one person actually do for another? What is this about someone vowing to do something so significant for another, such as ‘carrying a person to the other shore’, and freeing them from suffering? While it is true that ultimately every person has to understand and to actualize the causes of health and happiness for himself or herself, there is so much that can be done for another. I only have

to think of what others have given me for this thought to become real to me.

We all need support and encouragement; freedom from fear and hunger; we all need to have medicine available, and enough warm clothes. Most of all, we need respect, love and clear teachings, in the form of good human examples, and in some language we can relate to. These are very great things, and the Bodhisattva vow is the intention to give all these things, all needful things, to all beings, our family.

Skillful Means

Once we arrive at the Great Way – the Mahayana , with its strong central motivation to serve all beings, and to liberate all living beings, we will utilize every resource, we will do anything to communicate the Dharma, take any form to meet people's needs, to benefit them, to speak in a way they can understand, and lead them step by step to freedom. Because of the great sufferings and needs that are here, we *must* search until we find the methods that work for us, and that are effective in helping others.

In Buddhism, over generations, a diversity of forms have developed from this very motivation to benefit self and others. These are called *Upaya*, or Skillful Means. Out of compassion, teachers and translators are not attached to any one way of doing things, or saying things. Although the forms may change, as long as we keep to essential principles of wisdom and compassion, then it is Buddhist Dharma. Skillful means are just what are necessary to help and to reach people.

When I think of loneliness, death, suffering, and all that is unpredictable and tragic in this world; the inevitable separation from friends and loved ones, the cruelty and madness, all the absurdity and waste – all of it – this one factor is the only thing I can think of that makes life livable. This one great vow reveals the capacity we have to help each other. It reminds me that there have been in the past, and that there are now, people who are

working to help others, and that we can also take up this aim and this work. That, for me, is the glory of being alive. We can actually do something of real value with our lives.

This intention makes it possible to live with an awareness of all the amazing good and all the terrible things, and to live with resolve, commitment and joy. This is the only thing, really, that gives me the courage to face whatever life may bring. If fear is the feeling of not being capable, then right here is where resourcefulness, blazing true confidence, and solidity are found. This one aim, this one intention, tips the balance, in favor of life.

From A Commentary on An Exhortation to Resolve Upon Bodhi, by Master Hsuan Hua

What is the resolve upon Bodhi? It is a resolve to understand.

The resolve for Bodhi is a resolve to benefit people. By benefiting others, you yourself benefit. By working to lead others to become enlightened, you yourself become enlightened

We have heard people say that resolving the mind is foremost among the essential doors for entering the Path, and that making vows is first among the crucial matters in cultivation.

By making vows, we can save living beings.

Our vows support us. Without vows, people may even say that they cultivate, but will forget at crucial moments, and not remember what they have said. The power of our vows will be like a boat with which we can ferry people across.

By resolving our minds, we can realize the Buddhas' Path.

This is the crux, the important message.

We know that anyone wishing to study the vehicle of the Thus Come Ones, the Buddhadharma, must first make the vows of a Bodhisattva.

Without delay, don't wait to resolve on Bodhi. You certainly must make this resolve and vow to cultivate the Bodhisattva path; then, you can transcend the turning wheel and end birth and death.

A resolve comes from a person's thinking, from his goals, his will, and his intent. There are many different aspects involved...

*We help others, and seek nothing in return,
We teach others, but not so that they will owe us a favor.*

If, in moment after moment, he seeks the path of the Buddhas above; in thought after thought, he transforms living beings below; if he hears that the road to Buddhahood is long and far, yet does not retreat in fear; if he observes that beings are hard to transform, yet does not become weary; if he proceeds as though climbing a ten-thousand-foot mountain, determined to reach the summit or proceeds as though ascending a nine-storied stupa, fixed upon advancing to the top, then his resolve is true.

If, in moment after moment, he seeks the path of the Buddhas above, this aspect of a resolve describes someone who has his mind on what he is doing, and thinks of nothing else. What does he think of? "He seeks the path of the Buddhas above." The path that leads to Buddhahood.

In thought after thought, he transforms living beings below. We must do good deeds if we want to become Buddhas. We can't expect to become a Buddha without expending even the slightest bit of effort. We must perform acts of merit and service. How? By teaching and transforming living beings, enabling them to give up any deviant or false ways they have and return to what is proper and true. If we can thus cause living beings to wake up, then we will be doing good deeds in Buddhism.

The Conclusion of the text:

We now have a basis for our development. We have a human body and live in a favorable country. Our six sense organs are intact and our bodies are healthy. We have complete faith, and fortunately we are without demonic obstacles.

Furthermore, we Sanghans have been able to leave the home-life and to receive the complete precepts. We have found a Way Place and have heard the Buddhadharmā. We have looked reverently upon the Buddha's sharira and we practice repentance; we have met good friends and are replete with superior conditions.

If we fail to make the great resolve today, what are we waiting for? I hope only that the great assembly will sympathize with my simple sincerity and share my earnest intent.

Let us take these vows together. Let us make this resolve together. Whoever has not yet made the resolve should do so now. Whoever has already made the resolve should bolster it. Those who have already bolstered it should continue to advance.

Do not fear difficulty and make a cowardly retreat. Do not consider this matter easy and frivolously waste time. Do not wish for quick results and fail to persevere. Do not become lax and fail in your courage. Do not become dispirited and fail to rouse yourself. Do not let procrastination cause you to delay. Do not let stupidity and dullness keep you from making the resolve. Do not assume that you have shallow roots and are, therefore, unworthy of taking part.

For example, after a tree is planted, the once-shallow roots deepen every day. Similarly, as a knife is sharpened, the blade which was once dull becomes sharp. Because the roots are shallow, would we choose not to

plant the tree and allow it to wither away? That the knife is dull is no reason not to sharpen it and to set it aside as useless.

Moreover, if we feel that cultivation makes us suffer, it is because we do not know that laxity will make us suffer even more. Cultivation entails a brief period of diligent toil, but it yields peace and joy for kalpas without end. One lifetime of laxity and of shirking work results in suffering for many lifetimes to come.

Furthermore, with the Pure Land as our ship, what fear is there that we will retreat? Once we attain the power of patience with the non-existence of beings and phenomena, what difficulty can trouble us? When we know that in past kalpas there were even offenders in the hells who were able to resolve themselves upon Bodhi, how can we human disciples of the Buddha fail to make great vows in this life?

Since time without beginning, we have been muddled and confused. It is useless to remonstrate with ourselves about the past, but we can wake up now, and begin immediately to make amends.

Since we are confused and not yet enlightened, we are certainly to be pitied. But if we know that we should cultivate yet we fail to practice, we are especially pathetic. If we fear the suffering in the hells, we will naturally be vigorous. If we remember the imminence of death, we will not become lazy. Moreover, we must use the Buddhadharma to encourage ourselves, and find good friends to urge us on. For this short time, do not leave them. Rely on them to the end of your life. Then you need not fear retreat.

Do not say that one thought is a small matter. Do not feel that vows are empty and useless. If our resolves are true, then we can realize our goals. When our vows are vast in scope, then our practice will go deep. Empty space is not big, but the ultimate resolve is gigantic. Vajra is not durable, but vow-power is supremely durable.

Great assembly! If indeed you can accept my words, then from now on, let us join in unanimity the retinue of Bodhi and enter a covenant of kinship in a lotus society. We vow to be reborn together in the Pure Land, to see Amitabha Buddha together, to transform living beings together, and to attain Right Enlightenment together.

How do we know that our future perfection of the thirty-two hallmarks and the hundred blessings' adornments does not begin on this day that we make this resolve and set our vows? I hope that the members of the great assembly will urge each other on. What good fortune! How lucky we are!

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 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.

For as long as space endures,
And for as long as living beings remain,
Until then, may I too abide,
To dispel the misery of the world.

- Shantideva

Bodhicitta: The Great Wish for all Beings

The Aspiration for Enlightenment in order to Benefit Others

By Ani Tenzin Palmo

Ven. Tenzin Palmo gave this talk in Tasmania, Australia in July 2000.

According to the Mahayana tradition, there are three scopes or three levels of aspiration on the spiritual path. The first level or scope 1 is the aspiration to practice in order to benefit oneself in this life or in the next life to come. This is actually the general aspiration of most people.

When most people think of engaging in meditation, they do so because they hope that it will make them less stressed out, more peaceful, more centered, more happy and thus, more able to cope with things. In many religions- to the extent of extremes of self-denial- people go to great lengths in their spiritual practice in order to attain this. In medieval times, there was a lot of self-torment you know, flagellation and that sort of thing. And for what purpose? In order to obtain, at the time of death, an eternity in heaven.

So, for many people, deprivation in this lifetime now seems very small in comparison with an eternity of bliss. There is this consideration that one is willing to put in a lot of time and effort into ameliorating our life span here and now or our lifetimes hereafter.

I mean, if one thinks about it, it may be that for most people, the motivation underlying the undertaking of a spiritual path is the realization that they are not happy; that their life is pretty meaningless. They have problems which they hope they can cope with in a better way by engaging in a spiritual quest; that this quest will enable them to be more happy inwardly

by making things much easier, and that their life will take on some meaning.

This is not a bad thing- when we talk about these different levels of aspiration, I am not saying that any of them are wrong. They are all good, and anything that gets us turned inwardly toward change- anything which gets us to do something meaningful in our lives- is a good thing. And of course, if we try to engage on a spiritual path, it can certainly happen that hopefully our lives will become more peaceful, more meaningful, and less stressful. So, I am not saying as I go on with this talk, that this motivation is a wrong one. It's a perfectly valid and excellent motivation if this is what gets people started.

For example in the East, in the Oriental countries, people do virtuous deeds in order to plant the seeds of good karma so that in the future they will be successful, prosperous, and things will go well with few obstacles. So in this lifetime, they try to be generous and kind; they try to save animals and help people. But they do so not only because of the joy in so doing or because they do it with great delight, but also with some eye to the future. This is like investing money into a spiritual bank account: if you invest a lot now, it will come up with very good dividends in the future.

So you are secure, and it's good not to live off your capital. It's better to keep putting in more as you go along, otherwise you might deplete your capital very quickly. And so, there is the eye to that too.

This does benefit everybody- it oils the wheels of society, it encourages people to be generous, virtuous and kind. And this is good- this is good, but of course, it has nothing to do with liberation. This just oils the wheels of samsara; this just oils the wheel of this round of birth and death so that we will at least (hopefully) be reborn in good circumstances and on the whole encounter nice situations. That's what it does, right? It makes samsara that little bit more comfortable. But we are still in the prison.

Once, I had one of those vivid dreams which you remember when you wake up. I dreamt that I was in this huge prison. It was enormous and at the top were all sorts of luxurious penthouse suites where people were going to cocktail parties, lounging around and having a nice time.

Then, there were the intermediary stories in which some people were laughing and joking while others were weeping and moaning. And there were also all the other shades in between, down to the dungeons below in which people were suffering deeply and being tortured. But the fact was that whether they were in the penthouse or whether they were in the dungeons, they were all in prison. And they had no control- they didn't know whether they would be in the penthouse or the dungeon tomorrow. They just didn't know where they were going to be, and that however it might appear to them, they were all enslaved.

So I went around to many people, saying, "We've got to escape from this. We have got to get out." But people said, "I don't know, it's really ok in here- it's quite nice actually." So I said, "But you don't understand: it's nice right now but you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. We have to leave this place- this is a prison."

But then, other people would say, "Well, I'd really like to leave but nobody ever gets out and it would take a lot of trouble and be so difficult, so maybe if I stay here and keep quiet, it will be ok." And I asked many people and everybody I knew had excuses. Somehow, they would like to go but not just now- maybe next year. But eventually, I found two people who said, "Yes we will go if you go." So I said, "OK, let's go".

Anyway, that comes next. The fact is that we are essentially all in prison, but we don't know it. We don't know what's going to happen to us. Today, we are well off and have everything we need: our family is together and everything is going on nice and fine but then tomorrow, who knows? You know, the stock market crashes, somebody we love very much gets into a horrible accident, or we discover we have some dreadful and incurable

disease.... We don't know. Who knows? We are not secure. We think that because we are young and healthy, we will live forever, but people die in accidents all the time. And it's that insecurity-the sense that we can never actually settle down and be happy in samsara- which gives rise to the next motivation.

Samsara means this round of birth and death and is the opposite of nirvana which is the escape from birth and death; samsara means this ceaseless coming into being and dying and coming back into being and dying and coming back again and being constantly recycled. It is ecologically very sound but spiritually very tiring to be constantly recycled.

We don't know what is going to happen to us and however satisfactory it may look on the outside, it is not at all satisfactory inside. At best, there is always the fly in the ointment, or the ointment turns out to be poison. This round of birth and death is not satisfactory and is never going to be so. No matter how hard we try to make this an absolute Garden of Eden, it will never be a Garden of Eden.

When one really understands this; when one really feels deep inside oneself how utterly unsatisfactory this state of existence is, one then thinks "Stop the wheel, I want to get off! I don't want this anymore. I want to leave this whole prison-house".

When the aspiration to leave the prison house comes, it brings a turning away from even trying to be comfortable in samsara. It is a very different level of aspiration. You say, "However blissful the heavens may be, however pleasant or unpleasant my life on earth is, it is still very insecure- it can never give continuous satisfaction. I want to go beyond this. By its very nature, this condition is unsatisfactory. How can I get out?"

So in my dream in the prison, I got into a boat- there was a stream running through the prison and I got on a boat with my two companions. There were prison guards on the banks but nobody tried to stop us.

Nobody keeps us in samsara; nobody forces us to keep holding on. We are not chained to the wheel of birth and death, but we are clinging to it. We are clinging to it through our attachment and our desire. We can't let go- we can't let go of our attachments to people, to our self-image and to ourselves. That's what keeps us bound- nothing external keeps us bound.

And so, these prison guards on the bank did nothing- they didn't care. So we were on this boat and we went through the prison and came out on the other side. There was a road running parallel to this huge prison which had its windows lighted, and we were running on this road. And as we were running, I looked into the windows and saw that some people were laughing and having parties; others were very busy and were working very hard (they were cooking or typing or banging metals- they were doing all sorts of things). Some people were in total despair they were weeping and crying. They were all different; each window was a different vignette of human existence. But the prison was endless.

Now, this motivation to leave samsara; this motivation to leave the prison and attain what is called nirvana, is the second scope of aspiration to attain liberation and freedom from this round of birth and death. It's the aspiration to attain the unconditioned and remain there.

And this is a quantum motivation- you are saying that nowhere in samsara is there ever-lasting pleasure and this lets you get out altogether; you turn away from attachment and as I said, what keeps us bound to the wheel is our attachment.

When the Buddha put his first discourse to his five disciples after his enlightenment, he talked of the Four Noble Truths. First is the truth of suffering, unsatisfactoriness, or dukkha. Next was the truth of the cause of man's dukkha. The third was the truth of the cessation of dukkha, and the fourth, the truth of the path leading to the cessation of dukkha.

He said that existence by its very nature was unsatisfactory. What is the cause of this dissatisfaction? The cause of this dissatisfaction is our basic ignorance. And arising from that ignorance are delusions of mind. That's what causes a lot of problems. That's what causes fear, that's what causes grief.

When I go around the world, I meet so many diverse audiences in America, in Europe, in Asia and in Australia, but at some point, there are two main questions which people ask. The first is, "How do I find a spiritual master?" The second one is "How do I rid myself of anger?" Well, nobody ever asks how to rid oneself of attachment!

People want to be rid of anger because anger is an unpleasant emotion and they don't like it- it makes them feel bad. They know it's not good and so, they want to know how they can eradicate it from their lives. And this is fine, but it is not anger which keeps us clinging to the wheel- it's attachment, greed, and desire. But nobody wants to get rid of these. Provided our greed is satisfied at some point, we like it. We say, "Oh, if I can't love anything anymore, if I weren't attached to anything, it would be so dull. Life would be so boring; it would be so cold." Honestly don't we think like that? Unattached? Yuck!

But non-attachment doesn't mean that one is cold or that life gets very boring and that we don't have any more pleasure. It doesn't mean that. What it means is that this clinging aspect of life which we all have to an extent, and which we think of as being helpful and our natural right, is where all our fear and grief oozes from. It is very deep but it looks very nice on the surface; it looks like it gives us happiness and pleasure in the world. We do not understand how incredibly insidious it is.

When I was in my cave, there was a kind of patio, a sort of flat area of hard earth outside, and there were patches of pretty little purple flowers with lots of green leaves spread over the patio. At one time, I decided I wanted to put some large stones there since it got very muddy when it was wet. I

had to pull out these plants, these weeds, these pretty little flowers. Well, the roots of those tiny little flowers were unbelievable- just out of curiosity, I followed their tap roots and they went on and on and on all over the place, deeper, deeper and deeper.

And I thought, "What a perfect example of the poisons of the mind," because on the surface the weeds look very pretty, but underneath the tap roots are so deep that if you only pull out the top part they grow all over again within the next few days. And you see, one of the biggest mistakes we could possibly have is to confuse this attached, clinging and grasping mind for love. It is not love. It is self-love.

When I was nineteen and leaving for India, I said to my mother, "I am going to India." People travel everywhere now, but in those days people did not travel like this. So I said to her "Oh, by the way I am going to India" and she said "Oh! Yes? And when are you leaving?" That's what she said: "When are you leaving?" She said that not because she didn't love me but because she did love me. And because she loved me, she was happy for me that I did what I needed to do and not what she wanted me to do for her.

That's love. Love means really caring for the other person, and allowing them to be themselves. Love isn't, "What can you do for me? I love you therefore you must make me happy." It's like that with everything. It's the attached mind which causes grief.

You see, life is flowing; life is impermanent. Everything is changing and moving and if we try to hold on tightly to things, then not only do we lose them, but we also suffer from the fear of loss. We suffer from grief when we lose these objects of attachment and in the meantime, we can't enjoy life because we are so afraid of loss; we are so jealous that someone else is going to take them away. So, we are always anxious and in that anxiety we cannot enjoy the moment. Do you understand?

It's not the thing in itself that is the problem- objects are innocent. It's our clinging, grasping mind which is the problem. It's our mind, which always holds on and wants to keep things- this moment - just as it is and not allow it to flow, which is the problem. But we cannot resist this flow. If we dam up a river like that, we just end up with stagnant, stale and evil-smelling waters. We have to allow the water to flow.

There is a story about a king in India. He was a very devout king and had a guru who was a Brahmin (a priest). This Brahmin was an ascetic; all he owned and possessed was an alms bowl, a gourd. Once, when the guru was teaching the king outside in the garden under a tree, a servant came running and said, "Oh, Your Majesty, Maharaja, come quickly, the whole palace is in flames, the whole palace is burning up." And the king said, "Don't trouble me. I am receiving teachings from my guru. You go and take care of the palace." Just then, the guru jumped up and said, "Wait! I left my gourd in the palace!"

So that's the point: whether you possess your possessions or whether your possessions possess you. It's not a matter of what we own, how much we own or how little we own, but whether we grasp it or whether we can let it go.

The Buddha said that grief and fear sprang forth from attachment. And so, if we can learn how to live as much as possible with an ungrasping mind, he who is free from attachment will not experience grief or fear.

Attachment is this grasping mind- it is not a loving mind. A loving mind is a mind which is unconditioned and which just loves. And that mind is a very free mind. A mind with loving kindness is a mind which is very open, spacious and free. The grasping mind is very closed and tight and frightened- it's very rigid: "I want this and I have got to have this and if I don't have this I will be miserable," and "Now that I have this, I am going to keep it and nobody else is going to have it."

Whether it's things or people, that possessive jealous mind is a source of great pain. It's a source of pain to the one who possesses it and who is under its influence. And it is a very un-liberated mind. It is a mind which is tightly roped in prison. The more we learn how to love, the more we learn how to have an open spacious mind which does not discriminate.

If we have an open, spacious mind, changes don't matter: if we have lots of beautiful things and everything goes well and everything is how we'd like it to be, then that is very nice and we appreciate that. But if everything goes wrong and everything is bad and very difficult, we can also appreciate that, because we learn so many lessons from our difficulties. Therefore, whatever happens, we can flow with it. We can learn from it and appreciate that.

That mind is a very brave and fearless mind. A mind which is grasping is a fearful mind; it thinks it can find security in people and things, but there is no security in people or in things. And in its depths, it knows that this is true and therefore, it is more frightened and grasps further and more tightly. Therefore, there is grief. There is grief because of the fear; there is grief that we will lose these, but we all lose things and people in the end.

People die or they leave us. We are not here forever, any of us. So that kind of mind is a very fearful mind; however confident it might appear, it is very frightened inside. It is a very closed, rigid mind which brings grief and pain.

A mind which is open and which allows things to be- which holds lightly to things and allows them to flow, to come into being and leave again- is a happy and peaceful mind. Do you understand?

So, the idea of non attachment as being something alien, uncomfortable and cold is completely wrong. It's part of our delusion as human beings that we think attachment will bring us happiness, because attachment does not bring us happiness. And this confusion of attachment and love is a terrible one. So, when we understand this very, very deeply, we then have

the aspiration to get out- to really, totally and absolutely go down to the very tap roots and be free from attachment.

This second level is to turn away from samsara. It is usually the time when people join the order and become monks and nuns. They turn away from samsara and from family life; they turn away from possessions and put all their energy and time into trying to liberate their mind, to attain what is called nirvana. Nirvana means that we are now completely free and totally liberated so that there is not even the smallest trace of ignorance, attachment or anger left in our mind stream; our mind streams are completely pure.

Back to the dream of the prison: I was running and running along a course parallel to the prison. And I thought, "Oh, this prison is endless and there is still more running along the outside and it is never going to end. This is a waste of time. Let's go back to the prison again. At least, in the prison, I can just sit and be fairly comfortable. I've been running, running and running and I'm really tired. It's just a waste of time. I am going back into the prison again."

But then I thought, "Ah, but wait! There are these two other people who are with me. They only keep going because I am running. If I stop and go back into the prison, they will go back into the prison too. So I cannot stop. I have to keep running for their sake." And as soon as I thought that, the prison ended and I saw many roads going in different ways. And there were these very nice suburban houses with greenery and trees outside- it was a perfect suburb. I went up to the first house I came across and knocked on the door. Dreams are just dreams and they are so silly

Anyway, this pleasant looking middle aged lady answered the door and said, "Oh! I can see from your clothes and from your looks that you have come from *that* place. Not many people ever get away from that place. But don't worry: now that you are here, you are safe."

She also said, "But now that you are safe, you must also help others to get out." And I said, "But I have talked to the people from the prison and they didn't want to come with me. Only these two people wanted to come with me; nobody else wanted to come. I mean, of course I would like to help people, but I am powerless. I can't do anything."

And she said, "No, on your own, of course, you cannot do much, but you are not alone. Those in authority will help you. With their power and their authority you can help others to get out."

The point is that we are in a burning house; we are in a house which is on fire. We escape but then, what about the people left in the burning house?

What about our parents and our children and our partners and our family and our friends? They are all burning. Could we really leave a burning house with people inside and say "Oh, at least I am out of that by myself. The people inside will have to try to get out themselves." How could we do that? People rush back into their burning houses just to save their cattle and their dog. What more to speak of their children or their spouses, or their parents?

When we understand the nature of the mind, we understand that we are connected to all beings and so, there is no question of just liberating oneself.

If we consider this round of birth and death as a horrible, smelly swamp in which we are all drowning, then what we are trying to do is get on to firm dry land. But now having pulled ourselves out of the swamp, are we then going to say to everyone else- to all our loved ones and the rest of humanity who are drowning- "Well, too bad.... You are drowning but I am ok, and I am on dry land," and turn our back on them and leave them? How could it be?

Surely the reason for one being on dry land is that one can extend one's hand and help pull out the others. And when that feeling actually arises in the mind, that is the beginning of what is called the bodhisattva path.

Recently, I was in Singapore and there was an International Millennium Buddhist Conference or something. There were speakers from all over the world and one of them was an English monk who was from the Theravadin school and who had been trained in Thailand. And we were on a panel together with a Sri Lankan monk discussing monasticism. During the question section, somebody asked about liberation. And this English monk said that only monks and nuns could be liberated.

So I looked at this Sri Lankan monk but as he clearly wasn't going to give me any support, I sort of took the mike and said, "I think we should give the Mahayana view here especially since there are 850 Mahayana Chinese sitting here and who are saying "AHHHH."

It turned out actually that this monk was very displeased with me- he wrote me a long letter refuting my views. But it was actually because we misunderstood each other- I think we were talking about enlightenment and he meant enlightenment in terms of arhatship in nirvana, and it is very possible that only a monk, or someone without any family ties, would be able to attain this. He sent lots of text to prove his point. This might be true so I wrote back to him saying I was sorry it was a misunderstanding, and that I was not talking about arhatship.

I was talking about enlightenment in relation to the Bodhisattva path, and on the bodhisattva path, it is irrelevant whether you are married or whether you are a monk or nun- some of the most enlightened masters I've ever met are married.

I said that we all possessed Buddha nature inherently, and that it was up to us to discover it. Whether we were nuns, monks or lay people was not the point. The point was whether we could uncover our own original nature.

What I am trying to say is that this debate is still active- whether we should get personal liberation for ourselves (which was his view), or whether, as on the bodhisattva path, we are striving for enlightenment for the sake of others.

I'll put this as a practical example. Once, I was going to do some prayers, some protection pujas. It was late at night and I said "Oh, I am too tired, I won't bother, I don't want to do this now." And then suddenly, it came to my mind that "AH but you know, you are not doing it for your own sake. You are doing this as a representative and as a substitute for all the beings in the universe who don't know how to do this. You are their representative, and therefore, it's irrelevant how you feel."

And when I thought that- and it came very strongly at that moment- I didn't feel tired anymore. Because it wasn't whether I felt like doing it or not; it was like one was acting on the behalf of all the beings in the world who didn't know how to do this.

This is what the bodhisattva path is about: we are not traveling it for our own sake- we are treading it on behalf of all those other beings who don't know how to do this, and we are taking all beings with us with every step of the way.

In tantric visualizations, we are usually surrounded by other beings. And what is happening to us is happening to them, as we are their representatives. So, we are not just lifting ourselves up: we are lifting all beings up simultaneously.

Until samsara ceases, throughout time, we are dedicated to religious goals so that we could attain some kind of reward in the end. However the term "heaven" is worded, whether spoken about or not spoken about, it would imply that in the end our own problems would once and forever be resolved. But in the Mahayana ideal, the motivation is to perfect ourselves solely so that we may become servants of others throughout eternity.

Imagine that and think: if there were not great masters now in this world, what would we do? There would be no hope.

I once had a dream in which I was escaping from this very frightening totalitarian state- something like a communist state. I was about to cross over the border to a very safe and beautiful country when I thought, "How is it that I am able to escape? From my side, I have really done nothing, so what is it that is allowing me to escape like this?"

And as I looked at the customs point at the barrier, there was this man standing and looking at me. And I thought as he looked at me, "It's him! What is he doing here? It's because of him that I am free."

Then I thought, "He doesn't even belong to this horrible country. He is only here to help people like me get out. Maybe he belongs to this beautiful free country, but he doesn't have to live in this awful country- he only does so because, otherwise, people like me could never get out."

When I woke up I recollected that the man in the dream was my lama Khamtrul Rinpoche- he was wearing lay-clothes but it was certainly him. I was so overwhelmed by the dream, by the understanding of his incredible kindness and compassion and what he had to suffer which he didn't need to at all. He just suffered out of compassion for the people like me who wouldn't manage without him. So I woke up crying and crying.

That is what a higher bodhisattva is. They don't need to be in this world- they could be grooving it out in some wonderful Buddha Pure Land, but yet they come back here. They come back only because of this pure unconditional compassion in order to help us. And this is what we aspire to ... to become like that. Because, otherwise, what hope is there for the world?

So the bodhisattva makes the aspiration to attain enlightenment and the fullness of wisdom and compassion not for one's own benefit, but in order to really be of eternal benefit to others.

It's a very, very profound aspiration. It is not to enjoy the bliss of paradise, heaven or any kind of pure land, but to come back- again and again and again and in whatever form which will benefit others- whenever there is a need.

Bodhichitta means to generate the great compassion, and great compassion is all encompassing- it extends to all beings everywhere. This unbearable compassion which cannot for one moment rest in idle bliss and pleasure but is constantly there for the sake of others because it understands the interconnection of all beings. We are all interconnected.

Great compassion may all sound a bit heavy, but if we look at the Bodhisattva of Compassion (in Sanskrit, Avalokiteshvara, in Chinese, Guan Yin), he is smiling. The bodhisattvas are smiling; the bodhisattvas are not weeping, nor are they in anguish.

When we meet and great teachers from other traditions, one of the first things that strikes us- apart from their inner tranquillity and their calmness is their radiance and happiness. When we are in the presence of great beings from whatever tradition, we feel peaceful and happy.

So, although the task of liberating all beings sounds very heavy and onerous, we are able to see the situation as it truly is because of the possession of wisdom along with compassion- and it's an inherently empty spacious nature so it is not heavy. Also, since we perceive at a very deep level that this is all just a dream which we need to awake from, the bodhisattva smiles.

What is Bodhicitta, by Kangyur Rinpoche

Bodhichitta, the mind of enlightenment, is the greatest, most precious thing in the whole of samsara and nirvana. It is the supreme and essential element that brings about perfect enlightenment, the fruit of the path. This sublime disposition of mind is obtained through repeated training in the four boundless attitudes, and when disciples have engendered it, in aspiration and in action, they must go on to school themselves correctly in its attendant precepts.

Indeed, it is by their keen enthusiasm, as firm as the earth, and their sublime nobility of heart, as excellent as gold, that their bodhichitta will strengthen and grow, and as the “miraculous chariot” progresses higher and higher on the path, the improper desire for individual peace and bliss will wither away, and the two goals will be perfectly achieved.

If the supreme thought of bodhichitta arises in the minds of even the most abject of creatures, bound in samsara by their defilements and suffering (the dreadful consequences of evil deeds), as though in the dungeons of a terrible king- such people undergo a complete transformation of identity. They are ennobled with the title of “children of the Conqueror” and raised to an entirely new status. The powers of light rejoice and place their confidence in such people, praising them and making them offerings. Gods and humankind, the lords among the beings of the six classes, will pay them homage and shower them with gifts and eulogy.

The nature of the mind is primordially immaculate, and yet it is veiled by ignorance and defilement whereby samsaric action is engendered. Thus the virtue of ordinary beings is feeble and inconstant; it is like lightning that flashes briefly between the clouds in a dark black sky lit by neither sun nor moon.

Such virtue, practiced fitfully, produces mere temporary merit and nothing more. After yielding its result, happiness in the divine or human realms, it

is exhausted like the plantain, the castor-oil plant, or the bamboo cane, which bear their fruit and wither.

By contrast, the miraculous tree of virtue combined with bodhichitta is like a seed planted in fertile, well-farmed land. It brings forth a copious and proliferating harvest: the abundant happiness of the upper realms of samsara, which constantly increases until the peace of great enlightenment is attained.

Samsara is an ocean fed by the rivers of all-pervading suffering in the making. It is surrounded by the fiery abysses of karma and defilement and is turbulent with the surging waves of wrong thinking. It is fraught with danger for the fragile boat sailing to the haven of liberation, *but beings fail to recognize samsara for what it is*. They take delight in it and cling to it as if it were their home. Thus they deny themselves the chance of liberation.

*To don the armor of a powerful and courageous determination to bring such beings out of samsara: this is the sole meaning of supreme bodhichitta.

As Shantideva says in his Bodhicharyavatara:

*Those who wish to crush the many sorrows of existence,
Who wish to quell the pain of living beings,
Who wish them to experience of a myriad joys
Should never turn away from bodhichitta.*

(I, 8)

Beings of great scope do not consult their own interest in the way that those of small or middle scope do. They long to free limitless beings from their sorrows in just the same way that a hungry and thirsty man craves food and drink. This is the measure of their great compassion.

Through compassion they focus on the benefit of others, and through wisdom they focus on complete enlightenment.

This is the meaning of bodhichitta.

{From book one of his commentary on The Treasury of Precious Qualities
By Jigme Lingpa, pages 247 and 248}

The Mahayana Motivation is Like Aiming to Become a Doctor

We can go to the doctor, to a clinic or hospital for any of a number of reasons. If it's some small, temporary problem, we would go to be treated for that. If it is something more serious, or chronic, we could go for example for an operation, or to a treatment facility for an extended period of time, until we were fully cured.

We could also go to a doctor, to or healer, or to a teaching hospital with the aim of becoming a doctor. Following the footsteps of those who cared for us, and being inspired by them, we can determine to support them, and to learn from them how to help others in the same way.

This has its parallel in the different reasons why a person would approach Buddhist study and practice. We can be seeking relief from some temporary problem or suffering of body or mind. This can be likened to taking refuge, practicing the precepts and meditation. Its purpose is to relieve the sufferings we experience, and to restore peace and harmony in our lives.

We can also approach Buddhist practice with an aim to become free from all suffering and its causes. This is a different level of motivation that may arise from the first. Not content with suffering repeatedly, time and again, across lifetimes, once we hear that liberation is possible, and have some faith that freedom from all suffering could be attained, we commit ourselves to that, out of far reaching compassion for ourselves. We renounce samsara, and practice the unified path of ethics, meditation, and wisdom to accomplish our aims.

As it is with someone receiving treatment for an extended period of time, this level of concern and commitment is deeper, it goes much further, and is more focussed. It becomes our priority, excluding other matters for as long as needed.

We can also approach Buddhism to accomplish this path and help others in the same way. This is the Mahayana motivation. We see the necessity of becoming a capable and loving person in the world. What distinguishes the Buddha and all those with realization in any tradition is that they have the living knowledge of how to become free from suffering and to realize true health, peace and fulfillment.

We can see the need for everyone to have this knowledge early on in our study, or after some time. Getting out of our own struggles to some extent allows us to see and feel and understand what others are going through. Naturally the strong motivation arises to help them in the best ways we can. I believe this is what happens with all noble ones. Great compassion is born from their being able to recognize the confusion and sufferings others experience, and from their knowing the way out.

It's said that each level of motivation actually contains the others. So, for example, seeking to be relieved of some temporary difficulty actually includes in it the wish to be liberated from struggle and suffering forever, even if we don't see it for some time. Our kind motivation towards ourselves is naturally onward leading;

And the wish to be permanently free from the miseries of samsara naturally includes within it the aim to become a fully capable being, living in this world, and caring for others with wisdom and compassion. We may not know all that is contained in this motivation to become liberated until we progress on the path, or we may glimpse it and forget it, but it is there.

It can be compared to the flower and the fruit that is contained within a seed. With the right conditions and cultivation, after some time, all that is held within becomes tangibly known.

In the same way, each motivation we can bring to Buddhist study and practice contains the previous ones. To be fully effective in helping others, for example, we need to be free from suffering ourselves, and to do that, we

need cooperative conditions, each day's health and strength and ability. We can find they are mutually inclusive.

A person aiming to be a doctor, or to accomplish a spiritual path in order to help others in the best ways will still have to care for themselves. They may have times of illness, a cold, or problems sleeping, for example, and certainly they will have their own afflictive emotions and ignorance to overcome, but as much as they do this, patiently, and gradually, they fulfill their purpose by that much.

Of course, out of great love and compassion having the aim to become a doctor, or a person with enlightened understanding living in this world goes far beyond just taking care of our own difficult conditions or accomplishing our own personal freedom. We would need to understand all of humanity and the hardships and sufferings in other realms as well. This would of course include many challenges and difficulties we have not personally known, but as we see the universal characteristics of suffering and the path to freedom from suffering, this is what we then encourage others to understand, and to practice, and to realize.

It is the most worthy aim to want to accomplish the path in order to help all others do the same. We could say it is a kind of awakening. It broadens our sense of responsibility and brings great dedicated energy and inspiration, compared to previous levels of motivation.

I think of a kind parent, or a teacher, or someone learning to become a doctor, waking early, and going to work, and diligently studying, to offer to their family and students the fruit of their labor and meditations. There is joy in that unlike any other.

The Mahayana path is like this.

The Vehicle of Universal Enlightenment, by Bhikkhu Bodhi

Lecture 9: The Perfection of Determination (adhiṭṭhāna-pāramī) Con'd

Over the last few weeks, I have been discussing the perfection of determination, the adhiṭṭhāna pāramī. The main responsibility as Buddhist practitioner is the transformation of the mind. Transformation of the mind depends on the will or volition, which is the active force of the mind. It is volition that shapes and transforms all other aspects of the mind.

Determination is the act or process by which one directs the will to this work of inner transformation. It is an act of volition by which one firmly decides to do what is difficult to accomplish and applies oneself to fulfilling this decision.

Determination is a quality upon which the Buddha himself always placed emphasis because he recognized the great potential in determination for transforming the mind. To explore the role of determination of Buddha's path, I have been using Master Yinshun's scheme of the five vehicles which I have reduced to three for ease of explanation: these are

1. first, the vehicle of the higher human ethical norm;

(the happiness of this life, and future lives, or as he expresses it, the happiness visible in this present life, and the way to a fortunate rebirth)

2. second, the vehicle of personal liberation; and

3. third, the vehicle of universal enlightenment.

In the last talk, I spoke about the specific determinations of those who follow the vehicle of the human ethical norm and the vehicle of personal liberation. For those who follow the vehicle of the higher human ethical

norm, they make the determination to consistently uphold moral conduct and to practice other important human virtues with the aim of living a worthy life as a human being and of achieving a higher rebirth.

For those in the vehicle of personal liberation, the determinations are governed by the structure of the Four Noble Truths. They set out to fully understand the nature of the body and mind, and thereby to transcend suffering. They are determined to eradicate the defilements, particularly ignorance and craving, the cause of suffering. They determine to realize and to attain the highest happiness and peace, Nibbāna. They determine to cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path, the way to complete liberation from suffering. Those are the four determinations in the vehicle of personal liberation which I explained in greater details in the previous talks.

The Vehicle of Universal Enlightenment

The Vehicle of Universal Enlightenment is the path of practice aimed at the supreme enlightenment of Buddhahood. Those who follow the path of universal enlightenment with strong determination are known as bodhisattvas. **Bodhisattvas are thus those who make the aspiration of Buddhahood the central and governing force of their spiritual life.*

This path grows out of the vehicle of personal liberation, and it presupposes and comprises all the doctrines and practices of that vehicle. However, it has a different emphasis and scope. These differences stem from its aim, that is, from the motivation that underlies the practice.

For the bodhisattva, the aim is not one's own personal liberation from suffering but to acquire the ability to lead countless other beings to liberation from bondage and suffering. The aim is to achieve the skills needed to lead countless others to the ultimate bliss, freedom and peace of Nibbāna. The only person who can perform this function fully and perfectly is a fully enlightened Buddha.

The Buddha's enlightenment thus has a universal, even a cosmic significance. He is not merely a liberated sage, but a world teacher. He attains enlightenment not for his own sake but for the purpose of opening the doors to liberation for the whole world. He arises in the world to rediscover the path to deliverance from suffering and to share that path with as many beings as possible in the world. He establishes the Dharma of liberation in the world. He teaches the path to liberation in extensive detail and guides countless others to ultimate freedom. {*Namo!*}

To accomplish this, a Buddha must understand the Dharma, the truth, the principles of things in their entirety, in all of their details and implications. He must understand the minds of sentient beings in their detailed differences and complexity, and must know how to guide many different people with different aptitudes and capacities for understanding, in accordance with their own capacity.

Thus a Buddha's enlightenment has a vaster range than the enlightenment of those who attain personal liberation by following his teaching. It requires a far more extensive knowledge and has a more far-reaching significance, even a cosmic or universal significance. Thus the career of a bodhisattva, a career which culminates in Buddhahood, also has a vast universal significance of a truly cosmic scope.

According to Buddha's teaching, those who aspire to enlightenment in any mode through any vehicles must cultivate wholesome virtuous practices over many lifetimes, building up their spiritual potential little by little. But the requirements for bodhisattva, those who aspire to the supreme enlightenment of Buddhahood are especially vast, awesome and demanding.

To attain supreme enlightenment requires an inconceivable expanse of time, even millions of kappas (or kalpa - cosmic aeons) spent in perfecting all the factors that culminate in Buddhahood.

Sometimes in the text, to illustrate the bodhisattva's career, the simile of the ocean is given. Consider a man standing by the ocean watching wave after wave beat against the shore. Each wave can be considered to be a cosmic kalpa. The ocean consists of an inconceivable, unimaginable number of waves, each one arising, beating against the shore, and receding. In the same way a bodhisattva pursuing the goal of Buddhahood, every kalpa is just like one wave in the ocean. It's through millions of these kalpas that the bodhisattva must work in perfecting the pāramitās.

There is a beautiful verse in the very beginning of Samantapasadika, Acharya Buddhagosa's commentary on the Vinaya Piṭaka:

*He who for immeasurable millions of cosmic aeons,
Passed his time undergoing extremely difficult practices,
Undergoing hardship for the welfare of the world,
I pay homage to that great compassionate one.*

This verse also underscores the motivation behind the bodhisattva's practice of this very difficult course.

The motivation is this great compassion (mahākaruṇā). This great compassion is the inability to endure the suffering of other sentient beings. It is the quality by which one is so moved by the sufferings of others that one is ready to postpone one's own attainment of one's final liberation until one can act most effectively to remove the sufferings of others and promote their ultimate welfare and happiness. Through great compassion the bodhisattva wishes to rescue his or her fellow beings from the ocean of saṃsāric suffering, even if it means undergoing unimaginable hardships and sufferings over inconceivable periods of time.

For a person to enter upon the vehicle of universal enlightenment, to become a true bodhisattva aiming at the ultimate enlightenment, compassion alone is not enough. There must also be the clear recognition that it is only a fully enlightened Buddha who can actually perform the work of liberating beings from suffering, liberating

them finally and completely. It is great compassion coupled with this recognition of the unique function of a Buddha that gives rise to the bodhicitta, the firm, fixed determination to attain Buddhahood for the purpose of benefitting and liberating countless sentient beings.

Because bodhisattvas must pursue their path for such long period in the face of so many obstacles, determination plays an extremely vital role in their vehicle, more so than it does for those who follow the other vehicles.

A bodhisattva must be determined to dwell within saṃsāra for countless aeons undergoing inconceivable hardship without seeking private emancipation into Nibbāna. At the same time they must not delight in the pleasures of mundane life. They must be firm in their attitude of renunciation, in their resolve to cultivate all the factors leading to enlightenment and to cultivate them to the highest degree possible in the fullest measure.

Thus, they walk on a 'razor's edge' - on the one hand they must depart from the mundane life of worldly enjoyment, on the other they must also refrain from attaining Nibbāna quickly before they have perfected all of the requisites of Buddhahood. What enables the bodhisattvas to walk on the razor's edge is their determination. The bodhisattvas' determination comes to expression in the form of vows.

Vows are formulated determinations to be kept ever present in the forefront of the mind, to be constantly renewed and to be brought to ever higher, deeper and vaster degrees of fulfillment.

The classical Mahāyāna tradition which has given very extensive attention to the bodhisattva path has many different formulations of the bodhisattva vows.

The most popular in far eastern Buddhism is what's called *The Four Great Vows*:

Sentient beings are innumerable, I vow to rescue them all;

The defilements are inexhaustible, I vow to destroy all of them, from their very root;

The gates of the Dharma are immeasurable, I vow to enter them;

Buddhahood is supreme, I vow to attain it.

The First Great Vow: *Sentient beings are innumerable, I vow to rescue them all*

As mentioned above, the Bodhisattva career is born from great compassion, from the strong, overpowering wish to rescue other beings from sufferings, and to confer on them the highest bliss and peace. The love and compassion of bodhisattvas are such that they are ready to subordinate their own liberation to the desire to liberate others. They consider their own attainment of {the twofold-purpose of} enlightenment to be primarily a means of liberating countless others.

During their long preparation for Buddhahood, they seek to the best of their ability to introduce others to the Dhamma, and guide them along the Path. They work to propagate and support the Dharma and thereby help others to gain entrance into the Dhamma and make progress in the practice of the Path.

From their great compassion, they are ready to postpone their own attainment of final liberation in order to cultivate all the factors of Buddhahood. This will then enable them to attain the final goal as a Buddha and to exercise the supreme functions of compassion to realize and proclaim the Dharma in all of its fullness and guide countless beings out of saṃsāra to the ultimate bliss of nirvana.

Although the bodhisattva makes the vows to liberate countless beings, the only one who can do this effectively is a Buddha. Thus the bodhisattva

vows to attain Buddhahood for the sake of rescuing and liberating countless beings.

The Second Great Vow: *The defilements are inexhaustible, I vow to destroy all of them, from their very root*

Even though bodhisattvas do not realize the final goal until all their qualities are mature enough to attain Buddhahood, this does not mean that they live indulgently. They recognize the great danger in the mental defilements and the benefits in overcoming them. They must work constantly and diligently to subdue and eliminate the defilements. They train in taming and mastering the mind till they are able to enter all the meditative attainments, the jhānas and samādhi.

They also vow to help others to subdue and eliminate their own defilements. They do this in the only way possible by teaching others the Dhamma and guiding them in the practice of the path.

The bodhisattvas must eliminate not only the defilements of greed, hatred and delusion, pride, arrogance, etc, but also the very subtle obstructions that prevent them from gaining the complete knowledge of all phenomena. To gain the vast knowledge that is the unique possession of a fully enlightened Buddha, they must eliminate even these very subtle mental obstructions.

The Third Great Vow: *The gates of the Dharma are immeasurable, I vow to enter them.*

To win Buddhahood, a bodhisattva must bring to fulfillment all the practices that culminate in supreme enlightenment. These are the 37 bodhipakkhiya dhammas or 37 aids to enlightenment, such as the four foundations of mindfulness, the four right efforts, the five spiritual faculties, seven factors of enlightenment, and the Noble Eightfold Path.

They must fulfill the 10 pāramīs in three levels according to the Theravāda tradition, the ordinary level, the medium and the ultimate levels, making a total of 30 pāramīs. They have to master the various meditative states, the jhānas and samādhi, master them and know them inside and out, backward and forward.

They must practice the four great Brahmavihāra, the divine abodes, great loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity. The bodhisattva must fulfill all the practices of the disciple and fulfill them to the ultimate degree. To fulfill the practice of the pāramitās, they must be ready to sacrifice their own bodily organs, their bodies, even their lives over countless aeons to bring all these qualities to completion.

Since these practices extend over countless aeons, strong determination is needed to persist in the practice. Hence they make the vow,

The gates of the Dharma are immeasurable, I vow to enter them.

This means that one vows to bring all the practices of Buddha's path to fulfillment in the highest degree possible in the most extensive detail.

The Fourth Great Vow: *Buddhahood is supreme, I vow to attain it.*

The guiding ideal of the bodhisattva is always the attainment of Buddhahood. For those on the vehicle of personal liberation, the Buddha is essentially a teacher, the supreme guide along the path, but for the bodhisattvas, the Buddha is not only the guide along the path, but also the goal of the path itself. The Buddha is both the guide and the goal of the path for the bodhisattva. Thus bodhisattvas always keep the figure of the Buddha before their inner eyes. They do so by venerating the Buddha, praising the qualities of the Buddha, meditating on the bodily form, and reflecting on the majesty of the Buddha's qualities.

The qualities of the Buddha are innumerable and inconceivable, and can be briefly summarized as threefold:

First, there is immaculate purity of the Buddha which comes with the eradication of all defilements along with the subtle residues of the defilements;

Second is perfect wisdom by which they comprehend all phenomena both in depth and extension;

and third is great compassion by which they work ceaselessly for the good of all.

By repeatedly reflecting on the greatness of the Buddha's qualities, bodhisattvas must make their vow ever stronger and more powerful until it becomes invincible, firm and unwavering. They make the vow that however long it may take, whatever the difficulties,

I vow to attain supreme Buddhahood for the welfare of the world, of all beings.

By way of conclusion, I want to point out something that I discovered that is interesting. The Four Bodhisattva Vows as they are expressed in the Mahāyāna tradition are actually a kind of reinterpretation or an extension of the four determinations that define the disciple in the vehicle of personal liberation in early Buddhism.

First, in the vehicle of personal liberation is the determination to fully understand the First Noble Truth, and thereby overcome all suffering. This becomes reinterpreted or expressed as *the vow to rescue countless sentient beings from suffering*.

Second, the determination based on the Second Noble Truth is the determination to eradicate the defilements, ignorance and craving, taken to be the causes of suffering. This is retained in the bodhisattva vow to

eradicate all the defilements no matter how inexhaustible they may be. This also is reinterpreted to some extent to mean *the vow to help others eradicate their own defilements*.

Third, the determination to realize Nibbāna, the cessation of suffering is reinterpreted and expressed in the bodhisattva vow *to attain Buddhahood* which brings nirvana and the ability to help others attain liberation.

And fourth, in the Mahayana, the determination to follow the Noble Eightfold Path as the way to liberation from suffering becomes reformulated as the bodhisattva vow *to enter all the gates of Dharma* which include the Noble Eightfold Path, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, as well as the pāramitās and other qualities.

Now I have covered the explanation of perfection of determination, adhiṭṭhāna pāramī.

As followers of the Buddha, we should choose whichever particular path agrees with our own temperament, and then make the firm determination to follow that path consistently in all of our actions day after day.

I thank you all for your attention.

May the blessings of the Noble Triple Gem be with you all.

Aiming to do all you can for others
intimates fulfillment, it is true,
and yet, when you set out on a long journey,
if you look too far ahead,
you may stumble.

Especially when going through a difficult passage,
bring all your loving attention and care
to the steps right in front of you.
Then, in a non-dual way,
all of our purpose is well served.

Compassion and Self-compassion

What we call compassion is the love we have in us, meeting suffering in ourselves, in our family, and in the world.

We are closest to ourselves, and so of course we know our own suffering better than that of others. We need this one quality called self compassion to turn to what is difficult, and to keep our attention on it, and hold it tenderly until it begins to transform.

Sometimes this feels like caring for a young child, one who is frightened, or in tears. At first it may be that all we can feel is our own hurt, trembling, uncertainty, remorse, or fear. When we can hold this feeling, encompassing it with the warmth of unconditional love and compassion, we calm down. We find a sense of ease restored.

Thinking back now, I can see how compassion for myself is what had me begin to search for a way to live in this world, and to heal myself. It's what led to what is colloquially called taking refuge in sources of safety and protection.

In my thirties, I travelled to Asia for this reason.

In my 50's I went on retreat for a year, from this same compassion for self and others.

Self compassion is like this - it has us begin, and it's the power in us that has us continue, until we find deeper answers, and deeper healing.

Some traditions speak mostly of love for oneself, as essential, but to me compassion is more to the point here - that we are addressing the suffering we have known, and carry.

It's easier to speak of compassion and care for our loved ones, and those all around us in this world, but this - *self* compassion, is how we know what it is to be human, to struggle and suffer, sometimes to fail, and to endure. It's what we need to find comfort, and relief that is longer lasting than what the world commonly offers.

Having compassion for ourselves is what has us begin a path of practice, or begin again, as many times as needed, and then to continue, and from that, we are able gradually to be more available to others, and to share what we have found that actually helps.

The warmth we feel for others we have to have known ourselves.

As it's said in the Bible, in the first letter by John,

We love, because we were loved first

which I can read now as,

We have compassion for others, because we ourselves have received compassion first.

This can be from a parent, or a teacher, or a friend, or a Holy Being, or it can be from ourselves, from a pure, deep place inside ourselves.

When we choose to let go of negative, destructive habits, or an entire outlook and values, it's because of this self compassion, that is protective, and that has wisdom, knowing the effect of actions over the long term.

Refuge and renunciation of samsaric suffering then both have this basis, of feeling worthy of love, and of self compassion.

How often do we really appreciate the indestructible, healing quality of compassion throughout our lives as it arises to meet our needs? It's a truly

beautiful quality that isn't talked about or highlighted enough, I don't think, but it should be praised, and cultivated, and honored by all, and its importance shared with others.

Over the years, I have taken the bodhisattva vows many times in my heart, but I have to say, in truth, that I have not yet fully resolved my own samsaric suffering. What I have found is that it really is difficult, and it really does take time and dedication to practice for a person to completely transform the mind, as our great teachers have done, and to accomplish the stages of liberation, and non-regression.

Until then, what is plain to see is that *What I can give is limited by my own lack of freedom*. How can I give to others what I don't have myself? To modify the language just slightly of something I wrote over a decade ago, about cultivating love for ourselves

I know that some people, especially in spiritual traditions, would try to skip this step, of having compassion for themselves, or gloss it over lightly, on the way to the great, heroic, and truly praiseworthy actions of a bodhisattva living in this world, but I've come to realize that this is a mistake.

We can only help others to the extent that we understand our own experience, our own samsaric suffering, and get free of it, and we do this by receiving and awakening compassion for ourselves, and learning what it means to care for ourselves well, for our whole lives.

I'm afraid that those who would skip this step, and even put it down, achieve neither their own personal liberation, or the ability to help others. So the more I think about it the more it seems that this is something that is absolutely necessary.

Compassion leads to Great Compassion

This precious quality of self compassion can be with us all throughout our lives and meditations, and it is naturally onward leading. When we are in

touch with how hard it is to overcome suffering in our lives, over time we become less judgmental, more patient, and gentle, and generous, creative and adaptive, and willing to meet ourselves and others wherever we are in our lives. This only comes about because when we have not turned away from our own difficulties, sorrow and confusion, however much of it remains.

The clouds part at last, and the sky clears, and this one sun illuminates us all.

Look at the dedicated lives in this world, at our spiritual teachers, at those with something to give, and you will see it is this way.

So please, do your best to be kind and loving and compassionate to yourself. It is the way out of the wilderness, to safety; it is a protector; it is light and sustenance all along the journey, and the way to find purpose and fulfillment here on earth.

From Stages on the Path to Enlightenment, Volume One, by Geshe Sopa
On Bodhicitta

The gateway to the Mahayana path is bodhicitta. By now you know that bodhicitta is the wish to attain enlightenment in order to help all other sentient beings. The term literally breaks down into *bodhi*, which means perfect enlightenment or awakening, and *citta*, which means mind. So literally bodhicitta is the mind of enlightenment.

The person in whom this altruistic attitude arises spontaneously is called a bodhisattva. No matter who they are or where they may be, whether human or god, those beings who have that thought can be called bodhisattvas. As soon as you have produced the actual desire to attain buddhahood for the benefit of other beings you have entered the Mahayana path. From that point on, in terms of these three levels of spiritual scope, you are a person of great scope. Shantideva said in Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds:

*The instant that they produce the mind of bodhicitta,
{the aspiration to enlightened understanding and activity}
The miserable wretches shackled in the prison of samsara
Shall be praised as children of the sugatas
And be worthy of reverence in the worlds of gods and humans.*

The very moment after you develop this intention, all the buddhas and bodhisattvas will praise you. You have entered the Mahayana path, obtained the name of bodhisattva, and become a Mahayana practitioner. From there on all your activities of body, speech, and mind go toward helping all sentient beings, everything you do is for the benefit of others. Everyone can become worthy of receiving this kind of homage and honor.

If you lose that altruistic attitude then you exit the Mahayana path; you are no longer a bodhisattva. So you can see that bodhicitta is the main door of the Mahayana path- both for going in and for going out. Therefore those

who want to enter the Mahayana path must exert themselves to generate this attitude. This attitude must not be just an occasional thought; it must be present day and night. Your entire mind should be under its power; it should govern your personality.

The Bodhi Mind - the Mind of Enlightenment- is such an unusual attitude. It is most difficult to develop because there are so many inner obstacles. It will not arise easily or without a cause. Certain preliminary practices and meditations are necessary for it to arise spontaneously from the heart. Your mind must be calm, peaceful, and tamed. Therefore a certain accumulation of merit and purification of past negative actions are necessary to prepare your mind.

For example, when you plan to invite a famous and important person to your home you clean it very thoroughly and make everything beautiful. Here the thought of enlightenment is like the king of the Mahayana path, so before you invite this royal guest to enter your mind you have to clean and prepare it. You need various methods such as the seven-limb prayer, along with taking refuge before you even practice ritually generating bodhicitta. Thus many of the practices on the common path of the small and intermediate practitioners precede the practice of generating bodhicitta.

That is the route we will follow: first we will develop the basis, and then the actual practice of generating bodhicitta as explained in Shantideva's Compendium of Trainings and Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds will come later.

First of all, you have to understand why the Mahayana Mind of Enlightenment is important, why it is necessary, and the benefits of cultivating this attitude. Without understanding its benefits you will not be motivated to strive to achieve it; your efforts will be weak and the necessary feeling will not rise spontaneously. Therefore you must first meditate on the benefits of bodhicitta until a strong feeling that those qualities are

wonderful and necessary arises deep in your heart. You have to want those benefits so deeply that you cannot resist wanting to cultivate it.

So what are the benefits of developing bodhicitta - the aspiration to enlightened understanding and activity? They can be summarized into temporary and ultimate benefits. The temporary benefits are that you will not fall into bad rebirths and you will be born in good rebirths. The ultimate benefit is definite freedom from all obstacles, misery, and suffering. Without the mind of bodhicitta there is no way to attain highest enlightenment.

The cause to be born in a high rebirth is virtuous karma. Bodhicitta is an extremely powerful cause. It produces the temporary benefit of a high rebirth with excellent qualities and conditions even though a bodhisattva doesn't selfishly seek that result. This happens because once you have a spontaneous thought of bodhicitta all selfish attitudes are suppressed. You only aim for what is good for others.

This so dominates your mind that even if you have done many negative actions in the past they will not be able to bear fruit; the virtuous mind of bodhicitta purifies your previously accumulated negative karma. Here the term purify does not mean to clean something physically; it means to suppress, block, or push into the background. Even though some subtle negative seeds of past harmful actions may be left in your mental continuum, they will wither away, becoming smaller and weaker, until finally they are too rotten to ever bear fruit.

Another temporary result of bodhicitta is that you will not accumulate new negative karma. Most negative actions are done out of selfishness and a desire to harm others, and Bodhicitta is one of the main antidotes to that selfishness. The wish to attain enlightenment in order to benefit other sentient beings is the absolute opposite way of thinking and acting. You create only positive causes and these will be very powerful.

Bodhicitta increases the power of positive karma accumulated in the past, and new virtuous actions motivated by bodhicitta will have boundless results. When a virtuous action is dedicated toward a small purpose, once that aim is achieved the force of that positive potential is used up, but the purpose or goal of bodhicitta is limitless; until every sentient attains the highest bliss of enlightenment, the goal of bodhimind is not reached. Therefore there is no limit to the benefits brought by virtues accumulated in connection with this dedication to the welfare of others.

The Awakening Mind also has the ultimate benefits of emancipation and omniscience. With this intention, enlightenment can be easily achieved. In the beginning, however, you don't have any desire to attain this ultimate goal. Examine your own mind and you will see this clearly. So at first these temporary benefits have to take on some meaning for you.

When you see that it can prevent you from falling into lower births and assure you of higher births it provokes your interest. You will pay increased attention as your desire to seek these short-term goals grows. Tsongkhapa says that if you do not have a sincere desire to obtain both the temporary and ultimate benefits you will not be motivated to make the effort to produce the Awakening Mind.

So in order to produce this desire you must cultivate the attitudes and engage in the practices that are common to the persons of initial and intermediate spiritual scope. Without going through those stages you cannot produce bodhicitta, the gateway to the Mahayana path. The purpose of bodhicitta is to free all sentient beings from suffering and to invest them with all positive things- virtues, happiness, and enlightenment.

In short, the roots of the Mahayana motivation are great love and great compassion. Great love is wanting to directly help all others; it is wanting to bring them good things, enjoyment, pleasure, and happiness. Love is a wish that others obtain everything excellent- all temporary goals and the ultimate goals of emancipation and buddhahood. Great compassion is

wanting to free all other sentient beings from misery, suffering, and evils. So love and compassion are both directed toward benefiting others. But without attaining the highest goal yourself you cannot establish the happiness and freedom of others. Therefore, for the sake of benefiting all other beings, you want to attain the {two fold benefit of} highest enlightenment for yourself.

Thus bodhicitta is first directed towards your own goal. It aims for something that you want for yourself even though you wish to attain enlightenment for the benefit of others. So at the time of developing bodhicitta you are looking at your own goal.

In an ordinary worldly context, this is like a wise person who sees the many problems faced by his parents, family, or- even more broadly, his fellow citizens. He sees that they need this or that; he wants them to be free of their problems and wishes that good things happen to them- but he doesn't only want these things to happen in the abstract. He takes full responsibility to help them. So he seeks a solution: *What should I do? What needs to be done? What is the best way to accomplish this?*

He sees that in order to carry out his goals he must first equip himself for the job. For example, if you want to benefit the whole nation, you may decide that first you must become a great leader and obtain power; to do that you must first have certain qualifications. Similarly, if the job is to lead others to enlightenment, you must first be able to reach this goal yourself.

So to accomplish your main goal of helping others, you must first attain the highest enlightenment yourself. This is the case with bodhicitta. You first have to produce love and compassion. Then to actually improve the welfare of others you develop the wish to attain perfect enlightenment yourself.

Before you can desire to eliminate the suffering of other sentient beings you must want to be free of suffering yourself.

When you think about how you are wandering through samsara, bereft of true happiness and tortured by suffering, it should make your hair stand on end because you so fervently want to be free of this painful state, but if you feel nothing when you think about your own situation, how can great compassion arise when you think about the sufferings of others? If your own suffering doesn't move you at all to feel aversion and a wish to be free, how can the determination to free others from samsara arise? Without first finding your own samsaric misery intolerable, you cannot find it unbearable to see the suffering and unhappiness of others.

Santideva said in Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds

*If those beings have never before
Felt such an attitude for their own sake,
Even in their dreams,
How could it ever arise for the sake of others?*

Therefore, in order to produce great compassion and great love for others you must first generate aversion to all the harm and suffering that you yourself will experience if you fall into a lower rebirth. This is the practice the path of the person of the initial spiritual scope.

Then, on the path of the intermediate person, you meditate on how the higher rebirths have their own forms of suffering. Even if you are born in these higher states you will not find everlasting peace or an escape from suffering because the happiness there is merely temporary. It is entirely conditioned and always subject to change. By contemplating this in regard to yourself, you develop the desire to be free of even those higher states.

Then, after you think about yourself and your own situation, you look at the circumstances of your relatives and friends. From your own experience you can infer their situation: *you recognize that they are suffering just as you are*. By meditating in this way you begin to feel concern and pity for them. You generate love and compassion for them. From there you extend the

scope of your concern wider and wider, until finally you are thinking about all sentient beings. You contemplate how all sentient beings are enmeshed in misery and lack lasting peace and happiness. In that way great love and compassion will arise. Once great love and compassion arise sincerely and spontaneously, bodhicitta, the thought of enlightenment, will arise.

You can see, then, that the practices of the common path, the trainings of the small and intermediate spiritual persons, are the preliminary steps on the way to producing spontaneous bodhicitta. They are not leading you down a wrong or contradictory path.

Out of mistaken pride some people think: "I want to practice the Mahayana path only. The meditations on the leisure and opportunities of this life, impermanence, the causes and nature of samsara, the four noble truths, the benefits of emancipation for oneself, and how to get out of samsara are all on a lower path. Therefore, they will lead me the wrong way and I don't want to practice them. The Mahayana path is something different and goes in another direction." This is wrong. Each one of these practices builds upon the preceding one and prepares you for the next. When you become stable on one step of the path the next will come naturally, and when that is strong it will be the basis of the next one. There is no way to jump over necessary steps. In this way the practices of the fundamental and intermediate paths are all preparations for the Mahayana view and practice.

All of the practices of the seven-limb prayer are taught in the sutras and commentaries as a method to prepare for the generation of actual bodhicitta. Teachers should make it clear to their students that the initial and intermediate paths are steps on the path to unsurpassable bodhicitta, the awakening mind. And for their part, disciples should establish a firm and clear understanding of this.

When you do those practices you should remember your ultimate goal: the Mahayana aim is out there ahead of you, but you do these practices with

the understanding that you cannot get there without building the foundation first. This is how important these practices are. That is the way you should do them.

It won't work if you look down on the common, early practices as a lower method and want to leap directly to bodhicitta. If you try that, then the path you are following will bear no relationship to the practices taught by the scriptures and teachers of this lineage. You will be going your own way. Your practice will actually become an obstacle to the development of any understanding of bodhicitta and the Mahayana path. If you do not clearly understand what you are seeking, why you are doing it, and how you should proceed, you have really lost the great benefit of this life. Therefore, learn what the practices in the Stages of the Path teachings are, how each one leads to the next, and follow them very carefully and earnestly. If you have a definite understanding of what you are doing your practice will bring great benefit.

Practicing the One Vehicle - the Vehicle of Awakening

A person meeting the Buddhist teachings for the first time will notice a difference in emphasis in Traditions. In the Theravada, the main focus is on individual liberation, and in the Mahayana practice is for the sake of all our family, for all beings.

From the outside, there seems to be conflict between these two perspectives, and historically, unfortunately, too often there has been unfounded criticism. Basically, some Mahayanists with a more narrow perspective say the Theravadins are selfish, while some orthodox and critical Theravadins claim the Mahayana is not what the Buddha taught.

We can still have a few doctrinal differences, of course, but if these can be worked through so that they don't get in the way of our learning and practice, then it would be of tremendous benefit to us all.

I recall a teaching on the Lotus Sutra, where Thich Nhat Hanh said: *'There is only one vehicle – the Buddhayana'*, the vehicle of Awakening, and His Holiness the Dalai Lama expresses this very same thought in the book *Tantra in Tibet*. He explains that, in teaching, the Buddha set forth a path appropriate to trainees' abilities. '

The Buddha spoke in terms the situation, and everything that he spoke was a means of eventually attaining the highest enlightenment... Since the purpose of a Buddha's is others' realization of the wisdom of Buddhahood, the methods for actualizing this wisdom are one vehicle, not two. A Buddha does not lead beings by a vehicle that does not lead to Buddhahood; he establishes beings in his own level.'

For me, this idea allows us to hold all Buddhist teachings and wisdom traditions as not only non-contradictory, but as existing in a great harmony with each other. Depending on where we are in our lives, and on our character and inclinations, these different teachings and practices can help us to accomplish our aims.

This is how I have come to understand the different emphasis in the Mahayana and Theravada:

First, at times I can see the continuity between practice and life in the world in relation to others. I've found that:

*One's own individual liberation, the purification of mind,
is the necessary basis that allows for there to be empathy,
more extensive seeing, the ability to live fully, and to work...*

We have to talk about this first, otherwise words such as empathy, love and compassion don't make any sense. They are mostly concepts. What we call compassion, or the dedication to helping others, is the natural response of a liberated mind.

Sometimes it's said that 'at a certain point, the Buddhas awaken the Theravada Arhats and encourage them to enter the Mahayana path.' This can be taken as a metaphor - a poetic way of saying that at a certain point the heart awakens - the Buddha nature within us awakens in response to the suffering of living beings. Then, quite naturally, a person finds himself or herself dedicated to helping others.

Just witness the lives of the saints in South East Buddhist countries: Ajahn Mun, Ajahn Lee, Ajahn Mahaboowa, Ajahn Chah, Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Mahaghosana, Dipa Ma, Phra Payutto, and so many others, all exemplary lives of wisdom and compassionate activity.

Another way of speaking about the relationship between practice and our attitudes and actions could be to say that:

*The same life that brings us to birth,
the love, compassion and understanding within us,
brings us to reach for the birth
of all those we see in this world...*

So it is that necessary and appropriate self-interest, even what we may think of at the time as egoistic action, when it produces wisdom always leads beyond itself. There is more to individual liberation than individual liberation alone. There is understanding and the freedom it brings, leading to compassion, and to action.

Then, also, at times when it is necessary for us to focus on 'untying the knot of ego' and resolving afflicted emotions in order to move forward and act in this world, we can say:

*The same life that brings us to reach
for the birth of all those we see in this world,
also brings us to birth...*

It is just here that we can see how true it is- in taking care of yourself, you are taking care of all of us. For everyone this is essential work, and that this too is definitely one form of compassion-in-action.

I remember Thich Nhat Hahn said:

Everything you do, you do for everyone. That is the meaning of Mahayana.

In actual practice there is an organic, seamless continuity- having some freedom naturally leads to sympathy and mercy, and this feeling encourages a person to further wisdom and emancipation.

As Lama Je Tsong Khapa said:

Upon realization, all teachings prove to be non-contradictory

Practicing the One Vehicle - the Vehicle of Awakening

The appearance of two separate paths, those of liberation and compassionate action, actually contain each other. We could even go so far

as to say they are one, because practicing any one approach, with time, necessarily brings out the other factors as well. We find ourselves on the same road. From wherever we are, practicing the Buddha's teaching leads us to the wholeness of being a free and loving person acting in this world.

Everyone benefits from any practice that we do, but sometimes we have to wait to see this:

*Sometimes we have to wait
until the fruit grows
before we know what kind of a tree we have
When an apple grows
we've had an apple tree all along*

Isn't it so?

In this process, of course, each stage is as necessary, and as valuable as every other.

What we need here is a definition of self that in some way includes others, and a definition of others that in some way includes our own self. Then individual liberation and compassionate service are known to be *one action*. {The meaning of the name of my teacher, Thich Nhat Hanh}. Actually, going beyond concepts and labels leads us to the same place.

In reality, we are not separate. This is why we do what we do

At times I hear myself thinking:

*O, my world,
how quiet you are in me...*

Keeping the most valuable and well developed teachings from each tradition we meet, we should recognize their true nature.

In the Lotus Sutra, the Buddha teaches that Liberation is not the end of the path; that the purpose of our practice is to benefit all beings. I can see now why They referred to this sutra as 'A sutra of reconciliation'. By its very nature, practice is for all - there is no separation. This is how things are.

*In every step, the greater world is there
so everything that we do is for everyone
The whole world suffers in us,
we heal the whole world in ourselves
This is known as the interdependence of causes
the interdependence of effects*

And, phrasing it in terms of our responding to living in this world:

*With the thought to awaken the life
that is of the most benefit to others,
consider each activity, including taking care of yourself
as the actual practice of benefiting others.
Generate a parent's love.*

*A great many are with you now, this moment,
and the entirety of this vast field
will be reached, both now and in the future
by the life you live today*

*For all the uncontrollable suffering,
have mercy
generate a life that can heal every sorrow
and end, at last, the trains of hurt that have
been passed on...*

We all know that love is essential, and individual liberation is an integral part of the path of truly benefiting all beings. The buddhayana, then, is what is known as an inclusive path.

This is the one vehicle, complete in its expression.

Long may it flourish!

*May I clearly see that what I and all others need
is ultimate liberation of mind, perfect peace and freedom,
and that in taking care of myself, I am taking care of all of us
With an understanding of the Noble Truths,
may my love and compassion become the dedication to helping others through my
realization of this path*

I carry within me
medicine for the whole world,
but if I don't take it myself,
I'm not going to make it

To recover my sight, and strength,
to be able to continue on this road
to the fulfillment of my purpose

What I would share with all,
I need to practice, and realize

Now, many spiritually inclined people have good hearts and want to help everywhere, but unless their mind is clean and clear, they cannot really help other people. It is impossible to help others with confusion, attachment and emotion. Instead of trying to help our partner, motivated by emotional confusion, we should first make our own mind clean clear.

Once we have achieved a strong, clean-clear mind, trying to help others is reasonable, but until then we only create more and more confusion, and saying that we are trying to help is just words. Although we always say it is good to have a good heart, if we lack wisdom and understanding, it doesn't work and we can't solve our problems. So, if we really want to solve society's problems and not just create more confusion, first we have to get ourselves together.

-Lama Yeshe

The Bodhisattva Vow, Samadhi, and Prajna - revised

The Bodhisattva Vow is the aim to awaken to the truth, so we can help others reach that same peace, and wholeness. We have to *become* the freedom from delusion, from false identifications we are talking about, rather than have it be something we just read about, or have only a passing experience of. Once we've glimpsed the depths and beauty of our own inner life, that needs to be stabilized, and revealed, as there is such great need for all of our wisdom to shine forth in this world.

A vow can be something strong, middling, or weak. The strongest vows come from deep reflection, done over time, with a clear mind. Thinking about how ignorance has harmed us, and how it will continue to unless the causes are addressed in full has to lead a person to the kind of dedication I'm talking about here.

We should all cherish what I call 'a divine dissatisfaction', that won't settle for easy or comfortable non-answers to the problems we face. Nor should we settle for mere emotion, that may feel good, and necessary at the time but that leaves us no better off than before. We need deeper answers, and this is the motivating force for the Bodhisattva Vow.

A Bodhisattva is a man or woman who takes up the benefit of all beings as his or her life's work. Seeing the misery in the world, in our lives, and in the lives of those we love, we aim with all we've got to alleviating both the suffering and its cause, for now, and for the future. This then requires time and energy, and sacrifice to accomplish our purpose. Shantideva wrote:

*As long diseases afflict living beings,
may I be the doctor, the medicine,
and also the nurse who restores them to health*

*May I fall as rain to increase the harvests
that must feed living beings,
and in times of dire famine,
may I myself be food and drink*

*May I be a protector of the helpless,
A guide to those traveling 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.*

Having this motivation is the heart of the Mahayana Buddhist path. A person doesn't need to be a Buddhist to take up this vow, or this great aim, in my opinion, and so we can have Christian, Muslim, Hindu or non affiliated person with the same dedicated heart.

My appreciation for the Buddhism I found my way to, thanks to great teachers such as Thich Nhat Hanh and Lama Yeshe, is in part because it points out universal truths, and it is non-dogmatic. It shows the principles at work, and encourages us to see for ourselves.

How then does the Buddhist tradition say we should accomplish our aim of helping others? They say that in addition to this great love and compassion, the motivation to help others, we need what is called *samadhi*, or deep and clear meditation, and *prajna*, or wisdom.

We may have a glimpse of some deeper truth about ourselves, and others, but for that insight to be transformative, we need meditation. Our mind has great power, but it needs to be trained so that whatever knowledge we gain can be fully integrated. Our knowledge can overwhelm ignorance and

habitual ways of relating to ourselves and the world, but we need the cultivated strength of mind for wisdom to be fully effective.

Calm abiding meditation can be developed separately, and then combined with the insights we gain through study and reflection. This is how teachings on liberation from mistaken views and suffering are traditionally presented.

There are many ways we can approach freeing our own mind, and transforming our experience from one of contraction, self doubt, and self denigration to self worth and inner freedom. Some people come upon teachings for taming the mind and emotions, and can settle themselves quite comfortably, and perhaps think they have attained an irreversible state. Traditional teachings tell us that in addition to a calm and clear mind, we need *prajna*, or wisdom.

Wisdom, in the Buddhist sense, is seeing through the illusions we have held, and those of our society. Enlightenment is found right here, in understanding thoroughly how mistaken perceptions come to be, and how they are brought to an end. This is our study, as Buddhists, and as people looking to end ignorance and its effects.

Buddhism points directly to ignorance of our true nature as the cause of suffering, personally, between people, and collectively. The freedom, joy confidence and strength that come from insight are then the gifts that we share with one another.

An Introduction to Mahayana Buddhism

Mahayana means 'the great way', that aims to benefit all people, and all forms of life. This word comes from one of the ways a person can practice Buddhism. The motivation for their meditation, prayers, ritual and mantra can be not just for their own sake, but for the sake of all their precious family, and *for the sake of all beings*.

The heart of the Mahayana motivation

To make it plain, if we first look just at this quality of a path being *mahayana* alone - of it having this beautiful, loving, and all embracing, universal nature - we can see a Mahayana Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Taoism, or Indigenous spirituality. Every tradition then has methods we can use to accomplish our aims. A person who is living for others can even be without any tradition at all and, to my mind, still be a mahayanist. This is not the usual way of speaking, I know, but it can help us know the nature of a supremely life affirming path.

...

Sometimes we can get lost in the struggles of our own personal life, or our culture and times. We can become a prisoner of the moment. *The Great Way* - the mahayana motivation - then can help us to make our way through life's difficulties. It holds whatever is happening in a larger context. Little things don't bother us as much because we have a large view, one that is not just for ourselves alone, and we are also thinking for the long term.

The oh-so common 'eight worldly motivations' that people have- around material gain and loss, pain and pleasure, fame and obscurity, praise and criticism - don't move us any longer, and this comes as *a great relief*. Our lives become so much easier. As I hope we will all find out for ourselves, the mahayana view also brings us maturity, and to genuine fulfillment as human beings.

The history and resources of Mahayana Buddhism

Once we see this much of the universal motivation people can have, it helps to approach the history of Mahayana Buddhism. About 500 years after the Buddha's physical passing from this world, collections of teachings such as the Perfection of Wisdom, the Avatamsaka and Lotus Sutras were written down that described the practices and praised the great qualities of this path of universal benefit. Over the centuries, noble teachers such as Nagarjuna, Atisha, Asanga, Shantideva and others then taught methods to develop the loving, compassionate and liberating mahayana mind. Those of us who have a connection can draw from this extensive body of inspired teachings.

When we study Buddhism, we receive teachings on developing our inherent good qualities, and we also receive the blessings of our teachers and spiritual ancestors. Although it is not often talked about, there is an esoteric aspect to traditions as well. On the subtle planes, a tradition is a reservoir of blessing power, insight and inspiration built up over many generations. This sacred energy is a resource we can draw from. This is true of all the different Buddhist traditions and lineages. They each have unique and precious qualities we can know and benefit from. Every true religious tradition has produced also saints, and the influence of their realization surely outlasts their physical body. They are a blessing to this whole world, and especially to their lineage.

The development of the awakened heart

The nature of the awakened heart, everywhere it is found, is to help others as much as possible. In it, two aspects are always present, those of loving compassion, and understanding. Compassion is vitally important here. *Without it, there will be no urgency to put an end to suffering.* If we have the capacity to hold in our heart the awareness of what is difficult or tragic, even for a short while, then it can be a powerful force for good in our lives, in the lives of all those we love, and in our world.

The core of the Mahayana Buddhist motivation is called *bodhicitta*, the awakening mind. The view in this Tradition is that the best thing we can do for others is to help them to become free from all their suffering and its causes. To do this we need to awaken and liberate ourselves, then we can help others to reach that same state. Bodhicitta is called *the sole thought on everybody's side*.

A bodhisattva, literally an 'awakening being' is someone who is dedicated to the temporal and ultimate benefit of all beings, providing them with all they need and wish for. The bodhisattva vow is traditionally phrased as *May I become a Buddha in order to lead all others to that very same state*. This is the heart of the Mahayana. With this, they say, we 'enter the family of the Buddhas'. Its motivation is expressed in this way

*May I cause the pacification
Of all sentient beings afflictions*

And in the poetic language of Shantideva

*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 rain to increase the harvests that must feed living beings
and in times of dire famine,
may I myself be food and drink*

*For as long as space exists,
and for as long as living beings remain,
may I too abide,
to dispel the misery of the world*

As one teacher said, *Strive to give the taste of bliss to others!*

The Chinese Mahayana Buddhist teachings speak of something they call 'vow power'. This is the deep motivation that all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas have to help others, guided by wisdom and compassion. This is also something that can become a very real force in our own life. It has the potential to open us up, and to help us awaken our inner resources, of great strength, patience, courage, clarity, peace and joy.

We should realize at this point, as Lama Yeshe said, that we don't have to have completed the path before we can begin to act. He taught us that we should just help others as much as we can, always working to deepen our wisdom, and the effectiveness of our work.

Em Ah Ho! How wondrous!

May all beings benefit.

*May we all learn about and awaken the motivation to be of universal benefit,
find a path that suits us best,
and then practice diligently to actualize all of our noble aims*

*May all beings everywhere be free from suffering and the causes of suffering
May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness flourishing*

Liberating Words - from the teachings of Lama Yeshe

On Bodhicitta

Bodhicitta is like this: First, you have to understand your own ego problems- craving, desire, anger, impatience; your own situation, your inability to cope, your own disasters - within yourself and feel compassion for yourself. Because of the situation you're in, start by becoming the object of your own compassion.

It begins from there: "This situation I'm in, I'm not the only one with ego conflict and problems. In all the world's societies, some people are upper class, some middle and others low; some are extremely beautiful, some are medium and others are ugly. But, just like me, everybody seeks happiness and does not desire to be miserable."

In this way, a feeling of equilibrium begins to come. Somehow, deep within you, equilibrium towards enemies, strangers and friends arises-it is not merely intellectual but something really sincere. It comes from deep down; from the bottom of your heart. .

Bodhicitta is most precious, a diamond mind. In order to have space for bodhicitta, you have to feel that all universal living beings are equal.

You should practice equilibrium in your daily life as much as you can. Try to have neither enemies nor objects of tremendous, exaggerated grasping. In this way, in the space of your equilibrium, you can grow bodhicitta- the attitude dedicated to all universal living beings.

Bodhicitta is an extremely high realization. It is the complete opposite of the self-cherishing attitude. You completely give yourself into the service of others in order to lead them to the highest liberation, which is beyond temporary happiness.

Bodhicitta is very practical, I tell you. It's like medicine. The self-cherishing thought is like a nail or a sword in your heart; it always feels uncomfortable. With bodhicitta, from the moment you begin to open, you feel incredibly peaceful and you get tremendous pleasure and inexhaustible energy. Forget about enlightenment- as soon as you begin to open yourself to others, you gain tremendous pleasure and satisfaction. Working for others is very interesting; it's an infinite activity. Your life becomes continuously rich and interesting.

I really believe that the strong, determined, dedicated attitude of

"Every day, for the rest of my life, and especially today, I will dedicate myself to others as much as I possibly can,"

is very powerful.

All of us have a certain degree of loving kindness in our relationships, but many times our loving kindness is a mixture-half white, half black. This is very important. Many times we start with a white, loving kindness motivation but then slowly, slowly it gets mixed up with "black magic" love. Our love starts with pure motivation but as time passes, negative minds arise and our love becomes mixed with black love, dark love. It begins at first as white love but then transforms into black magic love.

I want you to understand that this is due to a lack of wisdom - your not having the penetrative wisdom to go beyond your relative projection.

* * *

Many Westerners project, "Buddhism has no love." Actually, love has nothing to do with emotional expression. The emotional expression of love is so gross; so gross-not refined. Buddhism has tremendous concern for, or understanding of, the needs of both the object and the subject, and in this way, loving kindness becomes an antidote to the selfish attitude.

Western religions also place tremendous emphasis on love and compassion but they do not emphasize wisdom. Understanding wisdom is the path to liberation, so you have to gain it.

Q: What is the difference between attachment and compassion?

Lama: Compassion understands others' lack of pleasure and their suffering situation. Attachment is "I want; I want"- concern for our own pleasure. Compassion is concern for others' pleasure and the determination to release other sentient beings from their problems.

* * *

Bodhicitta is a heart that's open to other people rather than totally closed.

The sense of being open is not so that others will give you presents, that you'll get chocolate cake. That's not the way, although normally we are like that. Of course, we are not buddha, but to some extent we should have an inner, deep, perhaps intellectual understanding, some discriminating wisdom, that the human need is not simply temporal pleasure. To some extent, we all have temporal pleasure, but what we really need is eternal peace. Having that highest of destinations is the way to be open. It eliminates the problems of everyday life- we don't get upset if someone doesn't give us some small thing.

* * *

When distractions come- perhaps your ego imagines, "Oh, I'm getting pleasure"- don't reject them; contemplate such notions. In that way, you can reach the point where the first notion disappears, which shows that the appearances your ego imagines are false. When they clear, contemplate the resultant clarity.

If you are unable to contemplate that clarity, move your mind a little by thinking, "I have just caught my ego muddying my mind with illusions and overestimated conceptions; so many living beings suffer from such conceptions and are unable to catch them as I can," and generate much compassion or bodhicitta.

You can also generate the determination to release other sentient beings from that ignorance, while being aware that, "At the moment, I don't have the ability to really lead other sentient beings into clarity, therefore, I need to clear up my own mind more."

Great vehicle practitioners, Mahayanists, even though they have problems, they are more concerned about other people's problems than their own. That's the difference.

That's why we say that bodhicitta is the door to enter the Mahayana vehicle. That's why bodhicitta is the principal, most essential need for stopping the problem of the self-pitying, self-cherishing thought. Therefore, if you are a Mahayanist, you have bodhicitta. What makes you a bodhisattva is having the realization of bodhicitta.

Then perhaps you will think, "I'm seeking enlightenment; that's why I'm meditating. I desire to reach enlightenment; that's why I've come to this meditation course. So how can that be?"

Let me give you an example. Say you are hungry and you go to a restaurant. In some restaurants they have a system where before you can get your food, you have to buy a ticket. Once you have a ticket, then you can get the food. Some places are like that. Your principal aim is to get food to stop your hunger, isn't it? To do that, you have to start by going through the business of getting a ticket.

It's the same thing: we are Mahayanists; our job, our duty, is to serve other people. That is our principal aim, not getting enlightenment. We should not

cry and grasp, "Enlightenment, enlightenment, enlightenment; I'm unhappy. I want to be happy." That is not principal. Now you can see the difference.

There are two things. A bodhisattva has two goals, two destinations: to help other people and to become self-sufficient by receiving enlightenment, by becoming totality. If we grab that- "It is more important that I become enlightened"- it's partial. But still we have to do it. It's not the principal thing, it's partial, but we still have to get the ticket in order to solve problems and help other sentient beings. I think this example is clear, isn't it?

Don't be confused about important things. Wishing to open other people, especially to the highest destination, enlightenment, is very important. I think you know this already and I don't need to talk too much about it. So, bodhicitta is the open, enlightened attitude- or, saying it another way, the healthy mind. Instead of using the Sanskrit-the healthy mind. No irritation; plenty of room. That's all. That *is* bodhicitta. *Citta* is Sanskrit; it means mind, in the sense of heart. Heart feeling is what we need. We *need* that attitude, not just an intellectual explanation.

* * *

Normally, Western people say, "I need so much love; nobody loves me." They say that kind of thing, don't they? Use that expression in the reverse way: We *need* the totally opened attitude. It takes care of all the problems that the narrow attitude brings. If you have this attitude you make yourself a complete human being- that's a better way of putting it- because you have complete comprehension. Otherwise, you're in the dark shadow of ignorance. You can see one thing but the rest is in the dark. You *know* that.

Even in everyday life, you need some kind of complete comprehension to keep your house and family together. If the husband sees only one thing, he cannot see the totality of his family's needs- especially in America! It's the

same thing with the wife. Of course, a woman comprehends things differently than a man does, but again, she sees only one thing and cannot see totality, what is needed for a totally satisfied life or total mental integration.

* * *

The enlightened attitude of bodhicitta allows your energy to expand universally. You develop a broad view.

How to Love Like a Mother, by Rev. Anne Sutherland Howard

the best way I know how to describe the work of love is as a mother.

I believe that what we need in our churches and our schools and our homes and our public squares is a kind of love that looks something like a mother's love. The kind of love I'm talking about is tender, and it's fierce:

It means naming danger when it threatens, and meeting it with savvy and with courage.

It means paying attention, knowing what time it is and what the weather's like out there.

It means teaching the difference between right and wrong.

It means being responsible for our words and our actions, and calling on others—like public officials who block common sense gun laws—to take responsibility for their actions.

It means showing up, being present, caring, not expecting somebody else to handle it.

It means having a strong sense of identity and belonging, coupled with a profound respect and appreciation for otherness.

It means compassion, knowing that we are all in this together.

And of course it means getting your heart broken, which opens you to hold the pain as well as the beauty of being fully human.

The practice of love might change that soundtrack of fear.

Love Like a Mother, May 15, 2017 - from Chasing Hazel

There really are some incredible mothers out there. So many stories of pain, challenge, joy, success. Stories of unconditional love. Love that I don't think any of us even know we are capable of until our children, our universe calls on us.

"Oh hey you, here's a little test...are you broken? Or are you still in? Can you take more?"

Mother's overcome.

Mother's take the cards they are given and turn them into a royal flush. They have this ability to make the bad or scary into this beautiful, selfless love. I have been on the receiving end of this love, not only by my own mother (although especially her) but from all these other women in my life that just know how to LOVE LIKE A MOTHER. Once you know how to love like a mother, or even have the fortune to be loved by a mother, it spills over onto everyone and everything else in your life. It makes you stronger, better, and more confident.

Loving like a mother is hard, extremely emotional work. A battle between the heart and the ego, where the ego often loses. Being a mother teaches you to be humble and kind. To see the world through empathetic eyes and want to make changes simply because it would make someone else happy or feel peace.

So here's to the all mothers out there who are loving like mothers and as a result teaching us all how to love the biggest love we can. Teaching us how to use that love to forgive, support, encourage, and empower all that we encounter and hopefully, our own children.

On Bodhicitta – from Twenty-One Taras, by Lama Yeshe

Now, actualizing bodhicitta. Actualizing bodhicitta means you take responsibility, wishful responsibility, strong responsibility. Think of how all mother sentient beings are kind and how you can (offer service to others, or) repay them.

‘The best way for me to repay them is to eliminate confusion, gain wisdom, gain the six paramitas and lead them to liberation. That’s the only way I can do it, for the rest of my life, as much as possible.’

The rest of your life – I don’t know, most of us have already lived about twenty-five years, so maybe we stay a couple of years more, who knows!

‘So that way, for the rest of my life, from now on, it doesn’t matter what I have to do in my life, as much as possible I will dedicate it for others. Also, my practice is for others because at the moment I am making negative karma, making problems for others by making negative vibrations, so this way I eliminate that.’

For example, normally, in an organization we fight! That is such an irresponsible attitude. The aim of an organization is supposed to make things better. Instead of recognition in order to make this, this, this, you are not acting, you just argue, your own ego goes I, I, I, I, I – nothing to do with reality you know. It is actually your understanding that is irresponsible.

Similarly, couples fight each other – irresponsible, I think. They think they are responsible but they are not, they are irresponsible, they destroy things instead of bringing them together. Of course, why destroy is because of their ignorance. They don’t want to destroy but they don’t see this reality, this totality, they don’t see how to bring about family totality. ‘This is the family home, we are clean, our bodies are clean, the kitchen is clean, the

sitting-room is clean, all these things are clean, in order to live in it we need to buy this and that' – if everybody understands clean clear then there is no problem, but if not then complications come.

So now, bodhicitta is taking some responsibility. The point is, because you take responsibility, even if someone gives you a bad time, if your mind is still taking the right direction continuously there is room – part of the journey you accept already. You have to accept, some way you have to cope, don't you? So you still keep going. One has to go to Barcelona, you know. That's all. So between here and Barcelona there are so many possible obstacles but still you try – the same thing.

The aim is to be totally liberated from ego – that's the aim. So you give space. Any problem comes, you have room. For example, it's like as if someone says to you, 'Hey, your friend so-and-so is very critical of you and wants to kill you'. So you say – (Lama uses a very sweet voice here, - 'kill me?' You think, 'He's going to give me a bad time – that's not necessarily bad. I should have room for that in my mind. I have to have room for that. Maybe tomorrow he'll bring me great pleasure, who knows? Today an enemy, tomorrow a friend. Today a dear friend, tomorrow an enemy. Who knows? Let's see'. Let go. Bodhicitta is that way. Bodhicitta has room.

Bodhicitta understanding is non-racial – you are black, you are white, you are religious, you are non-religious, you are a believer, you are a non-believer – all equal. You understand? This is the beauty of bodhicitta.

In Buddhism, a human being should be completely hippy, free from ideas, philosophy, religion, doctrine, everything – free. All living beings are one unity, one family. So your mind is happy. You don't feel jealous when you see a Muslim because they have oil! If you are practicing, if you look, really objectively look, all these sentient beings are equal. It is actually deluded to have different opinions about them. So you realize this and then you understand that your dear friend, your boyfriend, your girlfriend, your

enemy, non-buddhists, non-religious people, people who are against religion, actually they are all equal.

For example, we have a problem in this country, we have terrorism. Maybe the terrorists are showing some reality, who knows? Maybe we can learn something from them! Maybe, I don't know! Anyway, there are showing you some reality, aren't they?

Another good example, also: Mao Tse Tung threw me out of Tibet without any clothes – I came like this! Speaking personally, however, I'm grateful to him. I was kicked out of my samsaric nest – Tibet was my samsaric nest. I have hundreds of relatives here and there, relatives' nature is like this, eh-eh-eh-eh. In Tibet we have samsara too, Tibetan samsara. So, kicked out. Great. True, you know, for me. I learned more real dharma when they kicked me out. So it's good, you learn something. Many times instead of learning I just intellectually spaced-out. Never learned, never, never, ever learned I tell you. I never, never, never learned. I just said words. I believe that. By words, just words, you cannot learn anything, actually. Reality is something else. But in a situation, situation, situation – then you really know.

In one way the western environment is very good because it is very hard to practice dharma. Delusion is so strong, desire is so strong, hatred is so strong, so this is good, good for practicing dharma. One needs this. It's true. You know what the Himalayan mountains are like – nothing happens, the rock is always there, the water is flowing, always there, not so much challenge. To stay in the Himalayan mountains is such an easy life, you know. But you come to the west – to take care of this one here! – I don't feel western students are worthless, I really feel their challenge is very difficult, I really feel this, you know. Their practice is much stronger than the Himalayan monk's. I feel that way. They have to deal with society – difficult, I tell you. You bring a Himalayan monk and you put him into western society, maybe he goes berserk – it's true! – because it's too much for him, too much.

Also, that's why my point is that when you put yourself in that situation then you practice, then it becomes your experience. Dharma is the idea but you have to put it into action. Then it becomes experience. Then it becomes indestructible. Otherwise it is just philosophy.

So, the bodhicitta is, I think, the essential practice of dharma, the essential principle of dharma. Really, if one has this attitude one has no problem. If someone hits you, there is room. If someone criticizes you, there is room. If someone hates you, there is room. You understand? Then you aren't shaking, you're not down – well, maybe a little bit down, but still you understand. Okay, thank you so much, thank you.

Who Is My Neighbor?

A lawyer asked Jesus, but who is my neighbor?, and Jesus replied by telling him the story of the Good Samaritan...

As contemplatives, teachings across traditions are literally a kind of sustenance. Reflecting on them with an open heart, and a mind that wants to learn yields a rich harvest, more than repaying the time we spend in reading and quiet thought.

This is especially true when we find connections between the teaching stories and our lives and deep concerns today. At that point, the teachings come *alive*, and their wisdom speaks directly to us.

In this day of division, of the madness of walls, and armies, and inequality, and racism, and superficiality the common currency, the question is forced on us, if we are to live in any conscious way,

But who is my neighbor? Who is it that I must care for?

As with so many stories in the Bible and other sacred texts, here is one that is rich in its mytho-poetics. It begins,

A lawyer

- and right away, there is this dynamic that anyone familiar with Christianity would recognize. 'A lawyer' is in the category of *the scribes and pharisees*, those who know and repeat the known and accepted *rules* of the spiritual life and of society.

Again and again in the New Testament, these are set up to represent and to show us our own narrow mindedness, and the circle of our own small concerns.

This lawyer is asking, really, for the bare minimum he must do 'to inherit the kingdom'. He thinks and speaks and would act according to the letter of the Law, and not its spirit, and this is what Jesus would help us all break out of.

He tells him directly, not reasoning with him as he expected, but speaking straight to his heart,

A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead.

A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side.

So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.

But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him.

He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him.

The next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper.

'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.'

Then Jesus asked,

Now, Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?,

*The lawyer replied, The one who had mercy on him,
and Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."*

Notice that he didn't cite scripture, or talk on an intellectual level. He wanted the man *to feel compassion*.

In the famous exercises of Saint Ignatius, a person uses their creative imagination to place themselves right there, in the events of familiar passages, and this is the device Jesus used, to help that man awaken.

He wanted him *to feel* what it was like for the victim on the dark, windswept Jericho road, to recognize the desolation a person can feel, abused, and left for dead, and ignored, even by so-called 'religious leaders'.

(Hypocrites! - they have their reward)

When we look at the world with a compassionate heart, we are a different person, and this is the person that needs to awaken in us now, in the face of all our 21st century barbarism, strife and division; facing down all our bloodless leaders, all the hostile and deluded militarists, and own own apathy and fear.

The whole world is my home, and all beings are my family

Now, Who is my neighbor? -

They are the one I can know and care for, as my own;

She is the one I look out for; And when she is away, I care for her children as my own;

They are the ones I take into account when tilling the ground, when bringing in the harvest, when preparing a meal...

They are the ones who know me, and that my door is always open for them;

As long as I have food and drink, they need never face hunger, or thirst;

They know they can count on me.

Although I've not travelled to every country, or even to every state here, I know that we all know what a neighbor is, even if it's mostly been forgotten and covered over. In every place and time we know this because it is universal. It is the deep truth of our being here, and of our belonging to one another.

Who is my neighbor? -

He is the one I go out to meet, and if he needs help, I bring to him and his family whatever is needed;

I do whatever I can to bring him to safety.

This is simply what we are all called on to do.

Who are my neighbors? -

they are the ones whose needs and wishes I feel *as my own*.

Imagine a person *racing* to be the first to offer water and food and shelter and medicines to refugees, embracing them with tears in their eyes;

commanding building to start in that desert,

summoning laborers and doctors and teachers with a wave of his arm to join him...

Who is my neighbor? -

You are my neighbor, and *she* is my neighbor, and *that one coming up the road*, they too belong to us!

My neighbors - are those I can reach, and those I can serve in any way at all,

because I am willing to part from the indifferent, the indulgent, the immature mass, those with closed minds and hearts that are not awake to their own humanity;

and I will go out, alone if need be;

I am willing to be criticized, and accused of doing it for my ego, that void, or for credit, to earn the kingdom of god, or to be called a bodhisattva,

but, just so you know, I would do the same for you, and for yours.

Especially now.

Especially when so many doors are closed, out of contracted down suspicion, and because frightened people do not hear the call that's come down to us through the ages, of

Love thy neighbor

- and the two legged, and the four legged,
and the winged creatures,
and those who swim in the rivers and lakes and oceans,

and those who live in the forests, and in the mountains,
and those who make their home in the air

- all are my loved ones

and the lost, the afflicted,
the criminal,

the anxious, the depressed,
the addict too

- all are my family

and those who oppose peace and justice,
the blind oppressors,
and struggling men, women and children

already born, and yet to be born -

all are my family

And beauty wakes in us,
walks beside us,
is that light we see working, in all our noble family...

It is just as the author Ellen White said,

Wherever there is an impulse of love and sympathy, wherever the heart reaches out to bless and uplift others, there is revealed the working of the Holy Spirit...

For as long as I am here, I will try to follow that very call to love, and I will invite all others to join me, to live this truth wherever we happen to be, as all one family.

Eight Verses For Training The Mind

1. May I always cherish all living beings
with the determination to accomplish for them the highest good,
that is more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel

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

3. I will learn to search into my mind,
and as soon as an afflictive emotion arises,
endangering both self and others,
I will firmly face and avert it.

4. When meeting with those who have especially strong sins and suffering,
I will learn to cherish them as if I had found a precious treasure,
very difficult to find

5. When others treat me badly, with slander, abuse, and so on,
I will accept all loss and offer the victory to them

6. When one I have benefited with great hope hurts me,
I will learn to view that one as my own Supreme Guru

7. In short, I will learn to offer all help and happiness to all beings,
both directly and indirectly,
and in secret I will remove as much suffering as these beings may have

8. I will keep these practices undiminished by the eight worldly dharmas,
and by recognizing appearances to be like illusions,
I will be freed from the bondage of attachment

From The Heart of a Bodhisattva - A Commentary on the Eight Verses for Training The Mind

The Mahayana grew organically out of the Historical Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths, and the liberation that practicing these teachings accomplishes for men and women. When compassion is central to a person's path, then the whole way is illuminated with that virtue, and with its light and strength. Seeing our lives in relation to others, our family and friends, and all others in past and future generations, we find the greatest meaning in supporting their well being and peace. What Buddhism then adds to this general motivation is the way to fully achieve our purpose.

The Mahayana attitude is based on a radical inclusiveness, and the non-abandonment of beings; *on an encompassing, and enduring love.*

The Thought Training Teachings comes from this tradition of working for the sake of others. A verse from Shantideva expresses the profound dedication of one who loves fully:

*As long as space endures,
and as long as suffering living beings remain,
until then, may I too abide,
to dispel the misery of the world*

Such a mind is very different from the average egocentric person, with common aims of wealth, pleasure and acclaim. In some ways, in fact, we'll find that the thought training instructions aim in exactly the opposite direction from what the ego wants. This is the best possible news.

The Eight Verses for Training the Mind start this way:

Verse One - On Enlightenment

*May I always cherish all living beings
with the determination to accomplish for them the highest good,
that is more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel*

We begin with the Mahayana Mind of love for all living beings, from those precious ones close to us, to our family and friends, teachers, our elders and those in our community. We begin with our love for all those near and far, without a trace of hostility or indifference. Such immeasurable love in the Pali Suttas is regarded as *A Brahma Vihara*, or *A Divine Abode*.

We don't get to such a state by merely wishing it to be so, however. It takes a great deal of self cultivation, or previous good karma to truly awaken such a mind and heart, and the knowledge of our original nature, but step by step it is possible.

The metta teachings from the suttas clearly lay out how we can start with those closest to us, our most easily loved ones, and gradually extend that same quality of kindness and care to more and more people, animals, and to all beings in our whole ten directions world. At last we can come to love all with a great love that wishes with our whole heart for their health and peace, safety and security, and fulfillment forever.

From this loving motivation, the question naturally arises, *how can we best serve others? How should we live so we can help others as much as we can while we are here? How should we love?*

The first verse addresses this question:

*with the determination to accomplish for them the highest good,
that is more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel*

Without naming it, this verse refers to enlightenment, aiming to accomplish for them the highest good. Without wisdom ourselves, how can we help

others? Without unfolding our own beautiful, innate qualities, how can we show others the way to peace and fulfillment?

Wisdom in Buddhism is realizing the way to freedom from suffering, and to peace. This is something more than just book learning - even about the different expressions of Buddhist Wisdom teachings. The Wisdom that sees through the ego is actualizing that knowledge that has been passed down directly, and in spoken and written form through the generations. This is not beyond any of us, if we practice with good guidance.

The realization of enlightened understanding is said here to be *more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel*. This mythological gem is said to be able to bestow anything that is wanted or needed, such as health, resources, good connections with others; wonderful, enriching experiences, and success in everything we do. The reason enlightenment is said *to surpass even this jewel* is that it brings peace when worldly motivations and achievements ultimately do not. Further, it is the root cause of all we wish for in our lives - things such as health, peace, satisfaction, joy, and generosity.

Being able to help others to the far shore of freedom from suffering, and to peace and well being is the greatest thing we can do with our lives. With the wisdom that liberates, we become capable of offering true and lasting benefit.

Vow

From this point forward,
I dedicate myself to removing the suffering of all living beings,
and to bringing them happiness

I dedicate myself fully to their healing and awakening;
to their all having comfort,
strength of body, mind, and spirit,
most excellent nourishment, health, longevity
every level of protection,
shelter, food, clothing,
the best of all medicines, education,
leisure, joy, and wisdom

In order to accomplish the needs of living beings
in the most effective way,
I will develop my wisdom and compassion
just as my teachers before me have done
I aim to become free of all faults, and complete in all qualities
and, day by day, hour by hour
to always offer as much help as I can

In this way, I will make a gift of my life
In this way, my own life will be fulfilled

I dedicate myself fully, leaving nothing out,
to the complete healing, fulfillment and enlightenment
of all living beings

No matter how long it takes
no matter how difficult it may be
no matter what it costs

With all my heart and with all my strength,
I vow to always serve all living beings
in every way that is necessary for them
and in every way that will bring each and every one of them
true and lasting health and happiness

From *The Door to Satisfaction*, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche, on Bodhicitta

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.

* * *

All others as 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.

* * *

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.

* * *

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.

Why the Buddha is Regarded as the Supreme Healer

To my mind, there are two reasons why the Buddha has been regarded throughout time as the Supreme Healer:

The first is that the Buddha saw not only suffering, but its causes as well, rooted in ignorance, and, from his very first talk, proposed a remedy to *all suffering*. By developing the wisdom of insight into our own nature, the Buddha taught that we can become free from all karma and delusions, and all harm. This is a radical proposition that, over two millennia, many have investigated and verified.

If a person goes to an ordinary doctor, with one problem or illness, that is what they will be treated for. By comparison, it is said that this profound remedy goes to the cause of the entire range of our sufferings. Next to a medical model that treats only one symptom, or a few symptoms, this is vastly different, as it goes unimaginably further. It aims to cure all the oceans of samsaric sufferings, over countless lifetimes, that living beings experience.

A second reason why the Buddha as been thought of as the Supreme Healer is the scope of the enlightened person's concern, which includes every aspect of our life, health and well being, from the material and psychological, to the most subtle, spiritual levels. It is care that is comprehensive, all inclusive, and it is for all living beings. It is this range, the depth as well as this breadth of love and compassion, that distinguishes the Buddha.

Over two millennia, then, born of wisdom and compassion, many Skillful Means have been developed by the followers of the Buddha, and those with realizations, to meet the needs of beings.

These methods are what are offered in the Traditions.

There are many ways that Divine Light and Healing Energy can pour into this world. If we feel we have an affinity with these teachings, we are invited to try these methods and see if they work for us. When we do, we may have the experience that we are supported as well by all the great pure energy of the Saints and Noble practitioners of the Lineages.

All of this has its source in the life of wisdom and compassion of the Founder. All of these teachings and practices can be seen as the continuation of activity of that realized life. And so I join my voice with those of the past and present, and sing with them, as part of one traditional verse of praise:

*Homage to the Completely Perfected, Fully Awakened Being,
the Supreme Guide*

*Homage to the Fully Awakened One, The Glorious Conqueror,
the Subduer from the Shakya Clan*

And, from the Seventh Dalai Lama:

*Honor to Buddha, the supreme sage,
the cosmic overlord who awakens
all beings from drunken ignorance
by manifesting the hundredfold light
of truth's brilliant door.*

May all the benefit that can come from healing practice
be received by all living beings,
each according to their need,
and, in whatever way I can, may I be the cause of that

- From A Collection of Buddhist Healing Prayer and Practices

Bodhicitta: The Perfection of Dharma, by Lama Thubten Yeshe

I think it is absolutely essential for us to have loving kindness towards others. There is no doubt about this. Loving kindness is the essence of bodhicitta, the attitude of the bodhisattva. It is the most comfortable path, the most comfortable meditation. There can be no philosophical, scientific or psychological disagreement with this. With bodhicitta, there's no East West conflict. This path is the most comfortable, most perfect, one hundred percent uncomplicated one, free of any danger of leading people to extremes. Without bodhicitta, nothing works. And most of all, your meditation doesn't work, and realizations don't come.

Why is bodhicitta necessary for success in meditation? Because of selfish grasping. If you have an experience of bliss: 'Me, me; I want more, I want more.' Then the good experience disappears completely. Grasping is the greatest distraction to experiencing single pointed intensive awareness in meditation. And with it, we are always dedicated to our own happiness: 'Me, me I'm miserable, I want to be happy. Therefore I'll meditate.' It doesn't work that way. For some reason good meditation and its results - peacefulness, satisfaction and bliss - just don't come.

Also, without bodhicitta it is very difficult to collect merits. You create them and immediately destroy them; by afternoon, the morning's merits have gone. It's like cleaning a room and an hour later making it dirty again. You make your mind clean, then right away you mess it up - not a very profitable business. If you want to succeed in the business of collecting merits, you must have bodhicitta. With bodhicitta you become so precious - like gold, like diamonds; you become the most perfect object in the world, beyond compare with any material things.

From the Western, materialistic point of view, we'd think it was great if a rich person said, 'I want to make charity. I'm going to offer \$100 to everybody in the entire world.' Even if that person gave with great

sincerity, his or her merit would be nothing compared with *just the thought*, 'I wish to actualize bodhicitta for the sake of sentient beings, and I'll practice the six paramitas as much as I can.' That's why I always say, actualization of bodhicitta is the most perfect path you can take.

Remember the story of the Kadampa geshe who saw a man circumambulating a stupa? He said, 'What are you doing?' and the man answered, 'Circumambulating.' So the geshe said, 'Wouldn't it be better if you practiced dharma?' Next time the geshe saw the man he was prostrating, and when he again asked what he was doing, the man replied, 'One hundred thousand prostrations.' 'Wouldn't it be better if you practiced dharma?' asked the geshe.

Anyway, the story goes on, but the point is that just doing religious looking actions like circumambulation and prostration isn't necessarily practicing dharma. What we have to do is transform our attachment and self-cherishing, and if we haven't changed our mind in this way, none of the other practices work; doing them is just a joke.

Even if you try to practice tantric meditations, unless you've changed within, you won't succeed. Dharma means a complete change of attitude. - That's what really brings you inner happiness, that is the true Dharma, not the words you say.

Bodhicitta is not the culture of ego, not the culture of attachment, not the culture of samsara. It is an unbelievable transformation, the most comfortable path, the most substantial path - definite, not wishy washy.

Sometimes your meditation is not solid; you just space out. Bodhicitta meditation means you really want to change your mind and actions and transform your whole life.

We are all involved in human relationships with each other. Why do we sometimes say, 'I love you,' and sometimes, 'I hate you?' Where does this up and down mind come from? From the self cherishing thought - a complete lack bodhicitta. What we are saying is, 'I hate you because I'm not getting any satisfaction from you. You hurt me; you don't give me pleasure.' That's the whole thing: 'I - *my* ego, *my* attachment - am not getting satisfaction from you, therefore I hate you.' What a joke! All the difficulties in interpersonal relationships come from not having bodhicitta, from not having changed our minds.

So, you see, just meditating is not enough. If that Kadampa geshe saw you sitting in meditation he'd say, 'What are you doing? Wouldn't it be better if you practiced dharma?' Circumambulating isn't dharma, prostrating isn't dharma, meditating isn't dharma. My goodness, what is dharma, then? This is what happened to the man in the story. He couldn't think of anything else to do.

Well, the best dharma practice, the most perfect, most substantial, is without doubt the practice of bodhicitta.

You can prove scientifically that bodhicitta is the best practice to do. Our self cherishing thought is the root of all human problems. It makes our lives difficult and miserable. The solution to self cherishing, its antidote, is the mind that is its complete opposite - bodhicitta. The self cherishing mind is worried about only me, me - the self existent I.

Bodhicitta substitutes others for self. It creates space in your mind. Then even if your dearest friend forgets to give you a Christmas present, you don't mind. 'Ah, well. This year she didn't give me my chocolate. It doesn't matter.' Anyway, your human relationships are not for chocolate, not for sensory pleasures. Something much deeper can come from our being together, working together.

If you want to be really, really happy, it isn't enough just to space out in meditation. Many people who have spent years alone in meditation have finished up the worse for it. Coming back into society, they have freaked out. They haven't been able to take contact with other people again, because the peaceful environment they created was an artificial condition, still a relative phenomenon without solidity. With bodhicitta, no matter where you go, you will never freak out. The more you are involved with people the more pleasure you get. People become the resource of your pleasure. You are living for people. Even though some still try to take advantage of you, you understand: 'Well, in the past I took advantage of them many times too.' So it doesn't bother you.

Thus bodhicitta is the most perfect way to practice dharma, especially in our twentieth century Western society. It is very, very worthwhile. With the foundation of bodhicitta you will definitely grow.

If you take a proper look deep into your heart you will see that one of the main causes of your dissatisfaction is the fact that you are not helping others as best you can. When you realize this you'll be able to say to yourself, 'I must develop myself so that I can help others satisfactorily. By improving myself I can definitely help.' Thus you have more strength and energy to meditate, to keep pure morality and do other good things. You have energy, 'Because I want to help others.' That is why Lama Tsong Khapa said that bodhicitta is the foundation of all enlightened realizations.

Also, bodhicitta energy is alchemical. It transforms all your ordinary actions of body, speech and mind - your entire life - into positivity and benefit for others, like iron transmuted into gold. I think this is definitely true.

You can see, it's not difficult. For example look at other people's faces. Some people, no matter what problems and suffering they are enduring, when they go out they always try to appear happy and show a positive aspect to others. Have you noticed this or not? But other people always go about

miserable, and angry. What do you think about that? I honestly think that it indicates a fundamental difference in the way these two kinds of people think. Human beings are actually very simple. Some are a disaster within and it shows on their faces and makes those whom they meet feel sick. Others, even though they are suffering intensely, always put on a brave face because they are considerate of the way others feel.

I believe this is very important. What's the use of putting out a miserable vibration? Just because you feel miserable, why make others unhappy too? It doesn't help. You should try to control your emotions, speak evenly and so forth. Sometimes when people are suffering they close off from others, but you can still feel their miserable vibration. This doesn't help - others with even momentary happiness forget about leading them to enlightenment.

To help the people around you, you have to maintain a happy, peaceful vibration. This is very practical, very worthwhile. Sometimes we talk too much about enlightenment and things like that. We have a long way to go to such realizations. Forget about enlightenment, I don't care about buddhahood - just be practical. If you can't help others, at least don't give them any harm, stay neutral.

Anyway, what I'm supposed to be telling you here is that bodhicitta is like atomic energy to transform your mind. This is absolutely, scientifically true, and not something that you have to believe with blind religious faith. Everybody nowadays is afraid of nuclear war, but if we all had bodhicitta, wouldn't we all be completely secure? Of course we would. With bodhicitta you control all desire to defeat or kill others.

And, as Lama Je Tzong Khapa said, when you have bodhicitta all the good things in life are magnetically attracted to you and pour down upon you like rain. At present all we attract is misfortune because all we have is the self cherishing thought. But with bodhicitta we'll attract good friends, good food, good everything.

As His Holiness the Dalai Lama said recently, if you're going to be selfish, do it on a grand scale; wide selfishness is better than narrow! What did His Holiness mean? He was saying that, in a way, bodhicitta is like a huge selfish attitude because when you dedicate yourself to others with loving kindness you get a lot more pleasure than you would otherwise. With our present, usual selfish attitude we experience very little pleasure, and what we have is easily lost. With 'great selfishness' you help others and you help yourself; with small it's always 'me, me, me' and it is easy to lose everything.

Remember, Atisha had over 150 teachers? He respected them all, but when he heard the name of one - Lama Dharmarakshita - he would come out in goose bumps. He explained this by saying, 'I received many teachings from many, many great gurus, but for me, Lama Dharmarakshita, who gave me the bodhicitta ordination and teachings on the method and wisdom of bodhicitta and the six paramitas, was the most helpful for my life'.

This is very true. Sometimes techniques of deity meditation are extremely difficult, but bodhicitta meditation is so simple, so incredibly profound and real. That's why Atisha would shake when he heard the name of his main teacher of bodhicitta.

The main point, then, is that when you contact Buddhadharma you should conquer the mad elephant of your self cherishing mind. If the dharma you hear helps you diminish your self cherishing even a little, it has been worthwhile. But if the teachings you have taken have had no effect on your selfishness, then from the Mahayana point of view, even if you can talk intellectually on the entire lam rim, they have not been much use at all.

Do you recall the story of Shantideva and how people used to put him down? They used to call him Dushesumpa, which means one who knows how to do only three things: eating, sleeping and excreting. This was a very

bad thing to call someone, especially a monk. But that's all that people could see him doing.

However, he had bodhicitta, so whatever he did, even ordinary things, was of greatest benefit to others. Lying down, peacefully, he would meditate with great concern for the welfare of all living beings, and many times, out of compassion, he would cry for them. Westerners need that kind of practice. Fundamentally we are lazy. Well, maybe not lazy, but when we finish work we are tired and don't have much energy left.

So, when you come home from work, lie down comfortably and meditate on bodhicitta. This is most worthwhile. Much better than rushing in speedily, throwing down a coffee and dropping onto your meditation cushion to try to meditate. It doesn't work that way; your nervous system needs time and space. You can't be rushing through traffic one minute and sitting quietly meditating the next. Everything takes time and space. It is much better to have a quiet, blissful cup of coffee.

And don't pressure yourself either; that too is very bad. Don't punish yourself when you are too tired to meditate: 'I should be meditating; I am very bad.' You destroy yourself like this. Be wise. Treat yourself, your mind, sympathetically, with loving kindness. If you are gentle with yourself you will become gentle with others so don't push. Pushing doesn't work for me, that's why I tell others not to force themselves. We are dealing with the mind, not rocks and concrete; it is something organic.

The Western environment offers lots of suffering conditions that act as causes for our actualizing bodhicitta, so life there can be very worthwhile. For example, it is much better to subdue an adversary with bodhicitta than with a knife or gun. When attacked, you can practice loving kindness. We could also do this in the monasteries of Tibet, where there were often horrible monks. Don't think that Tibet was full of only holy people - we had unbelievably wild monks there that nobody in authority could subdue! If you would try to control them wrathfully they would get only more

aggressive. But arya bodhisattva monks, people who had completely given themselves up for others, would treat them with loving kindness, and the wild monks would calm down completely. They would feel, 'This man loves me; he has great compassion. He has given up everything for others and has nothing to lose.' In that way aggressive people would be subdued, without authority but with bodhicitta.

There are many stories about this kind of thing, but I'm not going to tell them now. Perhaps you think they're funny, but it's true - you can conquer your enemies, both internal and external, with loving kindness and bodhicitta. It is most worthwhile and there's no contradiction. Bodhicitta is the totally comfortable path to liberation and enlightenment.

In his text Lama Choepa, the Panchen Lama says, 'Self cherishing is the cause of all misery and dissatisfaction, and holding all mother sentient beings dearer than oneself is the foundation of all realizations and knowledge. Therefore bless me to change self cherishing into concern for all others.' This is not some deep philosophical theory but a very simple statement. You know from your own life's experiences without needing a Tibetan text's explanations that your self cherishing thought is the cause of all your confusion and frustration. This evolution of suffering is found not only in Tibetan culture but in yours as well.

And the Panchen Lama goes on to say that we should look at what the Buddha did. He gave up his self attachment and attained all the sublime realizations. But look at us we are obsessed with 'me, me, me' and have realized nothing but unending misery. This is very clear isn't it? Therefore you should know clean clear how this works. Get rid of the false concept of self cherishing and you'll be free of all misery and dissatisfaction. Concern yourself for the welfare of all others and wish for them to attain the highest realizations such as bodhicitta and you'll find all happiness and satisfaction.

You people are young, intelligent and not satisfied with what you have in your own countries. That's why you are seeking further afield, and now you have found that most worthwhile of all things, bodhicitta, but it is not an easy thing. Easy things bore you quickly. It is quite difficult, but there's no way you'll get bored practicing it.

People need to be most intelligent to actualize bodhicitta, some, though, have no room for it. 'Forget about yourself and have a little concern for others?' they'll ask. 'That's not my culture.' It is very difficult to change holding yourself dear into holding others dear instead - the most difficult task you can undertake. But it is the most worthwhile and brings the greatest satisfaction.

After practicing some meditations, such as impermanence and death, for a month you'll say, 'I'm tired of that meditation.' But you'll never get tired of meditating on bodhicitta. It is so deep; a universal meditation. You'll never get tired of bodhicitta.

You have heard of many deities that you can meditate on, many deities to be initiated into Chenrezig and the rest. What are they all for? I'll tell you - for gaining bodhicitta. As a matter of fact, all tantric meditations are for the development of strong bodhicitta. That is the purpose of your consciousness manifesting as a being with 1000 arms so that you can lend a hand to a thousand suffering beings. If you don't like to manifest yourself this way you can relate the meditation to your own culture and see yourself as Jesus. Avalokiteshvara and Jesus are the same: completely selfless and completely devoted to serving others.

Remember what happened the first time that Avalokiteshvara took the bodhisattva ordination? He vowed to guide all universal living beings to enlightenment from behind, like a shepherd. 'I do not want to realize enlightenment until first I have led all mother sentient beings there first. That will be my satisfaction.'

He worked for years and years, leading thousands of beings to enlightenment, but when he checked to see what was happening he found there were still countless more. So again he worked for years and years and again when he checked there were still so many left, and this cycle was repeated until finally he was fed up and thought to himself, 'For aeons and aeons I have struggled to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment but there are still so many left. I think it is impossible to fulfill my vow.' And because of the intensity of his emotion his head split into eleven pieces. Then Amitabha Buddha came and offered to help, and blessed him to be successful.

So I'm sure some of you people can be like Chenrezig. The main thing is to have strong motivation. Even if it comes strongly only once, it is extremely powerful. It is very rare to have this kind of thought. A mere flash is so worthwhile; to have it for a minute, for a day...

The Bodhisattva Vows, by Lama Yeshe

At the outset I mentioned two ways of taking the bodhisattva vows. The first is the wishful way, wanting to develop the mind that wishes to help other sentient beings as much as possible, realizing that to help others in the best way you have to develop toward liberation as quickly as possible, and trying to maintain that motivation continuously in this, the next and all future lives. You have no doubt that this is the best way to go, but you may feel, with respect to actually practicing the bodhisattva path, that you cannot keep the sixty-four vows or engage in the extensive deeds right now. Think, "I shall do as much as I can, but I cannot take the full commitment at the moment." This way there is no heavy vow and you do what you can.

If you take the vows the second way, you think, "I shall keep the root and branch vows and actualize the six perfections as much as I possibly can from now until my death, forever." This is the sort of strong determination that you make.

Thus, there are two ways to take the bodhisattva vows and both are acceptable. The first way is not a kind of lie. There is no doubt in your mind that the altruistic mind of loving kindness is really your path; that bodhicitta is your deity, your Buddha, your Dharma, your Sangha, your bible- your Buddhist bible, your Hindu bible, your Muslim bible, your all world religions' bible. This is the way you should think. When you take the vows you don't have to be nervous about breaking them because you have said, "I'll do as much as I possibly can," and you have not promised something that you can't do. You shouldn't feel that by taking the vows this way you are somehow cheating.

Many people have a commitment from certain initiations to practice the six-session guru yoga each day, in which they renew or make their bodhisattva vows clean-clear. Those who don't have this particular practice can still do the same thing. Six times a day, for just a minute, you can simply remember

your commitment to the development of bodhicitta. You don't have to do anything dramatic, like Muslims bowing to Mecca. Wherever you are- standing or sitting or when you go to bed- just remember bodhicitta. That's good enough. Actually, there is a traditional way of doing this six times a day, with a visualization of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions in front of you and a prayer to be recited, but there is no necessary requirement to do this. If you want to do this, it's good for reminding yourself about bodhicitta, but the other way is easier when you're amongst ordinary people.

When you get up in the morning, sit on your bed for a minute or two and think,

"Today I shall actualize bodhicitta and make my life meaningful for others."

That's all. Then take a shower, have breakfast and go off to work. You get a lunchbreak, so after you've finished your sandwiches and coffee, just sit for a minute or two and renew your motivation. The same thing before you go to bed. So, according to your daily life, you can find six times to do this short practice. It is simple isn't it, and it doesn't conflict with your culture. It's no big deal. But formal meditation, sitting cross-legged, is a big deal, isn't it? You cannot just drop into the full lotus wherever you are. And you can't mix sleep with formal meditation, but you can mix bodhicitta with ordinary sleep.

Thus, bodhicitta is the most worthwhile path. No argument, no worry about this. It is completely the right thing, something we can practice for the rest of your life. Really the best. Forget about tantra. Of course, if your tantric practice helps you grow bodhicitta, do it, but if you don't forget your bodhicitta from now until the time you die, you are totally guaranteed freedom from a bad rebirth. I can promise you that you'll not be reborn in an African desert! The mind that has bodhicitta is incredibly rich, an unbelievably rich mind. There is no way a person with bodhicitta has to go without water- a rich mind makes us rich. That's why I say the bodhisattva

path is the most comfortable path to enlightenment. It's very comfortable and very scientific. You don't have to worry that you're not understanding it or whether it's working or not. It's clean-clear; it's perfect.

For us it can be difficult when someone asks us for even a cup of tea. If the situation is right, it's OK, but when we are busy or something and someone says, "I'm thirsty, can I have some tea?" we get uptight, uncomfortable and unhappy.

When we have bodhicitta and someone asks us for a drink, no matter what we are doing we are delighted to be useful, to have a chance to help someone. In the old days, bodhisattvas used to be so happy when a beggar came to their door asking for money or something. They would think "He's so kind, helping me along the graduated path to enlightenment, helping me eliminate my self-cherishing," and they would give with respect. This is a good example for us. We live among people who are always demanding our attention, our time and our energy. Young people's parents, for example, ask, "Why don't you come home tonight?" or "Why don't you stay with us for Christmas?"

There is so much happening in our life; everybody wants something from us. It's true, isn't it? Definitely. Maybe good things, maybe bad things; our wealth, our body, our speech, our mind. It's complicated. Also, sometimes we are obliged to give our time or our body, even though inside we don't want to, so we give with an unhappy mind, but when we have bodhicitta and someone asks us to give our body, we do so happily. This is true; at a certain point it's true. This is a scientific situation; I'm not just joking. Sometimes we are obliged to give our body or our speech, so it is much better to give with happiness than with anger. It is no good at all to give anything with anger. When we have bodhicitta, where giving once used to cause us pain, now it makes us blissful. This is scientifically true.

Remember the story of one of the previous lives of Shakyamuni Buddha? It happened in Nepal: he was a prince, and one day went into the jungle to

the place that is now called Namo Buddha. He saw a tigress who was dying and too weak to feed her cubs, so he took off his clothes and offered his body to the tigress. She was too weak even to notice him, so he broke off a branch of a tree, cut himself and let the blood flow into her mouth. Thus, she gradually regained her strength until she finally ate the prince. Then the king and the queen came along, saying, "What has happened to our gorgeous son?" Well, the gorgeous son had gone into the tiger's mouth, but he felt no pain because he had offered his body with great compassion. And this also caused his mind to develop much further along the path to enlightenment.

Similarly, Chandrakirti explained how a first level bodhisattva can offer his flesh to others, piece by piece, without pain. Each time he cuts off a piece all he feels is bliss. Such happiness comes from the power of the mind; it's not something physical. It is the result of bodhicitta, loving kindness. Of course, although these are good examples of the power of bodhicitta, we should forget about trying to make these kinds of offering. Neither can we nor should we think of cutting our body like this- we'd cry; we'd die. We have to be careful when we hear this sort of teaching. It is always emphasized that bodhisattvas should engage in such practices only when they are ready to do so. Until the mind is ready we shouldn't give anything like that.

Bodhisattvas even have a vow against giving certain things that they need for their practice- certain texts, for example. When we're in trouble we need to have our Dharma book to refer to, so we should never give it away; it is a reflection of the information a bodhisattva needs to follow the graduated path to method and wisdom. It is wrong to think that a bodhisattva should give everything. There are rules for giving: at this level we give so much, at the next so much, and so on. There are complete explanations, so don't make mistakes. A bodhisattva should follow the middle path and avoid extremes.

Now, the reason I'm telling you all this is that we are living amongst the problems of human life and we have to deal with them. That means that sometimes we do have to give a little of our time and energy, everything, to others. If we can give with bodhicitta our ability to give develops gradually and makes us blissful instead of tight and uncomfortable. Wrong giving is not worthwhile; I want you to have right understanding. Until you are on the first bodhisattva level you should never give your body: you are not ready for that. Don't give your eyes; don't give your heart!

So far I have met three students who have offered me their heart: "Lama, I want to give you my heart; please take my heart." I said, "Yes, whenever I'm ready I'll write to you." What else can I say? I was a bit shocked. I mean, I talk about bodhicitta, "Blah, blah, blah," and actually my students are really true bodhisattvas, saying, "Please take my heart." They make me lose my concepts! It's true- I have met three students who made this offer. They are very good, they mean well. I couldn't give my heart! Anyway, who'd want it? It's a broken one with three holes and doesn't work properly.

The reason I have explained all this is for you to see that through the power of bodhicitta, loving kindness, even things that are very difficult to give can be given easily and with great happiness. That's a function of bodhicitta.

The bodhisattva's mind is very broad. When we adopt a religion, sometimes we become very dangerous, fanatical, closed. "I'm a Buddhist; I hate Muslims." This is very, very bad. With bodhicitta, we are completely open. The bodhisattva has space for all religions- Hinduism, Christianity, Islam. That's one of the most beautiful things about it. In fact, one of the bodhisattva vows is that we must never put down any other religion or a religion's philosophy. It even says that we should not put down the lower levels of Buddhist philosophy like the Hinayana. What other religion says that you shouldn't put down other religions or other divisions of your own religion? That's why we say that Buddhism has universal understanding of the entire universal human consciousness. We should understand that the bodhisattva path is completely open, embracing all mother sentient beings,

all humanity, everything. There is no sectarianism, no discrimination against any other religion. This is the most beautiful thing to make us grow happy and healthy. I think it is wonderful.

Without this attitude, life on Earth is terrible. Some people accept one religious group but hate all others. They criticize and put down other people. This is the most dangerous thing, the worst example they can set. Observing this sort of behavior, non-religious people have no hope: "Look at how the followers of that religion act. They fight amongst and kill themselves and others. Who needs religion? It only makes more problems." I agree with people who say this; I can't blame them for feeling that way. Who wants to be like those religious fanatics? Inside they are most painful, most dangerous, and they damage others. It's so unhealthy. But if we follow the bodhisattva path, we embrace, we have space in our heart for all universal living beings.

Now, as you take the ordination in one of the two ways, think as follows: visualize before you the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions of the universe. What are buddhas and bodhisattvas? Those who have attained high realizations in their consciousness, who have actualized bodhicitta, who have crossed the ocean of confusion and dissatisfaction in order to be of the highest benefit to limitless sentient beings. Consider them in this way and think:

"Today I am so fortunate. I have come to the conclusion that I must change my attitude of self-cherishing into that of holding others dearer than myself. I want to serve others, therefore my entire meditation and my practice of charity, morality, patience, effort, concentration and wisdom will be for the benefit of others, for me to grow better and better in order to serve them as best I can.

This is my attitude today, my strong determination. I am so lucky, so fortunate to feel like this. It is the most precious thing in my life. This attitude is far more valuable than any material possession. I am so lucky to have it. And I am especially lucky to have discovered the real antidote to my unhappiness, my life of self-pity.

There is no question that the solution is to follow the bodhisattva's path, to actualize bodhicitta. Without doubt, this is the most comfortable path. From now on, may I never separate from this wish, this determination, this pure enlightened thought. I shall actualize this thought and hold it in my heart twenty-four hours a day, as much as I possibly can.

"In front of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions of the universe, in front of my lama, I make this request. Please give me the inspiration and strength to increase this determination continuously for the rest of my life, to make my life meaningful for the benefit of others. For countless lives I have held fanatical concepts, the selfish attitude concerned for 'me, me, me' alone, continuously reinforcing the cause of all misery and sickness. All suffering comes from this kind of mind, but now I have changed this thought into openness for others. I have created space in my heart for all universal living beings. I shall never forget this new experience and actualize it every day to the best of my ability.

"Buddhas and bodhisattva of the ten directions, please listen and pay attention to me: just as you have all actualized bodhicitta and gained happiness, today I too dedicate myself to the bodhisattva path. I shall actualize bodhicitta as much as I can and make the rest of my life meaningful and happy, truly happy and truly satisfied."

With this kind of motivation, take the bodhisattva ordination.

The Bodhisattva Vow - Traditional

To all the Buddhas dwelling in the three times and ten directions,
 To the great Bodhisattvas on the ten levels,
 To the great teachers, the Vajra Holders - pray listen to me:

Until I attain the essence of enlightenment
 I take refuge in all the Buddhas;
 In the holy Dharma and
 In the Assembly of noble Bodhisattvas

(repeat three times)

**Just as the buddhas of the past
 Aroused the bodhichitta aspiration
 And gradually progressed through
 The stages of a bodhisattva's training,
 Likewise I shall arouse the aspiration to enlightenment
 For the benefit of all beings.
 And I shall undertake step by step
 That training of a bodhisattva**

(repeat three times)

Having attained a fortunate human existence,
 Now my life has borne fruit.
 Today I am born into the family of the Buddhas,
 Now I have become a child of the Buddhas.

Now, at all costs, I must act
 In accord with that family,
 I must not do anything that will defile
 This noble and faultless race.

Today in the presence of all the protectors
I summon all beings as guests to the state of buddhahood
And, in the meanwhile, to worldly happiness!
May celestial beings, asuras and all others be joyful!

May beings never separate from the enlightened mind
And always engage in the activities of a Bodhisattva;
May they be cared for by the Buddhas
And give up the actions of Mara.

May the Bodhisattvas accomplish
All they have intended for the sake of beings;
Whatever the protectors have intended for them,
May sentient beings receive it.

May all sentient beings be happy,
May all the lower realms be emptied forever,
And may the Bodhisattvas on the ten levels
Have all their wishes fulfilled.

May the precious bodhichitta take birth
In those in whom it has not taken birth.
And where it has taken birth may it not decline,
But grow forever more and more.

Dedication from the Bodhicharyavatara

May beings everywhere who suffer
 Torment in their minds and bodies
 Have, by virtue of this merit,
 Joy and happiness in boundless measure.

As long as they may linger in samsara,
 May their present joy know no decline,
 And may they taste of unsurpassed beatitude
 In constant and unbroken continuity.

May the naked now be clothed,
 And all the hungry eat their fill.
 May those parched with thirst
 Receive pure waters and delicious drink.

May the poor and destitute find wealth,
 The haggard and careworn joy.
 May confidence relieve those in despair
 And bring them steadfastness and every excellence.

My every being ailing with disease
 Be freed at once from every malady.
 May all the sickness that afflicts the living
 Be instantly and permanently healed.

May those who go in dread have no more fear.
 May captives be unchained and now set free.
 And may the weak receive their strength.

May living beings help each other in kindness.
 May all attain the human state,
 And be possessed of wisdom, faith and love.

With perfect livelihood and sustenance,
May they have mindfulness throughout their lives.

Thus by all the merit we have gained,
May every being, leaving no one aside,
Abandon all their evil ways
Embracing goodness now and ever more.

Verses for generating the mind of enlightenment

May I think all beings with great love and compassion,
and generate the supreme awakening mind...

May I think of them all as my family,
and care for them all as my own.

May all beings have happiness
and all the causes of true happiness flourishing...

May all beings be completely and permanently free of all suffering
and all the causes of suffering...

I celebrate all that is beautiful and right in the world,
I rejoice in all kindness, virtue, positive actions and intentions,
and in all success, happiness, and good fortune...

and abide in impartial love...

Seeing the world of sentient beings,
so full of suffering, I will follow the bodhisattva's way.

May I clearly see that what I and all others so urgently need
is complete liberation of mind, perfect peace and freedom,
and that in taking care of myself, I am taking care of all of us
With an understanding of the Noble Truths,
may my love and compassion become the dedication to helping others
through my realization of this path

May I always cherish all living beings,
with the determination to accomplish for them this highest good
that is more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel

An Awakened One has appeared in this world.
 He has taught the way to freedom,
 and generations of his followers to this day have realized his teachings.

Homage!

{The Bodhisattva Vow}

Just as all previous Buddhas first awakened the precious bodhimind,
 and just as they then carefully followed each of the requisite stages of the
 Bodhisattva disciplines,
 in the same way, for the sake of living beings,
 I will awaken and cultivate the bodhimind,
 this all embracing intention,
 and then train in every one of the essential disciplines of a Bodhisattva.

I take refuge in the Buddha, the Light of the World,
 the Great Compassionate Teacher
 I take refuge in the Dharma, in all the Liberating Teachings
 and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha, the Accomplished Spiritual
 Community, the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

By the merit I have accumulated by practicing Generosity, and other
 Virtues, {Ethics, Patience, Joyful Effort, Meditation, and Wisdom...}
 May I accomplish each of the stages of liberation and enlightened
 understanding and activity,
 and help bring all others, without a single exception,
 to these very same states.

With my heart going out with great compassion
 in whatever direction these most precious teachings and their result
 have not yet spread,
 or, once spread, have declined,
 there may I bring this treasure of happiness and aid!

Limitless is the extent of space,
and limitless is the number of sentient beings
Limitless are the karmas and delusions of beings
Such then are the limits of my aspirations!

For as long as space endures,
and for as long as living beings remain,
until then, may I too abide,
to dispel the misery of the world

May the supreme jewel, bodhicitta,
arise where it has not yet arisen,
Where it has arisen, may it not diminish,
May it ever grow and flourish...

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41. Two quotes on bodhicitta from the Great Perfection Teachings
42. From The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana
43. Genuine compassion is egoless, by Khandro Rinpoche
44. From Uprooting Clinging, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche
45. A quote by Lama Lodro Rinpoche
46. Like an ice cube dissolving in the great ocean, by Garchen Rinpoche
47. From Meditation Instructions, by Garchen Rinpoche
48. A Verse from The Aspiration Prayer for the Attainment of Mahamudra
49. From The Avatamsaka Sutra

50. Verses Quoted in the book Bodhicitta, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche
51. On the Pilgrimage of a Bodhisattva, from The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines
52. From the Sikshasamuccaya by Shantideva
53. Selected Verses from The Jewel Lamp - In Praise of Bodhicitta, by Khunu Lama Rinpoche
54. Refuge and Bodhicitta Verses, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche
55. The Bodhisattva Attitude - the Verses
56. Stabilizing in the Bodhimind, by Shantideva
57. Dedication I, and,
58. Dedication from the Bodhicharyavatara, by Shantideva
59. Dedication prayers from A Healing Buddha Practice

The process of going beyond suffering and helping others do the same is the way of the Bodhisattva.

- Chagdud Tulku

One may be born in chaotic times when people's lives are difficult; one wants to help but does not have much power to provide relief. Investigating this in depth, one knows that only by studying Buddhism and becoming a Buddha can one really save sentient beings from suffering. One thus has great compassion that leads one to seek enlightenment and to save all.

- From *The Way to Buddhahood*, by the Venerable Yin-Shun

Why light a small stick of incense,
or softly ring a bell in sanctuary
if these are here so briefly,
and then
are simply gone

but this song is eternal,
moving like a river
and our lives are woven
with this light

these are small gestures
that speak at times of consolation
and at times
as words and signs
that reveal gifts

'til these fields are turned again,
and all new worlds begin

From this day forward, wherever you are,
give praise to the Bodhisattva Vow -

And wherever you go,
encourage yourself and others to take it up,
and bring it to fulfillment

Then, whatever body and land you are born into,
whatever the conditions,
your work will be the same as all the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas.

- Based on a verse by Shinran

What is it that gives the bodhisattva this strength by which he excels all the rest? It is his capacity to sustain the comprehension of the true nature of things, his capacity to bear with every circumstance devoid of fear and anxiety, and his ability to meet every situation with unimpeded insight and unbounded compassion.

- K. Venkata Ramanan, Nagarjuna's Philosophy

As quoted in Jung's Psychology and Tibetan Buddhism, by Radmila Moacanin

An incomparable spark of divinity is to be found in the heart of each human being, waiting to radiate love and wisdom everywhere, because that is its nature. Amazing!

- Eknath Easwaran

Dwelling deep within our hearts, and 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 make contact with this essentially pure nature.

- Lama Thubten Yeshe

Seeing the world of sentient beings,
 so full of afflictions,
 bodhisattvas arouse their energy,
 thinking,

'I should rescue and liberate these beings;
 I should purify and emancipate them;

I should lead them,
 direct them,

make them happy,
 develop them,
 and cause them to reach perfect peace.'

Thus dedicated to the salvation of all beings,
 the bodhisattva reflects thus,

'By what means can these beings,
 fallen as they are into such misery,
 be lifted out of it?'

and it occurs to these bodhisattvas,

'The means to do this is nowhere else
 but in the knowledge of liberation...'

The bodhisattvas thus devote themselves
 to their realization of the Buddha's Way,

From The Avatamsaka Sutra - 722

From the teachings of Ringu Tulku Rinpoche I

Taking Refuge and then renouncing samsara is the expression of compassion for ourselves, with clear wisdom;

Bodhicitta is a natural extension of Refuge - the same happiness, health and peace we want for ourselves, we wish for all others as well. We dedicate ourselves to that aim.

From Thrangu Rinpoche I

Essentially love consists of wanting others to be happy, and compassion consists of wanting others not to suffer. These two attitudes, of course, are excellent. But if they are present without any way to bring about what you wish - if your love is without any way to bring about the happiness of beings and your compassion is devoid of any way to remove the sufferings of beings - then they will actually become a cause of greater suffering and sadness for you. You will be more sensitive to the sufferings of others because of your attitude, but will feel unable to help. And so, instead of just the other being suffering, two beings will suffer - you will suffer as well.

If, however, the attitudes of love and compassion include *the understanding of how you can actually bring about happiness and freedom from suffering*, then these attitudes do not become sources of depression. Therefore we expand the attitude of love from “*may all beings be happy*” to “*may all beings be happy and possess causes of happiness,*” and expand the attitude of compassion from “*may all beings be free from suffering*” to “*may all beings be free from suffering and free from causes of suffering.*”

Compassion with Wisdom, by Ringu Tulku

From his commentary on Gampopa's Great Teaching to the Assembly

Bodhicitta is usually thought of as compassion, but it is more than compassion - it is compassion inseparable from wisdom. Bodhicitta focuses on two things: on sentient beings, and on liberation.

Ordinarily, when we feel compassion we focus only on sentient beings. We see that people have problems, we feel very sad about that, and we strongly wish for them to be free from suffering. Usually, it doesn't go further than this.

The problem with just focusing on the suffering of others though is that this kind of compassion can be painful for us as well...

Therefore, bodhicitta also focuses on liberation. When you have *compassion with wisdom*, not only do you see the suffering of others and want it to end, you also know there is a way out. This makes bodhicitta a hopeful, optimistic kind of compassion. Your enthusiasm comes from knowing there is a path out of suffering.

With bodhicitta as a basis, whatever you do is for the benefit of all beings. Inspired by compassion with wisdom, you act with enthusiasm and purpose. Bodhicitta gives you a clear vision. Your compassion becomes focussed, directed, and optimistic...

Ringu Tulku III

A bodhisattva is someone who says from the depth of his or her heart, “I want to be liberated and find ways to overcome all the problems of the world. I want to help all my fellow beings to do likewise. I long to attain the highest state of everlasting peace and happiness, in which all suffering has ceased, and I want to do so for myself and for all sentient beings.”

According to the Buddha’s teaching, anyone who makes this firm and heartfelt commitment is a bodhisattva. We become bodhisattvas from the moment we have this vast and open heart, called bodhichitta, the mind intent on bringing lasting happiness to all sentient beings.

I carry within me
medicine for the whole world,
but if I don't take it myself,
I'm not going to make it

To recover my sight, and strength,
to be able to continue on this road
to the fulfillment of my purpose

What I would share with all,
I need to practice, and realize

From Steps on the Path to Enlightenment, Volume Two, by Geshe Sopa

Bodhicitta means wanting to attain the highest goal of buddhahood in order to help other sentient beings. You want to help them because you see how they are trapped in a seemingly endless cycle of misery, which is perpetuated by their own misunderstanding, attachment, and hatred. You see how these mental afflictions produce wrong action, and how this cycle of afflictions and harmful action causes their lives of misery to go on and on.

You empathize with these suffering sentient beings and you want to help them. In order to rescue them from the mire of cyclic existence, you want to lead them to perfect buddhahood. In order to do that, you know that you yourself must first obtain liberation and enlightenment.

This is what bodhicitta means: wanting to save all other living beings, and in order to do that, wanting to quickly become a perfect being oneself, wanting to attain the perfect wisdom, perfect compassion, and perfect power of a buddha. Once you have completed these qualities of a buddha, you can be of immeasurable benefit to all beings...

Bodhicitta is the wish to lead all beings to freedom from all misery. It is the wish to quickly obtain enlightenment for that purpose. Such an attitude of course has great power.

From *Ceaseless Echoes of The Great Silence*, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

The enlightened being, the bodhisattva, must be courageous because he no longer exists merely for himself and his family and friends. He has dedicated the activities of this body, speech and mind to bringing joy and happiness to all sentient beings- not just ten or a hundred, a few thousand or a hundred thousand, but to sentient beings as limitless in number as space itself. According to the Buddha, the bodhisattva's courage has to be equally infinite in scope, making neither exceptions nor discriminations.

The duration of this courage too, must be infinite, if you are to work for all of them. It must continue on for hundreds and hundreds of aeons, equal to the infinity of sentient beings who are suffering. Courage must, too, remain changeless and indestructible as a mountain. Like the earth, which remains earth regardless of what is built upon it, or a bridge which remains a bridge regardless of the people or cars that traffic upon it, the bodhisattva must help others with perfect and pure intensity.

There will inevitably be some who do not recognize what you are doing; they might be mean or stubborn towards you. Never be bored or upset, just continuously radiate courage until sentient beings are free from suffering. Then you will be known as a bodhisattva.

When the actual process of enlightenment was examined, the Mahayana found that it consisted of two definite steps.

In the beginning it was necessary to create for the sake of others an urgent longing for enlightenment, and then the attainment of the final goal would be possible.

The longing was just as important and full of meaning as the attainment itself, for the latter was impossible without the former; indeed the latter determined the former in every way,

That is, the time, strength, efficacy, etc., of enlightenment entirely depended upon the quality of the initiative will-power raised for the attainment of the final object.

The motive determined the course, character, and power of the conduct. The desire for enlightenment intensely stirred meant, indeed, that the greater and more difficult part of the work was already achieved.

- D.T. Suzuki

From The Life of Shabkar

The core of Shabkar's practice was the Great Perfection, Atiyoga, the summit of the nine vehicles, the extraordinary treasure of the Nyingma tradition. Yet his realization of the Great Perfection was firmly grounded in the impeccable precepts of the Kadampa masters, which inspire practitioners to have few needs and desires; authentic feelings of renunciation, humility and inner calm, loving-kindness, compassion and, above all, the precious Bodhicitta- the intense resolve to bring all sentient beings to the perfect freedom of enlightenment.

Quotes on how much we need realized people in this world

Because sentient beings are suffering and need our help, we need to actualize dharmakaya right now

With this realization you can perfectly guide sentient beings with perfect methods all the time, without the slightest mistake.

The quicker we achieve enlightened understanding and activity, the quicker we actualize it through the practice of Dharma, the quicker we can guide sentient beings, and the shorter they suffer. The longer it takes, the longer other sentient beings have to suffer, and even one sentient being suffering is too much.

- LZR

{For a Mahayanist} this desire to gain liberation comes from unbearable compassion for others. We realize that the longer it takes us to achieve enlightenment, the longer everyone we could help will have to wait.

The strong intention comes from the wish to help others as much as possible, as quickly as possible.

- LTY

This is a matter of great urgency, of great urgency.

Here we are talking about liberating ourselves from all suffering, but our reason for taking refuge doesn't finish right there. Numberless sentient beings are suffering like ourselves and in order to free all of them from all those oceans of samsaric suffering and its causes, we take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, who have the qualities and the power to liberate us and all sentient beings from the oceans of samsaric suffering and its cause, delusion and karma.

With this vast understanding, this deep understanding of suffering and the cause - of your own and numberless sentient beings' suffering - you generate compassion toward them, then rely upon Buddha, Dharma, Sangha. With that, you recite the prayer. Then the words and your heart go together.

It's important for you to practice Dharma as much as possible yourself, to actualize the path, and to help other people, those sentient beings who have human bodies, understand Dharma; to get others to practice Dharma. Actually, it's unbelievably urgent...

- LZR

That which naturally takes a long time to accomplish can be shortened by the intensity of action.

- Swami Vivekananda

You should not give in to the ignorance grasping at true existence anymore. Dispel this darkness of ignorance from your mind and the minds of all dear mother sentient beings by sharing this light of the wisdom of emptiness with others.

It is better that we do not waste our precious time and rather engage in the urgent mission of bringing unconditional happiness and peace to all our mothers and to ourselves.

Concluding the day with a meditation on emptiness and sealing the day's virtuous practices with prayers will be profoundly helpful.

- Geshe Dorji Damdul

Vow

From this point forward,
I dedicate myself to removing the suffering of all living beings,
and to bringing them happiness

I dedicate myself fully to their healing and awakening;
to their all having comfort,
strength of body, mind, and spirit,
most excellent nourishment, health, longevity
every level of protection,
shelter, food, clothing,
the best of all medicines, education,
leisure, joy, and wisdom

In order to accomplish the needs of living beings
in the most effective way,
I will develop my wisdom and compassion
just as my teachers before me have done
I aim to become free of all faults, and complete in all qualities
and, day by day, hour by hour
to always offer as much help as I can

In this way, I will make a gift of my life
In this way, my own life will be fulfilled

I dedicate myself fully, leaving nothing out,
to the complete healing, fulfillment and enlightenment
of all living beings

No matter how long it takes
no matter how difficult it may be
no matter what it costs

With all my heart and with all my strength,
I vow to always serve all living beings
in every way that is necessary for them
and in every way that will bring each and every one of them
true and lasting health and happiness

Fearlessness is the most prominent characteristic of all bodhisattvas and all who tread the bodhisattva path. For them, life has lost its terrors and suffering its sting. Instead of scorning earthly existence, or condemning its 'imperfection', they fill it with a new meaning.

- Lama Anagorika Govinda

A Verse by Arya Nagarjuna

If the rest of humanity and I wish to attain unsurpassed awakening
{so needed for all our sake}
the basis for this is bodhicitta, as stable as the King of Mountains
Compassion, which touches everything,
and pristine wisdom, which does not rely on duality.

How can I fathom the depths of the goodness of this jewel of the mind,
the panacea that relieves the world of pain,
and is the source of all its joy?

- Shantideva, Chapter I, Verse 26

* * *

Strive to give the taste of bliss to others.

* * *

Moment by moment, try to give happiness to others. That way, you will
develop bodhicitta.

- From a Tibetan Buddhist teaching

The ideal compassion or ideal bodhicitta is said to have four types of excellence:

The first excellence is that I wish to extend this wish for beings to be free from suffering to all and every kind of suffering: the gross sufferings, the subtle dissatisfactions, and all the kind of things like that, freedom from all kinds of sufferings;

The second supreme quality is that the wish is extended to every being, not limited to a certain number or certain groups or certain types of being. The wish is extended to every type of being without leaving anybody out;

The third way bodichitta is supreme is that I not only wish all these beings to be completely free from all types of sufferings, that is not enough. I also wish each and every sentient being the highest kind of joy and peace that is possible. I wish that for every being;

And lastly, I wish this for all beings for all time, that they have lasting peace and happiness.

- Ringu Tulku, from Journey from Head to Heart

From At this time

So much more than for my own sake alone, then,
millions of times, billions of times more,
uncountable times more than for my own sake alone,

for all my family, who are precious to me,
for those who have never even heard of liberation and enlightenment,
for those who have heard but who have no opportunity to practice,
and for those who practice, but who have not yet attained the full result

for all of their sake, because of all their suffering now
and the possibility of all their suffering in the future,
due to their not having completely realized their true nature,

and because of all their potential for happiness,
that is not yet realized, and that would otherwise go unrealized,
it is most urgent,

To be able to fulfill their needs,
May I realize the Teachings,
and my prayers
to do all I can
to accomplish the aims of living beings

From Thangu Rinpoche II

The idea behind generating bodhicitta is to recollect that all beings without exception wish to be happy in exactly the same way and to exactly the same degree as we do. If you bring that to mind fully, then your aspiration to attain freedom for yourself will expand and become an aspiration to bring all beings to that same freedom.

This aspiration has to be a long-term aspiration. It is not enough simply to aspire to free beings from a certain type of suffering, or to free them from the suffering they are undergoing now, or to free them from this year's suffering. For it to be the aspiration of bodhicitta, which is the fullest and most extensive motivation, you must have the attitude of wishing to establish beings in a state that will *permanently* free them from *all* suffering.

Now, the only way that you can actually make beings permanently happy is to bring them to a state of full awakening, to buddhahood...

{May it be so, and, may I be the cause of that.}

Mahayana practitioners take upon themselves the great responsibility of freeing all beings from suffering and leading them to happiness.

The emphasis in all Buddhist practice, especially in Mahayana Buddhism, is to think about our problems, the causes of those problems, and how to resolve them...

You consider, "How is it that I am miserable? What are the causes for my unhappiness?"

The Mahayana then extends that analysis to look at all other sentient beings in the same light.

"How is it that they are physically and mentally suffering? What are the causes and conditions of that misery?"

Thinking about the conditions of others, you try to generate a sympathetic attitude. If you have sympathy, the wish to help others will naturally arise. Then you will genuinely and sincerely take on the responsibility to help other beings...

* * *

Bodhicitta is called the mind of enlightenment because you want to quickly attain the high state of the buddhas and bodhisattvas in order to help all other sentient beings...

Mahayana means the Great Vehicle. The name indicates that your attitude and behavior take on a great scope. A practice with great scope includes all other sentient beings' (temporary and ultimate) welfare in addition to your own.

In this context bodhicitta refers to the bodhisattva's special determination to attain buddhahood- to actualize the Body, Speech, Mind, Qualities, and Activities of the Buddhas- in order to help other sentient beings.

This attitude dominates and guides all bodhisattvas' actions and practice of the path.

They realize, "If I can accomplish this practice, I will be able to benefit other sentient beings. Those others are in a low position. They can't help themselves; they need my help."

Bodhicitta is the attitude of wanting to accomplish each of the stages of liberation and enlightenment, in order to help others to be free from suffering, and to have lasting peace, health, and happiness.

- Geshe Sopa, revised

Seeing how difficult it is to practice a spiritual path and attain any lasting positive results at all can bring even greater determination.

Compassion arises as this strength to accomplish the path, and then to care for, support, and encourage others in every way that is needed.

The purpose of the spiritual path is to relieve suffering, initially our own, and then that of others. We begin by having compassion for ourselves, for our own suffering, for if we cannot help ourselves, how can we help others?

The Buddha said, Be gentle to yourself.

Once we develop compassion for ourselves, we begin to feel compassion for others... our heart opens, and we see and feel how we are all interconnected and interdependent.

We could say that opening the heart in this way, to embrace all sentient beings, to experience oneness, is the essential practice of Buddhism.

- Zasep Rinpoche

May I clearly see that what I and all others need
is ultimate liberation of mind, perfect peace and freedom,
and that in taking care of myself, I am taking care of all of us
With an understanding of the Noble Truths,
may my love and compassion become the dedication to helping others
through my realization of this path

From Pabonkha Rinpoche's outline of The Three Principal Aspects of the Path

In short, when your reflection on the suffering of sentient beings has made it impossible for you to not act on their behalf, and the aspiration for enlightenment for their sake arises without effort, then you have realized the supreme precious awakening mind

A Prayer

May all the suffering we are aware of
only clarify and strengthen our vows

May it cause us to give rise to even greater courage and commitment,
fearlessness in the face of delusion, and affliction,
and power to our limbs and to our thoughts and prayers

May it cause each of us to awaken to the preciousness of this time,
and every life,
and work day and night to heal the sick,
to rescue the lost,
to comfort the stricken,
to encourage the fearful,
to give to the hungry,

to clothe those exposed to bitter elements,
to liberate those caught in addictions of all kinds
to hold a mirror to the beauty of the world
to be a song of remembrance
to rekindle the sense of our innate dignity,
our belonging,
and our joy

May the fullness of love and wisdom manifest in each of us now

May we receive the gifts of our spiritual ancestors

May all our prayers for each other pour forth
May we find every action meaningful,
and may we create the world that from within longs to be born

Tirelessly, compassionately, for all who struggle and are lost,
for all who are closed in on themselves,
and for all those who know only violence,
whose world is already hell

May I go there without hesitation,
forever,
and lead them out

For all who do not know the treasures we hold within
or who do not know the beauty of our children, and our elders,
and our brothers and our sisters everywhere -

May there be nothing less than a full awakening for them

With gratitude for all my family
and for all my near and distant relations

With abundant gratitude for our teachers,
and for all the healers of the world,
for our ancestors,
and for this our natural home

I too dedicate all positive energy today
to the comfort and healing of all who need it.

May peace awaken.
May greater love awaken in me,
and in all my family and friends,
and in all the world.

You do not need to ask,

Seeing the stranger, will you let him in?

Seeing the wounded, the outcast,
will you tend to him?

All the hungry families, and children,
our flowing rivers, our breath moving over this earth -

Already I have answered you

Already my decision has been made

Let there be no doubt -

Let the others exclude,
Let them turn their backs,
amuse and indulge themselves endlessly -
no matter

They don't yet have the eyes to see
or the ears to hear the cries of the world

but some few are here for just that purpose

to carry those too weak to walk, or to stand

to shelter the homeless,

to clothe and feed the poor close to them
and however far the need may reach

to lift up the downcast,

and forge a way out of the wilderness

and everyone healed becomes a worker in time

(and everyone healed becomes a worker in time)

These are settled matters for some

They need no convincing

They are the first ones out the door in the morning,

or else they are those

who keep a clear, unwavering lamp burning throughout the night

Though we've not met face to face,

we delight in each other's company,

we lend strength and encouragement to each other

We partake of the feast together at harvest time,

invisible to some, but including all the world

For the sake of all who struggle and suffer,
all those who have not yet reached the highest state of freedom and peace,
to relieve their suffering and to bring them happiness,

I take refuge in the Buddha,
the Great Compassionate Teacher,
I take refuge in the Dharma,
in all the Liberating Teachings,
and I take refuge in the Noble Sangha,
the Accomplished Spiritual Community,
the Great Assembly of Saints and Bodhisattvas

By this practice,
just as my teachers before me have done,
May I realize the state of Peace,
Perfect Freedom, and happiness,
and Great Love, ~ the Mind of Enlightenment,
and may I bring all others to that very same state

The concerns of others are my concerns,
is that not so?

For their sake, then

May I accomplish this Path,

and,

May all temporal and ultimate aims be fulfilled

For this brief moment of time,
my life intersects with these infinitely precious ones,
who are without a guiding friend
May I serve them well

May the Supreme Jewel, bodhicitta
arise where it has not yet arisen
Where it has arisen, may it not diminish
May it ever grow and flourish

Lama Lodro Rinpoche described the depth of dedication of the Bodhisattva, saying:

A Bodhisattva would go to be born one million times in hell to help one sentient being. One million times he would go, and not complain- he would enjoy that, actually. Beings need help, and he enjoys helping. That's the Bodhisattva motivation.

Two selections from His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso

The Awakening mind is like a seed for the attainment of Buddhahood.

It is like a field in which to cultivate all positive qualities.

It is like the ground on which everything rests.

It is like the god of wealth who removes all poverty.

It is like a father protecting all bodhisattvas.

It is like a wish-fulfilling jewel.

It is like a miraculous vase fulfilling all your wishes.

It is like a spear vanquishing the foe of disturbing emotions.

It is like armor shielding you from improper thoughts.

It is like a sword beheading the disturbing emotions.

It is like an ax felling the tree of disturbing emotions.

It is like a weapon staving off all kinds of attack.

It is like a hook to draw you out of the waters of the cycle of existence.

It is like the whirlwind that scatters all mental obstacles and their sources.

It is like the concentrated teaching encompassing all the bodhisattvas' prayers and activities...

* * *

There is no more powerful mind than bodhicitta.

There is no more joyous mind than bodhicitta.

For the accomplishment of one's own ultimate purpose,
the awakening mind is supreme,
and to accomplish the purpose of all other living beings
there is nothing superior to bodhicitta.

The awakening mind is the unsurpassable way to collect merit.

To purify obstacles bodhicitta is supreme.

For protection from interferences bodhicitta is supreme.

It is the unique, all-encompassing method.

Every kind of ordinary and supra-mundane power
can be accomplished through bodhicitta.

Thus, it is absolutely precious.

You should try to meditate regularly on death and impermanence and thus become a spiritual practitioner of initial scope. Then you should develop the meditations on the unsatisfactory nature of samsara and the three higher trainings [ethics, concentration and wisdom] and thus become a practitioner of medium scope. Finally, you should give birth to love, compassion, universal responsibility and bodhicitta and thus enter the path of the practitioner of great scope, the Mahayana, which has full buddhahood as its goal. Relying on the guidance of a spiritual master, you should cultivate the seeds of bodhicitta in connection with the wisdom of emptiness and, for the sake of all that lives, quickly actualize buddhahood. This may not be an easy task, but it has ultimate perfection as its fruit.

- Ling Rinpoche

May I lead all beings to happiness

For however long I have left to live,
May I be devoted to the Dharma from the very core of my being,
And may whatever I do, say or think,
Be directed only to beings' good,
Never entangled in selfish desires!

May I set out upon the path to liberation,
And, mounting the steed of bodhicitta,
May I lead all beings to happiness!

- Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö

The self-arisen wisdom, by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche

The self-arisen wisdom, which is also called bodhichitta, is not something that has been fabricated, a new product created by the conjunction of causes and conditions. It never has changed, never changes, and never will change. The absolute nature remains what it is, perfectly pure, at all times. Even if it appears obscured for impure beings at the start of the path, it has never actually been obscured. If it seems to be a mixture of pure and impure during the course of the path, it in fact always remains pure. And at the time of the result, perfect enlightenment, it is simply the same ground nature made evident and not something new that was not there before. Through all conditions, the kinglike bodhichitta that is the doer-of-everything will never be stained or dampened.

On the relative level, bodhicitta is the strong, sustained motivation to awaken; to liberate oneself; in order to live a life of freedom, joy, and the greatest possible helpful action. It is also our true nature, of clarity, love, and compassion. Practiced together, it is aligning ourselves with the motivation to be of universal benefit.

Two Quotes on Bodhicitta, from the perspective of the Great Perfection Teachings

From *The Buddhist Path*, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Bodhichitta is the root or the seed from which enlightenment develops. Bodhichitta is not found externally, but it is within your own mind. Although all of us have experienced love and compassion, these qualities need to be developed further. One way to increase them is to do the Dzogchen meditation of resting the mind in its own nature.

And,

From *A Marvelous Garland of Rare Gems*, by Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche

Nyoshul Khenpo would explain the specifically Dzogchen understanding of bodhichitta motivation:

What is arousing bodhichitta according to the uncommon approach of Dzogchen? This is something that is not even mentioned in the other vehicles.

It is summoning forth or evoking mind as wisdom.

From The Awakening of Faith in the Mahayana

The True Mind of all sentient beings
leads and guides each sentient being

Genuine compassion is egoless. It is the inherent essence expressed, inseparable from awareness. This natural essence, which is genuine compassion, does not need to be formulated or even expressed as something like “compassion.” We see this exemplified in our great teachers. Their genuine compassion does not require phrases and expressions or even actions. Just their presence, who they are, is nothing other than the quintessence of compassion.

We, in contrast, have to invent and demonstrate compassion. Our {ego} contaminated compassion still requires effort and deliberation. That is conventional or general compassion. The good thing about the use of deliberate or conventional compassion is that it matures the mind so that ego-grasping diminishes. It definitely has that effect and is therefore a skillful method for developing awareness compassion.

~ Khandro Rinpoche

From *Uprooting Clinging*, by Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche

Compassion and wisdom don't come from the outside; they can't be gathered up and collected. They are the innate, enlightened qualities of mind- our most precious buddha-nature.

By applying the teachings of the Buddha, it becomes possible to reveal the innate wisdom and compassion of our true nature.

* * *

By overcoming karmic obscurations and ego-clinging, all good qualities spontaneously arise without effort. Previously hidden qualities of pure love and compassion will radiate in every directions for all sentient beings.

As your understanding and realization of the ultimate nature of mind is developed, compassion and loving-kindness will naturally manifest without attachment or clinging.

Lama Lodro Rinpoche taught that if we practice great loving kindness and compassion for all beings, it will lead us right up to the view.

Garchen Rinpoche said we should practice loving kindness towards all beings, and that this would gradually dissolve the ego - the false sense of separation between ourselves and others, *just like an ice cube dissolving in the great ocean.*

From Meditation Instructions by Garchen Rinpoche

Meditation means to first recognize and then habituate to the nature of mind. First, you must understand the basic nature of mind. This mind is a single ground within which we are one. Once you have recognized the nature of mind, you must always sustain it, uphold it, without falling into distraction. To habituate this present awareness is meditation...

What is most important is to cultivate bodhicitta, love and compassion, in all your activities.. If you give rise to compassion, then you will understand the nature of mind very easily.

* * *

The purpose of meditation is to realize the nature of mind.

You should begin your meditation by taking refuge and cultivating boundless love because when you meditate on the basis of love, your mind becomes all-pervasive, and only in such a boundless state will you realize the nature of mind as it truly is. Love is also your actual refuge, your actual protection...

Once you have given rise to boundless love, rest in a natural state while sustaining clear awareness...

A Verse from The Aspiration Prayer for the Attainment of Mahamudra, by
The Third Karmapa

The basis of purification is this very mind itself- when recognized as the
inseparable unity of clarity and emptiness;

That which purifies is the Great Vajra Yoga of Mahamudra;

That which is to be purified are the transient stains of delusion;

May the result of purification, the stainless Dharmakaya, be manifest.

From The Avatamsaka Sutra

*To all internal and external worlds
Bodhisattvas have no attachment at all,
Yet do not abandon works beneficial to sentient beings;
The great ones cultivate this kind of knowledge.*

*In all lands in the ten directions
They do not depend or dwell on anything;
They do not grasp things, such as livelihood,
And do not arbitrarily create distinctions.*

*They engage with all sentient beings
In all worlds in the ten directions;
Observing their essential nature,
They practice dedication reaching everywhere.*

May all beings have happiness, and all the causes of happiness flourishing
May they all enjoy an abundance of positive conditions,
well being, and peace.

Verses Quoted in the book Bodhicitta, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Since the limitless mind of the Sole Guide of the World
has upon thorough investigation seen its preciousness,
all beings wishing to be free from worldly abodes
should firmly take hold of this precious Awakening Mind

- A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, by Shantideva, chapter 1, verse
11

The thought desiring to dispel
every mistake from every sentient being
and to bring every being to full knowledge is bodhicitta.
Of all wonderful things, this is the most wonderful.

- The Jewel Lamp, by Khunu Lama Rinpoche, verse 21

If even the thought to relieve
living creatures of merely a headache
is a beneficial intention
endowed with infinite goodness,

then what need to mention
the wish to dispel their inconceivable misery,
wishing every single one of them
to realize boundless good qualities.

- Shantideva, chapter 1; verses 21 - 22

By depending on the medicine of bodhicitta
 all the diseases of the all-rising delusions are cured.
 Therefore, there is no question at all
 that there is no better medicine in samsara than bodhicitta.

- Khunu Lama Rinpoche, *The Jewel Lamp*, verse 286

It is the supreme ambrosia
 that overcomes the sovereignty of death;
 it is the inexhaustible treasure
 that eliminates all the poverty of 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.

- Shantideva, chapter 3; verses 29 - 30

All the Buddhas who have contemplated for many eons
 have seen it to be beneficial;
 for by it the limitless masses of beings
 will quickly attain the supreme state of bliss.

- Shantideva, 1.7

Just as I have fallen into the sea of samsara,
 so have all mother migratory beings.
 Please bless me to see this, train in supreme bodhicitta,
 and bear the responsibility of freeing all migratory beings.

- *The Foundation of All Good Qualities*, by Lama Tsongkhapa

Just as a flash of lightning on a dark, cloudy night
 for an instant brightly illuminates all,
 likewise, in this world, through the might of the Buddha,
 a wholesome thought rarely and briefly appears.

Hence virtue is perpetually feeble,
 the great strength of evil being extremely intense,
 and except for a fully awakening mind,
 by what other virtue will it be overcome?

Shantideva - 1.5, 6

{Of bodhicitta, Shantideva said}

Do even fathers and mothers
 have such a benevolent intention as this?
 Do the gods and sages?
 Does even Brahma have it?

If those beings have never before
 even dreamed of such an attitude
 for their own sake,
 how would it ever arise for the sake of others?

1. 23 - 24

When you walk, walk with bodhicitta.
 When you sit, sit with bodhicitta.
 When you stand, stand with bodhicitta.
 When you sleep, sleep with bodhicitta.
 When you look, look with bodhicitta.
 When you eat, eat with bodhicitta.

When you speak, speak with bodhicitta.
 When you think, think with bodhicitta.

- Khunu Lama Rinpoche, *The Jewel Lamp*, verses 338 - 339

Live with compassion
 Work with compassion
 Die with compassion
 Meditate with compassion
 Enjoy with compassion
 When problems come, experience them with compassion

{Bodhicitta is the medicine that can cure all illness and destroy all suffering}

Generating the mind of bodhicitta
 is the central axle of the supreme vehicle path;

It's the foundation and the support of all expansive deeds;
 To all instances of two accumulations it is like the elixir
 that turns base metals into gold;
 It's the treasury of merits
 containing myriad collections of virtues

Recognizing these truths, the heroic bodhisattvas
 uphold the precious supreme mind as the heart of their practice

I, a yogi, have practiced in this manner
 You, who aspire for liberation, too should do likewise

- From *Hymns of Experience*, by Lama Tsongkhapa, verses 21 - 22

The moment an Awakened Mind arises
 in those fettered and weak in the jail of cyclic existence,
 they will be named a child of the Buddhas,
 and will be revered by both humans and gods of the world

- Shantideva, 1.9

Bodhicitta beautifies the whole appearance of the face
 Bodhicitta lends beauty to the wideness of the eyes
 Bodhicitta gives beauty to the sound of the voice
 Bodhicitta makes behavior beautiful

- Khunu Lama Rinpoche, The Jewel Lamp, verse 129

The world honors as virtuous
 one who sometimes gives a little, plain food
 disrespectfully to a few beings,
 which satisfies them for only half a day
 What need be said then of one
 who eternally bestows the peerless bliss of the sugatas
 upon limitless numbers of beings,
 thereby fulfilling all their hopes?

- Shantideva, 1. 32- 33

If merely a benevolent intention
 excels veneration of the buddhas,
 then what need to mention striving to make
 all beings, without exception, happy?

- Shantideva, 1.27

If it possessed physical form,
 the merit of the altruistic intention
 would completely fill the whole of space
 and exceed even that

If someone were to fill with jewels
 as many buddha fields as there are grains
 of sand in the Ganges
 to offer to the Protector of the World

this would be surpassed by
 the gift of folding one's hands, even for a moment,
 and inclining one's mind to enlightenment,
 even for a moment,
 for such is limitless

- From A Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment, by Atisha, verses 15 - 17

Just like the lotus among flowers,
 is bodhicitta supreme among all virtuous thoughts
 Since having it brings immediate and final happiness,
 one should make every effort to produce it

Without arrogance when things go well,
 not depressed when times are hard,
 unharmable by anything -
 this bodhicitta gold

The bodhicitta that serves as a sword
 to cut the shoots of the afflictions,
 is the weapon for the protection

of all wandering beings

- Khunu Lama, v. 10; 63 - 64

Just like the fire at the end of an age,
it instantly consumes all great wrongdoing.

Its unfathomable advantages were taught
to the disciple Sudhana by the wise lord Maitreya

- Shantideva, 1.14

It is like the supreme gold-making elixir,
for it transforms the unclean body we have taken
into the priceless jewel of a buddha form.
Therefore firmly seize this Awakening Mind.

- Shantideva, 1.10

By relying on the medicine of bodhicitta
all the diseases of delusions are cured
So in all the world it is definite
that there is no other medicine like this

- Khunu Lama, v.286

If you want to help yourself, produce excellent bodhicitta
If you want to help others, produce excellent bodhicitta
If you want to serve the doctrine, produce excellent bodhicitta
If you want the path to bliss, generate bodhicitta

- Khunu Lama, v.26

Those who wish to destroy the many sorrows of their conditioned
existence,
those who wish all beings to experience a multitude of joys,
and those who wish to experience much happiness,
should never forsake the Awakening Mind

- Shantideva, 1.8

If you want to be a scholar, learn bodhicitta
If you want to be a noble person, learn bodhicitta
If you want to be a decent person, learn bodhicitta
If you want to be of benefit to others, learn bodhicitta

- Khunu Lama, v.325

If one is without the vital juice of bodhicitta,
one cannot even enter the Mahayana
If such is the case, how will one get
to the supreme stage of Buddhahood?

- Khunu Lama, v.298

All kinds of beings
transmigrate through all the realms
Buddhas, not discriminating,
liberate countless kinds

- From The Flower Garland Sutra

If you desire to benefit others,
 you should cultivate bodhicitta
 If you desire to benefit yourself,
 to take the joyous path,
 you should cultivate bodhicitta

- Khunu Lama, v.286

In brief, the Awakening Mind
 should be understood to be of two types:
 the mind that aspires to awaken
 and the mind that ventures to do so

Although great fruits occur in cyclic existence
 from the mind that aspires to awaken,
 an uninterrupted flow of merit does not ensue
 as it does with the engaging mind

- Shantideva, 1.15, 17

In short, no matter what appearances happen,
 be they good or bad,
 I seek your blessings to transform them into the path,
 ever enhancing the two bodhicittas,
 through the practice of the five powers³ -
 the quintessence of the entire Dharma -
 and thus to meditate only on mental happiness

- From The Guru Puja, by the Panchen Lama, Chokyi Gyalsten

³ Motivation, familiarization, virtue, repudiation, and prayer

In brief, I will train myself to offer benefit and joy
to all my mothers, both directly and indirectly
and respectfully take upon myself
all the hurts and pains of my mothers

By ensuring that all this remains undefiled
by the stains of the eight mundane concerns,
and by understanding all things as illusions,
I will train myself to be free of the bondage of clinging

- Verses Seven and Eight from the Eight Verses on Mind Training, by
Langri Tangpa

Determined to obtain the greatest possible benefit
from all sentient beings,
who are more precious than a wish-granting jewel,
I shall hold them most dear at all times

- Langri Tangpa, v.1

Bodhicitta pacifies one's own mindstream
Bodhicitta pacifies the mindstreams of others
With bodhicitta, one respects everyone
With bodhicitta, one sees everyone as equal

This precious gem of bodhicitta
does not discriminate between rich and poor,
does not differentiate between wise and foolish;
it benefits equally the high and the low

- Khunu Lama, v.72, 31

May the supreme jewel, bodhicitta,
 arise where it has not yet arisen
 Where it has arisen, may it not diminish
 May it ever grow and flourish

When your mothers,
 who've loved you since time without beginning
 are suffering,
 what's the use of your own happiness?
 Therefore to free limitless living beings,
 develop the altruistic intention -
 this is the practice of Bodhisattvas

- From The Thirty-Seven Practices of the Bodhisattva, by Thokme Sangpo,
 verse 10

If we were to see our dear ones
 fallen into the ocean of samsara
 as if into a whirlpool,
 swiftly whirling around,
 emerging, and then again disappearing
 in the cycles of birth and death,
 and if we were to ignore them and go away alone -
 how could there be anyone more shameless?

- From A Letter to a Disciple, by Chandragomin, verse 99

Even three times a day to offer
 three hundred cooking pots of food
 does not match a portion of the merit
 in one instant of love

Though through love you are not liberated,
 you will attain the eight good qualities of love -
 gods and humans will be friendly,
 even non-humans will protect you,

you will have mental and many physical pleasures,
 poison or weapons will not harm you,
 without striving you will attain your aims,
 and be reborn in the world of Brahma

- From A Precious Garland, by Nagarjuna, verses 283 - 285

The Shravakas and those half way to buddhahood
 are born from the Mighty Sage,
 and the buddhas take birth from the mighty heroes

Compassion, nonduality,
 and the wish for buddhahood for others' sake
 are the causes of the children of the Conqueror

Of buddhahood's abundant crop,
 compassion is the seed
 It is like moisture bringing increase
 and is said to ripen in the state of lasting happiness
 Therefore, from the beginning, I offer homage to compassion

- From A Guide to the Middle Way, by Chandrakirti, 1.1-2

Having considered how all these miserable beings
 have been my mothers,
 and have raised me in kindness again and again,
 I seek your blessing to develop effortless compassion,
 like that of a loving mother for her precious child

- From the Guru Puja, by the Panchen Lama, Chogyi Gyalsten

When beholding someone with my eyes,
 thinking, I shall fully awaken
 through depending upon this being
 I should look at that person with love
 and an open heart

- Shantideva, 5.80

The Mighty One has said
 that the field of sentient beings
 is similar to a buddha-field,
 for many who have pleased them
 have thereby reached perfection

A buddha's qualities are gained
 from the sentient beings and the Conquerors alike,
 so why do I not respect them
 in the same way I respect the Conquerors?

- 6.112-113

The mind that cherishes all mother sentient beings
 and would secure them in bliss
 is the gateway leading to infinite virtue
 Seeing this,
 I seek your blessing to cherish these beings more than my life,
 even should they rise up as my enemies.

- From The Guru Puja

Though someone may deride and speak bad words about you
 in a public meet,
 look upon him as a spiritual teacher,
 bow to him with respect -
 this is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

Even if a person for whom you've cared like your own child
 regards you as an enemy,
 cherish him specially,
 like a mother does her child who is stricken by sickness -
 this is the practice of Bodhisattvas.

- The Thirty-Seven Practices of the Bodhisattva, by Thokme Sangpo,
 verses 15 and 16

I and sentient beings are equal in happiness and suffering
 I have attained the holy form body only for the sake of sentient beings,
 and so harming sentient beings is the supreme harm to me,
 whereas benefitting sentient beings is the best worship to me

- According to the editor, this resembles a sutra, In Praise of Worshipping
 Sentient Beings, that was put into verse form by Nagarjuna

{It is similar as well to this: As you have done to the least of these, you have done to me; Matthew, 25:40}

There is no difference between myself and others;
 none of us wishes even the slightest sufferings
 or is ever content with the happiness we have.
 Realizing this,
 I seek your blessing that I may enhance the bliss and joy of others.

- The Guru Puja

When the world and its inhabitants boil with negativity,
 transform adverse conditions into the path of enlightenment
 Banish all blames into the single source
 Towards all beings contemplate great kindness

- From The Seven-Point Mind Training, by Chekawa Yeshe Dorje

When others out of jealousy
 treat me wrongly with abuse and slander,
 I will train to take the defeat upon myself
 and offer the victory to others

Even if one I have helped
 or in whom I have placed great hope,
 gravely mistreats me in hurtful ways,
 I will train myself to view him as my sublime teacher

- From the Eight Verses on Mind Training, by Langri Tangpa

How could someone in whom the bodhicitta
of the supreme vehicle exists
ever turn toward the poison of self-cherishing,
even for a moment?
How could they give up the nectar of cherishing others?

-Khunu Lama, v.162

When both myself and others
are similar in that we wish to be happy
what is so special about me?
Why do I strive for my happiness alone?

Surely whenever there is suffering
we must protect those who suffer
Although the suffering of the foot is not that of the hand,
one protects the other

- Shantideva, 6.14; and 8.95,99

If one is in possession of bodhicitta
it is fine if one is sick,
fine if one is dying,
fine if one is studying,
and fine if one is meditating
One seems to be fine no matter what one is doing

- Khunu Lama, v.296

May I become an inexhaustible treasure
for those who are poor and destitute
May I turn into all the things they could need
and be placed close beside them

May I be a protector for those without one,
a guide for all travelers on the way
May I be a bridge, a boat and a ship
for all who wish to cross the flood

May I be an island for those who seek one
and a lamp for those desiring light
May I be a bed for all who wish to rest
and a slave for all who want a slave

And until they pass away from pain,
may I be the source of life for them,
for all the realms of the varied beings
that reach unto the ends of space

- 3.10, 18-19, 22

The Pilgrimage of a Bodhisattva

From the Perfection of Wisdom Sutra in Eight Thousand Lines

Sariputra:

*How does a bodhisattva go on the difficult pilgrimage?,
and how can he possibly endure the those sufferings
which he is said to undergo for the sake of beings?*

Subhuti:

*I do not look for a Bodhisattva
who goes on the difficult pilgrimage.*

*In any case, one who courses in the perception of difficulties
is not a Bodhisattva.*

*Because one who has generated a perception of difficulties
is unable to work the weal of countless beings.*

*On the contrary,
he forms the notion of ease,
he forms that notion that all beings,
whether men or women,
are his parents and children,
and thus he goes
on the pilgrimage of a Bodhisattva...*

A Bodhisattva resolves:

I take upon myself the burden of relieving all suffering.
I am resolved to do so, I will endure it if necessary

I do not turn or run away,
do not tremble, am not terrified, nor afraid,
do not turn back or despond.

And why?

At all costs I must bear the burdens of all beings.
In that I do not follow my own inclinations.

I have made the vow to save all beings.
All beings I must set free.

The whole world of living beings I must rescue,
from the terrors of birth, of old age, of sickness, of death and rebirth,

of all kinds of moral offence,
of all states of woe,
of the whole cycle of birth-and-death,

of the jungle of false views,
of the loss of wholesome dharmas,
of the concomitants of ignorance,
from all these terrors I must rescue all beings. . . .

I walk so that all beings awaken, and are freed
and so that the kingdom of unsurpassed cognition
is built up for all beings.

In this, my endeavors do not merely aim at my own deliverance.
 For with the help of the thought of all-knowledge,
 I must rescue all these beings from the roaring flood of Samsara,
 which can be so difficult to cross,

I must pull them back from the great precipice,
 I must free them from all calamities,
 I must take them across the raging torrents of Samsara.

I myself must grapple with the whole mass of suffering of all beings.

To the limit of my endurance I will experience
 in all the states of woe, found in any world system,
 all the abodes of suffering -

And I must not cheat all beings out of my store of merit,
 I am resolved to abide in each single state of woe for numberless aeons;
 in all the states of woe that may be found in any world system whatsoever,
 and in so doing, I will help all beings to freedom.

And why?

Because it is surely better that I alone should go through these difficulties
 than that all these beings should fall into such states of misery.

There I must give myself away as a mere pawn
 through which the whole world is redeemed
 from the terrors of the hells, of animal birth,
 of the world of Yama,

and with this my own body I must do whatever is needed,
 for the sake of all beings,
 to remove the whole mass of all painful feelings.

In doing so I speak truthfully,
I am trustworthy,
and do not go back on my word.

I must not abandon all beings.

And why?

There has arisen in me the will to win freedom,
for the purpose of setting free the entire world of beings;
with all beings as its object,
I will perfectly accomplish the Buddha's teachings.

Sikshasamuccaya, verses 280-81 (Vajradhvaja Sutra) by Shantideva, revised

Selected Verses from The Jewel Lamp - In Praise of Bodhicitta, by Khunu
Lama Rinpoche

12

If one investigates to find the supreme method
for accomplishing the aims of oneself and others,
it comes down to bodhicitta alone.
Being certain of this, develop it with joy.

From 13

The rain of precious Dharma
nourishes the shoots of the good that people do

15

The sun, the moon, a lamp, a lightning flash -
they may illuminate, but they hardly clear away the inner murk.
This bodhicitta is extolled by the holy
as completely removing the darkness of living beings.

21

Supreme bodhicitta is the wish to remove
every flaw from every living being
and to help bring about limitless good qualities in each of them.
This is outstanding even amongst the outstanding!

22

If one wants to benefit everyone, one needs bodhicitta.

If one wants to befriend everyone, one needs bodhicitta.

If one wants to gain the confidence of all, one needs bodhicitta.

If one wants to be everyone's spiritual friend, one needs bodhicitta.

31

The precious gem of bodhicitta

does not discriminate between rich and poor,

does not differentiate between wise and foolish;

it benefits equally the high and the low.

55

It seems to be one of the dimensions of bodhicitta

that the hardships of heat and cold, hunger and thirst, and so forth

that come when one does something to help others

do not get one down but rather give one's spirit a boost.

59

Bodhicitta gets rid of malice.

Through bodhicitta one obtains concentration.

Bodhicitta produces wisdom.

Things go well if you hold on to supreme bodhicitta.

60

Even in a dream,
others are not there for one's own selfish aims
when there is this amazing concern for others
that arises with bodhicitta.

64

With bodhicitta, one does not do things
for gain, devotion, or praise;
and even if one gets those things,
like gold one does not change.

81

The fact that the more terrible the conditions
become for the bodhisattva,
the more they serve as an aid to their goodness
is, I think, due to bodhicitta.

116

Abandoning the intention to do harm to anyone;
working directly or indirectly for the sake of others;
immovable regardless of the conditions one faces;
these, I think, are some of the dimensions of bodhicitta.

131

The benefit of bodhicitta is supreme,
lasting as it does for as long as cyclic existence remains,
going forth without discrimination to every living being
equal to the limits of space.

143

Bodhicitta transforms
afflictive emotions, suffering and fear,
and sickness and death
into a path to enlightenment.

160

With bodhicitta one enjoys happiness.
With bodhicitta one enjoys even sorrow.
With bodhicitta one enjoys what is there.
With bodhicitta one enjoys even what is not there.

From 162

How could someone in whom the bodhicitta
of the supreme vehicle exists
ever give up the nectar of cherishing others?

167

What discriminating person would not delight in bodhicitta,
 which eliminates the increase in afflictive emotions,
 which stops any other faults from arising,
 and which is the culmination of all that is proper?

168

The bodhicitta of bodhisattvas is like a spiritual friend
 who naturally exhorts one to be ethical, to study,
 to analyze, to meditate,
 and to work for the welfare of wandering beings
 who reach as far as space.

169

Bodhicitta beholds the totality of living beings
 like a mother does her only son.
 It is the nectar that is of one taste with being of help to others,
 hoping neither for reward or future result.

170

Bodhicitta functions like a spiritual friend:
 it demonstrates correctly and without mistake
 the essentials of what is to be done
 and what is to be avoided.

175

Meditate upon bodhicitta when afflicted by disease.

Meditate upon bodhicitta when sad.

Meditate upon bodhicitta when suffering occurs.

Meditate upon bodhicitta when you get scared.

243

Strive to fully take up this bodhicitta,
the source of every happiness,
for wandering living beings
as long as existence endures.

245

Due to bodhicitta,
the children of the buddhas look without partiality
at wandering living beings
like a mother looks at her only son,
with a gaze of love
that comes from the very depth of her being.

261

If one wishes to engage in the spiritual deeds of Samantabhadra,
one should look after the root of bodhicitta,
just as if one wishes a fine tree
to have a wide spread of branches,
one conveys water to the root of the trunk.

265

When Mahayana bodhicitta has arisen,
 the muddy effluent of cherishing self-interest subsides;
 the essential thing - the needs of others-
 is enthusiastically embraced,
 and one becomes an anonymous friend.

267

Bodhicitta is the best means for getting nondual wisdom
 It is the best bringer of pleasure to all living beings
 It is the supreme amongst virtuous minds
 It is the ornament of the universe.

From 278

If you want supreme bodhicitta to arise
 mediate on the thought to be of benefit to all.

From 284

Enthusiastically embracing the needs of others
 is a friend to precious bodhicitta.

286

By relying on the medicine of bodhicitta
 all the diseases of defilement are cured.
 So in all the world it is definite
 that there is no other medicine like this.

296

If one is in possession of bodhicitta
 it is fine if one is sick, fine if one is dying,
 fine if one is studying, and fine if one is meditating;
 one seems to be fine no matter what one is doing.

304

Amongst medicines, the victory medicine.
 Amongst jewels, the wish-fulfilling gem.
 Amongst flowers, the white lotus.
 Amongst virtuous minds, bodhicitta.

311

It is bad enough if one's morality degenerates,
 but it is even worse if bodhicitta declines.
 The result of the former is heaven,
 but the result of the latter is enlightenment.

325

If you want to be a scholar learn bodhicitta.
 If you want to be a noble person learn bodhicitta.
 If you want to be a decent person learn bodhicitta.
 If you want to be of benefit to others learn bodhicitta.

338

When you walk, walk with bodhicitta.
 When you sit, sit with bodhicitta.
 When you stand, stand with bodhicitta.
 When you sleep, sleep with bodhicitta.

339

When you look, look with bodhicitta.
 When you eat, eat with bodhicitta.
 When you speak, speak with bodhicitta.
 When you think, think with bodhicitta.

348

Having seen that I myself
 and all wandering beings equal to space
 want happiness and do not want suffering,
 with the awareness that self and other are equal,
 one should meditate on bodhicitta continually.

354

Since bodhicitta is what causes one to obtain
 the unequaled stage that is neither situated
 at the extreme of samsara nor at the extreme of nirvana,
 my friends, it would be good to value it highly.

Refuge and Bodhicitta Verses, by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

I go for refuge to Buddha, the Dharma, and Sangha,
until I reach enlightenment

Due to the merits of having done charity, and so forth,
the Six Paramitas,
having listened to teachings,

by the three times merits collected by me,
the three times merits collected by numberless sentient beings,
and the three times merits collected by numberless Buddhas,

May I achieve total cessation of mistakes of mind,
and the total completion of all realizations of Buddhahood

in order to free from oceans of samsaric suffering
the numberless hell beings, hungry ghosts,
animals, human beings,
sura, asura beings,
intermediate state beings,

and bring them to enlightenment

The Bodhisattva Attitude - the Verses

1. The Full Verses

Recite or chant the following verses from Shantideva's Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life in the morning or at other times throughout the day. Then contemplate the meaning to bring about a total change to the normal attitude of self-cherishing that only harms ourselves and others. Try to live your life in this practice.

I shall give away fully with no sense of loss
 My body, enjoyments and all merits of the three times
 (past, present and future)
 To accomplish the work for ALL sentient beings.
 (Recite this verse with the meditation on "giving")

By giving away all, I will be liberated from the oceans of samsaric suffering
 And my mind will achieve the sorrowless state.
 Since I have to leave everything (at death)
 It is best to (now) give it away to every single sentient being.

Having given this body to sentient beings
 To use **HOWEVER** they want that makes them happy.
 Whether they always kill me, criticize, beat me, or whatever,
 It is **TOTALLY** up to them.

Even if they jest with my body,
 Ridicule me, put me down or make fun of me,
 Whatever they do, since I have given this body to them,
 What is the point of retaliating?

Let this body only do actions that cause no harm to others
 And whoever looks at or thinks of me
 May it **NEVER** be meaningless for them.

Whoever focuses on me -
 Whether with anger or devotion -
 May that ALWAYS be the cause for them
 To achieve EVERY success.

May all who say unpleasant things,
 Harm, mock or make fun of me
 Have the fortune to achieve enlightenment.

May I become a guide for those who are guideless,
 A leader for those who are entering the path,
 A ship, a boat, and a bridge
 For all who wish to cross (over water).

May I become a beautiful garden for those who seek one,
 A light for those who look for light,
 Bedding for those who wish to rest
 And a servant for all who want me as their servant.

Like a wish-granting jewel,
 A wish-fulfilling vase, powerful mantra,
 Great medicine and a wish-granting tree,
 May I fulfill all the wishes of sentient beings.

Just like the sky and the great elements
 Earth, (water, fire and wind)
 May I ALWAYS be the means of living and the cause of happiness
 For sentient beings equaling the limitless sky.

As long as space exists
 As long as sentient beings exist
 May I too abide and eliminate the suffering of sentient beings.

2. The Bodhisattva Attitude - The Short Verses

When there is no time to recite all the verses, just recite these last three or two that contain everything.

Like a wish-granting jewel,
A wish-fulfilling vase, powerful mantra,
Great medicine and a wish-granting tree,
May I fulfill all the wishes of sentient beings.

Just like the sky and the great elements
Earth, (water, fire and wind),
May I always be the means of living and the cause
of happiness
For sentient beings equaling the limitless sky.

As long as space exists,
As long as sentient beings exist,
May I too abide and eliminate the suffering of sentient beings.

Stabilizing in the Bodhimind, by Shantideva

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.

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 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 a treasury
For those desperate and forlorn.
May I manifest as what they require
And wish to have near 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 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 insignificant contact.

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 traveling 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,
 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.

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 a human life,
 Today I am born in the Buddha-family
 And am now a child of the Buddhas.

Thus in the 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
 Who 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 dispel
 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.

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.

A Dedication Prayer, by Shantideva

May all beings everywhere,
Plagued by sufferings of body and mind,
Obtain an ocean of happiness and joy
By virtue of these merits.

May no living creature suffer,
Commit evil or ever fall ill.
May no one be afraid or belittled,
With a mind weighed down by depression.

May the blind see forms,
And the deaf hear sounds.
May those whose bodies are worn with toil
Be restored on finding repose.

May the naked find clothing,
The hungry find food.
May the thirsty find water
And delicious drinks.

May the poor find wealth,
Those weak with sorrow find joy.
May the forlorn find hope,
Constant happiness and prosperity

May there be timely rains
And bountiful harvests.
May all medicines be effective
And wholesome prayers bear fruit.

May all who are sick and ill
Quickly be freed from their ailments.
Whatever diseases there are in the world,
May they never occur again.

May the frightened cease to be afraid
And those bound be freed.
May the powerless find power
And may people think of benefiting each other.

For as long as space remains,
and for as long as sentient beings remain,
until then, may I too remain,
to dispel the suffering of the world

Dedication from the Bodhicharyavatara

May beings everywhere who suffer
Torment in their minds and bodies
Have, by virtue of this merit,
Joy and happiness in boundless measure.

As long as they may linger in samsara,
May their present joy know no decline,
And may they taste of unsurpassed beatitude
In constant and unbroken continuity.

May the naked now be clothed,
And all the hungry eat their fill.
May those parched with thirst
Receive pure waters and delicious drink.

May the poor and destitute find wealth,
The haggard and careworn joy.
May confidence relieve those in despair
And bring them steadfastness and every excellence.

My every being ailing with disease
Be freed at once from every malady.
May all the sickness that afflicts the living
Be instantly and permanently healed.

May those who go in dread have no more fear.
May captives be unchained and now set free.
And may the weak receive their strength.
May living beings help each other in kindness.

May all attain the human state,
And be possessed of wisdom, faith and love.
With perfect livelihood and sustenance,
May they have mindfulness throughout their lives.

Thus by all the merit we have gained,
May every being, leaving no one aside,
Abandon all their evil ways
Embracing goodness now and ever more.

Dedication prayers from A Healing Buddha Practice

By this merit,
 and by all the virtue and all the blessings
 of all the ten directions three times Buddhas and Bodhisattvas
 all the Saints and Sages, Arhats and Ajahns,
 Lamas, monks and nuns,
 and of all Holy Beings...

together with all the virtue of kind hearted people everywhere,
 and all excellent practitioners,
 in mountains, and hermitages,
 in monasteries, Dharma Centers, and at home,

May all the sufferings of all living beings
 be completely and permanently cleared away,
 and may an abundance of health and well being be enjoyed by all,
 now, and always

May all beings benefit in every way that is needed by them,
 and may each of our temporal and ultimate aims be fulfilled.

By all this virtue, may all beings live always in safety, and in peace
 May all beings have lasting happiness

May all those I am connected to, through good or bad karma,
 be completely liberated from all suffering and its causes *forever*,
 May they enjoy every happiness,
 and may I be the cause of that

By all the blessings we have received,
 and by the strength of our own efforts, awakened insight,
 courage, and love,
 from this point forward,

may we all create only the causes
 to enjoy fortunate conditions,
 to realize higher rebirth,
 and to accomplish each of the stages of liberation and enlightened
 understanding and activity

May I and all others attain only these.

May we always care for ourselves and for one another
 in the best of ways.

May the supreme jewel, bodhicitta,
 arise where it has not yet arisen,
 Where it has arisen, may it not diminish,
 May it ever grow and flourish

For myself and for all others,
 may the complete Right View awaken where it has not yet done so
 Where it has been known, may it remain stable,
 and may its power increase in our lives, and in the world,
 more and more

Just as Samantabhadra and Manjushri have dedicated,
 in the same way do I make this dedication,
 in the way that is praised as best

May this bring peace.
 May this bring healing wherever it is needed,
 on outer, inner, and secret levels

May this bring about the health and balance of the elements,
 and the firm establishment of true health and well being,
 long life, and happiness for us all

By all this virtue,
may all the environments where we live be purified and renewed,
and may we all together accomplish the full realization
of the Noble healing buddha

By this merit,
wherever I am, and wherever I may go,
may I further the work of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,
the awakening of light, complete freedom and peace.

By all this virtue,
may all holy teachers live long, and guide us until samsara ends,
and may there be peace and joy in all the world.