

Readings on the Mahayana

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Readings on the Mahayana

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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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 Universal Love, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity, the inclusiveness, 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 stable, impartial 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, and seeing the ultimate aim. Without this, the problems we living beings experience 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 arises as bodhicitta, the mind of enlightenment. This is the dedication to helping both ourselves and all others through our realization of the path.

Lama Yeshe said:

To generate bodhichitta 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 {if needed} 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 to relieve suffering

*and the aspiration for enlightenment arises without effort,
then you have realized the supreme precious awakening mind*

This is the best gift we can offer.

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*

As *one action*, this is the Buddhayana, becoming a capable person. 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. Naturally then, in all that we do, we have the aim to provide what we all genuinely 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 (aspiring) 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 aaaaaaaaaaall 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 adamant 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.

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 Chan and Zen Traditions, 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 Buddhadharma. 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 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, Achariya 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 uniformed 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 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*

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

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 II - 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, and then: "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, ultimately 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.

The Two-fold Benefit

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...'

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

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

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

important than this. Anything other than living your life for other sentient beings is meaningless, empty.

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

* * *

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 has 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 Namu 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 (it was well known at the time that Lama Yeshe had a heart condition) "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.

The Bodhisattva Vow - Traditional

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 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.

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...

For further reading and reflection

[Readings on Metta](#)

[Readings on the Mahayana](#)

[Verses and Short Teachings on Bodhicitta](#)

[Metta and Readings on the Mahayana - Complete](#)

[Mahayana Prayers and Poetry - audio - and text](#)