



The Bodhisattva Way of Life

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One Goal, Many Methods

After we have explored the countless expressions of the different spiritual traditions and their meditative methods, even within the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana systems of the Buddha Dharma, we find their essence is the same. If we were to synthesize all these traditions and their practices into one essential practice or philosophy, this would be Bodhicitta (the awakened heart-mind of wisdom and compassion). Bodhicitta is the core essence of the teachings we are receiving, of all the teachings we have ever received. This is a very important point to recognize. The great Kadampa masters, like Atisha, have already essentialized these practices for us, so we do not have to invent something new. The proven path to success already exists. It is right here for us, in this moment. However, it is important to know how to essentialize the teachings, to look to their meaning, or Dharma can be very confusing, like when we come to a fork in the road when driving a car and we do not know which way to go. We have to recognize that the essence of all the teachings is Bodhicitta, the awakened state of mind, which is compassion itself.

When Atisha came to Tibet, he met a famous teacher named Rinchen Zangpo, who invited Atisha to his monastery. There they had a wonderful Dharma discussion. Rinchen Zangpo was able to answer any question Atisha had. Atisha said to his attendants, "Why do I have to be in Tibet when they have Rinchen Zangpo?" Finally, Atisha asked, "How do you practice all these sutras and tantras together?" Rinchen Zangpo said, "When you practice sutra, you practice sutra, and when you practice tantra, you practice tantra." Then he took Atisha to his temple and there were many images of deities, each with its own cushion. "Now I know why I have come," Atisha said. Atisha saw that Rinchen Zangpo was relying on the superficial level of the Dharma, he was relying on the external form and not connecting with the essence, Bodhicitta. Because Atisha saw how this approach to Dharma was corrupting the teachings, he unified them in order to reveal their essence and to prevent people from practicing improperly.

For example, in Vajrayana Buddhism there are an incredible amount of teachings—ngondro, tsa lung, trekchod, mahayoga, atiyoga. But is there a separate purpose for all these teachings? No! There is a single goal and a single practice, although there are many methods. Bodhicitta, which is ultimate love, is the highest realization one can gain through all these methods. Bodhicitta is not merely mundane love, it is the union of love and compassion, which is the actualization of wisdom. We can only understand the nature of reality through love, not through our small ideas, or concepts, or language, or even knowledge. We can only understand the highest reality through understanding and realizing ultimate love, which is Bodhicitta mind. Bodhicitta mind is love, which is wisdom itself.

The Goal is the Practice Itself

We begin Dharma practice by developing love and compassion. There is no end to Dharma practice, but if there were, it would end with love and compassion. This is the core essence of Dharma practice. Developing love and compassion is the essence of any Dharma practice we can do. All teachings have the same message, that of generating love and compassion. So it is crucial that we know how to essentialize all of the Dharma teachings, not thinking that all these Dharma teachings have separate goals. When we practice Bodhicitta, loving-kindness, the goal is already here, right here in each of us, in this moment. It does not exist in the future when we are better practitioners. The goal IS what we are doing right now. Practicing love and kindness is the goal of the practice. When we practice love and compassion for other beings, for ourselves, we are truly enlightened in that moment. There is no other definition of enlightenment apart from having love and compassion. The goal is already actualized in this moment. The goal is the practice itself.

This is a very Mahayana idea, because normally we think a goal is something we obtain in the future, as the result of the practice of meditation or yoga. But in this way our Dharma practice is based on expectations and selfish motivations and lacks the authentic heart-connection needed to free ourselves of delusion. Ironically, the goal is not in the future. The ever-present goal is already here. The path itself is the goal. This paradox characterizes the teachings. In many ways the teachings are paradoxical because we approach everything from a material point of view. We approach the teachings with a mentality of lack, which means we think the teachings are going to give us something. We think we are going to get something special from listening to teachings and practicing Dharma. But Dharma practice does not turn us into somebody special. Dharma practice only reveals what has always been present within each of us, but has been obscured by the pettiness of our desire, ambition, and greed. This is why it is so important for us to always check our motivation. When we check our motivation, we can see what is false and discard it through simply seeing. The seeing itself is the energy of Bodhicitta mind, of love and compassion. Seeing does not come from our intellect. Awareness is unconfined, universal love, whereas the intellect, the ego, is limited to

selfishness and does not have the capacity to see itself. Ignorance, not recognizing who we are, this is the characteristic of our delusion.

Bodhicitta Love Never Excludes or Rejects Anybody

One of the most difficult ways to practice Bodhicitta, practicing love, compassion, and forgiveness, is towards ourselves. This can be very difficult for us. We can be very loving and compassionate and demonstrate honorable intentions toward others, but we can be very hardhearted and closed-minded when it comes to relating to our own suffering. Oftentimes we need to be the object of our own compassion, because we have a deeply ingrained hatred towards ourselves, which we do not completely understand, so we avoid dealing with it. This is why it is so easy to take someone else as the object of our love and compassion. We like to play the role of savior, trying to help others, so we can continue ignoring our own issues. This is why it is so important to practice tonglen for ourselves regularly. This is the most powerful healing method we can incorporate into our lives. When we become capable of acknowledging our own suffering through tonglen practice, we can swiftly resolve our karmic issues. We can experience the amazing transformation of suffering into happiness.

It takes a lot of meditation and Dharma practice to unfold love towards oneself and towards all other beings. When we practice Bodhicitta mind we should not practice it partially. We should include all sentient beings. This includes our coworkers and family members, people we pass by on the street everyday, homeless people we see laying in a doorway, politicians we disagree with, angry gas station attendants. Bodhicitta love never excludes or rejects anybody. Ego has the tendency to reject and exclude certain people. However, this Bodhicitta mind can include all other beings without reference point, including ourselves. This is because within this Bodhicitta mind, there is no idea of a self to construct barriers, to establish boundaries that keep others out of our hearts and prevent us from entering into theirs. In Bodhicitta mind, there is only one heart. To realize this we must start with ourselves. We have to journey into the unknown territory of our own hearts to uncover the love and compassion that is already there. This journey of uncovering love and compassion is one of acknowledgment, acceptance, and letting go.

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First we acknowledge our resistance to life, to the unconditioned experience of love that exists as *what is* in every moment. Then we accept this unresolved part of ourselves, the resistance. We accept simply by being aware, without judgment or hesitation. We face our unwillingness directly, without distraction, by asking ourselves, "What is happening in my life right now?" We use this method of inquiry constantly to reveal our resistance to our lives, lives which are actually always perfect as they are. When we begin to see ourselves directly, our constant struggle to do, to obtain in order to produce some sense of satisfaction in our lives, then we begin to experience some space around the resistance. And this space is acceptance, a loosening of the tight grip of ego. To accept is to let go, which happens automatically. However, this letting go might mean that we are bound to experience some unpleasantness, some discomfort, but this is merely the release of bound up habitual energy. It has no substance. It is just like a deluded dream. But to experience ourselves in this way, we have to make some kind of sacrifice if we truly want to be free from the karmic weight of our ignorance, of not understanding who we are. This is because we are used to caving in on ourselves, disempowering ourselves by succumbing to our habitual tendencies, which are created out of the hope and fear that maintain the constant sense of struggle. There is no struggle, though, and there never has been.

In actuality, the unfolding of this process is the birthing of a complete willingness that evolves naturally into pure faith, which is the unlimited expression of our Buddha nature. From this place of healing within ourselves, we can then expand ourselves within the sphere of awareness, extending love and compassion, tolerance and forgiveness, healing that includes all of the people in our lives, especially the ones who are not the objects of our loving-kindness and compassion. We have to recognize that the practice of Bodhicitta is the essence of all other practice. Whether we are practicing meditation or mantra, or even the highest yoga, ati yoga; the essence never changes—it is Bodhicitta mind, the genuine heart of understanding. Bodhicitta is suffused with boundless love and unbearable tenderness that expresses its concern for the welfare of others continuously. If we lack recognition of this Bodhicitta mind we stray from the path that leads to enlightenment. We only need to remind ourselves of this point constantly: that we already possess Bodhicitta mind.

Bodhicitta is the Main Ingredient

What is true spirituality and who owns it? Nobody owns it. As long as there is the principle of Bodhicitta mind, then there is true spirituality. The moment there is no longer Bodhicitta mind, it is no longer the path to enlightenment. We always have to reexamine our heart and mind to see whether Bodhicitta is the main ingredient. In the Dharma practice recipe, Bodhicitta is the main ingredient. All other practices are just spice on top of that. Bodhicitta mind is the main ingredient. We must have that or the recipe is not going to be very delicious or satisfying. We prove it thus: when we do Dharma practice and forget to take Bodhicitta as the core essence, no matter how much we put ourselves into retreat, we always go back to the same samsara, the same hope, fear, and insecurity, because Bodhicitta has been lacking in our Dharma recipe. By practicing Dharma without connecting to our own hearts, our practice lacks the genuine flavor of a pure mind. So we have to always take refuge and generate Bodhicitta as the essence of our recipe.

We need to examine whether there is the Bodhicitta ingredient or not. We need to examine our own motivation. I've found the most helpful practice in Mahayana is to examine my own motivation. The essential message of the Mahayana teaching is to put Bodhicitta into practice by continuously examining one's motivation. Examining motivation is not about being harsh or judgmental to ourselves by being spiritually or religiously restrictive. We do not have to give commentary to ourselves about whether we are a good or bad spiritual practitioner. But it is good to reexamine our mind without judgment. Examination is completely different. When we examine our minds and the underlying motivation of our Dharma practice, we may sense that there is a lack of love and compassion. That's fine. We only have to be aware of this and then we can cultivate the desire to generate genuine Bodhicitta mind. If we do have the Bodhicitta mind then we should be very joyous.

From the beginning, when we practice Bodhicitta mind, the most important point is to acknowledge the suffering of all sentient beings, including ourselves. We acknowledge by asking ourselves, "What is the nature of the suffering we experience?" The nature of suffering is just the experience of our minds. It does not exist in physical circumstances. Suffering is a state of mind; the state of our minds when they have been completely obscured by the delusions of hope and fear. Suffering is only a state of mind. Our experience of suffering is like experiencing mental hallucinations. By understanding the nature of reality through the realization that all suffering is a fabrication of the mind, we come to understand the suffering of all sentient beings. We develop this understanding by deeply contemplating the sufferings of ourselves and all sentient beings.

Suffering

When Buddha turned the Wheel of Dharma, the first thing he taught was the truth of suffering—the suffering of all sentient beings. What is the meaning of meditating on the suffering of all sentient beings? What is the use of it? We all have fear of suffering, but we do not know exactly what it is. We do not find anyone who understands suffering, unless they understand the very nature of suffering. Everyone in our society is afraid of suffering. People who look very powerful outwardly are as afraid of suffering as we are. It does not matter whether you are poor or rich, powerful or weak, we all have this fear of suffering. Ironically, when we comprehend our life's activities, we discover that there is this secret activity going on—that we are trying to escape from suffering. We never have the chance to understand what suffering is because we are always avoiding it. But what is suffering? Does it truly exist or not? In our mind, we have this entrenched belief system that suffering truly exists in the form of outer circumstances, such as loss and sickness. This belief, in turn, creates the false idea that there is also happiness (which is the opposite of suffering) that can be acquired through favorable circumstances, such as being powerful or having lots of money. This deeply rooted belief system is our habitual cage, one that we have willfully imprisoned ourselves in for many lifetimes. We experience the suffering of suffering because we avoid it.

Meditation on Suffering

But what is suffering? Buddha's way to gain freedom from suffering is to not avoid it. In reality, there is nothing to avoid, because suffering does not exist as a physical or material entity. The way to liberate ourselves from suffering is to be willing to completely experience the suffering that we think exists within ourselves. We have to journey down so to speak, to venture into this unknown and undisclosed area of ourselves. Then we will understand freedom from suffering by understanding its nature. When we meditate on suffering, there is no longer fear and resistance in our heart. The suffering dissolves into its true nature, which is ironically love and compassion. If we really meditate on the suffering of another person, not just intellectually, but when we allow ourselves to experience someone's pain and confusion, our experience becomes love, compassion, and genuine caring born of understanding. This is because we have completely understood ourselves, and there is no separation to cause limitless confusion.

When we are having a bad day, what do we do? There are lots of things we can do. Some of them are brilliant and some of them are not so brilliant. Sometimes they have a mysterious cause, being triggered by certain events, circumstances, or personalities. But the seeds of those sufferings are already in each of us. When we experience suffering through emotion or a physical or mental state, our old habit is to run away by distracting our minds—by

watching television, listening to music, or entertaining our minds by talking with people on the phone, and so forth. Perhaps we take intoxicating substances. We employ many old tricks to run away from our suffering.

This is the Mahayana and also the Dzogchen way to understand suffering. Meditation on suffering is new to us. We have not done it. We may think we do not have to do it, because we think we've experienced so much suffering. But we have never truly allowed suffering to touch us before. In general, all of you are already on the path and have done many practices, but still this is very new for us to try to experience suffering. At the same time, all of us have many memories of what we have experienced through countless challenges in our lives—loss, sickness, and misfortune. We may think we have had enough education on suffering. But if we think back, how have we actually encountered those circumstances? When we encounter fear, hope, and anxiety, there is always struggle in each of us. We always try to push away the reality we are going to encounter. We may experience suffering, but we experience it with a barrier, with conflict. What we are doing now is to encounter every circumstance that is happening in our lives, and experience everything that arises in our mind. We do this whether the experience is one of pain or hope or fear. It does not matter, and we are letting go of all our resistance; our distrust of death, of sickness, of loss, and distrust of our own emotional experience of pain and misery. We are going to touch them, feel them, and meditate on their true nature. When we do this, we begin to clearly see the reality that our resistance has been concealing. We begin to see what the true nature of suffering actually is. We see that suffering is no longer caused by outer circumstances. The moment we recognize that suffering is a mental state, we no longer have to try to get rid of it. Suffering becomes a source of love, kindness, compassion, joy, and bliss as well.

Perhaps you have heard of turning suffering into bliss. There is no suffering to be rejected, or from which we have to escape. Understanding the nature of suffering is already freedom from suffering. We cannot find freedom from suffering in future circumstances, nor in Buddha heavens. The only time we can find freedom from suffering is in the present moment, right in the suffering itself. This is an important view we will have to talk about again. Many people think Buddhism is pessimistic because it focuses so much on suffering. But the Buddhist way to acquire freedom from suffering is in understanding its nature and cause. Understanding the nature of suffering is going to bring us absolute happiness as well. This whole Mahayana practice is focusing on the simple discipline of feeling suffering. Sometimes it is very difficult to feel suffering. We have been so resistant to pain, crisis, and misery, it is very difficult to open one's heart to one's own suffering and the suffering of all beings. Sometimes we do not want to see that other people are suffering. It is not a beautiful image to see other people suffering.

One powerful way to do practice, a most heartfelt way, is to reach your hand into someone's heart; to extend your heart into someone's life. Sometimes it is good to talk to beings who are suffering, to listen to beings who are suffering, to be in the space of those who are suffering. In the sutras, Bodhisattvas always make promises to come back to samsara and guide sentient beings who are lost. We have to practice these same Bodhisattva vows—to work tirelessly for the welfare of others. We must follow in the footsteps of Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara if we are to truly understand and live with genuine compassion. The footsteps of those great Bodhisattvas, and for ourselves, since we are also great Bodhisattvas, is to always come back to samsara without running away from the situations that challenge us, that bring fear and pain into our lives. The main philosophy of Bodhisattvas is to face phenomena that we are afraid of. This is a big shift in our belief system and spiritual practice. It seems that all we are ever doing is running away from samsara, from the sufferings of sickness, old age, and death. But the Bodhisattva way is to run into the landfill, into the garbage place, where the stench is consuming, where our senses are completely affronted. We have to run into the place that most people are afraid of facing. This is a reverse process. We are going where everyone is running away from, the place that everyone is pretending does not exist. We are diving headlong into this resistance, into authentic living and its flames of aversion and razors of guilt. We are marching into this cosmic landfill with ultimate courage, which is devotion to our Buddha nature, that sees Buddha nature in all things, in every being. It is there, in here, the cosmic landfill, that we shall face and find ourselves directly. This is the unmistakable path of compassion, the way of the Bodhisattva.

What we are working on is ourselves, transcending the dualism of our own fear, aversion, and guilt. We cannot really find anything outside ourselves that is the actual cause of suffering, aversion, and pain. By facing and encountering all these unwanted circumstances this will give us a very challenging and risky encounter on the spiritual path. We understand that all of the suffering, aversion, and guilt we are trying to get rid of, does not exist outside of ourselves. Then there is an immediate unveiling of freedom. There is immediate relief, because we realize that all of the sufferings are our own creation. We experience relief from the torment of suffering and exhaustion because we no longer rely on outer conditions to satisfy us or give meaning to our lives. We find total satisfaction and meaning within ourselves, just as we are.

View of Practice

Buddhist practice is always based on *view*, *meditation*, and *action*. I want to talk about Bodhicitta teachings within this context. According to the Mahayana perspective, the view is the understanding of the nature of reality through suffering. Meditation is like our tonglen practice or the daily spiritual practices we do, that are based on love

and compassion. Then we have action. What is the significance of Bodhicitta practice in action? Bodhicitta in action is going to bring up all of our limitations in an experiential way. From this direct experience, we can acquire true actualization of Bodhicitta mind, not as a temporary spiritual experience, but one that takes place deep in our hearts, one that we can feel in our bones.

Maybe we are in a place where there is much suffering. Our compassion will not be lost when we have true realization in our hearts. To do that, we have to go beyond our fear and hope, which arises from resistance to reality. To be a living Bodhisattva in this lifetime, we need to defeat or conquer fear and hope. We should be encouraging ourselves to go into that cosmic landfill and bring up all of our limitations to the surface. Then we will have a chance to study them. We can study them and then go beyond them when we see their true nature. This is the Bodhisattva's path.

There is a beautiful prayer in the Bodhisattva's teachings. It says, "May I encounter all unwanted circumstances." This is a revolutionary prayer, because we usually pray to not have misfortune. Christians are not the only ones who grovel in this way. Buddhists do too. When I was in the Jowo Rinpoche temple in Lhasa, I overheard all kinds of prayers—for many yaks, success, and longevity. But this Bodhisattva prayer is a very different prayer, a reversal prayer. We are asking God, or Buddha, or Avalokiteshvara to send us things we don't want. Of course, we don't need any unwanted circumstances. All we have to do is face reality. Reality shatters our mind completely, pushes our buttons, and brings up all the limitations of hope, fear, doubt, and laziness. Then we can go beyond them, because they are seen to be as insubstantial as the clouds passing in the sky. Like when I tell the Acharya Asanga story: because he was willing to sacrifice his ego, Asanga licked the maggots out of the dog's wound and had a direct experience of the Buddha Maitreya. By truly seeing someone's suffering, in his case the dog that was suffering with a horrible wound, and the maggots that were eating its flesh, he was able to completely experience love and compassion. Similarly, sometimes all we need to do is face unwanted circumstances in order to completely wake up to reality. When we do this, compassion and love arises in us spontaneously. This is the courageous Bodhisattva action.

For instance, when we hate somebody there is a part of ourselves that does not perceive the pain and suffering of that person. We are perceiving the person mechanically, in a material way. This is the ultimate blindness, when we do not perceive fundamental components of other beings, when we do not see their own enlightened potential and thus mistake appearances for actual reality. Let's say you don't like somebody. There is a part of us that has rejected that person because we have perceived that person as a mechanical entity. This means we do not perceive them as having thoughts and feelings and deeply ingrained tendencies, the same as ourselves. We see that person as separate and different, not recognizing the fear and existential pain manifesting in them because we have not addressed these elements within our own being. But when we recognize those components—fear, pain, suffering, the rich emotional vitality of life—love and compassion arise naturally, without intention. Bodhicitta mind springs forth from oneself without any effort. When we don't recognize those fertile qualities of beings that contain the awakened potential, we may try to have more love and compassion, but these vain efforts only turn our hearts into rock. Our mind becomes more untamed because it continues to rely on fabrications about how we think others should be, because we persist through unchecked notions about ourselves, about how we think we should be. But the Bodhisattva's way of developing love and compassion is to visit the cosmic landfill, which means going beyond our habitual inclinations that perceive everything as separate, and digging into the rich soil of our minds to discover our naked awakened state.

Transformation

The essential method of Mahayana Buddhism is transformation: the Bodhisattva transforms what is negative into positive, what is bad luck into good luck, the unfavorable into favorable. Transforming all negativity into positive conditions is called gyurwa—transformation. What does this mean? The Bodhisattva takes every situation as a chance to see one's limitations and go beyond them, to discover the ultimate enlightenment in oneself by bringing out one's innate love and compassion. Every situation, every chance encounter, every heartbreak, every thought is a precious opportunity to awaken completely if we have the courage to remain beholden to the open heart, Bodhicitta mind. This is the Bodhisattva's view, as well as meditation and action. When we practice this path we have to transform our fundamental attitude towards life, towards what happiness actually is, towards suffering, towards what our values are. We have to let go of our old karmic belief systems that are based on not understanding who we are. Those persistent views are our habitual tendencies.

Life itself is not samsara. Samsara can never be found as an outer circumstance. It is not in the elements, nor is it in the past, present, or future. Samsara, suffering, is in our own mind, based on fundamental ignorance about reality. We have to see the falsehood of those belief systems that we have held in our minds. By awakening to the false, we awaken to who we are and what reality is. In this awakened state we begin to see that there is no suffering, no negativity, no circumstance that can cause hope and fear within. Our struggle is the creation of our own mind, our own resistance to reality. We are not running away from any circumstances whatsoever—not running away from what we are facing right now, or what we will have to face tomorrow morning. We are simply opening our heart and flowing with life's natural direction without fighting the flow. When there is no resistance, there is a sense that

everything is a blessing, whatever happens. Whether there is good fortune or bad fortune, a Bodhisattva perceives everything as a spiritual lesson in how to be content. Thus a Bodhisattva exudes, without effort, an inexhaustible generosity, love, and compassion toward all beings. Everything is Buddha's voice, a living teaching, thus there is a sense of reverence that treats every circumstance as some kind of sacred phenomena, a sacred entity.

Everything is a Blessing

A Bodhisattva sees everything as a blessing, as joy, because a Bodhisattva does not see any stain in any person or in any circumstances. A Bodhisattva sees all of life as being an education, therefore a blessing. Shantideva says, "If we can learn the Dharma teachings, the six paramitas, from sentient beings, as we can learn from the enlightened ones, why don't we pay homage to sentient beings like we do to the Buddhas?" Everybody is a teacher, and everything they throw on us is a teaching. People may abuse us, they may be mean to us, be judgmental, but everything is a teaching to the Bodhisattva. The Bodhisattva does not have to fight for his own well being. The tougher life is for the Bodhisattva, the stronger he or she becomes. When a sentient being goes through tough times, however, he or she becomes weaker and weaker, protecting the wounds incurred by the delusion of the sense of separation.

Why does the Bodhisattva become so happy and so mature when going through hardships, and why do ordinary sentient beings become so injured? Obviously the difference in experience has to do with the difference in perception. Sentient beings look at things in a dualistic way, in terms of good and bad, fortune and misfortune, what can be had versus what one isn't getting. A Bodhisattva does not look at things in this dualistic way. Everything is good weather. There is no bad weather. If the sun shines, it is good. If it rains, it is good. There is only one circumstance, there is only good luck, because everything is a blessing. Everything can be used to bring up one's own limitations and be a teaching to help us learn to be happy, to acquire freedom in natural unfoldment. What could be better than this, if it is the cause of enlightenment? Every circumstance is the cause to be enlightened.

Bodhisattva's Heart Wish

We say going to school is good fortune, or winning the lottery is good fortune. But that is understanding in a very mundane way. If we look at life from a Bodhisattva's perspective, everything is good fortune, because a Bodhisattva is life. His or her heart becomes bigger and bigger, infused with more and more happiness, with greater and greater love. This happens because there is no distinction between what is thought and felt, seen and heard, tasted and touched, even smelled. Everything is the display of the Bodhisattva's pure heart. A Bodhisattva can go anywhere, do anything, even act outrageous at times, because the Bodhisattva only experiences love and compassion.

The Bodhisattva's heart wish is for all the sentient beings who are connected with him or her, in a positive or negative way, to be liberated through his or her path, through his or her activities. People who love the Bodhisattva, or people who torture or try to hurt him or her, there is no difference. Both are seen as teachers. When encountering the challenges of life, Bodhisattvas develop and practice more compassion, more love, and more joy because their sole intention is to awaken completely for the benefit of all beings.

Adversaries are the Greatest Teachers

Enemies may be a greater teacher than anyone else in our life, because the enemy can really push our buttons and bring out all of our limitations. It is very easy to love our dog, our friends, or our relatives, sometimes, and it is easy to love people who love us. But it is difficult to love people who don't mean anything to us, especially people who are negative toward us. Especially if you are in contact with them, it is hard to have true, genuine compassion toward them. Let's say you loved all sentient beings except one. That would be enough to keep you from enlightenment. Just by hating that one single being would keep you in samsara. So we have to rely on the enemy as a powerful object and teacher and go beyond our conceptual hang-ups to be truly Buddha, truly Bodhisattva. These Bodhisattva teachings are quite amazing. We are comprehending the view and now we have to keep the commitment.

Meditation: Just Love

How do we develop this Bodhisattva practice in our everyday life? We have to understand the power of the Bodhisattva's path. The power of the Bodhisattva path resides in the fundamental Mahayana view that all suffering is the cause of happiness; this is emptiness realizing itself. Where do we begin with this view? How can we cultivate this path? True commitment comes from your own heart. And we have to have inner discipline, which is a sense of responsibility towards ourselves, and the commitment everyday in each moment to examine our minds. We have to respond to reality, which is whatever comes into our lives. From this perspective, all occurrences take place within empty space and are thus available to us as opportunities to awaken. In every moment we have to respond to situations, not with hope and fear, but from this completely new dimension of understanding. If someone loves you, how do you respond? With love. If someone hates you, how do you respond? With love. If situations are good, how

do you respond? With love. If they are bad, how do you respond? Do you migrate or change your lifestyle? Just love. Love is the only solution. The way of the Bodhisattva is the wish-fulfilling jewel that can provide us with all the happiness we wish for.

Revealing the Essence

We are unconditionally Buddhas, without need of meditation or Dharma practice. At the same time, we are trapped by afflicted emotions and limited dualistic perceptions. So we need to ask, “What is the main hindrance that prevents us from unfolding our primordial essence?” It is the sense of “I” that prevents us from actualizing who we are in this moment, who we are as the mind of love and wisdom. Ego is a very powerful habit that continuously obstructs us because it is the most entrenched, deeply rooted habit that has occupied our lives. Therefore, it requires some kind of path. This is the work of purification. At the same time, we must recognize our own Buddha essence, otherwise the practice becomes stale and lifeless because we have no target, no real understanding of why we are practicing; we do not know what we are really aspiring towards. All beings have Buddha essence, therefore sentient beings and Buddhas are the same. We are not trying to be anybody else, not a saint, not a spiritual person. We are not trying to become anyone in particular, because we are already Buddha as we are. Who we are in this very moment is completely divine.

But we do not recognize who we are? Do you understand this tendency? If we have not recognized our Buddha essence, then no matter what we try to acquire from the outside, we will be ridden with the same lingering sense of dissatisfaction. We will be coupled with guilt, shame, and regret, because we have this intuitive knowledge that we are somehow cheating ourselves out of real happiness. There is no lasting happiness in acquisition. True happiness arises from the contemplation and recognition of our Buddha essence, which is a surrendering, regardless of what we are experiencing, whether we are joyous or sad.

The great Tibetan lamas I have known never experienced any sense of judgment towards themselves. They really live in each moment because they do not want anything. We never live in this present moment because we get stuck with memories of the past concerning unfortunate events. This tendency creates obscurations in the moment. We also think about the future, projecting the obsessions of our insecurity and uncertainty regarding fear of death. This makes us strive to achieve so that we may continue our petty evasions of reality. But living in this moment is the most amazing spiritual achievement, and the practice of compassion is about living in this moment.

Experiencing Naturalness

Do we live in the past, in the future, or do we live now? We only live now! But where is this now, and who is living it? Living in the moment is the most authentic spiritual discipline we can cultivate—connecting with every moment of reality, aware of what is happening around us in an openhearted way, open to the suffering and the beauty of all beings. Living in this moment is the only place we can practice compassion, the only time we can be genuinely concerned with the welfare of others. By being caught up in the past, identified with memory, or projecting into the future, identifying with our fantasies, we are unable to live and connect with other beings, naturally unfolding our innate love and compassion. This present moment is called the meditative moment. In this moment there is meditation. We do not have to practice love and compassion. It already exists. So when we practice tonglen, it is actually the natural state of things.

When the sun shines, the flower opens automatically. So meditation is non-doing, it does not require any effort or discipline to a certain degree. Realization is just a matter of being here, letting go. Then rigpa (pristine, nondual awareness) arises naturally, Bodhicitta mind arises naturally. Patrul Rinpoche said, “When we are able to relax, meditation grabs us, but when we can’t relax, we constantly chase meditation, and experience no joy, no peace. This is the wrong understanding of meditation.” Wrong meditation is like the hunter chasing deer, but real meditation is like a puppy dog following you around. We like to stuff our minds with advice and spiritual literature because we have not recognized our natural state. Our natural state-of-being automatically inspires confidence and trust. But real meditation is a non-doing art. All we have to do is be in this moment, then meditation arises naturally. We only have to open our hearts to all phenomenon happening in this moment, as this moment. When we are open in this way, the gateway to Buddha essence opens and Buddha essence reveals itself as the all-pervasive, natural vibrancy of this moment, where everything is seen and understood, the suffering as well as the happiness. We see the Buddha essence inherent in all beings.

But we tend to practice idiot compassion, which is limited, because it is based on duality; it is mixed with judgment. Our latent tendency is to hide from the complete enjoyment of this moment, which entails a frightening sense of abandonment to our egos. We feel bad or sorry for those people on the streets, for those who are less fortunate, for those whom we perceive have problems, but this is not genuine because we are not recognizing Buddha essence. This is because we are not seeing our own Buddha essence! Without recognizing the inner divinity we do not experience Bodhicitta; we experience idiot compassion which has no wisdom. Authentic compassion, which is Bodhicitta mind, is the union of emptiness and awareness—this is the natural extension of wisdom and love. *Bodhi* means awakening, *citta* means heart. So we are talking about the awakened heart, which is the full realization

of the Buddha essence of one's self and all sentient beings. Bodhicitta recognizes the inner divinity as well as the illusion of suffering.

The First Step

As Bodhisattvas, we have to live with the boundless qualities of love and compassion; that is wisdom extended towards all beings. But we have to start somewhere. What is the first step? We start with one person. Recognize one person's Buddha essence. For instance, it is easy to recognize the Buddha essence of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, but not Hitler or Chairman Mao. It is easy to have compassion for those who are oppressed, but what about the oppressors? We must include all beings in our compassion. From the essential Dharma perspective, we cannot judge anybody, including ourselves. We must always have good will and understanding. It is so important to distinguish between the relative truth and Dharma truth, which is ultimate and does not exclude anybody. If we are not mindful, it is very easy to judge, to condemn, because this tendency is very subtle. From the perspective of a Bodhisattva, we practice love and compassion towards everybody, recognizing their Buddha essence. We practice love and compassion to recognize our own essence as well. Love and compassion are the natural expressions of this essence. This understanding should transform our perception radically.

Compassion is beyond our ordinary samsaric perception, which usually approaches phenomenon with reactions to appearances, and reactive judgments of good and bad. Compassion does not exclude anybody. But we have dualistic radar that is constantly assessing, interpreting, scrutinizing inner and outer environments, and this is based on ego, on the sense of "I." This activity, the material busyness, is actually true spiritual laziness. But pure vision, which transcends the sense of "I" by seeing it as merely a fabrication, embraces all beings, all situations, all experiences as reflections of itself as love and compassion. This is the pure land of Akanistha, which is our pure perception. So when we make aspirations to be reborn there, we are aspiring to have pure perception towards all beings, not separating, excluding, or judging. All beings are ourselves. Everyone becomes us and we become them. There is no separation between anyone. There is no self and other. There is one enlightened field; a unified field of awareness-being. This is the state of liberation.

Happiness

Happiness has nothing to do with anything external. We can be in the most dreadful situation, but with pure perception, and everything is the pure land. Within the state of rigpa, everything is pure. There is the fearlessness of quietude because our minds are purified. This is liberation, enlightenment, and cannot be altered. Happiness and suffering do not come from outside, which is contrary to our present philosophy. We are always trying to invite positive, favorable circumstances and avoid negative circumstances. However, when we adopt spiritual disciplines, we must experience a shift in our view of reality. The right view is most important, having the right view of the nature of reality. For example, I can change the external details of my life, like diet, exercise, and lifestyle, but to change the inner view requires tremendous sacrifice of the tiny little ego. However these external changes can be worthwhile because they are symbolic—they remind us about the inner view, and encourage us to continue unfolding our natural spiritual qualities. My teacher, Lama Tsultrim Gyamsto, always asked whomever came to him to make a commitment to practice, upholding at least one vow. This was to hold a symbolic reminder in one's mind about the commitment to transformation. This is very auspicious for us because it helps us to follow through with the true change, which comes from within one's self, purifying habitual tendencies and unfolding natural Buddha qualities.

Being In The Moment

The essence of Dharma is personal change; transformation of habitual tendencies into wisdom qualities. We are not changing who we are, but rather we are letting go of that which obscures our true nature. This moment holds everything we need. This moment is the perfect opportunity to uphold and maintain our commitment to unfolding this inherent love and compassion. The object in need of love and compassion exists with us right here in this moment, sitting next to us, in our family, in our community, within ourselves. The contents of our lives are all that we need to awaken and to sustain through practicing love and compassion. The open heart always knows what is needed, because awareness of this moment is this moment itself. Sometimes this requires very specific actions, our time, effort, finances, all of which aid us in overcoming our selfishness, insecurity, fear, and hope.

We have made this commitment, which is aspiration and action, to be loving to all beings, free from any anger or hatred. We must put this great aspiration of Bodhicitta into action constantly, ceaselessly. We can feed ants, rescue animals that will be killed or slaughtered, go to hospitals where there are sick people, help homeless people by giving time, acknowledgment, perhaps money. There are so many things we can do to serve beings, and this loving energy is contagious. One time I freed lobsters that were going to be cooked, boiled alive. The Chinese man I bought them from explained to me how to cook them, but I told him I was going to free them in the ocean. He called me "good man" after that, and began giving me lobsters for free. So his own sensitivity was sparked by this simple action, and it inspired him to extend love and generosity. These kinds of acts help to invoke the ultimate mind of love and compassion, which is the realization of our Buddha nature. When we hold in mind that every action is dedicated

to the enlightenment of all beings, our hearts become tenderized, and we open to our essence and to the essence of all beings. We live for the benefit of all beings. This attitude is revolutionary. When we eat, sit, walk, and sleep, we can always hold in our minds the welfare of all beings. This is the teaching of the authentic Bodhisattva way of life.

Courage

How can we engage in the Bodhisattva's practice, like the six paramitas, in our everyday life? Application is the key point of this practice. We must have dedication. This dedication is the essential practice of Bodhisattvas. There are three essential principles of Bodhisattvas: noble motivation, noble wisdom (wisdom of emptiness), and noble dedication. These are not really separate principles. Dedication means dedicating all of one's activities, one's life, one's possessions, as the cause of bringing liberation to yourself and humanity, to all sentient beings without exception. Whether you are Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist Bodhisattva, the principles are the same: To be a Bodhisattva is to be a living saint. A Bodhisattva is one who unfolds all his loving compassion towards all beings.

The wonderful thing is that Bodhisattva principles can be blended into our lives. When we get deeper and deeper into the essence of Dharma practice, we reach a landmark—there is no longer a distinction between life and Dharma. It seems life is Dharma and Dharma is life. But when we are first scratching the surface of practice, there seems to be a difference between them. Like we have to reject life or be somebody in order to practice Dharma. This is what we call the Hinayana path. I think this is very good for awhile. But once we become a more evolved practitioner, we see that life and Dharma can be blended together. It depends on what kind of life we are going to choose. Life itself can be a powerful vehicle to practice love, wisdom, and the six paramitas.

Remember that the main Bodhisattva commitment is always to come back to samsara and benefit other beings. The meaning of coming back to samsara is to embrace your life, not to run away from your duties. This requires some sense of courage. The *sattva* in Bodhisattva means hero or heroine. It requires tremendous spiritual courage to embrace your life no matter how challenging it is. The moment you decide to embrace your life, all the conflict and suffering and detrimental situations come to an end.

Life

Each of us has a different life, different ways of being human and experiencing our life. Let's talk about what life is. Whatever is happening is your life. It is not past or future, it is the present. Whatever you are experiencing right now is your life. Being married, not married, being a monk, being a nun, this is life. Maybe you could be one of the people who win the lottery. That is your life. Or maybe you are one of the people who does not win. That is your life. Regardless, whether good conditions or bad conditions, that is your life. The question is: Are you enjoying being in your life in this moment? We need to ask ourselves this question: "Am I enjoying this moment, being who I am, and embracing whatever is happening around me?"

It is possible that somebody may be dying. That is his or her life. Or maybe somebody is becoming enlightened right now. That is his or her life. Life is the present. We must ask this fundamental spiritual as well as philosophical inquiry, "Am I enjoying this life?" This is a very profound inquiry. "Am I enjoying this moment?" We may discover that we are not enjoying this life in this very moment. What is the pattern behind that? We are being attached to the past, about pleasant memories, or projecting those grand illusory fantasies into the future. Maybe we are afraid or there is resistance to experiencing what is happening right now. Maybe we are resisting the thoughts, feelings, or sensations that are arising right now. Maybe they seem too detrimental or unpleasant to us. So we are going to the past or the future, not being in the moment, embracing the inner and outer life. However, embracing life means surrendering to all conditions, outside and inside, whatever arises. Escapism is the opposite of the *sattva*, the spiritual courage, because we are running away from samsara, we are running away from reality. Being a Bodhisattva is walking towards reality with great courage, appreciation, and joy. A Bodhisattva is somebody who has true spiritual courage, who is completely free from fear and hope.

Bodhisattvas are unique heroes. Worldly heroes may have courage, but they always have hope and fear. Bodhisattvas always transcend hope and fear because Bodhisattvas perceive everything as a blessing. Everything is an amazing source of wisdom and knowledge. Bodhisattvas do not have fear of life because they realize fear is only a mental projection. Bodhisattvas have already awakened to the nature of everything in reality, they do not have a sense of fear and are ready to embrace everything. Also, every time a Bodhisattva goes through life's challenges, it makes him or her even more compassionate. Situations enhance one's commitment and practice.

Embrace Life

Now you can see that our tendency to run away from life comes from being unable to transcend our own fear or resistance. This is the reason. So the Bodhisattva's main commitment to practice is the promise to embrace life. All the principles and precepts of Mahayana can be included in this simple statement: embracing life, whatever may come. If you are dying, embrace it. If you are winning the lottery, perhaps that would be easier to embrace. Or if you were enlightened in this moment, perhaps it would be easy to embrace. If somebody is being unfriendly to you right now, embrace that, without any action, without trying to defend yourself. If somebody is really kind to you, embrace

that. Embrace every moment. Whatever is happening to us is unavoidable reality. We can deny it, we can distract ourselves, but we cannot avoid it. When we are sick, we have to face reality in order to get well.

In India, people can pay *baksheesh* (bribe) for anything, but not for impermanence and reality. We have to go through an amazing change, the way we look at what we believe is happiness, what is good, what is beauty. We have to change completely, because our old perception is based on dualistic mind or false belief systems, the ego. The ego is the prime factor in *samsara*, all the tragedies and sorrow we go through. We have to sue the ego, bring it into court, as the culprit for all our suffering. There is no culprit outside of ourselves that we can blame for this suffering. The ego, this one misperception, causes all *samsara*. Ego is the Pandora's box. The main practice of the Bodhisattva is conquering the ego. Shantideva says if you conquer the enemy from outside, there will always be more enemies. But if you conquer the ego inside, you will be completely victorious.

Imagine the earth is covered with thorns and we can't walk it because it damages our feet. Then imagine trying to cover the whole earth with leather so we could travel in comfort. How absurd! It would be impossible! Instead, we only need to wear just enough leather on our own feet, then we can walk the entire earth without mishap. Dealing with ourselves, making our own issues the priority, eliminates so much of what is unnecessary. If we try to defeat death, misfortune, sickness, enemies, our perception of bad luck, we will die tired, broken, and totally unsuccessful. We can never defeat them all. We may defeat one but there will always be more. But if we look inwardly and find the root of our resistance to reality, we can defeat the ultimate enemy. Then we will be the victorious one. That is what we call an *arhat*, conqueror, the one who conquered not outer enemies but inner enemies, the ego. This whole process is about subduing one's own ego, which is the source of *samsara*. When we identify ourselves with this ego, we cannot recognize our Buddha essence, the nature of our minds, *rigpa*. We cannot unfold love and compassion for other beings. As much as we are able to eradicate our identification with ego, we come closer and closer to who we are, which is the authentic realization of love and compassion.

Ego

Ego consists of various misconceptions, attachment to name, body, possessions, and our life stories. It is all hallucination, a dark phantom. It seems so concrete to us because we have habitually believed in this sense of "I." This ego is deeply rooted in each of us. The moment we are born we have innate ego. It is the most ancient habit we have. It is the fundamental tendency. Right now we are not doing so much dedication. Our life is mostly lived under the influence of ego. We have to change and dedicate our life to the cause of liberation of all beings, not to the strengthening of ego. Our ego and attachment become stronger and stronger until we really undertake the Bodhisattva's path and purify that false belief system. The practice of *tonglen* is a very good practice to do this. *Tonglen* is a very powerful method that allows us to deal directly with our egos. A Bodhisattva is in a battle, not with outer circumstances, but with transforming the ego. Bodhisattvas do not use weapons, guns, spears, anger, or hatred. He or she uses the weapon of wisdom—the realization of emptiness, or Buddha mind. This is the Bodhisattva's secret weapon.

In *tonglen*, we have to face our ego right on the spot. Especially if we are practicing the visualization of giving away everything to others and taking their suffering into ourselves. Our egos wake up right there, saying, "No, no, I can't do that!" It is a reversal practice. We see that ego pop up, wrapped in fire with lots of teeth. In Tibetan Buddhism, the demons are a symbol of ego. The wrathful deities, like *Vajrakilaya*, they are trampling on demons. We can visualize the ego as very angry, insecure, feisty, obnoxious, and demanding. We can feel that ego. We do not have to try to do analytical meditation. We can feel it immediately when we practice *tonglen*. I think *tonglen* is one of the most transformative practices. Ego is a misperception of who we are. It's an "I" that is perceived as a separate entity from everything else. But if we want to *feel* it, perhaps the best technique is not to go through intellectual inquiry, but to do *tonglen* practice. We feel ego right there in the form of fear and aversion. We immediately feel fear of suffering, stinginess of not being able to let go of our happiness and possessions. Even though there is no form or color, we can feel the ego in our flesh and in our bones. Ego just pops up.

There is a method by Kadampa masters called a hunter's expression—they hunt an animal and put smoke on the other side because the animal is very smart. It is the same with facing ego. When dealing with the ego and the *kleshas* (defilements), we do not delay or procrastinate. We immediately attack, right there, by meditating on the nature of reality. We subdue ego right there, right here, in this moment, by realizing it's nature. But we have to be mindful in every moment, otherwise one spark, which is thought, sets the whole forest, which is consciousness, on fire.

We have to be mindful at a very deep level. Not just seeing that cars are coming and going, whether people are walking around, whether it's raining, how the flesh feels. Mindfulness is about observing one's own emotions arising and catching them on the spot. When we are mindful and witnessing whatever is arising in our consciousness, if love and compassion arises, rejoice. If we are experiencing *kleshas*, like hope, fear, and identification with ego, witness that and be mindful without changing or altering anything. My teacher said, "Be selfish mindfully." Mindfulness is all that matters. It's the catalyst. Mindfulness is the ground of all development. We have to be like the Tibetan hunter who is waiting to see if *kleshas* come up, without any procrastination, and we use the method, whether *tonglen* or

deity yoga, and we allow ourselves to experience instant liberation. This is being taught a great deal in both Mahayana and Vajrayana teachings.

Instant Liberation

What does instant liberation mean? From the Hinayana perspective, liberation is a result that one will acquire in the future, like in the next life. In both Mahayana and Vajrayana, especially in Dzogchen, liberation is instant. It is not a future achievement. It is the experience of being awakened to reality, being liberated from attachment to suffering, hope and fear. It is the experience of great bliss and ultimate freedom that we find the moment that we let go of the grasping to the kleshas and ego's identity. With the letting go, which is simply clear seeing, there is always a sense of instant liberation. In this case, the spiritual path is not a gradual path. It is an instant path. What does this mean? We are not having the thought that Dharma is a gradual process. It is not like going to the gym to build muscle, which is a gradual process, or engaging in a long project. Liberation is always what we experience right now, being liberated from the chains of our own kleshas (defilements). Liberation should be arising the moment we use these techniques. Liberation itself is the technique.

If one becomes attached to the kleshas of anger or hope or fear, we do not need to take a secondary method to free ourselves. We only need to look at the very source of that klesha, the seeing itself cuts through attachment instantly without spinning off in different directions. If we do spin off in different directions, it is like putting a target to the East and shooting the arrow to the West. We have to use our Dharma practice as the direct and immediate antidote. Then we can experience instant liberation. That is the ultimate liberation. There is no liberation that is higher when we experience being liberated towards our own inclinations of ego.

Enlightenment Is Not a Gradual Path

Enlightenment is not a gradual path. We practice meditation and detachment toward kleshas in each moment. We can experience liberation in each moment. This is what Dzogchen practice is all about. If we meditate on Dzogchen in the morning, we are enlightened in the morning. If we meditate on Dzogchen in the evening, we are enlightened in the evening, because what we experience with Dzogchen is instant liberation. If we are seeking for liberation somewhere else, we are missing the vital point. In the Mahayana and Dzogchen teachings there is great emphasis on understanding what liberation is, otherwise we look for conceptual liberation, one based on time or space or conditions.

What is liberation? Are we expecting liberation from another source, or from a pure land, or an achievement we can acquire in the future or the next life? If so, then we are missing the point. Liberation is a momentary inner experience, being emancipated from one's own inner kleshas. Liberation happens spontaneously in this very moment. There is no need to wait. No gradual process. It happens spontaneously when we do the meditation, which is an utter relaxation of our mental fixations.

And after we are liberated, we go back again and are attached to our emotions and kleshas. In Dzogchen teachings, liberation is not a static or permanent state. Of course there is ultimate Buddhahood, which is permanent, but the liberation we talk about happens in the present moment. We do more practice, more practice, and we have a more continuous experience of liberation. But in the beginning we experience liberation, then go back to our old habit. Then we experience liberation again and go back again. Liberation is a momentary experience. That is what we call the mukya. It is an instant, spontaneous experience. It is not a reward or a nirvana experienced in a distant heaven. It is in each of us. We can experience it spontaneously. We do not have to wait for it. There is no cause or condition to liberation. We do not have to cultivate causes for liberation. We do not have to journey or accumulate. The moment we are willing to cut through our own attachments and kleshas we are liberated. For example, let's say we have very powerful karmic tendencies. We may have all these negative karmas we have accumulated through many lifetimes. But when we meditate on Bodhicitta mind, in that moment we experience liberation. It may be long or short, but in that moment we experience liberation.

The great yogi Shabkar gave this powerful analogy: a cave has been dark for countless ages, but the moment someone brings light into the cave, the darkness vanishes. In the same way, no matter how many karmic conditions we have, if we just meditate in the nature of mind and experience ultimate Bodhicitta, it does not have anything to do with our previous karma or conditions—we experience liberation. We need not look for a greater more advanced form of liberation. There is no such thing. If we are experiencing hatred or judgment and we are seeking for liberation in the future, that desire doesn't help us liberate from judgment. But if we practice meditation on love and compassion then we are instantly liberated. That is nirvana too. It is a direct, spontaneous experience.

When we are able to recognize the nature of mind, that experience is liberation. When we are able to have unconditional love towards all beings, even one moment, that experience is what we call liberation. When we are able to let go of grasping toward a certain state of our klesha (habitual tendencies/defilements), that is liberation, too. Liberation always happens in each of us. When we are able to transcend our fear of death and impermanence, that state of our mind is what we call liberation. When we are attached to something, any object or phenomena, in one moment we say, "I am going to let go of that attachment." In that moment we experience nirvana. When we are able

to open our heart and embrace our lives and all beings without limitation, in a vast and spacious way, that is liberation.

Liberation does not come without challenges. It is all right if we fall back into our old habits of hope and fear. Every time we cut through attachment there is liberation. The perfect meditation does not have to be always completely perfect. We may think it is a static state of our minds without any more challenges. But actually, the perfect meditation can be associated with passions and habits and so on, because we can apply meditation as a way to cut through attachment. So meditation is the act of practicing liberating oneself by cutting through our grasping to kleshas (tendencies) as being real.

The Immeasurable Path

The path of the Bodhisattva is known as the immeasurable path. Immeasurable means that on that journey everything is immeasurable. The number of sentient beings is immeasurable. So is the love and compassion of the Bodhisattva and the altruistic activity, and so is the freedom and liberation of the Bodhisattva. So how are we going to experience this? There is no doubt that there are immeasurable sentient beings. How can we have immeasurable love, compassion, and altruistic enlightened activities when we are so troubled by our own habitual tendencies of hope and fear? How can we generate ocean-like activities when we have a difficult time helping just one person?

If we understand that there is intrinsic Bodhicitta in ourselves, then we do not need to try to develop love and compassion. We only need to awaken to this natural state of our minds, the very depth of our minds. When we open and unfold, that is immeasurable love. It is bigger than us, bigger than our individual abilities, bigger than our own ego. On the ordinary level, we perceive ourselves as finite and fragile, as very limited individuals, subject to doubt, fear, insecurity, death, and impermanence. We see ourselves as very fragile because we have not discovered our vastness; because we have identified with this false identity of ego. We perceive ourselves as being separate from everything, so we perceive ourselves as dominated by fear. Fear is inherent in the dualistic view of the world. However, when we go beyond that ego, ego's fragile identity, and we open to our true character, then we are quite amazing beings. We are then capable of manifesting immeasurable enlightened qualities. We are Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. When we realize this, then there is this ever-accessible, unfathomable divinity that lies within. But to realize and actualize this often hidden potential, we sometimes have to practice prayer and meditation.

Faith and Devotion

Maybe when we encounter a very challenging situation, it may provoke us to contact that immeasurable love within ourselves. Do not run away from the suffering of other people. If people need us, we have to be the witness of their suffering. We can talk to people who are sick, lonely, and insecure. We can have direct connection with people who are hungry and thirsty, tormented by the causes and conditions of their lives. Just by being the loving eyewitness to others, it opens our immeasurable intrinsic wisdom and compassion. Or we can recite prayers to the Buddhas or spiritual teachers or whatever is the object of our faith. Sometimes when we recite a prayer it can serve as a very powerful catalyst to bring up that intrinsic love and compassion.

In Mahayana Buddhism we visualize a deity during post-meditation, because it is easy to lose our grip on meditation after our meditation. So after meditation we always visualize Avalokiteshvara, because it is the archetype or logo of compassion and love. We visualize Avalokiteshvara on our shoulder when we walk. When we sit we visualize him on our head. When we go to bed, we visualize him in our heart. When we eat food we visualize him in our throat. This is complete, simple yoga. Dream yoga, sleeping yoga, working yoga, walking yoga, sitting yoga. Totally complete. It makes sense, actually.

For me, the most powerful visualization was to visualize some of my teachers, like Khenpo Jigme Phuntsok. When I visualize him it is impossible to do something really bad, or to get really angry, because I have such positive association with him. I would never steal or lie with him in my mind, it's impossible. When I am going through emotional upheaval, I think about him or my teacher and liberation is right there. There are many methods we can use, and we have to choose which one is best for us. Recitation of mantra can be very powerful, too. Or the notion of dedicating every single activity to the liberation of all sentient beings is very powerful as well.

Immeasurable compassion is in each of us, but it is just dormant at the moment. We have so much doubt in our mind. We have so much doubt about our own life, whether we can help ourselves and survive or not. But now in Mahayana Buddhism we are talking about whether we can save all beings, not just help ourselves. So we have to develop this immeasurable love and compassion.

Revealing the Nature of Doubt

When we meditate on ourselves, we will actually discover that there is this immense amount of self-doubt and insecurity. It is everywhere. Doubt in relationship to our survival, to our spiritual practice, our connection to people, health, mortality. Our mind is run by these doubts which are created by hope and fear. Why do we have so many kleshas (habitual tendencies)? Because we are identified with ego. But we are going to identify with the vast spacious place where there is no longer any doubt or hope or fear. That is called immeasurable love. When we have this

immeasurable love we are able to engage in immeasurable activity. We may ask, "Since I can barely manage my own life, how can I help infinite beings?" It seems that there isn't time or energy to do our own stuff, our personal stuff. Do we have that doubt?

We have this belief that our ability and capability is not enough to even benefit ourselves. But the very idea of immeasurable action is that the Bodhisattva does not have any doubt about his own actions. A Bodhisattva has complete faith in his or her own actions as a single cause to benefit beings. When we are beyond that doubt, then even very small things like releasing animals or giving lunch to one person, these kinds of actions become immeasurable activities. When we go beyond doubt, every act becomes an immeasurable act. When we get rid of that doubt toward ourselves and believe in our intrinsic love and compassion, then every act becomes an immeasurable act. In the absence of doubt there is immeasurable joy and happiness in each of us. Joy and happiness is the natural expression of freedom that the Bodhisattva experiences beyond the mundane. It is beyond words. There is no comparison with ordinary joy and happiness. Ordinary joy and happiness are impermanent and dependent upon causes and conditions. It can be injured and disturbed. It never lasts forever. And it's always based on klesha, on selfish mind. There is always insecurity about our own happiness or freedom. There isn't really happiness in ordinary happiness. The Buddha said it's like sitting on the top of a needle. There's no happiness sitting on that.

True happiness comes from immeasurable love. Nothing can destroy it or take it away. We may die but we will not lose our joy, happiness, and freedom. We may be sick or poor or the object of hatred for other people. But our joy and happiness has nothing to do with those conditions. Because of that we become the source of joy and love and generosity to other beings. This is everlasting freedom and happiness. It is pure, authentic, and absolute. Bodhicitta mind is the Buddha, because it is the guide. It is Dharma, because it is the path. And it is the sangha, because it accompanies us. It is the deity. It is the wish-fulfilling jewel. If he walked in front of us right now, even Buddha could not grant us happiness. But Bodhicitta mind can, so it is ultimate Buddha nature. The Dzogchen teachings say that we are Samantabhadra (the Primordial Buddha) because Bodhicitta mind resides inside of us.

In some way, nothing matters to us anymore in this lifetime. Once we become a Bodhisattva, we become fearless, ultimately confident. Whether we become successful or a loser, whether we are sick or dying, it doesn't matter, because the mind steeped in the ultimate reality of love and compassion is unshakable. Our happiness springs from inner richness, which is love and compassion. We begin to experience the state of great equanimity, where there is no longer the sense of separation between self and others, friend and enemy. For a Bodhisattva, this insect is as important as a human being. Everyone is as important as himself. There is no longer hatred or partiality. There is all-embracing love and compassion. But remember that we already have this intrinsic love and compassion. Remember to evoke it. That is all that matters to the end.

Life can be very challenging. Especially when we practice Dharma, because we no longer take refuge in illusions. In that way, we have a chance to exercise and strengthen our Dharma practice, to use Dharma as a way to overcome our personal obstacles. Dharma is not intellectual knowledge. It is direct experience of personal purification. When we know how to apply Dharma directly, we begin to experience liberation. We experience the profound effect of Dharma. Please continue with Dharma practice every day. There are many areas which have to be improved. But do not judge Dharma practice. Maybe we can put forth more effort, more determination, more time to cultivate Dharma practice. We understand that the Dharma practice is the only source of happiness we have. It's the most precious guide we have.