

# The Heart of Dharma Collection



# Contents

Introduction .....	3
The Four Noble Truths and Noble Eightfold Path .....	4
Eight Verses for Training the Mind .....	10
Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind Toward Dharma .....	14
The Four Immeasurables: Sublime Qualities of True Love .....	19
Discourse On Loving-Kindness: Karaniya Metta Sutta .....	22
The Six Paramitas (Perfections) .....	25
Karma: The Possession That Follows Us Everywhere .....	30
All Embracing Compassion: The Heart-Practice of Tonglen .....	34
Transforming the Three Poisons: Greed, Hatred, and Delusion .....	38
Twenty-Seven Verses On Mind Training .....	42
Verses On the Faith Mind .....	46

# Introduction

You have in your possession a collection of precious and priceless gems. Each teaching in this collection is alive with radiance and beauty, bestowing the immeasurable wealth of true wisdom upon those who can receive. Open this literal treasure chest of Dharma and receive these gems. Your heart and mind will be eternally enriched.

Most every system of Buddhist Dharma provides specific preliminary teachings that serve as a solid foundation for correct perception and correct spiritual practice. These teachings are the very foundation of the Buddhist path. However, these teachings will serve as a foundational understanding for everyone, regardless of faith, because they provide a clear description of the way reality works.

No matter which path we take in this life, without this foundational understanding, we are subject to common misperceptions of reality which inevitably cause confusion, stress, dissatisfaction, and suffering. To make progress in our spiritual and psychological development, to attain liberation from suffering in this very lifetime, and to be able to assist the awakening of other beings, we need to radically shift our fundamental perception of reality. These teachings will serve this purpose.

# The Four Noble Truths and The Noble Eightfold Path

## The First Noble Truth: The Truth of Dissatisfaction and Suffering

The First Noble Truth describes the nature of life and our personal experience of this impermanent, ever-changing world. All beings desire happiness, safety, peace, and comfort. We desire what is satisfying, pleasurable, joyful, and permanent. However, the very nature of existence is impermanent, always changing, and therefore incapable of fully satisfying our desire. Inevitably, we experience frustration, anger, loss, unhappiness, and dissatisfaction. Life is in constant change, and changes such as birth, old age, sickness, and death can bring dissatisfaction or suffering. Suffering may arise from being associated with people or conditions that are unpleasant, from being separated from people we love or conditions we enjoy, from not getting what we desire, or from getting what we desire then losing it. Even our own thoughts and feelings are impermanent, constantly changing. Inevitably, all physical, emotional, and mental conditions will change. Insight into the First Noble Truth: To overcome dissatisfaction and suffering, it is essential that we understand and accept the ever-changing, impermanent nature of life; we acknowledge the presence of dissatisfaction and suffering; we understand the very nature of suffering and we embrace suffering compassionately, without fear or avoidance.

## The Second Noble Truth: The Cause of Dissatisfaction and Suffering

The Second Noble Truth refers to the arising, origin, and cause of our dissatisfaction and suffering. We desire, crave, and thirst for happiness, security, and identity in this world of impermanence. Influenced by our misperception (ignorance/delusion), we want life to satisfy our every craving, need, and desire. We want from life what it can never provide: constant happiness, pleasure, and security undisturbed by change or loss. When life fails to satisfy our needs and desires, we experience fear, frustration, hurt, anger, pain, or suffering. Afflicted by such thoughts and emotions, we tend to speak and act in negative ways which cause further suffering. Therefore our dissatisfaction and suffering do not come from outside of ourselves. We cause our own suffering when we fail to realize that the impermanent nature of life is incapable of providing constant satisfaction for our craving, need, and desire. The origin and cause of dissatisfaction and suffering is our misperception of reality (ignorance/delusion), self-centered desire (greed), craving, grasping, attachment to things that do not last, and our negative behavior. Insight into the Second Noble Truth: To overcome dissatisfaction and suffering, it is essential that we clearly identify the causes of this experience; we deeply feel and fully understand these causes; finally, we choose to abandon, remove, and stop creating the causes of our suffering.

## The Third Noble Truth: The End of Dissatisfaction and Suffering

The Third Noble Truth tells us there is an end to our dissatisfaction and suffering when we let go of, abandon, and liberate ourselves from the craving and attachment that causes it. Because our pain, confusion, and suffering have a cause, a beginning, they also have an end. Once we understand the nature of our illness, we can cure it with the right remedies. In this same way, once we see and understand what causes our suffering, we can bring an end to it by eliminating those causes and realizing well-being. Liberation from suffering, awakening, supreme peace, lasting happiness, and perfect wisdom are possible. These qualities are the very essence and nature of our being. They are always available within us, awaiting our realization. Insight into The Third Noble Truth: When our delusion, greed, craving, attachment, and negative behavior have been extinguished, what remains in this absence of suffering is the experience of Nirvana: the awakened quality of our true nature. It is essential, however, that this supreme peace and wisdom of our true nature be realized and made fully conscious by way of direct experience. For one liberated in this way, in whose heart dwells peace, there is nothing to be added to what has been accomplished. This is the end of dissatisfaction and suffering—the realization of our true nature, Ultimate Reality, Nirvana.

## The Fourth Noble Truth: The Path Leading to the End of Dissatisfaction and Suffering

The Fourth Noble Truth is the Way, the Path leading to the end of dissatisfaction and suffering. By following and practicing the Noble Eightfold Path—Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration—we will overcome our dissatisfaction and suffering. Following this Path, also known as the Noble Middle Path, we avoid the extremes of searching for happiness through a life of indulgence in desire and sensual pleasure, or the opposite extreme of trying to gain happiness or liberation by tormenting one's body and mind through unreasonable, unprofitable, and painful forms of spiritual austerity (self-mortification). The Noble Eightfold Path is the Way to the end of suffering; the Middle Way that leads to peace, discernment, supreme happiness, perfect wisdom, enlightenment, and Nirvana. Insight into the Fourth Noble Truth: No matter how profound our conceptual knowledge of the Path may be, this will not be sufficient for true accomplishment. It is essential that we *follow*, *cultivate*, and *practice* the Path with diligence, sincerity, and full confidence.

# The Noble Eightfold Path

## 1) Right Understanding (or Right View)

Right Understanding or Right View is the ability to understand the nature of things exactly as they are, without delusion or distortion. If we hold wrong views, misunderstanding the nature of reality, then our thoughts, speech, actions, and plans come forth from this misunderstanding, bringing unhappiness and suffering. If we cultivate the Right View of reality, our thoughts, speech, actions, and plans come forth from this Right Understanding, bringing happiness and freedom from suffering.

Imposing our self-centered desires, needs, expectations, or fears onto life—being satisfied and happy when things go our way, and upset if they do not—is wrong understanding. With Right Understanding, we correctly perceive the interdependent, impermanent, ever-changing nature of life. We realize lasting happiness and satisfaction do not come from anything external. In addition, we understand the wholesome, life-affirming actions that bring benefit to all beings, as well as the unwholesome, negative actions which bring suffering.

Right Understanding requires our full comprehension of the Four Noble Truths, which explain the nature of reality. Through Right Understanding we cultivate *wisdom (prajna)*, an essential aspect of the Path.

## 2) Right Thought (or Right Intention)

Right Thought or Right Intention means our thoughts, feelings, desires, and intentions are in complete harmony with the wisdom of life, in accordance with the way reality works. With Right Thought, our thoughts and intentions are completely free from selfish desire, hostility, and cruelty. Right Thought means our thinking, attitude, and motivation, are rightly aligned with love, kindness, compassion, wisdom, and harmlessness, and these noble qualities are extended to all living beings.

Right Thought is directly related to Right Speech and Right Action; the way we think always influences our speech and actions. Therefore, our misunderstanding of reality causes wrong thinking, which gives rise to non-virtuous speech and actions which cause harm. Right Thought gives rise to virtuous speech and actions which bring happiness and benefit.

When our thought, desire, intention, and motivation are in harmony with Reality, the Way, the Dharma, this is Right Thought. Through Right Thought we cultivate *wisdom (prajna)*, an essential aspect of the Path.

## 3) Right Speech

Right Speech is the ability to speak truthfully and harmlessly. Right Speech comes naturally from Right Thought, since our speech is a direct expression of our thoughts. Our

speech should never be cruel or hurtful to others. Our words should not create hatred, misunderstanding, or suffering. Right speech means we do not lie, slander, or speak in ways that create resentment, conflict, division, or disharmony among individuals or groups. Right speech means not speaking in ways that are harsh, rude, impolite, abusive, or malicious. We refrain from idle, useless, and foolish talk or gossip.

In this way, we cultivate the ability to speak the truth; we learn to use words that are friendly, gentle, benevolent, and meaningful. Right Speech means speaking kindly and wisely at the right time and place. When we are not able to speak in ways that are useful, kind, or uplifting, we may consider the wisdom of remaining in noble silence. We should understand that spiritual or religious conversation or truthfulness alone is not Right Speech. Abstinence from unwholesome speech is the essence of Right Speech. Through the practice of Right Speech we cultivate *ethical conduct* (personal integrity/sila) and establish the essential foundation of the Path.

#### 4) Right Action

Right Action means our behavior is ethical, honorable, and responsible. Right Action comes naturally from Right Thought, since our actions are a direct expression of our thoughts. Our physical actions are based upon our mental volition or will. When our minds and hearts are overwhelmed with greed (attachment), anger (aversion), or delusion (ignorance) we have the strong tendency to engage in unwholesome, non-virtuous actions. Whenever these mental and emotional states arise, we should face them, observe them objectively, embrace them, and understand them as impermanent and being the cause of suffering. This brings insight, wisdom, and Right Action.

Being in accord with Right Action, we are always compassionate, generous, nonviolent, and peaceful. We abstain from unwholesome behavior such as destroying life, taking what is not given (stealing), sexual misconduct, and dealing with others in hurtful or dishonest ways. We live a life of honesty, being always conscientious, with a heart full of sympathy, desiring the welfare of all living beings. To the best of our ability, we support others in leading a peaceful, nonviolent, and honorable life as well. Through Right Action we cultivate *ethical conduct* (personal integrity/sila), and establish the essential foundation of the Path.

#### 5) Right Livelihood

Right Livelihood suggests that we earn our living in an honorable and life-affirming way, free from deceit or dishonesty. We do not earn our livelihood in any way that involves harm, cruelty, or injustice to either human beings or animals, nor do we support those who harm other beings. For example, Right Livelihood means not selling or trading in arms and lethal weapons, not selling intoxicating drinks or poisons, not killing or mistreating animals, not cheating or deceiving others, and so forth.

The Dharma of a human being is to support and assist life, embracing our interconnection with all sentient beings. Being in accord with Right Livelihood means living in harmony and unity with all of life; living not just to satisfy our own personal desires, but to compassionately serve the welfare of all beings. Through Right Livelihood we cultivate *ethical conduct* (personal integrity/sila), and establish the essential foundation of the Path.

## 6) Right Effort

Right Effort is the wholehearted, diligent, and energetic endeavor to train our mind and heart. We are to restrain or prevent unwholesome states of mind from arising. We are to make an effort to dispel and abandon those unwholesome states of mind that have already arisen in our awareness. In addition, we are to make an effort to cultivate positive, pure, loving, virtuous, and wholesome states of mind and heart which have not yet arisen or been developed within us. We are also to make an effort to maintain those positive, pure, loving, virtuous, and wholesome states of mind and heart which have already arisen and been cultivated within us. We should develop and bring these wholesome states to maturity and perfection.

Right Effort means we put forth the diligent effort to be mindful and aware at each moment so we can prevent and eradicate unwholesome thoughts, speech, and actions. In this way, we are also able to avoid being carried away by distractions. We are to develop steady perseverance, making a firm, unshakable resolve to practice the Dharma. We endeavor to express love, compassion, wisdom, and virtue in our thoughts, speech, and actions. If we truly want to awaken and attain liberation from suffering, we must practice with determination, diligence, and consistency. We must train the mind and heart by diligently applying the necessary effort. Through Right Effort we cultivate *mental discipline/concentration (samadhi)*, an essential aspect of the Path.

## 7) Right Mindfulness (or Right Attention)

Right Mindfulness or Right Attention means being attentive, mindful, and aware of our bodily actions, sensations and feelings, and the activity of our mind. Right Mindfulness means giving our full attention to that which is positive, life affirming, and beneficial to other beings. We are also mindful of that which is negative, harmful, or destructive. In addition, we are to cultivate those states of mind conducive to our spiritual progress.

In accord with Right Mindfulness, our awareness is where it should be, completely attentive to what is happening within us and around us in the present moment. We see things as they are, without distortion. When our attention is scattered, deluded, or placed on too many things at once, our thoughts, speech, or actions may become careless, which causes harm to ourselves or others. In these situations, we can practice Right Mindfulness by embracing the painful consequences of our actions with full awareness. As we practice Right Mindfulness, we are steady, open, aware, present, insightful, and serene in attitude; we think, speak, and act with loving-kindness, compassion, and wisdom. Through Right Mindfulness we cultivate *mental discipline/concentration (samadhi)*, an essential aspect of the Path.

## 8) Right Concentration

Right Concentration is the means for training and centering the mind. Through Right Concentration we bring our ordinarily restless, unconcentrated mind into a state of tranquility, one-pointedness, and unbroken attentiveness. By training the mind through Right Concentration, we extinguish the delusion, self-centered desire, and destructive



thinking that rule the scattered, untrained mind. In this way, we develop serenity and mental/emotional stability, and we gain insight into the true nature of reality.

Right Concentration leads one through the various stages of Dhyana (meditation) into equanimity, joy, purity of mind, and attainment of the highest wisdom. Right Concentration is a fully engaged means of training the mind and heart to be completely present in each moment, without cutting ourselves off from others or escaping the responsibilities of life. Through Right Concentration we cultivate *mental discipline/concentration (Samadhi)*, an essential aspect of the Path.

# Eight Verses for Training the Mind

by Geshe Langri Tangpa (1054-1123)

Composed by the Buddhist Master Langri Tangpa (1054-1123), Eight Verses for Training the Mind is a highly-revered text from the Mahayana Lojong (mind training) tradition. These instructions offer essential practices for cultivating the awakening mind of compassion, wisdom, and love. This eight-verse lojong enshrines the very heart of Dharma, revealing the true essence of the Mahayana path to liberation. Even a single line of this practice can be seen as encapsulating the entire teaching of the Buddha. For even a single statement of this mind training practice has the incredible power to help us subdue our self-oriented behavior and mental afflictions.

The fundamental theme of mind training practice is the profound reorientation of our basic attitude, both toward our own self and toward our fellow human beings, as well as toward the events around us. The goal of mind training practice is the radical transformation of our thoughts, attitudes, and habits. Presently, we tend to cherish the welfare of our own self at the expense of all others. However, the mind training teaching challenges us to reverse this process. This involves a deep understanding of others as true friends, and the recognition that our true enemy lies inside of ourselves, not outside.

As we practice these lojong teachings in daily life, we train the mind to embrace reality in a completely wholesome, wise, and compassionate way. These excellent practices help us purify our negativity and awaken the heart by giving us a way to transform adversity, conflict, and hardship into a direct opportunity for spiritual growth. In this way, rather than perceiving difficult people or adverse circumstances in our lives as an obstacle, tragedy, or punishment, we now meet these experiences with deep compassion, wisdom, and skill—using them as our actual practice on the path to enlightenment.

By way of these treasured practices we eliminate our competitive, selfish, and emotionally reactive nature, as well as our false and exaggerated concepts of self (also called self-grasping and self-cherishing). It is important to understand that the greed, jealousy, anger, pride, selfishness, and attachment, which cause us so much suffering, are actually misperceptions of reality, not inherent conditions of our mind. Therefore, these precious lojong practices can purify our misperceptions and delusions completely, revealing the natural radiance, clarity, wisdom, and compassion of our true nature.

**With the heartfelt desire and determination to attain enlightenment  
for the welfare of all living beings, who are more precious than a  
wish-fulfilling jewel for accomplishing the supreme goal,  
may I always cherish them and hold them dear.**

**Verse I** - Cherishing and caring for others is the source of all happiness. Cherishing ourselves over others is the source of all suffering and negative conditions in this world. Therefore, our determination to attain enlightenment should always be motivated by our heartfelt desire to serve the welfare of all living beings. The attainment of enlightenment is the supreme goal. Our enlightenment comes from the cultivation of bodhichitta (the

awakening mind of love, compassion, and wisdom). Bodhichitta arises from our deepest compassion. To develop this compassion and reach the supreme goal, we need others. In this way, all living beings are the principle source for our spiritual development and for accomplishing the supreme goal of enlightenment. In addition, at some time each of us has been, and will be, a source of great kindness and benefit for one another. The immense kindness of all living beings is integral to our own human existence. Considering this, we can understand how living beings are even more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel and that we should always cherish them and hold them dear.

**Whenever I am with others may I think of myself  
as the lowest of all and from the very depths of my heart  
may I respectfully hold others as supreme.**

**Verse 2** - This verse calls us to train the mind in proper humility, eliminating our habitual arrogance and pride by 'thinking of ourselves as the lowest of all.' This is certainly not suggesting we belittle ourselves; we should have self-esteem and self-confidence. Rather, a practice is being offered for taming our exaggerated sense of self-importance and for cultivating true humility and respect for others. The afflictions of arrogance, superiority, pride, and competitiveness create disharmony among people and prevent us from learning and evolving. Therefore, by respectfully holding others as supreme, we become more humble, gentle, and open. This naturally brings harmony and compassion into our relationships and helps us to achieve great qualities, virtues, and spiritual realizations.

**In all actions, may I closely examine my state of mind,  
and the moment a disturbing emotion or negative attitude arises,  
since this may cause harm to myself and others,  
may I firmly face and avert it.**

**Verse 3** - This verse calls for the sincere practice of mindfulness, closely examining our state of mind throughout all our actions. Through this practice of mindfulness, the teachings encourage us to firmly face and avert any disturbing emotions or negative attitudes the very moment they arise. The reason for this is that our delusions, disturbing emotions, and negative attitudes can provoke us to think, speak, or act in non-virtuous ways which may cause harm to ourselves and others. This behavior brings karmic consequences and perpetuates our delusion and suffering. Therefore, throughout the day, while working, driving, walking, studying, talking with others, and so forth, we should closely examine our state of mind and heart. By training our mind in this skillful way, we will be able to firmly face and avert disturbing emotions and negative attitudes as they arise and before they develop any further momentum or power.

**Whenever I meet people of unpleasant character  
or those overwhelmed by negativity, pain or suffering,  
may I cherish and care for them as if I had found a rare  
and precious treasure difficult to find.**

**Verse 4** - When we encounter unpleasant people, or those overwhelmed by negativity, pain, or suffering, we often prefer to ignore or avoid them rather than cherish and care for them. We may consider ourselves to be more important or more evolved than such beings, and we usually turn from them, as we do not want to be bothered, hurt, or contaminated by their condition. This verse suggests reversing our usual self-cherishing attitude by learning to cherish and care for such people, being joyful and grateful as if we had found a rare and precious treasure. To overcome the delusion and egoism of our self-cherishing, we view this encounter as an opportunity to serve and bring happiness to others, rather than a nuisance to be avoided. In this way, our self-cherishing mind diminishes and our compassion deepens so as to embrace all living beings without exception.

**Whenever others, because of their jealousy, treat me badly  
with abuse, insult, slander, or in other unjust ways, may I accept  
this defeat myself and offer the victory to others.**

**Verse 5** - Learning to accept loss and defeat for ourselves and offering gain and victory to others is the very foundation of the bodhisattva practice. Although it may appear, at the worldly level, that we suffer loss by way of this practice, ultimately the practitioner receives the greatest benefits of spiritual wealth and virtue. In learning to accept harsh or unjust treatment, we should not allow ourselves to react with anger, behave in the same non-virtuous ways in return, or to abandon others because of their actions toward us. This is the essence of accepting defeat and offering the victory, and the accomplishment of supreme patience and kindness. By accepting defeat and offering the victory to others, with the pure motivation of heartfelt compassion, we destroy the ignorance of our self-cherishing at its very roots.

**When someone whom I have benefited or in whom I have placed  
great trust and hope, harms me or treats me in hurtful ways  
without reason, may I see that person as my precious teacher.**

**Verse 6** - When we are kind to people, helping them, giving them our trust and hope, we naturally expect to be treated kindly in return. When people repay our kindness and trust by harming us or treating us in hurtful ways, we often react with anger, hurt, or disappointment. After such an experience, we may find it difficult to give them our love and respect. This type of ordinary love is conditional and impure. As practitioners, we want to embrace a situation such as this with skillful wisdom, compassion, and unconditional love. Therefore, it is essential that we have a way to transform these difficult experiences into the actual path to enlightenment. To accomplish this, we learn to see a person who harms us or treats us in hurtful ways, as our precious teacher. This person becomes our precious teacher because of the priceless Dharma lessons we receive. Through their kindness, we also receive the ripening and purification of our own negative karma, which is the

inevitable result of our having done a similar thing to someone in the past. In this way, we can see how even our worst enemies can be our greatest benefactors and precious teachers.

**In brief, may I offer both directly and indirectly all help, happiness and benefit to all beings, my mothers, and may I secretly take upon myself all of their harmful actions, pain and suffering.**

**Verse 7** - This verse refers to the essence of Tong-len practice (Giving and Taking). We are to offer, directly and indirectly, our help, happiness, benefit, skills, and resources in loving service to all beings who certainly, at some time in the past, have been our own mothers. In Tong-len practice, with strong compassion, we visualize taking on the obstacles, problems, illnesses, and suffering of others. We then visualize giving them all of our happiness, comfort, love, virtue, prosperity, and great insights. In this verse the word 'secretly' suggests this particular practice of compassion may not be suitable or may be too difficult for beginning practitioners. It also means that this practice should be done discreetly, and not openly displayed or spoken about so as to gain praise or recognition.

**May I keep all of these practices undefiled by stains of the eight worldly concerns (gain/loss, pleasure/pain, praise/blame, fame/dishonor), and by recognizing the emptiness and illusory nature of all existing things, may I be liberated from the bondage of attachment and mistaken views of reality.**

**Verse 8** - It is essential that our spiritual practice not be defiled or stained by the eight worldly concerns. For example, engaging in these practices hoping to be recognized or praised as an excellent Dharma practitioner is not the right motivation. Nor should we practice with expectations of gaining something special or pleasurable for ourselves. Our motivation for practice must not become polluted or obscured by worldly concerns and attachment. The right motivation is to act exclusively and compassionately for the benefit of other beings. Our mind training practice must also be unified with our direct perception of ultimate truth—emptiness. As we gain realization of ultimate truth, we understand the empty, illusory, and impermanent nature of all existing things. With this realization, grasping or clinging to external appearances, or being deceived by them, diminishes, and we gain liberation from the bondage of attachment and mistaken views of reality.

# Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind Toward Dharma

(Ngondro or Preliminary Teachings)

Most every system of Dharma includes specific preliminary teachings that serve as a solid foundation for correct perception and correct spiritual practice. This preliminary teaching, *Four Thoughts That Turn the Mind Toward Dharma*, is the very foundation of the Buddhist path. However, these Four Thoughts can serve as a foundational understanding for everyone, regardless of faith, because they provide a clear description of the way reality works.

Without this preliminary understanding, we are subject to common misperceptions of reality which inevitably cause confusion, stress, dissatisfaction, and suffering. To make progress in our practice, to attain liberation from suffering in this very lifetime, and to be able to assist the awakening of other beings, we need to radically shift our fundamental perception of reality.

As we contemplate the Four Thoughts, integrating this deep wisdom into our awareness, we transform our mind and heart, thus bringing about this most essential and necessary shift in our perception and in our ways of living. In this way, the Four Thoughts help us to purify ignorance, delusion, and attachment, and will continually strengthen and clarify our Dharma practice.

By contemplating the Four Thoughts we overcome the eight mundane concerns (fame/disgrace, pain/pleasure, gain/loss, praise/blame), we find the inspiration to transform our non-virtuous behavior, and we are motivated to embrace those aspects of life which are of true and lasting value. This excellent preliminary teaching brings greater insight, wisdom, loving-kindness, and compassion—the very heart of Dharma.

## General Instructions for Meditation on the Four Thoughts

It is suggested that you engage in active contemplation of these Four Thoughts by considering the direct importance, merit, and relevance of this wisdom to your own life and to the lives of others as well. Deeply contemplate and reflect upon these Four Thoughts until your mind is weary of thinking, then allow your mind to relax into the natural, effortless, and spacious awareness of non-conceptual meditation. The insights you gain through this contemplation and reflection will expand into deeper understanding and realization as you rest the mind. As you return to active contemplation, you will find that your mind is refreshed by the time spent in non-conceptual relaxation.

## Precious Human Birth

Contemplate the importance and opportunity of having a precious human birth. We are very fortunate indeed to be born as human beings and to encounter the Dharma. This human existence is invaluable, for we are endowed with the freedom and conditions necessary for practicing Dharma and cultivating our spiritual development. We have the opportunity to accomplish something meaningful, rather than spending all of our time and energy pursuing the temporary, passing pleasures of this life.

To have this precious opportunity and not use it wisely represents a great loss. We can use this precious human birth to attain enlightenment and bring great benefit and happiness to countless living beings. Contemplate and reflect deeply upon this precious human birth until the fortunate opportunity provided by this human existence, which should never be taken for granted or squandered, becomes clearly apparent.

Our first thought, as we begin to practice, must be appreciation for our human birth. Think about those who have a human body but who are not gifted with conditions conducive to their spiritual development. Contemplate those who attain a human birth but spend all of their time and energy on trivial, worldly pursuits or destroy their opportunity by harming others.

Allow this contemplation to inspire within you the compassionate wish that all beings find liberation from spiritually impoverished circumstances. Contemplate, "I have attained this extraordinary and precious human birth. This human birth I will use wisely for my own awakening and for the greatest benefit of all living beings."

## Impermanence and Mortality

The contemplation of impermanence and mortality (death) is an essential aspect of Dharma practice. Because of ignorance and misperception, we become attached to permanence and solidity. We habitually deny the fact of our mortality, acting as if we will live forever. This misperception of reality only brings more confusion, stress, dissatisfaction, and suffering.

However, when we face the inevitability of our death, then we start to wonder what to do about it and how to deal with the uncertainty of life. In this way, contemplating impermanence and death brings great insight and benefit. We purify our ignorance and delusion and we develop a correct understanding of reality. In addition, our attachment to pleasure, possessions, trivial activities, and other material pursuits subsides. We realize that the temporary pleasures of this life can never provide us with lasting happiness or satisfaction.

Everything in this material world, including our own body, is impermanent. Everything changes constantly. Even our state of mind and our feelings are constantly changing and are therefore impermanent. Assuming the permanence of anything except our essential Buddha nature, awakened awareness, will bring dissatisfaction and suffering.

We must contemplate the fact that death is inevitable. At some time death will come to each of us. Death is the inevitable result of birth, the natural display of impermanence. With each passing moment we are closer to our death. We will have to leave our body eventually, and death will come regardless of whether we have made time to practice Dharma.

Death is certain. The time of our death is uncertain—we do not know when death will occur. Each day we encounter numerous dangers that could cause death at any moment. At the time of death, our wealth, possessions, and even our most cherished friends will not be able to help us. Money cannot buy us more time nor will it buy us happiness or peace. Our friends can offer their love and support, yet they cannot hold us back from death.

Our body, no longer able to support us, will be of no assistance at the time of death. Only the wisdom we have developed by practicing the Dharma will remain with us continually. Nothing but the Dharma, our inner spiritual wealth, can be of benefit to us at the time of death.

By understanding impermanence and death we realize the preciousness of life and we can choose to embrace what is truly of value. We will wisely discern how we spend our valuable time and energy and will make a determined effort to practice the Dharma, cultivate virtue, and serve the welfare of all living beings.

## **Karma/The Consequences of Karmic Actions**

It is wise for us to contemplate that the quality of our life is fully determined by the quality of our behavior. Our thoughts, feelings, speech, and actions, virtuous and non-virtuous, create the intricate patterns of our life experience. We ourselves create the causes for our own happiness or our own suffering. When we understand the unwholesome, non-virtuous actions that cause suffering, we can eliminate those causes. When we understand the wholesome, virtuous actions which bring happiness and benefit to ourselves and others, we can cultivate those causes. We must begin by acknowledging that our situation in life is the result of our own actions.

Karma and its results are certain and unfailing. Karma is the inevitable results which come directly from specific causes. Positive actions of body, speech, and mind will always bring the positive result of some form of happiness and benefit. Negative actions of body, speech, and mind will always bring the negative result of some form of suffering.

Karma and its results are exactly like a seed and its fruit. If we plant the seed of a sweet fruit, this is exactly what the seed will produce. If we plant the seed of a poisonous fruit, this is exactly what this seed will produce as well. Karma works in the same way. If we act negatively, the seeds of our actions will produce the fruit (experience) of their kind. If we act in kind and virtuous ways, the seeds of these actions will also produce the positive fruit of their kind.

Even a very small seed can grow into a large tree. In this same way, just a small negative action can bring a large amount of suffering if it is not purified. An apparently small and insignificant positive action can bring a great amount of happiness. A specific action leads to a specific result. Actions not engaged, will not bring results. If the cause has not been



created, the effect will not be experienced. An action done is not lost and will definitely ripen and bring a result. Negative actions to be abandoned are killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, idle gossip, covetousness, malice, and wrong views of reality.

By understanding karma, by purifying our delusion and negativity, and by engaging in virtuous behavior, we change the entire course of our life experience and move swiftly toward liberation. If we use adversity as an opportunity for developing compassion, wisdom, and love, the purification of our karma will be rapid and profound.

Closely examine the karmic circumstances in your life. Consider deeply that there is a continuum, an interconnection between your present life, your previous lives, and your future lives. Observe your present thoughts, feelings, speech, and actions. Use this observation as a precise indication of what you are creating for your future experience.

### **The Disadvantages of the Worldly Life (Samsara)**

A very large obstacle to success on the path of enlightenment is our attachment to samsara, to the worldly life. Because we are all so strongly attached to this material world, we need to examine with great care whether worldly activities will benefit us eternally or not. For example, most of us desire possessions, pleasure, comfort, and we also want love and acceptance from others. We work hard to obtain these things, going through much discomfort and even suffering to get them. Ultimately, we will find that clinging to this world as the source of our safety, happiness, and satisfaction is fruitless and futile.

First we must understand and embrace the truth of our stress and suffering. We will then be motivated to identify and finally renounce the causes of this stress and suffering. It is necessary for us to fully understand suffering and its causes so we are able to generate this renunciation and enthusiastically practice the path to liberation.

Most all of us experience some amount of suffering. Not many of us experience permanent happiness. We experience stress and we suffer because of our own ignorance, our selfish attachments, and our negative behavior. However, we cannot attribute our suffering to circumstances outside of ourselves. Happiness and suffering originate within our own mind.

The origins of our suffering begin within our own mind and heart when our perception of reality slips into the delusion of duality, permanence, and selfish desire. We become attached to the things of this world thinking they will bring us happiness and satisfaction. This leads to more clinging, delusion, stress, greed, and hatred. This is the cycle of samsara (suffering). Attachment to this samsaric life can distract us from practicing the Dharma.

In the relative peace and stability of our human existence, it is wise for us to contemplate and deeply reflect upon suffering. In this way, we will develop a deep renunciation of the causes of our suffering and deep compassion for all beings who experience suffering. Birth, old-age, sickness, and death can bring suffering.

Suffering may arise from being associated with people or conditions that are unpleasant, from being separated from people we love or conditions we enjoy, from not being able to satisfy our desire, or from getting what we desire then losing it.

Contemplate human suffering. Allow yourself to feel the tragic, heart-rending experiences of others and your own life as well. Embrace, feel, and truly experience what you and others have felt. Allow deep compassion to arise within your heart. It is wise for us to perceive our suffering as a form of karmic purification, because we learn through our suffering.

For the welfare and benefit of all living beings, we should make a firm commitment to renounce samsara, a firm commitment to study and practice the Dharma until we attain joyous enlightenment; liberation from suffering. Through skillful practice of Dharma, there is an end to suffering (the cycle of samsara) and there is lasting happiness. Therefore, make a firm dedication to Dharma practice, renouncing the suffering of cyclic existence, determined not to be overcome by delusion, and not abandoning other beings.

# The Four Immeasurables: Sublime Qualities of True Love

The Four Immeasurables—Loving-kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, and Equanimity—are the sublime expressions of love: the essential nature and radiance of the enlightened heart. They are also known as the Four Limitless Ones, The Four Sublime States, and the Brahmaviharas or Divine Abodes. These four qualities of true love are said to be sublime, lofty, noble, and most excellent for they are the right and ideal way of relating with all living beings.

These sublime qualities of love provide the answer to all situations we may encounter in our lives. They are the great removers of tension, the great peace-makers in social conflict, and the great healers of wounds suffered in the struggle of existence. These noble qualities of love level social barriers, build harmonious communities, awaken the slumbering generosity within us, and revive the joy and hope long abandoned.

These four qualities of love are called *immeasurable* because their capacity to purify the heart and generate positive energy is beyond measure. In addition, as this sublime love grows within us through sincere practice, it extends immeasurably to all living beings throughout all realms of existence.

Through deep contemplation and dedicated practice of The Four Immeasurables, we transform our delusion, greed, self-centeredness, and negativity. We heal the afflictions of anger, hatred, loneliness, sorrow, and unhealthy attachments. In this way of practice, we develop a noble heart filled with the abundance of wisdom, compassion, and love.

In time, these sublime qualities of love become natural and spontaneous—a constant life-affirming attitude radiating from our heart bringing benefit and happiness to all. These immeasurable qualities of love are also called *abodes (vihara)* because they should become the constant dwelling places of the heart and mind; where we feel at home.

They should not remain merely places of rare and short visits, soon forgotten. In other words, our minds should become thoroughly saturated by these qualities of love. They should become our inseparable companions, and we should be mindful of them in all our daily activities. The Buddha tells us: “Cherish all living beings with a boundless heart, radiating kindness over the entire world.” He suggests we remain in this loving state of being at all times. This he calls the “sublime abiding” (divine abode).

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

In this first verse, we generate the mind of *Love (Loving-kindness)*. From the very depths of our heart, we radiate in all directions the sincere wish for all living beings to have happiness and the causes that bring happiness. The immeasurable quality of Loving-kindness is boundless, open, and pure—an all-embracing love, dedicated to serving the highest welfare

of all beings. Like a nurturing mother who protects and cares for her children, this sublime Love brings comfort, tenderness, warmth, and understanding to those in need. Always unconditional, free of self-interest, attachment, or expectation, Loving-kindness seeks no reward or compensation. This Love is the very heart of generosity, sympathy, and benevolence. In this way, Loving-kindness opens the heart and dissolves resentment, anger, hatred, possessiveness, and selfish desire.

Our Loving-kindness—our sincere wish for all beings to have happiness—must extend even further than those to whom we feel close. Our Loving-kindness must extend to and embrace all living beings throughout all realms of existence for it to become sublime, limitless, and immeasurable.

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

In this second verse, we generate the mind of *Compassion*. From the very depths of our heart, we radiate in all directions the sincere wish for all living beings to be free from suffering and the causes that bring suffering. The immeasurable quality of Compassion (Mercy) is a wise heartfelt motivation to relieve the pain, sorrow, and suffering of others.

This sublime Compassion arises from our genuine concern for others and manifests as selfless acts of physical and spiritual charity. With true Compassion we have deep insight into the causes of human suffering. Therefore, we are able to serve others in wise, loving, calm, and skillful ways without being overwhelmed by our feelings of pity, grief, or sadness.

In this way, Compassion opens the heart and dissolves cruelty, selfishness, and narrow-mindedness. Our Compassion—our sincere wish that all beings be free from suffering—must extend even further than those to whom we feel close. Our Compassion must extend to and embrace all living beings throughout all realms of existence for it to become sublime, limitless, and immeasurable.

### **May all beings never be separated from the supreme joy that is beyond all sorrow**

In this third verse, we generate the mind of *Sympathetic Joy*. From the very depths of our heart, we radiate in all directions the sincere wish that all living beings never be separated from the supreme joy that is beyond all sorrow. The immeasurable quality of Sympathetic Joy is our genuine ability to rejoice and delight in the happiness, success, and good fortune of others. With this sublime quality of Joy we are able to truly appreciate and be inspired by the positive qualities and virtuous deeds of others.

In this way, Sympathetic (Altruistic) Joy opens the heart and dissolves envy, jealousy, aversion, self-centeredness, and dualistic views that create separation between people. Our Sympathetic Joy—our sincere wish for the unceasing joy and good fortune of others—must extend even further than those to whom we feel close. Our Sympathetic Joy must extend to and embrace all living beings throughout all realms of existence for it to become sublime, limitless, and immeasurable.

**May all beings abide in equanimity  
free from attachment and aversion**

In this fourth verse, we generate the mind of *Equanimity*. From the very depths of our heart, we radiate in all directions the sincere wish that all living beings may abide in Equanimity free from attachment (self-centered desire) and aversion (hatred/hostility). The immeasurable quality of Equanimity is an imperturbable composure of heart—a love that embraces all living beings and circumstances with equality, wisdom, and serenity.

With this sublime Equanimity, our love is impartial, rightly discerning, balanced, not carried away by emotion, and free of attachment. We do not distinguish between friend, enemy, or stranger, but regard every sentient being as equal. In this way, Equanimity opens the heart and dissolves prejudice, attachment, aversion, uncaring indifference, anger, and hostility. Equanimity is the culmination of The Four Immeasurables; it is the most essential yet difficult to cultivate, the guide of the other three.

Our Equanimity—our sincere wish for all beings to abide in Equanimity—must extend even further than those to whom we feel close. Our Equanimity must extend to and embrace all living beings throughout all realms of existence for it to become sublime, limitless, and immeasurable.

# Discourse On Loving-Kindness

## Karaniya Metta Sutta

This is what should be done by one who is skilled in goodness and who wishes to attain the State of Peace and Wisdom (Nirvana):

Let one be capable, upright, exceedingly upright,  
easy to instruct, gentle, and humble.

Let one be content, not a burden to others but easily supported,  
with but few responsibilities, and living simply,  
with the senses composed and serene, let one be prudent, courteous,  
not proud or demanding, unswayed by the emotions of others;  
and let one not commit the slightest wrong  
for which the wise would later reprove.

Let one contemplate and wish:  
May all beings be well and safe.  
May all beings be happy.

Whatever living beings there may be—  
whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,  
the great or the mighty, medium size, short, small, or large,  
those seen and those unseen, those dwelling near and far away,  
those born as well as those yet to be born—  
may all beings be happy at heart.

Let no one deceive another, nor despise anyone in any place.  
Let no one through anger or hatred wish harm upon another.  
Just as a mother protects her child, her only child, with her very life,  
even so with a boundless heart of love let one cherish all living beings.

Let one radiate boundless love over the entire world—  
spreading upwards to the skies and downwards to the depths;  
in all directions—without any obstruction,  
completely free from hostility or hatred.  
While standing or walking, sitting or lying down,  
as long as one is awake, without laziness,  
let one sustain this recollection (mindfulness) of love.  
This is said to be Noble Living,  
and this is called the Sublime Abiding.

By not falling into wrong views—  
being virtuous, endowed with ultimate clarity and insight,  
having discarded greed for sensual desires—  
then truly, never again will one return to be conceived in a womb.

# Loving-Kindness Meditation

## Metta Bhavana: The Cultivation of Universal Loving-kindness

May all beings be happy and peaceful

(free from suffering and distress)

May all beings be safe and secure

(free from fear and harm)

May all beings be healthy and prosperous

(free from pain, illness, and lack)

May all beings live joyfully and with ease

(free from struggle and conflict)

This excellent meditation derives from the Discourse On Loving-kindness (Metta Sutta) given by the Buddha 2600 years ago. The loving-kindness he spoke of then is still the deepest need of the world today. The Pali word *metta* (*Maitri* in Sanskrit) means *universal loving-kindness, friendliness, and goodwill* free from expectation and possessiveness.

However, this is not the ordinary, sensual, emotional, or sentimental kind of love that most people commonly express. Metta has a far greater significance than this. Metta is an all-embracing love—a sincere desire for the happiness and well-being of others. Metta is without any selectivity or exclusion. If we select a few people we love and exclude someone we do not like, this is a lack of understanding of Metta. With the sublime heart of love, we express care and concern for all beings through benevolent thoughts, feelings, and words, as well as through selfless acts of kindness and generosity.

The benefits of practicing this form of meditation are immense. We develop the valuable skill of concentration. We dissolve the barriers in our hearts that create separation between ourselves and others. We transform fear and negativity into courage and kindness, and we learn to care for and love all beings without exception. The simple yet powerful radiance of our loving-kindness brings protection from harmful influences and offers blessings and beneficence to all it touches. Even if we do not recognize the immediate effects of our practice, nevertheless, we should always persevere and never doubt or underestimate the power of loving-kindness!

The Buddha does not offer us his teachings merely to be studied and recited. He asks us to follow and practice the instructions so they become a reality in our awareness, in our actions, and in our ways of life. It is action, not speculation; it is practice, not theory that really matters. Therefore, we should not be satisfied with the mere recitation of the Metta Sutta. We must strive to know and feel its meaning. We must allow the teaching to suffuse our entire being, and have the heartfelt intention to bring it into full practice in our daily lives. Cultivating the noble principles offered here in the Metta Sutta is the very essence of Buddhist Dharma.

## The Practice of Loving-kindness

Spiritual development and ultimate awakening are based upon the firm foundation of loving-kindness for all beings. To help establish this essential foundation, practice this meditation daily for at least 15 to 20 minutes, or longer. For ease of recollection, only the first line of each phrase of this meditation is used. It is not necessary to repeat the words in parentheses. If you wish, you may also create your own words for this practice.

1) *Begin by directing loving-kindness to yourself.* Love for self comes first. This is not a selfish love, but a pure love for oneself that has the power to dissolve anger, hatred, and selfish tendencies. By overcoming any sense of unworthiness and cultivating genuine love for yourself, you are able to share this love with others. Allow the heartfelt radiance of loving-kindness to fill your being as you recite each phrase of this meditation slowly and with deep feeling: “May I be happy and peaceful...” and so forth.

2) Visualize *a person for whom you feel love, respect, and gratitude.* Radiate heartfelt loving-kindness to this person, reciting each phrase of the meditation slowly and with deep feeling: “May you be happy and peaceful...” and so forth.

3) Visualize *a person toward whom you feel neutral or indifferent.* This may be a stranger or an acquaintance, somebody you have no particular feelings for or against. Extending loving-kindness to those toward whom we feel indifferent develops the ability of the heart to love all beings without exception. Radiate heartfelt loving-kindness to this person, reciting each phrase of the meditation slowly: “May you be happy and peaceful...” and so forth.

4) This may be the most difficult part of the practice. Visualize *a person with whom you experience tension, fear, hurt, conflict, resentment, anger, or aversion.* Radiate heartfelt loving-kindness to this person as well: “May you be happy and peaceful...” and so forth.

5) Finally, radiate heartfelt loving-kindness *to all living beings throughout all realms of existence:* “May all beings be happy and peaceful...” and so forth. The Buddha suggests we remain in this mindful state of loving-kindness at all times and “cherish all living beings with a boundless heart, radiating kindness over the entire world.



# The Six Paramitas (Perfections)

The Sanskrit word *paramita* means *to cross over to the other shore*. Paramita may also be translated as *perfection, perfect realization, or reaching beyond limitation*. Through the practice of these six paramitas, we cross over the sea of suffering (samsara) to the shore of happiness and awakening (Nirvana); we cross over from ignorance and delusion to enlightenment.

Each of the six paramitas is an enlightened quality of the heart, a glorious virtue or attribute—the innate seed of perfect realization within us. The paramitas are the very essence of our true nature. However, since these enlightened qualities of the heart have become obscured by delusion, selfishness, and other karmic tendencies, we must develop these potential qualities and bring them into expression. In this way, the six paramitas are an inner cultivation, a daily practice for wise, compassionate, loving, and enlightened living.

The paramitas are the six kinds of virtuous practice required for skillfully serving the welfare of others and for the attainment of enlightenment. We must understand that bringing these virtuous qualities of our true nature into expression requires discipline, practice, and sincere cultivation. This is the path of the Bodhisattva—one who is dedicated to serving the highest welfare of all living beings with the awakened heart of unconditional love, skillful wisdom, and all-embracing compassion.

## 1) The Perfection of Generosity (Dana Paramita)

This paramita is the enlightened quality of generosity, charity, giving, and offering. The essence of this paramita is unconditional love, a boundless openness of heart and mind, a selfless generosity and giving which is completely free from attachment and expectation. From the very depths of our heart, we practice generously offering our love, compassion, time, energy, and resources to serve the highest welfare of all beings.

Giving is one of the essential preliminary steps of our practice. Our giving should always be unconditional and selfless; completely free of any selfish desire for gratitude, recognition, advantage, reputation, or any worldly reward. The perfection of generosity is not accomplished simply by the action of giving, nor by the actual gift itself. Rather, the true essence of this paramita is our pure motivation of genuine concern for others—the truly generous motivation of the awakened heart of compassion, wisdom, and love.

In addition, our practice of giving should be free of discrimination regarding who is worthy and who is unworthy to receive. To cultivate the paramita of generosity, it is wise to contemplate the enormous benefits of this practice, the disadvantages of being miserly, as well as the obvious fact that our body and our wealth are impermanent. With this in mind, we will certainly be encouraged to use both our body and wealth to practice generosity while we still have them.

Generosity is a cure for the afflictions of greed, miserliness, and possessiveness. In this practice of giving, we may offer our time, energy, money, food, clothing, or gifts so as to

assist others. To the best of our ability, we may offer the priceless treasure of Dharma instruction, giving explanations on the Buddha's teachings. This offering serves to free others from misperceptions that cause confusion, pain, and suffering. We can offer fearless giving and protection by delivering living beings (insects, animals, and people) from harm, distress, fear, and terror. In this way, we offer care and comfort, helping others to feel safe and peaceful. We do this selflessly, without counting the cost to ourselves. We practice the perfection of generosity in an especially powerful way when we embrace all living beings continually in the radiant love of our heart.

## **2) The Perfection of Ethics (Sila Paramita)**

This paramita is the enlightened quality of virtuous and ethical behavior, morality, self-discipline, impeccability, personal integrity, honor, and harmlessness. The essence of this paramita is that through our love and compassion we do not harm others; we are virtuous and harmless in our thoughts, speech, and actions.

This practice of ethical conduct is the very foundation for progressing in any practice of meditation and for attaining all higher realizations on the path. Our practice of generosity must always be supported by our practice of ethics; this ensures the lasting results of our generosity.

We should perfect our conduct by eliminating harmful behavior and following the Bodhisattva precepts. We abstain from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, divisive speech, harsh speech, gossip, greed, malice, and wrong views. Following these precepts or guidelines is not meant to be a burden or a restriction of our freedom. We follow these precepts so we can enjoy greater freedom, happiness, and security in our lives, because through our virtuous behavior we are no longer creating suffering for ourselves and others.

We must realize that unethical behavior is always the cause of suffering and unhappiness. If we give even the slightest consideration to the advantages of cultivating ethical behavior and the disadvantages of unethical behavior, we will certainly develop great enthusiasm for this practice of ethics. Practicing the perfection of ethics, we are free of negativity, we cause no harm to others by our actions, our speech is kind and compassionate, and our thoughts are free of anger, malice, and wrong views.

When our commitment is strong in the practice of ethics we are at ease, naturally confident, without stress, and happy because we are not carrying any underlying sense of guilt or remorse for our actions; we have nothing to hide. Maintaining our personal honor and integrity, our moral impeccability, this is the cause of all goodness, happiness, and even the attainment of enlightenment.

## **1) The Perfection of Patience (Kshanti Paramita)**

This paramita is the enlightened quality of patience, tolerance, forbearance, and acceptance. The essence of this paramita of patience is the strength of mind and heart that enables us to face the challenges and difficulties of life without losing our composure and inner tranquility. We embrace and forbear adversity, insult, distress, and the wrongs of others with patience and tolerance, free of resentment, irritation, emotional reactivity, or

retaliation. We cultivate the ability to be loving and compassionate in the face of criticism, misunderstanding, or aggression.

With this enlightened quality of patience, we are neither elated by praise, prosperity, or agreeable circumstances, nor are we angry, unhappy or depressed when faced with insult, challenge, hardship, or poverty. This enlightened attribute of patience, acceptance, and tolerance is not a forced suppression or denial of our thoughts and feelings. Rather, it is a quality of being which comes from having our heart open and our mind deeply concentrated upon the Dharma. In this way, we have a clear and correct understanding of impermanence, of cause and effect (karma), and with strong determination and patience we remain in harmony with this understanding for the benefit of all beings.

The ability to endure, to have forbearance, is integral to our Dharma practice. Without this kind of patience we cannot accomplish anything. A true Bodhisattva practices patience in such a way that even when we are hurt physically, emotionally, or mentally by others, we are not irritated or resentful. We always make an effort to see the goodness and beauty in others.

In practicing this perfection of patience and forbearance, we never give up on or abandon others—we help them cross over the sea of suffering. We maintain our inner peace, calmness, and equanimity under all circumstances, having enduring patience and tolerance for ourselves and others. With the strength of patience, we maintain our effort and enthusiasm in our Dharma practice. Therefore, our practice of patience assists us in developing the next paramita of joyous effort and enthusiastic perseverance.

#### **4) The Perfection of Joyous Effort / Enthusiastic Perseverance (Virya Paramita)**

This paramita is the enlightened quality of energy, vigor, vitality, endurance, diligence, enthusiasm, continuous and persistent effort. In order to practice the first three paramitas of generosity, virtuous conduct, and patience in the face of difficulties, we need this paramita of joyous effort and perseverance.

Joyous effort makes the previous paramitas increase and become even more powerful influences in our life. The essence of this paramita of joyous effort is the courage, energy, and endurance to continuously practice the Dharma and pursue the supreme goal of enlightenment for the highest good of all beings.

From a feeling of deep compassion for the suffering of all sentient beings, we are urged to unflinching, persistent, and joyous effort. We use our body, speech, and mind to work ceaselessly and untiringly for the benefit of others, with no expectations for personal recognition or reward. We are always ready to serve others to the best of our ability.

With joyous effort, devoted energy, and the power of sustained application, we practice the Dharma without getting sidetracked by anything or falling under the influence of laziness. Without developing Virya Paramita, we can become easily disillusioned and drop our practice when we meet with adverse conditions.

The word *virya* means persistence and perseverance in the face of disillusionment, energetically striving to attain the supreme goal of enlightenment. When we cultivate this type of diligence and perseverance we have a strong and healthy mind. We practice with

persistent effort and enthusiasm because we realize the tremendous value and benefit of our Dharma practice. Firmly establishing ourselves in this paramita, we also develop self-reliance, and this becomes one of our most prominent characteristics.

With joyous effort and enthusiastic perseverance, we regard failure as simply another step toward success, danger as an inspiration for courage, and affliction as another opportunity to practice wisdom and compassion. To develop strength of character, self-reliance, and the next paramita of concentration, is not an easy achievement, thus we need enthusiastic perseverance on the path.

### 5) The Perfection of Concentration (Dhyana Paramita)

This paramita is the enlightened quality of concentration, meditation, contemplation, samadhi, mindfulness, mental stability. Our minds have the tendency to be very distracted and restless, always moving from one thought or feeling to another. Because of this, our awareness stays fixated in the ego, in the surface layers of the mind and emotions, and we just keep engaging in the same habitual patterns of behavior.

The perfection of concentration means training our mind so that it does what we want it to. We stabilize our mind and emotions by practicing meditation, by being mindful and aware in everything we do. When we train the mind in this way, physical, emotional, and mental vacillations and restlessness are eliminated. We achieve focus, composure, and tranquility. This ability to concentrate and focus the mind brings clarity, equanimity, illumination.

Concentration allows the deep insight needed to transform the habitual misperceptions and attachments that cause confusion and suffering. As we eliminate these misperceptions and attachments, we can directly experience the joy, compassion, and wisdom of our true nature. There is no attainment of wisdom and enlightenment without developing the mind through concentration and meditation.

This development of concentration and one-pointedness requires perseverance. Thus the previous paramita of joyous effort and perseverance brings us to this paramita of concentration. In addition, when there is no practice of meditation and concentration, we cannot achieve the other paramitas, because their essence, which is the inner awareness that comes from meditation, is lacking. To attain wisdom, compassion, and enlightenment, it is essential that we develop the mind through concentration, meditation, and mindfulness.

### 6) The Perfection of Wisdom (Prajna Paramita)

This paramita is the enlightened quality of transcendental wisdom, insight, and the perfection of understanding. The essence of this paramita is the supreme wisdom, the highest understanding that living beings can attain—beyond words and completely free from the limitation of mere ideas, concepts, or intellectual knowledge. Beyond the limited confines of intellectual and conceptual states of mind, we experience the awakened heart-mind of wisdom and compassion—prajna paramita.

Prajna paramita is the supreme wisdom (prajna) that knows emptiness and the interconnectedness of all things. This flawless wisdom eliminates all false and distorted

views of the absolute. We see the essential nature of reality with utmost clarity; our perception goes beyond the illusive and deceptive veils of material existence. With the perfection of wisdom, we develop the ability to recognize the truth behind the temporary display of all appearances. Prajna paramita is a result of contemplation, meditation, and rightly understanding the nature of reality.

Ultimately, the full realization of prajna paramita is that we are not simply a separate self trying to do good. Rather, virtuously serving the welfare of all beings is simply a natural expression of the awakened heart. We realize that the one serving, the one being served, and the compassionate action of service, are inseparable, all the same—there is no separate ego or self to be found in any of these. With this supreme wisdom, we go beyond acceptance and rejection, hope and fear, dualistic thoughts, and ego-clinging. We completely dissolve all these notions, realizing everything as a transparent display of the primordial truth.

If our ego is attached even to the disciplines of these paramitas, this is incorrect perception and we are merely going from one extreme to another. In order to free ourselves from these extremes, we must release our ego attachment and dissolve all dualistic concepts with the insight of supreme wisdom. This wisdom transforms the other five paramitas into their transcendental state as well. Only the illumination of supreme wisdom makes this possible.

# Karma: The Possession That Follows Us Everywhere

*It is mental volition, O monks, that I call karma.  
Having willed, one acts through body, speech or mind.*

- The Buddha (Anguttaranikaya, III, p. 41)

Karma is a very important subject, one which we should understand clearly. Karma is not a concept or a theory; karma is a natural law of the universe. Comprehending karma is the Right Understanding (or Right View) of Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path. With right understanding, we realize the wholesome, life-affirming actions that bring benefit and happiness to all beings, as well the unwholesome, negative actions which bring unhappiness and suffering.

With this correct understanding we are able to cultivate true wisdom. Our present understanding of karma may be vague or unclear. Although we may know that our thoughts, speech, and actions bring benefit or suffering to ourselves and others in this present life, have we given deep consideration to the fact that karma is a possession we have brought with us from the past, and one that will certainly follow us everywhere...even into the future?

## What is Karma?

It is essential to understand karma as a foundation for our behavior, for our Dharma practice, and for the quality of our lives as a whole. The Sanskrit word *karma* means *action*. This refers to intentional physical, verbal, or mental actions. Karma is directly related to our *intention* or *motivation* while doing an action. Very simply, we receive what we give; we harvest exactly what we plant.

Our actions, whether they are positive or negative, virtuous or non-virtuous, leave imprints or seeds in our minds, and these imprints ripen into our life experiences when the appropriate conditions come together. Karma is the universal law of cause and effect. The seeds of our actions continue with us from one lifetime to the next and do not get lost. Our relationship to karma is very simple—we *are* the actual product of our karma. We *are* the product of every thought, feeling, word, and action from our past and we will be the product of our karma in the future as well.

Life is a seamless continuum, uninterruptedly weaved together with the threads of our karma; our volitional (intentional) actions. Whether it is good or bad, our karma follows us everywhere, in this life and the next. If we are compassionate, wise, honest, and skillful, we create positive and harmonious circumstances in this and future lives.

Committing cruel, dishonest, and other unskillful actions of body, speech, and mind, we will certainly not escape the consequences of these deeds, either in this life or in the future. Whatever happiness and good fortune we experience in our lives comes from our own positive actions. Our problems and conflicts also arise from our own negative and destructive actions.

Karma is our only true property—for better or worse, it follows us everywhere. Therefore, the Law of Karma teaches that responsibility for unskillful actions is born by the person who commits them. Again, karma is our only true property.

It can be confusing when we see cruel people in positions of great power, wealthy people who are dishonest or selfish, or very kind people who have bad things happen to them or who die young. Seeing this, we may certainly wonder about the Law of Karma.

Our largest obstacle to understanding or even believing in karma may be the factor of time. Most often, the results of our actions will show up after a delay of time. As ordinary human beings, who have not developed the omniscient eye of wisdom, we cannot see into past lives. Thus, it is difficult to discern which action caused which result. We must realize we are only looking at a very small period of time in this one life. Many of the experiences we have in this life are the inevitable results of actions done in previous lives. In addition, the seeds of our actions in this life will ripen in future lives.

The following contemplations were offered by the Buddha in the *Upajjhatthana Sutta*: *“I am the owner of my actions (karma), heir to my actions, born from my actions, related through my actions, and have my actions as my judge. Whatever I do, for good or for evil, that I will inherit.”*

## The Four Laws of Karma

1. Results are similar to the cause. Karma and its results are certain and unailing. Positive actions of body, speech, and mind will always bring the positive result of some form of happiness and benefit. Negative actions of body, speech, and mind will always bring the negative result of some form of suffering. Karma and its results are exactly like a seed and its fruit.
2. No results come without a cause. Actions not engaged, will not bring results. It is obvious that things do not just appear out of nothing. If the cause has not been created, the effect will not be experienced.
3. Once an action is done, the result is never lost. An action done, is not lost and will definitely ripen and bring a result.
4. Karma expands. Once we have an imprint of an action in our mind, it tends to be habit-forming.

## Changing Our Karma

*Some people misunderstand the concept of karma. They take the Buddha's doctrine of the law of causality to mean that all is predetermined, that there is nothing that the individual can do. This is a total misunderstanding. The very term karma or action is a term of active force, which indicates that future events are within your own hands.*

*Since action is a phenomenon that is committed by a person, a living being, it is within your own hands whether or not you engage in action.*

- His Holiness the Dalai Lama, from his book: *Path to Bliss*

Understanding the universal Law of Karma, rather than being discouraging or overwhelming, can actually be very inspiring and uplifting. With a clear understanding of the Law of Karma (cause and effect/causality), we can choose to be the captain of our own ship. We can navigate our life in the exact direction we choose, rather than being tossed about upon the stormy seas of our own ignorance and delusion. If we ignore the workings of karma, we tend to create many problems for ourselves and others. However, with this excellent understanding, we have the ability to transform our mind, heart, and life for the better, and we will be able to benefit others as well.

Changing our karma is not difficult. However, this change does require a very sober realization and acknowledgment—simply that *our situation in life is the result of our own actions*. According to Buddhist teachings, there is nobody in the universe who is distributing rewards and punishments. We ourselves create the causes of our life experiences by our own thoughts, speech, and actions—and we experience the results. In this way, we can learn to be accountable. We can take full responsibility for our lives. Once we acknowledge that our situation in life is the result of our own actions, we can begin to change our karma.

To change our karma, we need to understand the unwholesome, negative, and non-virtuous actions that bring pain, unhappiness, and suffering. We also need to understand the wholesome, positive, and virtuous actions that bring benefit and happiness. The rest is diligent practice.

By practicing the essential foundation of the Buddhist Path, morality (personal integrity), we will transform our karma and our life experiences. By understanding the Four Noble Truths and following the Noble Eightfold Path we will transform our karma. By practicing The Six Paramitas (Perfections), we will transform our karma. By cultivating positive, virtuous thoughts, feelings, words, and actions, exercising compassion, loving-kindness, and wisdom in our daily lives, we will transform our karma. By way of this practice, we will change the entire course of our life experience and move swiftly toward liberation.

The Buddhist teachings of all lineages offer many excellent practices for training the mind, purifying the heart of defilements, and transforming our karmic tendencies. It is wise for us to truly contemplate the workings of karma so we are not influenced by deluded views of reality. Understanding karma and learning to take responsibility for our every thought, word, and action is true sobriety, wisdom, and awakening.

## The Four Powers of Purification

The purification practices we find in Buddhist teachings are similar to those in many other religions. The most essential factor that one requires is sincerity or honesty with oneself. When we want to purify past negative karma, we must apply ourselves to engaging in all actions with the correct motivation and by using the following Four Powers of Purification:

**1) Power of the Object:** One should practice remembering and thinking of all sentient beings one may have hurt. Traditionally, one remembers and generates compassion for all sentient beings and takes refuge in the Three Jewels of Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

**2) Power of Regret:** One realizes soberly, “what I did was wrong and negative.” One regrets having committed that action and feels this regret in their heart. This regret should not be



senseless guilt, self-recrimination, or criticism, which are said to be useless emotional torture. What is intended here is to examine oneself and one's actions and to truly recognize that negative actions done in the past were very unwise. With the power regret, one feels deep remorse for their past negative actions.

**3) Power of Promise or Remedy:** As a logical consequence of the above, one should promise not to repeat these negative actions and apply oneself diligently to doing virtuous actions in order to counteract the negative ones. It can be helpful to at least promise oneself to avoid a negative behavior for a specific period of time. Not being honest at this stage makes the practice useless or even harmful to oneself. Here one can also rely on and pray to the Buddhas and Bodhisttavas for the purification of the negative actions one regrets.

**4) Power of Practice:** Basically any positive action with a *good motivation* can be used. Traditionally in Buddhism one can use practices such as prostrations (as a means to destroy pride), making offerings (to counteract greed), reading Buddhist texts (to counteract ignorance and negative thoughts), and acts of kindness to cultivate a heart of compassion, and so forth.

Through applying these Four Powers of Purification and dedicating ourselves to the Buddha's Path of Liberation, we can purify the karma of negative actions and completely transform our lives!

# All-Embracing Compassion: The Heart-Practice of Tonglen

As human beings, we have a very interesting habit of resisting what is unpleasant and seeking what is pleasant and pleasurable. We resist, avoid, and deny suffering and we continually grasp at pleasure. If we observe our behavior, it is easy to see that we habitually resist and avoid people, situations, and feelings we consider to be painful, unpleasant, or uncomfortable, and we are naturally attracted to people, situations, and feelings we consider pleasant, comfortable, and gratifying.

According to Buddhist teachings, this behavior is a symptom of fundamental ignorance and is influenced by the defilements of greed (attachment), hatred (aversion), and delusion (misperception of reality). To break the spell of this dualistic perception, to dissolve the barriers in our hearts that keep us feeling separate from others, and to cultivate a deep compassion for all living beings, including ourselves, we need to meet and embrace reality in a radically new way. To accomplish this, we can use the precious heart-practice of Tonglen.

Tonglen is a Tibetan word which means *sending and taking*. This practice originated in India and came to Tibet in the eleventh century. With the practice of Tonglen, we work directly with our habitual tendency to avoid suffering and attach ourselves to pleasure. Using this powerful and highly effective practice, we learn to embrace our life experiences with more openness, compassion, inclusiveness, and understanding, rather than denial, aversion, and resistance. When we encounter fear, pain, hurt, anger, jealousy, loneliness, or suffering, be it our own or others, we breathe in with the desire to completely embrace this experience; to feel it, accept it, and own it, free of any resistance.

In this way of practice, in this way of being, we transform our tendency to close down and shut out life's unpleasant experiences. In accordance with Buddha's First Noble Truth, we acknowledge, touch, and embrace our personal and collective suffering. We do not run away. We do not turn the other way. Touching and understanding suffering is the first step toward true transformation. Rather than avoiding suffering, we develop a more tolerant and compassionate relationship with it. We learn to meet and embrace reality—naked, open, and fearless.

Although the idea of developing a relationship with suffering may sound somewhat morbid, we must remember the teachings of the Second and Third Noble Truths as well: when we touch and embrace suffering, we can finally understand what causes it. When we understand the cause of suffering, we can eliminate it and be liberated. There is an end to suffering, yet this requires we learn how to meet it in a new way. Tonglen practice can help us accomplish this shift of awareness, this training of the mind.

## A New Way to Embrace Our Life Experience

It is obvious that Tonglen practice is completely contrary to the ways in which we usually hold our personality (ego) together. Each of us has our defensive ego strategies for coping

with the pain, hurt, disappointment, and suffering we encounter in life. We armor, protect, and separate ourselves from our inner and outer experiences in numerous ways that we are not even conscious of. In truth, Tonglen practice does indeed go against our habitual tendency of always wanting things to be pleasant, of wanting life on our own terms, of wanting everything to work out for ourselves no matter what happens to others.

This practice dissolves and transforms the armor of our self-protection; the psychological strategies and defenses we create to keep ourselves separate from our own suffering and the suffering we encounter in the world. Tonglen practice gradually wears away our habitual grasping at a false sense of self (self-grasping/ego fixation/identification with the personality).

Tonglen effectively reverses our usual pattern of avoiding suffering and seeking pleasure. In this process, we finally liberate ourselves from a very ancient prison of selfishness. With this radical shift of awareness, this new way of embracing our life experience, our heart becomes more tender, open, sensitive, and aware. We naturally feel more alive; more loving and caring, both for ourselves and others.

By practicing Tonglen, we connect with a less defended and more open, spacious dimension of our being. The all-embracing compassion of our true nature begins to shine through and we are introduced to a far more intimate and grander view of reality. With this sublime heart of love, liberated from attachment, aversion, and indifference, we gradually recognize and feel the absolute interdependence and preciousness of all living beings. This is true intimacy with life. This is the cultivation of bodhicitta—the awakened heart of compassion and wisdom.

## **Hearing and Feeling the Cries of the World**

Breathing in, we allow ourselves to feel the inevitable suffering that occurs in this life. Our heart's natural response to this suffering, while breathing out, is compassion. We breathe in the pain and suffering of this world like a dark cloud, letting it pass through our hearts. Rather than bracing ourselves against this pain and suffering, we can let it strengthen our sense of belonging and interdependence within the larger web of being.

Avalokiteshvara (Chenrezig) is the Bodhisattva of Universal Compassion. His name means "One Who Hears the Cries of the World." Long ago he vowed not to return to nirvana until all living beings had been liberated from suffering. Avalokiteshvara listens to and feels the pain and suffering of the world. He breathes in, receiving the cries and anguish of the world and responds with the greatest care and compassion. In Buddhism, the traditional vow made by the Bodhisattva is to alleviate the suffering of all sentient beings.

The path of the Bodhisattva is to remember our belonging and connection with all of life. When we know in our hearts that we are connected to the insects, animals, trees, the earth, and every living being, we do not cause harm or suffering to any of these parts of ourselves. Rather, we become sensitive and attuned to the cries of the world, and we learn to respond with wisdom and deep compassion. We develop the wish to free all beings from their suffering and its causes; we desire, more than anything, to bring them happiness and peace. Indeed, the practice of Tonglen is an excellent way for us to train our heart and mind so we too can develop universal compassion and help alleviate the suffering of all living beings.

## Suggestions for the Practice of Tonglen

*Use what seems like poison as medicine. Use your personal suffering as the path to compassion for all beings.*

In Tonglen practice, through our compassion, we take on (embrace without resistance) the various sufferings of all beings: their fear, hurt, frustration, pain, anger, guilt, bitterness, loneliness, doubt, rage, and so forth. In return, we give them our loving-kindness, happiness, peace of mind, well-being, healing, and fulfillment.

1) Sit quietly, calm the mind, and center yourself. Reflect on the immense suffering that all beings everywhere experience. Allow their suffering to open your heart and awaken your compassion. You may also choose to invoke the presence of all the Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and enlightened beings, so that through their inspiration and blessing, compassion may be born in your heart. In this way, you are resting in bodhicitta—the enlightened nature of the mind. Bodhicitta, is an inexhaustible source of purity, generosity, and compassion.

2) Imagine in front of you, as clearly as possible, someone you care for who is suffering. Although this may be more challenging, you may also imagine someone you feel indifferent toward, someone you consider to be an enemy, or those who have hurt you or others. Open yourself to this person's suffering. Allow yourself to feel connected with him or her, aware of their difficulties, pain, and distress. Then, as you feel your heart opening in compassion toward the person, imagine that all of his or her suffering comes out and gathers itself into a mass of hot, black, grimy smoke.

3) Now, visualize breathing in this mass of black smoke, seeing it dissolve into the very core of your self-grasping (ego) at your heart center. There in your heart, it completely destroys all traces of fear and selfishness (self-cherishing) and purifies all of your negative karma.

4) Imagine, now that your fear, self-centeredness and negative karma has been completely destroyed, your enlightened heart (bodhicitta) is fully revealed. As you breathe out, imagine you are sending out the radiance of loving-kindness, compassion, peace, happiness, and well-being to this person. See this brilliant radiance purifying all of their negative karma. Send out any feelings that encourage healing, relaxation, and openness.

5) Continue this “giving and receiving” with each breath for as long as you wish. At the end of your practice, generate a firm inner conviction that this person has been freed of suffering and negative karma and is filled with peace, happiness and well-being. You may also wish to dedicate the merit and virtue of your practice to the benefit of all sentient beings.

## Another Excellent Form of Tonglen

Clearly imagine a situation where you have acted badly, one about which you feel shameful or guilty, and which may be difficult to even think about. Then, as you breathe in, opening your heart, accept total responsibility for your actions in that particular situation. Do not judge or try to justify your behavior. Simply acknowledge exactly what you have done wrong and wholeheartedly ask for forgiveness.

Now, as you breathe out, send the compassionate radiance of reconciliation, forgiveness, harmony, healing, and understanding. Breathe in the pain and the blame, and breathe out the undoing of harm. Breathe in taking full responsibility, breathe out the compassionate radiance of healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

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

## **Tonglen is a Practice and a Way of Life**

Traditionally, we begin by doing Tonglen for someone we care about. However, we can use this practice at any time, either for ourselves or others. Tonglen can be done for those who are ill, those who are dying or have just died, or for those that are in pain of any kind. Tonglen can be done either as a formal meditation practice or right on the spot at any time.

For example, if we encounter someone in pain, right on the spot we can begin to breathe in their pain and send out some relief. At any time, when we encounter our own emotional discomfort or suffering, or that of others, we open our heart and fully embrace what we are encountering on our in-breath. Breathing out, we offer the heartfelt radiance of acceptance, loving-kindness, and compassion. This is a practice and a way of life.

Practicing Tonglen on one friend in pain helps us begin the process of gradually widening the circle of our compassion. From there, we can learn to take on the suffering and purify the karma of all beings; giving others our happiness, well-being, joy, and peace of mind. Tonglen practice can extend indefinitely and gradually. Over time, our compassion will expand. We will find that we have a greater ability to be loving and present for ourselves and for others in even the most difficult situations. This is the wonderful goal of Tonglen practice, the path of the compassionate Bodhisattva.

# Transforming the Three Poisons: Greed, Hatred, and Delusion

In Buddhist teachings, greed, hatred, and delusion are known, for good reason, as *the three poisons*, *the three unwholesome roots*, and *the three fires*. These metaphors suggest how dangerous afflictive thoughts and emotions can be if they are not understood and transformed.

Greed refers to our selfishness, misplaced desire, attachment, and grasping for happiness and satisfaction outside of ourselves. Hatred refers to our anger, our aversion and repulsion toward unpleasant people, circumstances, and even toward our own uncomfortable feelings. Delusion refers to our dullness, bewilderment, and misperception; our wrong views of reality.

The poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion are a byproduct of ignorance—ignorance of our true nature, the awakened heart of wisdom and compassion. Arising out of our ignorance, these poisonous states of mind then motivate non-virtuous and unskillful thoughts, speech, and actions, which cause all manner of suffering and unhappiness for ourselves and others.

Greed, hatred, and delusion are deeply embedded in the conditioning of our personalities. Our behavior is habitually influenced and tainted by these three poisons, these unwholesome roots buried deep into our mind. Burning within us as lust, craving, anger, resentment, and misunderstanding, these poisons lay to waste hearts, lives, hopes, and civilizations, driving us blind and thirsty through the seemingly endless round of birth and death (*samsara*). The Buddha describes these defilements as bonds, fetters, hindrances, and knots; the actual root cause of unwholesome karma and the entire spectrum of human suffering.

Although this teaching may appear negative or unpleasant, indeed, a wise understanding of the three poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion is ultimately positive and empowering. With this sublime understanding we can clearly see and feel the factors that are causing confusion, unhappiness, and suffering in our lives. And with this clarity and insight, we can make the choice to eliminate those factors!

The teaching of The Four Noble Truths clearly explains that when we embrace and understand the exact causes of our suffering and dissatisfaction, we can then take the necessary steps to extinguish those causes and liberate ourselves. This is certainly positive and empowering. In addition, it is important for us to realize that Dharma teachings regarding defilement and purification are not just rigid, restrictive, or authoritarian theories regarding morality, but are real and solid facts essential to our correct understanding of reality and eventual awakening.

## Greed

Our greed is a burning desire, an unquenchable thirst (*tanha*), craving, and lust; we want the objects of our desire to provide us with lasting satisfaction so we feel fulfilled, whole,

and complete. The poison of greed creates an inner hunger so that we always seem to be striving towards an unattainable goal. We mistakenly believe our happiness is dependent upon that goal, but once we attain it, we get no lasting satisfaction. Then once again, our greed and desire will arise, looking outside of ourselves for the next thing that will hopefully bring satisfaction. Influenced by greed, we are never content.

Another common face of our greed shows up as a lack of generosity and compassion toward others. Even a moment of honest and mindful introspection will reveal how deeply-rooted our greed can be. We can experience the symptoms of our greed appearing in even the most trivial instances, and of course, greed can manifest itself in even more compulsive and destructive ways as well.

We always seem to want more, we want bigger and better, we want to fulfill our insatiable inner hunger and thirst (craving). This type of greed affects our personal lives, our professional lives, and the domain of international business and politics. Global conflict and warfare, as well as the destruction of our precious environment are obvious symptoms of our corporate and political greed. Our greed, craving, and thirst affects each of us on a personal and global level. Our greed is an endless and pernicious cycle that only brings suffering and unhappiness in its wake.

## Hatred

The symptoms of hatred can show up as anger, hostility, dislike, aversion, or ill-will; wishing harm or suffering upon another person. With aversion, we habitually resist, deny, and avoid unpleasant feelings, circumstances, and people we do not like. We want everything to be pleasant, comfortable, and satisfying all the time. This behavior simply reinforces our perception of duality and separation.

Hatred or anger thrusts us into a vicious cycle of always finding conflict and enemies everywhere around us. When there is conflict or perceived enemies around us, our mind is neurotic, never calm; we are endlessly occupied with strategies of self-protection or revenge. We can also create conflict within ourselves when we have an aversion to our own uncomfortable feelings. With hatred and aversion, we deny, resist, and push away our own inner feelings of fear, hurt, loneliness, and so forth, treating these feelings like an internal enemy. With the poison of hatred, we create conflict and enemies in the world around us and within our own being.

## Delusion

Delusion is our wrong understanding or wrong views of reality. Delusion is our misperception of the way the world works; our inability to understand the nature of things exactly as they are, free of perceptual distortions. Influenced by delusion, we are not in harmony with ourselves, others, or with life; we are not living in accordance with Dharma.

Affected by the poison of delusion, which arises from ignorance of our true nature, we do not understand the interdependent and impermanent nature of life. Thus, we are constantly looking outside of ourselves for happiness, satisfaction, and solutions to our problems. This outward searching creates even more frustration, anger, and delusion.

Because of our delusion, we also do not understand the virtuous, life-affirming actions that create happiness, nor do we understand the non-virtuous, negative, and unwholesome actions that create suffering. Again, our delusion binds us to a vicious cycle where there does not appear to be any way out.

## Transforming the Three Poisons

For countless eons we have been influenced and motivated by our greed, hatred, and delusion. Therefore, this work of purification and transformation cannot be effected hastily, in obedience to our impatient demand for quick results. This work requires patience, care, persistence, and deep compassion for ourselves and others.

The Buddha taught us that the poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion, which cause so much suffering, can indeed be purified and transformed. We can break the chain of suffering and negative karma and live a happy, fulfilling life. The Buddha's excellent teachings tell us that enlightenment is our true nature, and will naturally shine forth through the purified mind and heart. Therefore, the goal of our spiritual practice is to liberate ourselves from the defilements that obscure the natural clarity, radiance, and joy of our enlightenment.

So how do we encounter the three poisons and transform them in a way that leads to genuine liberation? We must begin this work of purification in the precise place where the poisons originate—in the mind itself (the conditioned ego or personality). This purification and transformation begins with the challenge of calming the mind and seeing deeply into ourselves.

In other words, to eliminate the poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion, we must first learn to recognize them when they first appear. Being mindful and aware, we can then discern how these deep-seated poisons influence our everyday thoughts, feelings, speech, and actions. This mindful awareness, this seeing deeply into ourselves, is the beginning of understanding; the beginning of our ability to transform these defilements.

To accomplish this awareness, we train our mind through meditation. We learn to concentrate on our breathing at the tip of the nose (or the abdomen in Zen training), allowing all thoughts and feelings to arise and pass without reacting to them or evaluating them. Through this practice, we become much more aware of ourselves in everyday situations. We are able to notice when thoughts and emotions arise and begin to disturb us. In this way, we can be conscious of these thoughts and emotions and work with them skillfully before they get out of control, causing harm to ourselves and others.

## The Antidotes

In addition to meditation practice, there are also the *antidotes* or *alternatives* to the three poisons. The Buddha has given us the antidote for every defilement; the method whereby we eliminate unwholesome mental attitudes and replace them with virtuous, wholesome attitudes which benefit ourselves and others. Therefore, the entire aim of spiritual practice is to gradually subdue the poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion by cultivating the alternative mental factors that are directly opposed to them. These antidotes are called the *three wholesome roots*: non-greed, non-hatred, and non-delusion.



**To antidote and overcome greed, we learn to cultivate selflessness, generosity, detachment, and contentment.** If we are experiencing greed, strong desire, or attachment and we want to let it go, we can contemplate the impermanence or the disadvantages of the objects of our desire. We can practice giving away those things we would most like to hold onto. We can also practice acts of selfless service and charity, offering care and assistance to others in any way we can, free of all desire for recognition or compensation. In truth, there is no objection to enjoying and sharing the beauty, pleasures, and objects of this material world. The problems associated with greed and attachment only arise when we mistakenly believe and act as if the source of our happiness is outside of us.

**To antidote and overcome hatred, we learn to cultivate loving-kindness, compassion, patience, and forgiveness.** When we react to unpleasant feelings, circumstances, or people, with hatred, anger, or aversion, we can use these sublime antidotes to counteract the poisons. Here we learn to openly embrace the entire spectrum of our experiences without hatred or aversion.

Just as we practice meeting unpleasant experiences in the outer world with patience, kindness, forgiveness, and compassion, we must also practice meeting our own unpleasant feelings in the same way. Our feelings of loneliness, hurt, doubt, fear, insecurity, inadequacy, depression, and so forth, all require our openness and loving-kindness.

Our challenge in spiritual practice is to soften our habitual defenses, open our heart, and let go of hatred, aversion, and denial. In this way, we can meet and embrace ourselves, others, and all inner and outer experiences with great compassion and wisdom.

**To antidote and overcome delusion, we cultivate wisdom, insight, and right understanding.** Learning to experience reality exactly as it is, without the distortions of our self-centered desires, fears, and expectations, we free ourselves from delusion. Deeply sensing and acting in harmony with the interdependent, impermanent, and ever-changing nature of this world—realizing that all living beings are inseparably related and that lasting happiness does not come from anything external—we free ourselves from delusion.

As we develop a clear understanding of karma, knowing the positive, wholesome actions that bring happiness and the negative, unwholesome actions that bring suffering, we cultivate the wisdom, insight, and right understanding that free us from delusion.

By studying the Dharma and applying the teachings properly in our lives, we will gradually wear away even the most stubborn habitual behaviors, fully liberating ourselves from stress, unhappiness, and suffering. The Buddha calls this the “taintless liberation of the mind.” When the three poisons of greed, hatred, and delusion have finally been extinguished, the sublime peace, wisdom, unity, and bliss of Nirvana shine forth as our essential nature.

# Twenty-Seven Verses On Mind Training

Composed by Lama Je Tsongkhapa (1357-1419)

Reprinted from:

Mother of the Buddhas: Meditation on the Prajnaparamita Sutra by Lex Hixon

1) With body, speech, and mind fully aligned, I prostrate fervently before those rare beings, who are victorious over all notions of limitation, and before their spiritual daughters and sons. May a cosmic celebration of pure poetry, perfectly expressing the most subtle teaching of these victorious sages and the inheritors of their wisdom, now burst forth like an infinite garden in perpetual spring.

2) Gaze calmly with the clear eye of Prajnaparamita (Perfect Wisdom) upon universal manifestation, this beginningless tapestry woven from vibrant karmic threads of conscious beings, and listen to the harmonious symphony of interdependence. Purify entirely from the slightest shadow of negativity this boundless expanse of apparent struggle and conflict. With diamond-clear intention, instill faith everywhere. With mirror-like wisdom, stabilize all chaotic minds.

3) If shadows of negativity are not dispelled immediately, these strange insubstantial absences of light gain immense potency with every new action, until even those who understand the dangers of negation will not have enough power to choose the way of Clear Light. Even those who study philosophy and speak eloquently are unable to release themselves from illusory darkness.

4) The full spectrum of struggling and aspiring humanity, from immature persons to advanced contemplatives, suffers the painful delusion of clinging to these empty shadows as they become filled with affective power by self-centered action and intention.

5) This apparent bondage, this clinging to shadows, is constituted by reactions of pleasure and pain, obviously or subtly rooted in self-serving motivation. By those rare beings who have gone beyond, who throughout all time abide in bliss as Buddhas, the true nature of reactions and their results is clearly known to be insubstantial. But the boundless expanse of self-oriented beings, who bind themselves inexorably to selfish motivation, therefore cannot liberate or even distance themselves slightly from egocentricity.

6) We should meditate carefully and thoroughly upon the inevitably binding nature of negativity, learning to discriminate sensitively and unerringly between the actions which negate the preciousness of others and actions which affirm and judiciously care for others. From this clear viewpoint, renounce all negation and strive with the total commitment of your being to become entirely affirmative of all life everywhere.

7) The seeds of action are positive and negative intentions. Any intention consciously rooted in selfless motivation, desiring only sheer goodness for all conscious life, will establish the stable ground of goodness and will universally generate rich results of goodness. Any intention even slightly weakened by selfish motivation undermines both the ground of our life and its fruits. Intention is the sole creative force of existence.

8) To cling to the intention of triumphing over another, the desire to prosper at the expense of any being or to indulge in the slightest bias against any being because of personal feelings of attraction or repulsion, these alone are the causes for whatever suffering exists in personal lives and in the universe as a whole. We should meditate ceaselessly on this revolutionary truth, remaining conscious of it during every moment of existence.

9) Those who attempt to deceive with words of advice that in any way exalt selfishness and depreciate selflessness become hopelessly lost in narrow-mindedness, obsessed with their own selfish interests. Such persons create the only error in the universe: diverting our precious care and concern for others to ourselves. This deception not only expresses hatred for Buddha's wisdom but is the absurd attempt to destroy universal Buddha nature.

10) To avoid decisively this disastrous way of hatred, bring to birth within your stream of awareness the maternal mind of totally positive intentions toward all beings as toward cherished children. This mind of kindness, supremely skillful in loving care, unveils the infinite value of every single life, demonstrating compassion as the meaning of existence. But the clumsy negative mind, operating blindly without concern for the preciousness of others, drains the nectar of meaning from human life. Cultivate diligently the selfless love that transforms every thought and action into tangible help for conscious beings.

11) The method taught by awakened sages to develop this skillful mind of kindness is to cut the root of all selfish projections by repeatedly and intensively studying Perfect Wisdom, meditating single pointedly on its essence in a state of contemplative stillness and stability. With the clarity and honesty of such concentration, projected worlds of self-serving desire will melt in the sunlight of meditation, like structures of ice, revealing the magnificent secret of our existence, its total significance and absolute justification, which is active compassion for all conscious life.

12) Such meditative practice brings to light the mind which envisions only the well-being of others, which is constantly grateful to all beloved beings for the immeasurable kindness they have poured forth through beginningless time as mothers, fathers, children, friends, benefactors, and teachers. This mind of goodness knows only the ceaseless longing to benefit all these blessed beings without exception in whatever manner and on whatever level imaginable.

13) To remember vividly during every moment the kindness that has been expressed by all beings, and to cultivate an intense and constant longing to return even a small portion of this kindness, unveils the true significance of life in all worlds. The person who fails to respond wholeheartedly to this call for universal kindness and concern is on a lower plane of development than animals, who are capable of experiencing immense gratitude.

14) Those who unhesitatingly embrace and tenderly serve all suffering creatures during this degenerate age, just as a loving mother painstakingly cares for even the most wayward of her children, they alone are the teachers of the holy life who authentically walk the Buddha Way.

15) The mind that faithfully and tirelessly serves and elevates conscious beings is sheer goodness, constantly giving the gift of itself, its faith in ever-expanding goodness, to all other minds thereby benefiting them in the most direct way. Of all possible forms of benefit on any level, the highest is to teach this practice of love, this indomitable faith in universal

goodness, by the direct transmission of selfless awareness flowing transparently from mind to mind in accordance with the need and capacity of each mind. This is true teaching, tangibly transmitting the living energy of universal goodness, which becomes perpetually active in the recipient, even during the most pressing times of crisis, never evaporating into mere words or concepts.

16) During this blissful practice, continually cultivating the wonderful, ever-expanding mind of goodness, even the slightest lack of sympathetic joy disappears and awareness becomes more concentrated and selfless, while the selfish emotions and conceptual projections which compose this narrow conventional world are gradually effaced, and we are completely liberated. The brilliant sun of Great Compassion shines unobstructed. The spirit of wholehearted love in every thought and action constitutes the spontaneously radiating sunlight, effortlessly melting the mist of self-centeredness, vastly strengthening our constant efforts for all beings.

17) Beings benefit each other, consciously or unconsciously. Even enemies become profound benefactors in subtle ways. Those who clearly perceive this radical principle find no isolated object for hostile thought. They can discover and encounter only friends, benefactors, and inseparably related beings. This insight avoids aggressive thinking and allows the mind to expand endlessly into wholesomeness, generosity, and sympathy.

18) Never offering the slightest encouragement to hostility, never hesitating to embrace the concerns of others, pay complete attention to every altruistic impulse that arises in the stream of pure awareness. Contemplate the teaching of selfless compassion, calming and clarifying the turbulent flood of egocentric mind with the sweetest meditation. Renounce the meaninglessness of selfish life. Become devoted to the true meaning of existence: the spontaneous, active compassion for all living beings. If one does not refute self-centered motivation, the subtle tendencies of the mind can never be free from the gross or subtle disposition to negation.

19) Transform the intense activity of daily life into the harmonious expression and teaching of truth by affectionately reminding and being reminded that the bitter dark fruits of negating others are poisonous, to be most carefully avoided, while the sweet bright fruits of affirming others are life-giving, to be thoroughly enjoyed. Authentic delight exists only in serving others, and suffering springs only from harming others or insensitively ignoring the needs of living beings, all of whom are as intimately related to us as our own precious mother and father.

20) So sensitive an ecology is the interdependence of all, that the slightest attention and assistance to others creates moral elevation for ourselves and humanity, while the slightest indifference or neglect toward others creates moral harm for ourselves and our civilization. The faintest spark of ill will toward other beings can burst forth into a terrible forest fire, consuming vast expanses of sympathetic joy. Even the faintest negative reaction or malicious wish opens wide channels throughout our entire being for life-destroying poisons of negation and life-obscuring shadows of self-cherishing.

21) Cast far away from all precious humanity these lethal doses, these ominous shadows, by cultivating instinctive admiration and love for those who practice the way of selflessness. Adore such bodhisattvas for their irreversible vow to remain intimate with the struggle of living beings as beacons of love and as the light of panoramic vision.

22) Once identified with this luminous way of life, you will experience every moment as soaked in bliss, tasting the delight of compassionate responses to even the most negative actions of other beings. I have composed this poem of rapturous affection further to strengthen the diamond-sharp conviction of those already faithful to the path of wisdom.

23) Gazing back over these exuberant verses, I perceive an abundant banquet of poetry, easy to assimilate and to understand clearly. Entirely in accord with the teaching of the sutras and with the deep realization of awakened sages, these words are full of subtle nourishment. To contemplate their various levels of meaning is not only to taste the nectar of wisdom but is to walk the sublime path of compassion.

24) This surprising poem condenses into a few verses the profound and extensive teachings of my lineage. I have composed these melodic lines, like heavenly wish-fulfilling gems, to benefit the minds of all beloved beings. Those with strong capacity for meditation in action will deepen their insight into the nature of Reality by following these words into the heart of Buddha.

25) Some authors tie complex knots of philosophical terms, while others rave incoherently like mad persons. In the most beautiful hermitage, the snow mountains of Tibet, this poet, known as Ever-Expanding Mind of Goodness, has attempted to write with richness and lucidity.

26) May the bliss of the mystical fusion of transcendent wisdom with tender compassion fall like sweet summer rain from dark blue clouds, the motivation of goodness, skillfully and gracefully opened by lightning flashes of selfless awareness. May conscious beings in every realm and condition enjoy their glorious existence as the dynamic play of Lord Buddha's four modes of manifestation: transparent, universal, heavenly, and earthly.

27) Having become, through the medium of this poem, the powerful and eloquent speech of Divine Manjushri, speaking directly with the harmonious and melodious voice of the transcendent Wisdom Deity, may I and all my relations and companions, from small insects to tenth-level bodhisattvas, attain the blessings of primordial Buddha nature: infinite bliss, infinite fulfillment, infinite perfection, and universal conscious enlightenment.

# Verses On the Faith Mind

by Seng-T'san, 3rd Zen Patriarch

The Great Way is not difficult for those who have no preferences. When love and hate are both absent everything becomes clear and undisguised. Make the smallest distinction, however, and heaven and earth are set infinitely apart. If you wish to see the truth, then hold no opinions for or against anything. To set up what you like against what you dislike is the disease of the mind. When the deep meaning of things is not understood, the mind's essential peace is disturbed to no avail.

The Way is perfect like vast space where nothing is lacking and nothing is in excess. Indeed, it is due to our choosing to accept or reject that we do not see the true nature of things. Live neither in the entanglements of outer things, nor in inner feelings of emptiness. Be serene in the oneness of things and such erroneous views will disappear by themselves. When you try to stop activity to achieve passivity your very effort fills you with activity. As long as you remain in one extreme or the other you will never know Oneness.

Those who do not live in the single Way fail in both activity and passivity, assertion and denial. To deny the reality of things is to miss their reality. To assert the emptiness of things is to miss their reality. The more you talk and think about it, the further astray you wander from the truth. Stop talking and thinking, and there is nothing you will not be able to know. To return to the root is to find the meaning, but to pursue appearances is to miss the source. At the moment of inner enlightenment there is a going beyond appearance and emptiness. The changes that appear to occur in the empty world we call real only because of our ignorance.

Do not search for the truth; only cease to cherish opinions. Do not remain in the dualistic state; avoid such pursuits carefully. If there is even a trace of this and that, of right and wrong, the mind-essence will be lost in confusion. Although all dualities come from the One, do not be attached even to this One. When the mind exists undisturbed in the Way, nothing in the world can offend, and when a thing can no longer offend, it ceases to exist in the old way.

When no discriminating thoughts arise, the old mind ceases to exist. When thought objects vanish, the thinking-subject vanishes, as when the mind vanishes, objects vanish. Things are objects because of the subject (mind). The mind (subject) is such because of things (object). Understand the relativity of these two and the basic reality: the unity of emptiness. In this Emptiness the two are indistinguishable and each contains in itself the whole world. If you do not discriminate between coarse and fine you will not be tempted to prejudice and opinion.

To live in the Great Way is neither easy nor difficult. But those with limited views are fearful and irresolute: the faster they hurry, the slower they go, and clinging (attachment) cannot be limited. Even to be attached to the idea of enlightenment is to go astray. Just let things be in their own way and there will be neither coming nor going.

Obey the nature of things (your own nature), and you will walk freely and undisturbed. When thought is in bondage the truth is hidden, for everything is murky and unclear, and the burdensome practice of judging brings annoyance and weariness. What benefit can be derived from distinctions and separations?

If you wish to move in the One Way do not dislike even the world of senses and ideas. Indeed, to accept them fully is identical with true enlightenment. The wise man strives to no goals but the foolish man fetters himself. There is one Dharma, not many. Distinctions arise from the clinging needs of the ignorant. To seek Mind with the (discriminating) mind is the greatest of all mistakes.

Rest and unrest derive from illusion; with enlightenment there is no liking and disliking. All dualities come from ignorant inference. They are like dreams or flowers in air—it is foolish to try to grasp them. Gain and loss, right and wrong, such thoughts must finally be abolished at once.

If the eye never sleeps, all dreams will naturally cease. If the mind makes no discriminations, the ten thousand things are as they are, of single essence. To understand the mystery of this One-essence is to be released from all entanglements. When all things are seen equally the timeless Self-essence is reached.

No comparisons or analogies are possible in this causeless, relationless state. Consider movement stationary and the stationary in motion, both movement and rest disappear. When such dualities cease to exist Oneness itself cannot exist. To this ultimate finality no law or description applies.

For the unified mind in accord with the Way, all self-centered striving ceases. Doubts and indecision vanish and life in true faith is possible. With a single stroke we are freed from bondage; nothing clings to us and we hold to nothing. All is empty, clear, self-illuminating, with no exertion of the mind's power. Here thought, feeling, knowledge, and imagination are of no value.

In this world of Suchness there is neither self nor other-than-self. To come directly into harmony with this reality just simply say when doubts arise, "not two." In this "not two" nothing is separate, nothing is excluded. No matter when or where, enlightenment means entering this truth. And this truth is beyond extension or diminution in time and space; in it a single thought is ten thousand years.

Emptiness here, Emptiness there, but the infinite universe stands always before your eyes. Infinitely large and infinitely small: no difference, for definitions have vanished and no boundaries are seen. So too with being and non-being. Don't waste time in doubts and arguments that have nothing to do with this.

One thing, all things, move among and intermingle, without distinction. To live in this realization is to be without anxiety about non-perfection. To live in this faith is the road to non-duality, because the non-dual is one with the trusting mind.

Words! The Way is beyond language, for in it there is no yesterday, no tomorrow, no today.