

MOTIVATION

In all our activities it is beneficial to assess our motivation. What are we trying to achieve? We all seek a lasting happiness and liberation from our problems. We are not alone in this - all other beings share this thought with us. We can best achieve this aim if we realise that a true, lasting happiness depends on our concern for others as well as our selves. We are particularly fortunate in having an opportunity to follow a path to liberation. This adds a sense of increased responsibility to our actions. If we remember this, it will give added impetus to our spiritual practice.

PRAYER OF THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES

The Immeasurable Equanimity Meditation

How wonderful it would be if all beings were in equanimity, free from attachment and hatred which keeps some beings close and others far.

May they be in equanimity,
I myself will make them be in equanimity.
Please bless me to be able to do this.

The Immeasurable Love Meditation

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings had happiness and the cause of happiness.

May they have happiness and its cause.
I myself will make them have happiness and its cause.
Please bless me to be able to do this.

The Immeasurable Compassion Meditation

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were released from suffering and the cause of suffering.

May they be released from suffering and its causes.
I myself will release them from suffering and its causes.
Please bless me to be able to do this.

The Immeasurable Joy Meditation

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were never separated from the sublime happiness of release and the happiness of higher rebirths.

May they never be separated from these.
I myself will make them never separated from these.
Please bless me to be able to do this.

(taken from The Sadhana of the Inseparability of the Spiritual Master and Chenrezig written by His Holiness the XVI Dalai Lama)

THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES IN BUDDHIST PRACTICE

To become liberated from the sufferings of our worldly existence (Skt. *samsara*), we generate *Bodhicitta* - the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of ourselves and all sentient beings. Such a state, free from the fetters that bind us to *samsara*, is much more effective in helping others than our present state.

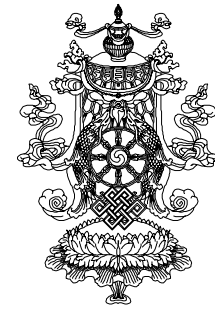
Part of Buddhist practice is to visualise oneself and all sentient beings as already having achieved this state - the state of Buddhahood. It focuses the mind on the nature of the state we wish to achieve, making us more familiar with it and helping us maintain our course towards it.

This visualisation, useful as it is, remains only imagination. It alone will not bring us to enlightenment. In reality, we are still ordinary beings bound to *samsara* and our actions of body, speech and mind are limited. When we investigate what obstructs us from actually becoming a Buddha, we find that it is our minds which are under the influence of fluctuating emotions towards friends and enemies. Therefore, in a practical manner, we go on to increase the power of the *Bodhicitta* we have generated by meditating on the Four Immeasurables.

The Four Immeasurables pertain directly to our existing state. They are a very sound, practical and effective meditation that we can apply immediately to our everyday lives.

* * * *

"A person who wishes to reach the top of a mountain pass has the goal in mind from the time that he stands at the foot of the mountain." Pabongka Rinpoche - Liberation in Our Hands.



LAM RIM BUDDHIST CENTRE SOUTH AFRICA

Spiritual Director
Ven. Geshe Damcho Yonten

BUDDHISM and BUDDHIST MEDITATION

"THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES"

1 Kite Street, corner 1st Street, Vrededorp, Johannesburg
Tel: (011) 837 9000 or (011) 473 2840



A SUMMARY OF THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES

The Four Immeasurables are thoughts or meditations which are based on our present worldly existence. They are called "immeasurable" as they are developed with us along the path to enlightenment.

The Four Immeasurables (Skt. *Apramana*), also known as the four Sublime States or "Pure Abodes" (Skt. *Brahma-vihara*), are:

- Immeasurable Equanimity (Skt. *upeksha*)
- Immeasurable Loving Kindness (Skt. *maitri*)
- Immeasurable Compassion (Skt. *karuna*)
- Immeasurable Joy (Skt. *mudita*)

Immeasurable Equanimity

Every sentient being has experienced every possible relationship - father and son, brother and sister, etc. - many times in countless past lives. Not recognising this fact, they feel attachment towards some and aversion towards others, bringing conflict and suffering. We do not see the past relationships, but we do see the attachment, hatred and the suffering. Even in this one life, we can see how we are all interdependent and have shared interests. We see how our discriminations can cause us and others unnecessary suffering.

Immeasurable equanimity arises from the wish that love, compassion and joy should apply equally to all sentient beings without attachment to friend or hatred for enemy. It is developed through even-mindedness and impartiality. We can achieve it by an understanding of *karma*, the law of cause and effect related to willed actions.

Immeasurable Loving Kindness

The best way sentient beings could exist would be in a state of happiness. Without knowing the causes of worldly happiness, they constantly miss opportunities to bring happiness to one another, thinking only of

themselves. Loving kindness toward all sentient beings is the cause of happiness. Loving kindness is fraternal affection, unbounded love and friendly feelings, free from lustful attachment.

Immeasurable loving kindness arises from the wish for all living beings to have happiness and the cause of happiness. It is developed by good-will, friendliness, generosity and mindfulness of the needs of others.

Immeasurable Compassion

Many beings continually accumulate more and more negative actions, unaware that to stop their suffering they must avoid non-virtue. There are some who still engage in non-virtue even though they do know this. Compassion is care and concern for others' sufferings.

Immeasurable compassion arises from the wish for all living beings to be free from suffering and its causes. It is developed by concern for the suffering of others, a willingness to bear others' pain and a mindfulness which avoids causing injury to others.

Immeasurable Joy

Some beings are in a state of worldly happiness. This can provide them with opportunities to develop spiritually, but this state is impermanent. Joy comes from the rejoicing in such favourable conditions and the wish to maintain them as a conducive environment for spiritual progress.

Immeasurable joy arises from the wish that living beings are never removed from favourable conditions out of which may develop the supreme happiness of liberation. It is developed through sympathetic joy at others' happiness and the removal of envy or dislike.

OBSTACLES TO THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES

With each immeasurable are associated two obstacles, or enemies: a near-enemy and a distant-enemy. The distant-enemy is often clear, but the near-enemy needs constant mindfulness if it is to be avoided.

Equanimity's near-enemy is indifference - the casual equanimity not borne from understanding of the conditioned nature of things which allows the root to remain. The distant-enemies are lust and aversion.

Loving kindness' near-enemy is sensuous love. This is like a foe lurking near his enemy to find the way of approach. Its distant-enemy is ill-will like a foe watching from some distant place.

The near-enemy of compassion is sorrow associated with worldly desire (tending to people's cravings and not their real needs). Its distant-enemy is cruelty.

The near-enemy of immeasurable joy is worldly joy (the indulgence in short-term pleasures). Its distant-enemy is dislike or envy.

THE FOUR THOUGHTS

The Four Immeasurables are each developed in a sequence of four thoughts. These are described as desiring, wishing, superior intention and requesting. Initially, we imagine the eventual state we seek to achieve and generate some real aspiration for it. We follow this with constructive thought and concepts to determine how we can best achieve it. With this in mind, we then take the responsibility upon our own shoulders. Then we recognise that we alone cannot achieve it and we request help and guidance.

The aspiration to achieve these immeasurables can follow on naturally from visualisations of ourselves as Buddhas. The constructive thoughts for achieving this begin at a worldly level. We decide what we ourselves are actually capable of doing at the moment. After this, the will to take personal responsibility comes naturally because we see immediate goals which we can achieve. When we get a little more ambitious, we see that there are limits to what we can do, even on a worldly level. We look for help and find it in the Three Refuges: Buddha (the teacher), Dharma (the teaching), Sangha (the students).

We can clearly follow these stages in the Prayer of the Four Immeasurables. Just repeating this prayer a few times can be of great help in strengthening our resolve to benefit all beings.

* * * *

"... do not accept my teachings merely out of respect for me, but analyse and check them, the way that a goldsmith tests gold by rubbing, cutting and melting it". Shakyamuni Buddha