

A Collection of Buddhist
Healing Prayers and Practices

with essays

by Jason Espada

“It is said that whenever we practice Dharma it should always be pervaded by compassion at all times – in the beginning, in the middle and at the end of our practice. Compassion is the source, the real essence of the entire path.”

- Khenpo Appey Rinpoche

Forward

A little over a year has passed since the first edition of this book was completed. Since then, I've been able to bring together a more Concise Set of Healing Prayers and Practices, of about 75 pages, based on that work. It's my intention now to publish the Concise Set separately, and also to include it here in this new edition, in its entirety.

Comparing the first and second editions, I've made three more changes: First, I've taken some of the commentaries on healing practice that were formerly in a later section, and incorporated those ideas into the opening sections, interspersed with an actual practice. For reference's sake, the First Edition will continue to be available online.

I've also written a few more essays and some poetry that I thought should be included in a second edition of this work.

And, in gratitude, the list of websites and e-mail addresses of people and organizations that accept prayer requests can now be found online, on A Buddhist Library, on the Things I Like to Share page. If there are any questions, I can also be reached via that website. Hopefully, the changes I've made will make this material easier to use.

I truly hope as well that, in some small way, I have done justice with this work to the Noble Lineage of this practice. Where I've been mistaken, I humbly ask forgiveness for my impertinence. Whatever good is here is just that good that is everywhere in the world, sometimes hidden, and then celebrated when revealed, and the incomparable kindness and generosity of my teachers.

A table of contents and two Prefaces follow.

My warm best wishes to you all. May all beings benefit.

Jason Espada, San Francisco, May 8th, 2010

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Preface I

From the Preface to the First Edition

For me, the whole of religion in general, and Buddhism in particular can be thought of as having a healing function. From what I can tell, if two conditions are present they can work to heal both the body and the soul, or the inner life of a person.

The first requirement for healing to be accomplished using the resources of a Tradition is that a link be maintained with the deep sources of vitality that can be found in these Traditions. If it happens instead that the contemplative aspect weakens, or if it becomes dissipated by too much intellectualization, or forced to the edges by a religion's search for political power, then a tradition can stop working for people.

The second requirement for the healing values in traditions to continue to work in people's lives is that we intelligently adapt the teachings as they have come to us. By 'intelligently' in this case I mean not changing them so much so that we're just 'winging it', or 'inspired by' what has come before, but also not just repeating the way people from another culture and time thought and practiced. If we do that then teachings then can take on an archaic quality, and it can feel like they are not relevant to our lives as they are now. It's clear to me that we can and should adapt traditional teachings so that they work for us.

Hopefully both of these requirements will be met to some extent in the following pages. May all beings benefit.

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

Preface I

A Note on the use of A Personal Sadhana, or, 'Hanging all of Buddhist teaching on the peg of Medicine Buddha Practice'

The following pages bring together a range of material on healing practices. In Tibetan Buddhism, healing can be accomplished through a number of different methods. For example, the practice of White Tara is excellent, and is something that I know from personal experience can be quite effective. Another of the healing methods from the Buddhist Tradition is the rich and wonderful practice of Medicine Buddha, and this is the framework I'll use in these pages.

It should be noted that the preliminary contemplations included here, and the other thoughts for reflection, can stand alone as meditations in themselves, and they can also be used with other practices.

For example, I've found that thinking along the lines of the article called 'I live in this world' (starting on page 19) can be useful whenever I need to get my bearings, or to help me to set a strong, positive motivation.

The 'list of things that are healing' (starting on page 60) is also something I refer to often, edit and add to, and share with others whenever I can. Sometimes it's a wonderful healing meditation just to sit with these thoughts.

As I write this (February of 2009) in regards to Buddhism, we are in a time of transition. These teachings have been here in the U.S.A less than a century, which is not a lot of time as traditions go. After a period of receiving the tradition as it was practiced, I feel we are just now beginning to make these teachings our own. Without question, this is something we need to do.

Rather than practicing Tibetan Buddhism, or Japanese style Zen Buddhism, understanding the principles involved, we need to see how these traditions relate to our own culture and our own lives, and then work with them to create an our own Buddhism. This is how a tradition is able to take root and

Preface I

to continue effectively in another place. This is how it always has been, and how it needs to be.

In terms of the healing practices presented in the following pages, here then is what I would propose:

If it happens that practicing in the way I've outlined brings a result that is not equal to or more effective than the traditional methods, then clearly the traditional methods should be used instead of this one. On the other hand, if using a personalized set of reflections and prayers such as these produces a result that is equal to or greater than the traditional methods, then this points in a useful direction for us to take.

For comparison's sake, I've included three complete traditional Medicine Buddha practice texts, as well as a White Tara sadhana, in section V. At this time there are also many excellent commentaries available on the traditional way to practice these teachings.

The word 'Sadhana' is sometimes used synonymously with 'practice text', as in 'The Compassion Buddha Sadhana', or 'A Wisdom Practice Sadhana'. I've heard that the term itself means 'method of accomplishment', and it's with this in mind that I've collected this material. We should use whatever works for us.

I would like to encourage others to bring together the reflections, prayers, selections from practice texts and commentaries that speak to them the most, and if this some or all of collection works for them, they are more than welcome to use it. Given our situation as human beings, and the suffering that exists in people's lives, it is imperative that we be as compassionate and as skillful as we can.

May we all find and make full use of whatever methods actually remove suffering and bring happiness.

Preface I

A note on what is sometimes called magic

Sometimes the use of prayer, mantra, and visualization, and even the subject of traditional healing is categorized as magic, which I have no problem with, if the term is used in it's best sense. The word, unfortunately has been too often associated with ignorance and superstition. At its best however, what is called magic can be thought of as using subtle laws to bring about a positive result.

The article on mantra, in Part IV, that goes into this subject in more detail.

May all beings benefit.

Here is a general outline of what follows:

Part I contains introductory prayers and reflections. As mentioned earlier, these can be meditated on separately, or they can be used in conjunction with any other practice.

Part II has selections from various sadhanas and commentaries, with prayers and meditations.

Part III has material for reflection. These can be used by themselves, or these can be read before, interspersed with, or after, mantra recitation practice. The reader is encouraged to write his or her own poetry and prayers, and lists of things that are healing. This section is more of a suggestion or a model for one way this be done. Of course, if these prayers are useful for you, you are most welcomed to use them.

Part IV: Nineteen essays and one more poem

Preface I

Part V contains traditional practice texts for Medicine Buddha and White Tara, as well as a few additional mantras

and

Part VI has dedication prayers

How to use this book

This collection can be read straight through, and practiced with, but it should be noted that parts I and II stand alone, and are meant to be used independently. To my thinking, the best way to approach a range of material such as this is to read and reflect on whatever is here that is useful to you, or whatever you feel you need. These elements all fit together, and I've tried to be as complete as I can.

If the general subjects of prayer in Buddhism, or the bodhisattva vow, or mantra are new to you, it may be helpful to read the essays in section IV on those subjects first. These ideas are the foundation for healing in Buddhism as I understand it.

Preface II

From the Preface to A Concise Set of Buddhist Healing Prayers and Practices

Almost as soon as I finished A Collection of Buddhist Healing Prayers and Practices I thought it would be good to have a brief text that can be used for daily practice, or that can be taken as a suggestion for another person who wants to draw together various prayers and practices for their own personal use. *I hope to offer in these relatively few pages a brief set of Buddhist healing prayers and practices, that contain all of the essential practical points.*

What I've come up with – 'A Concise Set of Buddhist Healing Prayers and Practices' is both published separately and included in this present volume, on pages 17 to 59 , with the dedication prayers beginning on page 312.

May all beings benefit.

A few words here on contemplation, prayer, and mantra practice

At Thrangu Rinpoche taught, the shortest form of a sadhana is the mantra itself. Anything more than that is just to improve our sense of what we are doing, and the effectiveness of a particular practice. How many or how few reflections and prayers are used by a person is purely an individual matter. We should do whatever works best for us.

Any one of the selections that follow can be used by itself alone as a basis for reflection, prayer, or mantra practice. However we make use of material such as this, we should know that right from the beginning reflections, we are already doing the practice – of generating positive, helpful, healing qualities. That is always the aim.

Traditionally, practicing a sadhana includes visualization and the recitation of mantra, however, for most people, most of the time, these are not the only

Preface II

components of an effective practice. The recitation of mantra and the element of quiet meditation are presented here, of course, and a part of the practice should be given to them. The proportion is up to each individual, and what works best for them. The reason I would like to present the practice in the following way is because of the importance of contemplation as a basis for the rest of whatever practice we do.

Over the long term, contemplation that produces a response from our deeper nature, is, in fact, absolutely necessary for prayer and mantra practice to have any meaning or energy behind it. This doesn't mean we have to spend a lot of time on the level of thinking. Sometimes thinking too much can keep things on the surface. But what it does mean is that our deeper resources need to be brought to bear in our life. When this happens, everything flows naturally, in prayer and various kinds of meditation practice that we do.

With our fundamental humanity, our deep nature as a basis, it can happen that we are continually generating positive energies. This is how the main reflections offered here, such as 'I live in this world' should be read – with this aim in mind – to produce a response from our deeper nature. Thoughts such as these can be used to this end. Reflections, and either our own writings or those we've collected, can orient and empower the mind. Then, everything follows from this.

This, essentially, is what is referred to in Tibetan Buddhism as 'thought training'. By engaging some difficult or suffering situation with a positive motivation, we can turn it into a cause of benefit in our own lives and in the lives of the world. Instead of being overwhelmed or depressed by it, we can be made clear by it, and strengthened to live and act in the world with greater wisdom and compassion.

Experiment and see for yourself what works best with all of this for you. Sometimes, without reading anything at all, you might like to try 'informal', semi formal, or less conceptual practice. Then, at other times, try reading texts, or poetry, and practicing with some consistency, and see what happens.

Preface II

Over this last year, I've found it helpful to regularly go through this short set of reflections and prayers, slowly, from the opening, 'O My ten directions three times family...' through the mantra recitation, quiet meditation, and dedication prayers. (pages 17 through 59)

Then, if a sense of perspective is already there, I've seen that the practice offered here can work also just as well using an even more brief form. The short section called 'Prayers from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries', (beginning on page 44) is only about 16 pages, or less, if only the sections in bold type are read. Even that much can be effective for guiding the mind in a positive direction and generating healing energy.

We should do whatever works for us. Getting a positive result is really all that matters. These are practices that can heal, and that can work to prevent illness, or to shorten their duration.

There is one application of these teachings that has proven itself for me, that I would like to mention: I've noticed that if I'm beginning to feel unwell in some way, or an imbalance of the elements, then practicing in the following way always helps. I'll wake early and, half asleep, I'll do a brief form of the practice, just reciting the mantra, and visualizing light, followed by some quiet meditation. Then I'll go back to sleep. I've noticed that whatever positive energy I can begin to cultivate will then continue in my sleep, and that I'll wake up feeling much better.

Experiment and see what works best for you.

Here is one more simple device that can benefit: along with having an image of the Healing Buddha, and my main teacher, I've found to be useful as well to write the names of a few teachers I have a good connection with on a piece of paper and set that to one side, within view, while practicing. When I glance at these names I do feel genuinely supported by them. For my own purposes I've been calling this 'the power of the name'. If approached with devotion and creativity, we make the practices more our own. This is my thought, at least.

Preface II

If using this material for formal practice, sections with titles such as ‘On Tonglen’, or ‘On the Refuge Tree’ need only be read through the first time, or as needed after that to improve one’s understanding.

It’s my wish that anyone that this finds its way to - use this in whatever way is most helpful. Feel free to use whatever you like, to use it as it is, or to add, subtract, borrow or change what is here to suit your purpose. It’s a work in progress for me as well, and if I’m blessed with more years on this earth, I’ll certainly be revising and improving it myself, and sharing that. For now, here is what I’ve found to be most useful.

Nine Bows

Homage to all that is healing
in a person’s life,
in Traditions,
and in the world

Homage to all that is healing
in the lives of Saints and Sages,
in this practice,
and in my own mind

and

Homage to all that is healing
in the Stream of Ancestral Teachers,
in the immediate Community of support,
and in our positive motivations

Many many bright blessings on you and yours.

May all beings benefit.

A Concise Set of
Buddhist Healing Prayers and Practices

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - I

O, All my ten directions three times family,
near and distant relations,

May my life, and this practice benefit us all
pervading all existences

every mind,
every body, every cell
earth and sky

May this practice benefit us all

May all my past, present and future selves benefit from this
and may all the past, present and future selves of all beings
benefit from this

May this bring health wherever it is needed

May this bring about the firm establishment of true health and happiness for
us all

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - II

All my family
in all the world
All my relations

All my African brothers and sisters,
aunts and uncles,
grandmothers, grandfathers,
little ones,

All my family in Central Asia, and in East Asia,
All my family in the Americas
North, Central and South,
All my Haitian family,

And in Europe, North, East, and West
and in the Mediterranean,
and in the Middle East

Mothers, fathers, children,
brothers, sisters,
elders,

Island Peoples,
and all my family in the far North and far South,

All my Native family,
All my family here in the USA

Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers,
aunts, uncles, young children, dear friends...

All my relations

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - III

I live in this world
of joy, and sorrow

of comfort and ease,
and of struggle, and pain

of friendship, and community
and of loneliness and isolation

I live in this world of riches and poverty
of abundance and of hunger

I live in this world where there is health
and there is illness

Where some people can only try to care for themselves,
while others are at the point where, more and more, they have thinking about
and caring for others as the aim and activities of their life

Bless them all

Bless them all

O, Bless them all

There are people serving others in this world -
there are people taking joy in that
and again and again I celebrate that
May they blessed

I live in this world
where many are in need of a protector,
where many are in need of an advocate

where many people do not have even a basic education...

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - III
I live in this world

Today, in this world, there are many who are kept back from doing good things because of some illness of body or mind

Today there are many who are broken-hearted
Today there are many who have been hurt in relationships

May there be an abundance of heart medicine,
an abundance of earth and sky medicine today
for those who need it
as much as is necessary

Today, there are many who have had their families broken

Today, there are many who are grieving

Every day in this world
there are people who are experiencing pain:
children, teenagers, adults, the middle-aged, the elderly;
those who are alone, and those with problems of the mind

I live in this world where there are people who are disturbed to some extent,
or who suffer from depression

This is the truth

I live in this world where some people don't love themselves,
they don't cherish their lives,
where people even hate themselves,
and where they despair,
even to the point of wanting to take their own lives...

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - III
I live in this world

I live in this world where there are so many people who are in need
of some form of human contact,

I live in this world where there are so many people who are experiencing
the absence of love
and we can do something truly substantial,
truly meaningful for each other,
every single one of us

I live in this world where many sensitive people are overwhelmed
and use drugs, or drink, or food, or sex, to self-medicate, to escape
leading to more dullness and obscurity,
and to more, and even worse problems
May they all be healed

I live in this world where many are without peace,
without control, without any freedom of mind

The root of all these sufferings, we should all know,
is self-grasping ignorance
and the afflictive emotions

And what we all need to experience
is the disbanding of stress
and the practices that lead directly to genuine happiness,
and enlightenment as to our own true nature

Ah...

Right now, there are people being trapped by their addictions,
overwhelmed by their delusions, lost

I live in this world where some people are in danger of falling,

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - III
I live in this world

where some are in danger of slipping - and the result can be severe for them...

There are many people right now
who are in need of forgiveness, inclusion
who are in need of the nectar of ethics,
the medicine of ethics,
the food of ethics,
the attainment of coolness,
strength, self control
light, and peace,
wisdom,
purity,
transformation, and release

I live in this world where we have all done wrong,
some worse than others
some, terrible things
out of ignorance, affliction,
or fear, desperation, despair;
out of weakness and limitation -
not seeing any other way
not being able to reach any other way

I live in this world where some people suffer because of
their own past actions, and regret, and shame

I live in this world where some people feel unworthy of love

I live in this world where there are many people who are obscured,
lonely,
or numb,
self-absorbed,
superficial,

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - III
I live in this world

greedy,
distracted,
afraid, or sad,
where there are those who are feeling ugly,
or feeling hopeless
or who are caught in self-pity

They are capable of perfection, but they don't yet know it

I live in this world where selves arise again and again that feel fragmented,
and isolated – even though this is not true, not even for a moment

I live in this world where many people are experiencing stress
and need comfort, love, light,
and the peaceful joy that is nourishing

May people receive such peace
everywhere it is needed
East, West, North, South,
May it be so

This is the truth
and it's better that I realize it -

I live in this world where most people
are without any sense at all of the sacred dimension in life

I live in this world where the deluded the band together
and increase ignorance and suffering

I live in this world where, even though there are those with the motivation to
learn

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - III
 I live in this world

many people are misled by false teachers,
 themselves ignorant

In these times, especially, it seems,
 wrong views are supported, in hundreds of ways,
 and wisdom is not;
 greed is encouraged, and non-attachment and generosity is not;
 aggression is supported, and peace,
 sanity, respect, kindness, and being helpful
 is not supported nearly enough

I live in this world where there are many people's
 experience is only that of a lower-realm being-
 (the realm of hell beings, the realm of hungry ghosts,
 and the realm of animals)

I live in this world where there are people
 who don't experience even a moment of peace;
 where there are those who feel they don't have any space, light
 or joy in their lives at all,
 who don't have any happiness,
 not even a little bit

For as long as this is true
I say, for as long as this is true
 may I respond to it
 in a way that eases their sufferings

and may they have every happiness
may they have every happiness
oceans of happiness
skies of happiness

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - III
 I live in this world

Every day in this world there are people with no perspective on their life,
 coarse, dissatisfied, lacking in gratitude, indulgent

I live in this world where people don't think about death
 or haven't integrated the truth of impermanence

Every day, all around, there are people wasting precious time,
 not seeing what they have,
 not taking advantage
 of the great opportunities they have
 for all of our sake
 while they still can

I live in this world where the vast majority of people are completely without
 any Dharma

Dharma:
 deep Buddhist teaching, or contemplative teaching;
 the result of deep Buddhist practice or contemplative practice;
 the experience of freedom,
 light, and wisdom –
 that can alleviate and can bring about
 the complete cessation of suffering
 true medicine for the ills of the world

East, West, North and South,
 May people receive the Dharma,
 And may I be the cause of that

I live in this world where few people have received instructions in
 meditation, and, of these few, most are still unclear about the essential points
 that:

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - III
I live in this world

whatever meditation we do
we should aim our minds
in the direction of clarity
and stable mindfulness,
and continually generate positive energies

I live in this world, where, though we may do some good,
though we may improve our lives,
those who *have* listened to essential teachings, *and understood*,
many times don't practice
and, of those who do practice, often they are not able
to overcome the obstacles to meditation,
and practice in a way that they progress...

I live in this world where even those people who have received, and
practiced, and accomplished a great deal of Dharma still suffer
they still fall into experiences that are like the lower realms

and I live in this world where some of the people who have become stable in
realization don't share the Dharma as much as they could

I live in this world where though we *can* help others
much too often we don't

where though *can* remove others suffering, to some extent at least
and give them happiness, to some extent at least
far too often we don't

I live in this world
where people don't live in the present
Where people don't know their own worth, or the worth of others,
where people don't know their own potential...

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections

On Tonglen – Taking and Sending

The practice called ‘Tonglen’, or ‘Taking and Sending’ in Tibetan Buddhism, is usually described sequentially. If practicing for one’s self, in self tonglen, one imagines or sees with the mind’s eye a part of one’s self as perfect, whole, and loving. That self is visualized as viewing and removing the suffering and pain we have, and replacing it with peace, happiness, well being and strength, and whatever we need.

When practicing directly for others, one first imagines taking or removing the sufferings or difficulties of others, and then giving them peace, happiness, health, and whatever is needed.

The thought of others’ suffering is said to be ‘aimed’ at one’s self-centeredness or insensitivity, destroying it, so to speak. Then, the imagined giving that follows is a practice of kindness, compassion, and generosity.

These are meditations that are considered to have the power to heal.

After reflecting on the traditional teachings about tonglen for some time, I came to connect them to a few thoughts I have had also about symbols in general, and stories that communicate with vivid imagery.

The first idea is that a true symbol is a manifestation of a state of consciousness; second, a sequence of images can be a symbol (as in a dream, or a story, or myth); and third, that meditation on a symbol can produce the same consciousness as the source of the symbol, or story.

As it regards tonglen practice, after meditating for a time on the visualizations as happening one after the other, I came to realize that what is called tonglen practice is actually aimed at producing *a single state of consciousness* that at once removes suffering, and gives happiness. Even though traditionally it is expressed sequentially, to demonstrate its nature,

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections
On Tonglen

tonglen is another name for the single state of consciousness we call compassion, or active compassion.

Tonglen is a creative or magical state of consciousness, in as much as every state of consciousness is creative, producing extensive effects, but with this difference - with the practice of tonglen, or the mind of compassion, the creative nature of our consciousness is brought out, and made abundantly clear.

For more on this wonderful practice, see the essay 'Regarding Tonglen', beginning on page 209.

Here follows a taking and sending prayer, a vow, and another prayer.
May all beings benefit.

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - IV

Taking and Giving prayer - I

May I have the actual knowledge
of the sufferings and needs that exist
in other beings' lives everywhere
and may that knowledge completely destroy
whatever self preoccupation I have
and keep it from arising again

May I then have a compassionate mind,
and respond to them in a way that frees them from all their suffering,
and may they have every happiness

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - V

Vow

From this point forward,
and for however long into the future it is needed
I dedicate myself to the alleviation,
and to the complete cessation of every suffering
of all living beings
each and every one of them

I dedicate myself fully to their healing and awakening;
to their having comfort, strength of body, mind, and spirit,
most excellent nourishment, health, longevity
every level of protection,
shelter, food, clothing, medicine, education,
joy and wisdom
I dedicate myself fully, leaving nothing out,
to the complete healing, fulfillment and enlightenment
of all living beings

No matter how long it takes
no matter how difficult it may be
no matter what it costs

With all my heart and with all my strength,
I vow to always serve them all
in every way that is necessary for them
and in every way that will bring each and every one of them
true and lasting health and happiness

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - VI

Taking and Giving prayer - II – in order to transform my own consciousness into something positive

Whatever difficulties living beings experience everywhere, I pray, may I, and others, and the environment lift them all from them

by myself becoming able, and then,
like opening a dungeon door
and carrying them out
or encouraging them,
welcoming them to walk

May I myself be cure for whatever ails them
or conduit for a cure
or a help for a cure to come to them,
whatever it takes

May I myself become a capable being,
and then like the fully rising sun
instantly
or if time is needed,
then over time

May I completely remove the suffering that all these beings experience

like the sun
drying up a pool of stagnant water
so that fresh and fragrant things can grow,
or,

easing pain,
'like removing a thorn from flesh',
mending bones
mending broken hearts

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - VI
Taking and Giving Prayer II

binding up wounds
and restoring them

For them, may I and others and the environment
be to them

bring to them
pray to them

a cooling rain, a healing balm
if that's what's needed

a desert chapel,
a well-funded schoolroom,
a well stocked and staffed clinic

As needed, may I *be* these things –
and may I work to bring these things
absolutely, clearly and definitely
to those who need them

For those who ache,
experience trials, or fears,
may I be
a gentle warm sun after their long winter
in an instant, completely dispelling all suffering
and the causes of suffering

Wherever there are suffering beings,
as much as needed,
may I be a fresh breeze, renewing them,
rain washing away
whatever of the thousands of sorrows these people have

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - VI
Taking and Giving Prayer II

May I be music, space and light for them, for their world
pure water, nourishing food and drink

or like the full noon-day sun,
the pure land of light,
destroyer of sorrow

For them, may I be as
medicine clearing the way,
friendship, land, virtue, peace,
arriving when its needed most
solid, firm, stable
all of one meaning

May I have a mind of compassion,
and of love

May I, in that same single moment, develop and increase
the causes for all people to be richly blessed, in every way
May they have all joys
every happiness
and may the causes be established for
these blessings remain for them,
stable, firm

For them, surely, may I be to them
bring to them
pray to them
wealth eliminating every type of poverty,
and the illusory perception of poverty

like gently waking someone from a bad dream
and reassuring them

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - VI
Taking and Giving Prayer II

outside, inside

May I replace ignorance with wisdom
and replace all wrong views, discomfort, and dis-ease
with knowledge, comfort, health and strength

*“May our intentions equally penetrate
every being and place
with the true merit of Buddha’s Way”*

I pray that whatever hardships I have experienced or know about, whatever
lack whatsoever, may others not experience any of those
I pray they will have it easier than I’ve had

May they not experience any privation or difficulty at all-
not even the slightest

and should they meet with any difficulties,
may they have the means to cope, to overcome these,
and to heal

And I pray that whatever good things I have known in this life, or even just
heard about, may they all experience these, and more,
knowing the love and support of teachers, family and friends...

May the force of goodness increase in me

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - VII

{ a 'sun prayer' – called so because it is a prayer to be as constant,
joyful and diligent as the sun }

I pray that
whatever suffering there is in peoples' lives
that I can remove completely and permanently
that I will do
I pray I will now, this instant, fulfill that task perfectly

and that whatever suffering I can't remove completely and permanently,
I will now at least remove temporarily

and I pray that whatever suffering I can't remove temporarily
I will now at least lessen greatly, by half or more

and that whatever suffering I can't lessen greatly, by half or more
I will now at least lessen even slightly

and that whatever suffering there is anywhere in peoples' lives
that I can't now at least lessen even slightly
I pray I will remember and keep that in mind
and work and study and continue trying to find ways
that will benefit
immediately, in this time,
and in the future
forever

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - VIII

{ a thorough going prayer }

However much suffering there has been in our lives in the past

and however much latent potency there is still in our lives
to cause suffering in the future

and however extensive the causes and conditions
have been, are now, or can be in the future
to produce suffering

I pray,

May it all be healed now

May it all be healed now

May it all be healed now

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - IX

By this practice
may those who have perfect health
be firmly established in that perfect health
May those who do not yet have complete and perfect health
be brought to that level of health, well being and strength
and may those who suffer in any way
be it very slight, or with very great suffering
be healed
may they be brought to the highest level of health
and may they be firmly established in complete and perfect health

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - X

Such is the nature of this dependent arising:
perceiving the needs of living beings
produces the wish to benefit them as needed
naturally, spontaneously, wholeheartedly, abundantly

May the complete fulfillment of this wish be unobstructed,
without any hindrance at all, may it be immediately fulfilled
Absolutely and without question

May I become sure medicine for every pain.

(bring to them, pray to them...)

To all of you
everywhere and in all times
who work to heal -
I pray, may I always honor you
and may I always serve and support you
in whatever way is needed,
and for as long as is needed

And I pray to all healers
I pray to gather and share with all others who are in need
all that is life-giving, health giving
O, hear my prayer!
and please give me your blessing!

By your graces,
and all the sources of healing in the world,
and by my own efforts,
however much I can do,

May all beings benefit

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - X
Such is the nature

May the force of caring
increase in me

May the power of love, compassion and wisdom
increase in me

May my mind be healing
May my consciousness be healing
May my presence be healing

May my thoughts be healing
May my prayers be healing
May my meditation be healing

May my words,
actions,
breath,
look,
touch,

sleep,
dreams,
and waking be healing

May everything I do be healing

May everything I do promote health and healing in this world
and in the lives of living beings

May I hold as my delight
the removing of suffering of living beings
and giving them happiness

May I dedicate myself now more and more fully to all others

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - X
Such is the nature

May I and others and the environment increase our ability to help others
in every way that is necessary
and for as long as is necessary

May virtue increase

At all times, may I produce, maintain and increase this life giving vision
for all

May whatever is good within me and in the world increase

May that which is beneficial increase

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - XI

Why don't we
invoke the blessings
of billions of angels
the light of love
to pour down upon
everyone we see,
hear, or even think of

Why don't we settle thoroughly
that we all have it in our power
to feed each and every one
with the food that matches their deepest need and desire
and then do it

Why don't we do this?
It costs us nothing if we do
and costs us all so much if we don't

Why don't we
wash the feet of all weary travelers,
offer them humble sustaining fare
and a soft bed
for them to be able to continue
laden with gifts
on their way

Why not
spread lotus blossoms
on the ground for each person to walk on
every step of their way

Why don't we

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - XI
Why don't we

Why don't we
wash away the murk
of our own confused thinking
and so stand resplendent
and as light for everyone's eyes

Why don't we pick up
in both our precious hands
that part of the wounded staggering world soul
we've each been given
to restore to health

In this, the briefest of moments,
this brief meeting,
our being here together,

O now,
Why don't hold in our heart
the dreams of future generations
and heal all injury
as our gift to be passed forward in time

I say,
Why don't we
abide in perfect, overflowing fullness
with every gift passed around
from one house to another
no limit

all the broken
isolated
born but not able to be fully born –
this, plus the heart

Part I: Introductory Prayers and Reflections - XI
Why don't we

and there is vow
this path made entirely of
somehow wanting,
needing to say
a mighty yes

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

(A note on this section: the parts in bold print are for formal practice, whereas the parts in normal type I read only occasionally, to refresh my memory, and improve my sense of the meaning.)

1. Motivation I – from ‘The Healing Buddha’, translated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche. Excerpts are in quotes, the rest are my own notes, including those sections in brackets [].

‘No matter what you do, it is essential to generate a positive motivation. Therefore, think as follows:

“The purpose of my life is to free all living beings from all their problems and the causes of these problems, which are [first] in their minds, [then in their emotions, energy patterns, and bodies] and to bring all beings peace and happiness, especially the peerless happiness of full enlightenment, which they desperately need. For me to be able to do this, my mind and body must be perfect, pure, and healthy.’

To you who can help, I pray: for all of our sake, as much as possible, please help me to alleviate the effect, and bring about the complete end to the cause of my own suffering, and obtain true health and happiness.

May I become a capable being – capable of knowing and responding to the suffering in the world, and offering whatever will help the most, temporarily and permanently.

Moreover, all these beings, my dear family, friends, and all my dear relations everywhere and at all times need health to be able to even hear teachings on how to be truly and completely free from their sufferings and attain happiness; to be able to receive encouragement and to be able to practice and achieve realizations, and live well, they definitely absolutely without question need health, long life, and freedom from such overwhelming and distracting obscuration, affliction and distress.

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

‘Therefore to accomplish this purpose, [of benefiting myself and all others everywhere, in all situations and in all times,] I am going to do this practice.’

**With so much need in this world, and in these lives that I love,
I pray that I will quickly, very quickly generate spontaneous great
compassion**

**Precious children, Venerable Elders, all my dear family and friends,
may this practice benefit us all.**

**O My ten directions, three times family,
May my life and this session of practice benefit us all
pervading all existences**

**every mind,
every body, every cell
earth and sky**

May this practice benefit us all

May this bring healing wherever it is needed.

**May this bring about the firm establishment of true health and
happiness for us all.**

**May this itself be the practice of all-inclusive, all encompassing
universal love and compassion.**

**‘To benefit living beings equal to the extent of space, I am going to
practice this healing meditation.’**

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

On the form of the Medicine Buddha

The Medicine Buddha, as ‘the manifestation of all the healing energy of all enlightened beings’ is seen as being in the nature of deep blue light. He sits in a cross legged position. In his right hand is the healing plant, the ‘arura’, and in his right hand, resting on his lap, is a bowl filled with long life nectars.

Here, the Ven. Thrangu Rinpoche discusses the position of the Healing Buddha's two hands:

‘His right hand is extended, palm outward, over his right knee in the gesture called supreme generosity. In it he holds the arura, or myrobalan, fruit. This plant represents all the best medicines. The position of his right hand and the arura which he holds represent the eradication of suffering, especially the suffering of sickness, using the means of relative truth. Sickness can be alleviated by adjusting the functioning of interdependent causes and conditions by the use of relative means within the realm of relative truth, such as medical treatment and so on.

‘His left hand rests in his lap, palm upward, in the gesture of meditative stability or meditation, which represents the eradication of sickness and suffering— and, indeed, the very roots of samsara— through the realization of absolute truth. From the point of view of either relative truth or absolute truth, the fundamental cause of sickness and suffering is a lack of contentment and the addictive quality of samsara. Therefore, to indicate the need for contentment, in his left hand he holds a begging bowl.’

On The Refuge Tree

Sometimes when doing Vajrayana practice, what is called a Refuge Tree is visualized. All of this is seen to be in the nature of light. Around the central

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

figure, whatever practice we are doing, one can visualize other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas that we have a connection with.

For example, White Tara can have the wonderful effect of truly strengthening the constitution and the central nervous system. Among other qualities, I bring this quality of enlightened action to mind at times when doing the Medicine Buddha practice, and imagine that She is there in the retinue of the Healing Buddha, bestowing her blessings as well. We can add to a single visualization simply, or we can just have the sense that those other Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are there, whatever brings the best results.

As Geshe Tenzin Wangyal teaches, all of this, seen as a support, represents your inner truth, your pure nature. Here, the forms are visualized, with faith and devotion, as a method to help us awaken our own Buddha Nature.

Motivation II – from The Sadhana of the Medicine Buddha, by H.H.
Dudjom Rinpoche

‘All beings are tormented by sufferings in Samsara – externally by physical sickness and internally by emotional disturbances and mental problems. In order to help free others from these sufferings, as well as ourselves, we need to take refuge in the Medicine Buddha [and what he represents].’

(Out of compassion for ourselves and others, first we turn through trust, faith and devotion to our sense of refuge. Doing so, we generate as a protective force, in ourselves and in the world, the power of the Healing Buddha. Then we cultivate a strong motivation to be of benefit.)

***‘Homage! (for) Myself and (for) the limitless sentient beings without exception
(I) take refuge in the Medicine Buddha, the Triple Gem.***

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

I will liberate all sentient beings equal to the sky, who have been our parents, to [the natural state,] the stage of the Medicine Buddha.'

(Not being an enlightened being myself, I admit that I don't know all of what this enlightenment is, therefore I give rise to the following intention)

Here I aim to clarify my mind, to purify faults, and to develop and bring out good qualities as far as I have known them. Furthermore, I aim through this practice to continue to learn what is possible, to awaken potentials, to gather and receive graces, to share this with others, and to help others as much as I possibly can, forever.

(therefore, trust, reliance, and setting my motivation, seeing my main teacher as the Healing Buddha)

**I take refuge, until I attain Enlightenment,
in the Buddha,
who is here my own root and lineage gurus
manifesting in the form of Medicine Buddha;**

**I take refuge in the Dharma,
in all the teachings on healing
and the Sangha
all helpful, Noble companions
existing everywhere and at all times**

I invite the Four Guests

Buddhas and Bodhisattvas

Benevolent helpers

Those I have a karmic connection with that I can help

and the Guests of compassion – those who suffer in any way

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

**By the merit I have accumulated through practicing Generosity
and the other Virtues as much as I can
May I accomplish true health and healing
and share that with all**

**May I accomplish Healing Buddha
for the benefit of all sentient beings**

Or, if one prefers, The Traditional Verse is

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

(Recite these verses, and the ones that follow, three times, or as much as you wish, to bring the meaning clearly to your mind. Here follow the Four Boundless Meditations, of Love, Compassion, Rejoicing in Virtue, and Equality of View, so vitally important to this practice)

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness

(or, May all beings have happiness and the causes of health and happiness)

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

I rejoice in all virtue

All are equal in deserving our love and our care

‘As we are all the Primordial Buddha, we have the essence of Buddha Nature. Realizing this, *relaxing* in the natural state is the absolute way

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

**of taking refuge and generating Bodhicitta (the mind of enlightenment).
When doing the practice, be free of subject, object, and action.'**

On the meaning of this, Dilgo Khyentse says, 'The twofold accumulation of merit and wisdom is indeed the way to buddhahood, but if it is adulterated with clinging, arrogance and condescension, it cannot bear fruit.

'More particularly, being free of attachments and concepts means being free of any clinging to whatever practice you may be doing as having some intrinsic reality.

'When a bodhisattva performs a beneficial action, he is totally free from clinging to the concepts of a subject who acts, an object who benefits from the action, and the action itself. That total absence of clinging makes the merit infinite.'

Om swabhava shuddho sarva dharma
swabhava shuddho hum

This is referred to as 'the emptiness mantra', and its meaning can be translated as, 'all things are fundamentally free of mind created concepts of self, and I am that intrinsically free nature'.

Or, more simply, meditate on the syllable Ah, and the experience of openness and clarity.

Rest mind.

2. Requesting Prayers – I

**Guru Medicine Buddha
Quintessence of all Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,
The Three Jewels and The Three Roots,**

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

**all vehicles
and all protectors,**

**You have taken oceans of vows
to remove every level of living beings' suffering,
and to replace it with peace, health, well-being,
strength, and happiness
May your vows ripen for us now**

**And because I have this same aim in my life,
to benefit others in this same way
to bring about healing
and the firm establishment of true health and happiness for all,
I pray you will help me**

**In these times especially,
I pray again and again that you will give me your blessing
to become more and more like you in this world
May I *completely* become you in this world**

**Just as you have done,
May I also accomplish this practice
and with this realization
actualize these qualities and activities
and**

May all beings benefit,

**May we all be free of the three poisons,
of greed, anger, and ignorance**

**May this bring healing of body and mind wherever it is needed
and the firm establishment of true health and happiness for all**

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

II– From The Healing Buddha’, translated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

**O Destroyer, Complete in All Qualities and Gone Beyond,
and you four medicinal goddesses,
please pacify immediately
the illnesses that afflict me now,
and help me to avoid all future sickness**

[and

**please pacify immediately
the illnesses that afflict the ones we pray for now,
and help them to avoid all future sickness]**

III – From A Stream of Lapis Lazuli, The supplication:

NAMO BEKENDZE MAHA RADZAYE

**You are endowed with an oceanic treasury of qualities and
merit;**

By the blessing of your inconceivable compassion

You calm the suffering and torment of sentient beings.

I supplicate you, Light of Lapis Lazuli.

Those bound by very intense greed

Are born in the hungry ghost realm.

**If they hear your name, they are said to be born human and
take delight in generosity.**

I supplicate you, victorious Menla.

Violating morality and abusing others,

Beings are born in the hell realms.

Hearing your name, they are said to be born in the higher

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

realms.

I supplicate you, King of Medicine.

**Whoever by repeated dissension and slander
Creates serious schisms and takes life,
Hearing your name, they cannot harm others.
I supplicate you, King of Medicine**

IV - From the Medicine Buddha Sadhana, translated by Lama Zopa

**The fully realized destroyer of all defilements, fully completed buddha
having fully realized the absolute truth of all phenomena, Guru
Medicine Buddha, King of Lapis Light, to you I prostrate, go for refuge,
and make offerings. May your vow to benefit sentient beings now ripen
for myself and others.**

3. Instructions for visualization and mantra recitation - I

It's traditionally taught that what's called 'self-generation' - where one visualizes oneself as the divine form - should only be done by those who have received the initiation of a particular Bodhisattva Divinity, but that 'front generation' - where one visualizes the divine form in space above and in front of oneself - can be done by anyone.

In front generation, we visualize (see with the mind's eye) above us, the Buddha or bodhisattva whose practice we are doing, and whose mantra we are reciting. It's helpful when doing this recitation and visualization, to see pure light and nectar streaming from the image we hold (that is also made entirely of pure light). These represent, or carry the blessings of the Buddha.

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

Traditionally, light goes out to the sources of benefit, making offerings out of respect, and prayerful requests, and then the light returns, bringing the blessings of these sources of healing benefit. These healing energies ‘fall upon us as light and nectar’, and dissolve into us. We then have the thought and image clearly in our mind that those we pray for receive this positive energy, and that they are completely healed by it, and made entirely well and strong. This form of prayer is referred to in the Tibetan Tradition as ‘gathering and spreading’.

At this time, it’s taught that we should also see ourselves and others, not in an ordinary way, not as flesh and bone, but as also being translucent and made entirely of light.

Many teachers advise, too, that when doing this visualization, we see ourselves and others in a pure land, made of light, and to make the visualization as beautiful, peaceful, perfect, and pure as we can. This is helpful.

Of course, all this can be as detailed or as simple as we like. We can also do the practice without any elaborate or detailed visualization. For example, we can just see a healing sun, with beautiful light streaming down from above us while reciting. Or without any visualization at all, we can just recite the mantra. We should do whatever works best for us.

As Lama Lodro teaches, even if you just practice for a short while, try and practice as purely and as perfectly as you can. This means concentrating on the visualizations, if any are used, and the sound of the mantra, without the mind wandering from that, doing the best we can.

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

II – From The Medicine Buddha Sadhana

As you recite the mantra, visualize as follows:

Purifying rays of light pour down from the Guru Medicine Buddha’s heart and holy body, eliminating your sicknesses and afflictions due to spirits, and their causes, all your negative karma and mental obscurations. Your body is completely filled with light and becomes clean-clear like crystal. Then the rays radiate out in all directions, purifying the sicknesses and afflictions of all mother sentient beings.

III - From The Healing Buddha’, translated by Khyabje Zopa Rinpoche

Light rays of the appropriate color emanate from each of the five deities at your heart. Your heart and body are full of blissful light, which completely purifies all disease, spirit harms, and negative actions and their imprints.

Beams of five-colored light radiate from all the pores of your body, while nectar flows down from the Healing Buddha’s begging bowl and the vases held by the four goddesses, completely filling your heart and body.

Generate the strong recognition that you have vanquished all disease forever and will never be sick again.

While concentrating single-pointedly on this visualization, recite the short or long Healing Buddha mantra seven, twenty-one, one hundred and eight, or more times.

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

IV - from The Sadhana of the Medicine Buddha, by H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche
(lightly edited)

When we recite the mantra, rays of light emanate from the heart of the Buddha, like a hundred rising suns, curing all the diseases and obscurations of beings, and their causes. By the power of this practice may all sufferings and problems be removed.

Recite while concentrating on the rays of light. At the end of the practice, by the power of these rays of light, sufferings are completely removed, like darkness is dispelled by light.

The long Medicine Buddha mantra can be done if one wishes:

Om Namo Bhagavate Behandze / Guru Baidurya / Prabha Radzaya /
Tathagataya / Arhate Samyaksam Buddhaya //
Tadyatha / Om Bhekhandzye Bekhhandzye / Maha Bekhhandzye
[Bekhhandzye]* / Radza Samudgate Svaha //

** The syllables in the mantras in brackets [] are optional. The Medicine Buddha mantra can be recited both with and without the optional syllables.*

The Medicine Buddha mantra:

**Tayata Om Bekandze Bekandze Maha Bekandze
Radza Samungate Soha**

At this point, any additional prayers or reflections can be read, such as ‘A list of things that are healing’, as one wishes and as time allows. This can be done in any of these ways: reading first, then recitation; alternating reading

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

and recitation a little at a time, or practice and then reading, in the manner or prayer.

4. Concluding practices

After the recitation of the Medicine Buddha mantra, recite the Vajrasattva mantra three times, to purify omissions and mistakes.

**Om Benzra Sato Samaya Manu Palaya Benzra Sato Tenopa Tishsta Dri
Bo Me Bhawa Suto Kayo Me Bhawa Supo Kayo Me Bhawa Anurakto
Me Bhawa Sarwa Siddhi Mem Prayatsa Sarwa Karma Su Tsa Me Tsi
Tang Shri Ya Ku Ru Hung Ha Ha Ha Ha Ho Ba Ga Wan Sarwa Ta Ta
Ga Ta Benzra Ma Me Mun Tsa Benzra Ba Wa Ma Ha Sa Ma Ya Sato
Ah**

Dissolve the visualization, if any was used. First the Pure Lands, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas dissolve into all beings, giving them joy and peace. Then all beings in the form of pure light dissolve into you. Then we imagine that we dissolve, from the soles of the feet upwards, and from the crown of the head downwards, meeting at a point of light at the heart. Pause for a moment and see this vividly and precisely. Then this dissolves into space, clear light, ‘like a rainbow dissolving into the sky’, and we rest our mind in that experience of clarity, free of concepts, and naturally awake, without grasping or clinging.

Or, more simply, from The Medicine Buddha Sadhana:

After you recite the mantra, visualize as follows:

The Guru Medicine Buddha melts into light and absorbs into your heart. Your mind becomes completely one with the dharmakaya, the essence of all buddhas.

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

To get the most out of any particular practice, at some point during the practice session, meditate quietly. This can be done after the recitation, then dedicating the merit. Or, read the dedication prayers, and then meditate quietly, with sitting and/or walking meditation, as you prefer.

Here are a few short dedication prayers that contain the complete meaning:

**By this virtue,
gathered together with all the merit
of all of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas,
Saints and Sages
of the ten directions and the three times:**

May all beings benefit.

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

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

**May our intentions equally penetrate
every being and place
with the true merit of Buddha's Way.**

**May this bring healing wherever it is needed.
May this bring about the firm establishment of true health and
happiness for us all.**

Part II: Selections from Various Medicine Buddha Sadhanas and Commentaries,
with additional prayers

**By this virtue,
May I attain the realization of Guru Medicine Buddha,
and bring all others to that same state.**

**May all holy teachers live long, and guide us until samsara ends.
And may there be peace and joy in all the world.**

To draw out the meaning of dedication – the meaning of what is given as well as the activity of dedication itself, additional prayers can be read and reflected upon. Some thoughts about dedication, and a few more prayers can be found at the conclusion of this short work, starting on page 312.

Tonglen

After the formal meditation session, we can practice tonglen, or taking and sending, to continue the energy of the practice. We do this by aiming, moment by moment, to remove as much suffering as we can, and to give as much happiness as we can.

Part III: Material for Reflection - I

A list of things that are healing

Beauty is healing
and love is healing

peace is healing

having the sense of space
and breathing in and out
deeply and slowly
is healing

Harmony is healing

Freedom from illusion is healing

fresh fruit is healing

and joy,
and a sense of humor and laughter are healing

(i.e., jokes are healing)

a conversation can be healing,
even as much as a single good thought
a single shared vision, insight
perspective,
is healing

kindness is healing -
the soft voice
the patience in a voice,
the peace in a voice,
the friendliness and warmth in a voice

Part III: Material for Reflection - I - A list of things that are healing

and the strength in a voice,
the kind attention in a voice,
the encouragement in a voice
these are healing

gratitude is healing

Traditions are a source of healing
Saints and great teachers are healing
and our respect and devotion connects us to them

Wisdom is healing
having a breakthrough,
insight is healing

trust,
faith in those that are worthy

drawing on the strength,
courage, and vision of our ancestors
this is healing

natural light is healing,
and human touch, when there is love, is healing
friendship is healing, and

the morning is healing,
and the afternoon,

and the night and the moon and stars
so lovely

enjoying the peace, freshness

Part III: Material for Reflection - I - A list of things that are healing

and joy of a new day

this is healing
the sense of
a new week, a new month, a new year
new beginnings –
these are healing

Grandmothers and Grandfathers,
with their kindness and gentleness and wisdom are healing

Mothers and Fathers are healing

the masculine,
the feminine,
balance,

these are healing

sometimes intimacies,
sometimes abstention

being married, or
being single,

starting a relationship,
keeping a relationship,
ending a relationship
and starting over

being part of a couple, or
being by oneself

hope or letting go when it does not serve our purpose

Part III: Material for Reflection - I - A list of things that are healing

any of these can be healing

children are healing
with their beauty, purity, playfulness and wonder,
their overflowing joy

thinking, rightly used
including quieting the mind
this is healing

being ethical is healing

remorse for wrongdoing is healing
regret and apology is healing,
forgiveness is healing,
as is self worth
shining from within

feeling sadness,
tears, the grieving process, when needed, is purifying, is healthy,
is natural, is healing

optimism, and unafflicted hope are healthy
and healing

hope is healing, having a great aim
and generosity is healing

maturity,
wisdom
perspective
stability,
composure

Part III: Material for Reflection - I - A list of things that are healing

these are healing

and dreams are healing
visions, sacred songs,

dances,
inspired drawing

the awe and wonder we feel,

pure perception,
suffused with a sense of the Divine
that is always here
always available
sacred outlook
is supremely beneficial,
supremely healing

and art is healing
need I say it? -
the endless burgeoning diversity,
the loveliness of one thing well done,
with great care, and boldness too...

a child's drawing

and

painting

frescoes,
silk miniatures,
the Dutch Masters
impressionists

Part III: Material for Reflection - I - A list of things that are healing

Picasso –
what wonders!

sculpture

dance

jig, waltz, ballet, tap, swing, pogo, pavane, salsa...

and

photography, poetry
architecture needlepoint
dress caress teaching

and on it goes

music is healing
melody, harmony, rhythm,
invention, expression

different great players
all with unique personalities and genius
expressed through their playing

and remarkable, unique instruments, each one of a kind
with all their individual textures and qualities

oboe clarinet guitar piano drum cello violin viola
trumpet xylophone flute sitar lute
viola da gamba kettle drum
harp voice (with kind and encouraging words written, like torn secret
messages, or spoken or sung)

Part III: Material for Reflection - I - A list of things that are healing

these and more
all of it,
all of it, healing

Dvorak, Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Handel, Haydn, Vivaldi, Dowland

Telemann, Boccherini, Rodrigo, Beethoven, Corelli

make your own lists today from these bright oceans...

the painters, the photographers eye

the authors and speakers' visions

the beauty and brilliance of writers is health
is life
is healing

Pablo Neruda, Walt Whitman, Julio Cortazar, Rumi, Hafiz –
these and others
the wonders of the world they show us
and their delight in showing us is healing

nature is healing
the sunlight itself
like food we eat, nourishment we enjoy
live juice
the fresh air
streams and shade, clouds, mountains,
and trees are extraordinary things,
if we look we can see it,
awesome and healing

as is the wood and the grass we stand and walk on –

Part III: Material for Reflection - I - A list of things that are healing

and the sound of flowing water
river, ocean, rain...

The pure elements are truly healing
pure fire, truly pure water

space, and allowing things to have space
pure air, pure earth
metal,
gemstones

and wide open spaces,

lakes, rivers
the sky,
and the great oceans
these are healing

May whatever is healing
touch whatever needs healing
and may that health and healing
pervade all existences
every mind, every body, every cell,
earth and sky,
O, my ten-directions three times family!

an easy walk in the park,
or on forests paths, fragrant
with leaves on the ground and
wind in the tall trees,
and birdsong,
delightful

Part III: Material for Reflection - I - A list of things that are healing

this is healing

all the wonderful smells of the earth
flowers, of all varieties

rose, tulip
lily
iris
freesia
sunflower
bird of paradise
daisy

and
herbs, and teas,
mint, lemon, orange

fruit with the glorious blossom of their ripening colors and flavors
strawberry, blueberry, mango, apple, pear, pluot
all of these are healing

and vegetables and grains and bread, and homemade soup
with barley and corn
give to our bodies and to our souls the power of the sun,
and the pure rain

all of these are
healthy and beautiful

and if needed, they are healing

food cooked with love is healthy, life giving

gifts given generously with love are divine, and are health and life

Part III: Material for Reflection - I - A list of things that are healing

and if need be, they are healing to us all, the whole circle

the food we receive with love and thankfulness
is healing

gifts received with gratitude are health and healing

simplicity, healing

sacred places, healing

loving pets, healing

angels and ancestors,

friendships,
now and recalled to mind

these are healing

thinking of
this same kind of action
in this and other places and times -
of people meditating on things that are healing
and engaging everywhere in beautiful, healing activities -
this brings joy,
this is healing

people of good will,

and stories of heroes,
famous or less known
these are healing

Part III: Material for Reflection - I - A list of things that are healing

these gifts continue – oh!

all the memories of a lifetime's happiness
well-being and peace
beauty, release

wonder, and celebration,
and gratitude

these are healing

gentleness
love
forgiveness

contentment

and relaxation
are healing

allowing things to have the space and time they need and deserve,
this is healing

generosity
patience (made of humility and deep knowing)

and also divine discontent, with patience and productive impatience,
is healing

vigor, zeal
clarity about
and devotion to our highest ideals
the aspirations, the vows we make,

Part III: Material for Reflection - I - A list of things that are healing

these are healing

having compassion for ourself
this is healing

and having compassion
the intention to remove another's suffering

this is healing
both for ourselves, and for others' sake

altruism,
the awakening mind,
the bodhi mind -
the Mahayana motivation:
the intention to benefit all others
in every way,
and the greatest possible ways
the most meaningful ways,
this is greatly healing

prayer,
mantra
samadhi
deep, calm and wakeful meditation
this is healing

sometimes talking something out,
sometimes quiet

depending on what we need
sometimes movement,
and exercise

Part III: Material for Reflection - I - A list of things that are healing

sometimes stillness, and rest, and sometimes naps too

sometimes eating well
and sometimes fasting

these are healing

sometimes tenderly taking care of ourself,
diligently, devotedly
and sometimes getting outside of ourself for a while
extending our world view

sometimes being alone,
and sometimes being with others,

all of these are healing

faith
humility

quieting the mind
respect for the fundamental,
immutable value,
the tremendous richness of oneself and others

these are healing

ethics
the attainment of coolness,
non-harming,
and aiming to benefit as much as possible
meditation
and wisdom –
in the sense of a transcendent insight

Part III: Material for Reflection - I - A list of things that are healing

an awakened perspective
with kindness
energetically seeing through all of the concepts of self -
these are healing

allowing for change, growth
generosity, patience and encouragement
moving toward the ideals we have

breathing in and out
peacefully
with an awareness of our body and our feelings
with gentleness
and with love

is healing

friendliness,
warmth

walking meditation
sitting meditation
with clarity and stable mindfulness
deep concentration

breathing and smiling
these are healing

Part III: Material for reflection - II

I believe in the power of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas to benefit living beings, in temporary, provisional, relative and ultimate ways.

I believe the great kindness and compassion of my teachers is healing.

I know there are healing angels that will come if we call on them,

and that there are benefactors in the world who offer their prayers on behalf of others.

I believe in the great benefit that comes about because of dedicated souls praying for us.

I believe the sacred name of Jesus always has the power to heal.

I believe the blessings of the saviors of mankind are available to us all.

I believe in the healing power of the Three Jewels.

I know mantra can heal, comfort, nourish,
assist us in our lives,
and in awakening the enlightened aspect of our nature.

I believe the world is rich with health and healing conditions.
I believe sky, earth, animal, plant, flower, wind, fire, sunlight, music,
Traditions, ancestry, and all the love this world has known
is health for us all.

Part III: Material for reflection - III

A Prayer to the Saints

Ajaan Mun

Ajaan Lee

I invoke you! I call to you!

Come! Bring your presence here, now

Ajaan Buddhadasa

Ajaan Chah

I invoke you! I call to you!

U Pandita Sayadaw

Ajaan Maha Boowa

Maha Ghosananda

I invoke you! I call to you!

Come! Bring your presence here, now

Tsong Khapa,

Gyalwa Karmapa, Rangjung Rigpay Dorje

Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso

Lama Yeshe

Lama Zopa

I invoke you! I call to you!

Come! Bring your presence here, now

Kyabje Sakya Trizin

Jetsun Chimay Luding

Chogye Trichen Rinpoche

I invoke you! I call to you!

Part III: Material for reflection - III
A Prayer to the Saints

Dezhung Rinpoche
Thrangu Rinpoche
Bokar Rinpoche
I invoke you! I call to you!
Come! Bring your presence here, now

Kyabje Kalu Rinpoche
Lama Lodo
Kenpo Karthar
I invoke you! I call to you!
Come! Bring your presence here, now

Ananda Mayi Ma
Swami Sivananda
I invoke you! I call to you!

Ramana Maharshi
Nisargadatta Maharaj
Swami Vivekananda
Paramahansa Yoganandaji
Swami Satchitananda
Swami Yatiswarananda
I invoke you! I call to you!

Meher Baba
Hazarat Inayat Kahn
Pir Vilayat Kahn
Rumi
Hafiz

I invoke you! I call to you!
Come! Bring your presence here, now

Part III: Material for reflection - III
A Prayer to the Saints

Lord Jesus
Lord Buddha
Mother Mary
I invoke you! I call to you!
Come! Bring your presence here, now

Mother Teresa
Abraham Isaac Kook
Padre Pio
I invoke you! I call to you!

William Butler
Dion Fortune
I invoke you! I call to you!

Uchiyama Roshi
Deshimaru Roshi
Master Dogen
Bodhidharma
Patriarch Hui-Neng
Venerable Hsuan-Hua
I invoke you! I call to you!
Come! Bring your presence here, now

Kenpo Tsultrim Gyatso
Thay Nhat Hahn
I invoke you! I call to you!
Come! Bring your presence here, now

Jamgon Kongtrul
Jamyang Khyentse Chokyi Lodro
Dudjom Rinpoche
Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche
Tsultrig Rinpoche

Part III: Material for reflection - III
A Prayer to the Saints

Chatral Rinpoche
Chagdud Tulku
I invoke you! I call to you!

Lama Tharchin
I invoke you! I call to you!
Come! Bring your presence here, now

Khyabje Ling Rinpoche
Khyabje Trijang Dorje Chang Rinpoche
Serkong Rinpoche
Song Rinpoche

Kenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche
I invoke you! I call to you!

Geshe Rabten
Geshe Sopa
Nyoshul Khen Rinpoche
Gen Lamrimpa
I invoke you! I call to you!

Geshe Dhargyey
Geshe Tsultrim
Milarepa
Gampopa
Atisha
Serlingpa
Longchenpa
Nagarjuna
Padmasambhava
I invoke you! I call to you!
Come! Bring your presence here, now

Part III: Material for reflection - III
A Prayer to the Saints

All you Christian Saints
Native Healers,
with your allies, helpers,
and the elements
Angels
I invoke you! I call to you!
Come! Bring your presence here, now

Tulku Urgyen Rinpoche
Geshe Wangdu
Akong Tulku
Lama Kunga
Lama Jigme Rinpoche
Tulku Thondup
Pabonkha Rinpoche
Penor Rinpoche

Za Choe Rinpoche
Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche

I invoke you! I call to you!
Come! Bring your presence here, now

Please be my witness
I pray to you
Please grant me your blessings
You Living Buddhas,
Masters of the Great Perfection
You who have Jewel-like bodhicitta
You who are like the sun and the moon

Glorious Sages,
Foe-Destroyers,
Exemplars,

Part III: Material for reflection - III
A Prayer to the Saints

Benefactors of living beings,
protectors of living beings,
teachers,
healers

Pray be my witness
Please help me to pacify my mind,
and, just as you have done,
to accomplish the qualities and stages of the path

Pray, grant me your blessing
help me to control my mind and emotions;
to live a good life
so that I can benefit others
as it should be

You beings of great wisdom and compassion
I bow to you
I pray to you

You liberated beings
Great compassionate spiritual guides

Please help me to purify the two obscurations-
and complete the two collections

Please help me in this, my hour of need

Immaculate Buddhas,
Foe-destroyers,
Liberators,
Arhats,
Bodhisattvas
you who have indestructible vows

Part III: Material for reflection - III
A Prayer to the Saints

Please give me your blessing

Pray help me to be free of suffering and the causes of suffering
and to have happiness and the causes of happiness
and please help me to help others to be free of suffering
and to have happiness

You who have the qualities of being ripened and free
mature understanding
stable realization
always present kindness and compassion
Please give me your blessing

By the power of the unfailing Three-Jewels' compassion,
and by the natural force of the need that exists
in me and in the world,
in response to the cries and prayers of living beings
in the six realms and bardo,
may the aims of this prayer be fulfilled
exactly as they were made

Notes:

1. Another way to practice A Prayer to the Saints is just to read their names, followed by the request, Please give me your blessings, or words to that effect.
2. It also works to have a list of names of friends and benefactors that one can read and reflect on. These are the people we feel can supported by, because of their excellent qualities. Thich Nhat Hanh, in *The Energy of Prayer* speaks of how connecting with people we have a good relationship with can help us through difficult times. See page 215 for an excerpt from this book.

Part III: Material for reflection - III
A Prayer to the Saints

4. If there are teachers or saints from other traditions you have made a connection with, it can help to also list their names on a sheet of paper, to connect with them and receive their benefit.

Part III - Material for reflection
Ten Poems - I - astringent and balm

astringent and balm,
heating and cooling,
bringing movement,
and solidity

kindness
and quiet

these are all within the realm of your knowledge

every variety of flowers and plants,
fruits
sacred places
minerals, animals
and spirits of different kinds

Traditions – stories of what men and women have done
and have passed on to us
to be used, added to
and given to future generations
next week, next month,
next year, and on after that

the timely word
color
laughter
music
and the harmonies and melodies of
dream,

Part III - Material for reflection
Ten Poems - I - astringent and balm

and clear reason
the bright day

all are within your kindness and giving

samadhi

austerities and their fruit

right celebration
and transformation

prayer
mantra
visualization
these you bring

May all share in these blessings

May all beings benefit

Part III: Ten Poems – II – this is what bodhicitta does

this is what bodhicitta does

At once: with one state of mind:

Comfort the lonely
 ease the pain of the sick
 heal
 clear away confusion
 teach
 nourish, strengthen
 assist in the awakening of inspiration,
 clear, fresh energy

give joy
 create harmony
 assure safety and health into the future time
 for all

actually produce from the body this substance
 ‘one touch of its divine sap quenches even the word ‘suffering’’

take away anger, fear
 give calm,
 strengthen constitutions

give life
 help good things to grow, to flower

remove obstacles

Part III: Ten Poems - II - this is what bodhicitta does

proclaim universal integrity and equality

remove poverty at once and give riches

rise up, lift up, give hope

remove feelings of illness, and give health

remove feelings of numbness and give joyous feeling, awakened

teach without words

and with words

you are *this*

you are *also* this

you are much more **this**

than what you believed yourself to be

universal light

accomplishing all purposes

instantly transforming a hell

into a pure land

transforming danger to safety

accomplishing all good things

Part III: Ten Poems - III – Parents praying for their children

Parents praying for their children
children praying for their parents
brothers praying for their sisters and brothers and in-laws
sisters praying for their brothers

dear friends praying for their dear friends
compassionate helpers praying for another

today, right now

people praying for themselves –
reaching for light, and peace, and safety

saints and kind hearted people with some freedom
praying for the whole world, and all life in it

their cries reach for the heavens themselves
and who would not be moved if they heard them?,
and hearing, who would not give their whole heart
and every breath
to join in their prayers?

for the life and health of their child
parent
sister
brother
friend
loved one
to ease their suffering
to ease their fears
to give them breath

O, may it be so!

Part III: Ten Poems - IV - Praise to All Healers

Praise to All Healers

Praise to all natural born doctors, nurses, midwives,
helpful friends and strangers, kind mothers, fathers,
and traditional healers

Praise to all those who work in all the fields of medicine,
with right intention and with diligence,
and to those who explore the full range of methods to bring health

I celebrate those having even the thought to benefit
even in some small way
I honor those with the intention to relieve even some minor pain
all the way to those dedicating their lives and working to cure all
major diseases and their causes

I celebrate the upholding of traditions that heal
and the conception and actualization of new technologies,
methods that provide insight into the conditions in the body and aid healing

My deepest respect to those who dedicate their lives to helping others
to those who research into causes and their resolution to cure illnesses –
May your aims be swiftly accomplished!
and my profound respect to those who with their lives produce true
medicines

And praise to all medicines *themselves* –
naturally occurring or compounded
to all the healing substances of this earth

the pure water, the blessed rain;
the clean air in the free flowing breath,
and the wind carrying beautiful scents;

Part III: Ten Poems - IV - Praise to All Healers

Praise to the sacred fire, to the light and warmth of the sun
and the sun in all my friends' kind smiles

I bow to the seed, to the root,
to the bark, branch, green leaf, flowers and fruits,
and to all the vegetables and grains that sustain and enable our walking each
day on this earth

O wondrous earth, boundless blessing!

This fertile ground, uncountable plant life, spice, stone, bejeweled,
iron gold silver beauties

and the valleys, our treasures, fields, ranges that stretch ever onward, forests
of mysterious welcoming life, breathing for us
scents that enrich us with each breath and remembrance

streams shining, echoing in us, rivers and treasure-oceans
our seeing is only a small cup spilling everywhere these miraculous joys
pearl sea-weeds, strange, long-lived nomads one with the sea
where the edges of our worlds lightly meet, tho we are also one
in this vast life

All the beautiful sounds, colors born to our eyes on this day, and scents that
uplift – these are healing treasures!

I celebrate this sky outside that wakes and feeds me at the start of each day,
and throughout the day

cloud wonders and the movement of awakening light
the movement of light throughout the day
to dusk, and then the moon and stars that appear
holding us in their palm

Part III: Ten Poems - IV - Praise to All Healers

In this world, I fully rejoice in the activities of those so empowered
who care for others,
in all the lineages throughout time that have accomplished,
and are right now engaged in curing with prayer,
with mantra and visualization,
with substances,
and with advice of love and encouragement

I rejoice in the Supreme Healer
Universal Medicine,
Acting as the personal physician to all beings,
giving freely and abundantly to all
the wisdom that is clarifying,
the warmth contained in even the smallest significant gesture

Peace that endures
diamond-life
fresh light for us all

I rejoice in
the Master of Remedies
to you I bow with respect
and gratitude

I rejoice in the hard work and dedication of students and scholars
To all teachers everywhere who show the way, I bow in profound gratitude –
everywhere and in all times,
they are a blessing to us all!

To all that is love
I celebrate, sing songs of continuous praise
to all the generosity of spirit that is always giving so much,
and so joyfully

Part III: Ten Poems - IV - Praise to All Healers

All the beauty, art, music, and humor;
I celebrate all the healing dances and songs,
poetry and words, painting and sculpture,
renewing visions

Here where there is silence, meditative peace,
insight that liberates totally from suffering and the cause;
for the ethics, meditation, wisdom, transformation and release
I sing silent songs of celebration

To all the spiritual currents set in motion,
maintained and increased by people in traditions
coming from the past, into this present time,
and especially to my main teacher,
the one who has helped me the most in this life,
I bow in gratitude
and with total devotion

To all the healing angelic forces, I pay homage
And to the Divine Source itself
I offer every form of honor

The unseen Protector's hand
the guardian of beings
of men, women, and children of every class,
age, race, time and place

O! The inner vision!

In the purification of faults,
the freedom from bondage,
becoming liberated
the welcoming home after too long an absence,
I celebrate

Part III: Ten Poems - IV - Praise to All Healers

Courage born, and a voice;
 faith renewed,
 sensing activities branching in thousands of ways
 from one source,
 this closeness,
 purity, and lasting joy

I rejoice in all that is healing,
 in the truth of all the healers that have ever been,
 are now, or will be in the future!
 Whatever their capacity to cure,
 be it small or be it very great,
 I celebrate fully, whole-heartedly!

To all kind teachers, I bow
 To all solitary practitioners, and healing groups
 I offer my deepest respect and appreciation

All the prayers, today, tonight, I celebrate!
 In the use of every effective means, I rejoice!

May I always support your good efforts,
 in every way, and as much as is needed
 for the fulfillment of your aims
 May all obstacles to the fulfillment of the wishes of all healers
 be removed at once

To all those who work to bring about
 true health of body and mind in living beings,
 I bow

And I bow to individual healers everywhere,
 I regard you all with admiration, heart-felt gratitude,
 and with the utmost respect

Part III: Ten Poems - IV - Praise to All Healers

Here and now I take up fully
 the vows of all healers, those of this time,
 and of all times

Just as healers of the past, present and future have this wish,
 now also, so do I
 May I remove the sufferings of living beings
 and establish them in pure, lasting happiness
 May I be able to do this perfectly, and May I do this perfectly

Whatever illnesses there are, symptoms and causes
 as quickly as possible may I completely remove them all

Always and everywhere,
 I rejoice in every single degree of lessening
 all the way up to the complete and permanent
 cessation of pain, fever, sorrow, loneliness
 grief and distress of living beings

And I myself will engage in accomplishing these
 this I breathe for them

To the Supreme Redeemers of humankind
 the Great Founders of the world's living spiritual traditions
 to Lord Buddha, to Lord Jesus, and others,
 I bow again and again
 and I pray
 in order to be able to fulfill our purpose here on earth,
 may we *all* receive the glorious rain of your kindness

All these,
 and if there are any sources of healing I left out,
 didn't mention or know about,
 they are all invited here to be honored
 and to join this celebration

Part III: Ten Poems - IV - Praise to All Healers

this festival of love

Come all you healers! This is your time!,
the season of health and well being!,
the nectar of peace and bliss!

Tears of release spontaneous remission
I rejoice and cry tears of happiness with the mother and father
as their child is healed
I am with them even now!

A lame person walks!
I shout with them in joy, even now!

An addict loses all craving,
regains strength and balance
dignity and beauty,
I am with them,
we are walking into that open field together
brimming with delight

The blind see! The deaf mute hears and speaks!
Wonder!

A slow person, and the thick and arrogant too
gain full wisdom
O blessing!

Every single chronic disease dispelled!
Forever gone!
Fear vanquished!

Death overcome!
Confusion cleared away
no more to return

Part III: Ten Poems - IV - Praise to All Healers

Every life given back
 I celebrate!
 and O the gratitude each time!
 shining forests

For this, in this moment and from this point forward, always,
 I am with them all

In this present time
 all this I gather into myself,
 into my heart of hearts
 and I sing out with joy:

May all the incredibly pure
 noble works of healers everywhere
 effectively flourish forever!

May all completely pure positive intentions
 bear their excellent fruit swiftly and perfectly
 so that even the words 'illness', or 'disease'
 are never heard again in this, or in any other world!

May joy reign in the hearts of all

The ground calls the cloud and rain
 the rain cloud calls the ground
 I am coming to rain on you
 hear my praise
 be fed and brightened by it

Hungry people call for food
 and food calls to those that are hungry
 runs swiftly to those that are hungry
 saying
 here – take me, eat me

Part III: Ten Poems - IV - Praise to All Healers

let me be strength for your limbs
and light for your eyes and intellect;
color for your cheeks
and comfort, strength and delight for your heart

By all that is good,
by all the virtue created here,
naturally existing,
and in the Sources of virtue
Right now and forevermore
May all beings enjoy every level of pure happiness

May all have good health,
a sound mind and body

May every noble realization increase,
and may the supreme state be attained by all!

(meditate quietly at this point; then dedicate the merit)

Part III: Ten Poems - V - Help them first

Help them first

Lords, Masters, Great Benefactors

I know there are people today
who are much worse off than I
help them first

There are those having their limbs pulled off
eyes pulled out
there are those being raped, bombed,
living in terror
trapped in sexual slavery

I am not one of them today
help them first

There are those stricken with grave diseases
terrible

I am not one of them
help them first

There are those exhausting themselves totally
praying with all their might
that a loved one be spared

I am not one of them today
and so help them first, I pray

There are those with no one
with no education

Part III: Ten Poems - V - Help them first

and no means to get out of suffering

I have a little means sometimes, to ease the pain
and to restore some small hope

so, help them first, I pray

with this whole world suffering
and no way out appearing to them

I pray, go to them, help them,
appear in whatever form they can relate to

I'm not completely blind,
at least not all of the time

so, help them first, I pray

but my life calls out too
for being the smallest part of what it should be -
entangled, wasted, heartbroken,
crushed,
with all its' infinite desires and remorse
isolated, sad...

I would help too but this is how it is-
I'm trapped, frozen, bound

I know I don't suffer as many do
their cries pierce the earth itself
but your compassion is limitless
and so I ask
out of the super-abundance of your compassion and ability

Part III: Ten Poems - V - Help them first

out of the super-abundance of your grace
that you help me also to heal my life
and live my full life
so that I and all the others I know
can be best cared for by me

Help my sister first
help my parents first
help my friends who suffer first

help all those who suffer more than I do first:
the homeless, the hungry, the destitute, the desperate,
the addicted
the benighted, the angry, the terrified and trembling

help all these before me
but then help me too
to live the best life I can live

I want to be more than a paralyzed, powerless bystander here,
tormented by what I see,
or avoiding it all

I would help too
and assist, and feed, and encourage

so, for others directly
and for myself
and then others indirectly

I pray,
heal us all

Part III: Ten Poems - VI

Buddhism is not for those who never fall
never fail

Buddhism is not for those
with iron wills
and unflagging determination
who never want to quit

it's for those, like myself
who fall down so often and so hard
that we don't know where we are sometimes

who give up many thousands of times a day
and try to hide from any reflection back at us
of what seems like the oceans of failures
that accuse and haunt and threaten

somewhere else entirely
other people prayed
stayed put
gained blazing clarity about the things we need
and somewhere else, other than this poor place
someone planted, tended, harvested,
and sent food out to the hungry crippled world

I cross on the other side of the street when I see a church
temple, mosque or synagogue
I feel not worthy of anything more
than cleaning the sidewalk outside after they close

but, being smarter than I am
immeasurably
the side door is open
and no one is inside

Part III: Ten Poems - VI - Buddhism is not for those

it's warm even one step inside
and the frozen wind doesn't catch me here
and so my feet
which also seem to know more than me most of the time
drag me in
where even the smell of the fresh bread
left on the table for visitors
is food for me

because we fall
are bloodied and afraid
stranded and alone
this vision appears
and words to go with it
open in my dreams

late, when everything else is settled
I hear this voice calling

it's because we need more than a little help sometimes
that Buddhism exists

let everything else be washed away -
those precious few prayers
born of transcendent knowledge
can be my home

Part III: Ten Poems - VII

Rain, O Rain

Rain on every rooftop
and in every coffee cup

Rain to wash clean bodies
and to make for clear eyes

Rain for the valley to green,
and the fruit to swell

Rain for there to be
freshness and joy everywhere,
light, blessings and peace,
and chilled cups
eagerly waiting travelers

Rain to fill all the world
with words spoken like rain

Rain to reveal secret passageways
and rain to break the drought
and to bring people dancing back out into the street

Rain, O rain,
and wash cups, utensils, clothes,
bodies that were caked and scabbed

Rain until there is freshness everywhere

O rain and rain and rain
soak the ground
and soak the roots of things
until there are flowers springing up

Part III: Ten Poems - VII - Rain, O Rain

meeting wonder with wonder
out of gratitude, gifts, and then more gratitude

Rain and quench all thirst, years of thirst
decades, generations of thirst,
whole cultures of thirst

Rain and fill all manner of shapes,
all manner of reservoir

Rain, O rain so that
for generations to come
joy and ease will have a new song

Part III: Ten Poems - VIII

O what will you gather from the mountain?
What will you gather from the mountain?

I will gather whatever I and my family need

And have you seen and felt what you and they call for?

Yes, its shape is familiar to me
its weight is familiar to me
the quality of what they ask for
is familiar to me
This is knowledge stored in my own body,
from living with these things

What else will you bring back from the mountain?

To be sure, I'll return with
things that have hundreds of uses
those things of which we can say
truly, there is no end to their usefulness
like clear pure water, like a bed to rest on
like a good pair of shoes,
or a well made cooking pot

peace, health, clarity, the will to give
knowledge, confidence, courage,
joy, love, forgiveness, light,
strength, gentleness, wonder

These I will return with from the mountain
These will be the treasures I will carry home
to all my loved ones,
friends, family,
adversaries and strangers

Part III: Ten Poems - VIII - What will you gather from the mountain?

Tho even now I taste the joy
of their receiving these gifts
it is so, even now
they receive these things in some way
even now

And what if you lose what you've gathered on the mountain?
What if it's lost or stolen?
What if you lose what you've gathered on your way home?

I'll tell you –
no matter.

If even the smallest part of these treasures is kept
and can be given
it has all been worth while.

If even so much as one seed makes it home,
that's enough, and more than enough.

But make no mistake –
my will is to give it all, and more
so needed are these things
in my life and in all the lives of the world
and so I'll study the trail
to treasures and return

and I tell you
with much help
I'll defeat the enemies of giving
whatever they may be

and I'll be patient too

Part III: Ten Poems - VIII - What will you gather from the mountain?

I'll return to the mountain as many times as I need to
hundreds of times, thousands of times
millions of times

and even then, if my hands cannot carry these gifts, then,
they will be like friends I've made while there
and once I'm again home, I will call
and they will come
all of them
streaming down from the mountain
to be well received

Part III: Ten Poems - IX

Oceans of gratitude
for my parents,
teachers, friends, family,
kind strangers

What is given
is not in the nature of coming and going
These shining gifts,
imperishable,
are the best kind of food

And there is no way to measure what is given,
by people,
by the natural world
and how it endures,
and so also
no measure
to my joy and lasting thanks

One person
pointed out the path out of the wilderness

Another gave me bread
and made possible all that has followed

I don't know how or why
but now, with these whole worlds of gratitude in me,
some secret celebration for what was received
continues
and this much is not to be missed

Wherever I am
I eat the fruit of that flourishing tree
and am sustained by it

Part III: Ten Poems - IX
Oceans of Gratitude

and am made large by it,
feeling joy
too large
to be caught in any contracted feeling

Because of the kindnesses of others
too many to count
and each too large, by far
we have been made bright,
and given the peace of not possibly asking for more
we have been made rich

Along with everything else in our lives
that may be counted as dull, or plain, or uphill
we, who are of great good fortune also,
surely must wake asking:
how can we hold the memories
or hold the knowledge of leaving?

What others do or don't do
feel or don't feel
with what they are given -
that's not my business
I have no say in the matter

but for those
with oceans of gratitude,
I'll say it -
nothing of any gift can ever be lost
and what is received can be opened again
at any time
and more of what is here
can be drawn from

Part III: Ten Poems - IX
Oceans of Gratitude

to sustain us

the more I look at
what a simple person like myself
has been blessed to receive
the more clear it is
how gifts re-appear
again and again
and continue on
in the color and flavor
of all that we dream, think and do.

Part III: Ten Poems - X

A healing prayer

May mothers give comfort
and fathers give comfort
and grandparents give comfort

May Buddhas and Bodhisattvas give comfort
and friends and kind strangers give comfort
May peoples' goodwill everywhere give us comfort

May this whole beautiful natural world give us comfort,
directly, as memory, or in story
through its stable, joyful presence,
as vision, or as scent

May music give us comfort
and may our dreams give us comfort

May good food, shared between family and friends
give us comfort
and may art give comfort,
peace, inspiration and nourishment

and the bravery, lifelong devotion
and aspirations people have for worthwhile ideals -
may these bring us all peace

May we all be comforted by all the grace there is in the world
and may we all receive all this peace, and rest
assurance and love

May those who are lonely or afraid

Part III: Ten Poems - X
A healing prayer

be comforted

May the confused and those who feel forgotten
be comforted

May the young and old be comforted

May those who suffer in any way
be comforted

May those who are grieving be comforted

May those who have experienced a loss
all be comforted

May those who are agitated, restless or afraid
be comforted

May the addicted be comforted

May the afflicted be comforted

The despondent – comfort them!, comfort them!
lift up their hearts

and those with bad memories –
comfort them...

Those who suffer in the lower realms,
or in lower-realm like experiences –
comfort them
bring them joy and peace

Part III: Ten Poems - X
A healing prayer

And those engaged in confused actions,
leading to suffering,
may they be comforted

May all those harmed by another
be comforted

Wherever there is war,
on earth or in people's minds
I pray,
comfort them
May they have blissful peace

Strengthen their constitutions –
these bodies of light
Shield them,
protect them –

And those in a bardo –
may they all be led to a Pure Land
by the blessings and calming light of love,
by the peaceful joy that is nourishing

May mothers give comfort
and fathers give comfort
and grandparents give comfort

May Buddhas and Bodhisattvas give comfort
and friends and kind strangers give comfort
May peoples' goodwill everywhere give us comfort

Part III: Ten Poems - X
A healing prayer

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May we all be comforted by all the grace there is in the world
and may we all receive all this peace, and rest
assurance and love

Part IV – Essays I

A few words on the art of contemplation

We're all familiar with the term 'contemplation', but for many of us what is meant by the word is not very well defined. For this reason, I thought it might be useful to set down a few ideas on the subject, for those who are interested.

To begin with, in it's most basic sense, I think of contemplation as the art of touching the truth of something with our intuition. It is an art in that there should be creativity in the process, as well as discipline. We turn an idea over in our thinking, looking at it in different ways to get a better sense of our subject. And more than the intellect is, or should be involved. We all know how intellectual knowledge alone doesn't go very far. When something is known with the intuition however, the effect is more thorough going.

Three elements are always present when there is contemplation. First, we are giving something time. This proves itself: we can't rush if we want our reflections on a subject to unfold some meaning for us.

Second, we are making space for that subject – in other words, we are not crowding ourselves with thoughts of many other things, or other activities. In a manner of speaking, we've made space, inwardly.

And the third element that makes up contemplation is attention. If we are just present with something but kind of spacing out or distracted, then that can't be called reflection or contemplation. Also, if we are doing many things, the mind would be too dispersed to connect in any deep way with a subject. We need to give time, and space, and to bring our mind, or our focused awareness, to whatever we are contemplating.

Part IV - Essays I - A few words on the art of contemplation

All contemplative traditions have concentration in common, and for a very good reason. This is something we need to develop if we're aiming for a deeper understanding and a greater effect from whatever we study.

In general, in any meditation that we do, we should aim for it to be free of distraction, dullness, and laxity. This means that, however our mind is behaving on any particular day, over time in meditation we should be cultivating stability of mind, clarity, and a real sharpness or vividness to our perception. Then whatever subject we study can bear fruit.

Just a bit further – the entry into contemplation

As we engage a subject, we meet our own mind. And here we come to what I think of as an important threshold. We need to ask: What level of mind will we bring to our subject? This is so important to consider, because it determines how much we will get out of whatever we meet.

Contemplation and nourishment

There are many sources of benefit we can connect with all around us – in beautiful nature, in the food we eat, in our own breath, in our relationships, and via the books we read. How much we are able to receive from them, though, depends entirely on how deeply we are able to engage them.

Think how it is when someone picks up a sacred text: The Bible, the Tao Te Ching, The Bhagavad Gita, or others. In some cases, a person stays relatively on the surface, and very little of the meaning or guidance, gets through to them. Another person reads and reflects deeply and a greater benefit comes to them.

What level of mind with we bring to our subject?

Part IV - Essays I - A few words on the art of contemplation

Again, a person can walk through the woods, with tall trees all around, or go to see a teacher, a representative of a Tradition... how much they gain from it depends of how deeply they experience these things.

Setting aside time, and energy, and learning to give attention to things, we can learn to touch life deeply, and to be nourished by nature, food, our breath, relationships, and the Traditions we study. Humility and gratitude can help us a great deal in this regard. They help us to be able to receive the good that is available. Of course, this is as it should be.

Being well nourished is complete in itself, and necessary. And it is important in another way as well. Being well fortified is needed before we can touch in any productive way the difficult things in life. Usually we have some choice. It is (hopefully) not the case that we have one extreme situation after another to handle. Usually there is some latitude in how we live our lives in more relatively peaceful times, and it's important to take advantage of that fact. Instead of slacking off in those times, we can cultivate strength, and access to our inner resources. We can learn about ourselves, our own depths. Then, when contemplating something difficult, we can ask: What level of mind will we use to touch our problems?

We have some choices. If we touch a subject, or our problems with a relatively superficial mind, or one that is afflicted with anger, or greed, or fear, then the result of our engagement with these problems will be at best superficial, and could quite possibly make the situation worse.

If there is a principle at work in contemplation it is this: that some benefit, or some resolution to a problem, comes only from accessing a deeper level of consciousness. When it comes to difficult situations, the same holds true whether we are talking about a personal problem, or an interpersonal conflict, or a collective problem. Generally speaking, what's true on every level is that we need to bring to bear our greater resources of creativity and intelligence.

Part IV - Essays I - A few words on the art of contemplation

What level of mind will we use ? – an illustration:

Take, for example, if we are considering a particular problem we have, with fear or anger, or with a some people we meet, the question applies: what level of mind will we use to meet our problems?

With one kind of mind, say an angry mind, or a fearful one, the result only stays on the surface – and nothing substantial changes. With another level of mind brought to bear, however, the situation or problem can be seen in a new light, considered in new ways, such that the beginnings of a solution can be found.

Again, with one kind of mind, meeting a disturbed person with anger in ourselves, we further that problem, or make new ones. With another, deeper level of mind though, some positive response can come forward as a result. We can find emerging from ourself a response that is the antidote to whatever problem we are facing. This is because our fundamental nature is inherently rich, resourceful, creative and intelligent. It is a matter of bringing this level of our nature to meet the challenges we face. That is one of the things that the art of contemplation is for.

Buddha Nature is another name for our original nature

From what I can tell, in Buddhism there is a conscious effort not to be attached too much to any one way of saying things. That said, there is also something practical about the ways Traditions have learned to phrase things. Our original nature, beyond concepts is described as open, clear, joyful, pure, intelligent, naturally kind and compassionate. The reason this is not known by everyone is because of people's obscurations, the concepts people hold of being less than this, and the emotional afflictions that 'color' the mind, and make it difficult to see. A person in any time and culture though, who we would describe as healthy and normal would respond in basically

Part IV - Essays I - A few words on the art of contemplation

the same ways to seeing a frightened child, or to a person who is hungry or cold. This points to something important about ourselves.

When we know this universal aspect of our own nature, life becomes easier. It is a solid foundation of values, and a sense of belonging to something far greater than our own small circle of involvements. I bow to all those people everywhere who are reaching out to others spontaneously out of our deep nature. How can I not honor that, wherever it happens?

At times, in self-cultivation, we are aiming to produce some good quality of mind in ourselves, and at times perhaps we are engaging some difficult situation. With our fundamental humanity, our deep nature as a basis, it can happen that we are continually generating positive energies. This is how reflections such as ‘I live in this world’ should be read – with this aim in mind – to produce a response from our deeper nature.

I remember writing a poem a few years ago that began

‘their drunkenness makes me sober,
 their sleep – so shocking!, makes me wake up
 Their violence makes me gentle,
 as an innocent child
 and their greed makes me generous –
 the more they take and demand
 hoard
 more than they could spend in a thousand lifetimes –
 the more I give whole worlds away,
 light-filled, boundless

When this happens, to any extent at all, as some response coming forward from meeting the world as it is, it’s not something we do consciously – it’s more of a reflex from some deeper level of ourself. We can’t help it, or produce it directly, when or if it happens. What seems to be needed though is that we are available to meet life. This means not being distracted or so

Part IV - Essays I - A few words on the art of contemplation

full of our thinking that nothing gets through. Quieting the mind is useful here.

Some people, of course, don't meet the world responding with kindness and compassion. And even in our own lives at times, the response will be despair, or anger, or dullness, a numb vacancy. This does not mean we don't have the capacity to respond, but it is covered over, and it's exactly because we have these qualities of response that we have the practices that purify the mind. We also have to practice patience, and persistence. Then, when the afflictions, greed, lack of concern are cleared away, what's left is naturally responsive and kind.

It can be that, if we meet anger, for example, naturally, spontaneously the response is calm; if we meet fear, peace, assurance and boldness arises; if it's restlessness we meet, then poise, and stability is evoked. It is a 'dependent arising' – not of our own making alone, but arising as needed in a unique situation. If we meet despair, then optimism, and so on. Solutions to our problems can only come from the energy, creativity and intelligence of our deeper nature.

When we practice contemplation, we have to watch how our own mind responds. If the theme is entered into more deeply, this is as it should be. If, on the other hand, our emotions are stirred up and we become more agitated or fatigued or despairing, then it's better to set the subject aside for a while and do whatever we can to refresh ourselves so we can engage it more fully another time.

The aim is always the same: to touch life deeply, so we can bring forward our greater resources, however we name them, and apply them to our situation. Only you can tell if this is happening for you. No one else can say, and so you are, we each are, responsible for our own progress.

Part IV - Essays I - A few words on the art of contemplation

Compassion – the elixir that turns base metals into gold

We have many strengths as human beings. We can be tolerant, generous, dedicated, courageous, curious, and creative. Of the many strengths we have, that of compassion enables us to do many things we would not have even imagined. It's great power is that it is our fundamental nature expressed in the world. With it, we have the will and the resources to meet whatever is difficult and work to change it for the better. Compassion looks out for the future as well, seeing possible danger or harm, it acts to protect life.

What's been described metaphorically as 'base metals', the too common kind we would overlook or discard, are experiences of suffering or confusion. When it's said that compassion transforms these, the meaning is that, when our life is embraced with wisdom and compassion, it can flower. New life can come from that life, a genuine human life that is pure and most precious, because it is rich in experience and native kindness. This, though it is likened to gold, goes beyond anything material in terms of its worth.

That new life, of dignity and innate richness, has eternal value, whether it is seen by others or not. Sometimes it is hidden and sometimes it is revealed, but our hope is always to be found in this, our human treasure, our fundamental nature.

My Son, My Daughter

If a parent had a son or daughter they knew would be going to another city or another country, the best thing they could do for them is teach them how to think deeply and clearly about things. If they did this much, they wouldn't worry about what their son or daughter would meet, no matter how strange, or difficult or challenging. They would have this confidence that they gave them the best gift, the most useful thing a person can have – the knowledge of how to make their way through life successfully.

Part IV - Essays I - A few words on the art of contemplation

We may not be a father or mother, with a child leaving for another country, but the same things can be said to be true between us and our family and friends, and future generations. The best thing we can offer to those we care about and to future generations is this: the knowledge of how to sort things out for themselves; how to be well nourished, and how to clarify their mind and their situation, wherever they find themselves, and to solve problems. In other words, the knowledge of what contemplation is, and how it works.

If we are able to give this knowledge to our present relations, and to future generations, we can feel that we've done our part. We can have peace of mind and confidence that, whatever comes their way, they will manage well, and with grace.

Part IV - Essays II

Calm Abiding in Three Points

To assure that whatever meditation we do
is as productive as it can be,
we should aim for three qualities to be present.

These are:

Clarity,
Stability, and
Vividness

Clarity here means the true wakefulness of the mind.
It is the opposite of sleepiness or dullness.
Instead, our senses are open, and our experience totally fresh.

Stability means staying with one object or experience exclusively,
without distraction.

This is developed gradually,
and is supported by doing one thing at a time
as completely as possible in our daily life.

Then, the quality of vividness acts to counter
a certain laxity of the mind.

The mind can be peaceful, still and clear,
but in order for us not to just 'coast',
we need real sharpness, and precision.

It is stability, clarity and vividness together
that lead to deeper understanding and experience.
With these qualities, practice become more powerful,
and meditation can have a much greater result.

Part IV - Essays II - Calm Abiding in Three Points

Colophon: Because many people study and meditate without these factors, the outcome is far less than it could be. Seeing what a loss this is, and wanting to encourage people to get the most out of whatever meditation they do, I've written this short description of the qualities of calm abiding.

May all beings benefit.

Part IV - Essays III

Going Beyond Loneliness - Applied Thought Training

Introduction

I've written the following short text on Thought Training because of the real need that exists for advice about how to deal with the kinds of feelings that can come with being alone. It was sparked by a letter I received from the person who is closest to me in the whole world, the one also who knows me better than anyone.

'Thought Training' is a term used in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, describing ways of thinking about what we call either 'favorable' or 'unfavorable' circumstances. Their purpose is to help us to make the best use of every situation. Often by just changing out thinking about something we can change our experience. For example, we can have more energy to do something, or we can have the feeling of no longer being weighed down by something. This is called a 'training', however, which implies that it needs practice over time to be effective.

I join many others in saying I'm indebted to this tradition, that includes Atisha's Seven-Point Mind Training, and the Third Dordrubchen's 'Changing Adverse and Felicitous Circumstances into the Path', as well as to the translators and teachers who have made these teachings available, such as Jamgon Kongtrul, commentator, and Tulku Thondup.

Reading this over, I realize I've had to talk about some personal things, but I don't know how else to communicate this, other than to speak from my own experiences, of sadness, and of sources of strength and hope. If I say too much, I beg the readers indulgence... You may like to skip to the main points... they should be pretty easy to find...

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In these times, when so many people find themselves alone, I pray that good and useful ideas be received and applied, and that whatever good methods people use be effective in relieving their sorrows, and in bringing them happiness.

My letter begins: My friend- when I read your message, I started thinking of how to respond, and what came of it is this long letter (small book). The reason I've said so much is that I can't stand the thought of you suffering, and so I hope there's at least one thing in here that's useful to you, and that you won't again experience even a moment's unhappiness... Ok- here it is... questions?... comments?...Let me know, ok?

Much love, Jason.

Going Beyond Loneliness

Dear one, when I read your last message, and came to the part where you're waking in the middle of the night feeling like you'll never find someone to love - my first thought was that you're not alone. My life is also like this. And yes, it is sad, maybe in a way more so with the passing of years, not to have a close relationship. As we get older, it's not so much the body as the heart that longs for companionship, but what are we to do?

I thought- in a way I'm glad you told me what you're feeling, so I can have compassion for you too. It's not that I'm someone looking down from a superior point of view, and I'm certainly not someone who has himself gotten beyond this suffering (lord knows how I've been brought low by this sadness), but it's compassion just as this humble feeling that somehow also wants to give.

I know very well the feelings you talk about, and how important it is to try to find a way to live with them and be happy, and have some fulfillment; to live in a way at least so that our feelings don't get in the way of these things.

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I thought how you've always been able to have more compassion for me than for yourself. And when I'm not too caught up in my own life, my feeling is this way for you too. It's almost always been that I can more easily bring to mind the unconditional wish for your happiness. This is a wonderful thing, in my view.

Somehow when we think of each other having a hard time, going through something we ourselves know very well, the circle of our compassion is made that much bigger. And I know that from one person it's much more possible to go further with it. The door can open to relating to even more people in a better way - a way that's more respectful, patient, generous in whatever way we can be... I remember this quote that's come to mind recently, that says, 'Be kind- everyone you meet is fighting a hard battle'.

I'm writing this the day after receiving your message, and since last night, I've had a few thoughts that may help here- but they're not just concepts or ideas that sound good. These are thoughts about our life that have proven helpful. I've seen they can work, and that there's a real need for us all to be reminded of these things, for however long we continue to cycle through this - unwanted experience.

Compassion and Thought Training

I know you've read Pema Chodron's books, so you're familiar with the idea of using our own experience as a starting point for understanding and feeling some relationship to others- even if it's only one other person.

When I think of you, I know you've had a lot of the same kinds of feelings I've experienced over the years- loneliness, doubt, sadness, fear... When I can really touch that truth in myself, an interesting thing happens- I don't suffer so much! And when I pray, it's not only easy, but natural to include you in my prayers. And why not? You are at least as deserving of good things as I.

Part IV - Essays III - Going Beyond Loneliness - Applied Thought Training

I heard this principle that applies to different types of training: 'Start with what is easy, and go from there'. And so, for you, maybe I'm the easiest person to feel sympathy for, as you are for me.

And this first step (and I'm thankful for it), of being aware of someone else's experience, this makes it possible, or even likely that we'll find other people to feel for, pray for, work for... After all, this is something universal, this experience of alone-ness... Then, really, our own life changes too. A measure of fulfillment is here, and humility, and gratitude, more and more, for every small thing; and self-respect too.

A related subject: self-worth can only come from having a deep contemplative life. Without this, we're too much at the mercy of outside forces- what this or that person thinks. With the self-worth that comes from self-knowledge, there's a kind of freedom from all that- freedom from depending on things outside, like culture, to tell us who we are. And what a relief!

This is something I can wish for everyone- to be free of the poverty of not knowing their natural value. My heart goes out to people that don't know this, and to those who have never learned how to concentrate, or contemplate. I think these things are really essential, if we're going to have any lasting, or reliable experience of happiness in life.

To return to the subject of loneliness: I know you know being alone is better than being in a bad relationship. We've both tried that out. Two people's loneliness is not enough to build a relationship on.

And sex without love and stability in a relationship is not only unfulfilling, not giving the heart what it needs, it can bring psychological and emotional pain and unbalance to our lives for a long time after. In the end, it's not worth it. This is what experience teaches.

And so, I think of all the people who want a relationship and don't have one, and of all the things that people do to try to escape the bad feelings. I know

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about quite a few of these: drugs, drinking, work, or ‘numbing out’ in front of the tv, or whatever... Then I think also about those who are in a relationship with some person who is wrong for them, and how they wish they were out of it- and...you know what?... my heart goes out to them all...

Maybe you’ve heard it put this way before- when you ‘change the angle of vision’ about something, you change your experience. This is both true, and sometimes startling. We believe so much in our point of view. Changing our thinking may not change the situation itself, but it can make it, if not beneficial to go through, then at the very least bearable. And by any measure, this is a boon.

I know that, if it isn’t taken step-by-step, ‘thinking about others’ can feel ‘unreal’. And so I try to be careful not to go in leaps, unless that happens by itself, which, I’ve seen at times, is possible. Usually though, I just try to start small- with one person, or a few people... and if I can really feel for them, and wish them well, then a whole other set of possibilities open up that were before just a nice story someone told.

When I’m feeling this thing called compassion, my own difficulties are not that great. Compassion, to our mind, amplifies the perception of the suffering of others- it makes it more clear, while diminishing the perception of our own suffering.

Without enough compassion for others, this connection to others, it’s easy for the opposite to happen- if we focus too much on ourselves, we can magnify to our mind our own pain, and almost completely neglect, or diminish what others go through. So I think this, the perspective of compassion for others, is something crucial, even for our own lives.

And certainly it’s a long process, this training of the mind, so we shouldn’t be too discouraged by whatever setbacks we encounter. Just having the intention to live with more sympathy, just wanting to go in the direction of helping others more and more, is a very positive thing. We can celebrate

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that. Even if living that life feels far away at the moment, the mind is the source of everything.

‘May all beings be free from suffering and abide in happiness forever’.

Gratitude

There are some words, or ideas, like ‘compassion’, or ‘gratitude’ that I see can either be dormant, or can be alive in us. I know we have many things to be thankful for- it’s just that sometimes we forget. And so I find myself praying that ‘to count my blessings’ never becomes a stale or clichéd idea for me, or for you.

It’s important to bring to mind, and often, just what we do have. This is another way of changing our perspective. Whatever we fill our mind with, that will be our experience.

And so, if we have, for example, an education- can read and write; if we have religious and political freedom; if we have some health and strength, and good values, and if we can appreciate these, then truly we are rich. If we can’t appreciate these, then, tragically, all the opportunity and riches in the world will be lost on us.

Maybe you’ve heard of what Buddhists call ‘the precious human life’- it’s not just having these conditions, like not being overwhelmed by delusions, or having education and a sound body- it’s not just having these things, but recognizing that we have them and appreciating their value- that we can really do something good with these very conditions!

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The Bodhisattva Vow

I know I need to remind myself: the purpose of my life is not just to make myself happy. The purpose of my life is to try to bring as much happiness as I can to other people, for as long as I can and in as many ways as I can. And when this life is over, I hope I can leave behind some things that will be useful in removing the sufferings that people experience, and bring them peace and happiness.

I pray that I will be able to give up the interests of just this one, small life.

As Shantideva said: ‘Suffering is transcended
by total dedication...’

And my feeling is that it starts here:

I won't refuse sadness
I know this can become something we need
when held close, guarded
fed with light and reason for hope
a pearl may emerge
this worth
out of not-abandoned grief...

and, going on:

‘May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness’
‘May all beings be happy and at peace, and may their hearts be filled with joy’

Wisdom - The Shortcut

I step out of myself, to where there's clear air, and where it's spacious.
There *is* such a thing as freedom from fear, self-doubt, etc.

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And this stepping out of self does not lead to non-existence- nothing of the sort. It's more like this: suffering is something that takes place in the mind, and if you go beyond the relative mind you go beyond suffering. This is definitely possible.

Even if it's not an easy thing, it is possible by training the mind to reach a point where the outside world or changing circumstances cannot trigger delusions in us, and cannot trouble us any more. It's up to each of us to develop ourselves and reach a state conferring immunity from all hardship. More and more I think this is what we need most of all.

Even though it's not the main topic of this letter, I want to urge you to learn about and accomplish the practice of concentration. Why? Only because, as the Buddha rightly said, 'Those who are without concentration dwell between the fangs of the defilements'.

Without control of the mind, we have no control over what we experience. But it's not the case that we have to go with whatever mood, or whatever delusions arise. With practice we can have a life more of our conscious choosing.

A calm and aware mind is the basis that makes wisdom effective in cutting delusion, but even just on the temporary level, the benefits of concentration-meditation are very great.

And then, when we go beyond the ego, or pacify this, what's left is not - not feeling, or not being- what's left is... this, our true nature, compassion. This, true compassion is the substance of our connection to others. Along with love, compassion is the substance of the web that holds us together. There are then bonds that are stronger than birth, old age, decay and death; vows that are stronger than delusions, stronger than time...

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Fill Your Mind With Wonderful Things

Before I forget, sometimes I try to count how many kinds of love there are that we can receive and feel and give, in part so that I don't fill myself instead with the feelings of missing what I don't have, for whatever reason.

I think of children, 'Every day, I look into the eyes of my savior-her round face and bright laugh fills me... She's six, and one of my little students, and a wonder to behold...' I think of music, the love of composers, and musicians... I think of kind people, friends, family, heroes and heroines in the world... angels... nature - that leaf- that brilliant day- if that's not spoken love, giving love, then I don't know what is.

I'm sure we can both make our own lists (writers, singers...) Perhaps this can be a project for us to share...

Keeping Things In Perspective

Sometimes I think the truth is that we're living in a miraculous world. And if we have no one to share it with, that's a small thing, in comparison. Maybe sad, but, it's not too bad, in context. Also, considering the pain or confusion that some experience, being alone is just one, relatively mild, difficulty.

In some ways, this is a tragic place, yet it's also a place where we have a great, but limited opportunity... to feel... wonder... to feel alive... to try to do some good ... I have thought lately that, if this is the only world anywhere in existence where there is suffering, then I am glad I am here, to try to ease the way for others, even if it's only a little. There is no place I'd rather be. It's this sense of things that I hope to keep awake in me always...

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‘Having Compassion for Ourselves; Workability’ and the ‘Long-View’

I don't know why our lives have so far gone like they have. I don't know why we each find ourselves alone at this time in our lives. Here is one place where I don't really connect with a common idea expressed in Eastern Philosophy- For me, it's not that helpful to think, 'it's karma'- even if it is the result of my own actions that I am here. There can be an interpretation of karma that just feels too fatalistic. And thinking this way can block having compassion for ourselves, which is something really necessary.

Granted, I've been at least part of where I am now- and I do try to take responsibility for my actions, both past and present. The problem for me is with this potentially dis-empowering view of karma is... that I can't remember all I've done... and I can't begin to fathom all the causes that have come together to produce this... life...

I think we have to be careful here. Westerners especially, for some reason, have a hard time with self-love. And so I want to warn you away from self-blame. It doesn't help. It rarely gives birth to any positive state of mind. What good does it do not to value ourselves?

One thing I know for sure is that if we're going to change and improve our lives, far from a critical attitude, we need a kind of love for ourselves that can accept our past and present, and that can be forgiving, and warmly encouraging. Instead of self-blame, we can choose to be compassionate towards ourselves, and towards all, and responsible from this point forward. Whatever our past and present, this is much more productive.

With this compassion in our mind then, I think it's better to use the idea of karma as a statement of the ultimate 'workability' of any situation. This I like. It gives me energy. It means the direction of our life is in our own hands. And of course this gives hope.

Then there is another, related aspect of karma that I think is true and useful to think about. I like the idea of past lives, where it says that it takes a long

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time to develop the soul and it's individual characteristics; that it takes a long time, perhaps years, or decades, or lifetimes to develop qualities... When I look at how long it takes things to change and grow and develop in us, and when I look at the different qualities that I, and other people have, this seems somehow to be accurate- it feels true...This 'long-view' also gives me patience, and determination...

When it comes to having compassion, and karma also, at the very least, as I've been trying in different ways to point to here, and I don't know how successfully- you'll have to tell me - when we change our mind, our experience changes too...

I hope and pray we'll all find happiness and peace in this life...

One more thing- you might want to check out this website: www.lamayeshe.com and look for two free booklets I found there. One is called 'Being Your Own Therapist', and the other 'Make Your Mind An Ocean'. They both speak very clearly about our experience 'the shuttling between elation and despair' and how to use our mind to go beyond it. 'Understanding our mind is the key to solving all our problems'.

Lama Yeshe was one of the teachers I had in mind when I wrote the following:

There are some teachers
for whom only existence itself
can be their teacher
I'm not one of them
but I've seen a couple
They listen patiently when others try to explain things
and they seldom speak
When they do, however, their words are rich
and they open beyond themselves

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new possibilities
 their words give life
 (or maybe I should say 'their understanding')
 If you find one who speaks like that
 cherish him, or her
 the mere thought of whom
 dispels illusion...

You'll have to navigate around that website to find those two .pdf booklets
 Look under 'LYWA Publications'. They should be pretty easy to find.
 You can download the books for free, and print them out. They look nice
 too. Now that's what I'd call a productive day at the office!

I've also 'met', through her person and teachings, an Indian woman saint,
 whom I simply love. Her name is Anandamayi ma (1896-1982), and you
 might want to take a look at this:

www.cosmicharmony.com/Sp/AnandMM/Mataji.htm

Well then! I've surprised myself! In the beginning, wanting to respond to
 your message, there was just the feeling, like a thread. You probably know
 the feeling, that says, 'pull', and you don't know exactly what will follow...

I'm surprised because the result was this small book on the ways of what's
 called 'thought training'. I guess this was what's been in my mind to say for
 some time now, it's just needed the right opportunity to come out.

I hope it doesn't feel impersonal to you... you send a letter, and I reply with
 a small book... but... it's all from the heart...and, need I say it?... let me
 know what you think...is any of this helpful? Does any of this communicate
 to you? Ok.

Much joy to you! Everyday!
 with love, Jason.

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The imperfect and the beyond perfect

On a personal and social levels, as a human being, there are some things we must resist, and work to change. None of us should accept unnecessary suffering in ourselves or in the world; none of us should accept injustice, or threats to our own and our children's shared world; and none of us should accept war, especially now, with modern nations' destructive capability. Even if it means thinking ahead several generations, merely by virtue of being a human being, we absolutely have to work, and struggle to keep from becoming numb, or complacent.

There is so much need. How then to live with ourselves, and with all that is unresolved?, and how to live in this world? Where will we get the energy to work? Do we need to turn our back on suffering to get what we need? It is right at this juncture that I find a saving grace – like - aha - this world is not as simple as our thinking would have us believe.

When we bring to mind pairs of words such as happiness and sadness, peace and war, satisfaction and dissatisfaction, contentment and discontent, it seems that such opposites cannot exist at the same time. But in fact they can and do co-exist, and exploring this paradox can yield riches. I'm just about finished reading the psychologist Robert Johnson's book on contentment, which I've enjoyed, and which has led to these and a few other reflections.

When it comes to happiness, usually we think in either-or terms. We are either dissatisfied, or we are satisfied. We can't possibly be both, can we? Last week I wrote out some thoughts about what I called 'neurotic dissatisfaction'. It is the kind of mind that cannot be satisfied, no matter how many possessions or different kinds of experience such a person has. It seems it's gotten more common in our culture, for young people especially to become more and more quickly jaded, burned out, sarcastic and disrespectful of just about everything.

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There is no happiness there, or satisfaction, or, it seems, the hope of satisfaction. It's a strange problem that needs profound work to change. Just to be clear, when I refer to the possibility of being both satisfied and not satisfied at the same time, I'm not talking about the neurotically dissatisfied mind.

For people who are still capable of happiness, I realized that the things we are not and should not be happy with in life *very much need* the kinds of experience that 'have light to them'. These different experiences are available to us and they can and should co-exist in us. They may have to be experienced first one then the other, at times so we can take care of ourselves, but ultimately they shouldn't be kept separate.

I was thinking that the word 'contentment' doesn't go far enough when talking about the good; the word 'perfection' doesn't reach far enough either. There are some things that I think of as really being beyond perfection. What I mean is that sometimes, when we meet something great, with an open, fresh mind, the experience is more than we could ever have imagined it would be.

Our conceptual mind cannot begin to contain the beauty, richness, healing power, joy and nourishment of – say, for example, a cloudy morning, the wind, a friendship, kind parents, great teachers, the existence of music or the shades of color we call green.

Such things as the beauty of that child, and your smile, and so much more feed us; they sustain our souls and make them healthy and robust. When we put our mind entirely on such things, there is peace in meeting them, and we don't - can't possibly - ask anything more of them. How could I possibly ask anything more of a humming bird? – I'm astonished – I realize I could never even begin to conceive of something like this.

These things have the feeling of being extraordinary gifts, so in that way we can say we are content with them. There is necessary peace to be found here. Such experiences are complete as they are, and more, they are

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overflowing, they move beyond themselves. They are life itself, and we all need to be in touch with these beyond-perfect things, for our own sake, for our family and friends sake, and for the sake of our communities and the greater world.

We each need nourishment, and nourishment is available. Maybe though the problem is that we haven't been taught to fully, rightly honor in our heart the sun, the wind, the earth, or friendships, arts, education, history or each other; maybe we haven't been taught to fully, rightly honor the miracle of our own eyesight, our breath, and motion...

Maybe we each need to learn how to be with these things quietly, in an unhurried way, and in an open-hearted way, so that we can receive their gifts. You can call it anything you like. Personally, I call it contemplation, but that's not quite it either for me. It's more like being with something and learning to be appreciative is being nourished by it. The joy of being alive is here.

Being in touch with the beautiful things, the life giving things is essential. Then, for everything else that life is, for all the 10,000 sorrows of the world, the benefit, the virtue of these gifts can continue. Real benefit can continue in places where it is needed most.

In Buddhist terms, when you see only the suffering of the world, with no apparent way out, that is called 'samsara'; when we see and experience only what is right, fine, pure, rich, unchanging, unmixed, undeluded, without affliction, peaceful, that is called 'nirvana'; and when you are able to see and experience both at the same time, that is called 'the realm of Buddha activity', and it's this last one, clearly, that this world needs more of.

One analogy for this is that we are able to hear two things at the same time, like music and a voice speaking, without the two obstructing each other in any way. They co-exist in our perception, and they can influence each other as well. So, for example, the quality of music, such as the slow movement from Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, can influence how a mother asks her

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teenaged son to clean up his room; or two people in dialogue can each influence each other's tone and what is said. They interpenetrate and effect each other.

Buddha activity arises, we can say, from a base of something perfect, or, more accurately, beyond perfect. When in touch with suffering, compassion arises. We respond to the world out of a heart of love, for as long as is needed. This fundamental divine nature is touched by, and touches suffering, and is able to bring relief and transformation over time.

That which is vast, and made of light both retains its' character, and at the same time is able to move, to touch, to influence, like light, like words, like rain. Now isn't that something?

Part IV - Essays V

On Ethics and Healing

We've all noticed that the mind of what we would call a good person has an ethical quality to it. In most of us, this ethical quality is mixed with delusions, or some corruption, in the form of greed, aggression, jealousy, pettiness, and so on. In a person with some inner development, the moral quality is stronger, and in someone we'd call saintly that ethical quality is there powerfully.

What is here being called ethical, or moral, has two sides to it. One is the character of the life itself of a good person, and the other is the expression of ethics as it is taught. This second category of ethics, the outward form, is sometimes called precepts, or commandments, but they all amount to the same thing. They are guidelines for sane living. Here, sane equates to health, because health on the inside brings peace and health on the outside as well.

On the subject of ethics, and its relationship to health, Lama Zopa Rinpoche says:

'..., one of the most important things you can do is to live a life of moral discipline. Do not deceive yourself by thinking that this is only a religious viewpoint - it is real protection. For example, if you let your mind go crazy, your life is unprotected. Preventing your mind from going crazy is the way to protect your life. Just see how many problems plague a country where moral discipline is in short supply. The way to protect, or heal, your mind and body is to purify the causes of problems that you have already created, which lie in your mind.'

Religious commandments, all by themselves, have gotten something of a reputation as being for hypocrites, or as coming 'from on high' and not from within, and this criticism is at least partly deserved. As one teacher put it, by the time something is merely a law, it's already too late, the Way has already been lost. And there's truth in that. For ethical teachings to make sense and

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be a source of strength, these outer guidelines will always need to be brought together with inner education.

Another way of looking at moral teachings, then, is to consider them to be our inherited wisdom from those who have lived before us. Out of their hard earned experience and out of their compassion, our ancestors have left us guidelines for living well, and for having balance, harmony, happiness and health in our lives. It's for each of us individually to receive such teachings in one form or another, and work out the implications for our own lives.

In Buddhism, ethics essentially means non-harming, and helping others as much as we can. This is talked about in many different ways. Two of the ways that ethics are taught are: avoiding the ten non virtues, and, practicing the Five Precepts, sometimes called the Five Mindfulness Trainings.

When ethics are referred to in terms of avoiding the ten non virtues, there are three of the body to be avoided: killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct; four of speech: lying, harsh speech, divisive speech, and frivolous talk; and three of the mind: anger, greed, and ignorance. To quote the Dalai Lama: 'A life rooted in ethics has at its foundation the abandonment of the ten non-virtues in favour of the practice of their opposites.' This lays the foundation for every possible good.

Traditionally, when The Five Precepts are taught, they are expressed as: not to kill, steal, harm sexually, lie or take intoxicants. These can also be stated positively, as in: to protect life; to live generously, with wisdom; to honor sexuality and relationships; to speak truthfully and constructively; and to cultivate clarity.

Here are Thich Nhat Hanh's contemporary expression of the Traditional Five Precepts, with an introduction by Thay:

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The Five Mindfulness Trainings, by Thich Nhat Hanh
Revised in the Summer of 2009

‘Sisters and brothers in the community, this is the moment when we enjoy reciting the Five Mindfulness Trainings together. The Five Mindfulness Trainings represent the Buddhist vision for a global spirituality and ethic. They are a concrete expression of the Buddha’s teachings on the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path, the path of right understanding and true love, leading to healing, transformation, and happiness for ourselves and for the world.

‘To practice the Five Mindfulness Trainings is to cultivate the insight of interbeing, or Right View, which can remove all discrimination, intolerance, anger, fear, and despair. If we live according to the Five Mindfulness Trainings, we are already on the path of a bodhisattva. Knowing we are on that path, we are not lost in confusion about our life in the present or in fears about the future.

1. Reverence For Life

Aware of the suffering caused by the destruction of life, I am committed to cultivating the insight of interbeing and compassion and learning ways to protect the lives of people, animals, plants, and minerals. I am determined not to kill, not to let others kill, and not to support any act of killing in the world, in my thinking, or in my way of life. Seeing that harmful actions arise from anger, fear, greed, and intolerance, which in turn come from dualistic and discriminative thinking, I will cultivate openness, non-discrimination, and non-attachment to views in order to transform violence, fanaticism, and dogmatism in myself and in the world.

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2. True Happiness

Aware of the suffering caused by exploitation, social injustice, stealing, and oppression, I am committed to practicing generosity in my thinking, speaking, and acting. I am determined not to steal and not to possess anything that should belong to others; and I will share my time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need. I will practice looking deeply to see that the happiness and suffering of others are not separate from my own happiness and suffering; that true happiness is not possible without understanding and compassion; and that running after wealth, fame, power and sensual pleasures can bring much suffering and despair. I am aware that happiness depends on my mental attitude and not on external conditions, and that I can live happily in the present moment simply by remembering that I already have more than enough conditions to be happy. I am committed to practicing Right Livelihood so that I can help reduce the suffering of living beings on Earth and reverse the process of global warming.

3. True Love

Aware of the suffering caused by sexual misconduct, I am committed to cultivating responsibility and learning ways to protect the safety and integrity of individuals, couples, families, and society. Knowing that sexual desire is not love, and that sexual activity motivated by craving always harms myself as well as others, I am determined not to engage in sexual relations without true love and a deep, long-term commitment made known to my family and friends. I will do everything in my power to protect children from sexual abuse and to prevent couples and families from being broken by sexual misconduct. Seeing that body and mind are one, I am committed to learning appropriate ways to take care of my sexual energy and cultivating loving kindness, compassion, joy and inclusiveness – which are the four basic elements of true love – for my greater happiness and the greater happiness of others. Practicing true love, we know that we will continue beautifully into the future.

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4. Loving Speech and Deep Listening

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I am committed to cultivating loving speech and compassionate listening in order to relieve suffering and to promote reconciliation and peace in myself and among other people, ethnic and religious groups, and nations. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I am committed to speaking truthfully using words that inspire confidence, joy, and hope. When anger is manifesting in me, I am determined not to speak. I will practice mindful breathing and walking in order to recognize and to look deeply into my anger. I know that the roots of anger can be found in my wrong perceptions and lack of understanding of the suffering in myself and in the other person. I will speak and listen in a way that can help myself and the other person to transform suffering and see the way out of difficult situations. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to utter words that can cause division or discord. I will practice Right Diligence to nourish my capacity for understanding, love, joy, and inclusiveness, and gradually transform anger, violence, and fear that lie deep in my consciousness.

5. Nourishment and Healing

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful consumption, I am committed to cultivating good health, both physical and mental, for myself, my family, and my society by practicing mindful eating, drinking, and consuming. I will practice looking deeply into how I consume the Four Kinds of Nutriment, namely edible foods, sense impressions, volition, and consciousness. I am determined not to gamble, or to use alcohol, drugs, or any other products which contain toxins, such as certain websites, electronic games, TV programs, films, magazines, books, and conversations. I will practice coming back to the present moment to be in touch with the refreshing, healing and nourishing elements in me and around me, not letting regrets and sorrow drag me back into the past nor letting anxieties, fear, or craving pull me out of the present moment. I am determined not to try to cover up

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loneliness, anxiety, or other suffering by losing myself in consumption. I will contemplate interbeing and consume in a way that preserves peace, joy, and well-being in my body and consciousness, and in the collective body and consciousness of my family, my society and the Earth.

For more on the Five Precepts, see Thich Nhat Hanh's commentary on his website, and in his book 'For A Future to be Possible'.

It's clear that keeping precepts holds us back from negative actions; these cultivate virtue, or positive energy, create good karma, and protect our life. They can also heal our life on a very deep level. We've all made mistakes, and messes in our lives, and these can be corrected and healed by practicing ethical conduct.

For more information on the purification of faults, their effects and also their causes, see also the essay that follows this one.

Ethical guidelines, in general are offered to help us find the way *in our self*. An outer teaching, at its best, can help to awaken in our self the sense of what is right. Then that teaching, a like medicine that helps awaken the body's natural healing function, has served its purpose.

The Dalai Lama has called lived ethics:

Medicine to eradicate the misery of delusion, and

An ointment to purify the stains of wrong conduct

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In a short treatise on ethics, he quotes one text known as 'The Great Sutra on Entering into Parinirvana':

'Like the raised victory banner of all Dharmas, moral discipline completely cuts off the paths of all negativities and unfortunate rebirths. Like the medicinal tree, it cures all evil sickness. It is nourishment for those tired and weary on the paths of worldly existence; a weapon for destroying the enemy of delusion. It is a mystic spell which eliminates the poisonous snake of delusion, a bridge for crossing over the waters of evil...'

He also quotes the Saint Tsong Khapa, saying:

Moral discipline is water to clean away the stains of negative actions,
It is moonlight to cool the heat of delusion,
Magnificent like Mt. Meru in the midst of sentient beings,
it is the peaceful force uniting all sentient beings.

We just need to watch our own mind to see how this works. We can see that even just aiming at being kind and ethical right away calms the turbulent emotions, and this immediately makes for better health, at least to some extent.

Thich Nhat Hanh has said that precepts are like the north star - we dedicate and aim to go in that direction and do the best we can.

Trying our best to live ethically and with wisdom brings a clear conscience, and this then is the basis for even greater health and happiness. It is because of all the good that can come from it, and because of how much these things are needed in our world today that I praise the precepts as practiced and taught.

Here follows the poem, In Praise of the Precepts

Part IV - Poem - In Praise of the Precepts

Note: in this piece, one can also substitute the words ethics, ethical sense, morality, discipline, moral guidelines, or any other term with the same meaning.

I bow to the precepts that give life

I bow to the precepts that heal, soothe, and pacify

I bow to the moral sense that protects the mind from suffering

I bow to the precepts that bring peace to self and others

I bow to the precepts that give health

I bow to the precepts that give strength

I bow to the precepts that purify all beings

I bow to the precepts that are the expression of great respect between people

I bow to the precepts that are the expression of reverence for life,

I bow to the precepts that are the expression of this wisdom

I honor the precepts that are the essential character of all good people

I pay homage to the precepts that support meditation

I bow to the precepts that tame the mind, and keep it humble

I bow to the precepts that bestow dignity upon self and others

Part IV - Poem - In Praise of the Precepts

I bow to the precepts that are true wealth

I bow to the precepts whose practice ennobles

whose practice uplifts

whose practice beautifies the world

I bow to the precepts that can bring safety for self and others

I bow to the precepts that can bring freedom from fear to self and others

I bow to the precepts that create the causes for happiness, now and in the future, for self and others

I bow to the precepts whose beneficial influence, even when practiced by just one person, reaches far

I honor the precepts that clarify the mind

Even the worst person, as soon as they turn their mind to the precepts, gains some improvement in their mind

I bow to the precepts that are the essential nature of the nectar that relieves the sufferings of the six realms the goodness

I bow to the precepts that liberate

I pay homage to the precepts as spoken, written, and practiced

Part IV - Poem - In Praise of the Precepts

Any person in whom the precepts are strong is an object of refuge, whether
they be a layperson or ordained
They are a source of safety and strength
Even without speaking, their presence alone comforts, and can heal

I bow to the precepts that are the essential character of all bodhisattvas and
saints, and all good persons

I bow to the precepts that nourish, and that bring happiness

Part IV: Essays - VI

A few words on what is called purification in Buddhism

You asked about purification a couple of days ago, and it set me thinking. This term is usually used in the Tibetan Tradition, although it is part of all Buddhist traditions. I mentioned the Four Opponent Powers, and I'll be sending you some things by Lama Zopa that I have.

When this comes to mind, I always immediately think that those teachings need some adaptation for Westerners, and I'll try and include a couple of definitions and comments later in this little note.

The question is already there, when we use the word 'purification' – 'What is purified?' In Buddhism, as you know, they talk about the three root causes of suffering, or the three poisons, as greed, anger, and ignorance, with the main cause being ignorance – both as wrong views and as obscured consciousness.

Anger, and everything that stems from it, is purified by love; greed, or attachment is purified by non-desire, by, renunciation, by letting go, or by right desires, having wisdom and compassion, and generosity; and ignorance is purified by wisdom.

In the Theravada, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness Sutra begins, 'There is this one way, to the purification of beings, to the alleviation of suffering, to the establishment of Peace, and that is the Four Foundations of Mindfulness'. Mindfulness, collectedness, and insight practices are what accomplish this.

In the Tibetan Tradition, they have one way of formulating teachings called 'The Ground, Path, and Fruition'.

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The Aspiration Prayer for the Attainment of Mahamudra, has a verse that says,

The ground of purification is the mind itself,
 indivisible cognitive clarity and emptiness.
 That which purifies is the great vajra yoga of mahamudra.
 What is to be purified are the adventitious,
 temporary contaminations of confusion,
 May the fruit of purification, the stainless dharmakaya, be
 manifest

If we think about it, when we make some change, or improvement, there is something similar, or identical to what I described in the notes on the different levels of mind. For example, we could say that patience purifies impatience, generosity, stinginess, zeal, laziness, and so on. A counter – current can be raised, and can cancel out the old habit energy, or at least lessen it. Maybe sometimes letting something be is best, but not always. Sometimes we have to be actively engaged in producing an antidote.

If I've learned anything from thinking about the different levels of mind, it's that there is more going on in our lives than we see. There is more to us than we see. Like Thay said, mind consciousness is the gardener, and store consciousness is the garden.

He also taught that things can exist in the form of a seed, and in the form of a manifest dharma. When something arises, it isn't that it didn't exist a moment before. This is especially noticeable if we're talking about habit energies. And when it is not manifest, this doesn't mean that it doesn't exist in us before purification, which should 'burn the seeds' or, in other language, effect transformation at the base. I think that remembering what we have done in the past, for as long as it is still a part of us in any negative or limiting way, is a good thing.

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Even if we are not suffering from those karmas at the moment, we will stay on a more even keel as far as practicing goes. If, on the other hand we think everything is fine, that we have completely purified those causes, when we haven't yet, that's when trouble comes back around to politely or not so politely remind us.

There are a couple more things I would like to say, and I hope you will forgive me if I am not completely orderly about this. I only write when I can't reference anything else, and these things have been on my mind the last few days. I'm sure most or all of these thoughts will come to light again, if I keep looking. For now though, I'd like to say a couple of words about what are called the Four Opponent Powers. They are usually given, in the order practiced, as Regret, the Basis, the Actual Opponent Practice, and Resolve. These may be my own words for them, you'll have to check, but that's more or less it.

We all know the first Opponent Power, that of Regret, from our own lives. I recently came across a clear expression, by the Dalai Lama, of how this works to purify. He said that when we have strong regret, we will be less likely to commit the same negative action again.

This factor can be cultivated, in a positive way, with a protective purpose in mind. I would add at this point that Westerners need to be very careful here, so regret doesn't become condemnation. We have a lot of the shadow of Western Traditions in us, certainly. We also sometimes have a powerful tendency to self-hatred, which is a distortion, and that greatly misses the point.

Regret has to be Wisdom-regret, in the sense of affirming something true and wonderful in us, otherwise it can easily slip into beating ourselves up – actually strengthening the wrong views that are the basis of afflictions. We need a lot of love for ourselves, and compassion, I'm sure, for looking at

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ourselves even to be possible, to touch, to know, to hold what we feel is ugly, or not worthy, or broken, or selfish. And we do need the wisdom that sees, and affirms, with love, that we are more than this.

Do you remember what I read to you once from Uchiyama Roshi – about repentance and vow. He said, that from the point of view of the conditioned self seeing we are something more we can't help but give rise to vow. And that from the point of view of the original self, as a reference point, even if it is just a flash or an intuition, seeing the conditioned self, we can't help but feel regret, and repentance, which also means wanting, aiming to do better. This seems to ease the way, to remember these things. We are both unconditioned, rich, beautiful, original nature, and the conditioned, for worse and better, until we are free of all that.

The second Opponent Power is traditionally given as motivation, or the power of reliance, which is generating a mind of Refuge and Bodhicitta. They give the analogy of using the ground to get up again, once we have fallen. This is the power of reliance. The teaching that follows goes something like this: that there are two kinds of beings that we engage in wrong actions in regards to - wrong thoughts, wrong speech and wrong actions – enlightened beings, and all others.

We generate devotion to realized beings, and love and compassion for those still caught in wrong views and sufferings. The category of enlightened beings can include bodhisattvas; those with profound realizations, our mentors, or the Noble Sangha. There are a couple of ways that Tibetan Buddhism speaks about what happens when we have devotion. They say it's like sunlight meeting the snow on a mountain top. This causes the snow, their pure compassion and blessings, to 'melt' and to flow towards us.

They also say the benevolence of bodhisattvas, and their wish to support us is always there, and that when we turn towards them, they 'gaze' upon us. Sometimes I know it happens that even with our wrong views, help breaks through to reach us. The activity of bodhisattvas is inconceivable this way. Most of the time though, I think there is something we can do to facilitate

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their blessing reaching us. When we have faith and devotion, we can feel their support, we can actualize these graces.

On the other hand we can also block our own receptivity, through disrespect, and not only for this one time. Karma is like this, it's future possible long term effect is what we should be more concerned about, rather than just the one instance of – being deprived, or whatever. Same is true for the positive karmas – if we think beyond the immediate effect, then that's really seeing more of why we should value creating good conditions in ourselves, and in the world.

So, faith and devotion are so important. They purify the effect, and the cause of our past wrong actions towards realized beings, and sow the seeds for our having a beautiful connection with holy beings in the future.

Regarding our motivation towards all others, those caught in samsara, I think it was Buddhadasa who gave a teaching where he said that on all non virtues, all the wrong actions that we do come from selfishness. Maybe in my own language I can think of this changing my point of view towards others. Instead of wanting something from them, when I just want to help as much as I can, everything seems to be much clarified. And simpler. Not so many problems either.

There is something about giving rise to the wish to benefit others that awakens our better nature, our emerging self in the most positive sense. Even if we don't feel it completely sometimes, even if it is mixed in with so much that also has a loud voice in us, wantings, or anger, or regrets; fears, still drawing on what is positive in us increases that, gradually. It affirms what is more true, to live out the life of this real self. Our true nature is loving kindness and compassion. When we can align with this, healing and change happens. Nothing is left out.

Where will we get the power to practice? Sometimes it comes from wanting to be free ourselves of suffering, and the future sufferings we may

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experience. This is natural in us, as long as we have these causes, we're going to want to purify them (or we can say they're going to want to purify themselves).

Then, when we start to see and to feel the connection between our own inability or ability to help others we care for, with an ever increasing love, then the motivation to purify and the purification itself becomes that much stronger. We are not just doing this for ourselves, what we conceived of before as our separate self, or for this one time.

In practical terms, when we think about our limiting actions that brought us suffering and that harmed or neglected others, this is certainly changed in us, and is purified, by cultivating that mind of compassion and dedication towards all others, called bodhicitta.

The third Opponent Force, the power of the actual opponent, is, like I said in the notes on the different levels, about producing a counter current. With the motivation to change and improve ourselves, any positive action or method of meditation can be used. I think it was Lama Lodro here in San Francisco who said that positive actions can outweigh the negative, that the positive overcomes the negative, always. This implies time, of course, and effort, sometimes great effort, but it is an extraordinary thing to know this is possible.

In speaking about applying different methods to remedy afflictions, or negative habits, Thrangu Rinpoche said the following: 'Taming or fixing the mind means abandoning the kleshas, the mental afflictions. Everyone's mind has two aspects, one pure, and the other impure, and the impure aspect is called klesha. If you abandon kleshas, then all of your actions of body and speech will automatically become Dharmic, or pure. As long as you have not abandoned them, then no matter how good your actions of body and speech may appear, you will never be happy.

'Abandoning kleshas is the aim of Dharma, but for this to succeed, it is necessary that the remedy, the practice, actually encounter the kleshas. In

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order for this to occur, you need to take an honest look at your own mind. You need to see which klesha is your biggest problem. For some people, it is anger; for others it is jealousy, or attachment, or bewilderment, or pride.

‘When you have discovered which klesha is the strongest, you dedicate your practice to its amelioration... Dedicate all your practice, whether is it the visualization of deities, the recitation of mantras, or the practice of meditation, to the eradication of the problem. Directing your practice in this focused way will weaken and eventually eradicate the problem.’

Some teachings speak of generating a strong, clear motivation – or aim – at the beginning, and then dedicating, or directing the positive energy created to the accomplishment of our purposes at the end. In the context of the Four Opponent Powers, the Actual Opponent force, the application of practice itself, is done with full awareness of what we are doing, and why, and then without distraction, or as close to that as we can get.

So, with positive regret for our wrong actions (1), and with devotion and compassion (2), here are some of the methods (3) traditionally given, in the Lam Rim teachings to purify karma:

reading profound texts

meditating on emptiness

reciting particular mantras

making holy objects such as statues, stupas, and scriptures

making offerings to the Guru-Triple Gem

and reciting the powerful Buddhas - holy names.

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When it comes to particular problems, often we need to use a range of remedies together. For example, here are seven antidotes to anger:

1. cultivating calm
2. insight
3. cultivating positive mental states, such as loving kindness, patience, and compassion
4. wise reflection, in this case on the suffering caused to oneself and others by anger, and the advantages and happiness that comes from being without anger
5. sustained practice
6. association with the wise, and,
7. having few desires

For other problems, the intelligent and diligent student will bring together and make their own list of whatever is most helpful for them. There are many remedies to choose from, but we need to actually apply them, consistently and over time for them to work in our lives.

What purification actually is

I remember that Chagdud Tulku said ethics and calm meditation were like pushing the pause button on a tape recorder – while those things may temporarily stop the karmas and negative emotions, as soon as the ‘finger’ of our effort is let up, they can start up again. He then goes on to compare wisdom practice to erasing the tape altogether.

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Connecting with a Tradition, and with forms, and devotional practices, are purifying on many levels, no doubt. They can also be a support for the development of wisdom. All the teachings point in this direction.

Purification is changing the very basis that the problems came from. This has a specific meaning in Buddhism: ultimately it is wisdom that purifies. {For more on what is meant by wisdom in Buddhism, see the essay ‘An Introduction to Buddhist Wisdom Teachings’, also in this collection.}

We can watch in ourselves how deep some practice of purification is going. Is it effecting upper levels only so far? Or is it changing things on deeper levels? This is something only we can know for ourselves, from watching our own experience.

I wanted to mention also that, in talking about purification, sometimes it’s good to be ‘hot’, as in passionate about these things, and sometimes it’s better to be ‘cool’ – quiet, calm, so that the practice of looking and understanding can go deeper. See for yourself what works.

I know many Westerners want to be on ‘hot’ setting when talking about purification, as they really feel so bad about what they have done, or really feel, with some new level of awareness, how far off their previous thoughts and actions were. But this likely to keep things on a relatively superficial level. Really, I think it’s important to understand all this, or else I wouldn’t say it. See for yourself what works. By all means do experiment with different approaches.

The Fourth Opponent Power is usually given as resolve, as in a promise not to repeat the particular wrong action we were purifying. This, it’s taught, can be a short term aim, even a few seconds, as one teaching says, or for the rest of our life, or for all our lives, if we like to think that way.

For me, it doesn’t work to say anything more than I’ll do my best, which I know sounds much watered down, but it is realistic. Sometimes a big wave can come up, and wash away everything, so with compassion towards

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myself, at the end of a practice I just aim to do my best always no matter what.

It may help sometimes to take a temporary vow, instead of thinking, 'I'll never get angry again and raise my voice', or 'I'll never touch another drink', it can be more work-able to set our aim for something we think we can manage, like a week or a month or more. This way we can gain a foothold, and build on that success.

I also like how it feels to take the last part of the opponent powers, the resolve, and making it part of a greater resolve, which is the vow to help others as much as I can. This seems to me to include all the particulars, and to bring that one stream into a larger current in me.

I seem to remember someone said the only real measure of for how long, or how much we should engage in practices to remove old tendencies is total purification. I try not to 'declare victory'. If 'a victory' is to be declared at all, let it declare itself. Otherwise it just seems to be me setting myself up. I think of what Buddhadasa said when asked if he suffered, meaning if he was a liberated being. He said, well, I haven't suffered for a while, but you can never be too sure, i.e., keep practicing...

In the Nyingma, they say that when the obscurations are removed, our positive qualities naturally shine forth. We are very fortunate to know this much, and to have the opportunity to practice, and share whatever is good with others.

Part IV: Essays - VII

At some point you have to say yes

For much of our early years, and then through young adulthood we spend a lot of time saying no to different things. No to this or that relationship, no to being in some situations, no to kinds of jobs, and especially no to feeling some things. We get to choose, if nothing else, what we want in our life, and what we don't want - political affiliations, taste in clothes, art, music, friendships. In a way, we define ourselves by what we say yes and no to.

This may not feel like much of a problem when we're younger, especially when it comes to pushing away some experience, and reaching for something else. After all, that's part of what defines us.

But as we mature, this saying no to so many things can have unplanned for, and unwanted effects. That part of our life that we consciously choose to own, embrace, and build on can become a smaller and smaller part of our entire life experience. It can be as if what we choose is whittled down like a small, slender part of a toothpick, compared to our whole life, which has been like a great river with all sorts of experiences, good and bad, adding to it.

At times in the past it felt like the right thing to do, to say yes to some things, and a definite no to some others - to just walk away from some experiences, and not look back. But what often remains with us, and what I see now, is the continuing feeling of saying no, even when that experience is past, in many cases long past. The feeling remains of not wanting some feeling, some experience, some relationship, some job, of not wanting to be treated in some way.

I can see how there are whole areas of my life, to this day, that I don't want. Which brings me to my present feeling, that, at some point, for the sake of wholeness, and as way of living with kindness and compassion for myself, I have to say yes to my whole life.

Yes to all the missed notes

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yes to all the relationships that didn't work out
 yes to not being seen, or appreciated
 yes to the confusion, yes to feeling sad, or lonely, or fearful, angry, arrogant,
 spoiled... and so on

As much as I wouldn't have wished for those things – they were not my first or second or third choice, still, they were my life.

At some point I have to say yes and embrace them as me, otherwise, what is left? A piece of a piece of a piece of the whole. Energetically, these experiences don't just disappear – they go underground, psychologically and physically, and they try to find ways to be known and accounted for. We innately strive for balance. That much is automatic for us.

Although I didn't aim to connect these simple things today – embracing our whole life, with what I've learned in Buddhism, here it is. Whatever system we study, or if we just study ourself, it seems to me that we find there is a difference between pacifying something, or transcending it so it's not an issue for the time being, and transforming it, which is a deeper, whole-making art, and what we really need to do, for the sake of greater health, with the difficult things in our life.

{For more along the lines of the subject of becoming whole, see also the article written a few days after this one, and a continuation of some of these thoughts, called A fully born human being}

I can say that I went from place to place, not knowing the outcome ahead of time, but doing my best; having ideals, and very often not meeting them. These experiences have become part of who I am now, and for that reason they have value.

Saying yes as a kindness

I know now that it's possible to block out whole sections of life from our consciousness – by not wanting to look, to acknowledge, to feel them.

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If we're just talking about a day, or a week, or a year, that's one thing, but I know the time we can reject can add up to much more than that. It seems that maybe half of my life, or more, can be resisted, or refused as being too painful to hold and look at and accept. But I want to acknowledge the whole river of my life, from birth until now. It's not necessary to exactly celebrate all of it, but to say, I was here, this was me, I did what I could with what I had, and sometimes things actually turned out well. I loved and struggled and fell and got up again and fell again, and it's been like this... exactly like this... and like this... and like this...

I missed here and here and there and there, and I didn't usually stop trying. I went through that hell and that one, and that desolation and that degradation also, and came out of it pretty much intact. I have marks and compassion now for others and myself. I walked this exact path to get here to where I am today.

At some point you have to say yes to it all

Even though there have been plenty of 'no' moments, I have to forgive and look at my self of these times with compassion. Those persons I have been, in some ways they are still with me. And the others that were involved, that are someplace else walking in the world – I have to forgive them too, or offer apology if I was at fault, regardless of how the past was for us.

In whatever way this energy that continues in me is now, I have to hold it and accept it, and embrace it as best I can now. Although there is also the elemental 'no' - pushing away energy, as this was and is now, I have to say a greater yes to it too, for wholeness sake.

Now, by 'you have to say yes', I don't mean anyone is ever going to force you to say yes, and hold and accept your life. What I mean by it is that, this is something that all by itself becomes necessary, if we're going to have inner peace, and wholeness, and the possibility of joy.

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To make peace with our past, however it has been, is to put our life back together. This can be done to move from a state of fragmentary-ness, to a dynamic completion, where everything is not just held together, but works toward some aim, which is the aim of our life.

If a person were to say they don't know what the aim, or aims of their life is, it doesn't have to be something dramatic, or singular. It can be knowing some modest place in this world, some role we can do out of our life experience. It can also be that we have more than one role or function. What a place in the world has in general for people is that it goes beyond ones' self in the small sense, and connects us to others, to the greater world, and to what is beyond this one time.

An interesting thing begins to happen when we can say yes to even the parts of life we don't like that we have lived through. That same yes opens the way for even greater appreciation of what has gone well, and what has far exceeded anything we could have known to seek or ask for. Our natural surroundings, whatever health we have, family, friendships, arts, and our own creativity – all this is known in a deeper way when we have a yes that looks on our entire life. This kind of yes is a mighty word.

All the good things can be known, energetically, in more and more of a relationship to what has gone wrong or what has not been fulfilled, and when that's the case, our gratitude for those good things can be much greater. Because of that greater yes, we receive more of life.

I watch how it works. When we truly appreciate something, we are nourished by it, we are strengthened. And out of this being more deeply nourished, we are able to give more. When our roots are fed, we flower and give fruit to the world, to all generations.

Saying yes to our whole life is what makes this possible. Without being able to say yes, we are cut off from ourselves; in denial, or in inner conflict. We may expend sums of energy avoiding thoughts or feelings or memories or

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associations. Without the yes, we are in disarray, in some ways choosing this (imagined) over that (real) life, at war with ourselves.

What is needed is a different kind of yes and no. Clearly we will still have preferences, regrets, memories – but how to view them? That's the question.

The yes I'm referring to has a comprehensive, and dispassionate quality to it. It is simply being able to look fully and say this is how things were, this is how things are now. Love is of course present in such a mind, in a toned down way perhaps, but it is there as a healing force. Why else look at and hold and embrace the difficult or confusing past?

When we see the value of saying yes to our whole life, we have a willingness to honor all the experiences we're had as a part of our life. We still can see how we would have wanted things to go, or would want them to be now, which is the 'no' aspect of viewing difficult things. But this is tempered by its being held within the greater affirmation of our life. Here, ultimately, there is no rejection or turning away from something, and dividing ourselves. This honest looking is then a basis we can build on, with continuing love for ourselves.

Having a recent conversation with a friend, I thought of another analogy for what happens when we say yes to our life. I thought of how we refer to what are called ancestral streams, and that, if we are in touch with our family's family, or our spiritual ancestors, we can receive energy from them. This is felt in many ways - as courage, protection, guidance, love, and a sense of belonging to something greater than ourselves. If we are in touch with these ancestral streams, we can receive and carry forward something of the impulse of their life, a part of that which made them what they were when they were here on this earth.

In the same way, it feels like there is something we can call the ancestral stream of our own past selves. All that wisdom, courage and support from our previous selves is still there with us, and we can benefit from it to the extent that we are able to say yes to our own life.

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This embracing of the past, the whole past, is certainly not a one time decision we make. It's more of a training. In order to do this well, we have to re-train the way we energetically respond to our past suffering. We can learn gradually over time, to gently hold and accept and value these experiences as our own. Our experiences, every single one of them, are what brought us to where we are today, and to love our life fully now, I think we have to embrace all of whatever got us here.

Saying yes is the gate, and it is always there, always available. Learning yes is the way to human fullness, integration and more inner health and peace. It is a path for a humble person, yes, true, that, and yet it is also the way for a person who knows his or her true worth, because they are in touch with it, and it is being exercised by them every day.

Part IV: Essays - VIII

A Fully Born Human Being

I'm convinced that those with their heart not yet broken open by this world, in some vital way are not yet fully born. Somehow, they are not yet completely what we would call a human being.

We have much in common with other species – instinct, intelligence, the arc or our physical existence. But beyond the culture we receive, there is one thing that I would say characterizes us as human beings. It is our capacity to feel what others feel, and to respond to suffering with compassion, to dedicate ourselves to something larger than the small sense of ourselves.

There are many ways a person can avoid feeling, not just temporarily, but for their whole lives. Food, sex, drugs, absorption in tv, over activity, intellectualization, games or fanaticisms of one kind or another - any of these can remove a person from feeling.

Now, I understand very well the urge not to feel, not to suffer, even my own suffering, let alone that of others. I think we all know that feeling can be just too much sometimes.

But there are two factors I can think of, beyond seeing its intrinsic worth, that make it possible for a person to go beyond the narrow boundaries of what they usually regard as their self.

The first is a certain strength of constitution, without which, no matter how well intended we may be, the result of contact with suffering will be too much to bear. We all have something like circuit breakers in us, and they will switch off, for survival's sake, if we can't hold the consciousness of another's pain.

If, however, as a result of being well cared for and fortified, our constitution is strong enough, then the second element is all that is needed to produce a motivation to be more aware of, and engaged in resolving the difficulties

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others experience. That second crucial factor is seeing how much of the suffering that people experience is not necessary.

If others must suffer, and they or we can do nothing about it, to remove or diminish it even slightly, then eventually we would feel ‘what’s the use?’ Engaging them would be to no purpose. But if we see that suffering can be lessened, or removed temporarily or permanently, *and we know the great value of this*, then naturally we would be motivated to become more aware, and to engage others positively, on deeper and deeper levels.

Those with their hearts not yet broken are not yet born in the world. They may appear outwardly and speak like human beings, but they have not yet matured.

I’ve come to feel that compassion is the only way to be completely born as a human being in this world. It ‘levels’ and humbles us so that we don’t put ourselves above anyone else, and like the earth, we are able to receive blessings to do our work, whatever it takes to benefit others, our family. Because of our consciousness of the great need that exists to respond to suffering in a way that actually helps the situation, strengths come to us, or are found, awakened and developed.

People are afraid of having their heart broken open, elementally afraid they won’t survive it. They are fearful also, if they live selfish lives, of the changes they’d have to make, in their values and the expression of those values. People are afraid of such a revolution because, like any real revolution, it would change everything. Really though it only changes the person, but that includes everything else – every intention, and every organization.

The purpose of a foundational education, I would think, should be to gradually introduce a person to life in this world. Then we can be given the gifts that are our heritage: knowledge of ways to joy, and ways to reduce and remove suffering, and the unmistakable knowledge that feeling and

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responding to suffering does not have to destroy us, but can actually make us stronger as human beings, mature, dignified, a full member of the human race.

As it is now, our education does not prepare us to be compassionate, full human beings. We're not raised to be progressively stronger, but instead, in this, the United States in the first part of the 21st century, we are educated to be indulgent, dissatisfied consumers; purposely self-centered, all mirrors pointing back to us, with barely a scent of the greater, endlessly greater worlds all around us.

We have to make huge efforts to overcome the conditioning of our time, the shallow, narcissistic, hedonistic, dispersed, miserable, neurotic, easily manipulated mindset. But once this is even partially accomplished, there's no going back. All those flimsy values fall away, and we stand revealed as a true human being, timeless, naturally virtuous, abundantly resourceful, spontaneously generous and joyful.

Com-*passion* then 'suffers with' all the broken, not fulfilled, confused, scarred, isolated and forgotten, and lives to benefit them. This is mature joy, and it puts everything else in context.

Even time away, rest and renewal, is held in this greater vision, a larger sense of purpose, a feeling for our place in the world. What more do we need? This is complete in itself, and it moves, dedicated, inevitable, weighty and grounded, yet nimble too, to meet each day's circumstances.

Compassion is the highest value. It is the prime characteristic of a fully born human being. All of this world's gifts can be received because of compassion. Wherever there is suffering, or confusion, or a lack of education, or wherever there is despair or illness, these can block the way to all the great gifts this world has to offer. But compassion ceaselessly, and extensively works to remove whatever keeps living beings from being able to receive joy, and whatever keeps them from happiness, health and peace.

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First, the 'deficit' of sorrow and suffering is removed. If the burden of affliction is removed even slightly, even that is felt with tears of joy to be something of enormous value. Then, imperial as the sun, and endlessly generous, it is our nature, the nature of compassion and love, to remove more and more of the suffering and to give greater and greater happiness. For a compassionate person, I tell you with certainty that naturally it is so.

No longer just thinking about the bottom line, or narrow, short-sighted aggression, or fixated on the next fix, with compassion some higher vision has come to be. And I tell you certainly, from that point on, with this birth, everything is effected, every motivation, every bat of the eyelash.

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{Note: I know that the term ‘shadow’, as it is used in the Western Tradition, until now, has not been a part of Buddhist vocabulary. But as Buddhism becomes established in the West, it’s my feeling that the language and the insights of the psychological and spiritual disciplines that are here can only add to the richness and the effectiveness of our practice. J. E. }

A Prelude to Talking about the Shadow

Looking at difficult emotions and held back elements in the psyche always has the potential to release a lot of energy. It’s been my experience that when an abundance of energy is released, on the way to integration, one hopes, chaotic events can unfold in the outside world. The feeling can be that these are not oneself, per se, but still we can feel that there is some relationship to the internal; and such things strange encounters, or accidents, or events involving the police, fire department and ambulances can take place.

My sense is that there is a parallel between the kind of held back, unformed energy that is released, and strange, unexpected, or out of control interactions or events. Somehow, their texture, or movement, or their character *feels* the same.

Once they hear about the value of shadow work, I know most people will probably ignore any preliminary warning, and just jump right in. Ok., fine. Should unpleasant events get set into motion, we can think of this as part of the learning process, instead of getting discouraged. We all need to learn our limits, and just reading or hearing is not the same as seeing for ourselves.

Shadow work in a safe container

There is a way to do safe and effective shadow work, looking into and transforming the held back elements. This involves gathering a wealth of

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supporting conditions. Create as much harmony, stability, goodwill and peace as you can, as a container for the energies to be released. If there are some spiritual practices that you know work for you, set that as the foundation. If the energy should start to feel like it is overflowing, and that there is something of a chaotic character to it, then set the inner work aside for a while and increase the stabilizing elements in your life. Most of all, go slow. This will give you time to assimilate whatever comes up.

Besides that of the container, another analogy we can use is that of 'the filament'. Our constitution has to be strong to look within ourselves and get in touch with difficult elements. Our body, mind and our emotions, or we can say, our constitution can be likened to the filament in a light bulb. Too much current, and the bulb will resist, or go out. We can tell when someone is frail, emotionally. Their voice trembles, and they avoid talking for long about anything difficult. Anger can be an escape, as well as distraction.

We all know, on some level, when we need to back off the difficult subjects in our life. We know, consciously or unconsciously when we are capable, and when we need more weight, so to speak.

The way we fortify our constitution is to be in touch with positive, nourishing things, such as art, beauty, nature, and peaceful environments and experiences. Then when we are ready, we can engage the deeper, and sometimes difficult things.

Ideally, shadow work is about more than just release. Deeper resolution is more than the discharge of energy, as valuable and necessary as that might be. We need then to be able to weather the effects of doing inner work. If we use a balanced approach as much as we can, I think we're headed in the right direction.

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The Shadow from a Buddhist Perspective

The shadow:

That which is held back, shunted away, denied, unresolved in our psyche; what opposes us in the totality of our 'personal' consciousness

An energetic phenomena, that, like all other energy dynamics, has it's own laws and specific ways of functioning

First thoughts about the shadow

Reflexively, a self arises, right or wrong – an idea of who we are is formed, and from that we relate energetically to the world. We have wishes, wants, perceived slights, experiences of despair, shame, frustration and virtues too. Everything that is held back, if its point of origin is still with us in some subtle way, makes up the shadow.

All that is held back, such as 'id energies', all that we cannot express, either due to social constraints, or because it conflicts with some other psychological factor inside us, is repressed or gathered into the unconscious.

Note here that there are two kinds of factors that we hold back – the first is what we don't say or do because of social discretion, and the second is also what we don't say or do because it wouldn't be appropriate, but that has a powerful inner component of willing to act or to speak in a certain way - the tension of these two elements together create the shadow factors in us.

To further clarify – sometimes we have the wisp of a motivation come up and, if we just wait, it passes without any sense of conflict created. Sometimes then, this same motivation, to speak or to act in a certain way has to be struggled against maybe even fought with mightily. The difference between these two reactions to the same impulse is that in the first case there

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are deep inner structures that support not striking out, not acting or speaking in a certain way.

It's the role of education, acculturation in the best sense, and the cultivation of morals - at its best, the development and extension into the world of our natural goodness - that determines if the difficult things we meet with in life brings out a mild response or something we need to struggle with and repress, which, in addition to not dealing with the root cause of the problem, brings a whole range of repercussions.

Note also that when we call something 'shadow' it implies a degree of unconsciousness – either we reject or deny something because we feel it is too ugly or terrible to bear, or because it does not fit with the strong, persistent idea we have of ourselves.

Further, we have to say that often a shadow element will not just be rejected, but actually hated, which is much stronger than just rejection. The energy of hatred is powerful. It is not just that we dislike or push something away, but that we oppose this fiercely, passionately. When we hate, we exert great psychic energy to keep some things at a distance. This results in the energy pushing back, also powerfully, in some ways.

As long as these elements are energetically unresolved, they find outlets against our will, or in spite of our best intentions. We may deny that we are somehow the cause of these shadow manifestations, especially if we hold an image of ourself as entirely right, and there is no outlet to release the charge of shadow energies.

What's as bad or worse than storing up such shadow energies, is that we then often then proceed to project the denied elements in our own psyche onto others. It happens sometimes that if we are angry, or petty around something, or dull, or confused and conflicted, and we see some occasion to blame, or to put onto others what we have in ourselves, we accuse them of

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what is actually our mind, reacting to our own, unclaimed, aspect of our psychological energies.

As Robert Johnson points out in his book on the shadow, we also project our own positive qualities onto others. It does not mean the person or situation doesn't have the negative or positive quality react to, but that some additional factor is there that is usually not perceived, not taken into account and not owned or taken responsibility for. We need to learn to distinguish what is ours from what is there in the people and circumstances we meet.

Getting a handle on the shadow

I think of those people who do not say what they most want, and need to say, and the effects that has on their person. We call such people 'bottled up' – their energy gets physically blocked, and even ordinary feeling or communication becomes labored.

Thich Nhat Hanh taught about the need to have what he called a healthy circulation of psychological energy, with an awareness of what is going on, not rejecting anything in our experience, any thought, feeling, memory or desire.

For me, this assumes some solidity, and enough weight on the other side of the balance: a sense of what is right, profound, rich with virtue and positive life. If we try to be in touch with or accommodate what is wounded before we are capable, we will be overwhelmed. Then we will either give up too soon, or press on get burned out, which amounts to the same thing. In either case, we will not have accomplished the task of accommodating the difficult elements so they can be transformed.

I think that in both Buddhism and in Jungian psychology, what is referred to by the term the shadow is an energetic phenomena – one that can have the charge taken out of it to a lesser or greater extent, and one that's energy can be, and needs to be utilized, or else it will unbalance a person.

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As physics will tell you, when it comes to energy, nothing is ever lost. These energies can be released and assimilated, to the strengthening and health of the entire person.

At this significant juncture, as I read it, Buddhism differs from Jungian psychology. The central point of Buddhism, for a person wishing to liberate his own mind from fears and afflictions, and help others to do the same, is wisdom. Without the teachings that make up Buddhism's Wisdom Traditions, the teachings would only be about ethics, calming the mind in meditation, and cultivating positive states such as goodwill, and patience. What truly distinguishes the language of Buddhist teachings is that they point to the cause of suffering, and teach ways to transform the base itself of our responses to life.

The reason I used the phrase 'have the charge taken out of it to a lesser or greater extent' is because when I read of shadow work involving such activities as writing a letter, using humor, or talking to 'let off steam'; or performing a dance expressing some locked up feeling, watching a horror movie, or making a ritual of letting go of an emotion, I sense that there is a difference between this level of dealing with things, and getting at the root cause of what underlies these difficult emotions. The temporary, provisional methods are useful and necessary as far as they go, but I know we can also work on a deeper, more causative level.

The Wisdom teachings of Buddhism are straightforward, and can be described in a few words, but they are profound in their application.

Essentially, Buddhism teaches that what we take to be ourself, habitually, reflexively, is not who we are, is not what is actually here. It teaches that our experiences are based on a mistaken concept of ourselves, and others, and this world.

As an idea, such words have only minimal value. When looked into though, the basis for our many difficult emotional reactions falls apart. No one can do the work for another, and words are not enough. This can have a

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profound effect on our whole life, but only if we do the investigation ourselves into who we reflexively conceive ourselves to be, and integrate that insight. The effect of integrating this dawning of wisdom in ourselves is that it is able to resolve and heal the past dynamics that were created out of ignorance.

As I read it now, I have the feeling that ‘shadow’ elements from the past are viewed as more fixed dynamics than they actually are. Perhaps this is true for someone who does not practice meditative disciplines, but it is not ultimately true.

The idea that every hurt, slight, unfulfilled motivation, wants and needs a kind of release or resolution for our psychological balance seems to me to be asserting some kind of a self as a fixed point, relating to the world, striving, making mistakes, seeking redress. If this ‘self’ as a center were to change, however, what does that do to the shadow dynamics of the previously posited selves? They may remain for a while, but in one analogy, they are compared to a thief entering an empty house – they can’t cause one trouble. In fact, the emotions themselves release on their own, and are referred to as ‘self-liberated’.

If it happens that naturally the view of ourself changes substantially from following the Jungian approach, this is not referred to specifically. Instead, their view seems to be one of a fixed matrix of experience that allows or prohibits different things in life. Teachings from Eastern traditions differ fundamentally in that they look at consciousness and the one who experiences himself or herself as being capable of changing.

Buddhism and Jungian psychology have a lot in common: they both aim for the health and wholeness of a person; they agree that mindfulness, self observation and being inclusive is always necessary, as an aim at least; and they both contain methods for catharsis, release and transformation.

Compare, for example, the methods described in Vajrasattva purification meditations, whereby one imagines pure light moving through one’s body,

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also imagined as being made entirely of light, and going down ‘nine stories’, feeding all we owe a karmic debt to;

then there is the Chod practice, where one offers one’s body, imaginatively transformed into limitless light and nectar, to – whatever opposes one – including those we owe something to, energetically, thereby satisfying them completely;

compare this with the active imagination techniques that are used to work out yet unresolved, unfulfilled energy dynamics.

Art and Shadow work

We can see also how reference is made to art in both traditions. There seems to be an over-arching principle to all systems, whether they are psychological or what we call religious, and that is the innate will to find balance. We all have this inherent intelligence that will function if we only let it. Intuitive art can accomplish this effectively. We all have the inherent ability to know when and where we are out of balance, and to create ways to adjust, to restore wholeness.

The poet Robert Bly spoke of an image or verse in poetry rising up to the surface of consciousness ‘soaked in psychic substance’, and therefore capable of transforming the experience of both the writer and the listener or reader. And music is long associated with healing and transforming emotional states: Mozart uplifts, and the musics of Beethoven and Bach, to name just two, express in sound the process of transformation: from tragedy, struggle and despair to exaltation, a journey that a listener does in fact participate in.

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Forgiveness is a revolution in consciousness

In this age, Westerners have an especially great potential for forgiveness. When we forgive, we no longer feel resentful and proud, like we are owed, and waiting, accumulating energy waiting for a chance to bust out and claim that we were wronged, and demand that we energetically be given our due.

For forgiveness to be deep and powerful, it needs to be based on understanding our human situation, and on having compassion. We can let go of any and all claims that we are owed something, and have a truly clean slate – no balance due, no feeling of having been wronged.

Apology from our side, and the forgiveness we offer internally, regardless of how it is received, is a great gift we can give to ourselves as well. Because we understand that delusion, and inability caused their wrong actions, wrong values, neglect and harmful actions, we no longer have to carry the burden of resentment and injury. We can let go of seeking redress from others. We ourselves become freer, and we have more energy as a result of forgiveness. This can have vast, entire life enhancing value.

All this takes humility, however, based on genuine self worth. Only when we know clearly our own value can we acknowledge our limitations, with the aim of working to improve ourselves. Apology is then not self-abasement, rather it affirms what is more true and precious in ourselves and in others.

Forgiving others is a kindness to ourselves, a great boon, and it helps us to be forgiving of ourselves as well, as we recognize that we are like others, needing love too and making mistakes. And, in turn, forgiving ourselves leads to having more understanding and compassion for others, who, we can learn, are like ourselves in all the fundamental ways: we all need to be treated with kindness and respect; we all have fears and dreams, injuries and confusion, and virtues too. When we are able to forgive, in some significant ways everything changes. All possibilities again become open to us.

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Gold in the shadow

In the shadow, something essential of our humanity is found. What would we be without that tender heart, that heart that can be crushed? Where else is understanding born into what it means to be a human being, except in the most difficult stuff of our own lives? Where else is compassion born?

Just as it is said that we are more than our suffering, we are also more than the sum of our joys, our triumphs, our ideals and aspirations, even more than our potentials.

I recall that Tibetan Buddhist practice involves letting go of our limited self concept (for better and worse, ideas that are somehow resistant to anything else) so that we can then access our deeper potentials. We're taught not to deny things, but to 'hold our concepts loosely' to allow room for greater possibilities.

Our whole energy, and some of our greatest resources are found in the comprehensive view that includes those part of ourselves, our experience that we've deemed unworthy and pushed away, consciously or unconsciously. Not only is great energy made available from shadow work, but understanding and qualities and virtues to can then become available to live and work throughout our lives.

Relational, familial, and collective shadow work

Perhaps I should say just a very few words about this here: From doing personal work, we can begin to see our relationship to the shadow in others. In fact our definition of ourself will change as we study and aim to go in a positive direction.

At some point, we can see that we can not remove ourselves, in terms of who we are, from our relationships, from our family and our culture.

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Related to this is the whole concept of Field dynamics: energetically, we are not separate. It's true also that if one in a group has a repressed desire to act silly, or sad, or angry, another can pick up on that unconsciously and express that energy. The causes have not been addressed, but for the time being that held back energy finds some release and relief.

At some point, any idea we had of ourself as separate seems to be just that – only an idea with no actual energetic reference in the way things are. We have to accommodate others in some way.

What then to do with the shadow we, or they experience or express, all the terrible unconscious imbalance that by its nature needs to be taken into account and brought back to a state of health? A line from one of Paul's letter's comes to mind: Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ.

We may not feel up to this, depending on where we are in our life, what challenges we face and work we ourselves have to do, but I take comfort in one idea I heard factored into a Western practice of prayer. At a certain point, a person is told to pause and to try to have a sense for what they are given to pray for – a person, or group, a situation, or a cause. I like this because it feels true.

We don't have to feel like we have to do everything, which no one person can do anyway. We are each given a part of the world soul to heal, and if we can do this much, we have fulfilled our purpose righteously on this earth.

Whatever approach we take, when the basis of our suffering is changed, there is no further accumulation, and so nothing more gathered that will need to be released or resolved. In addition to the provisional methods we use for balance sake in our lives, then we should also be sure to aim to address the underlying causes as much as we can. Such an intention will surely bear fruit in time.

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Jung and Buddhism

When I watch film of Carl Jung, Robert Johnson, and Joseph Campbell, I see what I think are whole human beings, intelligent, compassionate, balanced, integrated, articulate, and with a profound degree of inner freedom. Buddhism and Jungian psychology have much in common that is worth exploring, and not only for the sake of mutual affirmation, but because, like all useful inter-disciplinary study, the different approaches can be mutually illuminating.

I don't claim any high degree of accomplishment in Buddhist practice, or any great knowledge of Jung's methods, but as a student of these things, I can offer a few words about what I see as their strengths and differences.

I suspect that Buddhism, being a contemplative tradition, has an awareness of and active engagement with more subtle levels of functioning, and access to greater resources than are recognized by psychology. The reason for this is that Buddhism has always included the practice of calm meditation, and this reveals factors that any person without these disciplines, no matter how educated or intuitive, can only be dimly aware of.

Jungian psychology, on the other hand, is what Tibetans would call 'a close lineage'. The founder was a brilliant man that lived from the late 19th through much of the 20th centuries. His learning was boundless, engaged without inhibiting prejudices, and infused with intelligence, intuition and compassion. Many of his insights are particularly relevant for us today. His was, and continues to be an immeasurable gift for humanity.

Part IV: Two Essays on Wisdom - Introduction

Two reasons for the inclusion of the following essays in this collection

While the subject of wisdom is worthy of extensive study all by itself, I can think of two reasons for including the following essays in a collection such as this. The first is that, in Buddhism, the cause of suffering is put forth as ignorance. This is not just general unawareness or a lack of information, but it refers specifically about the wrong views we habitually hold about ourselves and others, and about the world we live in.

The way it's traced out in Traditional Buddhist teachings on health and healing, is that wrong views, or ego-grasping leads to the range of difficult emotions, and these lead to imbalances in our mind and body, sometimes manifesting as illness. When we are healthy mentally and emotionally, on the other hand, this produces benefit on a physical level as well.

My aim with this collection is to present a range of practices that make use of the richness and healing qualities we have available to us, and so for the sake of completeness alone, these articles have a place here. For those who are interested, Lama Zopa has an entire book, called 'Ultimate Healing' where he discusses in depth the relationship between Wisdom, in the Buddhist sense, and health.

In the article on ethics and the one on purification, I note that for healing and purification to go deep we need to get to root causes. This is where wisdom study and practice comes in, because it concerns the deeply held ideas we have of ourselves, and the effect of those ideas on our whole lives. True health is very much the issue here. As I noted in the preface, all of Buddhist teachings can be considered to have a healing function.

The second reason for including the following essays on Wisdom practice here is that, in order to practice tantra effectively, we need to move at least to some extent beyond our habitual ordinary view. This is necessary not only so that we can believe in what we are doing and apply ourselves, but it is needed also so that we can access the resources we all have within us.

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The bridge between the Mahayana and the Vajrayana

Although it is not usually expressed as I'm going to say it, I think there's a reason to speak explicitly about the natural bridge that exists between the Mahayana view and vajrayana view and meditation.

When a person sees through the ego, or sees that they are much more than they usually conceive of themselves as, the experience can be one of light, warmth, and richness. We could say they have a glimpse of the view, a truer experience, one that is more reliable. This happens when other elements, other than merely changing one's concept, are present. I go into this in more detail in the following articles.

There is a bridge linking the Mahayana Buddhist practice, of moving beyond ordinary, common ego grasping, and the vajrayana practice of mantra and visualization practice, and that bridge is what is referred to as Buddha Nature. When a person arrives at this from the study of various texts, and in his or her meditation, that can be the basis for all the various expressions of this fundamental nature. After all, where else can we get the energy, power or qualities that the different bodhisattva-divinities represent, other than from a source that contains all these potentials? Such is Buddha Nature.

If you've followed the material this far, perhaps all these ideas will be perfectly clear. This is my hope at least. There is nothing here that I've merely made up – it all be expressed before by great Lamas such as Lama Yeshe in *An Introduction to Tantra*, and Tulku Urygen, in *Rainbow Painting*.

May all beings receive everything they need for true health and happiness.
 May they have peace and joy
 right views and great appreciation
 for themselves, and others and this world we all share

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and why this is so important in Buddhism

How going beyond ego-grasping reveals our True Nature, and why this is so important in Buddhism

{Here are a few thoughts I wrote down as part of a letter to my sister. This is the section about the Perfection of Wisdom, or Prajna Paramita. }

Everything the different teachers say on Wisdom in Buddhism is true and useful in it's own way, but maybe putting it in the following context will make the ideas they put forward easier to follow:

Basically, all of the Wisdom teachings in Buddhism are talking about how our own mind projects an idea of things, people, ourselves and others, and then holds onto that idea, as if it were actually what is here, independent of our thinking. That ego-grasping is essentially wrong view. In Buddhism, it is precisely this wrong view that is identified as being the cause of all our negative emotions, negative actions, and unskillful karma. Of course, we are encouraged to see this for ourselves. No one else can do it for us.

And another crucial point follows this: ego grasping also keeps us from seeing what is actually here – what is called our True Nature, or Buddha Nature. Seeing through, or going beyond ego grasping reveals our Buddha Nature, which is naturally abundantly generous, ethical, patient, diligent, steady and Awake. This is why I've titled this short article 'How going beyond ego-grasping reveals our True Nature, and why this is so important in Buddhism'.

Every time I hear a teacher talking about 'emptiness' I feel like I need to stop and remind myself how some words, in different fields, have completely different meanings. For example, the word 'burn', to a cook, or a photographer, or a personal trainer, has three completely different meanings. Or the word 'run' - to an athlete, a fashion designer (as in 'a run in one's stockings') or a printer - again, three totally different meanings.

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and why this is so important in Buddhism

It's the same with the word 'emptiness'. It has to be qualified in no uncertain terms - clear to our own mind - as having a very specific meaning in the Buddhist Wisdom Teachings. Emptiness in Buddhism means that the idea we project onto things, ourselves and others has no corresponding existence in the thing itself. We grasp the idea, which is our own projection, as being true, 'out there', and independent of our own thinking. This is wrong view, and this effects us mentally, emotionally, physically; in our relationships, and in our communities, however we define them.

At times, in following a set of Buddhist teachings, everything will be making total sense- the idea that our life is a precious opportunity, that there is no time to waste, that everyone wants and deserves our kindness and compassion. We can even follow the teachings to the point of sensing the logic and fulfillment there is in dedicating ourselves to helping others as much as we can. There is nothing more important in life than this. Then, however, when we get to the pinnacle, the ultimate purpose of the teachings, it can all suddenly become abstract. Perhaps they will start talking about a table, and deconstructing our thinking about it. It can even seem as if those Wisdom teachings were removed from everything that came before. And what a tragedy if it is so! There is no way to measure what a loss that is, if that happens!

What needs to be remembered again here is that, in Buddhism, the cause of all our suffering is identified as a very particular kind of ignorance, which is called ego-grasping, or wrong view. And that the attainment of freedom from suffering, and gaining the genuine, stable happiness we all wish for is brought about by the development of wisdom. Whatever gets us to that point I would call Dharma, or the Path that Liberates.

With all due respect and with immeasurable gratitude to those who have come before, we can see how many of the extensively developed wisdom teachings have come down to us from monastic institutions, which are like great universities for these studies. Sometimes the profound motivation for these teachings – to help us to become free, and to help us to help others in

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and why this is so important in Buddhism

that same way – and their context, as part of a whole body of teachings, is not made explicitly clear, and it absolutely should be to our minds. It could be like we are opening a big book somewhere in the middle. Maybe we understand what is being said and maybe not.

If a teacher, when talking about Wisdom, is not explicitly stating the great purpose of these teachings, then it's up to us, as listeners, or as fellow travelers on the path, to supply the sense of context, the sense of why these teachings are of the utmost importance, their great value for us all.

The action of ego-grasping, as well as the habit, 'residue' or imprint of doing this is the cause of the afflictive emotions, and the self-perpetuating cycle of deluded suffering that is called samsara, with all the harm this involves.

Letting go of that wrong view, ego grasping, or seeing it for what it is and seeing through that, reveals a world of richness in ourselves and others. It was covered over by thinking, afflictive emotions and mental obscurations, but this true nature can be revealed. Then, effortlessly, respect for oneself and others, gentleness, generosity, and patience can arise. All the virtues are our Nature, and that's what I think teachers are pointing to, when they are discussing Wisdom, that going beyond ego grasping reveals our True Nature.

As Tulku Urgyen said, all the different methods come down to how conceptions are dissolved.

Then, beyond small ego-grasping, all the other Perfections function naturally, effortlessly. Then we are this truth, we are Generosity, Ethics, Patience, and the rest.

When teachers refer to interdependence, or to other reasonings, it is with the purpose of getting us only to see just this point that I made earlier: that we produce an idea of things that is not what is actually here. In Buddhism, all the analysis is just for that purpose.

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and why this is so important in Buddhism

Then, to be complete about it, so we're not just left with an absence of grasping our projected ideas, as one of the teachers, Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal pointed out, moving beyond our limited conceptions, we arrive at Greater Love, tolerance, Generosity, and so on. This is what makes the Perfections Perfections- that they are based on a realization of our nature that is beyond ego grasping. We arrive at the clear light nature of mind. I also like to call this the Ocean of Light that is in us and in all beings. It is, in the words of the Diamond Sutra, 'ungraspable and non-deceptive', and, in the Buddha's words, 'to be understood by the wise, each for himself'.

Of course, we need to calm the mind, and cultivate positive qualities, such as gentleness, gratitude, warm heartedness, forgiveness and generosity, to first pacify gross states and then to start to bring forward what is most true and best in us. And we need to cultivate the strength of discernment. But this sub-stratum is always here, as the verse says:

it is not produced or destroyed,
not made better by seeing it
or made less by not seeing it

To go beyond ego-grasping and it's traces, sometimes the method is used of seeing ourselves, and others, and this world, as being made entirely of light, translucent, and non-obstructing. We can still have concepts- how could we function without them?- but we need to learn to hold them lightly (pun, pun). This way we are not caught by them, to the seeming exclusion for a time of the greater world. Then our real depth and rich life is here. This realization is the cause of our own freedom from suffering and attaining happiness, as well as the basis for our being able to help others. As Dogen says, 'the treasure house opens, and we use it as we will'.

It is my great hope for all of us, when listening to and reflecting on Wisdom teachings, that this much is clear.

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An Introduction to Buddhist Wisdom Teachings

Namo Manjushri

Each Buddhist tradition has its own Wisdom teachings, which are different ways of pointing to the truth. In their own way each tradition encourages people to find truth in themselves.

In terms of what the different teachings have in common, we can say that they all serve the same purpose, which is to help people become free from suffering. We can say that without exception they all have this function. This is the reason for Buddhist teachings in general, and for the Wisdom teachings in particular.

In addition, all Wisdom teachings take place in relation to other disciplines, and to the whole of our life itself. This is important to know. Wisdom teachings will make sense, and their true worth appreciated, depending on how much a person practices, and how well their context is understood.

So then, instead of giving a historical overview of the development of language and ideas, I thought it would be useful simply to write a few pages on the methods of Wisdom teachings, mentioning a few of the points they have in common and placing them in context, showing their great value to us all. May it be of benefit.

Here are the first things a person should know about Wisdom teachings:

Up until the point of Wisdom practice, all of the other methods a person may use, such as ethics and calming meditation, are only a temporary means to pacify suffering. These other methods support and lead a person to wisdom,

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however, it is Wisdom alone that goes directly to the cause of suffering, which is ignorance.

For a person practicing as taught, the method of Wisdom is able to end the struggle and conflict of dealing with suffering just on a superficial, emotional level. This can be exhausting, and what's more it's not enough.

Wisdom also removes the fear that is a part of only having provisional methods to use. While these are necessary supports, somewhere we know that more is needed.

Even early on in learning we can sense that the method of Wisdom is sufficient. Because it deals with the cause and not just with the result of suffering, we can sense that Wisdom can put a complete stop to the cycle of repeated dissatisfaction that is samsara. This the best possible news.

It is Wisdom that gives 'the gift of fearlessness'. This is a gift we can give ourselves.

As long as a person continues to cultivate, they can reasonably expect a lessening of wrong view and afflictive emotion. As the Buddha taught, Wisdom is the actual means by which we can purify ourselves. Just knowing this brings another type of calm; it brings faith, and more energy to study and to practice until the result is achieved.

Wisdom begins with awareness. Then we can notice that when we practice mindfulness it can be something more than just the mere registering of phenomena. There can also be more *knowing*. Mindfulness can be of the nature of *discernment*, or *clear comprehension*, and it is this type of awakened intelligence that we should use, both in our daily activities, and in any practice we may do.

This discernment we develop is helpful to us not only in maintaining good ethics and in meditation, it is also the most useful quality in cultivating

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Wisdom. The reason is that the very essence of Wisdom is discrimination-telling what is what, or telling the true from the false, cutting through illusions. It's for this reason that it's taught that in meditation we should try to 'further and sharpen this bright awareness'. This means no spacing out, or trance-like quality. In fact, we go in the other direction: be awake ; be alert; be present; develop discriminating mind.

In a clear, bright mind of discriminating awareness, no delusion or cause of suffering can grow. This is our protection. This mind is without projections, or imaginings, and it breaks down the remainder of past thought on deeper and deeper levels of mind. We become freer as a result.

More specifically then, what is Wisdom as expressed in Buddhist teaching, and how are we to develop that in ourselves?

Wisdom, as the Perfection of Wisdom, is both relative, seeing what will benefit in a particular situation, and also being established in the truth state, in this moment being clear, without the least trace of wrong view.

The Wisdom taught by the Buddha is the realization of ego-lessness, and non-duality. Having this liberating insight is also sometimes called the experience of 'emptiness'. You might ask, 'Empty of what?'. The answer is empty of ego, or of an 'I'. As one teacher put it though, ego-lessness shouldn't be taken to mean that the ego exists and then we get rid of it; instead it means that we see the ego never did exist in the way we once believed.

When we search into our own body and mind for what we call 'I', or for what we are called by name, we find that what we usually hold to be an 'I', or a 'me' is a fiction, a concept. We have mistaken the ego to be what we, ourselves, actually are, and what other people actually are. There are many levels to this.

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The 'I'-grasping ignorance manifests especially strongly when experiencing either anger or attachment. However, that person you conceive of when you think of an ordinary, limited, permanent person- that person doesn't exist. That is a mistaken consciousness, and it is precisely this imaginary ego-grasping that is the root of all problems.

As Dudjum Rinpoche said, that which has kept us in samsara, the cycle of repeated dissatisfaction, is the grasping and the grasped. This is the cause of the emotional afflictions. Such ego-grasping is also called 'self-grasping ignorance', or 'dual-grasping ignorance'. Ultimately, this has no basis.

As an experiment, right now, tell me, what you imagine- is it real or not real? Of course you can say that it is real in a sense because it produces effects, like when a person mistakes a rope for a snake, but ultimately we know that it is not real. This is what is meant by there being different modes of existence, or different levels of mind or of truth.

There is a way the ego does exist, but it is different from what we have in our mind. We have thought up a mundane, permanent, independent 'self', and taken hold of it as real. This is wrong view.

Any time we fixate on things, ourselves or others, as existing in a particular way, we are hallucinating. This is sometimes called reification. Actually, as we can find out for ourselves, anywhere there is life there is an unfathomable depth of being.

If we are attentive though, sometimes we can notice how we project our imaginings instead onto what is here, and mistakenly believe them to be true. This tendency, and the remainder of having done this in the past influence our perception more than we may know. And it is this mistaken understanding and the effects of taking what is made up by our own mind as being ultimately true, that is changed on every level by Wisdom practice.

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With introspection and study we find that the way we experience is very much related to language, to our naming of things, or to what is called labeling.

The Indian sage Dharmakirti is quoted therefore as saying:

'By means of understanding the conventional level of truth, and ascertaining the manner in which mental labels and conceptualization affect the perceptual process, one perceives the final mode of the actual presence of phenomena. As it is the gateway to the deeper meaning of things, the wise practice in this manner.'

With careful attention reaching insight, we can see that what was taken hold of is not, and never has been true. At the same time, and this is an important point, we can see something else- we can see what is real, stable and lasting- that which is our own true nature, just as it is.

It's taught that our discriminating wisdom completely and absolutely destroys the ignorance of ego-grasping, the cause of suffering. We bring the light of illumination, and with greater strength of comprehension, we cut through the seemingly concrete sense of 'self'-existence.

One of the meanings of the images of destruction in mythology and iconography in fact, is just this total destruction of the ignorance of ego-grasping. They refer to that transformation of experience.

How are we to approach having this experience for ourselves?
What are the methods?

Upon investigation we find that, along with unawareness, one of the things that perpetuates self-grasping is self-cherishing, or the attachment to 'one's' own pleasure. So we can see why the practices of morality and compassion

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are recommended from the beginning, to first pacify the gross manifestations of ego. Then we can go further through meditation.

There are different ways of approaching the cultivation of wisdom. One is through analysis, as mentioned above. We look carefully for what we are called by name, for what we specifically conceive of as 'I' throughout our body, sensations, mental formations, also called tendencies, and consciousness.

To uproot the ego-clinging delusion, the cause of samsara, it's been said that it won't do to have only some sort of vague idea of the 'I' that we take hold of as being who we are. Instead it's essential that, moment by moment, we have as clear a perception as possible of the image or feeling of the 'I', or of who we consider ourselves to be. Then we can benefit from sharp analytical investigation. Keep your mind clear. Keep your knowing sharp.

When we grasp a self, the idea that we have is of a fixed, permanent identity. When we think about this though, right away we can tell it's not accurate. In this way we find that the recognition of impermanence can help with the realization of emptiness. Definitely this is a clue.

Bhikku Khantipalo wrote, 'Intensively examine every dharma, (form, sensations, perceptions, mental formations, consciousness), every momentary experience as it arises and passes away for any sign of (what we conceive of) as 'self'.'

After investigation, and seeing that there's nothing to find, no such 'I' at all there in the five aggregates, then don't look any further- you've already found what's to be found, just rest your mind with that, familiarize yourself with that recognition.

Beginning with ourselves in this way, what we find also holds true for others- we can recognize that they too are not merely what we conceive.

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When we see that the image we hold, in ourselves, or that we project, is without a factual basis, then it has to disappear, or at least the misidentification will lessen, gradually fade, and eventually vanish altogether, taking with it the accompanying emotional afflictions.

The subject and objects of attachment are actually non-existent; Seeing this purifies attachment. And the subject and our objects of anger are essentially non-existent, imaginary - seeing this fully purifies anger. Just so, the three poisons of attachment, anger and ignorance are cut at their very root by this one practice of Wisdom.

When we see illusions as illusions they lose their power over us. This is the essential point of practice. Bokar Rinpoche compares this function of insight as being like seeing a stuffed tiger for what it is, and completely losing any fear we might have had.

The way to make the above method effective is to practice alternating samatha and vipassana, or calm and insight meditation, reviewing the points of analysis, and then to combine the two.

There is a line in 'Heartwood of the Bodhi Tree', by Buddhahasa Bhikku, that 'Nothing whatsoever should be grasped as 'I' or 'mine'. We can also say, 'Don't grasp anything created by the mind as being real.' And, not even the 'emptiness' of the 'I' should be grasped. These are good to remember and meditate on.

Here's a verse:

Meditate one-pointedly on the absence of constructs
as your own true nature
Right meditation on emptiness destroys
mistaken thought forms, swiftly and easily,
like taking a hatchet to balsa wood

(or, as one teacher said, 'like a snowflake in a furnace')

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As mentioned earlier, the method of negation, of saying 'not this, not this' does lead also to something affirmative, in the words of the Diamond Sutra, something 'ungraspable and non-deceptive'. After analysis we can familiarize ourselves with that state, of bliss, and freedom.

Swami Sivananda said, 'After destroying all false imaginings become That which remains', without grasping, and without concepts.

In addition to the method of analysis and familiarizing ourselves with what is found after analysis, there is another way to the realization of our nature, and it is through a more intuitive approach. There are times in practicing meditation when mindfulness, as stability and clear comprehension, opens up and becomes Awareness, or Wisdom, a self-knowing state. All paths and practices are contained in this state.

One instruction by Tilopa says,

'Don't think about the past,
Don't imagine anything about the future,
Don't analyze anything in the present,
Don't contemplate,
Don't concentrate,
Don't meditate.
Leave your mind in its natural state.'

Let go of the past. Let go of the future. Let go of the present. What's left?

Rest your mind in a state of natural ease, without grasping or holding anything, and with your mind very clear and aware, very sharp and precise. Familiarize yourself with that.

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Knowing emptiness in this way is also called 'knowing the true nature of mind'. This experience is also called 'the view'. Sometimes we hear, 'Dissolve your concepts completely', or 'Allow your concepts to dissolve'. It's taught that, 'The view is there upon the dissolution of the conceptual mind'.

As far as the method of meditation here, Tulku Urygen Rinpoche describes it like this: 'Try now in your meditation practice not to maintain anything whatsoever. We should be free not only from the surface and underlying thoughts, but also from the deep seated thought constructs as well, which are what conceptualize the meditation state.

'We need to become used to the natural dissolving of thought through training. By allowing the expression of thought activity to naturally subside, again and again, the moments of genuine rigpa (non-dual awareness, self-existing wakefulness) automatically and naturally begin to last longer.

'Do not create or construct anything whatsoever. Leave your present wakefulness, which is the buddha nature itself, totally unmodified. Do not try to correct or alter anything. Leave it free, as it naturally is.

'The first point, then, is deliberate mindfulness. The next moment is seeing your nature. At that time you should allow for an ongoing state of naturalness.

'All the different speculations should be dropped completely. In the moment of seeing, allow for a continuity free from thought. Simply rest freely in that.

'Realizing the view, authentically and totally, melts away the obscurations of karma and disturbing emotions, and this allows the qualities of original wakefulness to unfold.'

(These lines are selected from the book 'Rainbow Painting'.)

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As we can see, the meditation on emptiness either explicitly or implicitly negates limited concepts of 'self', 'other', and the world. We can take up whichever method for cultivating insight we prefer, whatever works for us. Whatever our approach, however, we will need both of these elements- of stability, or continuity, and discriminating awareness.

In this process that we are engaged in, of cultivating Wisdom, it's also traditionally been taught that it helps us a lot to be in the presence of those who have awakened a deep realization. As there are layers of mind, there is much depth and subtlety that can be known sympathetically. It helps us to hear their voices, to see their pictures, to hear their words, or to think of them. I think of Nisargadatta Maharaj, Ramana Maharshi, Swami Sivananda, Bokar Rinpoche, Lama Yeshe, the Dalai Lama, the Karmapa, Thich Nhat Hanh, Hazarat Inayat Kahn, Kenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche, Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche... These are illumined beings.

You can think of the excellent qualities of any teacher with whom you have an affinity. To be in their presence is referred to as 'satsang', or 'association with the wise'. Association with the wise is association with wisdom itself. We can benefit a lot from this.

We should also clearly understand the need for our own continued application, and our own development toward deeper, more effective practice. 'Practicing correctly is your own responsibility.' Up until now we may have 'practiced' self-grasping, or 'I' grasping for a long time. We may have done it day and night, but this has all been delusion.

If all it took to be without wrong view was to have it explained once, then the practice would be very easy. But what happens is that thoughts that are the product of past thought and experience arise in us like a wave, and again there is wrong view, some negative experience or afflictive emotion.

Even when these negative experiences are not that noticeable, the potential for them can still be there, waiting to be triggered. A discerning mind will

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see if it is so. For example, we can find within ourselves the subtle sense of 'attachment or anger without an object'. This is the awareness of a tendency. Wisdom practice progressively destroys wrong view and afflictive emotion, both in their manifest and latent forms. As it is taught in the Pali scriptures, we should practice to the point of 'forsaking the substratum of existence' of delusion. With stronger and more profound realization, and continued practice, we can reach the stage where realization is complete.

Because of the fact that ego-grasping goes deep, we need to generate a mind that is able to counteract this ignorance on every level - otherwise we will have left the cause of suffering intact. The opposite of the most subtle mind that grasps the existence of 'self' is the most subtle mind that perceives the non-existence, or emptiness, of this. This is what we need to cultivate. There is no doubt that we need to cultivate subtlety and strength of realization.

In addition, we need to engage with consistency in the practice, so that we don't undo the good results we've achieved in the more formal sessions. Here, an 'on and off' practice won't do. It won't work. It's been said that delusions don't need our help- they happen automatically, but that freedom from wrong view and afflictive emotion needs our continued practice of mindfulness and discernment.

It's important therefore that we try to cultivate discriminating wisdom both in meditation and in the course of our daily lives. When there is ego-grasping we should first be aware when this is happening. We can think: 'Here is an illusion of 'self''. Then we should practice 'cutting through', or seeing through, and being without self-grasping. Imaginings disappear. Don't traffic in fictions!

Note: this may be easier to do with ego-grasping that is neutral in terms of its feeling quality- without the attendant emotional afflictions such as attachment or anger. Then we can gradually build up our strength of mind.

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Although selfishness and 'I' grasping ignorance are sometimes deeply ingrained tendencies, and although they may take quite a bit of application on our part to change, still this is something that is possible for us to accomplish. Through meditation we can resolve what Lama Thubten Yeshe called 'the organic problem of ego'. We should know this is possible, and that it is something most worthwhile- it is the way to our own liberation from suffering, and to our being able to help others more and more.

In 'Ceaseless Echoes Of The Great Silence', Palden Sherab Rinpoche says the following about the importance of continued right contemplation: 'We must deepen our understanding by contemplating thoroughly what we have read and heard. This stage of wisdom arrived at through contemplation is very clear and certain: it is called certainty wisdom. It is very important to reach the level of certainty wisdom in all the areas of our lives. Otherwise we will be allowing our minds to rest in states of subtle confusion, denying ourselves the success and fulfillment of lessons truly learned.

'When we contemplate successfully, we do not simply accept what has been taught. We use our intellect to analyze over and over again, until we feel certain that our projections, exaggerations, and fantasies have been eliminated. We are trying to discover exactly what is; to do this, we must constantly refer to what we have learned about the absolute nature, keeping our minds clear of the extremes of nihilism and externalism.'

It's worth mentioning here a number of the factors that are necessary for the continued functioning of wisdom to be possible. We should each do our best to maintain these supports for having a correct insight practice. We are so much more than ego; not small, not separate, nothing mundane here. A person is something precious; inconceivable, 'ungraspable and non-deceptive'. To know this, however, and to meditate with this recognition, we need freshness of mind, and to have much good, appreciative, affectionate energy; we need to have cleared away a lot of the remainders of negative thought and feeling; and we need, to some extent, to have developed

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stability of mind, and sharp, clear awareness. This means accumulating merit, doing purification practice, and a lot of quiet meditation.

Then in all our studies we have to be careful to avoid either of the two extremes- on the one hand, that of taking the ego to be real, or on the other, that of denying what is here. If we deny what is here 'because it's all empty', we would neglect karma, and if we assert too strongly what we perceive as being all there is, that is delusion, the root cause of suffering, and cyclic existence. The way to remedy both extremes is to have both a good heart and understanding.

Mercy, or loving-kindness keeps our karma right, and understanding, or wisdom keeps us from grasping too absolutely at appearances. Our wisdom and compassion should always be together.

For some people, the path of having love for all is itself a way to the intuition of Truth. Whatever method we choose though for the cultivation of wisdom, it is our having this quality, of loving kindness, that provides clarity, a sense of richness, and a ripening warmth in our lives. On any path of Wisdom, the development of love, then, is something necessary for each of us, for our full development. Love is there from the beginning, and it should develop as a matter of course.

There are many levels to the cultivation of Prajna, or Wisdom, and all along the way the unfolding of our understanding naturally leads to having more kindness, compassion and generosity. It has to be this way because our nature is this, and because we can see more of the worth of living beings. We can also see the mistakes of mind that people make that lead to suffering, and how much of it is unnecessary.

Out of our own freedom then we can have empathy, and this together with our own capacity to help brings a sense of responsibility towards other people. Since the way we share what we know is primarily through our own

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practice, we'll want to realize further and give of ourselves, in line with the wish, 'May all be free from suffering and the causes of suffering', ' May all be free from self-clinging.'

The development of compassionate wisdom is, then, the main point of one's own study and practice. It is the basis for our service.

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From a letter- on wisdom and compassion:

I just wanted to mention one thing you repeated in your short note- about what Goenka said about compassion developing naturally as a result of vipassana or insight- I think that, in all fairness, sometimes it happens like this, and sometimes not, otherwise all Arhats would be Bodhisattvas, and that's not yet the case.

Actually, this 'wisdom leading to compassion' is the approach in the Zen tradition, as well as in the Theravada, and also, to some extent, it is the approach taken by the lineages in Tibetan Buddhism that emphasize wisdom practice more first, on the way to a full, complete realization.

Just a note here: The Tibetan word 'San-gye', 'Buddha', translates to 'completely purified- and fully developed', meaning that all faults have been removed, which is the cessation without remainder, and all positive qualities are brought forth, *actualized*.

So, to get back to my point- if it is so that sometimes liberation, the freedom of mind, leads to the full development of love and compassion, and sometimes not, then why not? Why does it sometimes happen and sometimes not? This is so important for us to consider as individuals, and so important for our world, really.

And here's the best answer I can come up with so far- First, there are different temperaments, so that in any one system or approach one person will flourish fully, accomplishing all the different aspects of development, while another person may need other instruction, and to engage in other practices to achieve the same thing.

Then, I've found the following teaching very useful to explain what is happening in any case. In the Tibetan tradition, they speak of 'the two obscurations' that keep us from seeing the truth of what is here. The first

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type is what they call the 'conceptual obscurations', or the 'obscurations of conceptual thought' (wrong views). These are corrected, or cleared away by samatha and vipassana- the quieting of the mind and cultivation of the strength of discernment- discriminating between the true and the false. The Theravada, Zen, and Tibetan traditions that practice non-conceptual meditation clear away this type of obscuration, the obscuration of conceptual thought, very effectively.

But what happens, quite often as it turns out, - it's the characteristic possible sidetrack to this approach- is that the other type of obscuration, called 'the obscuration of afflictive emotions' (kilesa nivvana) is not always fully removed. Sometimes I've been calling these 'the qualitative obscurations'. And the all too common result is that people end up with a partial experience of the view of emptiness, or egolessness, one with the wrong concepts cleared away- but it is a cold, dark, meaningless, nihilistic experience, one that is lacking in the sense of worth, of the beauty and richness of what is here.

The emotional obscurations are cleared away by the development of all the qualities that we associate with the good heart: the development of love and compassion, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, humility, honesty, gratitude, joy, generosity... These change the quality of the mind so that when the conceptual obscurations are removed as well, the experience is warm; the mind is bright, appreciative, and loving; and the feeling is one of richness, of the great value of life.

The no-self teachings of the Buddha are further expressed in the Prajnaparamita Sutras, and the Middle Way is a further explanation of those teachings. The term 'Middle Way' refers to 'being free of the two extremes', the extreme of eternalism (ego-grasping), and the extreme of nihilism. According to Middle Way philosophy, all the mistakes that people can have regarding the View fall into one of these two categories.

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Right View is accomplished by removing the two obscurations, conceptual and emotional, together with their seeds. So the development of love and the positive qualities of the heart are definitely an essential aspect of vipassana, or wisdom practice, seeing things fully as they actually are. Whether we arrive at this indirectly, or through our engaging in methods that directly cultivate both discernment and kindness, the need is there for everyone to have these elements present. That said, we should each practice what suits us best, and accomplishes a full result.

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Why compassion is the most important thing in the world

I think most people could tell you, after having lived some years on this earth that what really lasts in memory is not what people do, but the goodwill that people share with us. When we're treated with kindness, it stays with us. It can nurture and strengthen us for a long time. Deprived of love, we wither, or become twisted. Cared for, we are healthy and we thrive. After a while we know for ourselves that love is essential for living.

I've been feeling these last few weeks that I have something implied in this assertion 'compassion is the most important thing' that needs to be drawn out. I'm proposing for your consideration that it has natural, intrinsic worth. Here's what I've thought:

First of all, how do we measure importance?

Clearly, there's an enormous range of what people think, fervently believe, to be important - baseball, money, prestige, family, food, study, travel, pets, very clean dishes... make your own list...

I think we'd all agree that even our own ideas about what's important changes from year to year or even from day to day, hour to hour... I had to ask, then, what are we all trying to define here, when we say something is important, that it is worth pursuing, or avoiding, or being careful about, or holding on to?

I think it has to do with happiness and unhappiness.

When we call something important, it means we believe, rightly or wrongly, that it has the potential to give us happiness, or it could be important to us also because of its potential to cause us unhappiness.

Think of a person's attitude towards a tossed away gum wrapper, not of much value, unimportant - and then think of a mother seeing her child

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walking toward some traffic, and reacting to that as something important, as something with the potential to cause a lot of unhappiness.

So, as a working idea, I've thought that what we are calling importance is: our idea of the potential something has for to bring us happiness or to avoid unhappiness.

Right ideas, in this regard, are more valuable, naturally than wrong ideas, just like an accurate map is more valuable than one with wrong information... By nature, good advice, is of more value to us than wrong, or misleading ideas.

From here, at least, I can see why, in the scheme of things, I give compassion the highest importance. Why do people study, or seek knowledge?, Or build schools, or hospitals, or water treatment facilities? It's at least in part because these are seen, rightly, as things that can bring happiness to others, and prevent harm.

Compassion is a motivating force for good. It gives birth to seeking wisdom, and to wisdom, understanding something rightly, and to works...

As the attitude responding to suffering, and the actions that follow, compassion opens the way for every enjoyment. All the enjoyments of the world are blocked for a time when a person suffers in some way. Removing that suffering makes available all the treasures this life has to offer. For this reason it naturally has the greatest worth.

Instead of being swept along with so many others valuing meaningless things, I'd like to propose, here is a true scale of values. See for yourself.

In my opinion, nothing else compares - not generosity, or ability, or wealth, companionship, longevity, pleasures, all of these we can give, but without kindness, understanding and loving compassion, they are at best temporary.

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Compassion is instinctively praised, respected, and honored everywhere and in all times.

Even a poor person, without resources to speak of, without much strength or wit or charm, can still, in his room one night, have compassionate thoughts for the pain someone experiences or could experience. And that person, despite their limitations, can still get up the next morning and change the world for the better. Even if it's just one person's life, it can still be a very great thing.

Anyone who has been in need, and received someone's kindness knows how important this is, that someone reached out to us, or gave us their support. Nothing else compares in life. Everything else, compared to having that need met, moves far to the background, leaving only this shining truth, and gratitude.

No condemnation - 'Saving All Beings...'

From what I can tell, there is no condemnation in Buddhism, no 'un-pardonable sin', especially in Mahayana Buddhism. As I understand it, there is no fixed good and evil. In this paradigm, instead, human problems are talked about in terms of ignorance and wisdom - the cause of the sufferings of the world being ignorance, and their solution being the development of wisdom. This is a much more workable way to think about things. Here, there is no enemy that cannot be transformed. In addition, whatever good is a person reaches has to maintained.

In the Lotus Sutra, there is a figure called 'Bodhisattva Never-Disparaging', whose main characteristic is that he never puts anyone down. In fact, he always refers to other people as Buddhas, because he sees their potential.

In Buddhism, it's recognized that all have this Buddha nature, which is the potential to be free, and healthy, and naturally helpful.

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Not only should we be free from suffering and confusion, but in this way of thinking, happiness and intrinsic wealth is all of our birthright. Without exception this is true.

Seeing Buddha Nature - our own, and that it exists everywhere, in everyone - this is the understanding that's the basis for working without anger, certainly, and without getting discouraged. I find even the idea of this to be most helpful when things are really difficult, maybe even looking impossible for a time.

I remember a quote that's stayed with me over the years, that goes something like this:

“Buddhas do not blame living beings who are flawed, but, with compassion for all sentient beings, lead them from the ocean of samsara” (the cycle of repeated dissatisfaction and suffering)

We Westerners need a lot of compassion for ourselves, to ease the way in our own life, and to know our own worth. This then becomes the basis for seeing just how much others also need acceptance, and support and encouragement to blossom.

Helping others is truly worthwhile, not only because freedom from suffering is intrinsically worthwhile, but also because of the natural wealth of happiness, and peace, that is attainable by everyone.

Of course, it's not easy, or a one-shot deal. There will be more difficult cases, but we're led onward by the inspiring example of our teachers, to gradually become more and more inclusive in our kindness and compassion.

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Regarding Tonglen:

The Fruit of Practice that is

The Natural Functioning of a Healthy and Capable Human Heart

There is a Tibetan Buddhist Practice called ‘tong-len’, or sending and receiving’, which cultivates the heart-wish to remove others’ suffering and to give them happiness, moment by moment. This is the quintessential expression of what they call bodhi-citta, our ultimate good heart.

Universally, everybody understands this state of mind, the one that aims to remove suffering and to give happiness. It’s so close to where we all are, all the time.

As I see it these days, when it comes to tonglen, there are four things to understand – two pairs of two terms. They are, first, breath and the heart; and second, willingness and capacity.

The verse that is most cited as a source teaching when it comes to tonglen is ‘Giving and taking are mounted on the breath’. Traditionally it’s taught that the sense of one’s own, or another’s suffering is ‘breathed in’, accompanied by an image, if one chooses, representing the suffering or unwanted condition. Then all good conditions, good qualities and positive experiences are sent out with the exhalation.

As we are all breathing in and out all the time, I had the thought that it is not the breathing alone that is tonglen, giving and taking, but that something else is involved. Whether or not we are actually doing tonglen practice – bringing to mind and expressing the aim to give happiness and to remove suffering, something else is the decisive factor, and that is the heart.

In tonglen, with each in breath and each out breath, compassion and loving kindness can be the beautiful expressions of our fundamental human nature.

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The breath then can be used to breath in and out positive qualities that we then naturally share. Such kindheartedness is something we are all familiar with, we just need to practice it, that's all. When we do, it naturally removes suffering and creates happiness. And it gives us strength as well.

I work at a bookstore in San Francisco, and sometimes people look to a person in that position the way a bartender must be looked at sometimes – as someone to talk to, to unburden themselves to. Many times, people just want to be heard. To say it openly, sometimes I am able to listen, and sometimes much less so. (more on that capacity in a moment).

The point I would like to make here though is that we've all had the experience of being a true, sympathetic listener, and also the experience of being genuinely heard. For a person with some problem, even if we haven't said or done anything yet, just being heard, right away there is some relief.

We've also seen and felt how it is when we are not able to listen and feel, or when the person we're talking to is not sympathetic. It is as if we, or they in some way deflect or shield themselves from our pain or suffering, difficulty, confusion. We can say it does not touch their heart, and so we leave much as we came.

What seems to be at work in tonglen is that a person's pain or difficulty is felt in the heart, as it is taught, 'destroying one's self-centeredness'. This is experienced with both the in breath and the out breath - it's a matter of the heart. It's a person being available, open and strong enough. Then naturally, spontaneously, we reach out to help. We don't need to go to school to learn this, or reference some book to know how to respond. Our innate intelligence and compassion guides us.

Watching how this can work, I've come to feel that what is called tonglen is just the natural functioning of a healthy and capable human heart. When we are able, we naturally respond with compassion to remove suffering, and

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naturally we reach out to give joy. Every parent, brother, sister and friend knows this.

Oh, but you say, why then is this world as it is? – which brings me to the next pair of words I think we need to understand and practice tonglen – which is, after all, the natural function of the healthy and capable human heart – which are:

willingness, and capacity

Some people are taught that it's right and necessary to care for one another. In these times, other people are taught that it's every man, woman, and child for themselves.

Given a choice, I'd much rather be with someone with all the willingness in the world to help out, but little or no capacity, crying all the time, easily overwhelmed, than with someone with great capacity to offer help, but no motivation to lift even a finger.

It's much harder to change that second type of person – the 'hard hearted' - into a kind of person who actually contributes to society, instead of living a completely self centered existence, or, worse, just exploiting others to serve their own ends.

Some people think they will be destroyed or overwhelmed if they touch another's suffering, and they may be partly right in this. Maybe it would be too much for them if they are not strong enough. But it is a trick of the mind, a mistaken idea to think that it needs to always be this way. We can strengthen ourselves so that suffering does not pull us down – far from it. The energy of compassion can inspire and empower us to work to change the situation. We have to know our limits, and work to create the conditions so we can have a good effect.

Clearly, both of these types mentioned, either willing but not capable, or able but with no motivation to help don't work. What we need is both the

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willingness *and* the capacity to feel, and to respond. If we've been raised well, and have a basic sense of human responsibility, then what we absolutely need is to know how to take care and strengthen ourselves. Then we will be able to feel, and act in this world.

Many times, people with the best intentions are overwhelmed or exhausted or burned out, and then because they are then not able to fulfill their compassionate motivation, they suffer even more.

From observing how this works in myself and in others, I'm convinced that being overwhelmed is our body and mind's way of telling us to stop and go strengthen ourselves. It's a safety mechanism, like the fuse in a house tripping. Something of that kind of functioning in us is a type of intelligence we all need.

We strengthen ourselves with good food, adequate rest, peace, enjoyment, and the refreshment and spiritual nourishment found in the arts, Tradition, nature, and our own contemplative practice. By assimilating these things our entire constitution is changed so that, to a greater extent, we can be with suffering conditions. We can allow the difficult things to touch our heart without being overwhelmed by them. In fact they can strengthen us. We can feel it in the moment of meeting some difficult situation. Something in us, maybe even something we didn't know we had in us, rises up to meet the conditions. And after, we can become more clear and determined to live and act in a way that can help. This can only happen if we have taken good care of ourselves beforehand.

Here are two images to illustrate willingness and capacity

Venerable Rita told of how a mother who has to go out to work so she can feed her children, out of compassion, could eat all of the food in the house. Normally, such an act might be considered selfish, but if we see the mother's motivation, it could also be the most selfless, most altruistic thing she could do.

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Another analogy came to mind: imagine you are a tree – capable of bearing fruit for others to eat and be nourished by. A tree needs to grow step by step – trunk, branches, leaves, flowers, and then finally fruit. Now suppose that the tree saw a hungry person, or if a hungry person saw the tree, before there was fruit, but the tree, out of sympathy and compassion but without enough wisdom, said ‘Here! Eat this branch!, these leaves!’ That might only do a little good, while preventing the development of fruit that could really help, really benefit, really nourish.

The tree, that is ourselves, could also, out of compassion, say ‘stay back!’. It could put up natural barriers, fences, guardians and protectors, to create and maintain an environment where good, useful food and medicine can be produced.

I know that sometimes it’s hard to separate ourselves from suffering situations, but in these cases I’ve found the following simple and profound teaching, from the Western Esoteric Tradition, called ‘moving up the planes’, to be helpful: The idea is that we all exist simultaneously on different levels.

One application of this idea is that we may not have to be physically in touch with someone to be psychically or energetically connected; we do not need to be psychically connected to be mentally connected, or mentally connected to be spiritually connected, and to be a positive influence.

This kind of verifiable idea helps to cancel the mistaken notion we can have, especially when in meditation or on retreat, that it is somehow selfish to remove ourselves in some ways from others in need. Or the wrong idea that if we have removed ourselves in some way we are not still connected on another, more subtle level. Sometimes, this is the best thing we can do, for all of our sake.

If we are to practice removing suffering and giving happiness – the essence of the Mahayana path, for the benefit of all, then we have to be skillful, and not just be carried away by our emotional responses to things. It is essential

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that we learn to listen to ourselves and learn what we need. Taking care of ourselves then, organically, we become a capable being.

Then, with the right kind of education and encouragement to guide us, having a strong and clear motivation to help, the result is that we are able to meet what is difficult in our own lives and in the lives of others we meet, with stability, with resourcefulness, and with joy.

Once we have that precious thought to be of use to others and benefit them, then wherever we are in our lives can be thought of as one of the phases of actualizing that much needed fruit of practice.

The fruit-bearing tree in winter and spring, and in summer and fall – are they the same tree? or different? We can say they are the same in essence, but different in function, and that we need the first to get to the second result.

Tonglen, removing suffering and giving happiness, then, is one name for the quintessential practice of a capable being. It is that enabled, effortless, natural functioning of our completely pure, positive human nature.

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A selection from Buddhism and Prayer

Here are two selections that have touched me, that describe how prayer can work in Buddhism:

The first is from Thich Nhat Hanh, from his book, *The Energy of Prayer*:

‘In Vietnam, we also have a custom of praying to spirits, those who have died and become holy souls. We also pray to our ancestors and to our parents who have passed away. We pray because we believe firmly that when we are in touch with these people, we receive energy from them that will help us...

‘Through my own prayer I have discovered that it is as helpful to pray to the living as it is to pray to those who have passed away. The happiness and lucidity of those around us can also add energy to our prayers. Within our circle of friends and family, there are those whom we see as solid, as an inspiration. Thinking of these people can bring more energy into our bodies...

‘In difficult moments, if our mind is conditioned in the direction of someone in whom we have faith, then we can have more energy to overcome life’s uncertainties.’

The second selection is from the Christian teacher, Ron Roth, from his book, *The Healing Power of Prayer*. In it he says:

‘When you pronounce a name with love, any name, you make a connection with it. I can look at a picture of my mother and call upon her name and feel an immediate connection. Now, you might say that’s just a memory or affection, but I would disagree. With love, we call our beloved’s name and it seems to release an energy in our beloved as it does in us...’

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When we look at the history of religions in different cultures, it seems that prayer is a universal activity. People everywhere use prayer in difficult times; to express yearning, aspiration, and for the transmission of the energy of compassion.

In all religions and cultures, prayer gives true voice to our deep regrets and to our aspirations.... and depending on the inner state of a person, prayer can be a form of spiritual activity, springing from that deep part of ourself, or inspired by what is most true in us, to act in this world...

Different religions' cosmology comes into play here, of course, but the impulse, the motivation to receive benefit, to reach for truth or to express our real life is everywhere the same... if there is a work-able world view, then prayer can function for a person.

This last year I've come to feel that prayer is the expression of our fundamental nature in response to the world. We pray because we have to. This is who we are.

One definition I came across recently called prayer 'a heart wish'. To me, this is saying that, whether or not we use words, our prayer is an action of some type. It is the direction of our life. If we think about things, then something in us moves. We respond. Contemplation leads naturally to prayer.

Of course, there are- always and everywhere - relatively enlightened or unenlightened levels of prayer. The 'relatively unenlightened' would be praying selfishly, whereas the - step by step- relatively enlightened prayer has more understanding of who we are and what we need.

The simple wish, , 'May you be happy' can mean many things in the mind of people, and I think if we are sensitive we can have some feeling for what people are talking about when they wish us well...

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I imagine a passing a person on the sandy road in a beach town - he lives there, and is deeply tanned... he has a mixed drink in one hand, a pina colada with plenty of ice, let's say, and a fat mystery novel in the other... if this person were to wish me happiness, I think it would be his idea of what that means... like, 'May you get a good tan today and not get sunburnt, may you get comfortably numb from delicious fruity drinks on the beach, may your mystery novel have some good twists to it.... may you sleep blissfully in the sun, wake up and find your way home before nightfall, then do the same thing again tomorrow...'

When we wish another well, we have something in our mind that this means. For a person who has studied and practiced meditation, or prayer, and has found some wonderful things, this, naturally, is what we have in mind when we have a wish for another.

May you have happiness - this is perhaps the root Buddhist prayer, and in it is what is meant by happiness as known when meditation is studied and practiced.

May you have happiness
 May you be healthy
 May you be peaceful

In addition to such things as happiness and harmony in our relationships, or for stability and success in our careers, in Buddhism we find many prayers also to accomplish what the Buddhas and Saints intend for us. It is their wish, expressed in their teachings and great encouragement, for us to cut the root of confusion in our lives and put an end to suffering, so that we can act with wisdom and compassion in this world.

Specifically Buddhist prayer can be identified in this way. It always has this function. It helps a person to develop his or her mind, his or her good heart.

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Or, it is an expression of a positive motivation regarding the needs of this world.

Prayer is used to purify and uplift the mind. It moves towards enlightenment, and outwards from the realization of compassion.

There is another way that prayer can be considered Buddhist, and that is when we make use of the language of a Tradition and are able to draw on the power of that Tradition or transmit something of its energy.

It is perhaps here that Buddhist prayers have their widest application. Over the course of a person's life, all manner of guidance or assistance will be sought, all manner of appeal made. And since the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas intend only good for us, if we are connected, somehow we will get what we need. It may not come in the form we would wish, or as fast as we want, but certainly there is benefit, there is comfort, healing and support.

If we study other world religions we will certainly see similarities to the Buddhist prayers. There is a universal aspect to many of them. A Tradition will always have these two aspects to it – one is the all important ultimate dimension, beyond tradition, that empowers all traditions.

Rabia has a poem in which she says:

In my soul
there is a temple, a shrine,

a mosque, a church

where I kneel.

Prayer should bring us to an altar
where no walls or names exist.

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This aspect ‘beyond names and forms’ is what unifies and lets us know our kinship with others of other places and Faiths. And it is this ultimate dimension that gives life to a tradition.

It’s much like when the roots of a tree go down deep into the earth and reach water, and that life nourishes the whole tree. Then all the branches, of a tree, or a tradition, and leaves, and flowers and fruit will certainly flourish.

The second aspect of Tradition comes from the fact that in our relative world there is something unique about the qualities and energies of the different Buddhist Traditions that have come to us from different cultures and times.

Both of these aspects are vital. If not for the first, a tradition or a practice might have no power, no effect. And if we are not aware of the second – that of the different energetic qualities of traditions, and that we exist and receive them on all these different levels, then we could find ourselves meeting an appropriate teaching for us, but perhaps from a lineage that does not suit us personally. There is no need for this. Where some small adjustment can be made, such as getting that teaching through another lineage. Then we can more fully receive the benefit that can come from connecting with a teaching and tradition.

Language is a powerful and endlessly diverse mystery, and so, if we want to find what we connect with on a deeper level, we should hear things expressed in different ways, by different teachers. The main thing is to find what works for us personally. This is very much in keeping with the Buddhist principle of testing the teachings and then sharing the good we find with others.

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On the Nature of Vow, and the Bodhisattva Vow

Vow is an interesting word, a rich word. It has connotations of a depth of commitment; and of something solemn, and serious; a deep dedication that calls up our resources and aims them all in a single direction.

This word can also be a mirror – as in - What is your vow? People can ‘vow’ to do all sorts of things, as a reflection of who they are, what they believe, what they hold to be of ultimate importance, for example, young people vowing to become a millionaire before the age of 30, or vowing to lose weight, or to never again subject themselves to a destructive relationship.

Then there are those people who don’t feel any real commitment to anything other than their own happiness, and of course conflict with others has to come from that. Some people don’t feel any dedication to something larger than themselves, but one way or another, this is something we all need. We are all related, so even looking at it from the point of view of our own happiness, we do need some positive motivation regarding others, and the world we live in.

Vow galvanizes our aim

Taking a positive motivation one step further, we come to vow. Whereas being inclined to help is a great thing, vow has more focus, and more power. Forming our intention then helps us to see clearly what is getting in the way of our aims, and helps us to clear away those obstacles. It affirms that we know our place in the world, and it breathes fresh life into us. Vow calls up energy we never knew we had, and strengthens us.

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Vow is not fanaticism

The only thing that can possibly keep vow from becoming fanaticism, is reason. What we commit ourselves to should be the result of a great deal of reflection. When instead there is a small amount of reason, and a whole lot of emotion, the results are something tyrannical, unbalanced and destructive – witness all the great evils in history and you’ll see, they all had a fanatic ideology at their base.

Ideally, the vows we make should be based on illumined reason, the kind that is the product of deep and careful thought, and reasoning that can stand up to investigation and questioning.

I’ve heard a traditional teaching about the place of reason that says, if something is true or worthwhile then the more you look into it, the more apparent that truth becomes; and if something is not true, then examining it will remove that wrong idea. This is like seeing a rope at night in the dark and thinking it is a snake – if we take a closer look, the mistaken concept will disappear.

If we are dedicated to something that is really worthwhile, on the other hand, then thinking about it will only increase the energy we have to carry out our aim. This is how it should be.

Vow can only come from oneself

When we look within our own heart and hold the question: what should I do with my life in this world? in time, an answer will come that will be our own. Such a sense of direction and commitment can’t be given to us. Although such things as outer ceremonies and readings can strengthen our sense of direction and can help our courage to grow, the initial impulse can’t come to us from the outside. It has to be ‘self-born’. We can say that vow is

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the flower of self knowledge. The advantage to this is that a clear decision we make about our life is truly our own. It can't be given, and no one can take it from us. Once we've had some experience of it, whatever clear sense of purpose we've had can be a reference point. Then, when things get uncertain, as they are bound to sometimes, we can, once more, orient ourselves to that.

Not easy

In all of us there is something called habit energy. By itself, habit is a neutral thing – it can work either for or against our wishes. If we're talking about actualizing an ideal however, almost certainly there are going to be things inside us and in the outside world that feel like they oppose our aims. This is natural and nothing to be afraid of or shy away from. In fact, we can say that the river of our intention flows by itself, but the path to actualizing this aim is made up of gradually removing the obstacles.

If we have clear aims, then naturally we will know what to do and what not to do. There is a perception that opens up that leads us to knowing what is most necessary at any time.

Vow strengthens us, clearing the way, first in our own thinking, and then in its outward expression; based on reason, it holds up where trust alone can get lost. Thinking on those things that are really worth committing to will prove to us their worth over and over. The more we stay with it, the better it becomes – the clearer our vision and the more abundant our courage. There is a kind of peace and strength to vows that is nourishing. We all need something of this kind of foresight, knowing the value of our goals. This is what helps when, over the long periods of time, no apparent result can be seen. We don't give up. We know what we have set ourselves to do is worth every effort we can give to it.

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Steady

When we know from inside what truly matters to us, it makes for stability in our character. Like a tree with deep roots, we'll be much less at the mercy of outside forces, like income level, or what is current in our culture, changes in our relationships, or other people's opinions.

Vow functions to make our own priorities appear clearly to our mind. More and more, when we have a strong sense of our personal vows, we will find we have things in a perspective that makes sense to us. Little things won't bother us as much, and we will appreciate the big, important things, and at least aim to give them the care and attention they deserve.

The words are not the thing itself

Repeated words, as in a liturgy, all by themselves are not vow. If they are gone through mindlessly, they don't help much, if at all. The ideal with words is when writing and reading, and then reflecting on our truest aims can help us to touch that force in our lives that moves us forward. This can certainly help to increase that power in our lives. We should be clear though, that the words are not the thing itself - that's where idolatry comes from - regarding something that is essentially inside us as being separate from our own nature.

When we are able to increase the clarity, depth and power of feeling of dedication to our ideal, that can help to pacify and eventually transform the elements in our lives that obstruct what we aim for.

Will all the hypocrites in the room please raise their hand?

Vows are like a mirror. We can, and should feel uncomfortable when we realize we have fallen short of our ideal. This feeling of discomfort is actually a good thing. Until we have worked through all of our psychology,

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we will have inconsistencies between our best thought and our behavior, Some people would use the harsh term 'hypocrite', but this only applies if we are not honest, with ourselves primarily, about where we diverge. We need a vast amount of compassion for ourselves, for our suffering and struggle, and we need awareness. Then our vows can gradually help us to live whole, integrated lives.

The heart of the heart

The human heart was made to love. That is its' fulfillment, and that is the shining sun of its enduring nature that we can know in our lives each day. However much we are able to help today, having the highest aim, to help one another as much as we can, this greatly simplifies our complex, worried lives, and makes them so much easier, a delight, really. This one great aim can give to us all, strength and spiritual health. It is this that gives life to our life.

Freedom and service

The more freedom we have from suffering, the more available we are to be aware of and to respond to the needs of others. You can't expect someone who is suffering to try to help anyone except himself. But if even a little freedom is gained, with it comes some ability and naturally greater responsibility.

One analogy I have is, when a parent leaves the children at home, and the older sibling can see and reach the food on the shelf, when the younger ones cannot. That older brother or sister, because they can see and reach the soup or cereal, has a responsibility to help feed his brothers and sisters. It is that way naturally. If the mother were to come home and the kids had not been fed, she'd rightly blame the older child if he didn't do what he could have.

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When I think of my family, friends, and myself, I know we each have difficulties to work through, and that sometimes we are not available for each other. Thankfully, at least most of the time I have some people who are available to offer their support.

The Bodhisattva Vow

There is a way of orienting ourselves to the world that many people over time have found to be greatly life-affirming. Based on universal love and compassion, and understanding the source of problems and their resolution, it is the intention to help others as much as possible. Included in that intention is freeing ourselves from whatever would keep us from offering such service. In traditional language, the dedication to help others with both wisdom and compassion is called 'the Bodhisattva Vow'. Bodhisattva means, literally 'an awakening being'.

There are ceremonies for taking the Bodhisattva vow, but the true vow comes from our own heart. When we have this motivation, it is a breakthrough, no matter how many times it happens. It's the dawning of a new awareness.

Finding the Bodhisattva vow in ourselves, re-affirming and strengthening that can give a person much courage and energy for their whole life. It clarifies everything, and helps us to have a feeling for our place in this world.

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

The term 'Maha-yana' in Mahayana Buddhism means 'Great Vehicle', and this refers to the aim, to work for the benefit of all.

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Being Buddhist in origin, the Bodhisattva vow includes the thought of enlightenment. In this Tradition, the cause of our many problems is seen as ignorance, and the remedy is wisdom, or insight, which taken to its furthest point, is enlightenment. The vow is then taken to cultivate the highest wisdom, and to lead each and every one to that same state. Quite the expression of love, compassion and understanding of what we all need!

Two Traditional Verses

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

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

If we are able to maintain compassion for others, then there will naturally be produced in our mind a certain kind of intention for our whole life. What is called in the tradition *bodhicitta*, or *bodhimind*, or the awakening mind, is the whole-function, powerful intention to liberate our own mind from confusion and suffering, and to actualize or bring forth all beneficial, necessary qualities, so that we can best serve others.

In traditional terms, bodhicitta is made of love and compassion, and is the wish to become a Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings. That mind itself, that thought, is a holy mind, a holy, profound and sacred thought, bringing only good into the world.

A person who lives to serve others is called a *bodhisattva*. Whatever other elements there are in such a person's mind, they have this ardent wish to live in a certain way and so help others as much as they possibly can.

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

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

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

Resolve

I have heard that the Dalai Lama, when asked what is the quickest way to enlightenment, was moved to tears by the question. He answered, with characteristic humility, that he had been practicing most of his life, and had only been able to make a little progress on the spiritual path. Then he said that we shouldn't think even in terms of lifetimes, but that instead we should think in terms of aeons. This is the kind of resolve that we need.

In the following passage, from the film 'Compassion and Wisdom: A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life', writer and director James Zito beautifully and succinctly expresses the Traditional background and the aim of the Bodhisattva:

'The Buddha taught that the enlightenment and spiritual liberation he achieved were by no means unique to him. Rather they are potentially available to every living being. The *Bodhisattva* is a follower of the Buddha, who in deep sympathy and compassion for the suffering of the

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world, vows to do the utmost to help all living beings reach their highest potential. The Bodhisattva works tirelessly to release beings from their temporal sufferings into the timeless peace and fulfillment of Buddhist enlightenment.

‘According to Buddhism, the state of enlightenment is the full expression of the innate potential for compassion and wisdom, which lies more or less dormant within every being. This innate potential is known as the Buddha Nature, and it is the Vow of the Bodhisattva to help each and every being bring their inherent Buddha Nature to its full awakening as the state of enlightenment.’

The Bodhisattva vow has as its goal for beings, freedom from suffering, and not just the result of suffering, but its causes as well; and the happiness of all, and not just in a temporary way, but lasting happiness. This all comes from the mind. A Buddhist, therefore, is dedicated to finding freedom himself or herself, and sharing that with all others. When it comes to passing along teachings, our own realization is the vital factor in any communication.

All Buddhist traditions express the utmost need for wisdom. In the Way of the Bodhisattva, such understanding is viewed in relation to the needs of all. In fact, we can say that the Mahayana has as its starting point the inseparability of love and wisdom.

Arya Nagarjuna taught that:

If the rest of humanity and I wish to attain unsurpassed awakening
 {so needed for all of our sake}
 the basis for this is bodhicitta, as stable as the King of Mountains:
 Compassion, which touches everything, and pristine wisdom,
 which does not rely on duality.

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Ultimate Nature, Relative Practice

The nature of mind, our ultimate nature, is described as originally pure, vast, and perfect, naturally awake, and ungraspable. It is beyond concepts, and non-dual; lacking nothing, it is complete in all qualities. In the relative, only apparently dualistic practices that we do, however, the path is described as expressions of compassion: generosity, prayer, patience, forgiveness, the cultivation of peace, and so on. These are all expressions of love.

The Seventh Dalai Lama wrote:

The expanded mind which thinks
only of that which benefits others
is a tree of endless fruit;
one touch of its divine sap
quenches even the word 'suffering'

Everyone who has experienced a mother's or a grandmother's love knows how true it can be: when touched by a compassionate person when we are suffering can instantly reduce, or even totally remove our pain. From a loving person, this profound true nature comes forward effortlessly, and heals.

All beings want happiness, but as long as we do not know the causes of happiness, instead, we blindly create the causes of suffering. In response to this, what is called the Bodhisattva Vow is the dedication that we have in us to helping others, by realizing our own true nature as fully as possible, and drawing from this ocean of light. This sense of dedication to others can be there with or without words, or it can be taken formally and re-affirmed. It is the commitment of our whole life energy to helping others as much as we can, and in as many ways as we can, to alleviate their suffering and to support their health and happiness. This Vow is the vibrant central principle of the Mahayana Path.

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

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

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

Here is one traditional verse from the Indian Saint, Shantideva, that expresses the compassionate motivation at the heart of the Bodhisattva vow:

As long as diseases afflict living beings,
May I be the doctor, the medicine,
and also the nurse who restores them to health

May I fall as rain to increase
the harvests that feed living beings
and in times of dire famine,
may I myself be food and drink

In one sense, to say that vow is the flower of our self knowledge is to say that vow shows how deep a persons’ knowledge is. If there is no deep knowledge, then there is no deep vow either. The vow of a Bodhisattva though, is based on something broad and deep. It is based on universal love and compassion, and insight into our real nature. It is possible to feel that, not only do we and our family and friends want and deserve happiness and

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freedom from suffering, but everyone, really wants these things. In that we are equal.

When we aim to benefit even one other person, something in us wakes up. When we extend that and aim to feed, comfort and care for our group, family and friends, then that much more in us wakes up. And when we extend that even further, it's possible to awaken the sense of something universal in ourself, working for the good of all.

Sometimes we are able to glimpse this universal nature, and then again we are taken up with the particulars of our life, but the shining basis, which is our compassionate nature, remains the same. There is always something universal, beyond any one form or action or life span, that supports and sustains us, and is the source of all our vows. Perhaps this is why Lama Yeshe said that when we have bodhi-citta, the thought to benefit all others in the best possible ways, we take on a more universal character.

'When you have this kind of motivation,' Lama Lodro says, 'it makes whatever practice you do very powerful.' We are saying very clearly and strongly with our life and practice, 'May all beings be free of suffering!' 'May all beings be happy!'

How to increase compassion

All contemplation has one thing in common, as shown by its etymology, and that is that we are giving time and attention to a particular subject. Usually the feeling of compassion is associated with a sense of sadness, heaviness or sorrow, and that kind of feeling can't be sustained for long. There are associations of suffering, and the feeling perhaps that looking at these things too long will actually weaken us. This is because we don't know how to go about thinking about suffering. It's important that we go about this in the right way if we want workable results.

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When we are able to successfully contemplate a subject like suffering, and increase our compassion, it is because we do it slowly, and carefully. To do it well, we should reflect and then stop and refresh ourselves and assimilate what we've been thinking about. Then the effect is strengthening. Our determination to help only increases; our clarity and sense of priorities is made sharper; and our delight in doing something useful also increases.

In actual practice

Forming the idea of a dedication before practice, setting ones motivation is like saying, 'I will cultivate this crop for this purpose, for this person or these people'. Then we cultivate – plant the seed, let the sun shine, water, pull the weeds, and finally, harvest. Then, in our thoughts, when we dedicate at the end of a practice, again we are saying, 'This belongs to this person, or these people'. 'May it accomplish this benefit'.

Now, I know this can't be proven to you unless you are a person with some amount of extra sensory perception, but I do believe that, when we have a clear idea of communicating some benefit, that positive energy is transmitted instantly. This is the basis for the concept of absent healing. Most of us live ordinary lives, I know, but I thought I should at least mention it. It really does feel this way sometimes, and it changes the way I think of the practice itself.

When we have others in mind, a universal aim, even eventually, as a long term goal, then we don't feel like the harvest of benefit is ours alone. We also gain, naturally, but it feels like the result is bigger, much bigger than just our own gain. We can live in a state of big generosity. Then, when we actually do meet the person or people we have been practicing for, it's easy, natural, to 'give over', or extent to them what we have produced, whatever peace or clarity, or light, health or strength. We share these things in whatever way they can receive them. We can feel, 'Here, this belongs to you...' aah...

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Now, about this ‘all beings’ business...

As soon as we try to practice like this, it’s immediately clear that some people or situations are easier to practice for, and some more difficult, or impossible for now. We should take special note of who we have a problem with, and make special efforts to dedicate our practice to them until we wear away that resistance.

Gradually, in every Buddhist approach to developing the good heart we all have, the aim is to become more and more inclusive, and completely impartial in our kindness and compassion.

I think of teachers and sages who seem to have accomplished this impartiality of love. It looks like they treat everyone they meet with the same kindness and compassion. This is a high and wonderful aim, more than worth whatever effort we make in that direction. It’s the basis for great things.

Dharma centers’ red flashing lights and whooping si-reens

If we go to a center where they chant, ‘saving all beings’, but the people there won’t give you the time of day, or even look you in the eye, you should know something is seriously wrong. The people there, and especially the teachers, have completely missed the point. A practice center should be a place of mutual support. Warm and alive, it should be a place where people can feel safe, and where inner disciplines can flourish.

Speaking realistically for a change

The Bodhisattva vow is something we will naturally need to bring to mind again and again. At times, almost all of us will only be able to focus on our own struggle. Sometimes this is only right and appropriate, but as long as we live in a world with others, this intention, to help as much as we can, is a

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most useful one to have. It connects us to others, or re-connects us to others. And it is the most fulfilling way to live. We may be able to actualize only a small part of that aim, but the motivation itself is something noble, generative, healing, strengthening, illuminating and enlivening.

We never give up

One Tibetan Lama here in San Francisco, Lama Lodro described the depth of dedication of the Bodhisattva, saying:

‘A Bodhisattva would go to be born one million times in hell to help one sentient being. One million times he would go, and not complain- he would enjoy that, actually. Beings need help, and he enjoys helping. That’s the Bodhisattva motivation.’

Another verse by Shantideva says:

For as long as space endures,
and for as long as living beings remain,
until then may I too abide
to dispel the misery of the world

All my lives

I know that many Westerners, like myself, don’t see past and future lives – literally being born back then, in that place, and in the future in some other place. What then to do with the idea of past and future when it comes to vow? For me, it continues to be helpful to think beyond this one life span – however we conceive of ourselves. This works well in terms of the Bodhisattva vow. We can aim to dedicate ourselves to things that we feel can help now, and will be helpful in the long term.

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Here is an analogy: If we see that there is a river close to where some houses are, and that each year the river comes a little closer, it would be right to solve the problem now, while we can. If we don't, then it may not be this generation, but eventually the houses of our children or our children's children could be washed away. This kind of thinking ahead puts our own lives in a far truer context than we usually think in. More meaning is evident in our own lives now, also, when we think this way, the present is viewed in relation to the next generations.

Good seeds

We can also think of our lives as a chance to plant good seeds. Of course a tree takes years or decades to grow and become shelter, and bear fruit, but the work of planting and nourishing has great worth. If we think of the wonderful things we have inherited from past generations, teachings, art, institutions, we can feel gratitude, and this can also help us to live in a way that is dedicated to those we share this life with, and to future generations. May they have great trees and clean water, and everything they need for happy lives!

Thinking far ahead also makes the problems of this one life easier. We are related to the past and future generations, and we all have our part to do. Our part is not the work of the past – they had their own work; and our part is not the task of the next generation – they will have their own work.

We've inherited riches, but also a world of suffering, greed and confusion, so doing our part is a very great thing – really, it is the most important thing individually for any of us.

What's in a name?

When we have insight into conditions, and knowledge of what will bring resolution to problems, then, whatever our place in the world, we can be

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doing the most needed kind of work. we can be fulfilling what is here being called ‘the Bodhisattva vow’. Of course, this goes beyond any one name or Tradition. Whatever group we belong to, when we know something of our human capacities for freedom, health and clarity, and when we know the extent of confusion and unnecessary suffering, then quite naturally we will find ways to work effectively.

We may work with a group, or alone. It may be with a few close friends, or in association with Traditions and lineages that hold the same vows. However it works out, knowing our potential, and how much need there still is- these two make up our response to the world. The response to life of a person awake to this much is the Bodhisattva vow, whatever name we give it. It is the vow to serve. Here is joy, strength, freedom, fire to warm, wind, earth, and delicious water too; food, music, gifts to give, and peace.

When it comes to birth, death and rebirth, they say an ordinary person is controlled by karma, habit energy, and delusion, whereas a person who is awake and free of these is controlled by compassion. He or she has no choice but to work for others.

Bodhicitta, the thought to benefit, equalizes the eight worldly dharmas

There is nothing more practical than working in our daily life with our emotions, and our mind. Whether we want to meet them or not, our responses to life are always there, and they can be changed in a positive direction. Having a strong clear intention in our life meets these factors head on. They say that the energy of the Bodhisattva vow ‘equalizes’, levels flat, and frees us from the eight worldly dharmas. These are the four pairs that people spend so much time and energy chasing or avoiding: material gain and loss, physical pleasure and pain, praise and criticism, and good reputation or bad reputation, or recognition.

What this means is that, when the factor of living our lives to benefit all others as much as we can is strong in us, then we don’t get caught by these

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things. They don't limit us or obstruct us or disturb our mind in any way. Even just having this aim with our life, there are already real freedoms that come with it.

This is the only thing that tips the balance

In the 8th century, Shantideva wrote:

Just as a flash of lightning on a dark, cloudy night
for an instant brightly illuminates all,
likewise in this world, through the might of Buddha,
a wholesome thought rarely and briefly appears.

Hence virtue is perpetually feeble,
and the great strength of evil is extremely intense.
Except for a Fully Awakening Mind
(the dedication to help all others)
by what other virtue will it be overcome?

and

This intention to benefit all beings,
which does not arise in others even for their own sake,
is an extraordinary jewel of the mind,
and its birth, an unprecedented wonder...

To which I say, all these centuries later, a hearty 'a-men brother!'
In these verses, the 'Fully Awakening Mind' is the thought of universal benefit.

When I think of loneliness, death, suffering, all that is unpredictable, and tragic in this world; the inevitable separation from friends and loved ones, the cruelty and madness, all the absurdity and waste – all of it – this one factor is the only thing I can think of that makes life liveable.

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This one great vow reveals the capacity we have to help each other. It reminds me that there have been in the past, and that there are now, people who are working to help others, and aiming to do so, and that we can also take up this aim and this work. That, for me, is the glory of being alive. Now and forever, we can actually do something of real value with our lives.

This intention makes it possible to live with an awareness of all the amazing good and all the terrible things, and to live with resolve, commitment and joy. This is the only thing, really, that gives me the courage to face whatever life may bring. If trembling fear is the feeling of not being capable, then right here is where resourcefulness, and therefore blazing true confidence, and solidity is found. This one aim, this one intention, tips the balance, in favor of life.

Skillful Means

Once we arrive at the Great Way – the Mahayana , with its strong central motivation to serve all beings, and to liberate all living beings, we will utilize every resource, we will do anything to communicate the Dharma, take any form to meet people's needs, to benefit them, to speak in a way they can understand, and lead them step by step to freedom.

Because of the great sufferings and needs that are here, we *must* search until we find the methods that work for us, and that are effective in helping others. A diversity of forms in Buddhism arose out of this motivation to benefit self and others. What is referred to as creative ‘Skillful Means’ develops out of compassionate need, and it is the overriding reason for not to be attached to any one way of doing things, or saying things. As long as we keep to essential principles of wisdom and compassion, then it is Buddhist Dharma. Skillful means, or Upaya, are just what is necessary to help and to reach people.

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The Sakya Trinzin, in 'Mo – The Tibetan Divination System' says the following:

“In Buddhism, especially in the Mahayana Tradition, it has been taught that the highest good is to benefit other living beings... Numerous scriptures tell us that a bodhisattva should not hesitate to use any method that would bring relative and ultimate happiness to others. The bodhisattva has been enjoined to assist others by giving them spiritual teachings, material objects such as medicine and food, fearlessness, loving kindness and advice on how to deal with the travails of worldly existence.”

There is a figure in Mahayana Buddhism (The Chinese Mahayana, and the Tibetan Tradition) called Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion, who is sometimes shown with one thousand arms reaching out to help people. Of course 'a thousand' means 'limitless' in Eastern Traditions. Sometimes 'myriad' and sometimes 'Ten-thousand' are used - all these terms have the same meaning.

In the more visible hands in the iconography one can see various implements, a vase, a rosary, The Wheel of Teaching the Dharma, and so on. The meaning is that Avalokiteshvara, which is our own compassionate nature, has the ability to take infinite forms to benefit others.

Here are a few of my favorite quotes from Lama Yeshe, on the motivation to benefit all, the enlightened attitude of a bodhisattva, called bodhicitta:

‘Bodhicitta is not partial. Wherever you go with bodhicitta if you meet people, rich people or poor people, black or white, you are comfortable and you can communicate.’

‘Bodhicitta is the intoxicant that numbs us to pain and fills us with bliss.’

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‘Bodhicitta is the cloud that carries the rain of positive energy to nourish growing things.’

‘We need the pure innermost thought of bodhicitta; wherever we go that will take care of us.’

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Vow

From this point forward,
and for however long into the future it is needed
I dedicate myself to the alleviation,
and to the complete cessation of every suffering
of all living beings
each and every one of them

I dedicate myself fully to their healing and awakening;
to their having comfort, strength of body, mind, and spirit,
most excellent nourishment, health, longevity
every level of protection,
shelter, food, clothing, medicine, education,
joy and wisdom
I dedicate myself fully, leaving nothing out,
to the complete healing, fulfillment and enlightenment
of all living beings

No matter how long it takes
no matter how difficult it may be
no matter what it costs

With all my heart and with all my strength,
I vow to always serve them all
in every way that is necessary for them
and in every way that will bring each and every one of them
true and lasting health and happiness

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Great River of Compassion

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Avalokiteshvara, help me to say this rightly, for all who could benefit from it.

Mantra:

I: A set of sacred syllables, repeated to attain a spiritual benefit

II. From the Sanskrit: A 'tool for thinking'. 1. Prescribed syllables, in Sanskrit, to protect the mind from defilements. They express the essence of specific energies. The recitation of mantras is sometimes done with specific visualizations. 2. Often, Mantra is used as a synonym for Vajra, or Tantra, as in 'Mantrayana' - the path of mantra.

In thinking about writing this introduction, I've tried to bring to mind the most commonly asked questions about mantra practices. I know, first off, that most people have no interest in this subject, feeling completely sure, for some reason, that these practices don't work, and that it's a meaningless subject for them to learn anything about.

A second, much smaller group tend in the opposite direction - without trying things, they believe what they hear. They take it on faith, or because it sounds reasonable, or because it fits with their world view of what's possible.

Both of these extremes, of tending toward credulity, or a pre-judged disbelief, would have to be set aside, before anything new can be learned,

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especially when it comes to more recondite subjects - where there is a lot that is hidden, or subtle - outside the range of our usual perceptions.

Instead of believing or not believing from the outset, perhaps someone new to this subject could listen to these ideas more as an invitation, to try some of these practices, or to see things in a different way.

I hope in these pages to be able to share some basic information, and to offer as much as I can in the way of warm encouragement to practice.

The effects can really be great, profound and life-altering. They can change what we think of as ourselves, and what we think of as a human being. As Rumi said, 'Human beings are mines...'

We have all these riches inside us. All these potentials. May they manifest effortlessly in whatever way, and as much as necessary for the benefit of living beings.

Imagine if someone told you that you had a pot of gold right around the corner from where you are standing, in your very own backyard. Whether or not you knew this person, it would at least be worth a look. If they even said that you had a single gold coin, most of us would at least look. The usefulness of money is something we can all relate to - 'no harm in trying', we'd say. And yet, compared to the claims that are made about the power of mantra, the usefulness of money is limited, almost nothing.

There are other kinds of wealth near at hand that we can have access to and make use of.

Our body contains medicine

When we're first introduced to the idea that there are healing properties within our body and mind, that can be contacted and increased, we might be

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surprised. After all, it goes against everything we've been taught about who we are - and these beliefs can be quite solid.

If someone says to you that your body contains healing properties that can be awakened and increased, it's like being told that there's gold nearby, in your own yard. First, you'd want to know where, and second, how much! Well, the teachings on mantra provide the 'where' - the directions, if you will, to inner treasures.

As far as the 'how much', I'll repeat what tradition teaches, and that is, that it depends on the person and the practice itself what will come about. As always, there is the invitation to practice, to experience and see for yourself, along with the encouragement that these practices could be of great benefit to yourself and others.

If you find you are interested, then please do give these practices a fair try, in terms of time and effort, as it's said, 'to awaken the energy of the mantra'.

Working from two directions

Let's say you want to cultivate compassion. You may choose to recite the compassion mantra, OM MANI PEME HUM. An experience like this may follow: you can feel peaceful, and have a warm feeling. You may see light like sunlight, rising from within. You may want to share that feeling or express that feeling in some way...

While reciting, you may pause, and say, 'may all beings be happy', 'may all beings be peaceful...', or make prayers of that nature. The feeling then can be somewhat different - as if you are using a different part of the mind to cultivate good-will, love and compassion.

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Two explanations for why mantra works at a deeper level

It's taught in both the Indian and Tibetan traditions that the sounds of the syllables of mantra themselves have power. They embody, or express, or *are* the quality that we aim to produce, experience, or cultivate. The sounds *are themselves* the quality we aim to experience, and to make use of to benefit self and others. This is one explanation.

The other explanation is that, through use over generations, mantras have been associated with qualities, or states of consciousness. And when we repeat the syllables of a mantra, we tap into a reservoir of particular life-energy, or power that has been built up over time.

Either way, if it works, that itself is proof enough. We really don't need a theory, though it may clarify some of what goes on. Personally, I feel there is truth in both explanations as to why mantra works.

Often when we read about the use of prayer or mantra, we read extraordinary statements - far from our usual world view. And I must say, in all honesty, that there is something in mantra that is beyond description, and that needs to be mentioned.

More food for thought - On world view

I recall reading early books about Tibetan Buddhism (the branch of Buddhism where mantra has flourished). They referred to the Tibetan Tradition as "Magical Buddhism", and in a way they were right.

The starting point for much of the prayer, visualization and mantra in the Tibetan Tradition is what can be called a magical world view.

A magical world view, wherever it is found:

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- asserts levels of reality beyond the physical world
- and that there can be interaction between the different levels
- in a magical world view, thought, or more particularly focused thought, is considered a creative force, a world changing force, to a much greater extent than is commonly believed.
- often in a magical world view, spirits of different types can be called on for assistance in various matters, and they will come – ancestors, saints, forms of divine beings, such as angels or bodhisattvas, or saviors
- sometimes in a magical world view, the whole world is thought to be alive, sentient

Magic, in it's most general sense, is changing the outside world by changing something in the inside world. This is often accomplished by ritual, or by prayer, meditation, the use of mantra, or a combination of these.

Sometimes it's asked, with so many mantras, where should a person begin?

I think of one analogy I heard years ago, that points to an answer, and that at the same time offers an explanation of why a mantra is more suitable for one person, and one not work for them. It goes like this: Imagine a field or a plot of land, and beneath the surface of the earth, at different depths, are different kinds of seeds. The seeds that are closest to the surface are those that will give results first, or the most quickly. This is why gurus, or teachers with insight into a student's nature, their 'field', so to speak, are traditionally the ones who tell the student what mantra to practice.

The theory of karma - past experiences determining one's character and affinities - can be useful for some people, but it's not essential to accept as a prerequisite for practice. Just do some practice and you will see for yourself what mantra brings you what, if any, results.

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The quantitative and qualitative aspects of mantra practice

When we make contact with a tradition through study, recitation, chanting or mantra, we can feel that we connect with a flow of energy to some extent. It may be a subtle feeling, or it can be something stronger, like a steady current. Sometimes it can be quite a forceful experience of energy, of a certain type of life that we are in touch with. It can be like opening the sluice of a canal. We can feel we have contacted some source of energy, and we can feel it moving in us or through us.

(See 'Imagine an underwater system of channels...' - the short poem that follows this article)

However, if we only talk about a quantitative increase in energy, as if life-energy were just generic force, like water or electricity, that would not be saying enough. It wouldn't fully describe what we meet with and utilize when we connect with a tradition or make use of a mantra. We also need to speak of the qualitative aspect of spirit.

Ajaan Lee said this about the worth, or the value and power of certain states of consciousness:

'Things that are genuine, or pure, even though they may be small, can give rise to enormous results. Just as a piece of genuine paper money - a tiny strip of paper with the state seal - can be put to use in all sorts of ways. But if it's newsprint, even a bushel of it wouldn't be able to buy a thing. In the same way, a pure mind, even if we can make it pure for only a little while, can give rise to results way in excess of its size.'

And, in speaking about specific qualities, here's how one teacher named Mingyur Rinpoche replied when asked, 'What does blessing mean?'

He said, 'It is a particular type of power... various medicines have various types of strength, or power. Water has a power to wet things and clean things. Fire has a power to burn. When we put water in a field, it helps to

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grow flowers or crops. All phenomena have a particular power associated with them... Blessing comes as a particular type of power' (to accomplish a specific purpose).

Many different practices

There are many different mantras, and many different practices that one can choose. Sometimes these are called 'yidam' or 'deity' practices.

It think it's important here to consider clearly what is meant by the word 'deity' in Buddhism. This is a difficult word for Westerners. We have a 2000 year monotheistic tradition that is in our Western soul. And any term that brings to mind our Western Tradition needs to be considered very carefully.

All of the qualities represented by figures in Buddhism are within each of us - every quality, of love, intelligence, purity, healing power - but usually we don't see ourselves this way.

If our self view were to fluctuate, even a little, we would find that simultaneously the way we view images representing enlightened qualities would change too.

If we see ourselves as ordinary beings, and we experience ourselves as fundamentally without these qualities, then naturally if we think of Buddha's or Bodhisattva's qualities existing at all, they are felt to exist outside of us. (more on that in a moment, but first, a little more on this line of thought)

If there is a change in our self-view, to include more of these qualities, then when we look at these images we can feel that 'this quality is there - it is in Tradition and it is in me, as potential perhaps, but in the same way the fully developed flower-and-fruit giving tree is in the seed and the first shoots'.

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In addition to their being an external, historical aspect, like a reservoir of a particular energy that can be contacted, we can also feel that the image or the idea of what is here being called 'a deity' represents aspects of our own nature, fully developed.

Perhaps when we are there, when we are the full expression of some enlightened quality, then we could look at the image, sometimes called 'deity', and, with understanding, say 'That is me'.

There may be one place where the Western idea of a deity and the way it is made use of in the Vajrayana overlap, and that is in its external aspect. Names and forms of Buddhas and bodhisattvas can be called on, and they will respond. Not for everyone, and not always, but this is an inherited truth. This has been many peoples experience in many places throughout time. I've had this experience myself on many occasions or else I probably wouldn't be writing this.

Actually, many people have had the experience that mantra and prayer really do work in the ways they are praised - to heal, to harmonize, to clarify. But, again, as we say 'the proof is in the pudding'.

My feeling is that if others, or if even one other person could hear about these things, be inspired to practice, and gain some of this benefit, then my efforts here will have met with success. So I know I at least have to try to speak of these things.

To call on a holy Name, and to feel some response, this is precious, of inconceivable worth. But there is more intended by the practice of mantra and the forms passed down to us to be meditated upon. We can receive their benefit as needed in our lives. And we are also encouraged to cultivate this understanding, that we all have all these qualities within us. We are encouraged to bring them out as much as we can, and to live and act in this world, in enlightened and enlightening ways, with compassion and wisdom.

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Mahayana

What's called 'Mahayana' in Buddhist traditions refers to a re-orientation towards teachings, one's self, and others in the world. All Buddhist lineages have teachings about love and compassion, but in Mahayana this aspect is placed right in the center. In this way of thought, the needs of all others, inclusively, and compassion for all is emphasized, and then every other practice, such as calm meditation, contemplation on mortality, karma or realizing selflessness, is seen in relation to the suffering and confusion of living beings.

All these teachings then take on vast importance. When practiced, they can help us first to help ourselves, freeing, awakening, and increasing our ability to help, and they can directly help others.

When held, and maintained, all these teachings and practices can be seen as being not just for ourselves. And then their potential, to bring happiness and to remove suffering, can be perceived to be as it is - as something tremendous, limitless. Seen this way, our appreciation of the value of these teachings can increase enormously in our own mind.

These teachings and practices have the potential to benefit self and others. They can open the way to peace, health and every enjoyment, so their value is naturally very great.

What then to say about mantra? In this context, a Mahayanist, whether they think of themselves as Buddhist or not, someone who has bodhicitta heart, the intention to remove as much suffering as possible and to benefit others as much as possible, naturally will look in an unprejudiced way for whatever can help. Naturally, there will be no obstacle that is insurmountable to that kind of determination to help.

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What joy, then, when someone with these pure, good intentions, finds the study and practice of mantra. Even if this is not for everyone, due to karma and people's affinities, still, who would not be intrigued?

And in the true Buddhist spirit of free inquiry, the way is open, and the warmest invitation is given, to try the practice for oneself, to see if they work as described in many places, or possibly too in ways that are even better. Of course, they may not work at all, but for those with an affinity with any of these practices, the results for oneself and for others can be very great.

Wherever We Are - Compassion and Mantra

The relationship between compassion and mantra

In Buddhism, The Tantras, and the practice of mantra comes from the Mahayana Tradition. Their reason for existing is to help us and to help us to help others. It's taught that, in as much as we can align ourselves with the current of the compassionate aims of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, to that extent can we connect with them and receive their blessing. And sometimes I do believe this.

Of course, Buddhas aim to help all equally, and I think that, miraculously, and with great compassion and ability, they meet us wherever we are in life. This is also my experience.

If we call on them just able to think of ourselves, no doubt, we can receive benefits; when our thinking includes others we are connected to, we can receive even more. We can become a bit more like the Buddhas, both in our generosity, and in what we give as well.

But it is in practicing with a compassionate mind that knows our relation to others that prayers and mantras reveal their power and significance. If we are made to care for each other, for as long as we are on this earth, then

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surely our prayer and activities are in the nature of existing for self-others-and- this whole world.

On Mantra and Initiation -

Often before beginning the practice of a mantra, a person will attend a ceremony called an initiation. This is helpful, to introduce a practice, and to further realization, but it is not essential to begin or to receive the benefits of a practice.

If you begin some practice, and get some positive result, then you may like to consider attending an initiation. This can strengthen your practice, and facilitate realization. An experienced Lama can share his or her energy, and connect us to a living lineage of practice, and this can be something really profound.

Some people gladly travel great distances to attend initiations, because of how important they feel these events to be. If you have any interest, and the chance to attend an initiation, by all means do take the opportunity.

You can check with your local Tibetan Buddhist centers for a schedule of events and initiations (also called 'empowerments'). Usually there will be some teachings or commentary along with the ceremony that will explain what will take place and how to practice in detail. Until that time, however, mantras and practices are available.

It's traditionally taught that what's called 'self-generation' - where one visualizes oneself as the deity - should only be done by those who have received the initiation of a particular deity, but that 'front generation' - where one visualizes the deity in space above and in front of oneself - can be done by anyone.

In front generation, we visualize, or see with the mind's eye, above us, the Buddha or bodhisattva whose practice we are doing, and whose mantra we

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are reciting. It's helpful when doing this recitation and visualization, to see pure light and nectar streaming from the image we hold, that is also made entirely of pure light. These represent, or carry the blessings of the Buddha.

We should also see ourselves, our own body, not in an ordinary way, not as flesh and bone, but as also being made entirely of light. Many teachers advise, too, that when doing this visualization, we see ourselves in a pure land, and make the visualization as beautiful, peaceful, perfect, and pure as we can. This is helpful.

We can also do the practice without any elaborate or detailed visualization. We can just see light above us while reciting. Or without any visualization at all, we can just recite the mantra.

People ask, 'But isn't this all just the imagination?' And the answer is... yes, and... no. It may begin that way, but sometimes something else, something quite wonderful, can 'kick in', or enter into the practice. When done properly, by someone with an affinity for a particular practice, we can receive benefits far more than we could ever have merely imagined. We can tap into something larger than what we usually think of as ourselves, and receive fresh energy and inspiration. We can receive and awaken these different qualities that then can be made use of to benefit self and others.

Things that can be done with mantra

heal
 strengthen
 relieve
 purify
 bring light
 protect
 clarify
 liberate from samsara
 facilitate the liberation from samsara

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comfort the lonely
 bring about the manifestation of the good
 rescue the crazy, the out of balance
 hold back the endangered
 give riches to the poor
 relieve depression
 cure depression
 give direction
 strengthen realization
 eliminate maras
 pacify, remove the influence of, transform maras
 increase realizations of the graduated path,
 and all realizations

The Exception and The Rule

I realize that much of what I've written here concerning mantra seems to highlight their 'miracle working' power, and in many different circumstances the practice of a mantra *can* produce remarkable results. However, this is not to say there isn't a sequence that is traditionally taught. On the contrary - when we read or hear about some practice working out of nowhere, or in extraordinary ways - these are the exceptions, not the general rule.

Tantra, and the practice of mantra and visualization is traditionally taught in the context of a Mahayana Buddhist world view and motivation. Most people who practice in a traditional way follow what is called 'a sadhana', or 'method of accomplishment. These always begin with a verse, for reflection, and for connecting with a lineage, and Tradition. This is called taking refuge and generating bodhicitta:

I take refuge, until I attain enlightenment,
 In the Buddha, the Dharma, and the Supreme Assembly

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By the merit I produce by the practice of generosity
and other virtues,
May I accomplish Buddhahood for the sake of all beings

Reciting this a number of times, and reflecting on its meaning can help us to connect to the living energy of our teachers, and Tradition, which can be a very powerful thing.

There are also teachings and practices, ways of life and thought that are the usual foundation for mantra practice. While it's true that mantra can be approached from any direction, the teachings about the foundations of practice have been passed down to us precisely because they've been found to create the best conditions for getting a good result.

The teachings that serve as a stable foundation for practice go by different names, depending on the lineage. They can be called 'Lam Rim', 'The Stages of the Path', or 'Lam Dre', 'The Path and Its Fruit', or something with a similar meaning. These sets of teachings, their contemplations, practices, and stages, are similar in content. There are many books on this subject for someone who's interested.

Here is a short instruction on the stages of the path, from the founder of the Gelugpa lineage of the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition.

The Foundation of All Good Qualities, by Je Tsong Khapa

The foundation of all good qualities is the kind and venerable guru. Correctly devoting to him is the root of the path. By clearly seeing this and applying great effort, May I rely upon him with great respect.

By understanding that the precious freedom of this rebirth is found only once, is greatly meaningful and difficult to find again, May I generate the mind that unceasingly, day and night, takes hold of its essence.

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This life is as impermanent as a water bubble - how quickly it decays and death comes! And after death, just like a shadow follows the body, the results of black and white karma follow.

Finding firm and definite conviction in this, May I always be careful to abandon even the slightest negativities and accomplish all virtuous deeds.

Seeking samsaric pleasures is the door to all suffering. They are uncertain and cannot be relied on. Recognizing these shortcomings, May I generate the strong wish for the bliss of liberation.

Led by this pure thought, mindfulness, alertness and great caution arise. The root of the teachings is keeping the pratimoksha (individual liberation) vows. May I accomplish this essential practice.

Just as I have fallen into the sea of samsara, so too have all mother migratory beings. May I see this, train in supreme bodhicitta, and bear the responsibility of freeing migratory beings.

By clearly recognizing that developing bodhicitta, without practicing the three types of morality, I will not achieve enlightenment, May I practice the bodhisattva vows with great energy.

By pacifying distractions to wrong objects, and correctly analyzing the meaning of reality, May I generate quickly within my mindstream the unified path of calm abiding and special insight.

Having become a pure vessel by training in the general path, May I enter the holy gateway of the fortunate ones, the supreme vajra vehicle.

At that time, the basis of accomplishing the two attainments is keeping pure vows and samaya. Having become firmly convinced of this, May I protect these vows and pledges like my life.

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Then, having realized the importance of the two stages, which are the essence of the vajrayana, by practicing with great energy, never giving up the four sessions, May I realize the teachings of the holy guru.

Like that, may the virtuous gurus who show the noble path, and the spiritual friends who practice it have long lives. May I pacify completely all outer and inner hindrances.

In all my rebirths, never separated from perfect gurus, May I enjoy the magnificent Dharma. By completing the qualities of the stages and paths, May I quickly attain the state of Vajradhara.

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

(and may I be the cause of this)

(May I contribute to their freedom from suffering
as much as I can)

And,

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness

(and may I be the cause of this)

(May I contribute to their happiness
as much as I can)

May everyone receive, understand and practice well the teachings that will
benefit them the most, freeing their minds from suffering and confusion, and
may all arrive at peace, fulfillment and joy in this very life.

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Imagine an underwater system of channels
one channel opens
and the stream of cool, pure water can be felt moving through
felt all the way back to its source
Contacting a spiritual tradition can be this way
the clean, clear life moving through
felt in this very place, and known to its origin
Teachers, practitioners, deities, protector spirits
virtues faithfully maintained
and given forward through lives
We are welcomed by this, our family
They are eager to assist the awakening life
the heart becomes very quiet watching this work
this far reaching, unceasing compassion

They speak behind their words
move behind the curtains of form
in silence, shaping
All of this is given to you, it is immanent
the life within the life

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The Power of Peace

*‘With diamond clear intention, instill faith everywhere.
With mirror-like wisdom, stabilize all chaotic minds.’*

- *Lama Je Tsongkhapa*

One of the most common ideas about peace is that it is the absence of war, that it is rest, and perhaps on some deeper level, safety or freedom from fear. Peace is all of this, clearly, but I’d like to say something here about the power of peace as more than the mere absence of conflict, or the threat of conflict.

The presence of peace when it is there powerfully is very stable and solid. It can have the effect of pacifying aggression, anger, suffering, and fear, and it is able to heal those diverse problems on deeper and deeper levels. If we can move in this way, from thinking of peace as only the absence of strife, a ‘cease-fire’ if you will, to regarding it as a positive force, then we can begin to cultivate such peace as the foundation for a truly healthy life and society.

In Praise of the Qualities of Peace

To say peace is not war does not begin to touch what peace is. For example, peace is inherently joyful. The presence of true peace promotes clarity and wisdom, and health for the body and soul, or the inner life of a person and the community. To the extent that peace is there, all good qualities that accompany peace, and all that it enables can also be there.

Thich Nhat Hanh has a verse for meditation that says, Breathing in, I see myself as a flower, Breathing out, I feel fresh; Breathing in, I see myself as a mountain, Breathing out, I feel solid.

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Freshness and solidity are naturally qualities of peace.

The phrase, to be 'solid as a mountain' – this points to the fact that there are degrees of peace and stability a person can have. When the feeling of peace increases, it becomes more enduring, and reliable, and more of a resource of calm and freshness and joy that others can benefit from as well.

Peace has harmony and love in it also, naturally – right there, when there is peace, there is the wish to get along, to accommodate, to be inclusive, and to protect the happiness of others and our self, which are known to be deeply related. In peace there is strength.

Peace can calm and comfort all kinds of difficult emotions. Like a mother, or a father holding a baby when it is crying, the energy of love and calm penetrates the feelings of the child. It calms and comforts the child such that little he or little she can feel safe and happy and can rest. Such an energy is true nourishment. The great treasure that is peace is something we should recognize, and appreciate and enjoy as much as we can.

In terms of getting the most out of cultivating peace, through meditation, or contemplation, it should be noted, that meditation is something we do consciously, and so the effect is deeper, and more thorough-going, for all our bodies.

Peace is True Strength

Thought of one way, war is not power, peace is power. Violence is not strength – the ability to counteract violence, in ourselves and in the world, to calm it, and transform it – that is true power. Rage is weakness, but calm presence, education, the ability to settle the mind and emotions, and build on that – this is true strength.

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How to Cultivate the Power of Peace

There are many methods for bringing peace into our lives. A note before I describe these, though. The term ‘cultivate’ is used in contemplative traditions for a good reason. Developing some quality in our lives takes time and attention, just like taking care of a good garden would. Because we are talking here about our experience here though, there is one more factor, that is useful to bring to our self-cultivation, in addition to time and awareness, and that is enjoyment. When we enjoy, take pleasure in our practice, and savor the good results we can have, then the effect and the benefits of peace goes much deeper. As Rumi says, ‘the rain soaks in the ground, and the fruit gets juicy’. This is how we should enjoy and be nourished by our peace.

A few methods: Going for a walk, slowing down a bit and making more room in our lives for reflection, and meditation methods such as following our breath while sitting or walking– all of these have proven their value for people. There is also the method of working with images that can have a wonderful effect. Here are four images I’ve found particularly useful.

First: Sometimes if my mind is noisy – more than usual – as if my thoughts themselves have thoughts – then I will imagine all this chatter as being like a great many birds in a big tree, or in a grove of trees, and I imagine telling them all to quiet down, with a gesture perhaps, or just by mentally putting my finger to my lips and saying ‘Shhhh...’. And in my mind I imagine that they do so. And believe me, I enjoy that feeling of peace – it’s quite a relief!

Second: Another image I’ve used over the years occurred to me to try after learning one of the meditation methods taught by Thich Nhat Hanh. He said, Breathing in, I see my self as still water, Breathing out, I reflect things as they are. Or, Water, Reflecting. Once someone showed me a picture of a lake in Canada, very still, very serene, with the mountains and clouds reflected in it. I can still picture this image, and holding it in my mind settles my thoughts.

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It's interesting to consider that *all* images have an effect on our body and mind, and not just the ones we choose. Meditating on select images makes this abundantly clear. As a result, we will become more discriminating about the kind of thoughts we hold.

Third image: I learned an interesting word, one I've found useful for in developing the feeling of peace, and that is 'ballast'. Ballast is the water that a large ship or small boat will intentionally take on for the sake of stability. When there is more weight, the ship will not be so easily pushed around by wind and waves. I try to identify when I need more of this feeling, of more weight and centered-ness, and I look to see what helps this feeling. When I feel more grounded, and like I have enough of the good 'weight' of peace, I feel like I'm better able to handle whatever the situation may be.

And four: The images of my teachers has been enormously helpful for me as well. We all have stores of positive images in our mind from our own life, and these can arise spontaneously when we need them most, or we can go looking for the kind of images that can benefit us. For example, think of a teacher you have met, or whose picture you have seen who seemed settled, grounded, clear and kind. If you stay with this image for a while, it resonates. We can feel its positive effect in our body and on an emotional and mental level as well. It's worth repeating that this is something we should enjoy, we should relish – the stabilizing influence of the thought of a kind teacher.

Sometimes having the language to think or speak about something can help us to understand it. The opposite is also true: if we don't have the language or clear ideas about something, it becomes harder to work consciously and intelligently in that area. I would like to propose here that one thing that can help us to cultivate a greater power of peace is to have some more clear ideas on the subject, the nature of peace.

Peace is being settled, so in that way it is the opposite of scattered, confused thinking, wild emotional states or the lack of control. From another

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perspective on the same function, peace is also collectedness, control, and the ability to be present with a steady mind and feeling.

There is a Mullah Nasrudin story about the uncontrolled, undisciplined mind. One day a person saw Mullah Nasrudin going back and forth on a galloping horse. The person managed to call out to Mullah Nasrudin, 'Hey! Where are you going?', and Mullah Nasrudin answered, 'I don't know! Ask the horse!'

This is how it is with an uncontrolled mind. If the mind wants to go up, we go up, we feel happy. If the mind wants to go down, we feel despair, or anger, or fear. Wherever the mind wants to go, or is triggered to go, without calm, without discipline, we have no choice. From what I can see, a lot of people's suffering has this in common. People feel little or no control, and little or no choice when it comes to their states of mind.

When peace has been developed over time, and is there strongly, this brings control, and choice. The mind is not so easily influenced. Of course it takes more than a little experience of peace to counter some strong factors, but it is possible to 'saturate ourselves' with positive feelings of calm and well being, such that these very experiences begin to effect how we respond to people and to the world we live in. We can become more stable and grounded, more solid and calm. To the extent that peace is there powerfully as a rich and strengthening resource in us, then, to that extent it is resistant to being provoked or stirred up to act irrationally.

The Far-reaching Benefits of Peace

Because the nature of mind is not material, it can be developed without limit. If we had to put the mind's product in a room somewhere, we'd quickly run out of space, even if it was a big room. But we are talking about the mind's qualities here, and this is something that can be developed without such restraints.

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Here is what we really pass on to our descendants: not physical structures, or words or sounds and images, but the essential quality they bear. With real peace, there is robust health, safety, clarity, joy, gentleness, natural generosity, and harmony for generations to come.

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The Interaction of the Four Elements

In our everyday experience, the principles we refer to as the four elements are always functioning together in us. Understanding how they work can be useful in many ways. By the term the four elements I'm referring to fire, water, air and earth. These function in our experience as qualities, or as far reaching principles. They can exist in us to a greater or lesser extent, and in a more or less balanced way.

In general, as a starting point,

fire warms, illuminates, causes growth, and is there as light, brilliance, creativity, diversification, or growing strength or power

water moistens, eases the way, is gentle, nourishing, refreshing, heart-centered, sensitive, purifying, fluid and malleable

air moves swiftly as thought, intelligence, moves unobstructed, without limits, as breath, permeates, penetrates, carrying life energy and knowledge, and provides spaciousness and circulation

earth stabilizes, is tangibility itself, provides traction, weight, substance, firmness, solidity, and stability

It should be noted here that each of the elements also have a shadow side, when they are functioning physically and psychologically either in excess or in a state of deficit. So, fire can also burn, be critical, impatient, destructive in a counter productive way, impulsive, or contributing to growth in an unbalanced way, excessive, destabilizing; or when we lack the fire element, a person can be cold emotionally, without passion, inspiration, or drive, energy or endurance;

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Water, in excess, can be too sensitive, wishy-washy, too changeable, malleable, melodramatic, hysterical, over emotional; when the water element is lacking, a person can be without feeling or appreciation, without joy, or with little well-nourished growth;

Air, in excess, can make a person flighty, mentally overactive, skipping around without much strength of focus, or spacing out; when deficient, a person can exhibit a lack of thorough thought, consideration or grace.

Too much earth can feel heavy, weighed down, lethargic, sluggish, burdened, stuck in the mud or in counter productive inertia; with a lack of earth one can feel not grounded, without focus or solidity or enough weight.

Now, while considering the elements can be useful for self-understanding or cultivating balance, these reflections are further enriched when we consider their interaction in pairs. These reflections are can be good for cultivating balanced psychological and physical states, and can also work to heal or to correct imbalance, to promote well being, strength and balanced growth into the future.

And so, the elements considered in pairs:

In conjunction, in a balanced way, earth and fire together promotes growth – think tropics – where the earth and fire elements are there together in a garden, powerfully, with flourishing growth;

fire and water together make for warm emotion, passion

air and fire produce fiery intellect, thorough going, bright, illuminating, powerful thought

Water and air together equals balanced intellect and feeling, heart and mind in conjunction

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water and earth produces nourished earth, think: like a plant that's been watered, physical joy and well being down to the roots

Together with air, earth has space, and order; earth can stabilize the mind in meditation

Now consider: what element is most present? What is lacking?
 What, if any, is clearly dominant in its effect at any given time of day?
 What is in excess, and what element (quality or principle) can I cultivate to bring greater balance?

When one element is in excess, very often another will be lacking. For example, if someone is flighty, often there's a lack of earth; if sluggish, often there is a lack of fire, inspiration or drive; if over-emotional, sometimes there is a lack of thought (or the air element) contributing to that. With observation, we can see how these dynamics work.

A two step method

Moving toward balance can involve either producing or augmenting one element, or correcting an excess. Regarding some element or quality that is excessive, first, sometimes just being aware of some imbalance is enough to curb it or slow it down. If we are impatient, and aware of it, that can calm the feeling, to some extent at least. Or, if we are prone to being flighty, or excessive in speaking, just being conscious of when that is happening can lessen that tendency. However, for more substantial change for what is in excess in our person, a second step is needed, and that is cultivating some qualities in our character, to bring balance. This takes more effort over time, of course, but it is the only way to achieve the balance in our constitution that we are ultimately looking for.

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Consciously cultivating the elements

Cultivating the quality of a particular element can be done in a number of ways. If one knows what an element is, essentially, a person can focus on that feeling, and whatever we focus on increases in us. That is what reflection is for, it is one of the purposes of meditation.

Also, we can look for the element we want to better understand, and cultivate in ourself, in the natural world. Earth is all around us as the ground, and as grasses, woods, rock, roots, mountains; fire is there as the sun, volcano, and vivid colors; air as breezes strong winds, wide open spaces, our own breath; and water as the rain, oceans, rivers, streams, waterfalls, lakes, wells, and the water we wash our bodies with and are cleaned by, the pure water we drink, and so on.

Reflecting on the four elements can yield rich results. These are themes that get more interesting and fruitful with time. Over time, the more interest, creative thought and attention we give to this extensive subject the more we can see its effect. We can have greater means available to us to influence our experience. The effect at first can be subtle and gradual, but it is clearly tangible, especially on the inner level.

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Karma as experience

At this point in the West, we have the word 'karma' in our vocabulary, with what seems to me to be a poor, only semi-functional definition. Some of the collective aspects of this idea are that: whatever we sow, we reap; that our own choices now determine our future, and that we are all responsible for the life we have now, and will have in the future. While all of these are true, as far as they go, the problem I think is that we are defining karma much too narrowly to do us much good.

I was thinking about this today as I was reflecting on how small a part of our lives are conscious and volitional. I can see now how *it is the sum total of our experiences that results in each response we have to the world.*

When I take it just a step further, I can see how, on a deeper level we each have clearly defined lives, and we respond in a unique way to the world from that. We are like an ocean in this way – each wave, though it has a surface we can all see, also has a depth that is behind the particular shape and character of the wave.

What's more, if we are talking about understanding our responses to the world we meet, becoming more free of conditioning, and healing our suffering, then we need a fuller definition of what is going on than one that holds karma to be only volition and the effects of our consciously decided actions.

One of the main drawbacks to this over simplified, partial definition of karma is that it 'blames the victim'. This definition says that, if we are miserable, or poor, or confused, then it is because of our own actions. It says, even if we don't remember them, our choices led us to where we are. Or, if you really want to get abstract about it, some philosophies even say that we chose to incarnate when and where and how we did, to go through certain experiences. Another branch to this remote, abstract definition says, even if we don't remember our actions, nothing happens without a cause,

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and therefore we must have, in some previous moment produced the causes for whatever happens in and around us.

The problem with this, and all abstract philosophies is that a large part of it, for most people, is not verifiable. We are asked to take it on faith, or just because it sounds reasonable enough. The result is a strange kind of guilt, having been accused and convicted long ago, we now suffer the sentence for things we do not and cannot remember.

Such a definition of karma may work to channel people's efforts in a positive direction, out of fear, or just because it is completely enough for a human being to try to do the right thing at any given time. The shortcoming is evident though when whatever we do is not enough. If we hold onto this under developed idea of karma, we blame ourselves.

It's much more accessible and tangible, I feel, to begin to think of karma as conditioned experience. This includes volition, but our intention and consciously chosen action is just a part of it. I think of will, and conscious choice as one part, a small part of the whole that forms the basis for our perceptions and responses to the world.

A few examples occurred to me today, as I was walking around thinking about these things. Experiences in childhood, or before that even, those of our race, our ancestry, nation, education or mis-education, all are part of every single one of us. These factors appear in a unique way in each of us, but the elements are all there, and they all contribute to how we view and reflexively respond to the world.

As I watched my mind and feelings today, I could see how, this person or that store, this thought, that hope, evoked responses that were more like reflexes than individually made choices. Each of these responses were composite, made of many factors.

I can think of a child, perhaps, having some experience that causes him or her joy, or fear, or hurt. Maybe this is forgotten consciously, but if a person

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or situation reminds him of that event, then, of course there will be a reaction. We can't say the child, or now adult, chose to react in a certain way, but this reaction is an experience. Now if I take just a bit it further, and imagine that the now adult has reacted many times to some situation, based in the long ago forgotten past, then the conditioned response is their habit, their view, their experience.

A couple of more examples before I set out some ideas about working with all of this, in terms of our freedom and happiness.

Say a person is born into a culture that has oppressed another, minority culture, or culture in another country, based on feelings of assumed privilege and the rights of the powerful. Whether or not the person chose these values or agrees with those ideas, the fact remains that there is something in their makeup that values things, experiences and responds to others in a particular way. In computer terms, it may not exactly be hard-wired, but it is something akin to software that came installed with the machine. It takes consciousness and effort to undo the automatic effects of some of these programs.

Another example of experience as karma would be that of race. If a person is born in a particular race that has been oppressed, denigrated and abused, then that person, on some level, carries that, and needs to heal that in themselves in order not to be inhibited by it, not to have their lives truncated by that set of factors.

I think of what it is to have Eastern European Jewry in my background, and, how it is that, although I haven't learned anything of this ancestry, still I carry with me some of the scars, grief and fears of that race. If I see or hear about some event in the past or present that has to do with prejudice against this group, something in me responds – I feel under attack as well, and like I have to defend myself and this part of my family.

Another example of karma as experience that we have inherited, not created ourselves, is that of our ancestry, our DNA. If a person was born, for

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example, in a situation where depression runs in the family, they did not create those circumstances, but they are effected by them, indirectly via the behavior of those family members, and directly as well, as their own genetic predisposition to respond to the world, and to stress and sadness in a certain range of ways.

This is not fixed, of course, but it is there as a fact for a person to deal with, and heal if they were born in those circumstances. The disposition to health or certain types of illness are also part of what I'm referring to here. We didn't create these circumstances, but we live with them, and they are part of what we carry with us, as karma, until they are transformed.

Some New Ager's would say, we were born, or we chose to be born in this family in particular because we have the same tendencies, but I have no personal proof of that. It's conjecture, and, I feel, it critically overlooks a great deal of what is happening. What I do know, and I think what we can agree on is that one person didn't by himself create the full range of these conditions.

Again, to put it in organic terms, if our diet has hidden elements in it that we have not consciously chosen, they still effect everything from our health, and energy, to our ability to ward off illness. What we have 'eaten' over the time, both figuratively and, in this case literally, has *become* us. Although not of our conscious choice, we carry these elements with us.

What I'm getting at here is that we are deeper and more complex beings than is accounted for by describing karma merely as volition, conscious choice and its effect. While that may be true, in and of itself, it's also true that we carry with us a unique and far reaching set of experiences and impressions, that behave in us in a certain way. It's only by accounting for all that moves in us that we can understand the range of what we are talking about liberating when we speak of finding some range of freedom in our lives from karma and conditioning.

Part IV: Essays - XIX - Karma as experience

For example, if we have liberated ourselves from small feelings of being undervalued, say, as a divorced woman in her 40's, we have accomplished more than undoing our own thinking, speaking and acting on a certain set of mistaken assumptions. In a manner of speaking, we didn't create the prison bars, even if we have wandered inside the compound for a long time. And when we step into freedom, it's not just our own creations we are freeing ourselves from – it's all we have been born into.

This is a much more functional way of viewing karma. It is an approach that is entirely verifiable, and it is free of the presumed guilt that says, if we experience trouble, we have been the cause of it. While this may be true, if we are not omniscient, or not the kind of person who sees all the way to *all* the long ago causes for any particular situation, we need another way to think about our lives. It's better by far to say, I don't know all of who built this set up, but I see how it limits and oppresses, and I chose to own this set of responses that I can be conscious of as my own and see how I can live in the best possible way with them.

Conditioning goes deep, but there are deeper levels than what we reflexively identify with and often move out of. Finding those deeper levels and bringing them to bear on the present set of circumstances first 'softens', and then can transform the overall response.

I would say that, as unique as persons' conditioned responses are, equally unique is their freedom from whatever distortions or limitations those experiences imposed. This is by far a more tangible and workable definition of karma.

Healing differs from liberation

I've been thinking also about the difference between liberation, or transcendence, and healing. We can step out of suffering conditions, for a longer or shorter period of time, but that still feels somehow incomplete to me. The prison, so to speak, continues to exist, and on a personal level, we

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can say the causes still exist to get caught again in some partial, afflicted experience. It's only when the causes are seen into in a thorough going way, and cared for *as our own life* that the path to healing opens up before us.

With love and wisdom, when we heal ourselves, the benefit travels back to the roots of things, and goes well beyond what we usually think of as ourself, at least in the small sense of the word. As part of the world soul, our culture, ancestry, genetics, are all effected, are all benefitted.

I think of something genuinely transformed in a life or a culture as being like fertilizer or garbage creating vegetables. When the transformation of old elements is thoroughly done, what is new in no way resembles what came before. It is there as a richness, some knowledge gained, certainly, but the old element is now a factor in name only.

We've all been given a unique life, and a unique part of the world soul lives in us as experience. Working with this karma, then, whatever we do to right our own life effects the whole, and organically, everything we were born into is in some way also positively effected.

To me, this is a fuller, more compassionate and workable way of understanding karma:

The world is what we have inherited, including the fruits of our own thoughts and actions. It lives in us as our own unique experience. What we do with this legacy, and sense of self and the world, is, then, the gift we offer our descendents, all our near and distant relations.

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - I

The Healing Buddha

A Practice for the Prevention and Healing of Disease

Translated and composed by Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche

Motivation

No matter what you do, it is essential to generate a positive motivation. Therefore, think as follows:

"The purpose of my life is to free all living beings from all their problems and the causes of these problems, which are in their minds, and to bring all beings peace and happiness, especially the peerless happiness of full enlightenment, which they desperately need. For me to be able to do this, my mind and body must be perfect, pure and healthy. Therefore, to benefit living beings equal to extent of space, I am going to practice this healing meditation."

Meditation

Visualize yourself in your ordinary body, with your heart at the center of your chest, inverted, pointing upwards. Inside your heart is a white, eight-petalled lotus. At its center is a moon disc, upon which is seated the Healing Buddha in the aspect of the supreme transformation. His holy body is clear and in the nature of dark blue light, and he holds an arura plant in his right hand and a begging bowl in his left.

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In front of the Healing Buddha is the white medicinal goddess, Actualized Wisdom; to his right is the yellow medicinal goddess, Simultaneous Wealth; behind him is the red forest goddess,

Peacock's Throat; to his left is the green tree goddess, Radiant One. Each goddess is in the nature of blissful radiant light and has one face and two arms. An arura plant is in each goddess's right hand, with a vase adorned with various ornaments in the left. The four goddesses sit cross-legged, not in the full vajra position but in the aspect of offering respect to the Healing Buddha.

Then make this request:

O Destroyer, Complete in All Qualities and Gone Beyond (1) and you four medicinal goddesses, please pacify immediately the illnesses that afflict me now and help me avoid all future sickness.

Light rays of the appropriate colour emanate from each of the five deities at your heart. Your heart and body are full of blissful light, which completely purifies all disease, spirit harms, and negative actions and their imprints. Beams of five-coloured light radiate from all the pores of your body, while nectar flows down from the Healing Buddha's begging bowl and the vases held by the four goddesses, completely filling your heart and body. Generate the strong recognition that you have vanquished all disease forever and will never be sick again.

While concentrating single-pointedly on this visualization, recite the short or long Healing Buddha mantra seven, twenty one, one hundred and eight, or more times.

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Short Healing Buddha mantra

TAYATHA / OM BEKANDZE BEKANDZE /
MAHA BEKANDZE RANDZE /
SAMUNGATE SOHA

Long Healing Buddha mantra

OM NAMO BHAGAWATE BEKANDZE /
GURU BENDURYA PRABHA RANDZAYA /
TATHAGATAYA /
ARHATE SAMYAKSAM BUDDHAYA / TAYATHA /
OM BEKANDZE BEKANDZE /
MAHA BEKANDZE RANDZE /
SAMUNGATE SOHA

If you are sick, after you have finished reciting the mantra, put some saliva on your left palm, rub it with the tip of your right ring finger, place the tip on this finger at the entrance of your right and left nostrils, where the so-called All-Doing King Nerve can be found, and apply the saliva to the afflicted parts of your body. Then recite as many mantras of the Sanskrit vowels and consonants as possible, along with the mantra of the Heart of Dependent Arising.

Sanskrit vowels

OM A AA I II U UU RI RII LI LII E AI O AU
AM AH SVAHA

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Sanskrit consonants

OM KA KHA GA GHA NGA /
 TSA TSHA DZA DZHA NYA /
 TA THA DA DHA NA/
 TA THA DA DHA NA/
 PA PHA BA BHA MA/
 YA RA LA VA/
 SA SHA SA HA KSHA SVAHA

The Heart of Dependent Arising

OM YE DHARMA HETU-PRABHAVA HETUN TESHAN
 TATHAGATO HYA VADAT/
 TESHAN CA YO NIRODHA / EVAM-VADI/
 MAHASRAMANAH YE SVAHA

This practice, a Dharma treasure (terma) of Padma Sambhava, protects you from both the illnesses troubling you now and those you have yet contracted.

Dedication

Because of all my positive actions of the past, present, and future, which bring happiness, may the ultimate good heart - which cherishes all living beings and is the source of the three-time happiness of myself and others - arise in those minds where it has not yet arisen, and increase in those minds where it already has sprung.

Because of my three-time positive actions and those of all holy beings, whose attitude is the purest, may all the kind father and mother sentient

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts -I - The Healing Buddha

beings have happiness. May I alone be the cause of this, and may the three lower realms be empty forever.

May the prayers of all holy beings - those who dedicate their lives to the happiness of others - succeed immediately, and may I alone be the cause of this.

Because of my three-time positive actions and those of all holy beings, may I achieve the peerless happiness of full enlightenment - the state of mind that is free of all error and complete in all positive qualities - and lead all others to that state.

Colophon

This healing practice was translated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche at Tara Institute, Melbourne, Australia, on September 1, 1991. The Motivational and Dedication have been added to the original text.

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts -I - The Healing Buddha

Notes

1. An epithet for the Healing Buddha.

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - II -
The Sadhana of the Medicine Buddha

The Sadhana of the Medicine Buddha, by H.H. Dudjom Rinpoche

All beings are tormented by sufferings in Samsara – externally by physical sickness and internally by emotional disturbances and mental problems. In order to help free others from these sufferings, as well as ourselves, we need to take refuge in the Medicine Buddha.

In order to do the practice of the Medicine Buddha, first take refuge in the Buddha as the ultimate protector, in the Dharma as the path of liberation, and in the Sangha as the companions on the way.

Repeat the Refuge Prayer three times with the image or visualization in front or above.

*Homage! Myself and the limitless sentient beings without exception take refuge in the Medicine Buddha, the Triple Gem.
I will liberate all sentient beings equal to the sky, who have been our parents, to the stage of the Medicine Buddha.*

Repeat the Four Boundless Meditations three times.

*May all beings have happiness and the cause of happiness.
May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.
May they never be separated from the Supreme Happiness which is free from suffering
May all leave attachment to dear ones and aversion to others and live believing in the equality of all who live.*

As we are all the Primordial Buddha, we have the essence of Buddha Nature. Realizing this, *relaxing* in the natural state is the absolute way of taking

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - II -
The Sadhana of the Medicine Buddha

refuge and generating Bodhicitta (the mind of enlightenment). When doing the practice, be free of subject, object, and action.’

From the voidness, before our mind gets interrupted by other thoughts, we should form the intention to do the practice of the Medicine Buddha. Preparing to welcome the Buddha, we should gather offerings. Imagine all the nice and beautiful things that exist in the form of offerings. Offer these to the Medicine Buddha. Now begin to practice. Consider the place of meditation as a Buddha Field. The landscape is extremely beautiful. All of space is filled with rainbows. There are gods and goddesses holding offerings (sounds, tastes,... objects of the five senses) for the Buddhas.

Visualize a vast throne in the center of the Buddha Field. Upon that is a vast thousand-petalled lotus. Upon the lotus is a moon disc and upon that the Medicine Buddha. The Medicine Buddha is blue in color and is in the lotus posture. His right hand, in the gesture of granting wishes, holds the Arura fruit (Myrobalam).

His left hand, in the gesture of meditation, holds the begging bowl filled with medicinal nectars. He is surrounded by the eight Bodhisattvas, et al. With the major and minor marks of full enlightenment, wearing the three monastic robes, the Medicine Buddha, as an object of concentration, appears in translucent rainbow light.

With the thought of inviting Him from the Buddha Field to become one with our visualization, make offerings with what we have prepared and blessed. Although Buddhas don't need anything, we make offerings in order to accumulate merit.

Repeat the Seven Branch Offering; recite prayers; do prostrations.

LAMA TONPA CHOMDANDE DESHINSHEGPA
DRACHOMPA YANGDAGPAR DZOGPAI SANGYE

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The Sadhana of the Medicine Buddha

MANGYILHA VAIDURYA OD KYI GYALPO
LA CHAG TSHAL LO CHOD TOD KYAB SU CHIO*

Repeat as many times as possible.

(* for the translation of the Invocation and mantra, see the two pages that follow this sadhana)

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE BHAISHAJYE GURU VAIDURYA
PRABHARAYAYA TATHAGATAYA ARHATE
SAMYAKSAMBUDDHAYA TADYATHA OM
BHAISHAJYE BHAISHAJYE MAHA BHAISHAJYE
RAJA SAMUDGATE SVAHA

or

BHAISHAJYE BHAISHAJYE MAHA BHAISHAJYE
RAJA SAMUDGATE SVAHA

Phonetic key of Tibetan Pronunciations:

Teyatha Om Baikanze Baikanze Mahabaikanze Radza Samungate Soha

Although all the Buddhas have the same nature, each has a particular power. When we recite the mantra, rays of light emanate from the heart of the Buddha, like a hundred rising suns, curing all the diseases and obscurations of the beings, and even their causes. By the power of this practice may all suffering and problems be removed by the power of the Medicine Buddha.

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The Sadhana of the Medicine Buddha

Recite while concentrating on the rays of light. At the end of the practice, by the power of these rays of light, sufferings are completely removed, like darkness is dispelled by a torch.

At the end of the recitation of mantra, be free of the concept that beings and Buddhas are different. Buddhas and beings all dissolve in emptiness, as water dissolves in water, as space in space. Remain in the inexpressible state, which is free from thoughts and concepts, mingling with the nature of Buddha's body, speech and mind.

At the end of the practice, when we arise from meditation, free from notions or concepts, share the merit with all beings.

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The Sadhana of the Medicine Buddha

Meaning of the words of the invocation and the mantra
(as provided by Frederika Fairchild)

LAMA	Guru
TONPA	Teacher, 'One who Knows'
CHOM-DAN-DE	Destroyer of demons
Possessing the Enlightened Qualities, Gone Beyond, Transcending duality	
DESHINSHEGPA	Thus Come, this Gone
DRACHOMPA	Destroyer of the enemy (ego)
YANGDAGPAR DZOGPAI	Exceedingly pure, Fully Perfected
SANGYE MANGYILHA -	Medicine Buddha
VAIDURYA	Blue Diamond
OD KYI GYALPO	King of Luminosity
LA CHAG TSHAL LO	To you I prostrate,
CHOD TOD	Make offerings, Praise
KYAB SU CHIO	and go for refuge

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - II -
The Sadhana of the Medicine Buddha

There are two versions of the Medicine Buddha Mantra presented in the root text. The first is more elaborate and the second is more essential. The first mantra is usually recited as a prelude before beginning the second mantra. If you are unfamiliar with tantric practice, it is recommended that you simply recite the second mantra, and do so as many times as possible.

OM NAMO BHAGAVATE BHAISHAJYE GURU VAIDURYA
PRABHARAYAYA TATHAGATAYA ARHATE
SAMYAKSAMBUDDHAYA TADYATHA OM
BHAISHAJYE BHAISHAJYE MAHA BHAISHAJYE
RAJA SAMUDGATE SVAHA

or

BHAISHAJYE BHAISHAJYE MAHA BHAISHAJYE
RAJA SAMUDGATE SVAHA

Phonetic key of Tibetan Pronunciations:

Teyatha Om Baikanze Baikanze Mahabaikanze Radza Samungate Soha

Meaning of the Words in the Mantra

OM	Auspicious in the beginning Seed syllable of the Body of all Buddhas
NAMO	Homage
BHAGAVATE	Buddha (epithet for)
BHAISHAJYE	Medicine, Healing

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - II -
The Sadhana of the Medicine Buddha

GURU	Guru
VAIDURYA	Lapis Lazuli, blue diamond
PRABHARAYAYA	- King of Light
TATHAGATAYA	Thus Gone
ARHATE	Killed the enemy, ego
SAMYAKSAMBUDHAYA	- Totally Perfected Buddha
TADYATHA	In such a manner as follows
OM	(same as above)
BHAISHAJYE	Medicine, Healing, Cure
BHAISHAJYE	Medicine, Healing, Cure
MAHA BHAISHAJYE	- Great Medicine
RAJA	King
SAMUDGATE	Crossed the Ocean (of Samsara)
SVAHA	Receiving the blessings of all Buddhas

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

From the Sky Dharma, which is a Mind Treasure, An Ornament of the Clear
Expanse of Mind, Comes a Ritual of Menla Called

A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

Namo. Maha Bekandzeya. If they are available, arrange in front of a Menla thangka as many peaceful offerings as you can, such as a mandala and so forth; in this way the accumulations are completed. If these are not available, it is enough to make mental offerings while imagining the front visualization in the sky—nothing else is needed. Since this is the anuttara, the practitioner need not refrain from meat and alcohol nor perform the rituals of purification, such as taking the blessing of pure water. It is definitely necessary, however, to receive the empowerment and reading transmission for this practice, as it belongs to the anuttara tradition. Since it belongs to the nyingma tradition, the self and frontal visualizations are simultaneously generated; it is not necessary to create them separately. As it is a chanted meditation of the nyingma, your mind should meditate on the meaning of the words.

The supplication:

NAMO BEKENDZE MAHA RADZAYE

You are endowed with an oceanic treasury of qualities and merit;

By the blessing of your inconceivable compassion

You calm the suffering and torment of sentient beings.

I supplicate you, Light of Lapis Lazuli.

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

Those bound by very intense greed

Are born in the hungry ghost realm.

If they hear your name, they are said to be born human and take delight in generosity.

I supplicate you, victorious Menla.

Violating morality and abusing others,

Beings are born in the hell realms.

Hearing your name, they are said to be born in the higher realms.

I supplicate you, King of Medicine.

Whoever by repeated dissension and slander

Creates serious schisms and takes life,

Hearing your name, they cannot harm others.

I supplicate you, King of Medicine

Excellent Name, Appearance of Stainless Fine Gold,

Glorious Supreme One Free of Misery, Resounding Dharma Melody,

King of Direct Knowledge, King of Melody,

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

And King of Shakyas, I supplicate you all.

Manjushri, Kyabdröl, Vajrapani,

Brahma, Indra, the four Kings of the four directions,

The twelve great Yaksha chiefs, and so forth,

I supplicate you, entire and perfect mandala.

The Sutra of the Seven Tathagatas' Aspirations,

And the Sutra of the Medicine Buddha,

The treatise by the great abbot Shantarakshita, and so forth,

I supplicate all the volumes of the genuine dharma,

Bodhisattva Shantarakshita, Trisong Deutsen, and others,

Translators, scholars, kings, ministers, bodhisattvas,

And all genuine lamas of the lineage,

Powerful One of the Dharma, and others, I supplicate you.

Through the blessing of this supplication,

May diverse temporal diseases and dangers of this life be stilled.

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

At death, may all fear of the lower realms be calmed.

Grant your blessing that afterwards we are born in Sukhavati.

To the sources of refuge, the three jewels

And the three roots, I go for refuge.

To establish all beings in buddhahood,

I awaken a mind of supreme enlightenment.

From the expanse of primordial purity emanate

Clouds of offerings filling the earth and sky

With mandalas, articles of possessions, and goddesses.

May they never be exhausted. PUD DZA HO.

May all beings be happy and free of suffering.

May their happiness not diminish.

May they abide in equanimity.

OM SOBHAWA SHUDDHA SARWA DHARMA SOBHAWA
SHUDDHO HAM

Everything turns into emptiness.

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

From the depth of emptiness, this triple universe becomes

The exquisite palace, where

On lion thrones, each with a lotus and moon disk on top

Appear deep blue HUNGS, the seed syllable of myself and the main figure
visualized in the front,

From which, arises Menla, his body the color of lapis lazuli and radiating
light.

He is clothed in the three dharma robes.

His right hand in the mudra of supreme generosity holds an arura.

His left hand in the meditation mudra holds a begging bowl.

With the major and minor marks complete, he sits in the vajra posture.

In particular, on the lotus petals of the front visualization

Are the seven Buddhas, Shakyamuni and the others, and dharma texts.

Around them are the sixteen bodhisattvas,

Around them are the ten protectors of the world,

And the twelve great chiefs with their respective retinues.

The four Great Kings are at the four gates.

From the three syllables in their three places and the HUNG in their hearts,

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

Lights radiate, invoking from their own eastern buddha realms, countless
Wisdom deities which dissolve into myself and the one visualized in front.

HUNG. The eight Menla companions and all deities without exception
I invite here to this place. Kindly rain upon us your great blessings.
Bestow the supreme empowerment on those who are worthy and faithful.
Dispel false guides and obstacles to long life.

NAMO MAHA BEKENDZE SAPARIWARA BENZA SAMAYADZA
DZA
BENZE SAMAYA TIKTRA LEN OM HUNG TRAM HRI AH
ABHIKENTSA HUNG

HUNG. Flowers, incense, lights, scents,
Food, music and so forth;
Forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touch, and all dharmas,
I offer to the deities.
May we perfect the two accumulations.

OM BENZA ARGHAM PADYAM PUPE DHUPE ALOKE GENDHE
NEWIDYE SHABDA RUPA SHABDA GENDHE RASA SAPARSHE
TRATITSA HUNG

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

HUNG. The eight foremost auspicious substances,
The best royal white mustard seed, and the others,
I offer to the deity.
May the two accumulations be perfected.

MANGALAM ARTHA SIDDHI HUNG

HUNG. The eight foremost auspicious symbols,
The peerless royal vase and all others,
I offer to the deity.
May sentient beings perfect the two accumulations.

MANGALAM KUMBHA HUNG

HUNG. The foremost desirable qualities, the seven precious articles,
The most excellent royal one, the jewel, and the others,
I offer to the deity.
May I perfect the two accumulations.

OM MANI RATNA HUNG

HUNG. The foremost of all, Mount Meru

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

With its four continents and subcontinents

I offer to the deity.

May the two accumulations be perfected.

HUNG. With scented water

I bathe the sugata's body.

Although the deity is flawless,

This creates the auspicious connection for purifying all wrongs and
obscurations.

OM SARWA TATHAGATA ABIKEKATE SAMAYA SHRIYE HUNG

HUNG. With a scented, soft white cloth

I dry the victor's body.

Though your body is flawless,

This creates the auspicious connection for freedom from suffering.

OM KAYA BISHODHANI HUNG

HUNG. With these beautiful saffron robes

I clothe the victor's body.

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

Although your body is never cold,

This creates the auspicious connection for vitality to flourish.

OM BENZA WAYTRA AH HUNG

HUNG. Your body is like a mountain, the color of lapis lazuli.

You dispel the suffering of illness in sentient beings.

Surrounded by a retinue of eight bodhisattvas,

Holder of Medicine, precious deity, I praise and prostrate to you.

Excellent Name, Precious Moon, Fine Gold, Free of Misery,

Resounding Dharma Ocean, Dharma Mind, Shakyamuni,

The genuine dharma, the sixteen bodhisattvas and others,

To the precious three jewels, I offer praise and prostrate.

To Brahma, Indra, the Great Kings, the Protectors of the Ten Directions,

The twelve Yaksha chiefs and all their assistants,

Vidyadharas and rishis of medicine, divine and human,

To the deities of ambrosial medicine, I offer praise and prostrate.

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A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

The HUNG in the heart of the self and front visualizations is surrounded by the mantra garland.

Through radiating many-colored light rays, offerings are made to Menla in the pure realm appearing in the east as the color of lapis lazuli. These lights invoke his mind stream, whence Menla's bodies, large and small, his speech as the mantra garland, his mind as the hand symbols of the arura and the begging bowl filled with amrita, all falling like rain, dissolve into myself and the front visualization.

TAYATA OM BEKENDZE BEKENDZE MAHA BEKENDZE
RADZA SAMUDGATE SO HA

Repeat as much as possible and then at the end:

I confess all wrongs and downfalls and dedicate all virtue to awakening.

May there be the auspiciousness of freedom from sickness, harmful spirits, and suffering.

A prayer to return back and dissolution:

The worldly ones return to their own places. BENZA MU.

The jnana and samaya sattvas dissolve into me,

And I dissolve into the expanse of all goodness, primordial purity.

E MA HO.

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

This ornament that is a mind treasure was compiled from the Sky-Dharma and arranged by Raga Asya. If there are contradictions, I confess them before the deity. Through this virtue, may all sentient beings, once freed from sickness, swiftly attain the level of Menla. Though the sutra rituals have the practice of washing [which is not done here], as this is a higher practice, found at the end of the [supreme] yoga tantra, there is no contradiction.

If you take this as your regular practice, the benefits are the following. If you are ordained, your discipline will be maintained; though there might be an occasion when it is not, having purified this obscuration, you will not fall into the lower realms. Having purified the negative karma of being born as a hell being, a hungry ghost, or an animal, you will not take such a birth. Even if you do, immediately liberated, you will take a felicitous rebirth in a higher realm, and gradually attain awakening. In this life as well, you will easily obtain food and clothing and not be harmed by disease, negative spirits, sorcery, or the punishments of rulers. You will be protected and guarded by Vajrapani, Brahma, the Great Kings of the four directions, and the twelve great Yaksha chiefs each with their 700,000 assistants. You will be freed from all harm: from the eighteen kinds of untimely death, the harm of enemies, carnivorous beasts, and so forth. All your wishes will be fully realized, and so forth. In the two more extensive sutras of Menla, the benefits are said to be inconceivable.

In the great monastic centers, such as Jang Damring Pelkhor Chöde, and their philosophical colleges, where the scholars find fault with most dharma and are difficult to satisfy, only this Menla ritual for prolonging life and clearing away the obscurations of death has spread widely. The ritual to be performed before the Jowo in Lhasa, Tibet's Bodhgaya, and before the Great Awakened One at Samye is this ritual of Menla. You should trust that within any of the new and the ancient transmissions, the sutras and the tantras, nothing is more beneficial than Menla. There are many extensive and concise versions; this one has few words and the full meaning. Since it belongs to anuttara yoga, rituals of purification are not needed. Since the

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

offerings are mental, it is all right not to offer tormas. Everyone should practice this.

SHUBHAM DZAYENTU.

Translated under the guidance of Thrangu Rinpoche and Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche by Michele Martin with assistance from Ngodrup Burkhar and reference to translations by Lama Yeshe Gyamtso and Sarah Harding, Woodstock, N.Y., 1984, 1999, Kathmandu, 1999.

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

Short Menla Practice

Your body the color of a mountain of lapis lazuli,

You dispel suffering of disease from all sentient beings.

Your retinue of eight bodhisattvas surrounds you—

I praise and pay homage to the Deity Who Holds the Precious Medicine.

TAYATA OM BEKENDZE BEKENDZE MAHA BEKENDZE RADZA
SAMUDGATE SO HA

May the many sentient beings who are sick

Quickly be freed from sickness

And may all the sicknesses of beings

Never arise again.

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

Shorter Menla Practice

To you, Bhagavan, Tathagata, Arhat, perfect and fully

Awakened Menla, king of lapis lazuli light, I offer prostrations.

Part V: Three Medicine Buddha Practice Texts - III -
A Stream of Lapis Lazuli

Bhagavat, who is compassionate equally to all beings,
The very hearing of whose name pacifies the three lower states,
Medicine Buddha, who eliminates the illnesses of the three poisons,
May there be the goodness of the Vaidurya Light.
May sentient beings, whatever illnesses they suffer,
Be liberated quickly from those illnesses.
May all the illnesses of beings, without exception,
Forever not arise.
May medicines be effective,
And may the intentions of the recitations of the secret mantra path be
accomplished.
May demonesses, cannibal demons, and so forth
Attain compassionate mind.

Part V: Practice Texts

The Practice of White Tara – The Wishfulfilling Wheel

called “Heap of Immortal Essence”, by Kyabje Pabonkha Rinpoche

One begins the practice by first taking refuge and generating Bodhicitta.

SANG GYE CHO DANG SOG KYI CHOG NAM LA
 JANG CHUB BAR DU DAG NI KYAB SU CHI
 DAG GI JIN SOG GYI PE SO NAM GYI
 DRO LA PEN CHIR SANG GYE DRUB PAR SHOG (3 times)

I go for refuge until I am enlightened, to the Buddha, the Dharma, and the supreme assembly. By the virtuous merit that I create by practicing giving and other perfections, may I attain the state of a Buddha, in order to benefit all sentient beings (3 times)

OM SVABAVA SHUDDHA SARVA DHARMA SVABHAVA
 SHUDDOHO HAM

Everything becomes empty.

From within the emptiness on top of moon disc on a white lotus, my own mind is represented by the syllable TAM.

The utpala lotus with the TAM then transforms into myself as the embodiment of long life granting Goddess – White Tara.

With one face and two hands, (my) right hand is in the mudra of supreme generosity. (my) left hand is holding the stem of an utpala lotus and (I) have seven eyes; a youthful body adorned with the major and minor marks and a moon disc as a backrest.

Part V: Practice Texts: The White Tara Sadhana

The three points are marked by the three syllables.

From the seed syllable (TAM) light rays radiate inviting the wisdom Goddess (White Tara) and empowering deities.

(White Tara) merges into me becoming non-dual and through the initiation of the empowering deities, my crown is adorned with Amitayus.

From the (syllable) Tam at my heart, light-rays emanate extracting all life and essence of all good qualities of samsara and nirvana which dissolve into my heart.

OM TARA TUTTARE TURE MAMA AYUH PUNEY JNANA
PUSHTHIM KURU SOHA (21 times)

OM TARA TUTTARE TURE SOHA (as many times as possible)

Recite either the vowel and consonant mantra or the hundred syllable mantra.

OM A AA I II U UU RI RII LI LII E AI O AU AM AH SVAHA
OM KA KHA GA GHA NGA
TSA TSHA DZA DZHA NYA
TA THA DA DHA NA
TA THA DA DHA NA
PA PHA BA BHA MA
YA RA LA VA
SA SHA SA HA KSHA SVAHA

Part V: Practice Texts: The White Tara Sadhana

OM PADMASATTVA SAMAYA MANUPALAYA
 PADMASATTVA DENOPA TITHA DIDO MAY BHAWA
 SUTOKAYO MAY BHAWA
 SUPOKAYO MAY BHAWA
 ANURAKTO MAY BHAWA
 SARVA SIDDI MAY PAR YA TSA
 SARVA KARMA SU TSA MAY
 TSITAM SHRIYAM KURU HUNG
 HA HA HA HA HOH BHAGAWAN
 SARVA TATHAGATA
 PADMA MA MAY MU TSA
 PADMA BHAWA MAHASAMAYA SATO HUNG PAY

One completes the practice with the dedication:

If I see the signs of untimely death, let me straight away clearly see the form of Mother Tara, the wish fulfilling wheel, and, crushing the might of the Lord of Death, quickly become a deathless vajradhara.

GE-WA DE-YI NYUR-DU DAK
 LA-MA SANG-GYA DRUP-GYUR NA
 DRO-WA CHIK-KYANG MA-LU-PA
 D'E-YI SA LA-GO-PAR-CHOK!

By this virtue may I quickly realize Guru-Buddhahood, and transfer each sentient being into that enlightened state!

J'ANG-CH'UP SEM-CHOK RIN-PO-CH'E
 MA-KYE-PA-NAM KYE-GYUR-CHIK!
 KYE-PA NYAM-PA ME-PA-YANG
 G'ONG-NA G'ONG-D'U P'EL-WAR SHOK!

Part V: Practice Texts: The White Tara Sadhana

May the precious Bodhi-mind, where it is unborn, arise; may that born have no decline, but develop more and more.

Translated by Ven. Geshe Kalsang Wangdu's student and translator Michael Lobsang Yeshe, after Geshe-la granted the White Tara Initiation at Tse Che Ling Center for Tibetan Buddhist Studies in San Francisco on August 16, 1996.

May all holy teachers live long lives and guide us until samsara ends.

Part V: A few additional mantras

A note on a few additional mantras that I've found to be useful

I've heard that any one mantra, if a person has an affinity to it, and practices well enough, can accomplish every purpose. That said, there are times when another mantra can have a particular beneficial effect for a person.

Revealing mantras in a book, generally, is 'not the done thing'. However, I'm not saying anything here that hasn't been taught elsewhere, and I thought, simply, that it might just be advantageous to some to mention these mantras, and their effect for the right person – a person with a karmic connection to their practice – at the right time.

It's best to learn these directly from a teacher, but, undeniably, because of the power of these mantras, benefit can certainly come for some people. So there's my motivation. Who am I to withhold anything that could be helpful to another?

As far as knowing if they would work for you, I would say, without a doubt, if you have a connection this any of these, you will know it right away, or almost right away. There will be some positive effect.

The mantra of Manjushri: OM AH RA PA TZA NA DHI

This is the mantra of the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, and it always has the effect, for me, of tangibly giving the emotional body a rest. It's useful when things are difficult, and tiring to deal with so much on a feeling level. It helps to see clearly. This, in itself can have a liberating function.

The White Tara mantras, as mentioned earlier in the White Tara Sadhana, are:

OM TARA TUTTARE TURE MAMA AYUH PUNEY JNANA
PUSHTHIM KURU SOHA , and OM TARA TUTTARE TURE SOHA

Part V: A few additional mantras

This can have the wonderful effect of truly strengthening the constitution and the central nervous system. Among other qualities, I bring this quality of enlightened action to mind at times when doing the Medicine Buddha practice, and imagine that She is there in the retinue of the Healing Buddha, bestowing her blessings as well.

Then at times, when I feel I especially need this quality to be a stronger factor, I'll do the White Tara practice.

Tara is known for her 'swift action', which translates to: the benefits of Tara practices are relatively easy to connect with and receive in our lives.

One variation of the Green Tara mantra that I found worked in a unique and helpful way comes from The Selected Works of the First Dalai Lama: it is:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SARVA JHAVAN BHAYAH SHANTIM
KURU YE SOHA

This is given as 'the mantra for eliminating diseases'. For me, this I've found always helps with tangibly improving the breathing, and the circulation of good breath energy in the body.

The mantra of Avalokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion is:

OM MANI PEME HUNG

This mantra has inconceivable benefits.

The mantra of Amitabha, the Buddha of Infinite Light:

OM AMITABA HRI, or, NAMO AMITABA SOHA

Part V: A few additional mantras

This mantra and practice is especially used in relation to death and dying, with prayers to purify the causes of unfortunate rebirths, and to be born in the Pure Land of the Buddha Amitabha. From there, spiritual progress is said to be unhindered, and advancement, purifying negativities and developing positive qualities can happen quickly.

The Vajrapani mantra, the mantra of the Bodhisattva of Great Power is:

HUNG BENZRA PE, or OM VAJRAPANI SOHA

This can help to purify the blood, or if there are troubles with spirits, particularly those called ‘nagas’.

Another mantra that can be very helpful, quickly, especially when there are disharmonious or jeopardous conditions of any kind is the Green Tara Mantra:

OM TARE TUTTARE TURE SOHA

This is another mantra and practice with amazing, really inconceivable benefits. Anyone with a connection with Tara I would consider to be very very fortunate indeed.

The Vajrasattva mantra is used for purification. This is also called ‘The Hundred Syllable Mantra:

Om Benzra Sato Samaya Manu Palaya Benzra Sato Tenopa Tishsta Dri Bo
 Me Bhawa Suto Kayo Me Bhawa Supo Kayo Me Bhawa Anurakto Me
 Bhawa Sarwa Siddhi Mem Prayatsa Sarwa Karma Su Tsa Me Tsi Tang Shri
 Ya Ku Ru Hung Ha Ha Ha Ha Ho Ba Ga Wan Sarwa Ta Ta
 Ga Ta Benzra Ma Me Mun Tsa Benzra Ba Wa Ma Ha Sa Ma Ya Sato Ah

Part V: A few additional mantras

The shorter form is:

OM BENZRA SATO HUNG

This is also used as a foundational practice, in order to make more subtle and profound practices have a solid basis, and a greater positive effect.

Vajrasattva purification practice is done with what are called the Four Powers, to maximize its effectiveness. These are: 1. regret for negative actions and the suffering they cause ourselves and others; 2., depending purely on our spiritual teachers and their advice (refuge), and aiming to help others out of selfless compassion, in the best possible ways (bodhicitta); 3., the actual practice, in this case of the mantra recitation, visualizing purifying light and nectar flowing through us, cleansing us, filling us with bliss, and the experience of the purification from our faults, and fundamental, original purity; and, 4., the determination not to repeat the negative action again, to whatever extent we are able.

There are detailed teachings available on each of these practices. If any of these resonate with you, please do follow up with more study and practice.

and

May all beings benefit.

Part VI: Dedication

On Dedication Prayer

Dedication makes a bridge from our own practice to connect with people. The more we dedicate the merit of some positive activity, in our hearts and minds, the more we are sharing whatever positive creative energy we have produced by our practice with others. As with all acts of sincere generosity, this increases its value for us all even more, and makes it shine even more brightly within us.

On another level, since there is no separation between us in reality, this kind of orientation is also an affirmation. It says, in effect, ‘this is who we are’. We are connected. It’s right to always be as generous as we can, and our true nature *is* this active love and compassion.

If we are cultivating love and compassion, we are naturally producing what could be called ‘continual dedication’. This quality of mind is naturally connected to others. This is the one quality of mind that most facilitates re-integration with others after meditation or retreat.

The final dedication prayers we make at the conclusion of any particular practice also affirm to our own mind this knowledge we have, that the practice we are doing has the power to work for us as we intend. It’s a statement we make to ourselves of confidence in its effectiveness.

When we do the practice of dedication, it’s taught that we shouldn’t think that our merit – our positive creative energy producing happiness – is divided up between all those we share it with, but rather that every being we are dedicating to receives the full measure of our what we share. We dedicate, or give over, in our mind, in our heart, all our positive energy, good fortune, health, peace, learning and enjoyments, and the causes of these. May all beings benefit.

Part VI: Dedication – On Dedication Prayer

It's important to dedicate the positive energy we create not only to friends, family, those we feel we owe something, and to 'neutral' people, but also to those who give us problems, the people who we sometimes perceive as antagonistic towards us. This gives our practice an indestructible quality,

and makes it truly extensive, without limitation and without obstruction. No one can keep us from wishing them well, regardless of their attitude toward us. This is the freedom of the mind that we have as human beings, and such wishes are sure to bear fruit in time.

In 'The Heart of Compassion: The Thirty-seven Verses on the Practice of a Bodhisattva', concerning the practice of dedication, Dilgo Khyentse says, 'Dedicate all the merit and positive actions you have done or will do throughout the past, present and future so that all beings, especially your enemies, may achieve enlightenment. Try to dedicate the merit in the same way that the great bodhisattvas do.

'Not a single prayer vanishes. Dedicating the merit of every positive action you do with a pure mind will continuously bear positive fruit until you attain enlightenment.

'The attitude of a bodhisattva must be extremely vast, constantly keeping in mind the infinity of beings and the wish to establish them all in buddhahood. If your mind is vast, the power of your prayers is unlimited too. If your mind is narrow and rigid, your accumulation of merit and the purification of your obscurations will also be very limited.

'Do not let yourself be discouraged by such thoughts as that it is not worth dedicating what you see as your miserable accumulation of merit because it could hardly benefit anyone; or by the idea that for you helping others is just talk since you will never really be able to benefit them. If you keep your mind open and vast, the effectiveness of your bodhicitta (the naturally enlightened aspect of the mind) will increase, and so too will the benefit and merit of all your words and deeds.

Part VI: Dedication – On Dedication Prayer

‘In your daily life and practice you must keep developing the excellent mind of enlightenment.’

Seen in one way, in the beginning we set our motivation. Then we do a particular practice, whatever works for us, and are attentive to just this. Then, at the conclusion, being as generous as we naturally know how to, we joyfully dedicate or give over whatever positive energy we have created through our practice to accomplishing our intention.

Sometimes dedication is referred to as ‘sealing’ our meditation. In this sense it does two related things: First, it keeps whatever positive energy we have produced from becoming, even unconsciously, a cause of the negative sort of separative pride, and second it concludes and integrates the formal practice on a most positive note – that of kind regard and abundant good wishes towards others.

One last note on the subject of dedication: It’s taught that the best way to dedicate merit, if we can, is with the right view, that is, without clinging to oneself, the action or the recipient of an action as having intrinsic reality, as it appears to our mind. This is called ‘sealing the dedication of merit with wisdom’, or emptiness. We can at least have this as an aim.

In The Thirty-seven Verses, the verse that refers to this says:

Dedicating to enlightenment

Through wisdom purified of the three concepts
all merit achieved by such endeavor,
to remove the suffering of numberless beings, is the practice
of a bodhisattva

This may not be easy to accomplish, and yet there is always much we can do. In the Traditional teachings on dedication, there are many ways to engage this wonderful practice.

Part VI: Dedication – On Dedication Prayer

As expressed by Dilgo Khyentse: ‘To dedicate merit in the best possible way – a way entirely free from the three concepts of a subject, an object, and an action – is possible only for someone who has fully realized emptiness. How then should we ordinary beings dedicate the merit, (as yet) incapable as we are of such perfect dedication? We can do it by following in the footsteps of those who have that realization.

‘The bodhisattva Samantabhadra mastered the ocean-like infinitude of a bodhisattva’s aspirations, while Manjushri and Avalokiteshvara mastered the oceanlike infinitude of a bodhisattva’s activity to benefit beings. When you dedicate merit, do it with the idea of emulating the way these great bodhisattvas dedicated merit.’

Feel free to use any or all of the following prayers if you like, substitute prayers or verses of your own choosing, or write your own prayers.

May all beings benefit.

Part VI: Dedication

May all beings be happy.

May all beings benefit.

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

May our intentions equally penetrate
every being and place
with the true merit of Buddha's Way.

May this bring healing wherever it is needed.

May this bring about the firm establishment of true health and happiness for
us all.

By this virtue,
May I attain the realization of Guru Medicine Buddha,
and bring all others to that same state.

May all holy teachers live long, and guide us until samsara ends.

And may there be peace and joy in all the world.

Part VI: Dedication

By this virtue,
may all beings,
my dear family, friends,
and all my dear relations everywhere and at all times
have health,
long life,
clear minds,
peace and joy

Part VI: Dedication

A Dedication Prayer, by Shantideva

May all beings everywhere,
Plagued by sufferings of body and mind,
Obtain an ocean of happiness and joy
By virtue of these merits.

May no living creature suffer,
Commit evil or ever fall ill.
May no one be afraid or belittled,
With a mind weighed down by depression.

May the blind see forms,
And the deaf hear sounds.
May those whose bodies are worn with toil
Be restored on finding repose.

May the naked find clothing,
The hungry find food.
May the thirsty find water
And delicious drinks.

May the poor find wealth,
Those weak with sorrow find joy.
May the forlorn find hope,
Constant happiness and prosperity.

May there be timely rains
And bountiful harvests.
May all medicines be effective
And wholesome prayers bear fruit.

May all who are sick and ill
Quickly be freed from their ailments.

Part VI: Dedication

Whatever diseases there are in the world,
May they never occur again.

May the frightened cease to be afraid
And those bound be freed.
May the powerless find power
And may people think of benefiting each other.

Part VI: Dedication

By this virtue:

May all beings be free of suffering
may they be instantly free of whatever suffering they may have

May they have happiness
and may that happiness be lasting for them

Part VI: Dedication

By this practice
may those who have perfect health
be firmly established in that perfect health
May those who do not yet have complete and perfect health
be brought to that level of health, well being and strength
and may those who suffer in any way
be it very slight, or with great suffering
be healed
may they be brought to the highest level of health
and may they be firmly established in complete and perfect health

Part VI: Dedication

O, All my ten directions three times family,
near and distant relations,

May my life and this practice benefit us all
pervading all existences

every mind,
every body, every cell
earth and sky

May this practice surely benefit us all

May all my past, present and future selves benefit from this
and may all the past, present and future selves of all beings
benefit from this

May this bring healing wherever it is needed.

May this bring about the flourishing of true health and happiness for us all

Part VI: Dedication

By this virtue
may those who do not have happiness
have happiness

May those who do not have confidence
have confidence

May those who do not have peace
have peace

May those who do not have knowledge and joy
have knowledge and joy

Part VI: Dedication

From Shantideva

As long as diseases afflict living beings
may I be the doctor
the medicine
and also the nurse
who restores them to health

May I fall as rain
to increase the harvests
that must feed living beings
and in times of dire famine
may I, myself, be food and drink

For as long as space remains,
and for as long as sentient beings remain,
until then, may I too remain,
to dispel the suffering of the world

Part VI: Dedication

(Where the other dedication prayers offered here are for general use, and can be used with any practice, this one uses the name of the Healing Buddha. If we are doing another practice, if we like, we can substitute the name of that practice wherever appropriate.)

Dedication, Aspiration and Benediction, by Tulku Thondup, from the audio cd 'Boundless Healing', lightly edited.

So now let us dedicate, and make aspirations of this meditation.

Let us dedicate all these merits that we have created by this meditation to all mother beings, as a cause of happiness, peace and joy for them, and as a cause of their attainment of Healing Buddha's blessings, peace and joy.

By the power of the Buddhas,
 Healing Buddha,
 and by the power of the infinite Buddhas that we have prayed to in the sky
 and prayed to in our body,
 by the power of all these Buddhas,
 and by the power of all the Pure Lands,
 and by the power of the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha,
 by the power of the meditation we have done,
 by the power of the merits that we have created,
 and by the power of the Ultimate Nature, Absolute Truth,
 by the power of interdependent causation,

May all mother beings have happiness, peace and joy
 May they always be with Healing Buddha's blessing light,
 blessing energy, and blessing sound, without separation

And may we always be with Healing Buddha's blessing light,
 blessing energy, and blessing sound, without separation,
 day and night, awake or asleep,
 good times and bad times

Part VI: Dedication - Dedication, Aspiration and Benediction, by Tulku Thondup

And may we always be the source of Healing Buddha's blessings for all mother beings especially those with whom we have close connections, we have special responsibilities

And by the power of all the Buddhas,
May all our prayers be answered
May all our wishes be fulfilled

(Benediction)

Now think and feel that Buddhas in the sky, and Buddhas in our body, give us their benediction. In one thunderous voice, filling the universe, they say to us:

'May your prayers be answered
May your wishes be fulfilled

'May you be healed of your old illness
ills of your mind, and your body

'And may you always be with Healing Buddha's
blessing light, blessing energies, and blessing sound'

Think and feel that we have accomplished the healing activities, the blessings of the Healing Buddha.

Part VI: Dedication

Lama Zopa always makes the most wonderful, extensive dedication prayers. Here is an example of one of them, lightly edited, from the book, *Teachings from the Medicine Buddha Retreat*.

Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me and the merits of the three times collected by others, may our teachers and all other virtuous friends have stable lives. May their holy wishes succeed immediately.

May the source of all happiness and success for me and for all sentient beings, bodhicitta, be generated within my mind, in the minds of the members of my family and in the mind of every single sentient being without even a second's delay. May the bodhicitta that has been generated be developed.

Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me and the merits of the three times collected by others, from now on in all future lifetimes, forever, may I be able to offer extensive benefit like the sky to all sentient beings and to the teaching of Buddha, like Medicine Buddha and Lama Tsongkhapa, by having the same qualities as Medicine Buddha and Lama Tsong Khapa have.

Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me and the merits of the three times collected by others, in whichever universe, world, country, area, place and house I am, may just my being there in that universe, world, country, area, place and house be most beneficial, so that all the sentient beings living in that universe, world, country, area, place and house never ever be born in the lower realms from that time.

May they immediately actualize bodhicitta and realize emptiness.

May they never experience war, famine, disease, torture, poverty, and sickness and dangers from fire, water, air or earth, such as floods and other natural disasters that cause so many people to be homeless or to die.

Part VI: Dedication - by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

May those happening now immediately be stopped, and may they never experience any of those things again.

May those who are deaf be able to hear; may those who are blind be able to see; may those who are lame be able to walk; and may those who are in comas be able to immediately recover consciousness.

May the hearts of those who experience many depressions where nothing can help immediately be filled with great bliss.

May those who have many headaches that are difficult to cure immediately stop getting those headaches.

May all those with emotional problems, those who are sad, hurt, angry or otherwise disturbed by their own emotional thoughts, and all those with relationship problems, those who have been abandoned or abused, have their minds filled with great loving kindness, and may their lives be filled with joy and satisfaction.

May those who are looking for a guru be able to find a perfectly qualified guru.

May those who are looking for the Dharma be able to find unmistakable Dharma, the correct path to enlightenment and the teachings that reveal that path.

May those seeking to do retreat be able to find a perfect place and conditions and then be able to have a successful retreat and achieve realizations during it.

May everyone obtain peace and happiness.

May everyone with sickness, including those with cancer, AIDS and other incurable diseases immediately recover, and may they be able to complete the path and achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

Part VI: Dedication - by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

May my being in that universe, world, country, area, place and house be able to cause sentient beings to achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

Due to all the merits collected by me today, during this retreat, in the past, and all the merits that I will collect in the future, and all the merits of the three times collected by others, which are empty from their own side, may the I, which is empty (the real I that is appearing from its own side, from there, is totally nonexistent; not even the slightest atom of it exists), achieve His Holiness the Dalai Lama's, Medicine Buddha's enlightenment, which also does not exist at all from its own side, and lead all sentient beings, who appear truly existent from their own side but who are completely empty, completely nonexistent, to that Medicine Buddha's enlightenment, which is also empty from its own side, by myself alone, who is also empty from its own side.

Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me and the merits of the three times collected by others, may the numberless sentient beings who are experiencing unimaginable suffering in the lower realms now, and those people who have died whose names were given to me, for whom I promised to pray and who rely on me, immediately be free from the sufferings of the lower realms, and reincarnate in a pure land where they can become enlightened, or receive a perfect human body and quickly achieve enlightenment, by meeting a perfectly qualified Mahayana guru and the Mahayana teachings.

Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me and the merits of the three times collected by others, may my hearing that a sentient being is sick cause that sentient being to immediately recover.

May my hearing that a sentient being has died cause that sentient being to immediately be reborn in a pure land where they can be enlightened.

And may any sentient being who have been born as a human being but with no opportunity to practice Dharma, be able to meet a perfectly qualified

Part VI: Dedication - by Lama Zopa Rinpoche

Mahayana guru, and the Mahayana teachings, and by putting them into practice, may they quickly achieve enlightenment.

Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me and the merits of the three times collected by others, may I, the members of my family, all the students and benefactors of this organization, especially those who give their lives to this organization to benefit sentient beings, and the teaching of Buddha, and those who rely upon me, those for whom I have promised to pray, and those who are offering service, have long lives and be healthy, and may all our wishes succeed immediately according to the holy Dharma.

Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me and the merits of the three times collected by others, may all the Sangha in this organization be able to complete the scriptural understanding and realizations to the path to enlightenment in this very lifetime, based on living in pure vinaya, and by receiving all their needs and all protection.

Due to all the past, present and future merits collected by me and the merits of the three times collected by others, may all the social service centers, such as the schools, hospices and so forth, and all the meditation centers become most beneficial for sentient beings, immediately pacifying the sufferings of body and mind of sentient beings. May they spread the teachings of Lama Tsongkhapa in the minds of all sentient beings by receiving everything needed for that.

May all the projects that each center has succeed immediately. And may all these projects and centers cause all sentient beings to generate bodhicitta and achieve enlightenment as quickly as possible.

May the conqueror Losang's teachings flourish in our own mind, in the world, and in the minds of others.

Due to the blessings of the eminent buddhas and bodhisattvas, to my pure attitude, and to dependent arising, may my pure prayers succeed immediately.

Part VI: Dedication

By this virtue

may all beings benefit

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

Recommended Reading

Bokar Rinpoche: *Meditation: Advice to Beginners*

Thich Nhat Hanh: *Breathe!, You Are Alive!* (also published as ‘*The Sutra on the Full Awareness of Breathing*’); and, *The Miracle of Mindfulness*

Jamgon Kongtrul: *The Great Path of Awakening – A Commentary on the Seven-Point Mind Training*

The Dhammapada, P. Lal translation

Gen Lamrimpa: *Calming the mind* (also published as ‘*Samatha Meditation*’)

The Uttara Tantra – A Treatise on Buddha Nature; Attributed to Maitreya; translated by Ken and Katia Holmes

Ani Tenzin Palmo: *Reflections On A Mountain Lake*

Sharon Salzberg: *Loving kindness*

Khenpo Palden Sherab Rinpoche: *Opening the Door to Inconceivable Wisdom and Compassion;* and, *Opening to Our Primordial Nature*

Tulku Thondup: *The Healing Power of the Mind*

Thrangu Rinpoche: *Medicine Buddha Teachings*

Tulku Urgyen: *Rainbow Painting*

Tenzin Wangal Rinpoche: *The Five Elements in Tibetan Shamanism, Tantra, and Dzongchen*

Lama Yeshe: *An Introduction to Tantra;* and *Wisdom Energy (and others)*

Lama Zopa Rinpoche: *The Door to Satisfaction*