Chapter 7 The importance of Kindness and Compassion

Peaceful Mind

Simply taking care of our body and tending to its physical comfort but neglecting the state of our mind and heart is not wise. Just as we nourish our body and care for its health each day, we should also invest effort and time into cultivating our mind and ensuring its spiritual health. Doing so will bring us great peace and happiness now as well as in the future.

Whether or not you accept future lives, counteracting disturbing emotions and cultivating our good qualities are still extremely important. We are all subject to frustration, disappointment, and loss in life as well as to aging, sickness, and death. Such conditions plague us simply because we are human. No external method to eliminate them exists; the only way to face these trials gracefully and lessen the suffering that accompanies them is to prepare for them by transforming our mind. Then, when such inevitable sufferings come, we will be able to handle them more easily, with less anxiety and fear, and even with some joy at the special opportunities they provide for our spiritual development.

Medical researchers are taking more interest in studying emotions because they see there is a relationship between positive emotions and good health. Having a positive attitude sustains good health as well as increases our ability to heal after injury and surgery. Destructive emotions, such as anger, fear, and anxiety, can eat away at both our emotional well-being and our health. The link between these emotions and ulcers, high blood pressure, etc has long been known. Some scientific studies have found that destructive emotions weaken our immune system while constructive emotions boost it.

Constructive emotions help people better weather the natural process of the body's aging and eventual demise. People with a positive attitude are able to face these events with inner balance and acceptance—this illustrates that although the body may be ill or painful, the mind can remain peaceful and people can still enjoy a sense of purpose in life. My mother was a good example of this. She experienced many hardships, including fleeing her homeland and becoming a refugee, but she maintained a positive and kind attitude throughout. Because of this, she was appreciated and loved by others.

From the time we are born, constructive emotions affect our physical, social, and emotional development. Studies show that when infants receive compassionate care from their parents, it facilitates the proper development of their brains. We all know from our own experience that a child who is treated with kindness and compassion has more self-confidence and better relationships with others.

Sometimes we think that animals and insects may be happier than we are: they have no fear of layoffs at work, financial woes, or broken relationships. This may be true, but their lack of anxiety is not due to spiritual practice and mental transformation but to clouds of ignorance and confusion that obscure their minds. Contrary to the popular saying, ignorance is not bliss. Fortunately, we human beings, by using our intelligence and reason, have the ability to consciously cultivate constructive mental states and the path to peace and happiness.

From the beginning of the Buddhist path to the end, each practice is aimed at developing virtuous qualities of mind. The qualities we attain through disciplining

and cultivating our mind are vast and extensive, as illustrated by sincere practitioners and highly realised beings.

For our spiritual practice to bear good results, kindness, tolerance, and compassion for other sentient beings are essential. Practicing any spiritual path motivated by habitual self-absorption won't do, because that attitude is a principal cause of our unhappiness. Seeking wealth, social status, or fame is hardly a spiritual motivation, nor is arrogance, jealousy, or competition. To progress on the path to awakening, we need to begin with and maintain a sincere attitude that deeply cherishes others and cares for ourselves in a healthy way, without being either self-indulgent or self-denigrating. Such a mental state is necessary both to live happily in this life and to make our spiritual practice effective. Our motivation is the chief factor determining the long-term results of our actions. In this chapter, we learn contemplations that lead to a compassionate attitude and altruistic intentions, and discuss mind training, a skilful method to help us maintain a compassionate outlook even in the face of adversity.

The Importance of Motivation

The Buddhadharma is a method to train our mind that aims at eliminating afflictions—disturbing emotions and incorrect views. Nirvāṇa is true freedom—the elimination or cessation of these afflictions. Our physical, verbal, and mental efforts directed toward this goal are included in Dharma practice.

What is and is not Dharma practice is determined by our motivation. A spiritual motivation must differ from our ordinary wish to seek well-being by way of possessions, money, reputation, and the sweet words of our loved ones. A spiritual motivation must go beyond seeking happiness in only this life. Three levels of Dharma motivation correspond to the three capacities of practitioners: the first seeks a favourable rebirth, the second aims for liberation from cyclic existence, and the third aspires for full awakening in order to benefit all sentient beings.

We may wonder, "What about the happiness of this life? Everyone wants that." Although that is true, we often employ misguided means in our attempts to be happy and wind up creating more causes for misery instead. To get what we want, we may lie or cheat. When our efforts to procure what we desire are frustrated, we become angry and blame the people around us. We talk behind their backs, stir up others against them, and speak harshly to them. In this way wars begin, be they our personal wars against a colleague, acrimony among racial, ethnic, or religious groups, or wars between countries. Attachment to the happiness of this life brings more problems in the present, creates causes for future problems by transgressing our ethical values, and impedes our spiritual goals.

For these reasons, the demarcation between a Dharma action and non-Dharma action is whether our principal aim is only the happiness of this life. Activity done exclusively with strong grasping for the happiness of this life is limited in scope. A motivation focused on my happiness now cannot act as a cause for good rebirths, liberation, or awakening. In fact, it contradicts our spiritual aims. On the other hand, actions motivated by kindness and compassion; done with the thought to abandon harming others; and done with the motivation to attain a good rebirth, liberation, or awakening enable us to transform even the simplest actions in our daily life into Dharma practice.

While the happiness of this life is not the principal aim, it comes as a byproduct of Dharma practice. By restraining from harmful actions, we immediately get along

better with others. When we act with kindness and compassion, we feel good about ourselves and our self-esteem improves. Others reciprocate our kindness. Interestingly, people who relinquish the preoccupation with the happiness of only this life experience more happiness in this life.

A motivation seeking good rebirth, liberation, or full awakening helps us to overcome clinging attachment, hostility, confusion, jealousy, and arrogance, the source of so much unhappiness. We experience a great sense of purpose in our lives, and our minds become more peaceful, even as we create the causes to achieve our long-term spiritual goals.

We can't evaluate the spiritual value of an action by how it looks on the outside; the same activity can be done with different motivations. Giving millions of dollars to charity with the aim of increasing our fame or wealth in this life is not Dharma practice (no matter how much acclaim we may receive) whereas giving a small donation with a kind heart is. Meditating with the motivation to reduce our stress will bring that result, but is not Dharma practice because our motivation is on our own happiness in this life. To ensure our practice brings the long terms spiritual results we seek, we consciously generate Dharma motivation before engaging in any activity, especially prior to meditating or giving or attending teachings.

Before going to work, take time to cultivate motivation to help others. For example, think, "May the work I do serve my customers and bring happiness in their lives. May I contribute to a feeling of harmony among my colleagues." Changing our motivation changes our actions, and in turn changes the dynamics in our family and workplace. One person cultivating kindness has a strong effect on a group.

It is important to observe our mind and ensure that our kindness is sincere.[32]

Mindfulness and introspective awareness are indispensable to maintain compassionate motivation or one that looks beyond our immediate gain. We have strong habits underlain with the thought "I want what I want when I want it," and we need to continually reinforce mindfulness of our values so we act ethically. With introspective awareness, we monitor our physical, verbal, and mental actions to make sure they correspond with our motivation. In this way, we treasure, protect, and enhance our noble motivations so they manifest in constructive actions.

A good intellectual understanding of the Dharma path helps us refine and improve our motivation. Although conceptual knowledge is not the final goal of the path, it does give us tools to counteract corrupt motivations. When we feel lazy, we know to meditate on impermanence and the unsatisfactory nature of cyclic existence to instil a sense of urgency to practice. If we are angry and upset, we meditate on love or fortitude to calm and centre ourselves.

REFLECTION

1. Our motivation is the principal factor determining the value of our actions.
2. For an action to be Dharma, the motivation must be more than seeking our immediate happiness of this life.
3. We are not "bad" for seeking the happiness of this life, but if we seek only this, we often create the causes for misery now and in the future.
4. Expanding our hearts to care for others and training our minds in long-term motivations such as seeking fortunate rebirth, liberation, and full awakening bring a sense of inner fulfilment.

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[32] When I was a child in Lhasa, I had a parrot that would bite anyone who put his finger in its cage. My calligraphy teacher would give nuts to the parrot, who was always excited to see him. My teacher would put his hand in the cage and pet the parrot, and the parrot would eat nuts from his hand. I was jealous and wanted the parrot to like me just as much as it liked my teacher, so I gave it some nuts. The parrot took them to the other side of the cage and ignored me. It knew I didn't have a good motivation. One day I was so angry when it didn't respond to me that I hit it. Afterward, whenever I came near, it would cry out in fear. Even animals know if we're hypocritical or sincere.

Cultivating a Compassionate Intention

Developing a genuinely compassionate attitude is based on being aware of others' duḥkha as well as their kindness. To be aware of others' misery, we must first be aware of our own. To cultivate compassion that wishes ourselves and others to be free from duḥkha, we must identify the causes of duḥkha and know they can be eradicated. Ignorance—a state of 'unknowing' that misinterprets[33] how phenomena exist—is the root cause of duḥkha. 'Unknowing' implies the existence of its opposite—a state of knowing or wisdom. This gives us confidence that it is possible to eliminate ignorance and overcome duḥkha. To achieve this, we naturally want to learn the path to bring it about. Once again, we see the Buddha's teachings on the four truths of the āryas, the framework for the Buddhist path. The first two of the four truths pertain to the cause and result of birth in cyclic existence—ignorance and suffering. The last two truths pertain to the cause and effect of freedom from that duḥkha—the path and the attainment of nirvāṇa.

Recall (page 9), there are three levels of duḥkha. The duḥkha of pain is the physical and mental pain that all beings abhor. The duḥkha of change refers to experiences and sensations that we usually identify as pleasurable. These are harder for ordinary people to identify as unsatisfactory, but when we think about them in greater depth, we see that they do not bring us lasting happiness, ultimate satisfaction, or security. In fact, they often leave us disillusioned or despondent.

The deepest unsatisfactory condition is the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning—ie, our very existence is a 'condition' of ignorance and polluted karma. When the Buddha spoke about the disadvantages of duḥkha, he was principally referring to this form of duḥkha. When we recognise the nature of cyclic existence in these terms, we can develop genuine aspiration to seek freedom from it.

Cultivating the wisdom that counteracts ignorance is the path to freedom. This wisdom that knows reality must be cultivated by the subtlest level of consciousness, a state of mind that is beyond our everyday, gross mental processes. Highest yoga tantra refers to eighty conceptions that are indicative of the gross level of mental processes.[34] When these gross levels of mind gradually dissolve, we experience three increasingly subtler levels of consciousness—called the white appearance, red increase and black near-attainment. When these, too, have dissolved, the innate mind of clear light dawns. Wisdom (the true antidote to our innate ignorance) needs to be cultivated at this subtlest level of consciousness.

Demarcation between being fully awakened or imprisoned in cyclic existence is a function of this fundamental mind of clear light. If the fundamental mind of clear light remains obscured by afflictions, we are in the state of cyclic existence. When afflictions with their seeds and latencies are removed from the fundamental mind of clear light, we attain liberation. When the fundamental mind of clear light is freed from even the latencies of afflictions, we attain buddhahood. Hence, liberation and awakening are functions or states of the fundamental innate mind of clear light.

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[33] misapprehends

[34] The 80 conceptions in the context of Highest Yoga Tantra in Buddhism are detailed and complex, referring to various mental processes and states that are considered to be at a gross level, obscuring the more subtle nature of mind. These conceptions include a range of thoughts, emotions, and perceptions that arise from the dualistic mind, involving attachment, aversion, ignorance, and other afflictive emotions. Understanding and transcending these 80 conceptions is part of the practice aimed at realising the innate, clear, and luminous nature of the mind, ultimately leading to enlightenment. For a detailed exploration of these conceptions, it would be beneficial to consult specific texts on Highest Yoga Tantra or teachings from qualified Vajrayana or Tibetan Buddhist masters.

At first we understand saṃsāra and awakening in terms of our own duḥkha and our own minds, which inspires our renunciation of saṃsāric duḥkha. When we extend our perspective to see all other sentient beings this way, compassion arises. Although we are seldom aware of it, we are closely connected to all these sentient beings. Because we have been reborn for infinite lifetimes, they have been our parents and raised us with kindness in previous lives. In this life, too, our ability to stay alive depends on them. They grow our food, make our clothing, build our homes, treat our illnesses, and teach us everything we know—their kindness to us is limitless. Compassion and concern for their well-being arise within us.

Just as all of our experiences of mundane happiness—prosperity, security, friendship, or simply having enough to eat—come in relation to other sentient beings, the fruits of spiritual practice also rely on other beings. Cultivating compassion, practicing generosity, living in ethical conduct, and developing fortitude are all done in relation to other sentient beings. When we cultivate single-pointed concentration or wisdom, our underlying motivation has to do with other sentient beings. Likewise, our attainment of buddhahood depends on sentient beings: it can only occur when we truly dedicate ourselves to their welfare. Without sentient beings serving as the object of our compassion and care, there is no way for us to create the causes for supreme awakening. Therefore we can see that when it comes to our own happiness, be it mundane or transcendental, the presence of other sentient beings is indispensable. Seeing this, Śāntideva wonders in Engaging in the Bodhisattvas' Deeds why we revere the buddhas but not sentient beings. Shouldn't we try to forsake our self-preoccupation and cultivate a sense of endearment and compassion toward them?

One line in the Seven-Point Mind Training of Geshe Chekawa[35] (1101–75) says emptiness is the supreme protection. The idea is that when we are confronted with an obstacle, we should reflect upon the emptiness of the person who is harming, the act of harm and ourselves as the recipient of the harm. By contemplating that none of these has any independent self-nature but exists in dependence on the other two, we are able to counter the obstacle. Similarly, meditating on compassion toward the agent of harm is a strong method to cut the intensity of our sense of injury. Instead of harbouring malice toward that person, cultivating a sense of concern, caring and compassion for him is the most powerful kind of protection.

The tremendous benefits of altruism are evident in both our daily lives and our spiritual lives. When we cultivate an altruistic attitude toward colleagues, family members or people whose actions are repugnant to us, immediately fear, insecurity and anxiety decrease. This occurs because underneath fear and insecurity is a suspicious attitude that looks at others as a threat. When we view others as being truly like ourselves—as living beings who naturally aspire for happiness and wish to overcome suffering—and on that basis develop concern for them, it has the immediate effect of releasing us from the grip of tension, mistrust, and jealousy.

Here it is evident that right away altruism creates ease and joy within us. We can mentally relax, sleep more deeply, and the taste of our food even improves. A byproduct of cultivating an altruistic attitude and engaging in altruistic action, is

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[35] The **Seven-Point Mind Training by Geshe Chekawa** focuses on transforming the mind towards compassion and wisdom. It includes: 1) Preliminaries, as a basis for practice, 2) Training in the awakening mind of bodhicitta, 3) Transforming adverse conditions into the path to enlightenment, 4) Applying the practice throughout one's whole life, 5) The measure of having trained the mind, 6) The commitments of mind training, and 7) The guidelines for mind training. This practice encourages developing altruistic intentions and transforming challenges into opportunities for spiritual growth.

our own interests are served, everything from temporary happiness to the long-term joy of full awakening. All of these are a function and result of altruism. If we think and act with compassion now, eventually, as buddhas, we will be able to benefit other sentient beings in the most effective way possible.

Although the wisdom realising emptiness is very important on the path, it is **bodhicitta** that makes this realisation a cause for us to attain the fully awakened mind of a buddha. Without great compassion and bodhicitta, the wisdom realising emptiness alone cannot bring buddhahood.

REFLECTION

1. The altruistic intention of bodhicitta encompasses all sentient beings. Generating it uplifts our hearts and gives meaning to our lives.
2. Generating bodhicitta begins with wanting to free ourselves from the three kinds of duḥkha or unsatisfactory conditions—the duḥkha of pain, the duḥkha of change, and the pervasive duḥkha of conditioning.
3. Like us, other sentient beings are afflicted by the three types of duḥkha. Like us, they want to be happy and avoid misery. In addition, they have been and will continue to be kind to us. Generate compassion wishing them to be free from all duḥkha.
4. Based on this compassion, generate the altruistic intention to become fully awakened so that you can bring this about.

Mind Training

One practice I cherish and enjoy most is mind training. Many texts are written on this, and I often teach them. Mind training presents techniques for transforming adverse circumstances into the path. From a Buddhist perspective, all the misfortune we experience can be traced back to our own destructive actions—negative karma—which were motivated by our self-centred thought and self-grasping ignorance. The self-centred thought believes that our own happiness—including our own liberation—is more important than that of others, and self-grasping ignorance misunderstands the actual way all people and phenomena exist.

At present, our idea of success is that all external events unfold according to our wishes and all people behave in accordance with our ideas. We are happy when our desires and needs are fulfilled, but when we encounter adversity, we revert to old habits of complaining, sulking or attacking those who interfere with our desires.

If our happiness depends on the behaviour of others, we have little control when things do not go as we wish. But if our happiness is rooted in our own thoughts and actions, we have the means to determine the nature of our future experiences. Remembering this, we resolve to subdue self-centredness and self-grasping ignorance and the actions that are motivated by them. It is counterproductive and futile to blame others for our problems and unhappiness. It is also unrealistic: they are not the true cause of our misery. By accepting responsibility for our unrealistic expectations and previous harmful actions, we can change their undesirable results into factors that help us progress on the path to awakening. We do not deliberately seek out suffering, but if it comes, we can use it by practicing mind training.

One method to transform adversity into the path to awakening is to contemplate cause and effect by understanding that our difficult experience is the result of our own past destructive actions—motivated by afflictions. In this meditative technique, we reflect that the karmic seeds created by those actions could have ripened as horrible suffering in an unfortunate rebirth. However, now they are ripening as suffering we can actually manage. That brings a sense of relief: “This is nothing compared to what it could have been.” Then we understand that if we don’t like this suffering, we must stop creating the causes for it. We renew our de-

termination to live ethically and abandon harmful actions, because we understand that harming others brings suffering upon ourselves.

The practice of transforming adversity into the path sees difficulties as opportunities to learn and grow. If someone criticises us unjustly or if we experience a painful physical injury, we contemplate the benefits of problematic situations. Adversity strengthens our renunciation because we see no lasting happiness is to be found in cyclic existence. Our conviction in the law of karma and its effects becomes stronger because we see that difficulties arise from causes that we ourselves created. Our compassion increases because we can empathise with the suffering of others. Bodhisattvas even look forward to problems because they are focused on the benefit that can be accrued from experiencing them with a virtuous attitude. That this can happen illustrates dependent arising: ie, when we introduce new ways of thinking, our resultant mental state changes from unhappiness to appreciation. We are no longer constrained to fear, anger, or self-pity in our choice of emotional responses to difficult situations.

The mind-training practice instructs us on the development and implementation of the **two bodhicittas**. *Conventional bodhicitta* is the altruistic intention to attain awakening for the benefit of all sentient beings, and *ultimate bodhicitta* is the wisdom directly realising the ultimate nature that relies on the extraordinary method of conventional bodhicitta. Practitioners of mind training generate compassion and conventional bodhicitta whether or not things are going well in their lives. They cultivate ultimate bodhicitta by meditating on emptiness. When doing so, in addition to using reason, as a way to approach the correct view of emptiness and to deal effectively with adversities, they emphasise the practice of seeing all phenomena as like illusions. When we see a difficult situation as illusory and remember it is only an appearance to the mind (not an inherently existent problem) then our mind is more relaxed. Recalling impermanence also eases the mind. When we remember that everything is in a state of constant flux, we see that even our painful feeling is changing in every moment and will not endure forever.

Because we live in times when anger, wrong views, and violence abound, mind-training techniques are especially valuable. Sometimes we have difficulties procuring material requisites for life—food, shelter, clothing, and medicine. Other times we are beset by abuse and insult from others. Due to political or economic situations, we may find ourselves impacted by conflict or corruption against our wishes. We may face prejudice and oppression, and in extreme situations even war or genocide. Of course, if we can avoid or escape horrible situations without harming others, we should definitely do so. But when we can't change our environment or the people in it, practicing mind training can lessen our misery and help us find inner strength we didn't know we had. If we don't practice mind training and remain stuck in our old views and emotional habits, these situations torment us. We may even be in danger of giving up Dharma altogether due to discouragement.

Mind training enables us to turn all these situations around so that we can benefit from them. If we change our way of thinking to make it more in tune with reality, most of our mental unhappiness will be dispelled. Fear comes from the self-centred attitude that fabricates a thousand worst-case scenarios. Recognising the scenarios are fictions of our own mind and are highly unlikely to happen alleviates stress. Even if those scenarios do occur, we will have inner strength to deal with them and know that resources also exist in the community to help us. Of course it

is wise to take sensible precautions to avert harm or disaster. Being crippled by unrealistic fears does not help us prepare for the future.

Many Tibetans practiced mind training when they were imprisoned or tortured by the Communist Chinese after 1959, and for this reason, few of them suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder. Cultivating the two bodhicittas through mind training was the chief practice I relied on when I became a refugee in 1959, at age 24. It continues to be the practice I rely on to maintain a peaceful mind despite not being able to return to my homeland and seeing the suffering of my people, the destruction of our culture, and Tibet's pristine environment.

Mind training is very useful for dealing with psychological problems as well, for it gives us alternate perspectives on situations, so that we can break out of the rusty mental and emotional patterns that perpetuate unhappiness. To understand these techniques properly, receiving teachings on them and then applying these instructions to our own situation are important.

REFLECTION

1. Since problems are inescapable in cyclic existence, transforming adversity into the path to awakening is a skilful and useful technique to make every situation we encounter an asset to our spiritual practice.
2. How do we learn from misfortune? We practice thinking that unpleasant situations result from our own destructive actions and make a strong determination not to perform those actions again in the future.
3. Consider other benefits we can derive from accepting an unpleasant situation—increasing our determination to be free from saṃsāra, enhancing compassion and bodhicitta, and developing the wisdom realising reality.

Eight Verses

Every day I recite the "Eight Verses of Mind Training" by Langri Tangpa (1054–1123)[36] and regularly apply it to my life. When I'm delayed at an airport, I reflect on these verses, and before going into potentially difficult situations, I contemplate them as well. I will briefly explain this poem and encourage you to read it daily. Beyond just reading or reciting the eight verses, try to practice what they say by transforming your emotions and thoughts.

1. With the thought of attaining awakening
   for the welfare of all beings,
   who are more precious than a wish-fulfilling jewel,
   I will constantly practice holding them dear.

Imagine looking at sentient beings[37] (friends, enemies, strangers, humans, animals, the sick, the healthy, the young, and the old) and seeing them all as equally precious. This attitude takes time to cultivate, but is both realistic and beneficial because other sentient beings are a major source of our happiness and prosperity. As we explored above, all experiences that we value and seek depend upon cooperation and interaction with others. We depend on their efforts: they grow the food we eat, make the clothes we wear, construct the buildings and roads we use, remove the trash we no longer want and provide the friendship and support we seek.

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[36] The "**Eight Verses for Training the Mind**" by Langri Tangpa is a profound text from Tibetan Buddhism focusing on developing bodhicitta and compassion through mind training (Lojong). It emphasises transforming adverse conditions into the path of enlightenment, seeing oneself as the lowest among all, maintaining great and unwavering compassion, and practicing patience in the face of harm. The verses teach the cultivation of a selfless attitude, encouraging practitioners to work for the benefit of others and to purify their minds of egoistic tendencies. This text is revered for its concise yet powerful instructions on developing a compassionate and enlightened mind.

[37] **Sentient being**. Any being with a mind that is not free from pollutants; i.e., a being who is not a buddha. This includes ordinary beings as well as arhats and bodhisattvas.

Our feelings of comfort and security are due to sentient beings' help and support. Our knowledge comes from those who teach us; our talents depend on those who encourage us and provide us with opportunities. Even our progress on the path and our Dharma realisations depend on others. Without cultivating the aspiration to attain full awakening for their benefit, we cannot progress on the bodhisattva path. At buddhahood, too, buddhas' compassionate activities occur spontaneously and effortlessly in relation to all sentient beings who are beneficiaries of their awakening influence. Sentient beings provide the reason for bodhisattvas to work hard to become buddhas.

Our internal well-being depends on others as well. As we train our minds to see others in a more positive way, feelings of closeness and caring arise in us, which allow us to relax. On the other hand, we are unhappy if we dwell on others' faults and despise them. A sense of goodwill toward others gives us inner strength in our daily lives, even in the face of difficulties.

When we experience pain, we often feel angry or overwhelmed because we lack control over a situation we did not choose. However, when empathising with or feeling compassion for another's pain, although we may feel some discomfort, it is accompanied by a certain inner stability and confidence, because we have accepted that pain voluntarily. Intriguingly, if we imagine taking on the suffering of others when we feel wretched, it alleviates our feelings of misery.

Buddhist teachings on compassion and altruism contain instructions such as, "Disregard yourself and cherish others." Understanding this advice properly is crucial. It is given in the context of training the mind in compassion and used as an antidote to self-obsession. Compassion for others must be cultivated on the basis of self-respect, not out of guilt or feelings of unworthiness. We and others are equal in wanting to be happy and avoid pain. On that basis, it is suitable to care for and benefit everyone.

Self-preoccupation brings us misery: viewing everything (whether large or inconsequential) in terms of ourselves, we become overly sensitive, easily offended, irritable and difficult to be with. Self-centred thought clouds our judgment and makes us foolish. If people are kind to us, we like them (even if they have the motivation to manipulate or deceive us). But we get angry when people who care about us point out our faults or try to prevent us making a bad decision. Self-centredness is the cause of many mistakes and bad choices, skewing our interpretations of situations and people, Expanding our focus to care about others alleviates this unhealthy self-preoccupation and enables us to connect better with others. As social animals, healthy interactions with others gives meaning and purpose to our lives.

To be happy ourselves, we have to care about the welfare of others. We live in relation to others and if they are distressed or oppressed, we will be surrounded by unhappy people, which is certainly not pleasant for us. If we care for others' well-being, they will be happy and living among people who are content is more pleasant for us, too! Ie, our own happiness comes as a byproduct of genuinely caring for others—caring for others' welfare is a wise way of caring for ourselves.

2. Whenever I am with others,
   I will practice seeing myself as the lowest of all,
   and from the very depth of my heart,
   I will respectfully hold others as supreme.

Building on instructions in the first verse to see others as precious, the second verse points out that our arrogance is an obstacle to doing this. Love and compas-

sion are based on seeing others as worthwhile and respecting them. These virtues are unbiased and go beyond the ordinary attitudes of cherishing those who help us and feeling pity for those less fortunate. The foundation of impartial love and compassion is knowing we and others are equal in wanting happiness, not suffering.

To remedy our arrogance and partiality, we practice seeing ourselves as the lowest of all. This must be understood in the proper context. It does not mean denigrating ourselves or succumbing to low self-esteem. Thinking we are worthless certainly can't lead to compassion for others.

Seeing ourselves as lower is done in relative terms. In general, human beings are considered higher than animals because we have the ability to distinguish virtue and non-virtue and understand the long-term results of our actions, whereas the ability of animals to do this is limited. From another perspective, we could say that animals are superior to human beings because they kill only because they are hungry or to protect their life when they are personally threatened, whereas human beings kill for sport and pleasure or when caught up in an ideology or wrong views.

This verse encourages us to cherish others and appreciate their good qualities. When we invite guests to our home, we respectfully regard them as supreme, prepare a delicious meal for them, and serve them first. In our workplace and family life, we respect those in leadership positions. Similarly, here too we regard others as "supreme" regardless of their or our social status.

When greed, hatred, or arrogance overwhelms us, we may act without restraint, often in ways that we later regret. Cultivating the thought that others are valuable and that we are just one among many people enables us to curb this behaviour.

3. In all actions I will examine my mind
   and the moment an affliction arises,
   endangering myself and others,
   I will firmly confront and avert it.

The essence of the Dharma is liberation, the state of freedom from duḥkha and afflictions that cause it. Afflictions are the real enemy that destroys our happiness, and the task of a Buddhist practitioner is to defeat this inner enemy. Confronting and averting afflictions does not mean suppressing them or pretending they do not exist, which can be psychologically unhealthy. We must notice afflictions and apply an antidote so that they cease, like tossing water on a fire to extinguish it.

Cultivating introspective awareness, which identifies afflictions the moment they arise, and mindfulness, which recalls their faults, helps us to exercise restraint, curtailing the harmful influence of afflictions. Without applying mindfulness and introspective awareness, we risk giving afflictions free rein to wreak havoc in our lives. They will increase in strength until they overwhelm common sense and reason, and we will find ourselves in dangerous, bewildering, or painful situations.

This verse describes how to apply antidotes to the afflictions at the level of manifest and felt experience. Since only very advanced practitioners are able to cut off afflictions at their root by meditation on emptiness, we must train ourselves in the easier technique of applying the antidote that counteracts a specific affliction.

- To counteract **anger**, we contemplate love and compassion;
- to oppose strong **attachment**, we reflect on the disgusting aspects or undesirable aspects of the desired object.
- To dissolve **arrogance**, we reflect on our shortcomings and all that we don't know or understand to increase our humility. Whenever I have a little tingling

sense of conceit, I think of computers, about which I know next to nothing. That really calms my conceit!

REFLECTION
1.Contemplate the disadvantages of the afflictions.
2.Make a strong determination to notice and counteract them.
3.Spend time familiarising yourself with the antidote to each affliction so that you will be able to recall and apply it easily whenever that affliction begins to arise.

4. Whenever I meet a person of bad nature
who is overwhelmed by negative energy and intense suffering,
I will hold such a rare one dear,
as if I had found a precious treasure.

Difficult people challenge our ability to maintain compassion and peace of mind. When we encounter such people, the temptation is to react with strong anger or even violence. Some people may simply appear to us as hateful or offensive, and we need to be especially mindful in their presence to counter the afflictions that arise in our mind. This verse advises us to hold them dear - not disdain them.

We can apply this teaching to larger social issues. We may have prejudices about certain groups of people—for example, people branded as criminals—and not want to include them within the scope of our compassion. In the case of the incarcerated, it is important for us to release our biased antipathy and make an extra effort to give them a second opportunity to become accepted and productive members of society and restore their self-esteem.

Likewise, we may habitually ignore or avoid those with disabilities and the terminally ill. We may be afraid we will contract the illness—even if it is not contagious or the chances of our getting it are slim—or we may feel uncomfortable witnessing their suffering. In these cases, too, we need to consciously cultivate empathy and compassion, remembering that we could one day find ourselves in similar circumstances and need the kindness of others.

Since we have the opportunity to overcome our deep-seated biases only by meeting people who are oppressed by negative energy and intense suffering, for us they are like precious treasures, giving us the chance to enhance our fortitude, empathy, and compassion. We may even be surprised by how much we can learn if we open our hearts and minds to their experiences.

5. When others, out of jealousy,
mistreat me with abuse, slander, and so on,
I will practice accepting defeat
and offering the victory to them.

From a conventional legal viewpoint, if we are wrongfully accused, we feel justified in reacting with righteous indignation. However, vehement outrage is not in our best interest—it simply stirs up an already contentious situation, forcing people to form factions and making genuine communication impossible.

Accepting defeat does not mean we make ourselves the world's doormat or accept responsibility for the wrongdoing of others. In some conflicts, capitulating could damage others or ourselves. "Offering the victory" to others means we don't have to have the last word in an argument or continually correct every small error others make. We can be more open and tolerant and less vindictive. When we are calm, we can try to clarify the situation and reach a resolution suitable to all.

Some people like to quarrel and enjoy picking a fight. In such a situation, it is best not to bite the hook. When we refuse to argue, the squabble can't continue.

Giving the victory to others means restraining ourselves when we want to dominate others physically or verbally. Seeking to control or have power over others does not bring happiness to ourselves or others in the long term.

This is not to suggest that practitioners should simply yield to whatever harm or injustice is being inflicted upon them. In fact, according to the bodhisattva precepts, we should respond to injustice with a strong countermeasure, especially if there is danger that the perpetrator will continue acting destructively in the future or if others will be adversely affected. We need to be sensitive to the situation, and know when to let a situation pass and when to confront it. But whether we say something to the person or let it go, it is vital that our own mind harbours no resentment. That is what we are releasing when we offer up the victory.

6. When someone I have benefited
   and in whom I have placed great trust
   hurts me very badly,
   I will see that person as my supreme teacher.

After helping someone, we usually expect at least a "thank you". When, instead of responding to us in the way we would like, the other person is inconsiderate or inflicts harm, we may react with hurt or anger. Our sense of disappointment and betrayal may so deep that we may ruminate on it for a long time and plan our retaliation, wanting that person to hurt as much as we do. Such thinking can be all-consuming as we alternate between feeling sorry for ourselves and indignant toward the other person. However, taking revenge will not eliminate our pain; it only masks it temporarily by giving us a false sense of power. The only way to free ourselves from pain and anger is through forgiveness.

Forgiveness does not mean we condone the other person's action. It means that we are tired of being hurt and angry and are releasing those emotions because they make us miserable. To do this, we practice seeing the other person as our teacher of 'fortitude'. A rare gem, because people who give us the opportunity to practice fortitude and forgiveness are rare.

Also helpful when we feel pained due to betrayal of trust is to reflect that we ourselves have behaved in such ways toward others. Although it is unpleasant to admit, it is true that we have not always been exemplars when it comes to treating others fairly or keeping our promises and commitments. Because we have acted in hurtful ways to others, why are we surprised, incensed, hurt when such behaviour is done to us? It is wiser to accept the situation, forgive the other person, and work on making ourselves more reliable and trustworthy in the future so that we avoid creating the karmic cause for us to receive even more such treatment.

In the future, instead of throwing a blanket of mistrust over everyone to protect ourselves from being hurt, we should slow down and evaluate which areas and to what extent each individual can bear trust. We trust the pilot of a plane, a stranger, with our life when we board the plane, but maybe not trust him to do our accounting. We may trust a friend to speak to us honestly but not to fix our car. One reason we experience pain from broken trust is that we mistakenly trust people in areas where they cannot bear trust, or perhaps we have expectations of them that they cannot fulfil or never agreed to fulfil. It is wiser to get to know others better and not have so many unverified assumptions about how they will think or act. Also, even when people make promises, circumstances change, and they may be no longer able to keep them or even want to. Human beings make mistakes and change their minds. Our expectations have to include space for these possibilities as well.

REFLECTION

1. Acknowledge your pain in situations when a betrayal of trust has occurred.
2. Contemplate that in the past you have acted in ways that others saw as breaking a commitment.
3. Extend compassion and forgiveness to yourself for such behaviour.
4. Extend gratitude to those who betrayed your trust for the opportunity they gave you to practice fortitude and forgiveness.

7. In short, I will offer directly and indirectly
every benefit and happiness to all beings, my mothers.
I will practice in secret taking upon myself
all their harmful actions and sufferings.

This verse describes the taking-and-giving meditation, where at the level of thought, we cultivate compassion so strong that we imagine taking upon ourselves the suffering of others as well as the afflictions and destructive karma that caused it. By taking on these, we think that they destroy our own ignorance and self-centredness. Then, with a loving heart, we imagine transforming our body, possessions and merit into whatever others need and giving those to them. This meditation can be practiced in conjunction with our breathing, inhaling the suffering of others with compassion and exhaling with love all that they need to be happy.

To paraphrase the Kashmiri sage Paṇchen Śākyaśrī, "When I'm happy I dedicate this well-being so that all sentient beings throughout space will be filled with happiness and its cause, merit. When I am miserable, may my suffering desiccate the suffering of all sentient beings. Through my experiencing difficulties, may all others be free of these." These are the thoughts of a true mind-training practitioner, someone who is at peace with himself and with others.

Practicing "in secret" may be understood in two ways. It suggests that this practice of love and compassion may not be suitable for beginners and should be taught only when someone has a certain depth of courage and commitment to the mind-training practice.

"In secret" also refers to how we should do this practice—discreetly, with humility and integrity, without drawing attention to ourselves. Geshe Chekawa advises that we radically transform our inner thoughts and emotions but act normally. When a person with little knowledge succumbs to the temptation to show off and assumes an air of importance, it cheapens his or her true experience and deceives others. We should definitely avoid this.

8.Without these practices being defiled by the stains of the eight worldly concerns,
by perceiving all phenomena as illusory,
I will practice without grasping [in order] to release all beings
from the bondage of the disturbing, unsubdued mind and karma.

The **eight worldly concerns** consist of four pairs:

- Delight at receiving money and possessions and dejection at not receiving or losing them
- Delight with receiving praise and approval and dejection when receiving criticism or disapproval
- Delight with fame and a good reputation and dejection when infamous and notorious
- Delight with pleasurable sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible objects and dejection with those that cause unpleasant feelings

These eight worldly concerns pollute our virtuous activities. For example, when I sit on the Dharma throne, if in the back of my mind there is the thought, "Did I give

a good Dharma talk? Will people praise or criticise me?" my mind is polluted with the eight worldly concerns.

Perceiving all phenomena as illusory is one method to prevent the eight worldly concerns from contaminating our mind. Before we can see all phenomena as like illusions, we have to realise they are empty of inherent existence. The realisation of emptiness does not come about through repeating this verse in our mind or chanting "empty, empty" while imagining nothingness. To develop a genuine insight into emptiness, we must employ reasoning to investigate how phenomena exist.

One of the most effective and convincing ways to understand that everything is empty of inherent existence is to contemplate dependent arising and interdependence. A unique quality of this approach is that it enables us to find the middle way between total nonexistence and independent or inherent existence. By understanding that things are dependent, we know they are not independent. Because independent existence and inherent existence are synonyms, we then know that they lack inherent existence. However, things are not totally nonexistent because they exist dependently. Contemplating in this way, we will not be lost in either absolutism or nihilism and will generate the correct view.

Once we gain insight into emptiness in our meditation, there is a new quality to our interactions with the world and the people in it. This is due to our awareness of the illusory nature of veil objects[38] we encounter in daily life. With an understanding of both the empty and the illusory natures of persons and phenomena, we can work with compassion to skilfully lead others on the path so they, too, will be free from the unsubdued mind of afflictions and karma and will experience the joy and peace of full awakening.

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[38] "Veil objects" are obstacles or obscurations that hinder one's spiritual progress by veiling the true nature of reality. These include emotional afflictions and cognitive obscurations, which prevent the realisation of emptiness and the attainment of enlightenment. The concept emphasises the importance of practices aimed at removing these veils to achieve a clearer understanding and experience of the ultimate truth.