

The Four Immeasurables

(tshad-med bzhi, Skt. apramana, Pali: appamanna) are:

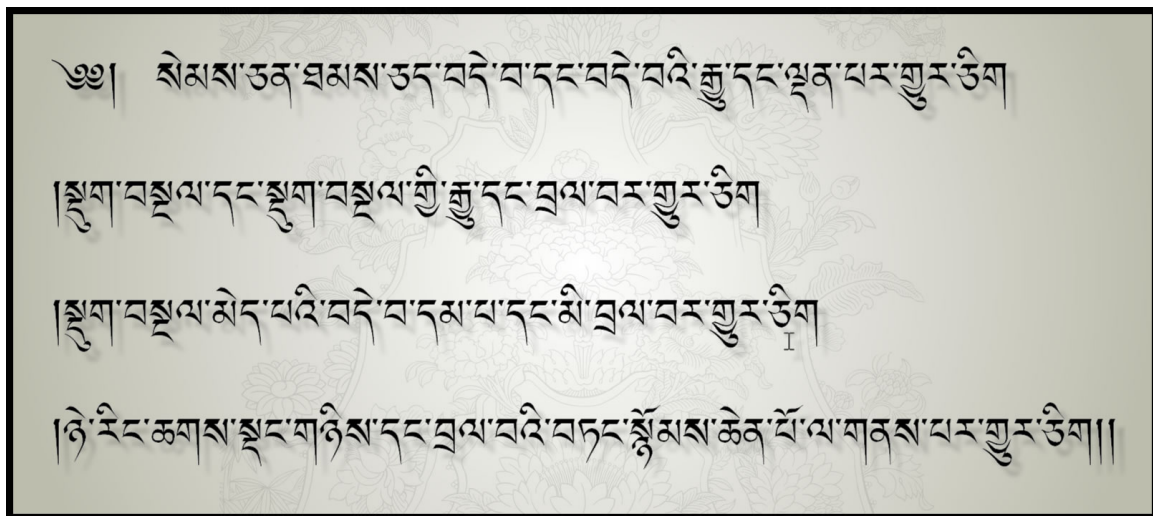
Immeasurable love (byams-pa, Skt: maitri, Pali: metta),

Immeasurable compassion (snying-rje, Skt: karuna, Pali: karuna),

Immeasurable joy (dga'-ba, Skt: mudita, Pali: mudita),

Immeasurable equanimity (btang-snyoms, Skt: upeksha, Pali: upekkha).

The Four Immeasurables as a Traditional Tibetan Buddhist Prayer



May all beings have happiness and the cause of happiness.

May they be free of suffering and the cause of suffering.

May they never be disassociated from the supreme happiness which is without suffering.

May they remain in the boundless equanimity, free from both attachment to close ones and rejection of others.

The following section is excerpted from *The Door to Inconceivable Wisdom and Compassion* by Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche

...There was a very famous Dzogchen master in the thirteenth century Tibet named Longchenpa who taught that the entire conduct of the bodhisattva can be summarized into two aspects: (1) aspirational bodhichitta and (2) actualizing bodhichitta.

Longchenpa went on to explain that the aspirational bodhichitta is actually based on the Four Immeasurables: (1) Immeasurable Love, (2) Immeasurable Compassion, (3) Immeasurable Joy, and (4) Immeasurable Equanimity.

Because sentient beings are as limitless as space, our practice of these four virtues must also be immeasurable. We can begin developing these in our heart by chanting aspirational prayers such as, “May all beings be happy, may the causes of their suffering be removed, may they always be joyful, and may they all remain in a state of equanimity.”

The aspirational bodhichitta is mainly applied at the levels of mind and speech. Through practice, it becomes the cause of the actualized bodhichitta. Once we accomplish this, we can perform actions with the confidence arising from our intention to benefit others.

The first of the Four Immeasurables is loving-kindness. Presently our loving-kindness is very partial, because we just love ourselves and our close friends, family members and relatives. Love is something we can experience quite easily, and therefore through practice it can become profound and vast.

The Buddha Shakyamuni taught that there are one thousand and one buddhas that will come into our world during the superior aeon. Among those, three buddhas have already come, so Shakyamuni is the fourth. The next, or the fifth buddha, is known as Maitreya in Sanskrit, which means “loving-kindness.” Buddha Shakyamuni spoke a lot about this future buddha in the Mahayana Maitreya Sutra. He taught that Maitreya would realize buddhahood solely through the practice of loving-kindness.

When you really love, you feel respect for the person or beings who are the object of your love. This attitude of loving-kindness expands and increases by seeing and appreciating their good qualities. True love is based in pure perception and a respectful attitude toward yourself and others.

If you decided to be loving, you can easily develop the other three immeasurables: compassion, a joyful attitude, and equanimity. So it is important that we know the value of love before we begin the other practices. The benefit of love is a very powerful and special. As soon as you generate an attitude of loving-kindness, you will start feeling more calm and peaceful, and naturally share this feeling with other beings. Your whole field of perception will be changed into something beautiful.

When you radiate true love, in that moment everyone is your friend. You will be able to see how nice everyone is, and they will see that you are also very special. Another power of loving-kindness lies in its ability to overcome serious obstacles. When Buddha Shakyamuni sat beneath the bodhi tree before his enlightenment, hundreds of demons were attacking him, but he conquered all of them by not getting angry. By

simply meditating on loving-kindness, he transformed each one into an ornament of his enlightenment.

Being open to the value of loving-kindness, one can easily develop the precious attitude of compassion because its nature is the wish to remove the suffering of all beings. Love moves you to offer them some assistance to get through and free them from misery. It weakens the structure of ego-clinging so that your true nature can break through and reach out to all sentient beings, sharing this open-hearted attitude with everyone. Of course, you can feel compassion for yourself as well, but it is primarily practiced in relation to other beings. Compassion helps create an opening or gap in your normal habit patterns and weakens ego-clinging.

You have good reason to feel compassion for others, because every being is suffering. Although their intentions are quite normal and similar to your own—to be happy, joyous, and peaceful, their aspirations and what is actually happening are at variance. We would like to be happy, but often, if not constantly, we are facing many difficulties, misfortunes, and hardships.

Sentient beings normally act with good intentions. Even in trivial activities we are trying to achieve some joy, peace, and freedom for ourselves, either directly or indirectly. Animals are doing this as well. In running, flying, digging, and moving, by day or night, their final goal is to achieve some kind of comfort according to their understanding. In this way, the common goal of all sentient beings is the same. We have similar desires and objectives, yet we do not achieve what we want all the time. Why not? The major obstacle is ignorance.

...We already have the Four Immeasurables within the natural state of our mind, so practice is actually a matter of progressively clarifying and revealing them. To do this, we have to be purified of ego-clinging, grasping, and attachment to dualistic knowledge and experience. Such activities obscure our primordial nature and put severe limitations on these four precious powers.

As I have indicated many times, all beings already enjoy some degree of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. They are not qualities that we simply do not have or have never experienced. They are not beyond us in any way, like something we might discover out in space. The Buddha and Shantideva both explain that these four are naturally inherent in our being.

When practiced impartially and consistently, love, compassion, equanimity, and joy lead to buddhahood. Even when first beginning their cultivation, you will start to awaken to the inconceivable qualities of the buddha-mind. Everybody has the opportunity to grow in this way and realize buddha-nature. This wondrous Truth is the supreme potential we have to develop.

...People often wonder why there are such great benefits associated with practicing bodhichitta. To account for this, Buddha Shakyamuni gave four reasons.

First of all, when you grow in this way, you are not just doing it for one or two people. You are developing love and compassion for all beings, so there is great cause for an infinite expansion of merit. The practice truly brings joy and happiness to all sentient beings directly or indirectly, so it is a great source of spiritual energy and miraculous abilities. This is the first reason given to account for the immeasurable power associated with the practice of bodhichitta: the infinity of the objective focus—all sentient beings.

The second reason given is that, when considering the experience of all sentient beings, you feel from the bottom of your heart that you would like to remove their misery. Since you are not only thinking of the misery of one or two friends, but you are aspiring to remove the suffering of all beings, the power of this virtue expands infinitely. This is the inconceivable power arising from the aspiration to relieve all of their suffering.

The third power is related to the fact that you would like to establish them in the unceasing happiness and joy of enlightenment. This is called the power of giving, the great aspiration to share happiness with all beings.

The fourth power is associated with tireless endurance. As we have already mentioned many times, the bodhisattva's endeavor is not just for one or two days. His or her commitment perseveres until every single sentient being is totally free from suffering and realizes ultimate enlightenment.

On the basis of these four great factors, bodhisattvas accumulate great power to remove the troubles and obscurations of self and others.

The Buddha Shakyamuni's Words on Kindness in the *Metta Sutta*

This is what should be done by one who is skilled in goodness, and who knows the path of peace:

Let them be able and upright, straightforward and gentle in speech.

Humble and not conceited, contented and easily satisfied.

Unburdened with duties and frugal in their ways.

Peaceful and calm, and wise and skillful, not proud and demanding in nature.

Let them not do the slightest thing that the wise would later reprove.

Wishing: In gladness and in safety, may all beings be at ease.

Whatever living beings there may be; whether they are weak or strong, omitting none,

The great or the mighty, medium, short or small,

The seen and the unseen, those living near and far away, those born and to-be-born,

May all beings be at ease!

Let none deceive another, nor despise any being in any state.
Let none through anger or ill-will wish harm upon another.
Even as a mother protects with her life her child, her only child,
So with a boundless heart should one cherish all living beings,
Radiating kindness over the entire world, spreading upwards to the skies,
And downwards to the depths; outwards and unbounded,
Freed from hatred and ill-will.

Whether standing or walking, seated or lying down free from drowsiness,
One should sustain this recollection. This is said to be the sublime abiding.
By not holding to fixed views, the pure-hearted one, having clarity of vision,
being freed from all sense desires, is not born again into this world.