

Introduction to the Four Immeasurables

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“Don't be afraid of acts of merit, for what is happiness, what is desirable, what is wished for, what is dear and agreeable. One should train in deeds of merit that yield long-lasting happiness: generosity, a balanced life, developing a loving mind.”

~ Shakyamuni Buddha, As It Was Said (Itivuttaka 22)

The four immeasurables are natural expressions of every sentient being's wish to be free of suffering, to be happy and healthy, to experience joy and ease, to be balanced and at peace.

How to Practice

- Begin the session by taking refuge in awakening for the sake of all beings.

Recall an experience of feeling cared for, a time you felt safe and warm and loved. Recognize, acknowledge and appreciate how good that was. Connect with your natural wish to be safe, happy, healthy, at ease. Feel the genuine, good, and healthy caring that is the source of genuine happiness.

Full-bodied kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity are sensations, feelings, thoughts, aspirations, intentions, and actions. Cultivate them on all those levels.

Obstacles

Resistance will arise: boredom, indifference, anger, greed, fear, jealousy, pride, cynicism, unworthiness. Whatever "obstacles" appear,

gently include them in steady, gentle, accommodating awareness, as you continue cultivating the immeasurables.

Extending

Gradually, over months and years, make them truly immeasurable by extending them to others: friends, strangers, enemies, various groups, and all beings, human and non-human, seen and unseen.

Recognizing that everyone wishes to be safe, to be happy, to be cared for. Let goodwill, compassion, joy, and equanimity radiate in all directions, to all beings, without limit, boundless and immeasurable.

- End the session by dedicating the benefits of your practice to all beings.

The four immeasurables are intimately connected. Explore how they support and balance each other. The immeasurables are also related to every Buddhist practice: stability (shamatha), insight (vipashyana), faith and devotion, awakening heart and mind (bodhicitta), mind training (lojong) and taking and sending (tonglen).

Loving-kindness (metta, maitri, jampa)

Loving-kindness is radiant warmth and friendly goodwill that wishes for the deepest well-being of oneself and others.

Far enemies: ill-will, resentment, anger, enmity, irritation.

Near enemies: selfish affection, shutting down, narrowing, irritation.

Allies and practices:

- Lovingkindness is a quality of both heart and mind.
- Cultivate friendliness; see the loveliness of beings.
- Cultivate patience, not letting pain or irritation lead to anger.
- Recognize that all beings are alike in wanting to be happy.
- Remember that each being is responsible for their own karma.
- Remember that we are connected to others in countless unseen ways.
- Generosity: give to those you don't like, and appreciate kindness from those don't like.
- Keep kindness grounded in compassion and equanimity.
- Carry kindness into your day by mentally wishing well to random people you encounter.
- Carry kindness into difficult interactions; even in conflict, wish yourself and the other well.

May all beings have happiness and the seeds of happiness.

May all beings be healthy and strong.

May all beings be supported and loved by friends and community.

May all beings have good food, clean water, and beautiful surroundings.

May all beings enjoy the ease of well-being, a happy heart and peace of mind.

May all beings be safe, healthy and happy, at ease in body, at home in the world.

Compassion (karuna, nyingje)

Compassion is the courageous heart that wishes oneself and others not suffer.

Far enemies: ill-will, cruelty, sadism.

Near enemies: disappointment, pity, despair, contracting to avoid discomfort, trying to control what arises, rescuing and fixing.

Allies and practices:

- Remember that each being is responsible for their own karma, but don't enjoy others' misfortune or unhappiness.
- Extend compassion to those who are suffering, but also to those doing evil deeds, because they will suffer because of their behavior.
- Extend compassion to happy and successful people, because their pleasure and good fortune may cause them suffering, and in any case will eventually come to an end.
- Become familiar with the particular sufferings of the six realms:
 - The hell realm of anger, aggression, fear, and conflict.
 - The hungry ghost realm of grasping and neediness, of never getting what one wants.
 - The animal realm of seeking security and comfort, getting stuck in instinctive behaviors.
 - The human realm of jumping from desire to desire, endless busyness chasing possessions and pleasures, never satisfied for long.
 - The jealous god realm of feeling inadequate, jealousy and competitive ambition.
 - The god realm of pride, maintaining privilege, blind to the inevitability of change.
- Balance compassion with kindness, joy, and equanimity.
- Mentally extend compassion to any person or an animal you see that is suffering.
- If you feel someone deserves to suffer, do your best to wish them the happiness and freedom that all beings want.

May all beings be free from suffering and the seeds of suffering.

May all be safe, free from inner and outer harm.

May all be free of cruelty and ill will. May all be free of superiority and pity.

May all be sensitive to suffering, and never shrink from helping others.

May we be free from disease, hunger, poverty, and violence.

May we be free from fear, worry, anxiety, pain, sorrow, and grief.

May we be free from struggle and turmoil.

Joy (mudita, gawa)

Mudita is gladness and appreciation for beauty, goodness, happiness and well-being.

Far enemies: jealousy, envy, aversion, boredom, comparing, judging, competing, and preserving or enhancing self-images.

Near enemies: frivolous, careless, exaggerated pleasure with worldly things.

Allies and practices:

- Joy is physical, emotional, and mental gladness. Gladden the heart by appreciating virtue, good fortune, resources and opportunities -- anything that is good or enjoyable.
- Recall and appreciate your own and others' virtue, happiness, and peace.
- Watch the arising of jealousy, competition, comparison, perfectionism, and overly critical attitudes; recognize these as obstacles to joy.
- Practice appreciating happiness and joy whatever its cause; don't worry about whether someone deserves happiness; remember their actions and karma are their own.
- Extend mudita even to those who are unhappy, because they have known happiness and success in the past and will again in the future.
- Keep joy grounded in kindness, compassion, and equanimity.
- Carry joy into your day by appreciating everything good, wherever it appears: beauty, nature, art, skill, virtue, kindness.
- Notice when your joy gladdens others, and others' joy gladdens you.

May all beings recognize and appreciate beauty, happiness, success, good fortune, and virtue.

May all beings enjoy good things: food, shelter, friendship, pleasures, peace.

May all beings recognize and appreciate the good in the world and in each other.

May all beings delight in the success and happiness of themselves and others.

May those experiencing sadness and pain never lose sight of their joys and good fortune.

May all beings be free of jealousy, enmity, and competition.

Equanimity (upekkha, tangnyom)

Equanimity is stable, clear balance in the midst of experience. Equanimity sees the equality of all beings.

Far enemies: attachment (greed) and aversion (hate), prejudice and favoritism.

Near enemies: indifference, apathy, ignoring.

Allies and practices:

- Notice attraction turn into grasping and greed.
Watch aversion turn into rejecting and hate.
Watch indifference turn into apathy and ignoring.
- Recognize that no object, and no living being, is inherently good or bad.
- Equanimity depends on clarity and insight. Don't ignore what arises in and around you.
- Watch for exaggerated feelings of pleasure and displeasure. Don't be shocked by the inevitable winds of pleasure and pain, gain and loss, praise and blame, good and bad reputation.
- Carry equanimity into your day by cultivating physical, emotional, and mental balance. Slow down, stay grounded, don't ignore stress.

May all beings rest in great equanimity, free from attachment and aversion and prejudice.

May all be able to respond calmly to the ups and downs of life.

May all be free of confusion, fear, and emotional reactivity.

May all be free of apathy and indifference.

May we all know things just as they are, abiding calmly in the midst of change.

May we care for others, yet know that each is the owner and heir of their own deeds.