



E-Vam Institute's offering of free teachings by our founder Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX.

A Series of Four Talks on the Four Brahmaviharas

Introduction

The Four Brahmaviharas, also known as the Four Infinities or the Four Immeasurables, are teachings on ways to generate love, compassion, joy, and equanimity in meditation and everyday life. It is the practice of developing loving-kindness. “In Buddhism, the main aim of engaging in spiritual practices is to transform ourselves in such a way that we become more enlightened, which is to say that we aspire to become more like Buddha Shakyamuni or Gautama Buddha. This automatically suggests that spiritual practice is fundamentally about self-transformation...” In these four talks Rinpoche explains how by generating love, compassion, joy, and equanimity in order to replenish ourselves and stabilise our minds, and in this transformative way we can be more enriched and able to be more giving to others.



Biography

Traleq Kyabgon Rinpoche IX (1955-2012) was born in Nangchen in Kham, eastern Tibet. He was recognised by His Holiness XVI Gyalwang Karmapa as the ninth Traleg tulku and enthroned at the age of two as the supreme abbot of Thrangu Monastery. Rinpoche was taken to Rumtek Monastery in Sikkim at the age of four where he was educated with other young tulkus in exile by His Holiness Karmapa. Rinpoche studied under the auspices of His Eminence Kyabje Thuksey Rinpoche at Sangngak Choling in Darjeeling. He also studied with a number of other eminent Tibetan teachers during that time and mastered the many Tibetan teachings with the Kagyu and Nyingma traditions in particular.



Rinpoche moved to Melbourne Australia in 1980 and commenced studies in comparative religion and philosophy at LaTrobe University. He established E-Vam Institute in Melbourne in 1982 and went on to establish further Centers in Australia, America, and New Zealand. Throughout his life Rinpoche gave extensive teachings on many aspects of Buddhist psychology and philosophy, as well as comparative religion, and Buddhist and Western thought. He was an active writer and has many titles to his name. Titles include: Lonchengpa's Three Cycles of Natural Freedom: Oral Translation and Commentary; Moonbeams of Mahamudra; Vajrayana: An Essential Guide to Practice; Circle of the Sun: Heart Essence of Dzogchen; Desire: Why It Matters; the best selling Essence of Buddhism; Karma, What It Is, What It Isn't, and Why It Matters; The Practice of Lojong, and many more. Rinpoche's writings are thought provoking, challenging, profound, and highly relevant to today's world and its many challenges.



Talk One of Four Talks on the Four Brahmaviharas

Copyright © E-Vam Institute 2024

The Four Immeasurables, known as the Four Brahmaviharas or Four Infinities, are teachings on generating love, compassion, joy, and equanimity, the practice of loving-kindness. In Buddhism, the main aim of engaging in spiritual practices is to transform ourselves in such a way that we become more enlightened, which is to say that we aspire to become more like Buddha Shakyamuni or Gautama Buddha. This automatically suggests that spiritual practice is fundamentally about self-transformation and that we have the capacity to transform ourselves just as the Buddha Shakyamuni was able to do. By following his teachings and instructions, we too can become more enlightened.

Here, the emphasis is not on connecting ourselves to some form of divine reality, some greater being other than oneself in order to be able to attain our spiritual goals. In Buddhism, we do not need an explicit conviction towards a divine reality. But this does not then mean that Buddhist spiritual practice is more akin to the various secular methods of self-improvement. There are many and varied self-improvement programs on offer, however, Buddhist goals differ. Self-transformation in Buddhism does not require only a type of psychological readjustment or adaptation, but also a real spiritual transformation, a self-transformation that requires transformation on the level of spirituality.

Therefore, we want to make a distinction between Buddhist spiritual training and spiritual practice; alternative secular options, methods and techniques for self-improvement and so on; and other forms of religiousness and theism. All orientations can display an attachment to the literalness of various secular and religious doctrines. Fixed views do not directly address the immediate and real experiences of human beings. Discussions can become abstract and removed from the daily experiences of being a human being. To truly engage as a Buddhist, we need to work on ourselves. We need to engage in the experience of being human.

As practicing Buddhists, we have to aim towards self-realisation, but we have to do that as spiritual beings and we have to maintain some sense of spiritual vision. We cannot think of or relate to everything only in terms of what is on the surface. In other words, we cannot be relating only on the empirical level of our experience, what is obvious to us, what we directly experience. We have to go further because according to Buddhist teachings, if we examine ourselves in the way described in the teachings, then we will experience ourselves differently, in ways we have not experienced ourselves before. Things that are not immediately obvious to us will become more obvious and things that we may have had some kind of glimmer, glimpse, or intimation of—that we couldn't really make much real sense of—become meaningful and begin to make sense.

For these reasons, self-cultivation is an important concept in Buddhism. Without it, we would not have a Buddhist spiritual practice to speak of. Even Buddhist rituals, prayers, and other forms of religious functions and practices are related to this key concept of self-transformation. When we consider self-transformation, we need to be alert because we may immediately conclude that self-transformation means we ourselves are transformed. But from the Buddhist point of view, even “what the self is” may not be so obvious to us. We may think we know what our “self” is. So self-transformation can simply mean, “I transform myself,” but as spiritual practitioners, we need to go deeper into it to see *what that self is* that becomes transformed. By engaging in meditational and other practices, with these kinds of thoughts and endeavours in mind, we learn to engage in what is basically a practice of self-enrichment that is not egocentrically based. That is, enrichment without enriching the self in an egocentric fashion. Later, non-egocentric enrichment will briefly be explained, but for now, the practice of the Four Brahmaviharas will be discussed. We need to understand that the practice of the Four Brahmaviharas or Four Infinities is another method, among many different methods, used in Buddhism for self-enrichment. It is important to keep this in mind. With the Four Brahmaviharas, we are not speaking about generating love, compassion, joy, and equanimity in relation to what we do. We are simply talking about them as a form of meditational exercise, as an exercise of self-enrichment. I might share this story with you. This is a dialogue between a master and their student:

The student asks the master, “Why is everyone here so happy except me?”

The master replies, “Because they learn to see goodness and beauty everywhere.”

The student asks the master, “Why don’t I see goodness and beauty everywhere?”

The master replies, “Because you cannot see outside of you, what you fail to see inside.”

Therefore, we may think that having love, compassion, and so on for others is extremely important, but we may think that we have to have something to give. According to Buddhist teachings and Buddhist practices, if we meditate, if we cultivate these qualities within ourselves, then we will become enriched. Many of our conflicting emotions and negative emotions come from a feeling of impoverishment within ourselves, experiencing an emptiness and poverty within. One may never feel good enough, never satisfied with oneself, or with others. When there is so much conflict within, then one sees conflict without. The misery and unhappiness that one experiences inside is projected outwards.

From a Buddhist point of view, the cultivation of the Four Brahmaviharas and other forms of practice, are not only about alleviating the suffering of others. We may see our “self” and “others” as completely separate. We may see other types of separation as well, such as seeing worldly people as doing everything for themselves, and spiritual people as doing everything for others. These types of dichotomies in themselves are a problem, at least within a Buddhist context. From a Buddhist perspective, self and other cannot be separated so easily, and in fact, separating the self and other is where the real conflict arises. This is seen as the source of all of our anxiety and insecurity—ensuing mental afflictions of all varieties arise from here.

When we feel love, when there is love, we feel enriched. It is not the case that the “beloved” is the only beneficiary. When one gives love, one does not then have to become impoverished. To have love, compassion, joy, and equanimity can have a stabilising and strengthening influence by building our character. What this means, from a Buddhist point of view, is that we do not get fixated on this notion of “self”—our focus in the practice of self-transformation is not about fixation on the self. Rather, it is the development of various character traits, what we may call, “dispositional properties.” This is because our dispositional properties determine and define who we are, what we become, and what we see ourselves as being. According to Buddhism, our actions and what we might regard ourselves to be are defined by our character traits. This is a very important concept to truly understand.

We are speaking about it in terms of meditation, but even in terms of how we apply compassion and how we practice compassion in everyday life, from the Buddhist point of view, is not about doing what is right from a doctrinal or morally fixed position. It is doing something in relation to what we consider to be good and valuable, what we consider the most beneficial.

In Western thought also, this separation has been made regarding morality and ethics. Morality is about moral precepts or moral guidelines whereas ethics is about what is good, what is valuable in relation to the more immediate circumstance. In this particular context, what is good, what is valuable, also contributes towards the building up of one’s character. If too much emphasis is placed on this thing called “self-discovery,” according to Buddhism, we will find nothing worth discovering. If the person is empty of character or truly impoverished within, then there is no such thing as the “self” that one can discover. But if one has cultivated oneself and has engaged in the practices of self-cultivation, then one has become enriched. One becomes enriched through meditations where one concerns oneself with oneself in relation to others.

In the Brahmavihara contemplations, we are thinking of others. In a sense, one’s own self is mirrored in others and others’ is mirrored in oneself. The presumed gulf that separates this “self” or “myself” from the “other” or “others” is experienced as an imaginary separation. As is the notion that there is something called “the self,” existing on its own accord. In Buddhism, this is considered the biggest illusion that we entertain. From a Buddhist point of view, our fixed notion of the self as an independent entity gives rise to our miseries and misfortunes as samsaric beings. This does not mean that there is no self at all, but rather, it means that one’s sense of self is determined by the characteristics that one possesses. The importance of the nature of such a meditation as the Four Brahmaviharas is in its ability to build characteristics of enrichment.

We can develop intellectual understanding of the concept of what in Buddhism is called, “selflessness.” This can also be understood as akin to “soullessness” in the metaphysical or theological sense. If we see soul as a type of psychic immutability or psychic substance, then soullessness or selflessness should be seen as a mutable, an unfixed self that by its nature has the capacity for transformation. *Atman* is the Sanskrit word meaning soul. In the past, many translators translated *atman* as self. However, the Buddha rejected *atman*—the idea of an immutable, unchanging, permanent self-entity. We can carefully read Buddha’s own words and Buddhist literature generally, to see that what Buddha denied is something that we think is immutable, unchanging, and permanent within the self.

In contemporary times, people generally do not have a problem in understanding that there may not be something that is unchanging, permanent, and a “selfhood.” In fact, if we trace Western concepts of the various theories of self, we can see this journey as travelling from the notion of *soul* to *self*. The notion of self in Buddhism is not something fixed and permanent, but always evolving. This is an important concept to appreciate because as one becomes more enlightened, then one’s own self is also evolving. Otherwise, this whole notion of self-transformation would not make any real sense because nothing would be able to fundamentally change. If we believe in a permanent self, then whatever transformation that occurs has to be illusory, superficial, and not real. This, of course, is not the case.

In that way, we seek to develop the self into a more loving self, a more caring self, a more compassionate and joyous self, and a self which is stable with equanimity—not given to extreme mood swings; on top of the world at one moment and plunging into the depth of despair the next.

In this way, we can see that meditation that helps us to generate love, compassion, joy, and equanimity has real self-transformative power. It is not simply about helping others, alleviating others’ suffering or trying to make others’ lives happier or easier by having to sacrifice one’s own happiness for the sake of others. In Buddhism, we are not doing that, but it is easy to involve ourselves in all manner of self-deceptions. It must be balanced. Boosting one’s own sense of self-worth, but not giving real consideration to others is not a balanced practice of generating love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. The practices can become lopsided. So we need to keep in mind at all times the balance between self and other. Self and other need to be equally balanced, and as a matter of fact, by paying attention to others, others’ experiences and one’s own experiences become transformed. The more attention that is given to others, one’s own notions about oneself, ways of seeing things, one’s own way of experiencing emotions, and feelings that one has about varieties of things, all proportionally become transformed.

As *Shantideva* and many other Mahayana masters have pointed out, the more we concentrate on our own experiences to the exclusion of others' experiences, our level of mental agitation, disturbance, anxiety, frustration, and despair increase. If we pay attention to others' experiences, we will then automatically view our own experiences differently. Therefore, it will become easier and easier to be more loving than hateful, to be more compassionate than resentful, more joyous than given to bouts of depression, et cetera. The "Four Brahmaviharas" literally means "four abodes of Brahma," Brahma, being an Indian God. This basically means that Buddhism, being a non-theistic religion—non-theistic not atheistic—may try to refute through debate and dialogue arguments presented to prove the existence of god, but Buddhism itself does not either deny nor affirm the existence of god.

Buddha has suggested that by meditating on the Four Brahmaviharas or Four Infinities, infinite love, infinite compassion, infinite joy, infinite equanimity, then we are becoming divinised, becoming more like god. Buddha has said many times in the sutras, "becoming like gods," which obviously means that one becomes an elevated being, and perhaps we can call that some form of saintly being. This seems to be important to think about in Buddhism. We do not believe in soul, we do not subscribe to any notion of god; god is not seen as an important concept in terms of spiritual practice. And then automatically, we may assume that all of these cultivations of love, compassion, et cetera are just psychological states that we are trying to inculcate, but as already mentioned, this is not the case. In Buddhism, the notion of saintliness, divinising oneself, is extremely important, which basically means that we can elevate ourselves or we can descend into a very low forms of existence. Even without believing in rebirth, in Buddhist literature it is said over and over that if we lose our senses and just neglect ourselves, then we can, due to habits, descend into very depraved states of existence, and become sub-human, if you like. Becoming conflicted, violent, angry, all very undesirable states of mind can prevail.

The Four Brahmaviharas or Infinities in meditational contexts are practised in relation to what is called the "Six Transcendental Actions" in Buddhism—generosity, good conduct, restraint from excesses, wisdom, vigour or effort, and patience. This is how compassion is utilised on a day-to-day level, according to Buddhist practice. To help us with that, we engage in the meditation of the Four Infinities, infinite love, infinite compassion, infinite joy, and infinite equanimity. The reason it is called "infinite" is because when we actually engage in a specific situation, when we are practising the transcendental action of generosity, patience, or vigour, et cetera, it is specific to a particular given situation. So there are limited numbers of players involved in that given circumstance or situation. But in meditation, there should be no limit because through the use of imagination, one can expand one's love, joy, equanimity, and compassion in a somewhat boundless fashion. There are no constricting and constraining factors to limit one's experience of these four qualities.

If we engage in this type of meditational practice, in a real situation, we can draw from that meditational experience and level of expansiveness that is generated in our meditation. With this kind of inexhaustibility, we generate a reservoir to draw upon. In the teachings, it is described as an inexhaustible world of goodness. So this is why it is called, the Four Infinities. Here I am seeking to point out the difference between meditative experience and real-life experiences, as well as the connection between meditative experience and real-life experiences in daily situations and the power of practising the meditation of loving-kindness.

One of the practices to *generate love*: in meditation, first one can think of one person, and then gradually expand that to include all the people that one knows. One then thinks of everyone in the surrounding area, expanding through the whole country and then the world, including all sentient beings, as it is said in the teachings. Normally, in terms of our consciousness and how it functions, we discriminate; it is about separation. But in this meditation, everyone is included, our love is generated without separation or discrimination.

In Buddhism, we need to understand that the mind functions on two different levels and both levels are important; one is in relation to our natural untainted state, which is non-differentiated and all-encompassing, and the other is the differentiated state where discrimination is used. To reiterate, both states are necessary. We need to learn to access the non-differentiated state to overcome our mental afflictions. It is the same with what is called, *Buddha's Wisdom*; one is called wisdom of equanimity, and the other is called wisdom of discrimination. Wisdom of equanimity means seeing everything as being of the same nature, the sameness of everything, the evenness of everything. These are mentioned in Buddhist Sutras. So in this particular meditation, to generate love (and also when generating compassion, joy, and equanimity), one emanates from that state of mind of seeing everyone as being the same, equal, whether they are friends, foes, or strangers unknown to us. When we come to the level of discrimination, of course, there is a difference between a friend, enemy, stranger, and so on. Having access to the non-differentiated state, there is a change in perspective, how we view things, which is to say that we begin to see that how we see things on the level of discrimination, is not an absolute perspective, but a relative perspective, relative to our perceptions and the immediate circumstances. We see our distinctions and how we use our discernment.

By practicing the Four Brahmaviharas meditation, it does not mean that in our daily life we see and relate to everyone as if everyone is the same. Rather, we can develop love and compassion for everyone on one level, while being discerning on another level. We can develop an understanding that the level of discrimination it is not absolute. The non-differentiated is the absolute standpoint to see the evenness of everything. On that level, we can be all-inclusive and we can develop love and compassion for everyone, without discrimination.

It is made very clear in Buddhism that even an enlightened being functions on these two different levels, of non-differentiation and differentiation. There is the discriminating wisdom and then there is the wisdom of equanimity. Discriminating wisdom is called *Soso thope yeshe* in Tibetan. And wisdom of non-differentiation, or evenness is called *Nyamnye Yeshe*, or *Chur Tumche Nyambar Nyi* is the full expression, which means all things, everything, exists in a state of evenness, without evaluation. Certain things are not more valuable than other things, in terms of their intrinsic nature. But then on the relative level, things are different, and these individual attributes and characteristics are apprehended by wisdom of discrimination.

In a similar fashion, with the practice of loving-kindness meditation also, during the practice of meditation, we generate this mental state of all-encompassingness, of non-differentiation. Then in terms of everyday life, there is discrimination because for example, we may want to help those who are most in need. If we want to help someone, then we will not treat those who are most in need as the same as the one who is in least need of help. We will discriminate and help the one who needs the most help. It is important to recognise the necessity and value of the two realities—the absolute and the relative.

I think that sometimes people think that generally, we should love all sentient beings. Yes, we have to love all sentient beings in a state of imagination, but in concrete terms, how we go about helping sentient beings is determined by our life circumstances and situations, our capabilities, our abilities, and lack of or presence of resources, all kinds of things that are aided and abetted. We need to consider what can help or hinder a particular situation. Loving-kindness meditation will help us to be able to be more effective in everyday life in terms of helping others because it will bring about certain change in one's perspective.

I will share this story with you. It is called *Happiness*: The disciple is complaining to his master.

The Disciple: "I'm in desperate need of help, or I'll go crazy." The disciple is living in a single room, with his wife, children, and in-laws. Their nerves are on edge. They yell and scream at one another. Their room is hellish.

The Master: "Do you promise to do whatever I tell you?" Said the master gravely.

The Disciple: "I swear I shall do anything."

The Master: "Very well, how many animals do you have?"

The Disciple: "A cow, a goat, and six chickens."

The Master: "Take them all into the room with you then come back after a week."

The disciple was appalled. But he had promised to obey his Master, so he took the animals in. A week later he came back, a pitiable figure, moaning.

The Disciple: "I'm a nervous wreck. The dirt, the stench, the noise, we are all on the verge of madness."

The Master: "Go back and put the animals out."

The disciple ran all the way home and came back the following day. His eyes sparkling with joy. The Disciple: "How sweet life is. The animals are out. The home is a paradise, so quiet and clean and roomy."



Talk Two of Four Talks on the Four Brahmaviharas

Copyright © E-Vam Institute 2024

In the West, people may come to a Buddhist centre to practice meditation and could get the impression that in Buddhism, the ultimate aim is to develop some kind of stoicism, like the stoics of ancient Greece—to become dispassionate as if the stirring of passion would automatically lead to our downfall. Meditation then, is seen as a way of achieving a state of *ataraxia* or a type of stoic indifference. In such a state, one cannot be perturbed in any way because one remains detached from everything. This is a mistaken understanding. Rather, Buddhism encourages us to manage our emotions. The full potency of emotions has to be *acknowledged* because emotions can be very destructive. We know this to be true, but in spite of this, we continue to indulge in many forms of destructive emotions. Another misconception in relating to practices such as the Four Brahmaviharas is the idea of modification, management, and creative use of emotional intelligence, to borrow a term from Daniel Goleman. Emotional management for want of a better expression, emotional education and making creative use of emotions, is a very important and practical skill to develop in order to function well in the real everyday world. Shantideva, Nargarjuna, and many other ancient Indian Buddhist masters have pointed out that in reality, how we normally deal with our emotions on a daily basis is impracticable.

People can be driven to all kinds of extremes due to their lack of management skills regarding how to express and fully utilise emotions. We can be driven to all kinds of destructive behaviour as a result of a lack of skill. We see the evidence of this all the time all around us and within ourselves. It is not something that we see happening from time to time intermittently but something that we see, hear about, and have direct experience of. When we start to think about it, we can appreciate the importance of practices such as the Four Brahmaviharas, realising the need to develop such an understanding and skill to benefit others and also for our own well-being. Far from being impracticable, it is a very practical way to make appropriate use of our emotional expressions. It is not the case that emotions, supposedly tied to our instincts and other natural urges, are beyond education. They can be worked with to integrate our emotions with our feeling component and to recognise the relationship emotions have with our thoughts and thought patterns.

We can look at emotions in terms of all the components and their relationship to one another—thoughts, feelings or physical sensations, and responsiveness and emotions. Meditation on the Four Infinities or Immeasurables is exercising mental purification, a healing, and it leads to self-enrichment without obsessing with one's own internal goings on. Sometimes when we engage in any kind of exploration of our inner mental world, we often do not concentrate on such integrations but rather can end up dwelling on negativities, such as the hurt or rejection we are feeling, such as being denied love, being grief-stricken over a loss, feelings of hopelessness, inadequacy, feelings of insecurity, or anxiety about the future, seeing danger in what is to come tomorrow. If we spend time looking at ourselves in this more indulgent way, we can then become more and more caught up and entangled in our confusion, instead of elevating it.

That approach will not lead to any sense of self-enrichment or of feeling centred. It leads to a sense of disintegration. This type of meditation we are discussing is a remedial method used to correct these tendencies within us. When meditating, oftentimes unwittingly, not with any kind of conscious purpose, we can lapse into this type of self-absorption. We can end up going over and over certain things in our minds. Contemplation on the Four Immeasurables can help lessen this cycle and lessen these defilements and delusions. While we engaged in this type of meditation, we can have respite from our normal states of mind, which are disturbing, and instead add richness through generating great qualities within ourselves and within our mind. Our capacity to care, give, and feel for others increases and in this way, we become enriched. In Buddhist literature, we look up to and have admiration for the many Great Beings. This is due to these great masters exhibiting wonderful qualities. The greatest quality one can have is the capacity to connect with others and to have a positive effect on them. Such qualities and abilities come from within.

By thinking in this way, we can then embark with great enthusiasm and determination upon the meditation of the Four Infinities. There are many different levels of depth that we can experience the Four Infinities over time. With this type of meditation, our mental stability is strengthened but without fixity. Normally we can have mental fixity but there may be little stability. It is important to understand that we are usually stuck in a particular mode with little flexibility. To illustrate this point, I have a story, "One Minute Wisdom" by the author Anthony De Mello, who I believe was a Jesuit priest that lived in India for many years.

This one is called, *Inflexibility*:

"Heavens you have aged" exclaimed the master after speaking with a boyhood friend. "One cannot help growing old. Can one?" said the friend. "No, one cannot," agreed the master, "but one must avoid becoming aged."

Equanimity

Stability without fixity helps us develop certain character traits in ourselves which can sustain us. With the Four Brahmaviharas, we will start with equanimity, that is, the infinity of equanimity.

In Buddhism, equanimity is a very important dispositional state to cultivate. Equanimity, *upeksha* in Sanskrit and *tang nyom* in Tibetan does not mean “indifference.” Rather, it means that our experience—the love, compassion, and joy that we generate and give rise to—emanate from a particular mental space that is not at all cluttered, a mind which is at rest basically, like a meditative state of rest.

Meditation on equanimity:

First we settle ourselves on the cushion, adopt the meditation posture, then close our eyes to slowly begin a series of experiential visualisations. Before one does the visualisation, first one should try to settle the mind by not encouraging thoughts or following thoughts. This does not mean trying to suppress thoughts that arise or trying to get rid of them, but simply not interfering with them or trying to get rid of them. One concentrates on one’s breath, exhalation and inhalation or just focuses on the exhalation. We imagine that all the disturbing thoughts and emotions are leaving our body. As we inhale, we inhale peace, serenity, a sense of spaciousness.

When the mind has become sufficiently calm, then think of a person who you love, a person whom you are extremely fond of. This could be a relative, a spouse, a friend and when that particular person is vividly present—if one does not find visualising easy, one can still experience their presence, the person’s attributes and qualities that we admire and enjoy—then the person with all those attributes and qualities is there. Then think of that person in relation to their past and in relation to their future in respect to one’s own relationship to that individual. Perhaps that individual was a non-entity at the beginning, before one had encountered them, and now one is extremely fond of that individual. Then imagine that in the future, perhaps this individual will not remain as a friend. One considers how circumstances change, and how our relationship with others changes. They can move from indifference, to fondness, to aversion, et cetera. We can recognise that the individual is also not some kind of self-sufficiently existing being but exists in relation to ourselves, our perceptions, and everything else.

In order to develop this state of equanimity, first one has to learn to be in a state where the mind is neither in a state of aversion nor in the state of attraction, without attraction, without aversion, without indifference. So to attain that state, one does this meditation with a loved one or with someone one is fond of and then, the love and compassion that one generates has to come from this space. To create this space, first one needs to generate this mental state of equanimity.

In Buddhism, we use many different kinds of skillful means to induce a state of mind that can generate different states and experiences in an open and non-fixated way. This can be done in relation to loved ones, followed by visualising someone we normally feel intense dislike for. For someone we dislike, who is a constant thorn in our side, we think of this person and all the qualities and attributes, features, and characteristics, everything unpleasant about this person generally, for it to become vividly clear. This experiential visualisation should be grounded in a state of calmness. We first try to maintain a state of calmness through breathing meditation. Once the mind is calm, in that state of calmness, we give rise to the mental image and experience of the particular person; then the appropriate emotion will arise without even having to generate them. Someone who we dislike comes along, then we think about all the things that we dislike about the person. Then we think of that person in relation to their past. Perhaps in the past either that person was insignificant, not noticed, or perhaps was a friend, in fact, a close friend. Then we think of that individual in relation to oneself now. Then again we think of them in the future. Due to changing circumstances, for example that person may move to another state, country, or suburb, they may become insignificant again or maybe due to changing circumstances, become an ally. Using one's imagination in that way, we are not constrained by the limiting circumstances of real situations. Using our imagination, we can think all of these things, imagining the relationship changing, becoming a friend, or maybe they disappear into anonymity.

Then think of someone with whom one is not really familiar, someone with whom one does not have any real opinion about, as being this or that kind of a person. Then think of that individual in relation to their past and future. Perhaps in the past, that individual was a friend but due to circumstances and situations, you have drifted apart and now that particular individual hardly features in one's mind or life at all. Think of that same individual again and due to changing circumstances, we can visualise many different kinds circumstances and situations that may alter everything again. We may again become friends or may become adversaries.

In relation to these three different kinds of perspectives, they are referred to as the *three objects of meditation*, each person being a friend, adversary, or unfamiliar person, and our attention is viewed from three different perspectives, past, present, and future possibilities. We then see that the relationship (or lack of relationship) we have with the friend, foe, and unfamiliar person is contingent on varieties of factors. There is nothing that is fixed or certain in terms of our relationships. We do not know where we will be positioned in terms of life circumstances and one's dealings with others. Because of this uncertainty, then all kinds of possibilities arise. There are many different permutations. We do not definitively know our relationships with others.

Viewing our relationships in this way, we can see all of these possibilities with a state of equanimity. It is an exercise in learning how to let go of our fixations. In Buddhism, it is believed that all of our problems come from our fixation on things. We get fixated on things because of our thoughts, what we regularly think about. We become fixated on things because of our emotional investment and because of our feelings about things and people and so on. We often speak about letting go of fixations in Buddhism, that which is responsible for the fixity that lacks stability. This type of letting go comes from adopting mental spaciousness, which allows us to be freed up, and loosened up. We do not need to feel our mind as cramped up or squashed.

When this feeling of spaciousness is generated, then the emotional intelligence will arise, because intelligence comes from the lessening of fixation. It is the fixation that narrows our vision. We can't see the forest for the trees. It is like that because we do not have the wider perspective; our vision is so narrowed and fixated, channelled so narrowly, that we miss so much. In that way, our emotional intelligence is dimmed and we become distorted.

The first fundamental point of this meditation is to, in meditation, generate this spacious state of mind in our meditation. We generate this spacious state of mind by realising, through practicing this meditation exercise, how relationships move about. There is always movement, there is nothing fixed. That is the main point.

That is what equanimity means, to have that mental space. That state of mind is not indifferent. It is a state of open-mindedness. Indifference is another state of mind, which is closed off. But an open state of mind, one that arises from equanimity, is engaged. It is engaged without fixation. That is the aim and doing the meditation practices themselves frees up the mind. That is why meditation is emphasised so much.

Of the Four Infinities, the spaciousness of the mind is said to be the most important. Without the state of equanimity, then love, compassion, and joy can become corrupted. Without generating equanimity, we can get caught up in all forms of self-deceptions. We may be thinking that we are generating love and compassion towards others, but we may just be indulging in our own needs, satisfying our own emotional needs with what Buddhist's would call, *impure motivations*.

If we can have a spacious state of mind, then there is room for genuine self-love, genuine self-caring, which is not narcissistic. Rather than the egoistic need for attention for oneself or excessive nurturing of the self, it is a genuine sense of looking after one's well-being, a genuine caring for the self. This is also extremely important. Even in the early Buddhist Sutras on this very topic of love, compassion, et cetera, the Buddha has said that love for others and love for oneself have to be related. Someone who hates oneself can never love another fully. So self-hatred is a fixation. It is a fixation that is destructive and is one of the root causes (again, root causes is a Buddhist expression) of our problems. So therefore, friendliness towards oneself is important.

I will share this story with you called, *Friendliness*:

“What shall I do to love my neighbour?” “Stop hating yourself,” said the Master. The disciple pondered those words long and seriously and came back to say, “But I love myself too much for I am selfish and self-centred. How do I get rid of that?” “Be friendly to yourself and yourself will be contented and it will set you free to love your neighbour.”

This is the redressing of the biblical adage of “love thy neighbour.” “Loving oneself” here, is basically the self-acceptance or self-accommodation that comes from having a state of mental equilibrium, being in a state of equanimity. Self-acceptance does not mean that we just accept our bad behaviour or all of our negativities and feel happy about it. It is an acceptance that arises from this feeling of openness, not getting fixated, even on our negativities, as I mentioned. We can be tormented over our fixations, disappointments, and discomforts. If we feel we are being treated badly and are constantly dwelling on our negativities, et cetera, equanimity will elude us. That is the Buddhist perspective. In Buddhism, we do not have to try to resolve issues. Rather, we have to learn to let the issues dissipate so that they become non-issues. There does not have to be any kind of clear indication that something was resolved necessarily. It is like starting the day with a problem or concern and then forgetting about it during the course of the day. If certain things are not dwelt upon, it does not mean they have been pushed under the carpet. It means that problems or obsessions can become resolved or dissolved because one has been able to let go of them. When that mental space is created, it allows us to be accepting and accommodate ourselves, whereas fixation does not allow that. Fixation does not allow us to accept or tolerate ourselves and does not allow us to let go of our obsessions. We are unaccepting of ourselves then.



Talk Three of Four Talks on the Four Brahmaviharas

Copyright © E-Vam Institute 2024

I will now discuss love and compassion. When I discussed equanimity, I mentioned the idea that as human beings, we have the tendency to dwell upon things that are negative. This includes negativities within ourselves. Either we simply indulge in them mindlessly, with feelings such as anger, resentment, spite, and many other forms of negative feelings and emotions, harbouring various types of unwholesome thoughts, or even if we try to overcome them, we do so by dwelling on them. Dwelling on our own feeling of hurt, rejection, guilt, shame, and so on, are tendencies that come naturally to us. Such dwelling reinforces those habits rather than helping us to free ourselves from such tendencies. Continuous indulgence in this kind of behaviour does nothing to help us develop a real sense of self-esteem, or feeling of self-worth. In fact, it does the opposite. Entrenched habit becomes part of one's character and leads to further experience of suffering and pain. Buddhism is about putting an end to avoidable suffering. Some suffering such as old age, sickness, and death can be unavoidable so we many never be able to overcome some types of suffering altogether. Avoidable suffering can be overcome through the attainment of Buddhahood. If we can move closer to that goal than we are now, we may not be able to stop experiencing any form of suffering altogether, but we can reduce it. We can reduce it by cultivating and dwelling on things that are positive, good, and that are valuable.

What we become depends on what kinds of things we think about, and dwell on—what we put into ourselves and our minds. If we think of love, compassion, and things of this nature, we then become a loving and compassionate person. When we see our capacity to develop these redeeming qualities, qualities that enable us to rise above and transcend our ordinariness, we become, in a manner of speaking, special beings. From the Mahayana point of view, this is what one has to aspire to. Not in a competitive sense of wanting to be better than others, but in the general sense of wanting to transcend oneself, attain some form of self-transcendence so that one's own familiar egoistic state that one is caught up in, is transcended. In that sense, we can function from a higher level of being. That is what is meant by a bodhisattva in Mahayana Buddhism. We aspire to become a bodhisattva and to be a bodhisattva is to be a special person, a special being, a being who has changed their life around; someone who has made some kind of commitment to not continue to indulge in negative states of mind, and self-destructive forms of behaviour. With self-destructive behaviour, we cause pain to ourselves. This is the behaviour of an ordinary human being, as it is said in the teachings.

When we cultivate the Four Brahmaviharas of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity, this of course does not include all of the virtuous qualities that one needs to develop, but these are the essential foundations to create such a favourable mental condition for a breadth of qualities to arise. They are the precondition for that development. It is said, that if there is love, compassion, joy, and equanimity, then all the other virtuous qualities and attributes of a noble being will flourish. If the Four Brahmaviharas or infinities are absent, then the other qualities will not flourish.

In Mahayana teachings, the example of a garden is often used. Generating these positive qualities is compared to tending a garden. If the garden is well-watered and well looked after, then everything that is in the garden will flourish. Even though the Four Brahmaviharas is not an exhaustive list of all the qualities that one can develop within oneself, nonetheless, they are the preconditions to help develop all the necessary dispositional properties. This is the reason why this kind of meditation is so important. Often people mistakenly think of love and compassion only as forms of doing, as an action. That is where the proof is, but if one is not loving by nature and not compassionate by nature, then obviously that particular individual would find it almost impossible to be loving in reality.

As a Buddhist practitioner, and as a human being, that gap has to be narrowed between being and action. We do certain things not because we have to or are obliged to, but because that is our nature to behave in that way. From a Buddhist point of view, doing something good based on such notions as, “I must be doing good things” is commendable, but acting with love and compassion because it is one’s nature is far more powerful. This is why this type of meditation is encouraged. By thinking about loving thoughts, and having thoughts and feelings of compassion, the stirring of emotions based on love, compassion, joy, and equanimity gradually leads us to becoming that kind of a person; a person who is loving, compassionate, joyous, well grounded—not given to extreme mood swings and being unstable—extremely generous and caring one moment and then being spiteful and vengeful the next. When we reflect on this, we can really fully appreciate the importance of this type of meditation. We shouldn’t be thinking, “What good is it going to do if I am just simply thinking about this sort of thing but I am not doing anything?” However, doing comes from being that kind of person. The reason many of our actions are unhelpful or self destructive is precisely because we have become a certain kind of individual and so this kind of meditation gives us the opportunity to refocus, to reorientate ourselves and elevate ourselves to transcend the limited, egocentric self-absorbed state of being.

Love

When it comes to love, there are many different kinds, both in the East and West. In Ancient Greece, there were many different kinds of love spoken about; love between friends, family members, love of philosophy, ideals, erotic love between individuals, and so on but in this particular context, we are not discussing any of these as such. What we are learning to do with these meditations is to generate a really fundamental loving feeling that is not compromised or diluted by other forms of negative emotions or feelings. We learn to love.

This can in fact also include romantic love, love for one's family, neighbours, and so on. Love that is, for want of a better expression, pure. We know how love can become diluted because of excessive attachment or possessiveness and how love can switch and turn into hatred inviting all kinds of other negative emotions to arise leading to other destructive forms of behaviour and so on.

Meditation On Love

We need the love we are generating in our meditation to be pure and all-encompassing. We are using our imagination in meditation, so it is not constrained by a variety of factors we may encounter in everyday life. In this particular meditation, love is generated in relation to three types of individuals. The first, those that we actually love and have a lot of affection for; second, those with whom we have no serious dealings, who are acquaintances; and the third, those that we have dealings with but have extreme dislike towards. First, we visualise these three different types of individuals in the order described and then slowly we expand that to include all human beings and all sentient creatures including animals, all forms of other living beings, not just human beings.

If we wish, we can extend our imagination to other beings on other planets, other galaxies—we should include them all, it is said in the teachings. The main emphasis is on the feelings and emotions that are being generated. That is the most important part of this meditation exercise. What is actually going on externally is not of consequence objectively, what is subjectively experienced is the key factor. That is why we begin the meditation imagining those we are very fond of because it is easier to generate love for those individuals to begin with. Love in this particular context is defined as wanting someone to be happy. Then, as the meditation progresses, we are expanding our love to eventually wishing all sentient beings to be happy. By visualising and imagining in this way, we can also imagine, “What would make this person, and this sentient being happy? What does this particular person desire? What does this particular person need, physically, mentally, and most importantly, spiritually?” Then one imagines that the person responds to the love that has been generated by receiving that love. We then imagine that the particular individual, people, or sentients have happiness, joy, and that they are feeling completely satisfied and content.

When practising meditations on love, we can return to meditating on equanimity after generating love for each of the three types of individuals. In our meditation, we can think about the types of things that would make the different individuals or groups of individuals happy. After doing that, then we go back to being in a state of equanimity before imagining the next types of individuals. For equanimity, we can simply calm the mind and remain in a restful state for a short period.

As I mentioned, we first visualise and imagine those individuals we love and what would make them happy. After generating love for a time, we return to the restful state of equanimity; and then we give rise to acquaintances, strangers and generate love for them; again we return to a restful state of equanimity before returning to generate love for people we have aversion for. We return to equanimity for a short time and then expand our love to all people and other sentient beings. It is done in this order, as visualising acquaintances is easier to generate love for than someone we actually have definite aversion towards, for example.

After visualising or imagining acquaintances and strangers, we then visualise those we have aversion to and we imagine and consider what would make them happy –“What would make this person content and satisfied? What would this person desire?” Physically, mentally, spiritually, whatever this person desires and needs, all the wishes, dreams, aspirations are fulfilled. They are getting all of that because of your love, because you are sending out this love to this person and this person is enveloped by love and has received the benefits of this love. We wish, “May this person be happy.” As we know, our dislike can come from experiencing unpleasant characteristics and behaviours from a person. For example, if the individual is aggressive, then one can think about this person’s aggressive nature being mellowed and transformed. In other words, this person is transforming and becoming mellow, less aggressive, and this person is becoming happier as an individual, joyous, rather than acting aggressively towards you or towards others any more. This person is then happy. Again, in the meditation, we need to add in the details of the situation. We generate this love for the person and then return to the state of equanimity.

It is important to remember that this is a mental exercise. It is done to transform oneself by thinking of others. We may think that to transform ourselves, we have to think about ourselves. According to Mahayana Buddhist perspective, we do the greatest service when we think of others. By thinking of others in this meditation, close friends or distant acquaintances, and experiencing their happiness and contentment, we experience enrichment.

Now in Buddhism, we can do this practice incorporated into our daily practice, just simply from time to time, or even focus on this practice over a weekend retreat type of situation.

This concludes the description of the meditation on loving-kindness, *maitri* in Sanskrit, *jampa* in Tibetan. Please keep in mind the importance of returning to resting in a state of equanimity and generating love, just being in that loving state without thinking of any specific individual or individuals, without any object. This is called objectless loving-kindness meditation, which has to follow from the loving-kindness meditation with object. All-pervasive radiating love, we can simply remain and be in that state. As one becomes more proficient in the meditation, then more and more sentient creatures are included in the meditation. One expands their imagination and feeling to include all living creatures that we know and we do not know exist on other planets and other galaxies. This is said explicitly in the teachings.

Compassion

The fourth meditation is on compassion, *karuna* in Sanskrit or *nying je* in Tibetan. As with love, we generate compassion that is not tainted or corrupted. In meditation of love and compassion, the Four Brahmaviharas generally, the practice itself is the result. The practice of loving-kindness gives rise to loving-kindness, and the practice of meditation on compassion gives rise to compassion. If any doubt arises, “How can I give rise to love? How can I give rise to compassion?”—in meditation, if thoughts of compassion arise, then compassion has risen. Instead of thinking this is just a prelude to something which is more real later on, we can recognise that we are experiencing love and compassion. Of course, the experience of love, compassion, joy, and equanimity may become more profound over time particularly with these meditations. In other words, just meditating on compassion is compassion.

The basic definition of compassion in Mahayana Buddhism is the desire to want to alleviate others’ suffering. To generate compassion in our meditation, we think of the three individuals as we did for the exercises in generating love. First we imagine/visualise a close and dear friend, partner, a family member. That is, someone who one feels close to and has a lot of affection towards. Then, we think of that particular person’s unhappiness. “In what way is this person unhappy and suffering?” Think of their suffering and then generate compassion and sympathetic feelings towards their suffering. Generate a strong feeling of compassion. Think that one’s compassion is having an effect on the individual and elevating whatever it is that is causing suffering for them, either through ill health, mental instability, family problems, work related problems, whatever it might be. Then, think that these problems have been fixed up and this person is now feeling happier and is not suffering anymore. They have found relief from torment. Again the meditation on equanimity comes before and after this visualisation. The reason we return to the state of equanimity is because when we arouse emotions, one may feel a bit overwhelmed or carried away by the experience, so we need to stabilise the mind repeatedly back into being in a state of equanimity.

Then we move onto the second type of person—of an acquaintance and again think of that particular person’s individual problems. Whatever problems you may suspect this person has—drug related, physical or mental ill health, loneliness, whatever it might be and again generate compassion towards that person. How this acquaintance feels is significant. You feel concerned, and want to help, and try to alleviate their difficulties. Then one imagines this person is finding relief and begins to respond to your care and kindness. Imagine you are giving them material things, saying kind words, kinds of advice, counsel, psychological or spiritual, and then feeling that this person has now been able to overcome suffering and is feeling happy. Before we return to equanimity, we remain in the state of compassion restfully, without generating thoughts of compassion, just simply resting in the experience we have generated. The compassion can continue to just well up, radiating outwards in all directions. Remain in that state and then move into the state of equanimity without thinking too much, just abide in a state of calm-full resting. When we return to equanimity we rest the mind, and do not continue to think about the individual we were imagining in the meditation.

Then we move to the third type of person, imagining someone we dislike and consider their suffering. Whatever we think their problems are, we can see that as not only a problem for oneself but for that person as well. Whether it is because that person is selfish, egoistic, self-centred, overbearing, whatever the reason might be that has caused this dislike to arise. It might even be that you consider the person to be more good-looking, more successful, and so on. Whatever the source of the problem is, we need to consider the issues and build compassion for the person's suffering. As it is said by Shantideva and others, as ordinary sentient beings, we are not our own masters of our house. We are at the service of our uncontrolled emotions, habitual patterns and various other tendencies. So this person we are imagining and focusing on is no different. They are also suffering from uncontrolled emotions, habitual tendencies, and so on. Then imagine that the aspects of the person we don't like are diminishing. That is, that they are becoming less selfish, self-centred, and not as inconsiderate, et cetera. Whatever is disliked is reducing as a problem for that individual.

Whatever other forms of suffering this person may have, they may themselves be unaware of the reasons they cause suffering for others and themselves. By thinking along those lines, and in different scenarios, we can envisage their greater happiness. In the meditation, we can think that our own compassion that has been directed towards that individual has taken effect. We rest in that generated compassion allowing it to self-generate without needing to think any further about the individual. Then again we return to a state of equanimity after just remaining in compassion without thinking for some time.

As with love, compassion also has to be practised by including more and more individuals. As it is said, we focus first with the people we care about; then those we consider acquaintances; those we do not like and then we expand our compassion out to include all sentients in the whole country, the continent, the whole world, and the galaxies. This is why it is called infinite *tse me* in Tibetan, meaning measureless, boundless. Boundless love and compassion is generated towards all beings. It is also said that these feelings of love and compassion should be generated towards beings that have existed in the past, existing now, and will exist in the future. So include everyone and anything. This is why it is called infinite and referred to as the Four Infinities.



Final Talk of Four Talks on the Four Brahmaviharas

Copyright © E-Vam Institute 2024

Editor has added a brief summary of the Four Brahmavihara meditation based on Rinpoche's description. Rinpoche explains a traditional approach to contemplating the Four Brahmaviharas within one's meditation practice. This is a brief summary of the sequence as a general guide:

When meditating on the four immeasurables, we are seeking to develop some sense of spaciousness and encompassing positivity within our meditation. We can begin by generating *love* for three types of people—those we easily love, people we hardly know, and people we find challenging. Then we expand our focus to include our community and then extend our love non-discriminatorily to all beings. After this contemplation on love, we return to *equanimity* reflecting on the changing nature of our relationships over our lives—people coming in and out of our lives. We then move to contemplating *compassion*, wishing the fulfillment of dreams, goals, and altruistic motives of those same three types of people—those we love, those we barely know, and those we find difficult. We then extend our compassion to include our community and then all beings. Once again, we return to equanimity before then contemplating *joy*—the celebration of fortunate circumstances and great achievements of others. Again we contemplate the three types of people, and extend to our community and all beings before returning to equanimity.

Traleg Rinpoche's fourth talk begins here:

When we are focusing on one of the Four Immeasurables, we are bathing in it. For example, if we are bathing in happiness, we are celebrating and thinking that the person we are contemplating is deservedly happy, and we extend that to everyone being happy. Then we remain in that state of happiness or joy; we do not need to think anything too much. We extend our happiness without using a person as the object of our focus. We are simply generating happiness. We remain in that high spirit for a short while. Then we return to being in a state of equanimity and so on.

The Four Immeasurables can be practised in different ways and in a different order and so on. I will describe here how they are generally practised: First one generates love, and then from love attachment may arise, so in order to counteract that, one rests in equanimity and then moves to meditation on compassion. From the meditation on compassion, sentimentalism may arise. And so to counteract that, one meditates on equanimity again. With equanimity, one may descend into indifference or apathy, so from that state, one can give rise to love again or move to the generation of joy. In this way, we can repeat these meditations over and over. By doing meditation on the Four Infinities, we can also address negative emotions and negative states of mind, without having to dwell upon them.

If we have love, then proportionately, anger, aggression, hostility and so forth, will decrease. And if we meditate on compassion, attachment, greediness, neediness, all these will become diminished. Meditation on joy reduces the experience of jealousy, envy, and so on. Meditation on equanimity acts as a remedy or corrective mechanism, like an antidote to conceit egocentrism, selfishness, and so on. Instead of trying to get rid of excessive desire or excessive anger, resentment, and so on, just by meditating on the Four Infinities and getting used to having these kind of feelings, emotions, and thoughts, they become part of our own makeup so to speak, one's own character traits, one's own way of being. It becomes how one is and how one expresses oneself, and how one perceives things. They become part of our makeup. In this way, we can automatically overcome varieties of unpleasantness we feel about ourselves, things we have been feeling guilty about, ashamed or fearful of, confused about, et cetera.

These disturbances can come to rest without having to deal with them directly. In that way, their power diminishes and their ability to make impressions on our mind becomes more and more faint. The bigger the impression that is made in the mind, the deeper the experiences, and the more lasting effect it produces. Faint impressions have less of a lasting impact. In Buddhism, we can understand this from karmic point of view and this is how it can be understood, that the negative tendencies begin to diminish. Unpleasantness we feel about ourselves can manifest as an obsessive thought. That thought comes up again and again and we can feel powerless to stop it. Such obsessive thoughts can take away any room to think about something else. We may think of other things for a time but then somehow return to that same obsessive thought, whatever it is. So it is with our negative states of mind.

From the Mahayana perspective, by practising the Four Immeasurables regularly, we will be thinking less and less of the more disturbing things that are not good for our well-being. The transformation is accumulative. Rather than saying to ourselves, "I'm not going to do that," or "I am not going to think that," rather than trying to think about something else, worry about not thinking something, or thinking about whatever it was that one was obsessively thinking about, all these concerns and obsessions can automatically diminish, and affect us less and less over time.

We do not often think in this way. We think differently, believing something drastic has to be done to overcome a problem we have with ourselves. The Four Brahmavirahas practice is a more subtle way of dealing with ourselves, without even concentrating on ourselves. We do not need to think, "I have to change," "I can't do this anymore," "I should not do this anymore," or "I can't stand it anymore." Such thoughts can become overwhelming, and trying to improve ourselves in that way is so difficult to carry out. If all the self-absorptive thoughts are set aside, and instead we concentrate on the simple task of cultivating positive mental states, emotions, and feelings, all kind of discursive thoughts subside, and we become transformed. Our capacity to have positive emotions, and feel joy, happiness, and love become enhanced. Our capacity to have affection for and care for others can increase.

Often, when we speak about meditations of this kind in the West, people raise questions about this; “If we learn to overcome attachment, without attachment, how can we care?” Attachment interferes according to Buddhism. Our capacity to care for others is interfered with in a myriad of ways. Attachment is not a simple emotion, it is a complex emotion, often intermingled with varieties of other forms of negative emotional states, thought formations, ideas, and concepts. They become jumbled together and it clouds the mind as a consequence. So affection, true affection and a truly caring attitude can be separated from attachment. Attachment from the Buddhist point of view means that one has a need to be attached a material thing, physical condition, particular person or individuals, particular set of beliefs or ideas, or whatever, for one to feel secure, to have security. Attachment is seen as being fundamentally based on fear. One has to believe in something or someone to feel certain and secure. If the things one is attached to and depends on, such as beliefs, are challenged, then one’s reality falls apart. A loved object is under threat, and one may even prefer to part with a loved one than risk the loss of their treasured object. Such loss can produce all kinds of anxiety about one’s own self, one’s own identity. One’s whole identity can be challenged through loss or change. That is why so many problems can arise.

In Buddhism, it is never said “non-attachment means that we should not have affection.” It is not about rising above our emotions. What is said is that as our understanding of emotions and feelings (as our feelings, concern and care for others increases), we will understand that our feelings, emotions, and thoughts about others will be revealed as something which is always moving, not something existing as static, solid entities. They are in motion and are transient. Within that transiency, is also stability. *Transient* does not mean that there is no stability whatsoever. Sometimes people may think that in Buddhism, because we emphasize the sense of transiency, we do not really cherish the notion of stability. Stability is very much valued in Buddhism. Stability, as I have been emphasising, does not come from things remaining the same. Things remaining the same is stultifying, a form of imprisonment. We take refuge in that, we find comfort in sameness. From the Buddhist point of view, that is illusory, fabricated, created by our own mind.

In reality, nothing stays the same, so we’ll be better off realistically accepting that fact, rather than just pretending that there is some security we can find where things always remain the same. So we have to build stability based on that, acknowledging that fact. In Buddhism, in terms of our practice, we have to have stability, in terms of our spiritual growth there has to be stability, steadiness. If we say, “Well, it’s all about impermanence,” we could become erratic and completely unpredictable. A real sense of stability comes from embracing the fact that everything is in motion and it is the same with our emotions and things that we care about, people we have affection for, and so forth. In other words, we are constantly interacting with things, people, other living creatures. We are never positioned in any kind of static world; there is nothing that remains the same. In Buddhism, that is where growth comes from, this is how we become, how we begin to learn to transcend our ordinariness. If things were static, we would never be able to rise above our ordinariness, we would always be trapped, and we could never aspire to become a bodhisattva, or enlightened.

According to Buddhism, it is important to aspire to become a bodhisattva. We should aim towards that, and to do that we have to cultivate ourselves through practices such as the Four Infinities, where we can become transformed, where we can effect change in ourselves without thinking of the self. This is worth emphasising.

There is a tendency to think of the Buddhist practice of self transformation as also another way to improve ourselves as we normally understand it—to fix ourselves up. In Buddhism, we are counselled to transform ourselves in a different way. It is like putting all the pieces of a bicycle together, without thinking of the bicycle all the time. We do not have to be thinking “Oh, this bicycle, I have to fix this bicycle.” We can get hung up over the bicycle, but what kind of bicycle we have is determined by the pieces. Similarly, we do not have to be so obsessed about ourselves, but rather, if we contemplate the Four Immeasurables and things which are uplifting and thus helpful, and if we experience them in our meditation, then we will become transformed. We do not have to always worry about fixing ourselves, or constantly thinking about doing something for ourselves. This is worth thinking about, because if we are too self-obsessed, we will tend to reinforce our pre-existing notions about ourselves that we hold. It is then difficult to change affectively. What tends to happen is that we reinforce sense of self.

In these teachings, I have very closely followed how the Four Infinities are traditionally practised. The final aspect still to be discussed is the notion of rebirth and using the contemplations in consideration of that. Those who wish to include this contemplation can visualise the three different types of people as before—those we love, those we find difficult and those we hardly know. In terms of the past, you can think of and imagine previous lifetimes. When thinking of previous lifetimes, we contemplate; this person who I dislike intensely may have been my best friend in the previous life, and this person that I love so intensely in the present life could have been the worst person I ever encountered in my previous life. This person I barely know in this life may have been my dearest friend in past lives. You may like to practise in this way also. You do not have to do that of course. In Buddhism, this is not a precondition that you have to visualise in that way, you can do without it, you do not have to think in terms of a previous life. The rebirth aspect of the practice is an extension not a substitute, so it does not alter any of the fundamentals of the Four Immeasurables practice.

Further Reading

- *Essence Of Buddhism: An Introduction to its Philosophy and Practice*, Traleg Kyabgon, Shambhala Publications.
- *LoJong: Cultivating Compassion through Training the Mind*, Traleg Kyabgon, Shambhala Publications.
- *How To Do Life: A Buddhist Perspective*, Traleg Kyabgon, Shogam Publications.
- *Desire: Why It Matters*, Traleg Kyabgon, Shogam Publications.



Other Books By Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX

The Circle Of The Sun: Heart Essence of Dzogchen, Shogam Publications.

Actuality Of Being: Dzogchen And Tantric Perspectives, Shogam Publications.

Vajrayana: An Essential Guide to Practice, Shogam Publications.

Luminous Bliss: Self-realization Through Meditation, Shogam Publications.

Integral Buddhism: Developing All Aspects of One's Personhood, Shogam Publications.

King Doha: Saraha's Advice to a King, Shogam Publication.

Song of Karmapa: The Aspiration of the Mahamudra of True Meaning by Lord Ranging Dorje, Shogam Publications.

Moonbeams of Mahamudra: The Classic Meditation Manual, Shogam Publications.

King Doha: Saraha's Advice to a King, Shogam Publication.

Song of Karmapa: The Aspiration of the Mahamudra of True Meaning by Lord Ranging Dorje, Shogam Publications.

Karma: What it is, What it isn't, and Why it matters, Shambhala Publications.

**E-Vam Institute hopes you have enjoyed these free teachings
by our founder Traleg Kyabgon Rinpoche IX.**

**Copyright © E-Vam Institute 2024
evaminstitute.org
info@evaminstitute.org**