



Hello everyone. My name is Michael Lobsang Tenpa and I'm a Tibetan Buddhist translator and meditation instructor. In this talk we will briefly consider the four immeasurable states, or the four boundless states (or attitudes), and their connection to the profound practice systems of Mahamudra (Great Seal) and Dzogchen (Great Perfection). Before we go into the actual discussion of the four immeasurables, I would invite you to join me in a brief meditation on the first two of these Immeasurable States, a meditation on immeasurable lovingkindness and immeasurable compassion.

Meditation

To do this meditation, please consider adopting a comfortable stationary position that would support your body in being still and relaxed for a few minutes. For most of us, this would be an upright position, and yet it is perfectly okay to do this practice in the supine position, lying flat on your back, or in another position that is uniquely suitable for your own body.

The first thing to do is to bring your awareness to the tactile sensations of the body, especially to the tactile sensations associated with the earth element, noticing where your body is touching the ground, and then taking some moments to release any type of tension from those areas.

Breathing naturally, release tension, notice the tactile sensations, and allow your body-mind complex to arrive at a greater degree of ease or relaxation, combined with a profound sense of stillness: stillness with regards to your body, stability with regards to your mind; and a greater degree of clarity, where your mind is clearly aware of the present moment, and more specifically, of the shifting, changing, transforming tactile sensations.

With your body still releasing greater and greater levels of tension with each new exhalation, take a few moments to revisit your highest aspirations for meditation practice in general, and potentially for also listening to this talk.

What are your highest spiritual or psychological aspirations?

Remind yourself of those, and then orient this practice, this Dharma Talk, and the act of listening to this Dharma Talk, to the fulfillment of those goals and aspirations for the benefit of all sentient beings.

And then for the main part of this meditation, we will generate two simple aspirations, or thoughts, which constitute the essence of lovingkindness and compassion.



Think of yourself, think of your communities, and then by extension think of all sentient beings. Think of the vulnerable core within ourselves, within all sentient beings. Think of the part of ourselves that wants to be happy and has the potential to reach a state of profound well-being. And in connecting to the vulnerable core within yourself and within all the other beings, generate the aspiration of lovingkindness itself, which in this case can be worded in the following manner:

“May all sentient beings have happiness and the cause of happiness, which is love.”

While resting within that wish, strengthen your lovingkindness. If you want, you can breathe life into this aspiration, with each new exhalation strengthening this wish. May all beings have happiness and the cause of happiness, which is love.

Imagine, if you wish, that this aspiration is spreading out boundlessly, entering the hearts of all beings, altering their unique systems of interdependence, so that every being comes closer and closer to a genuine state of happiness.

And then for just a few moments, meditate on compassion, the wish for beings to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. For this specific practice, we can formulate that wish, that aspiration, in the following manner:

“May all beings be free from suffering, and the cause of suffering, which is self-grasping.”

Once again, rest with this wish, rest with this aspiration, and strengthen it with each new exhalation, allow it to pervade, to fill our mind, and also the minds of others. And then dedicate the energy of this abbreviated practice, which still has the power to leave certain positive imprints in our mindstream. We think, "May all beings be happy and free." Just that, as the thought of dedication, before we bring ourselves back to our physical space and to this shared space of learning.

In this brief talk, I would like to explore the four immeasurable states as they relate to the profound nature of reality. The four immeasurables are lovingkindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity. These four aspects of kindness, or benevolence, are incredibly important in



the Pali tradition of Buddhism, where they are presented as powerful techniques for acquiring single-pointed concentration, or profound states of *samadhi*.

The four immeasurables are also incredibly important in the Indo-Tibetan tradition of Buddhism. Even though for many of us, and that has certainly been my experience, our first meeting with the four immeasurables is through a prayer, a four-line verse that is quite often recited as a part of different liturgies, for example at the beginning of a meditation session or a session of teachings.

When that verse is recited, we are often invited to meditate on the meaning of each line. Sometimes additional instructions are given on how to combine these four lines with, for example, the practice of *tonglen*. But beyond that, there is not an elaborate explanation of how to use these four states in order to attain deeper levels of concentration and more profound states of wisdom. In a way, that is a shame, but actually, when we look at the original literature that exists in the Indo-Tibetan tradition, we see quite a lot of profound teachings on the four immeasurables.

However, in my own experience, it is specifically the Dzogchen, or the Great Perfection tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, and Mahamudra, or the Great Seal tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, that provide an especially clear and practical set of instructions on how to integrate the four immeasurables with all the levels, steps, and stages of our spiritual progression towards full awakening. Such instructions are contained within some of the most beautiful writings of Dzogchen masters such as Longchenpa, Jigme Lingpa, or in more recent times, Dudjom Rinpoche, and Jigdral Yeshe Dorje. The four immeasurables were also an important topic for Patrul Rinpoche, who is quite well known through his text, *The Words of My Perfect Teacher*.

Within those instructions, these masters explore the connection between the four aspects of kindness—the four immeasurables themselves—and other facets of our practice. It all begins at the level of our ethical training, of course, since we would ideally be practicing the three levels of bodhisattva ethics—avoiding harm, bringing benefit, and training in the two types of *bodhicitta*—cultivating the resources of our body, heart, and our mind.

Within that context, our ability to stay with our highest values, which would include lovingkindness and compassion, would acquire incredible importance. So when we are training in lovingkindness on the level of our daily behavior, we are integrating that lovingkindness with our *sila*, our ethical practice.



On a slightly deeper level, this is where the Dzogchen masters in the Tibetan tradition would add explanations regarding our karma and the types of karma we might want to create, both to experience different types of happiness and to create conditions that would be conducive for our spiritual journey.

Within that, we are invited to consider five types of karmic results that are brought about by practicing the four immeasurables. This is where both Longchenpa and Jigme Lingpa offer certain clarity on the topic. The idea of three, four, or five different types of karmic fruition is quite widespread within the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. It is explained that each full action, an action that has an object, an intention, completion, and so forth—there's a number of different karmic factors that are described—would be able to bring about three, four, or five different facets of karmic fruition.

And these facets of karmic fruition, with regards to the four immeasurables, would always be wholesome. They would always be good because through practicing the four immeasurables deliberately, consciously, and with a certain degree of perseverance, we are cultivating and creating beautiful seeds within our mental continuum.

So through that, according to Jigme Lingpa, we would have five types of karmic results:

1. Experiencing beautiful types of rebirth
2. Cultivating a propensity for the four immeasurables
3. Receiving kind treatment from others
4. Finding ourselves in different environments that are especially conducive for living, for finding prosperity, and for undertaking spiritual practice
5. And finally, because the four immeasurables within our mind stream would be growing stronger and stronger, eventually they would lead us to the fulfillment of the two types of benefit, or the two types of goals as it's described. We would attain full awakening, which would include having a form body—the *sambhogakaya* and *nirmanakaya*, which are used for the benefit of others. Additionally, we would acquire our *own* benefit through reaching or uncovering *dharmakaya*, the truth body of a Buddha.

To a certain degree, all of that is already established when we're combining the four immeasurable states with a certain degree of ethical behavior—when we're trying to be mindful of our behavior, when we're trying to imbue our behavior with lovingkindness and compassion, and so forth.



On the level of samadhi practice, in which we are trying to gather our mental energy to refine and purify it, we would be, once again, able to use one of the four immeasurables in order to reach the profound states of concentration that would serve as a basis for other types of practice.

This is where some people choose to cultivate *shamatha*, or calm abiding, by using lovingkindness, compassion, or empathetic joy as their primary technique. And such masters, once again, as Jigme Lingpa, Longchenpa, and so forth, offer a description of different benefits that would be associated with choosing such techniques as our primary shamatha method.

After that, many of us would eventually hope to move on to the realm of wisdom or insight practices, the practices of *vipassana*. Within the Tibetan tradition, these would sometimes be undertaken on the level of sutric practice, through doing analytical meditations on the philosophical systems of Madhyamaka, the middle way, or Yogacara, the yogic stages of the path. And within those, the four immeasurables could serve as the foundation for logical analysis—the object that is being analyzed, or the process that is being analyzed with regard to the absence of inherent existence.

But on a more profound level of practice, within the practice systems of Vajrayana, where *deity yoga* is used in order to cultivate profound types of insight, the four immeasurables would be integrated with our practice of a meditation deity. So for example we would be undertaking a meditation on deities such as Tara, Avalokitesvara, Medicine Buddha, or Padmasambhava, and so forth. And within those meditations, we would be seeing those deities as embodiments of the four immeasurables, as a window into our own potential to fully experience the four immeasurables. In some systems, we would be even inviting these deities to arrive, to merge with us, to stay with us, to be inseparable, and so forth, by making references to the four immeasurables as different facets of the fully enlightened mind.

Beyond that, the four immeasurables would of course be used as an important part of the practice of bodhicitta: relative bodhicitta, which is our wish to become fully awakened for the benefit of all sentient beings, and ultimate bodhicitta, which is our direct cognition of the ultimate nature of reality. And this is where the beauty of Dzogchen and Mahamudra is particularly evident.

In some practice systems, in some styles of explaining what Dzogchen and Mahamudra are all about, we are introduced by a qualified spiritual teacher, a qualified lineage holder, to that ultimate nature of the mind, known as *pristine awareness*, or *rigpa*, in the Dzogchen system, for example, through an introduction to its three different qualities.



And one of those qualities present within that ultimate nature of the mind, one of the facets of pristine awareness is described as “all-pervading compassion,” *thugje künkhyab*: the boundless, compassionate, loving energy that is inseparable from the emptiness and the luminosity of the ultimate nature of our mind.

In some systems, we would be introduced to the ultimate nature through the facets of emptiness or luminosity, but there are also some teachers who would encourage us to undertake profound meditations on the four immeasurables, on lovingkindness, on compassion, and so forth, so that our self-grasping, and, our grasping at inherent existence in general, would slowly melt away. The ice of our grasping would melt and reveal the freely flowing waters of boundless compassion.

And because that all-pervading compassion, *thugje künkhyab*, is inseparable from the two other aspects of pristine awareness, we would eventually be able to arrive at that pristine awareness, connect to it, rest within it, lengthen the periods of recognition, and through that eventually even attain full awakening.

This process would rely on being introduced to this ultimate nature of the mind by a qualified lineage holder, but it would also rely on all the preparation work that we have undertaken through practicing the four immeasurables on the level of ethics, on the level of samadhi, on the level of regular insight practices within the sutra system, and on all of the practices of preparation that we undertake in meditating on such deities as Tara, Avalokiteshvara, and so forth.

All of that combined helps us release some of the types of grasping and experience greater and greater degrees of heartfelt warmth which then brings us closer and closer to the all-pervading compassionate clarity of pristine awareness.

Even if we're still taking our first steps on this path, even a tiny bit of meditating on lovingkindness, compassion, empathetic joy, and equanimity is already building a bridge to our ultimate nature. And that's why we can always feel good about doing those practices and all the time that we spend on those meditations would truly bring a lot of benefits. There would be karmic benefits—as we have discussed, and that's clearly described in the root texts of the Dzogchen tradition—as well as benefits in our samadhi and insight practice.

May you always succeed in your practice of the four immeasurables!