



# The Four Immeasurables

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By the merit of this work, may Their Holiness the Sakya Trichen and Sakya Trizin enjoy perfect health and very long lives, and continue to turn the wheel of Dharma.



# EDITORIAL *PREFACE*



We all possess some degree of loving-kindness and compassion, yet we often fail to extend these qualities to their fullest potential. This limitation prevents us from consistently maintaining unconditional love and compassion for all people and beings. Consequently, we find it difficult to experience lasting peace and happiness. For those with great aspirations, seeking liberation and enlightenment, it is essential to cultivate boundless love and compassion for all beings. Without this, one cannot break free from the cycle of saṃsāra, let alone genuinely embark on the bodhisattva path and ultimately attain buddhahood.

However, putting this into practice is no easy task. Overcoming self-cherishing requires not only persistence and courage but also skillful methods to aid in our practice. This text offers simple yet effective techniques suitable for everyone, regardless of their knowledge of Buddhism. By reading, reflecting, and practicing these methods, one can begin to appreciate their benefits, thereby fostering greater enthusiasm and perseverance.

Now, all you need to do is take the first step: turn to the first page and join us in cultivating the four immeasurables.

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# Introduction

**W**e all wish to have joy and happiness, and we all wish to overcome suffering. All of us are making efforts of one kind or another to fulfill these wishes. Many people have put great effort into developing the material world or acquiring personal wealth for the sake of human happiness, but in reality, the external world is not the real cause of genuine happiness. Whether you are rich or poor, life is impermanent. No one can live forever. At the time of death, no one can bring their wealth with them, not a single penny. When people are alive, maybe there are big differences between the rich and the poor, but in death they are the same. The rich may actually suffer more because they have more to lose. And you should think that everyone will die just the same. There is not a single person born into this world who will not die. Furthermore, the human lifespan, while indeterminate, is not very long. No human can live for centuries and centuries.

If we wish to achieve real happiness, it must come from our minds, or from the inner world rather than the outer world. If our minds are positive, then everything will be positive. In order to develop the inner world, we practice mental training so that we can tame the mind, and this is not easy. It is difficult, but it is not impossible. We are so accustomed to being ruled by our negative thoughts that it is difficult to change our minds or alter our mental proclivities.

With the right methods, however, it is possible to overcome the negative thoughts that are the cause of our negative actions, or karma. Negative actions are the cause of our suffering, so that if we wish to achieve genuine happiness, then we need to avoid doing harmful actions. If we wish to avoid doing harmful actions, then we need to overcome our negative thoughts.

We can begin doing this by making efforts to be warmhearted and kind. If you try to achieve happiness by winning out over others, by harming them, or by causing others to suffer, that is not right. You will not achieve real happiness that way.

You should not be angry towards anyone because anger causes suffering. Anger will not make you happy, and it will not make those around you happy. Any harmful action done in anger towards another will produce suffering, not only for the other

but for you in the future. If someone treats you badly, uses harsh words, or acts maliciously towards you, then you will naturally feel that this needs to be corrected. You will be upset. It is the same for the other person if you use harsh words towards them; they will feel the same hurt feelings and experience the same unhappiness that you would. Therefore, before committing any act of harm, you should always think, “What if it were me in that position?” How would it feel to receive such a harmful action? By putting yourself in the position of the other, you can learn to stop acting with anger or with harmful intent towards others. We need to avoid causing harm with body and speech, whether using harsh words or scolding others.

Wishing others to be happy is the cause of our own happiness. The great Nālandā master Śāntideva said, “All happiness is caused by wishing others to be happy.” He also said, “All suffering is caused by wishing for your own happiness.” When Śāntideva says “others,” he means not only our family and not only our friends. These others are not only the people from your country, or the people from this or that continent, or all the people of your religion. Śāntideva means all beings without exception.

If you wish for some people to have happiness and others to have unhappiness, or if you wish for some people to have

happiness and you are neutral regarding others, then it means that you are discriminating among people and not extending your loving-kindness towards all beings. We need to train to produce the sincere wish that all beings without any discrimination or exception can have happiness and the causes of happiness, and that they can be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

Therefore, the topic of today's teaching is the Four Limitless Meditations, which is a method for this mental training.<sup>[1]</sup> The Four Limitless Meditations are:

1. Loving-kindness
2. Compassion
3. Joy
4. Equanimity

We commonly wish these four things for all sentient beings with the following prayer:

*May all beings have happiness and the cause of happiness.*

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

*May they never be parted from sorrowless joy.*

*May they dwell in equanimity, free from attachment and aversion to those near and far.*

# The Four Limitless Meditations

## Loving-kindness

**L**imitless loving-kindness means wishing all beings—**L**imitless sentient beings—to have happiness and the cause of happiness. The cause of happiness is engaging in virtuous deeds, and therefore we wish that all beings will gain happiness and do so by engaging in all the virtuous deeds that cause happiness.

If you love some beings but hate others, then your mind is divided: You have both hatred and love in your mind. A divided mind of this kind is an obstacle to limitless loving-kindness. In order for the meditation to be limitless, you need to extend this wish, this loving-kindness, to all beings without any exception.

A mind that discriminates between sentient beings, that doesn't include all sentient beings as the object, is another obstacle. We refer to "all beings" here as the *object* of your loving-kindness. If you wish for one hundred people to gain happiness and

have the causes of happiness, or one thousand people, then the object of your loving-kindness is limited to those one hundred or one thousand people. It is important to extend your thought towards all beings without any exception; that should be the object.

When we practice loving-kindness, we focus on the similarities among sentient beings rather than their differences. All of us have the same wish to gain happiness, and all of us have the same wish to overcome suffering. These wishes are common to all beings.

To grasp what we mean by “all sentient beings,” it helps to think about groups of beings in the world. The planet’s human population today is almost eight billion people. So, “all sentient beings” must include everyone in every country in the world; everyone from every religion in the world, and nonbelievers, too.

However, when we say that we should extend our loving-kindness to all sentient beings, it doesn’t just mean human beings. It means all animals and all other beings in the six realms of existence. All of them should be the object of our loving-kindness. We cannot go ourselves to all the realms of the universe and perform positive actions to make others happy,

but with our minds, we can extend the wish for their happiness; we can extend our loving-kindness to the highest levels and the furthest reaches of the universe and to all beings because the mind has no barriers. We can extend our loving-kindness to as vast an extent as we wish.

When we wish all beings to be happy, this means real or genuine happiness. Some people take drugs, and they feel happy as a result. But this kind of happiness is not what we mean. Worldly happiness lasts only for a short while, and its nature is not genuine. Furthermore, the happiness caused by drugs is produced by wrong actions—by intoxication. The happiness that we wish for, both for ourselves and all sentient beings, is real happiness that comes from liberation from suffering. It is lasting happiness. Such happiness is gained by doing positive actions. All things arise from causes and conditions, and the law of karma teaches that happiness arises from virtuous deeds.

In order to practice virtuous actions, one needs to have a positive mind. Therefore, if we really wish to make the world more peaceful and happy, then we must cultivate positive minds. We can do this through loving-kindness. Peace and harmony will arise from love and not through hate, whether we are talking about our families, our towns, our countries, or the entire world.

Hate and anger will never produce happiness. There were many wars and conflicts in the twentieth century. Today, they are history; both sides have passed away. Such fighting cannot bring lasting happiness for the people who have passed away. Not one of them was able to take with them even a small portion of the land that they fought for. Really, all are losers, there are no winners, if everyone dies in the end. Furthermore, although we say in worldly terms that someone has won a battle or has won a war, this is only accomplished by killing others. In reality, killing or harming others is never the cause of happiness. Those who kill others or cause injuries to others will suffer in the future. This is why we say that both sides are losers, in reality.

In your own family, too, hate and anger will never produce happiness. If you want happiness and harmony at home, then it is important to love and respect each other and avoid quarreling. Sometimes, people become addicted to quarreling with their life partners. This produces misery for both of them. It can also have a big impact on children, interrupting their study and causing disturbances and obstacles to their future.

Fighting or quarreling with one's life partner is more serious than quarreling with a stranger. If you quarrel with a stranger, you can walk away and you are likely not to meet that person

again. Maybe you see will them occasionally, every few months or years, but not every day. Quarrels with a life partner are quite different. As I said, they can become a daily practice, or an addiction that will make both partners miserable. Therefore, it is important to control one's own mind and to have love and respect for each other.

We should start practicing loving-kindness with our families. From there, we can extend loving-kindness outward towards friends and neighbors and, finally, to all beings without any exception. When we practice this way, we will be able to make friends with anybody; we can live in harmony with everyone and live without difficulties. This is the benefit of practicing loving-kindness. That is the power of love.

To practice loving-kindness means wishing all sentient beings to be happy and wishing for all sentient beings to do positive actions, which are the cause of happiness. When we wish others to be happy, we are also wishing for them to have positive thoughts, such as loving-kindness. If everyone had loving-kindness for each other, then there would be no possibility of harm committed against each other; there would be no chance for hurtful actions to rise.

## **Compassion**

The second limitless meditation is limitless compassion. Loving-kindness and compassion are like two sides of the same thing. They have one nature, or are like two sides of the same mind. Limitless compassion means wishing others to be free from suffering and free from the cause of suffering, which is wrong actions. We should strive to produce such limitless compassion.

In the teachings, it is said that if we have limitless compassion, then we will have all of the other good qualities. All the other good qualities will follow from genuine compassion, and we will have them without putting forth extra effort. The teachings say that it is like inviting an emperor: if you invite the emperor, you can expect that all of his entourage will come without sending separate invitations. They just follow the emperor. Similarly, if we develop genuine or limitless compassion, all the other qualities will follow.

The teachings divide suffering into three kinds: the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change, and the suffering of the conditioned nature of phenomena. I will only describe the first two here. The first one, the suffering of suffering, refers to all the things that we ordinarily consider to be suffering. This includes physical pain, mental anxiety, and everything else that we all accept as suffering.

The suffering of change refers to things that worldly people consider to be happiness. The Buddha teaches us that such happiness is not real or lasting; it will change into suffering. Take food, for example. If we eat delicious food, we feel happy. It seems like eating delicious food is the cause of happiness. But if this were true, then the more we ate, the happier we would become. We all know that, in reality, it is not like this. If we overeat, it will cause us discomfort and suffering. Thus, the happiness that comes from eating tasty food is not genuine happiness. There are many other kinds of worldly happiness that are like this. They change into something else. This is why such happiness is considered to be the suffering of change. All worldly happiness, our present happiness, is not real happiness. Such worldly happiness is caused by attachment, or desire, which is one of the negative thoughts, one of the three poisons (desire, anger, and ignorance). These poisons only create more suffering for us. They cannot produce real happiness.

## **Joy**

The practice of limitless joy means to wish that all beings will never be parted from the happiness that is free from suffering, or never be parted from “sorrowless joy.” Our worldly happiness has a duration that is very short. A human lifespan is

not long. Most people die before they reach one hundred years of age. Furthermore, there is not a single person who has only experienced happiness and no suffering in their brief life. If you compare the two—how much suffering versus how much joy—then we all experience more suffering in life than happiness, generally speaking.

If someone lives to be one hundred years old, it might be that their happiness amounted to twenty-four years, or less. Not only is a person's happiness brief in terms of its duration, it is also often caused by wrong actions. We might have gained some happiness by deceiving others or by doing something else bad towards others. Even if we didn't do anything nonvirtuous, the nature of ordinary happiness is not real happiness; as I explained, if something brings real happiness, then the more you enjoy it, the more happiness you should have. But it is not like that with worldly happiness and the things that produce it. For example, being with friends can make you happy, but if you spend too much time together, then this will strain the friendship. Such ordinary happiness is, in reality, the suffering of change.

So then, from three different aspects, we can see that worldly happiness is not genuine happiness: the nature point of view, the duration point of view, and the cause point of view.

## **Equanimity**

The fourth “immeasurable” is equanimity. This means to sincerely wish that all sentient beings will remain in equanimity, free from aversion and attachment to those who are far and near. The phrase “far and near” refers to people who are either distant from you (“far”) and people who are close (“near”). Equanimity means to avoid both aversion to those who are far and attachment to those who are close to you. If someone has these feelings, then it means that they are not remaining in equanimity, and their mind is not limitless but limited.

## Conclusion

**Y**ou should try to have these limitless thoughts at all times in your mental continuum. It doesn't matter who you are: powerful or not, rich or not, famous or not. It doesn't matter whether you have many followers or not. Everyone can practice these four limitless meditations. Everyone has the potential or the propensity to practice them.

As a worldly person, an ordinary person, or a beginner, it might not be possible to practice them all the time, but we should all strive to do that. The more we practice, the longer we will be able to maintain them, and eventually we will be able to practice them at all times.

Try to control your anger or hatred before it is exposed to others. It is much better if you can control it before it is expressed. Whenever your mind has hatred or anger or some other obstacle, you should remember that it is an obstacle, and you should bring your mind back to the practice of the

limitless meditations. Eventually, you can become a really good practitioner and play an important role in bringing peace and harmony to the world and beyond.

I wish for everyone to improve their practice of the four limitless meditations. I hope that we will all have great success in reaching our short-term and long-term goals.

## Questions and Answers

[Question] – This is about what you said regarding anger and other negative thoughts and quarreling. I know that my negative thoughts have been very destructive, both to me and to everybody around me. I have made mistakes that have been destructive of my relationship. What is the way forward once everything is destroyed? What is the way out?

[His Holiness] – We have all made mistakes. As ordinary people, we have thoughts all the time that are nothing other than the three poisons of desire, anger, and ignorance. Therefore, we have all made many mistakes. Recognizing these mistakes as mistakes is itself a good sign. It means that now we are prepared to make a change and to do good.

If someone has an illness and no one knows about it, if it is hidden for a very long time, then it might be too late to do anything by the time it is discovered. Discovering your mistakes now is much better than discovering them years from now. This itself is a positive sign.

Practicing the four limitless meditations can really help us control our negative thoughts, the three poisons, and can help us overcome our mistakes. To have discovered mistakes and then to have the wish to overcome them—this is a good sign. It is important to be positive, to encourage yourself, and to be confident that you can overcome the mistakes and make a better future.

Our thoughts of anger are always harmful. Anger only brings us more suffering when it stays in our minds and in our bodies. The main thing is to try to control the negative thoughts like anger and to try to increase positive thoughts. When positive thoughts are growing stronger, then negative thoughts will naturally grow weaker. Eventually, we can eliminate all our negative thoughts through our practice. Recognizing the negative thoughts as our enemy will help us to eliminate them. It will help us to control them, too, so that we will not expose our harmful thoughts, such as anger, to others.

[Question] – I would like some advice on how we can have loving-kindness and compassion arise spontaneously before we do our practice?

[His Holiness] – At the moment, our minds are controlled by negative thoughts. Our negative thoughts are much stronger than our positive thoughts, and so it is not really possible to have spontaneous positive thoughts. As beginners, we must put effort into generating positive thoughts in our minds. Only later, once we have developed them, can we have positive thoughts arise spontaneously. Consider, for example, a potter and a potter’s wheel. In ancient times and even now, a potter needs to turn the wheel with effort to get it started. Only after that does it turn easily or by itself, without making effort. That’s when the potter can focus on shaping the pot.

[Question] – Can you say more about what “limitless” means?

[His Holiness] – In this context, limitless refers to a capacity of the mind. Mentally, our minds can encompass all things or all beings. Physically, this is not possible, but mentally it is. We can focus our minds on limitless sentient beings without any exception. The mind can extend towards all beings and produce positive thoughts of loving-kindness towards them—not only towards one hundred, or one thousand, or one million, or one billion beings, but to limitless beings.

By contrast, that which is physical has limits. Consider how physical improvement and mental improvement are two different things. Physically, we cannot improve our capacities to the extent of limitlessness. Maybe you can train to do a two-meter long jump, but you will never do a one-hundred-meter long jump. It is just not possible. Our mental capacities, on the other hand, are not limited. The more you practice, the more you can improve the mind—all the way to buddhahood.

Notes:

[1] The Four Limitless Meditations, or the Four Immeasurables, are “brahmavihārā” in Sanskrit, which means “the abodes of Brahma” (catvāro brahmavihārāḥ). In Tibetan, ཚད་མེད་བཞི།, tse me zhi (Wylie: tshad med bzhi).





- His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin, Ratna Vajra Rinpoche, is the eldest son of His Holiness the Sakya Trichen (the 41st Sakya Trizin). Renowned for his erudition and the clarity of his teachings, His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin is regarded as one of the most highly qualified lineage holders in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. He belongs to the noble Khön family, whose successive generations have provided an unbroken lineage of outstanding Buddhist masters.

Since his youth, His Holiness the 42nd Sakya Trizin has received an ocean of sutra and tantra teachings, empowerments, transmissions, and pith instructions from His Holiness the Sakya Trichen, as well as many other learned and accomplished masters. After years of rigorous philosophy studies at Sakya College in India, he was awarded the kachupa degree. And starting from the age of twelve, he has completed numerous meditation retreats, including the Hevajra retreat. With utmost humility, he travels extensively to bestow teachings and empowerments at the request of students across the globe.



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