



THE CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE OF THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES

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Contents

I	The Four Immeasurables and the Three Vehicles....	55
II	Immeasurable Loving-kindness	60
	1. Semantics of Loving-kindness	60
	2. Happiness and the Causes of Happiness	62
	3. How to Cultivate Immeasurable Loving-kindness?....	65
	1) The <i>Metta Sutta</i>	66
	2) Seven-Point Cause-and-Effect	71
	4. Immeasurable Loving-kindness and Perfect Unconditional Loving-kindness	75
III	Immeasurable Compassion	78
	1. Semantics of Compassion	78
	2. Suffering and the Causes of Suffering	81
	3. How to Cultivate Immeasurable Compassion?	83
	4. Immeasurable Compassion and Universal Compassion of Oneness	86

IV Immeasurable Joy	88
1. Semantics of Joy	88
2. What Is Joy Free from Suffering?	89
3. How to Cultivate Immeasurable Joy?	91
4. Reasons for Practicing Rejoicing	95
V Immeasurable Equanimity	99
1. Semantics of Equanimity	99
2. How to Cultivate Immeasurable Equanimity?.....	101
VI Benevolence, Universal Love, and Compassion	106
1. Tainted and Untainted Love	107
2. Self and No-self	109
3. Equality and Inequality	110
4. Limited and Unlimited	111
VII Conclusion	113

The Four Immeasurables have four aspirations: loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity, each immeasurable. They are Immeasurable Loving-kindness, Immeasurable Compassion, Immeasurable Joy, and Immeasurable Equanimity. The specific vows are: “May all beings enjoy happiness and the causes of happiness; may all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering; may all beings always possess joy free from suffering, with contented body and mind; may all beings abide in equanimity, devoid of greed and aversion.” Although the Four Immeasurables are part of the practice in the Śrāvaka Vehicle, they resonate with the spirit of the Mahāyāna Bodhisattva Path—“unconditional loving-kindness

and universal compassion of oneness.” Hence, they are also important for cultivating the Bodhisattva spirit.

Yet, how to understand and practice the Four Immeasurables? And how to make these four sentences the practice of our life?

I

THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES AND THE THREE VEHICLES

The Three Vehicles in Buddhism refer to the three levels of Buddhist practice: the Vehicle of Humans and Devas, the Vehicle of Sravaka, and the Vehicle of Bodhisattvas. What is the relationship between the Four Immeasurables and the Three Vehicles?

From the perspective of the Vehicle of Humans and Devas, cultivating the Four Immeasurables can reap vast blessings, manifesting in worldly prosperity, successful careers, harmonious families, and positive relationships. More importantly, it can attract the blessings of future

rebirth in the heavens. The Four Immeasurables, also known as the Four Brahmaviharas, embody the virtues of the Great Brahma, the highest deity in various Indian religions. Perfecting the Four Immeasurables aligns one with the virtues of Brahma and leads to rebirth in the Brahma heavens. This is documented in numerous Buddhist sutras, such as in the *Dirgha Agama* (*Long Discourses of the Buddha*), which states, “By cultivating the Four Immeasurables, one can be reborn in the Brahma heavens after death.” In the *Ekottara Agama* (*Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*), it also says, “Cultivate the four Brahma practices of loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity, and at the end of life, attain rebirth in the Brahma heavens.” Similarly, the *Abhiniskramana Sutra* (*Sutra of Great Renunciation*) states, “Cultivate the four Brahma practices, and after death, be born in the Brahma palace.”

From the perspective of the Sravaka path to liberation, cultivating the Four Immeasurables can attain the liberation of immeasurable minds. The *Madhyama Agama* (*Middle-Length Discourses*) states, “If a monk or ascetic,

in a place of tranquility, or a quiet and empty space under a tree, unifies his mind with loving-kindness and suffuses one direction with it, achieving mastery; Similarly, it permeates the second, third, and fourth directions, as well as the four intermediate directions, and also above and below, encompassing everything. With the mind unified with loving-kindness, free from entanglements, resentments, anger, and disputes, it becomes immensely vast, greatly expansive, and immeasurably well-cultivated, pervading all worlds with mastery. Similarly, with compassion, joy, and equanimity, the mind becomes free from entanglements, resentments, anger, and disputes. It is immensely vast, greatly expansive, and immeasurably well-cultivated, pervading all worlds with mastery. This is called the liberation through the immeasurable minds.” The *Samyukta Agama* (*Connected Discourses*) also says, “If a bhikkhu cultivates a mind of loving-kindness and practices it extensively, he will attain great results and great benefits. How does a bhikkhu practicing loving-kindness attain great results and great benefits? Such a bhikkhu, with a mind unified in loving-kindness, cultivates the awakening

factors of mindfulness. This cultivation relies on detachment, the absence of desire, cessation, and aims at renunciation. Similarly, cultivating the awakening factors of equanimity relies on detachment, the absence of desire, cessation, and the pursuit of renunciation.”

In the practice of the Mahayana Bodhisattva Path, loving-kindness and compassion among the Four Immeasurables are precisely the foundation for cultivating bodhicitta. The *Lamrim (Gradual Path to Enlightenment)* describes the Seven-Point Cause-and-Effect of cultivating bodhicitta. It starts with recognizing all sentient beings as our past mothers, remembering their kindness, and repaying their kindness. This leads to the cultivation of loving-kindness, compassion, and extraordinary aspiration, ultimately leading to the arising of bodhicitta. From another perspective, cultivating bodhicitta enhances and completes loving-kindness and compassion. While ordinary people may possess some level of loving-kindness and compassion, they are often limited and discriminative, lacking purity, broadness, and intensity. How can we infinitely

expand this thought of loving-kindness and compassion, so we can achieve the great loving-kindness and universal compassion of Buddhas and bodhisattvas? We need to arouse the vast aspiration of “benefiting all sentient beings” and purify the mind with the view of emptiness, thereby elevating the quality of this aspiration.

The mind of equanimity is one of the characteristics of emptiness. Ordinary beings tend to attach to the self and dharmas, as well as forms of self, others, sentient beings, and longevity. They always feel that they do many things and help many people, but they are chained by dualistic opposition, which is limited and defiled. Only by not clinging to the four forms and the “self” as the liberator of sentient beings can they become true bodhisattvas by practicing loving-kindness and compassion.

In summary, the Four Immeasurables and the Three Vehicles in Buddhism are closely interrelated.

II

IMMEASURABLE LOVING-KINDNESS

1. Semantics of Loving-kindness

Loving-kindness is endowing joy and bringing happiness to others. Immeasurable means broad and boundless. “May all beings enjoy happiness and the causes of happiness.” is a vow to help all sentient beings, wishing them happiness and, more importantly, fulfilling the causes of happiness. By diligently cultivating the causes, one can continuously attract the fruit of happiness.

The prerequisites for cultivating loving-kindness are two-fold. First, avoid disliking others, as such feelings obstruct

the sincere wish for their happiness. Second, refrain from any intent to irritate and harm others, ensuring that no thoughts of harming others arise in any situation. However, simply steering clear of these two is not enough. Some people, although they do not dislike, irritate, or harm others, are indifferent towards them, and lack any mental connection, as if they are strangers. Consequently, their loving-kindness cannot actively arise. To truly foster loving-kindness, we must open our minds and embrace all beings, empathizing with their joys and sorrows. We should further cultivate loving-kindness just as we do for our dearest loved ones, sincerely wishing for their well-being and happiness.

Meanwhile, to cultivate loving-kindness, one must break free from two mental barriers: greed and aversion. While loving-kindness stems from love, worldly love is often mixed with greed and defilement. For example, our strong love for children, parents, relatives, and friends is based on specific relationships and accompanied by varying levels of greed. Particularly between spouses, love can lead to

extreme possessiveness and exclusivity. Therefore, such love comes with side effects. Genuine loving-kindness, however, is free from any greed or possessiveness; it is a pure wish for the happiness of all beings, without bias or expectation of anything in return. If one's cultivation of loving-kindness becomes tainted with greed or possessiveness, it signifies a failure in practice. Furthermore, one must overcome aversion, the greatest obstacle in cultivating loving-kindness. Only by completely eradicating aversion can the perfection of loving-kindness be achieved. Therefore, from a Buddhist perspective, a person who clearly distinguishes between likes and dislikes cannot fully cultivate loving-kindness. No matter how many people they love, if the love is intertwined with greed or aversion, it does not embody the true mind of immeasurable loving-kindness.

2. Happiness and the Causes of Happiness

To cultivate loving-kindness is to wish for all beings to attain happiness and the causes of such happiness. What,

then, are the forms of happiness that manifest in life? Broadly speaking, there are two: temporary and ultimate happiness. Temporary happiness includes internal well-being, such as physical and mental health, and external success in various aspects—these are the goals worldly individuals relentlessly pursue and strive for. Yet, it's essential to realize that these are merely fleeting moments of fortune in life, offering only temporary relief from suffering. Health cannot conquer the cycle of life and death; success cannot escape the destined impact of impermanence. Only by realizing nirvana can one attain ultimate bliss free from suffering.

The causes of happiness refer to the essential conditions required to attain happiness. In the Dharma, the world is perceived through dependent origination and causality. Hence, to attain happiness, one must first delve into its causes and strive to cultivate them. In particular, when one possesses loving-kindness and sincerely benefits others, they are farming a field of merit, naturally yielding the wholesome fruits of blessings. Therefore, loving-kindness

is the most profound cause of happiness. On an individual level, loving-kindness softens our hearts, distancing us from adverse emotions like aversion and fostering mental and physical well-being. Regarding interpersonal relations, loving-kindness inspires us to prioritize the needs of others, steering clear of selfishness, egoism, self-righteousness, and other mundane habits, thereby promoting harmonious interactions. In managing a business, cultivating loving-kindness and altruism is also essential. Internally, one can gain employee support; externally, one can secure recognition from the public. It is difficult to make a business large and strong if they focus solely on their personal interests. It can be said that loving-kindness is a universally applicable corporate culture.

Beyond worldly benefits, loving-kindness also navigates us towards ultimate benefits. The core issue addressed in Buddhist practice is self-attachment, and overcoming this is essential for eradicating afflictions and realizing nirvana. How do we break free from self-attachment? Usually, it relies on the meditation of emptiness. In fact,

loving-kindness and altruism also serve as a powerful contributing factor. When one's mind is constantly filled with care for others, self-attachment weakens due to the lack of sustenance, and the barriers obstructing wisdom subsequently diminish. Therefore, altruism not only cultivates loving-kindness and compassion but also unlocks wisdom.

When we cultivate loving-kindness and wish for all beings to attain happiness, we must understand what true happiness is and how to cultivate its causes. Otherwise, blind efforts may lead in the opposite direction, where suffering is mistaken as happiness.

3. How to Cultivate Immeasurable Loving-kindness?

Cultivating loving-kindness is not difficult; in fact, everyone possesses loving-kindness to varying degrees. However, our loving-kindness is often constrained to a select few and arises only in specific circumstances. Immeasurable loving-kindness, on the other hand, is about consistently

maintaining this mental state towards all beings without discrimination. This is not just a nice wish but also a reflection of a virtuous character.

How can we achieve such character? The *Metta Sutta* and the Seven-Point Cause-and-Effect in the *Gradual Path to Enlightenment* serve as guidelines for cultivating this loving-kindness.

1) The *Metta Sutta*

The practice outlined in the *Metta Sutta* begins with loving oneself and then extends that love to others, continuously expanding this love. Of course, such loving-kindness is pure and positive, not a narcissistic and selfish action stemming from self-attachment. How to practice this self-care? The answer is summarized into four sentences in the sutra: “May I be free from enmity and danger. May I be free from mental suffering. May I be free from physical suffering. May I take care of myself happily.” This is the key focus of contemplation in the *Metta Sutta*: just as you

do this for yourself, so should you do it for all beings.

The first sentence is, “May I be free from enmity and danger.” Enmity is the root of all conflicts and even wars. It always keeps individuals in tension. Due to enmity, we position ourselves against others and the world, always on guard against any enmity directed at us. Yet, viewing the world through the lens of enmity only projects that same animosity back onto ourselves, making the world seemingly fraught with danger and trapping us in an endless cycle of defense. What a burden that is! The numerous natural disasters, human-made calamities, and the pervasive unrest in today’s world are all tied to the enmity rooted in people’s minds. It is often said, “The world’s peace stems from our inner peace.” And where does this inner peace originate? It comes from letting go of enmity, from dropping opposition, thereby dissolving the causes of mutual harm and eliminating danger at its root.

The second sentence is “May I be free from mental suffering.” In recent years, there has been a significant rise in

the number of individuals suffering from mental illnesses, posing a pressing societal concern. More and more people around us are struggling with mental distress, ranging from inner void to extreme conditions of depression and mania. Some have even reached the point of despair. When someone is mentally suffering, even with abundant material conditions, they are incapable of experiencing true happiness.

The third sentence is “May I be free from physical suffering.” Our body, composed of the five aggregates, is essentially a gathering of great suffering; as Laozi says, “I have great affliction because I have a body.” When healthy, it remains in a relative balance without causing much trouble. When not healthy, it not only causes physical pain but also restricts our activities, subsequently affecting our mental state and posing numerous obstacles in our lives, work, and studies.

The fourth sentence is, “May I take care of myself happily.” Happiness arises from a mind capable of experiencing

joy. We may have such experience that as we grow older, childhood's pure and unadulterated joy becomes increasingly hard to attain. When the mind is laden with concerns and constraints, it's like carrying a heavy burden, gradually distancing itself from joy. Hence, cultivating our ability to feel and embrace joy is pivotal, as it is a fundamental element for leading a fulfilling life.

Through these four sincere wishes, we nurture loving-kindness within ourselves and allow it to settle. As this loving-kindness gradually becomes clearer, stronger, and more stable, we extend the wishes outward. Starting with ourselves, we radiate this loving-kindness to our parents, siblings, relatives, spiritual companions, and then to our entire community, nation, and the whole world. In terms of life forms, this includes "all living beings, all beings with form, all beings with names, all beings with bodies, all females, all males, all noble ones, all worldlings, all deities, all humans, all beings in the realms of suffering." In terms of time and space, it encompasses all beings inhabiting land, water, and air in every direction: east, west, north,

south, southeast, northwest, northeast, southwest, as well as below and above... For all sentient beings, we sincerely wish them: “May they be free from enmity and danger. May they be free from mental suffering. May they be free from physical suffering. May they take care of themselves happily.”

The practice of the *Metta Sutta* involves two aspects: how to give rise to loving-kindness and how to expand it. The loving-kindness of ordinary people is often very limited. To expand it from small love to great love, from oneself to all sentient beings, one must break through by means of contemplative practice. Therefore, when reciting the sutta, it is essential to engage oneself wholeheartedly and carefully contemplate the text, allowing each sentence to resonate as a sincere wish emanating from within and genuinely embracing them.

Moreover, during chanting like “May my parents, teachers, relatives and friends, fellow Dharma farers...,” it’s crucial to vividly envision the corresponding figures as if they

were present before us. The clearer our contemplation during practice, the more concrete our focus and the more heartfelt our wishes will be when delivering them. Such chanting can enable the true spread of kindness and fulfill the practice of loving-kindness. Therefore, the *Metta Sutta* itself serves as a contemplative practice ritual, and it is very specific. The key is to achieve accurate visualization and maintain focused attention; without these, the practice lacks potency.

2) Seven-Point Cause-and-Effect

Transitioning the focus of loving-kindness and well-wishes from oneself to others is where the challenge of the contemplation lies. How to accomplish this transformation that involves seeing others as oneself? The *Gradual Path to Enlightenment* approaches this through the Seven-Point Cause-and-Effect and the practice of exchanging self and others, guiding us to generate loving-kindness and compassion, and then infinitely expand the two mindsets. Here, the focus will be placed on the

former, the Seven-Point Cause-and-Effect, from recognizing all sentient beings as our past mothers, remembering their kindness, repaying their kindness, cultivating loving-kindness, compassion, and extraordinary aspiration, to ultimately generating bodhicitta.

Recognizing all sentient beings as our past mothers involves perceiving the relationship between ourselves and all sentient beings from the perspective of samsara. In the endless cycle of rebirth, we have undergone countless lives, adopting various identities, each with its own circle of parents, siblings, and beloved relatives and friends. These karmic connections lead us to encounter each other continuously in the flow of life. Although our identities and relationships change with each life, the past bonds of kinship cannot be denied. The *Brahmajala Sutra* states, “All men are my fathers; all women are my mothers.” It encourages us to regard all males as fathers and all females as mothers so that we can start to see our profound connection with all sentient beings, thereby feeling the loving-kindness and a

sense of responsibility to help them attain happiness.

Nonetheless, is this approach effective for everyone? Not necessarily. In today's world, we hardly show respect to our present parents, not to mention parents from countless past lives, towards whom we feel even less connection. Therefore, after recognizing all sentient beings as mothers, the crucial step is to remember their kindness. The lack of filial respect often stems from forgetting the nurturing kindness of our parents and not feeling a debt of gratitude. One must reflect: parents not only give us life but also laboriously nurture us. Without their sacrifices, we wouldn't have grown into adults and owned what we have today. Their kindness is so profound that no amount of reciprocation could ever suffice.

Traditional Confucianism places a strong emphasis on filial piety. However, for modern individuals, there is a lack of relevant guidance in both family and school education. On the contrary, many of today's parents tend to spoil and indulge their children, accommodating their every

whim. This leads to the youngsters taking everything they receive for granted and feeling indifferent to the kindness of their parents. If this mindset does not change, it not only poses an obstacle to Buddhist practice but also adversely affects all aspects of their social interaction. After all, the self-centeredness and self-righteousness prevalent among many today are, to a large extent, the result of failing to recognize and appreciate the kindness of others.

Only by adjusting this mindset and remembering their kindness with respect can we further think about repaying their kindness. In order to repay kindness, we must cultivate loving-kindness and compassion. This, in turn, leads us to the extraordinary aspiration of benefiting all sentient beings as our inescapable responsibility, ultimately guiding us to generate bodhicitta. This is the practice sequence of the Seven-Point Cause-and-Effect method.

4. Immeasurable Loving-kindness and Perfect Unconditional Loving-kindness

Loving-kindness is a healthy, beautiful, and positive state of mind. Individuals with loving-kindness possess inner tenderness, tranquility, and joy, bringing blessings to themselves and simultaneously developing wholesome qualities like those of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. Their presence allows sentient beings to feel the inspiration and benefits of loving-kindness. Conversely, a person filled with aversion not only experiences internal agitation and suffering but also emits an aggressive energy that instills fear and unrest in those around them. Recognizing the value of loving-kindness, we should cultivate it actively, allowing this mindset to emerge, stabilize, and expand until it becomes infinite, reaching the point where it is always maintained regardless of the circumstances. In this way, nothing in the world can harm us, just as the sutra states, “Loving-kindness is like the great earth, impervious to the intrusion of any bandits.”

The *Metta Sutta* originated from a true story where a group of bhikkhus were disturbed by spirits and fairies during meditation in a forest. To calm their panic, the Buddha instructed them to cultivate loving-kindness to dissolve opposition and fear. In the *Ekottara Agama* (*Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*), the Buddha also taught bhikkhus that, “If you are seized by bandits while traveling, you should maintain your composure and not give rise to evil thoughts. You should cultivate the loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity, extending them boundlessly, infinitely, and immeasurably in all directions. Keep your mind steady like the earth, just as the earth receives the pure and impure... the evil and the good, without any favor or discrimination. Cultivate the loving-kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity towards all sentient beings.” When encountering evildoers and dangers, responding with violence only leads to more conflicts and opposition. Therefore, instead of succumbing to aversion, we should cultivate boundless loving-kindness for all sentient beings. Only through this can we fundamentally eliminate the danger, as the saying goes,

“Loving-kindness and compassion have no enemies.”

The practice of the Bodhisattva Path places greater emphasis on unconditional loving-kindness. “Unconditional” implies not making distinctions between close and distant, likes and dislikes, or noble and humble. From aspiration to action, the object of the practice is infinity, encompassing everything equally. The *Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* elaborates on this approach. After generating loving-kindness, we could follow the perspective from the *Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*, treating each object of perception in life as a practice, constantly maintaining and strengthening loving-kindness. Subsequently, transform this loving-kindness from being self to no-self, from having form to formless, and from being limited to limitless, ultimately achieving the perfect unconditional loving-kindness of Buddhas and bodhisattvas.

III

IMMEASURABLE COMPASSION

1. Semantics of Compassion

Compassion is an expression of deep empathy. “May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering,” implies that seeing sentient beings struggling in the ocean of suffering, one aspires to rescue them from it, wishing them to be free from all suffering and their causes. Furthermore, they put this aspiration into practice and make concrete efforts to help all beings attain happiness by alleviating their suffering.

Cultivating compassion must be based on loving-kindness.

It is because we have loving-kindness towards sentient beings that we empathize with their suffering and cannot bear to see them suffering. Mencius said, “If people suddenly see a child about to fall into a well, they will all have feelings of worry, fear, sympathy, and compassion.” Why do we feel compassion? It is precisely because of our loving-kindness towards the child. Without loving-kindness, we wouldn’t feel anything, not to mention compassion. For instance, many people see animals merely as food ingredients. They kill and cook them alive, ignoring their painful struggle, thinking it’s just part of preparing a meal. They don’t even realize that they are taking a life or empathize with their suffering from being cut and killed, let alone alleviate this suffering. They are indifferent not because they are fierce, but because they lack loving-kindness towards animals.

To cultivate compassion, one must overcome two mental states: sorrow and harm. Compassion arises from empathy and the vow to relieve the suffering of sentient beings, and this is a powerful mindset. If we feel sorrow for the

suffering of sentient beings, become attached to it, and are overwhelmed by it, our compassion becomes misguided. This indicates that this compassion is mixed with greed, a tainted state of self-attachment. Additionally, we must avoid the intent to harm sentient beings. Harm is a sub-mental state of aversion and one of its manifestations. In Buddhist practice, as long as we harbor aversion towards even one sentient being, our compassion is incomplete. Complete compassion is achieved only when we completely cease harming others and harbor no aversion towards any sentient being under any circumstances.

Whether cultivating loving-kindness or compassion, the foundation lies in the mind of equanimity, avoiding greed or aversion, and not singling out specific individuals. Otherwise, our loving-kindness and compassion become tainted rather than pure, limited instead of limitless. Thus, the practice of loving-kindness and compassion follows a gradual path to avoid deviations. This will be elaborated in the following sections.

2. Suffering and the Causes of Suffering

Compassion aims to help sentient beings eliminate suffering and its causes. What is the suffering in human life? The *Metta Sutta* primarily addresses physical and mental suffering, while Buddhism also categorizes suffering into “Three Types of Suffering” and “Eightfold Suffering.” “Three Types of Suffering” include Suffering of Suffering, Suffering of Change, and All-pervasive Suffering. “The Eightfold Suffering” includes Suffering of Birth, Suffering of Aging, Suffering of Sickness, Suffering of Death, Suffering of Separation from Loved Ones, Suffering of Encountering the Unpleasant, Suffering of Not Getting What One Wants, and Suffering of the Five Aggregates. These categories only provide a broad overview of suffering. If they are fully elaborated, life encompasses countless suffering, too numerous to count. The key is eliminating the causes of suffering; this is the fundamental solution. Otherwise, suffering is endless. What are the causes of suffering? Buddhism believes that they mainly include past karma and present-life afflictions.

First is karma, a mental force generated by actions of body, speech, and mind. Since beginningless time, our actions, words, and thoughts do not simply disappear after they occur. Instead, they have become seeds stored in our life system. Once the causes and conditions are mature, this karma will produce corresponding results that come back to us, and no one can escape this. Wholesome karma will return, and so will unwholesome karma, sometimes even with greater force. As the saying goes, “Karma not created does not manifest, karma created is never lost, and karma grows extensively.” Our current state is a result of accumulated actions from past lives, encompassing everything from our internal physical and mental conditions to our external family background, living environment, and interpersonal relationships—all influenced by karma. Moreover, our present actions will continue to impact our future lives. The fundamental law of karma is that good deeds bring happiness, while bad deeds bring suffering. Thus, unwholesome karma is the root cause of life’s suffering.

Second are the afflictions, namely the three poisons of greed, aversion, and ignorance. These are the soil in which unwholesome karma grows. We create unwholesome karma out of greed and aversion, both of which are rooted in ignorance, delusion, and self-attachment. Only by completely eliminating self-attachment and transforming erroneous perceptions of the self can we permanently liberate ourselves from the causes of suffering.

We hope all sentient beings can permanently free themselves from suffering and the causes of suffering. To achieve this, we should guide them to see through the harmful effects of ignorance and self-attachment and then eliminate greed and aversion. Only by extinguishing greed, aversion, and ignorance can we fundamentally eradicate unwholesome karma.

3. How to Cultivate Immeasurable Compassion?

Cultivating immeasurable compassion also starts with oneself, as stated in the *Metta Sutta*, “May I be free from

enmity and danger. May I be free from mental suffering. May I be free from physical suffering ...” We see the flaws of contaminated life, and also the suffering caused by delusion, self-attachment, greed, aversion, ignorance, and unwholesome karma, thus seeking to be free from suffering. It is the motivation for cultivating a mind of compassion. If we do not feel suffering, there is no need to seek liberation from the suffering.

People are busy seeking happiness and liberation from suffering. Unfortunately, more suffering arises in the process of trying to change it because they fail to find the root causes of suffering. Through studying Buddhism, we see that the root of suffering lies in karma, greed, aversion, ignorance, and also in delusion and self-attachment. Therefore, we need to resolve these issues at the source. Furthermore, we should extend this aspiration from ourselves to relatives and friends, from the locality to the country, and from humans to all sentient beings in the six realms, wishing that all beings can ultimately be free from the causes of suffering. Confucianism emphasizes loving one’s family

and extending this love to the public. This means extending love from close family members to all relatives and eventually to all people in the world.

In the *Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva*, each vow and action of the bodhisattva is based on benefiting all sentient beings across the infinite space, throughout the Dharma realm, and in all ten directions and the three times (past, present, and future), guiding us to open our minds and expand compassion limitlessly. The vastness of space corresponds to the vastness of the mind. As long as we do not fall into self-attachment, our mind is inherently infinite because the essence of the universe is indeed the essence of the mind. When we establish an infinite focus, we can project compassion onto all sentient beings, becoming all-encompassing. Therefore, the *Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* is a crucial guide to achieving immeasurable compassion.

4. Immeasurable Compassion and Universal Compassion of Oneness

The key to expanding compassion into infinity is to recognize oneself as one unity with all sentient beings in the six realms. With this understanding, helping others alleviate suffering is inevitable. Just as when a part of your body gets injured, your hand instinctively moves to treat it without considering whether to help or not. This is because your hand and the injured part are one unity, and it's an instinctive reaction. However, from a superficial level, we and sentient beings may seem like independent individuals—I am me, and they are them. How can we view ourselves and sentient beings as one unity? Ultimately, one must realize emptiness to comprehend that oneself and all sentient beings are fundamentally inseparable without any boundaries. Any perceived separation is merely a manifestation of dependent origination. What can we do before enlightenment? Does it mean we cannot practice? Not at all. Even though we may not have realized emptiness, we can still adjust our understanding through

learning and contemplation and stimulate our aspirations through reflective practice. These are the foundations for cultivating compassion.

Like loving-kindness, compassion is a precious spiritual treasure, a priceless treasure in life that can bring endless benefits to oneself and all beings. Even from the perspective of mental qualities, we should cultivate and achieve compassion. Nowadays, many people enjoy collecting antiques, sparing no expense. However, what real issue can antiques solve in life? How can our collections help us when we are mired in trouble or when we are about to leave this world? Only positive mindsets and wholesome karma can distance us from afflictions and serve as guidance at the time of death, bringing about pleasant results in future lives. Realizing the preciousness of compassion, we should actively cultivate and grow it, and further purify and expand it infinitely with the view of emptiness, making it the dominant force in the continuity of the mind.

IV

IMMEASURABLE JOY

1. Semantics of Joy

Joy, in this context, refers to delight and rejoicing. When we see sentient beings practicing virtuous deeds, achieving success, and gaining benefits, we feel genuinely happy for them and sincerely praise them. Rejoicing seems simple; it doesn't require any special abilities or much financial support. As long as we are willing, anyone can do it. But in reality, it's not that easy. Often, when we see others doing good deeds, achieving success, or gaining benefits, instead of being happy for them, we feel envy, jealousy, and resentment. Sometimes, this jealousy turns into conflict,

destruction, and harm due to a hatred of the rich. This mindset stems from self-attachment; we only want to benefit ourselves, so we see others' gains as a threat and become hostile.

To cultivate rejoicing, we must overcome two mental obstacles. The first is joy tainted with greed, and the second is dislike or displeasure. Rejoicing is originally a mind that benefits both oneself and others, but if it is mixed with greed, it becomes tainted and no longer equal. Dislike, on the other hand, is related to hatred and jealousy. As long as there is even a trace of aversion and jealousy in our minds, we cannot fully and openly rejoice in the joy of others.

2. What Is Joy Free from Suffering?

There are two types of happiness: one is happiness with suffering, referred to as Suffering of Change in Buddhism; the other is happiness free from suffering, which is the immeasurable joy, wishing that “may all beings always possess joy free from suffering, with contented body and

mind.” The happiness experienced by people, whether it comes from family, relationships, wealth, or career, is based on greed, aversion, and ignorance. It is unstable, fundamentally painful, and contaminated. Such happiness is only a temporary alleviation of suffering, and when balance is lost, extreme joy turns into sorrow.

Buddhism, however, tells us that besides the worldly happiness with suffering, there is transcendental happiness free from suffering, which is the bliss of nirvana. This happiness has no side effects and is unceasing because it is not based on external circumstances. Instead, it arises from the complete eradication of afflictions, constantly emanating serenity, joy, and freedom from the awakened nature. Practicing immeasurable joy involves not only rejoicing in the worldly benefits that sentient beings have gained but also rejoicing in their spiritual accomplishments, wishing them to possess the ultimate happiness.

3. How to Cultivate Immeasurable Joy?

Cultivating immeasurable joy also entails a gradual approach. As suggested in the *Metta Sutta*, we should first rejoice in our own virtuous actions and spiritual achievements because this is relatively easy and conducive to activating a joyful mind. However, it's essential to maintain a balanced approach: we should not become attached, arrogant, complacent, or self-righteous. Then, we can extend this rejoicing to those around us, starting with our relatives, then to colleagues and friends, and eventually to strangers. Once our rejoicing becomes stronger, we can further expand it to people we dislike. Thus, the gradual practice of rejoicing is crucial. If we practice rejoicing, starting with an enemy, this generally does not work. Therefore, we can practice rejoicing in ourselves first, and then extend it to people we like and are willing to rejoice in. Only after our ability to rejoice strengthens can we have the power to gradually extend it to other sentient beings.

The Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva also expounds on the practice of rejoicing in the merits of others, which is one of his ten great vows: “To rejoice in the merits of others, we start with rejoicing in all the Buddhas and Tathagatas of the ten directions and three times, as numerous as the minutest dust particles in all Buddha lands throughout the infinite space and Dharma realm. From the moment they first aroused the thought of enlightenment for all wisdom, they diligently cultivated and accumulated merits, not sparing their lives, as numerous as the minutest dust particles in inexpressibly inexpressible numbers of Buddha lands. During each eon, they would sacrifice their heads, eyes, hands, and feet, as numerous as the minutest dust particles in inexpressibly inexpressible numbers of Buddha lands. Through such difficult and arduous practices, they perfected various paramitas, attained different stages of Bodhisattva wisdom, achieved supreme enlightenment, and entered the final nirvana of all Buddhas, with their relics divided and distributed. I rejoice in all their wholesome roots. Furthermore, I rejoice in all the merits of sentient beings in

the six realms and four kinds of birth throughout the ten directions and all worlds, down to one dust particle. I also rejoice in the merits of all Sravakas and Pratyekabuddhas of the ten directions and three times, whether they are still learning or have completed their learning. I rejoice in all the difficult and arduous practices undertaken by all bodhisattvas in their aspiration for supreme enlightenment. Thus, even if the realm of infinite space ends, the realm of sentient beings ends, the karma of sentient beings ends, and the afflictions of sentient beings end, my rejoicing is endless, thought after thought without even an instant of ceasing. And my actions of body, speech, and mind will never tire of this.”

The key to practicing rejoicing lies in completely opening our minds, taking as our focus the infinite space and Dharma realm, and all Buddha lands in the ten directions and the three times. Ordinary beings often fill their minds only with themselves, their families, work, or careers. At most, they extend this to their region, ethnicity, or country. Now, we need to establish an infinite focus by

opening the mind. The smaller our mind, the smaller our focus; the larger our mind, the larger our focus. In reality, the mind itself is infinite; it is only self-attachment that makes it narrow-minded. By meditating on this infinite focus, we can return the mind to its original state. This mind is infinite, formless, and non-abiding. It is also the mind in which we shall realize emptiness.

In terms of the object of practice, the *Metta Sutta* teaches us to start with rejoicing in ourselves and then expand this rejoicing outward, while the *Practices and Vows of Samantabhadra Bodhisattva* starts with rejoicing in the virtues of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, adopting a top-down approach. This approach is ingenious because we are unlikely to feel envious of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, making it easier and more sincere to rejoice in their merits. By establishing a mindset of rejoicing in the virtues of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, we can extend this practice to all sentient beings across the six realms, thereby accomplishing immeasurable joy.

4. Reasons for Practicing Rejoicing

Similar to loving-kindness and compassion, rejoicing itself is a beautiful quality of life. If we harbor a mind of rejoicing, taking joy in the good deeds, benefits, and achievements of others as if they were our own, it not only brings happiness to ourselves but also inspires joy in everyone around us. This is because we are witnessing and conveying positive energy. When others feel this kindness, they are encouraged and reciprocate with kindness, mutually enhancing each other's growth. In contrast, those who are jealous and cannot tolerate the accomplishments of others live in constant discontent. The smaller one's mind, the more numerous the objects of envy, and the greater the unwillingness to see others' good deeds and successes. They may even use others' achievements as fuel for their own anger, endlessly generating negativity. This mindset not only causes personal suffering but, when expressed, also creates conflict with others, making one generally disliked. This is detrimental not just to spiritual practice in Buddhism, but even to worldly life and work.

In addition to bringing joy to oneself and all beings, rejoicing also cultivates immeasurable merits. While each person's abilities, energy, and financial resources are limited, the mind of rejoicing can be limitless. Even if we can't personally practice all virtuous deeds, sincerely rejoicing in others' good deeds yields the same merits as theirs. With a more expansive aspiration, the merits we gained could even exceed those of the original doer. In worldly pursuits, there is often regret from unfulfilled potential, but in practicing rejoicing, simply having the intention is sufficient. Rejoicing can be seen as an incredibly beneficial practice—understanding how to cultivate it allows for the constant accumulation of merits for enlightenment. In terms of worldly affairs, rejoicing also acts as a lubricant and plays a significant role in social interactions. As the saying goes, “Your network is your net worth.” How does one build this network? It's inseparable from the practice of rejoicing. Sincerely rejoicing in others' accomplishments helps us build positive connections, quickly dissolve barriers between people, bring mutual happiness, and naturally create favorable conditions for success.

Moreover, rejoicing can diminish self-attachment. Those with a strong sense of self-attachment find it difficult to rejoice in others, habitually finding fault or even criticizing others' achievements. Over time, this only strengthens self-attachment, increases self-righteousness, and intensifies opposition to others. In contrast, when we widely rejoice in others' accomplishments, without clinging to our own knowledge and actions, self-attachment weakens due to a lack of reinforcement. It's important to note that rejoicing is not about flattery or ingratiating behavior for ulterior motives, but rather a genuine appreciation of others' positive attributes, benefits, virtuous actions, and merits.

In conclusion, rejoicing can break down self-attachment, accumulate rewards, and clear obstacles, thus advancing on the path of the bodhisattva. It also enhances virtue and fosters worldly benefits. From both the perspectives of Buddhist practice and secular affairs, rejoicing is an excellent means of "wealth creation," making it an endeavor well worth pursuing. We should not

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only cultivate rejoicing but also strive to expand it
boundlessly.

V

IMMEASURABLE EQUANIMITY

1. Semantics of Equanimity

The term “Equanimity” encompasses two aspects: renunciation and equality. In the context of the Four Immeasurables, it is expressed as, “May all beings abide in equanimity, devoid of greed and aversion.”

Renunciation involves relinquishing greed and aversion, fundamentally abandoning self-attachment, thereby cultivating a mind of equality. The personality of ordinary people is based on self-attachment, which inevitably leads to likes and dislikes. With likes and dislikes, we see the

world, further fueling greed and aversion—clinging to likes is greed, and rejecting dislikes is aversion. When the mind is caught in the grips of greed and aversion, it becomes unsettled and restless. Notably, aversion is painful, but greed also inflicts suffering. Moreover, they strengthen self-imposed limitations, preventing us from treating all beings equally. Without this equanimity, it is impossible to cultivate boundless loving-kindness, compassion, or rejoicing.

The sequence of the Four Immeasurables begins with loving-kindness, followed by compassion, rejoicing, and finally, equanimity. However, in practice, to cultivate immeasurable loving-kindness, compassion, and rejoicing, we must first establish a foundation of equanimity. Only by overcoming greed and aversion can we view all beings equally and regard them as the focus for practicing loving-kindness, compassion, and rejoicing.

2. How to Cultivate Immeasurable Equanimity?

To cultivate immeasurable equanimity, we begin with a neutral object—an object neither of greed nor aversion nor involved in any significant personal interests. This approach is not easy to involve interference. Further, we practice with family and friends. They are divided into three tiers based on intimacy: the most intimate, the intermediate intimate, and the least intimate. To cultivate equanimity, we start with the least intimate friends and family, because this intimacy is the least, and the greed is the weakest. As equanimity grows to a certain level, we can view them equally, without greed or aversion. Next, we extend this equanimity to the intermediate and even the most intimate family and friends. For instance, the most intimate ones are our parents, children, and spouses. Yet, they may also become the best ones to break free from greed. As we know, when relationships are too intimate, the potential harm to ourselves and others are more intense, as the saying goes, “The deeper the love, the sharper the aversion.”

After developing equanimity towards loved ones, we move on to practice with those we dislike. Like friends and family, these disliked individuals can also be categorized into three levels based on the intensity of our aversion: strongly disliked, moderately disliked, and slightly disliked. When practicing equanimity, we start with the slightly disliked individuals, then move to the moderately disliked ones, and finally to those we strongly dislike. Cultivating equanimity is a process of developing an equal mind. As our equanimity strengthens, we can gradually handle more challenging situations. If we don't follow this gradual approach but directly handle the most difficult situations first, we are likely to fail immediately.

In texts like the *Gradual Path to Enlightenment*, there are also methods for practicing equanimity, teaching us to view love and hatred from the perspective of samsara. In this lifetime, we may love someone deeply, finding it hard to let go, or hate someone intensely, feeling completely opposed to them. How can we view them equally? This requires thinking from the perspective of samsara. Life

did not begin with this current existence; it stretches back through countless past lives. The person we love now may have been an enemy in a past life, possibly having harmed us. Similarly, the person we hate now may have been a beloved one in the past, having loved us deeply. We simply forget these connections due to the cycles of existence. Even if we don't consider past lives, love, and hatred are not fixed even within this life. People who love each other can become enemies, and those who oppose each other can become friends. These reversals often occur in life. Love and hate are just temporary emotions at the moment; love is not permanent, so we shouldn't cling to it, and hate is not fixed, so we shouldn't dwell on it. All these reflections help us develop equanimity.

Some may think that having no love or hate means having no stance or even being indifferent. In fact, when we view all beings equally, we not only let go of hatred but also develop an equal and impartial compassion towards all beings. This is not indifference; rather, it is great loving-kindness, great compassion, and great love.

All sentient beings tend to be self-centered due to self-attachment. In reality, self-attachment is just a mistaken assumption we create to support the cycle of samsara. With this self-attachment as a reference, we distinguish who is related to us and who is not, forming a complex web of relationships that give rise to love and hate. However, these references and supports, originating from incorrect assumptions, are baseless. If we eliminate self-attachment and see everything from the perspective of dependent origination, our relationships with others and all sentient beings are flattened, without any central focus. This applies to ourselves as well as to the world. Does the universe have a center? Does the Dharma realm have a center?

The key to practicing equanimity lies in eliminating self-attachment. By doing so, we eliminate the central focus and the relationships built around it, allowing us to face all beings in the Dharma realm with an equal mind. Only on the basis of equality can we extend loving-kindness, compassion, and rejoicing to all sentient beings,

establishing vast and impartial loving-kindness, compassion, and rejoicing.

Moreover, the balanced, tranquil, and ordinary mindsets embody the original state of the mind and the most precious qualities in life. They align with equanimity. When we return to our true nature, we can view all beings equally and face the world with unwavering calmness. This powerful tranquility can quell all delusions, allowing our minds to be filled only with compassion and deep rejoicing for all beings. In this way, we can maintain a transcendent detachment even while engaging in the world.

VI

BENEVOLENCE, UNIVERSAL LOVE, AND COMPASSION

For the harmonious development of human society, love is an indispensable and important driving force. It is because of love that the world is filled with warmth. Traditional cultures and religions contribute to the world by spreading great love. For instance, Confucianism advocates benevolence, Christianity promotes universal love, and Buddhism advocates loving-kindness and compassion. This may lead many people to think that all religions essentially teach the same kindness. Is this true? If not, what distinguishes these forms of love?

1. Tainted and Untainted Love

What is tainted love, and what is untainted love? The distinction lies in whether such love is tainted with greed and possessiveness. Commonly, when people speak of love, they do not make this distinction. For instance, Confucianism teaches that love begins with affection for parents, spouses, children, and siblings, and then extends to love among friends, between superiors and subordinates, society at large, and even all things in the universe. This is a process of gradually expanding the object of love, but it does not define the nature of love itself. The universal love in Christianity also focuses on expanding from small and personal love without distinguishing the nature of love itself. In fact, the love for one's immediate family often involves greed. Without addressing this issue in the transition from narrow to broad love, true equality cannot be achieved, nor can it extend to everything.

Buddhism distinguishes between two types of love. The one we are familiar with is tainted with greed and

possessiveness, encompassing nearly all forms of worldly love. Upon analysis, we find that regardless of the object of love, there is invariably a degree of greed and possessiveness, be it in the relationship between spouses, parents, and children, or even our love for objects. Although love involves giving, greed and possessiveness taint this love, leading to various negative side effects. In many sutras, the Buddha spoke of “ignorance as the father and attachment as the mother (of suffering),” highlighting the dangers of love. In the teachings on the Twelve Links of Dependent Origination related to the cycle of life, it is also stated that “craving, grasping, and becoming” lead to “birth, aging, and death.” Thus, tainted love is considered the root of the cycle of rebirth, and the fundamental cause of all suffering and afflictions in the world. If we want to achieve liberation and escape from this cycle, it is essential to eliminate tainted love; failing to do so results in an endless cycle of creating and experiencing karma, trapping us in perpetual birth and death.

Eliminating tainted love does not mean disowning family

or being indifferent and unfeeling toward all beings. Instead, it's about transforming it into an untainted love, referred to as "great loving-kindness and great compassion" in Buddhism. In Buddhist practice, compassion and wisdom are the two most essential aspects, and one must cultivate an equal, selfless love for all beings. This love makes no distinction between the close and distant relationships. It is not driven by greed, does not aim for possession, nor does it seek any form of return. Consequently, this love is free from side effects; it neither fades nor deteriorates over time like worldly love.

By distinguishing these two different types of love, we come to understand what needs to be resolved and what should be preserved and developed.

2. Self and No-self

In Confucianism and other religions, love begins with close family and friends, and gradually expands to a broader range, ultimately extending to love for society.

Such love involves a sense of self, where even if one loves numerous beings, the central self remains unchanged.

In Buddhism, love initially begins with a sense of self, but it must eventually transcend to a state of no-self. Otherwise, it cannot align with the path of cultivation. In the *Diamond Sutra*, the Buddha repeatedly reminds us that, in the process of benefiting sentient beings, bodhisattvas must have no forms of self, others, sentient beings, or longevity. If they have the forms of self, others, sentient beings, and longevity, then they are not bodhisattvas because having a self creates a self-centeredness. Thus, the practice becomes a worldly virtue, which is form-attached and limited.

3. Equality and Inequality

The benevolence in Confucianism is grounded in filial piety, where there is a distinction in the love shown towards family and the general public. The universal love in Christianity is based on faith in God, with differences between

believers and non-believers, as well as between humans and animals. However, loving-kindness and compassion in Buddhism mean “unconditional loving-kindness and universal compassion of oneness,” which must be based on equality. Only when our mind is completely equal, without the slightest difference between close and distant, noble and humble, can we embrace everything and generate boundless love for all beings: like sunlight that shines equally on everything without discrimination; also like the earth that supports all things without exclusion.

4. Limited and Unlimited

Confucian and Christian love is limited to humans, excluding animals and unseen beings. Buddhist compassion, aiming to benefit all beings, is limitless. However, without the wisdom of emptiness, limitlessness is just a conceptual imagination, so one cannot break the boundaries between self and others. Confucianism and other religions, lacking the correct view of emptiness and the practice based on it, cannot genuinely perceive themselves and sentient

beings as one. Such love is inevitably limited, not limitless. Only through practicing and realizing the nature of emptiness can one truly understand that everything is a false appearance due to causes and conditions. This realization allows one to recognize that all past, present, and future Buddhas and all beings in the six realms are fundamentally no different. As the sutra says, “Minds, Buddhas, and sentient beings are fundamentally no different.” With this understanding, one can firmly believe that benefiting others is benefiting oneself, loving others is loving oneself, thus establishing boundless great love.

VII

CONCLUSION

The practice of the Four Immeasurables is a vital part of Buddhist cultivation. I encourage everyone to incorporate these four sentences into your daily practice routine, reminding yourself of daily aspirations and continually recalling them in your daily lives. Most importantly, these teachings should be embraced as heartfelt wishes, earnestly and sincerely. It requires contemplative practice to tune the mind to resonate with all beings, cultivating loving-kindness, compassion, rejoicing, and equanimity. Once your mind abides in these states consistently and steadily, spread this boundless aspiration outward. Therefore, this not only brings blessings to other beings, but

also serves as the best practice for ourselves, allowing us to be blessed by these positive mindsets in the process of blessing others.