

# The Four Immeasurables



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# A Root Source from the Buddha

*Karaniya Metta Sutra: The Hymn of Universal Love*

May all beings be happy at heart.  
Let no one deceive another  
Or despise anyone anywhere,  
Or through anger or irritation  
Wish for another to suffer.

As a mother would risk her life  
To protect her child, her only child,  
Even so should one cultivate a limitless heart  
With regard to all beings.  
With good will for the entire cosmos,  
Cultivate a limitless heart:  
Above, below, & all around, unobstructed,  
Without enmity or hate.<sup>1</sup>



# The Four Immeasurables are crucial to Yoga Lineages.

MASTER PATANJALI (approx. 200AD), *The Yoga Sutra*

तत्प्रतिषधे ऽथर्म एकतत्त्वाभ्यासः ॥ ३२ ॥  
*Tat pratisheda-artham eka tattva abhyasah*

I.32 And if you wish to stop these obstacles, there is one, and only one, crucial practice for doing so.

मत्रैीकरुणामुदितापे क्षे णां सखु दुःखपणु यापणु यविषयाणा  
भावनाताश्चित्तप्रसादनम ॥ ३३ ॥  
*Maitri karuna muditopekshanam sukha duhkha punya-apunya  
vishayanambhavanatash chitta prasadanam*

I.33 You must use kindness, compassion, joy, and equanimity. Learn to keep your feelings in balance, whether something feels good, or whether it hurts; whether something is enjoyable, or distasteful. This practice makes the mind bright and clear as pure water.<sup>2</sup>

all

मैत्र्यादिषु बलानि ॥ २३ ॥  
*Maitryadishu balani*

III.23 The powers are to be found in love and the rest.<sup>3</sup>

*Note: The list of The Four Immeasurables (fully articulated in Chapter I, verse 33) was so well-known, you could often just say love and the rest....*



# The Three Kinds of Suffering.

## THE BUDDHA

*Dukkata Sutra: Suffering*

... there are these three kinds of suffering. What three? Suffering caused by pain; suffering caused by the formations or conditioned existence [pervasive suffering]; suffering due to change. It is for the full comprehension, clear understanding, ending and abandonment of these three forms of suffering that the Noble Eightfold Path is to be cultivated...<sup>4</sup>

## PABONGKA RINPOCHE (1878-1941)

*Opening Your Eyes to What You Should Keep, and What You Should Give Up*

These are the three suffering: the suffering of outright pain, the suffering of pleasure that changes, and the suffering of simply being alive. They rip at me, they torture me, relentlessly, unceasingly.<sup>5</sup>

**The Four Immeasurables  
serve as antidotes to  
specific mental afflictions:  
excessive attachment,  
harmful intent,  
displeasure over the  
well-being of someone  
else, and malice.**

**MASTER VASUBHANDU**

(approx. 350AD)

*Abhidharmakosha,*

*The Treasure House of Higher Knowledge*

VIII.113-4

The number of Immeasurables is four.  
Since antidotes for malice and the rest.<sup>6</sup>



**GENDEN DRUP (1391-1475)**

*First Dalai Lama's Commentary to the Treasure House of Higher Knowledge*

The Immeasurables—states of mind that focus upon an object of immeasurable living beings, and which involve an immeasurable amount of merit—number four. These are immeasurable love, compassion, joy, and equanimity.

“Why,” one may ask, “do they number exactly four?” There’s a good reason: the number is fixed at four since they act as antidotes for specific mental afflictions. These are “malice and the rest”—which refers to harmful intent, displeasure over the well-being of someone else, and malice, along with excessive attachment.<sup>7</sup>

One may next ask what attitude the mind assumes with these four.

The attitude is one of thinking,

May all you living beings be happy;

May you be free of suffering.

May all of you find joy;

May every living being reach equanimity.<sup>8</sup>

# Putting the Four Immeasurables into Action (Method)

**LOSANG JAMPEL LHUNDRUP**

(1845-1919, Pabongka Rinpoche's root guru)

*A Necklace for the Fortunate*

If only all sentient beings would remain in the equanimity that avoids attachment for those held close and hatred for those held remote. I pray they do remain so. I vow personally to make sure they remain so. May the gurus and deities bless me with the ability to accomplish this.

If only all sentient beings would find happiness and the cause of happiness. I pray they do find them. I vow personally to make sure they find them. May the gurus and deities bless me with the ability to accomplish this.

If only all sentient beings would become free of suffering and the cause of suffering. I pray they do become free of them. I vow personally to make sure they become free of them. May the gurus and deities bless me with the ability to accomplish this.

If only all sentient beings would never be separated from the happiness of the higher states and the supreme happiness of liberation. I pray they never are separated. I vow personally to make sure they never are separated. May the gurus and deities bless me with the ability to accomplish this.<sup>9</sup>

# Meditate on Immeasurable Equanimity First

**PABONGKA RINPOCHE**

(1878-1941)

*A Key that Unlocks the Door to  
the Noble Path*

As for the order of the Four Immeasurables, it is important that you meditate first on the feeling of neutrality towards all beings; this then matches the feeling's position in the seven-part, cause-and-effect instruction for developing the wish to become a Buddha for every living being.<sup>10</sup>



# Understanding the Enlightened Mind

**PABONGKA RINPOCHE (1878-1941)**

*Liberation in the Palm of Our Hands*

The next step is to meditate on the Four Immeasurables. First reflect that in the practice just completed [a practice called taking the result as the path] you were only imagining that you established all sentient beings in the state of Buddhahood. The reason they have not actually achieved this state is that they possess attachment for those they hold dear and aversion for those they dislike. Therefore, you should resolve to establish them in the mental states >>

known as the “Immeasurables” and reflect, “If only all sentient beings would remain in the equanimity which avoids attachment for those held dear and hatred for those held remote and so forth.”

The wording of the recitation text expresses each of the Four Immeasurables in four distinct forms. The attitude reflected in the phrase “If only” represents an immeasurable aspiration. Similarly, the phrases “I pray that,” “I vow personally to make sure,” and “May the gurus and deities bless me with the ability to accomplish this,” represent an immeasurable prayer, extraordinary attitude, and supplication, respectively. This explanation is one that comes from oral tradition.

In the case of equanimity you reflect, as might a child of quarrelsome parents, “I resolve to attain Buddhahood in order to establish all sentient beings in the state of great equanimity where they will be free of attachment and hatred.” Similarly, for loving-kindness you reflect, “I resolve to attain Buddhahood in order to bring all sentient beings to every conceivable kind of happiness, from cooling breezes that give comfort in the hot hells to the supreme happiness of perfect enlightenment.” In the case of compassion you reflect, “I resolve to attain Buddhahood in order to free all sentient beings from every conceivable manner of suffering, from the torment of the hells to the most subtle form of knowledge obscuration.” In this way, you will increase the force of your enlightenment mind.<sup>11</sup>

# Generate a Greater Way Motivation from the Beginning

**PABONGKA RINPOCHE** (1878-1941), *Liberation in the Palm of Our Hands*

It is possible, moreover, to explain the entire path relating to the persons of three capacities in each of these meditations [Contemplations on the Four Immeasurables]. You might wonder why practices such as generating enlightenment mind come before you have even trained yourself in the practices for a person of lesser capacity. It should be understood that in the Lamrim teachings (Steps of the Path to Enlightenment) you do not train yourself in the actual paths for persons of lesser and moderate capacities. Rather, the attitudes of both these paths

are practiced as a foundation for generating the enlightenment mind of the Mahayana. Therefore, from the very beginning you must imbue your practice with this attitude.

For instance, a person who wishes to reach the top of a mountain pass has this goal in his mind from the time that he stands at the foot of the mountain. Another example is an artist who, when painting the figure of a deity, has in his mind an image of the completed work even as he draws the first lines.<sup>12</sup>



# The Final Benefit of Focusing on The Four Immeasurables

**GESHE LOBSANG THARCHIN (1921-2004)**  
*Principal Teachings of Buddhism*

The “Immeasurables:” These are immeasurable loving kindness, compassion, joy, and neutrality; they are so described in a classic verse, respectively, as follows:

May all living beings gain happiness  
and what causes happiness.

May all living beings escape suffering  
and what causes suffering.

May all living beings never be without  
the happiness free of every suffering.

May all living beings stay neutral,  
free of all like for their friends and  
dislike for their enemies. >>

The four are called “Immeasurable” because they are thoughts directed at an immeasurable number of beings and because one gains immeasurable merit from thinking them. There is another set of four attitudes with the same names, known collectively as the “four places of the Pure One.” Pabongka Rinpoche elsewhere explains that the loving-kindness of this set covers many, but not all, sentient beings, and so one who meditates upon it is born as being like the worldly god named Pure One, whose authority extends over many, but not all, places. By focusing on all beings, one achieves nirvana “without a place” (beyond both this suffering world and a lower nirvana) as the Great Pure One (another name for a full Buddha).<sup>13</sup>



# Scriptural Sources

<sup>1</sup> The Buddha, *Karaniya Metta Sutra: Good Will* (Sn 1.8), translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/snp/snp.1.08.than.html>

<sup>2</sup> Master Patanjali, *The Yoga Sutra*. Translated by Geshe Michael Roach. The Yoga Studies Institute, *The Yoga Sutra*, Course I, Reading 8

<sup>3</sup> Master Patanjali, *The Yoga Sutra*. Translated by Geshe Michael Roach. The Yoga Studies Institute, *The Yoga Sutra*, Course III, Reading Five

<sup>4</sup> The Buddha, *Dukkata Sutra: Suffering* (SN 45.165), translated from the Pali by Maurice O'Connell Walshe. Access to Insight (Legacy Edition), 30 November 2013, <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/sn/sn45/sn45.165.wlsh.html>

<sup>5</sup> Pabongka Rinpoche (1878-1941), *Opening Your Eyes to What You Should Keep, and What You Should Give Up*. See also *Preparing For Tantra, The Mountain Of Blessings*. Translated by Khen Rinpoche Geshe Lobsang Tharchin and Geshe Michael Roach. Classics of Middle Asia, 1995, p. 80

<sup>6</sup> Master Vasubhandu (approx. 350 AD), *Abhidharmakosha, The Treasure House of Higher Knowledge*, VIII.113-4. Translated by Geshe Lobsang Tharchin with Geshe Michael Roach

<sup>7</sup> First Dalai Lama's Commentary to *The Treasure House of Higher Knowledge (Abhidharmakosha)*. Translated by Geshe Lobsang Tharchin with Geshe Michael Roach, pp. 1065-1066

<sup>8</sup> First Dalai Lama's Commentary to *The Treasure House of Higher Knowledge (Abhidharmakosha)*. Translated by Geshe Lobsang Tharchin with Geshe Michael Roach, pp. 1067-1068

<sup>9</sup> Losang Jampel Hlundrup, *A Necklace for the Fortunate*. See Pabongka Rinpoche, *Liberation in Our Hands: Volume I*. Translated by Sermey Khensur Lobsang Tharchin and Artemis B. Engle. Mahayana Sutra and Tantra Press, 1990, Appendix C, p. 247

<sup>10</sup> Pabongka Rinpoche (1878-1941), *A Key that Unlocks the Door to the Noble Path*, a commentary to Je Tsongkapa's (1357-1419) *Three Principal Paths*. Translated by Geshe Lobsang Tharchin with Geshe Michael Roach. ), *The Principal Teachings of Buddhism*, Classics of Middle Asia, Mahayana Sutra and Tantra Press, p. 145

<sup>11</sup> Pabongka Rinpoche, *Liberation in the Palm of Our Hands*, Vol I. pp. 161-162

<sup>12</sup> Pabongka Rinpoche, *Liberation in the Palm of Our Hands*, Vol I. p. 162

<sup>13</sup> Geshe Lobsang Tharchin, *The Principal Teachings of Buddhism*, Note 183, pp. 191-192

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