CHAPTER-IV

The Blessings of mettā

Introduction

The present chapter will discuss the blessings of the Mettā which were found mentioned in the Pāḷi Tipiṭaka. Further it discusses about the usefulness of these blessings to each and everybody of the society irrespective of religion, caste, race, social status etc.

Mettā –Bhāvanā, the first of the Brahmavihāra is one of the most important concepts in Buddhist ethics having great social implication. If enjoy on a Buddha-disciple to be always solicitous for the well-being and happiness of all creatures in the universe known or unknown, born or yet to be born. Sabbe sattā bhavantu sukhitattā, should be the aspiration of the one practicing mettā, but only the cultivation of the wish for the good of all is not sufficient he should intently work for the well-being and happiness for all creatures with a heart over flowing with boundless love for all. The concept of mettā friendliness can help to bring about the permanent harmony in the society. A contended or friendly family can help to bring about social transformation in an entire block of house in a locality. If this experiment transcends the locality and spreads the entire township it can have catalytic effect on the society as a whole.

The Blessings of Mettā

The Blessings gained by Mettā practices were explained by the Buddha as follows Monks, universal love leading to liberation of mind when it is ardently practised, developed, unrelentingly resorted to, used as one’s
own vehicle, made the foundation of one’s life, fully established, well consolidated and perfected, then these eleven blessings may be expected. What are these eleven?\footnote{A(xi), Myanmar, vols (iii), p.542, PTS:5.341.}

One sleeps happily; one wakes happily; one does not suffer bad dreams; one is dear to human beings; one is dear to non-human beings; the gods protect one; no fire or poison or weapon harms one; one’s mind gets quickly concentrated; the expression of one’s face is serene; one dies unperturbed; and even if one fails to attain higher states, one will at least reach the state of the Brahma world.

Monks, when universal love leading to liberation of mind is ardently practised, developed, unrelentingly resorted to, used as one’s vehicle, made the foundation of one’s life, fully established, well consolidated and perfected, then these eleven blessings may be expected.

\textit{Mettā} cetovimutti\footnote{A(xi), Myanmar, vols (iii), p.542. PTS:5.341.} universal love leading to liberation of mind signifies the attainment of \textit{samādhi}, absorption based upon meditation on \textit{mettā}. Since \textit{mettā} liberates the mind from the bondage of hatred and anger, selfishness, greed and delusion, it constitutes a state of liberation. Every time one practises \textit{mettā}, for however short a period, one enjoys a measure of freedom of mind. Measureless freedom of mind, however, is to be expected only when \textit{mettā} is fully developed into \textit{samādhi}.

The various applications of \textit{mettā}, as indicated by the terms “practised, developed,” etc., signify a well structured force brought about
not only by specific hours of meditation, but also by converting our one’s deeds, words and thoughts into acts of mettā.

By “practised” (Āsevita) is meant the ardent practice of mettā, not as a mere intellectual exercise, but by committing oneself wholeheartedly to it and making it the life’s guiding philosophy, something which conditions one’s attitudes, outlook and conduct.

By “developed” (Bhāvia) it is implied that it is the processes of cultivating inner culture and mental integration effected by the practice of meditation on universal love. Since meditation brings about unification of mind by integrating the various faculties, it is called development of mind. The Buddha taught that the entire mental world is developed by the practice of meditation on universal love; leading towards mind’s liberation and the transformation of the personality.

“Unrelentingly resorted to” (Bahulīkata) emphasises repeated practice of mettā all through one’s waking hours, indeed, word and thought, and maintaining the tempo of mettā-awareness throughout. Repeated action means generation of power. All the five spiritual powers, namely, faith, vigour, mindfulness, concentration and wisdom, are exercised and cultivated by the repeated practice of mettā.

“Used as one’s vehicle” (Yānikata) signifies a “total commitment” to the ideal of mettā as the only valid method for the solution of interpersonal problems and as an instrument for spiritual growth. When mettā is the only “mode of communication,” the only vehicle, life automatically is a “divine abiding” as mentioned in the Mettā Sutta.
“Made the foundation of one’s life” (Vatthukata) is making mettā the basis of one’s existence in all respects. It becomes the chief resort, the haven, the refuge of one’s life, making one’s refuge in the Dhamma as a reality.

“Fully established” (Anuṭṭhita) refers to a life that is firmly rooted in mettā, has anchorage in mettā under all circumstances. When mettā is effortlessly practised, not even by error does one violate the laws of universal love.

“Well consolidated” (Paricita) means one is so habituated to mettā that one remains effortlessly immersed in it, both in meditation as well as in one’s day-to-day conduct.

“Perfected” (Susamāraddha) indicates a mode of completeness through total adherence and development, leading to that fully integrated state in which one enjoys perfect well-being and spiritual felicity, indicated by the passage detailing the eleven blessings of mettā.

The benefits of mettā are indeed great and comprehensive. For a follower of the Buddha this is one supreme instrument that can be wielded with advantage everywhere.

Love is a priceless gift to bestow on the other. Through love, we can provide the warmth to satisfy the burning needs of an individual to be loved, for those who love and are loved in return are happier than those devoid of love. The more love we give the more will we receive in return. This is in accordance with the eternal law of cause and effect.
In the Buddha’s teachings, the spirit of love is more important than good work. ‘All good works whatever are not worth an iota of love which sets free the heart. Love which sets free the heart comprises good work. It shines, gives light and radiance.’

Love is one of the greatest instrument of nature. The powerful force of love is the bond and cement of society- the spirit and life of the universe. Love is the most precious thing in the world. No matter how unhappy you are now or have been in the past, you can still find happiness in the future. The key to happiness is love, and you are in possession of that precious key, right now and always. And remember, that love begins with you. Start the process of extending your love and compassion to all beings. The inevitable reaction will surely be that you will receive plenty of love in return. Telling another person ‘I love you’ can be a risky business sometimes, but the rewards can be substantial.

The eleven benefits of Mettā

In the Mettānissāma Sutta, a discourse from Aṅguttaranikāya the Buddha teaches the following eleven benefits that an individual can gain from the liberation of the mind with love (mettā cetovimutti) when it is sustained, practiced frequently, made into a habit, made strong, undertaking, increased, and made into a commitment.

i. He sleeps easily (sukham supati)
ii. He wakes up freshly and comfortably (sukham paṭibujjhati)
iii. He had no bad dreams (na pāpakam supinaṁ passati)
iv. He is dear to human beings (manussānaṁ piyo hoti)

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v. He is dear to non-human beings (amanussānaṁ piyo hoti)

vi. Deva (spirits) guard him (devatā rakkhanti)

vii. Fire, poison and weapons do not harm him (nāssaaggi vā visaṁ vā satthaṁ vā kamati)

viii. His mind is easily concentrated (tuvañaṁ cittam samādhiyati)

ix. The expression of his face is serene (mukhavañño vippasādati)

x. He dies peacefully (asammhūo kālaṁ karoti)

xi. If he has not attained arahatship he will be reborn in the Brahma world after death. (uttari appañivijjhanto brahama lokūpago hoti)

In the Visuddhimagga174 and Patisambhidāmagga, the Commentator gave a detailed description of the eleven benefits of mettā. As regarding the first one who sleeps easily, he gives explanation as Niddaṁ okkantopi samāpattim samāpanno viya hoti.175 One who cultivates mettābhāvanā, loving-kindness of meditation falls asleep as if entering upon a meditative attainment. Furthermore, he sleeps comfortably; he does not toss and turn, nor does he snore as other people may do in their sleep. Mettābhāvanā is a good cure for insomnia.

Second one is given in the same text as Appaṭibujjhītva vikasamānāmiva padumam sukhaṁ nibbikāram paṭibujjhati176: instead of groaning or yawning or turning over as others do, he wakes up freshly and comfortably like a lotus flower opening without frowns as to his physical appearance.

Third one is described as *Supināṁ passanto pi bhaddaka meva supināṁ passati, cetiyāṁ vandanto viya pūjaṁ karonto viya dhammaṁ suñanto viya ca hoti* 177: he does not dream of himself like others. Instead, if he dreams he dreams pleasant or auspicious dreams, such as paying respect to the stupa, making offering of flowers etc, and listening to dhamma.

Fourth benefit is that he will have no enemies. People like him because of his habit of cultivation of *mettā*. In the same texts it is explained as *Ure āmuttamuttahāro viya sīse pilandamālā viya ca manussānaṁ piyo hoti manāpo* 178: i.e. as if one who wraps pearl necklace in the neck or use of flower in the head, because of his habit of radiance of *mettā*, people like him, people love him.

Regarding the fifth one, there is a story found in the Visuddhimagga. 179 Here a monk namely *Visākha Mettā* practitioner was preparing to depart from a forest monastery in the Island of *Tambadīpa*, a guardian spirit of the tree (*rukkhatṭhadevatā*) appears to him, crying. When the monk asked the reason for weeping, the spirit replied to the monk that it was because of his departure. And also the spirit asked the monk to live there. The spirit then stated the following reasons for such a request. O monk as long as you live here, non-human beings treat each other kindly.

Regarding the sixth benefit of Mettā practice, in the Visuddhimagga mentioned as *Puttamiva mātāpitaro devatā rakkhanti* 180 i.e. as if mother protects her son, spirits also guard. We can consider one of the mottos,

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180 Ibid.Vols (i), p.306, line.17.PP.p.338
Dhammo have rakhati dhammacārī.\textsuperscript{181} The dhamma upholds those who uphold the dhamma.

The Cittavagga of the Dhammapada Commentary \textsuperscript{182} there was a story of a group of monks who were meditating. They were disturbed by the spirits of the forest. The spirits took fearsome forms and made dreadful noises to frighten the monks. The monks fled to the Buddha from the forest monastery. The Buddha advised them to go back and radiate mettā to them. The monks did so and the spirits not only stopped haunting them but also protected them.

In this connection regarding the seventh benefit, Visuddhimagga \textsuperscript{183} has quoted four instances, such as the case of a female devotee by name Uttarā\textsuperscript{184} who had escaped scalds from burning oil. Another woman by name Sīrimā who was jealous of Uttarā had poured hot oil over her but she was not scalded in any way. To her, it was as if the hot oil was cold water. In another case he is a monk named Cūlasīva who was famous scholar of Saṁyuttanikāya. He was one who was immune from poison. It does not mention in detail in the Commentary as regards that story. The other incident was about a seven years old novice, named Saṁkicca,\textsuperscript{185} who could not be injured by a knife. Some robbers want to kill him to offer him in a sacrifice to their gods. But when they struck him with sharp swords, the weapons just bounced off. Besides, there is also the story of a cow that was giving milk to her infant calf when a hunter threw a spear at her.

\textsuperscript{181} Thera, p.272, Verses.No.393.
\textsuperscript{182} Dha, p.199.
\textsuperscript{183} Vism, vols (i), p.307, PP.p.339
\textsuperscript{184} Story of Uttarā Upāsikā, DhA, Vols ( ii), p.196.
\textsuperscript{185} Story of Saṁkicca Sāmanera, DhA, Vols (i), p.425.
When a hunter threw a spear at or towards the cow, the spear bounced off simply because of the strength of her pure and intense love for her young calf. Furthermore, in the story of Suvaṇṇasāma\(^{186}\) it is shown the power of mettā. Suvaṇṇasāma was a young boy. He was looking after his two blind parents. One day he went into the forest to collect food for his parents. When he reaches the river to fetch some water, the deer helped him by carrying the pots on their back.

One day, when he went with deer to fetch water, a King Pīliyakkha, who was hunting in the forest, was astonished to see him amidst the deer. He was not sure whether Suvaṇṇasāma was a deva or human being. He decided to shoot at Suvaṇṇasāma first with poisoned arrow and then he asked who are you. When the arrow hit Suvaṇṇasāma, he falls down.

The deer fled in fright. He was not angry with the man who shot at him. He had no time to think about the man who shot at him. Only his parents first came to his mind. Because of his power of mettā and truth (Saccā), his feeling of pain was much better and he was still alive. That was the practice of the concentration on Mettā.

Regarding the eighth, the mind of one who abides in mettā is quickly concentrated. There is no sluggishness. This is because meditation helps him to concentrate on one’s own mind and purify the mind by filling it with good (Kusalacitta), making it one pointed and wholesome.

With respect to the ninth advantage, when one meditates loving-kindness of meditation become serene and peaceful, so complexion of his face also becomes clear. One who practices loving-kindness of meditation is

\(^{186}\) JA, Vols (vi), p.84.
in no need of cosmetics. The beauty of mettā is natural while that of cosmetics is artificial. If one has an unpleasant character or when dosa, anger flares up even if one is prettily made-up, one can still be ugly. The Buddha states in the Dhammapada as Candanaṁ tagaram vā pi, uppalam atha vassikī, Etasaṁ gandhajātānam sīlagandho anuttaro:

Of all perfumes, such as sandalwood, and jasmine etc, the perfume of virtue (sīla) is by far the best. And it is also said by the Buddha as Satañca gandho pavāhati: the fragrance of virtue, unlike ordinary perfumes, can blow against the wind.

Regarding the tenth advantage, Visuddhimagga and Paṭisambhidāmagga did not mention in detail, but they state briefly as Mettāvihārino sammoharanaṁ nāma natthi. Asammulo na niddamokkamanto viya kālaṁ karoti.

One who cultivates loving-kindness of meditation passes away peacefully and calmly as if falling asleep. But we can consider that we must live well, we must die well. To live well means to live nobly, to uphold a high standard of integrity and morality. To die well means to die calmly, mindfully, peacefully without fear or attachment, without tears or sorrow. One who lives with a heart full of love for all living beings is one who lives well and he will pass away peacefully as if falling asleep.

The last advantage of mettā was defined in the Visuddhimagga and Paṭisambhidhāmagga that one, who practices loving-kindness of meditation, can achieve Brahma world. Mettāsamāpattito uttariṁ arahattaṁ

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The path which can be leading to Brahma world is explained to a Brahman named Dhanañjāni by Sāriputta Thera in the Dhanañjāni Sutta of the Majjhimanikāya, and it is given below:

One who develops loving-kindness of meditation with the mind which filled with a feeling of mettā, which spread the mind covering all directions, with the lofty mind, with boundless mind and with the mind free from hatred and with the mind free from unpleasantness can reach to the Brahma world. The cultivation of loving-kindness of meditation is a true way to companionship with Brahamā.

Mettāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamaṇena averena abyābajjena pharitvā viharati. Ayaṁ kho Dhanañjāni brhamānaṁ sahabyatāya maggo.¹⁸⁹

The Benefits of Mettā in Saṁyutta Nikāya

The Buddha has enumerated several benefits which can be gained by a cultivator of loving-kindness (Mettā). He cites the following example to teach about them in Kula Sutta, Nidāna vagga, Saṁyutta Nikāya.¹⁹⁰

Just like even a small-time thief, depending on the illumination provided by a light placed in a pot, can rob a house with few men and many

¹⁸⁹ M, Vols (ii), p.405, line.2. MLS, Vols (ii), p.378
¹⁹⁰ S, p.454. SA, p.206
women, so also, demons of a low order like those infesting the earth can possess the person of one who does not cultivate mettā.\textsuperscript{191}

Again, just like a small-time thief, depending on the illumination provided by a light placed in a pot, cannot rob a house with many men and few women, so also, demons of a low order like those infesting the earth cannot possess the person of one who cultivates mettā.

A certain man donates hundred pots filled with choice food for feasting thrice daily morning, midday and evening. Another man disseminates Mettā for a moment of drawing a squirt of milk from a cow thrice daily morning, midday and evening.

However, the merit gained by the latter, disseminating Mettā for a moment of drawing a squirt of milk from a cow thrice daily, is greater than that of the former who donates a hundred pots filled with choice food thrice daily, altogether amounting to 300 pots of choice food. Thus the Buddha taught in Okkhā Sutta, Nidāna Vagga Saṁyutta Nikāya.\textsuperscript{192}

\textbf{The Benefits of Mettā in Aṅguttara Nikāya}

\textit{Brahmin Velāma}\textsuperscript{193} the Buddha to be, of Baranasi donated 84,000 gold cups filled with sliver and 84,000 sliver cups filled with gold, and an immeasurable amount of food for feasting, This generosity was performed over seven years and seven months, But the merit he gained, or that of a devotee who takes refuge in the Three Gems, or who keeps the Five Precepts, is smaller than that of a person who disseminates mettā for a

\textsuperscript{191} During the time of the Buddha, thief by the illumination provided by a light placed in a pot is known as small-time thief. Nowadays, he is called opium addict thief.
\textsuperscript{192} S. p.455. SA, p.206
\textsuperscript{193} A (ix), Myanmar vols (iii), p.197.
moment of smelling a breath of fragrance. The level of such loving-kindness (mīttā) refers to that of absorption (jhāna).

But most beneficial is the contemplation, lasting for a moment of a finger snap, of aniccasaññā (impermanence).

One who is given to mīttā and cultivating it is likely to become endowed with compassion (karuṇā) sympathetic joy (muditā) and equanimity (upekkhā), all these four constituting the four sublime states of mind. Then he will find it easy to fulfill the perfections like generosity, morality, etc.

O friends! As Metta Sutta is conducive to sound sleep, lack of nightmares during sleep, let us recite it in unison bearing mīttā without distracting from its meaning, words or grammar. Our recitation of Metta Sutta is aimed at doing away with hatred and bringing peace to all of us throughout the world lings.

One who wisely wishes for insight with his mind dwelling in nibbāna should take up the training in higher morality, superior mentality and superior wisdom. The cause of ruin for the three kinds of training, i.e. breakdown in morality etc., should be done away with. One who wants to realize peaceful Nibbāna after attaining Path knowledge, aspires to attain Fruition also.

Inferring that Nibbāna means peaceful bliss, a clever person has to take up the noble training. Such a practitioner is desirous of realizing nibbāna by the elimination of defilements (kilesa), i.e. the end of suffering (dukkha) as taught by the Buddha, or through his sharp intelligence, or through his inferential knowledge (anumāna ṅāṇa). Apart from the secular
anumāna ṇāṇa the pāḷi word santāṁ is taken as indicative of nibbāna in this second version.

One who is clever in gaining advantages through his inferential knowledge should take up the noble training.

How does he practise? And why? If he answers, “I practise having inferred the state of nibbāna by word of mouth”, it is still complete in meaning. Hence this translation.

One who is clever in acquiring gains for himself, knowing the heartwarming perfection of morality and the practice required to abandon defilements, is an “atthakusala”.

One who does not know or understand such practices and benefits, or does not practise despite his knowledge of benefits, is called an “atthakusala”.

Cultivating loving Kindness

The idea of love can mean different things to various people. Love, according to the Buddha, does not mean attachment to a person or an object through which one desires to satisfy his or her selfish craving. Love, should be an endless self-immolating compassion, freely flowing towards all living beings. In the Metta Sutta, the Buddha said:

*Let not one deceive another
Nor despise any person whatsoever in any place.
In anger or ill-will,
Let him not wish any harm to another.*
Just as a mother would protect her only child,
At the risk of her own life,
Even so let him cultivate a boundless heart
Towards all beings.

Love is the soil in which the loved ones grow. It enriches the other person without limiting or restricting him. Love elevates humanity. Love costs nothing. Love should not be selective. Some may think of love as something to receive, but it is basically a giving process.

In cultivating love and kindness, we should start with those at home. The love between father and mother greatly influences the atmosphere at home and generates love, care and sharing among other family members. A husband and wife should treat each other with respect, courtesy and fidelity.

Parents should fulfil five duties for their children: avoid doing evil and shall set an example of good deeds, give them an education, be supportive and understanding in their children’s love affairs or arrange for their marriage, and let them inherit the family wealth at a proper time. A child, on the other hand, should honor his parents and do for them all he is supposed to do. He should serve them, help them at their labour, cherish the family lineage, protect the family property, do some service to others in their name and hold memorial services for them after they have passed away. If husbands and wives, as well as parents and children follow this advice taught by the Buddha, there will always be happiness and peace in the home. Life is made up of little things in which smiles and kindness and small obligations, given habitually, what win and preserve the heart.
One mark of a loving person is that he has a compassionate heart. We should cultivate the habit of helping those in trouble and who are less fortunate than ourselves. One should not merely be sympathetic to another emotionally, but should seek to translate that feeling into positive actions. Extending love and kindness does not mean showering gift, but the showering of gentleness and generosity of spirit. Kindness is a virtue that the blind can see and the deaf can hear. So long as there is one single person whom you can console by words, whom you can enliven and cheer by your presence, which you can relieve by your help, however insignificant or unimportant it might be, you are a precious possession to the human race and you should never be disheartened or depressed. ‘Almost anything good you do will seem insignificant,’ says Gandhi, ‘but it is very important that you do it.’

Search for someone less fortunate or less healthy than yourself. Extend any possible help or assistance you can within your means and ability. Make sympathy, empathy and loving kindness keep peace with your capacity for self development. You can be cheated or let down by another and there is none in this world who has not faced such crafty individuals. There is no shame or humiliation if you are cheated, but it is a shame if you do so to others. Never harbour thoughts of revenge against those who have wronged you.

There may be times when those you love do not seem to care, and you are apt to feel heavy at heart. But there is no just cause for dejection. What does it matter if others are not grateful to you or do not care for you, as long as you believe that you are full of compassion and love for others.
'There is brightness all around,
When there’s love at home,
There is joy in every sound,
When there’s love at home,
Time will softly, sweetly glide,
When there’s love at home.'

Gratitude is a rare virtue today. For our own happiness, we should not expect to be appreciated for every act we do. If we expect that, we are bound to face disappointments and frustrations. If honours or recognition come our way, so be it: if not, never mind.  

**Prayers in the Buddhist Tradition**

**Buddhism and Prayers**

The teachings of the Historical Buddha can be linked to a golden thread, running through Buddhist history and through the whole range of genuine Buddhist teachings.

Buddhism is essentially teachings on practices that bring liberation through insight into our own nature. Significantly, Buddhism is also the whole range of the practices that support this knowing, as well as the result of such insight-acting in the world to relatively and ultimately benefit others.

The necessary supporting practices come from insight into what we need, and these can include such things as ethics (*sīla*), meditation (*dhyana*), loving kindness (*mettā*), gratitude (*kataññūta*), humility (*nivāta*), patience (*khantī*), generosity (*cāga*), sobriety (*dhiṭi*), and so on.

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194 K. Sri Dhammananda, How to live without Fear & Worry, p.197
The word Buddhism comes from the Sanskrit root ‘Budh’ which means ‘awake’. The Tibetan word for Buddha is ‘San-gye’ which means ‘completely purified, and fully developed’. What is purified, or removed, is wrong view, and what is fully brought out and developed is all of our excellent qualities, especially those of love, compassion, wisdom and power.

It is helpful to know, or to develop for oneself an idea of what characterizes Buddhism. In this way, we will know where the various teachings of the Buddha were appropriate and suit with one another. We will have this sense of reference, like looking at a map and knowing where we are at any moment. And we will have a sense of the direction that Buddhist teachings would have us go in as well.

Traditionally, what is called ‘merit’ is positive energy, creating happiness. This is produced by right actions of body, speech and mind. Some examples of right action would include: speaking gently, having patience, forgiveness, gratitude, humility, and devotion; generosity, calm, encouraging others, and having cultivating loving kindness and compassion. These produce positive energy, positive conditions. We all need a lot of this.

While merit is not the essential point in Buddhism, it is necessary as a supporting condition, without which the full actualization of the path is not possible. The same could be said of devotional practices such as chanting, reflections that generate faith, calm concentration meditation, ethics and love— that while these are not the main points, depending on the individual, they have this use, they can be necessary to get a full result. In one sense, Wisdom is dependent on nothing. In another important way however, Wisdom arising in a person’s mind is dependent on a number of causes.
When we look at the history of religions in different cultures, it seems that prayer is an universal activity. People everywhere made prayer to express their grief, yearning, aspiration, and for the transmission of the energy of compassion.

In all religions and cultures, prayer gives true voice to our deep regrets and to our aspirations…. and depending on the inner state of a person, prayer can be a form of spiritual activity, springing from that deep part of our self, or inspired by what is most true in us, to act in this world.

The cosmology of different religions’ comes into play here, of course, but the impulse, the motivation to receive benefit, to reach for truth or to express our real life is everywhere the same. If there is a work-able world view, then prayer can function for a person.

Last year I feel that prayer is the expression of our fundamental nature in response to the world. We pray because we have to. This helps us to realize who we are.

One definition I came across recently called prayer ‘a heart wish’. To me, this is saying that, whether or not we use words, our prayer is an action of some type. It is the direction of our life. If we think about things, then something in us moves. We respond. Contemplation leads naturally to prayer.

Of course, there are- always and everywhere - relatively enlightened or unenlightened levels of prayer. The ‘relatively unenlightened’ would be praying selfishly, whereas the (step by step) relatively enlightened prayer has more understanding of who we are and what we need.
The simple wish, ‘May you be happy’ can mean many things in the mind of people, and I think if we are sensitive we can have some feeling for what people are talking about when they wish us well.

I imagine a person passing on the sandy road in a beach town - he lives there, and is deeply tanned. He has a mixed drink in one hand, a pina colada with plenty of ice, let’s say, and a fat mystery novel in the other. If this person were to wish my happiness, I think it would be his idea of what that means like, ‘May you get a good tan today and not get sun burnt, may you get comfortably numb from delicious fruity drinks on the beach, may your mystery novel have some good twists to it, may you sleep blissfully in the sun, wake up and find your way home before nightfall, then do the same thing again tomorrow’.

When we observe another wish, we will have something in our mind that this means. For a person who has studied and practiced meditation, or prayer, and has found some wonderful things, this, naturally, is what we have in mind when we have a wish for another. May you have happiness - this is perhaps the root of a Buddhist prayer, and learned it is what is meant by happiness as known when meditation is studied and practiced.

May you have happiness
May you be healthy
May you be peaceful

In addition to such things as happiness and harmony in our relationships, or for stability and success in our careers, in Buddhism we find many prayers also to accomplish what the Buddha and Saints intend for us. It is their wish, expressed in their teachings and great encouragement, for
us to cut the root of confusion in our lives and put an end to suffering, so that we can act with wisdom and compassion in this world.

Specifically, Buddhist prayer can be identified in this way. It always has this function. It helps a person to develop his or her mind, his or her good heart. Or, it is an expression of a positive motivation regarding the needs of this world. Prayer is used to purify and uplift the mind. It moves towards enlightenment and outwards from the realization of compassion.

There is another way of identifying that prayer which can be considered as the Buddhist, prayer wherein we make use of the language of a Tradition and are able to draw the power of that Tradition or transmit something of its energy.

It is perhaps here that Buddhist prayers have their widest application. Over the course of a person’s life, all manner of guidance or assistance will be sought, all manner of appeal made. And since the Buddha and Bodhisattva intend only good for us, if we are connected, somehow we will get what we need. It may not come in the form we would wish, or as fast as we want, but certainly there is benefit, there is comfort, healing and support.

If we study other world religions we will certainly find some similarities in various types of prayers offered in this world. There is an universal aspect to many of these prayers. A Tradition will always have these two aspects to it – one is the all important ultimate dimension, beyond tradition, that empowers all traditions.
Prayers in the Theravāda Tradition

The Buddhist people pray for the well-being of others in many ways. The people in the Theravāda pray by themselves first as follows:

May I be happy. May I be free from stress and pain. May I be free from animosity. May I be free from oppression. May I be free from trouble. May I look after myself with ease.

The Sublime Attitudes

There are four sublime attitudes the four Brahmavihāra remain in the cultivation of four feeling namely Mettā (loving-kindness), Karuṇā (compassion), Muditā (sympathetic joy), and Upekkhā (equanimity).

These four are the supreme states of the consciousness. Brahma means supreme, the great. Since the result of these feelings is to be born in Brahma loka i.e. the world of celestials and to enjoy the delighted things, therefore, these are the Brahmavihāra. These are supreme sources of the purification of mind. The person, who practices the four divine states of mind, wishes the welfare of the all beings.

Mettā (loving-kindness)

The practice of loving-kindness is the cultivation of these four wishes: May all living beings be free from danger and enmity (sabbo sattā averā hontu). May they be free from mental suffering (abyāpajjā hontu). May they be free from physical suffering (anīghā hontu). May they joyfully take care of themselves (sukhīattānam pariharntu).
When you cultivate loving-kindness, you can do it for all living beings or for any specific person. It can be developed in any posture, be it while sitting, standing, walking, or lying down. It can also be cultivated while doing work or general activities. For example, you can cultivate loving-kindness while taking your meal by mentally reciting, “May all living beings be free from danger and enmity. May they be free from mental suffering. May they be free from physical suffering. May they joyfully take care of themselves.”

**Karuṇā (compassion)**

The practice of *karuṇā* (compassion) is the cultivation of the wish: May they be free from suffering and misery (*dukkhā muccantu*).

When we see living beings afflicted with suffering or feeling miserable, we feel compassion for them and we want them to be free from that suffering as quickly as possible. Repeatedly cultivating this wish amounts to developing *karuṇā* (compassion).

**Muditā (sympathetic joy)**

The practice of *muditā* (sympathetic joy) is the cultivation of the wish: May they not be separated from their acquired wealth (*yathāladdha-sampattito māvigacchantu*).

When we see living beings who are wealthy and affluent, we wish them not to be deprived of their wealth and luxury and that it may not be reduced. We wish that they will continue to be wealthy and prosperous. We develop the wish that their wealth may increase and multiply. Repeatedly cultivating this wish amounts to developing *muditā* (sympathetic joy).
This is indeed an exquisite mental state. Without spending any money, you acquire a lot of merit. It contributes to success and prosperity- not only in this world, but also throughout the *samsāra* (round of repeated births and deaths).\(^{195}\) Those who frequently develop sympathetic joy are completely free from dangers and obstacles and loved by both humans and *devas* (deities). But most people cannot rejoice in other’s wealth and prosperity. Instead, they get jealous. As a result, they experience mental and physical suffering, are bound to encounter many dangers, after death fall into the lower realms, or else will be reborn as a poor and destitute human being.

**Upekkhā (equanimity)**

The practice of *upekkhā* (equanimity) is the contemplation: All living beings are the heirs of their deeds (*kamma*) (*sabbe sattā kammassakā*). All living beings fare according to their deeds (*kamma*); their deeds follow them and causes production of their respective effects. Repeatedly contemplating this fact amounts to develop equanimity.

When you meet a living being, you should associate with and help this being with a heart full of loving-kindness (*mettā*). Support and assist this living being with compassion (*karuṇā*). With a heart full of sympathetic joy (*muditā*) help somebody along with be an ally. If one’s association with others cannot be rooted in these three qualities (*mettā, karuṇā, muditā*, and *upekkhā*), then it becomes necessary to develop equanimity by reflecting on the fact that all living beings are the heirs of their *kamma*. This leads to a greater degree of calmness, stillness, and stability in the mind.

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\(^{195}\) Samsāra, Lit. ‘perpetual wandering’, is a name by which is designated the sea of life ever restlessly heaving up and down, the symbol of this continuous process of ever again and again being born, growing old, suffering and dying. The coexistent arising of mind and matter, aggregates, is Samsāra.
The qualities of loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy are good qualities indeed. But as there is still sympathy and concern, the mind does not get completely calm, still, and stable. In cultivating loving-kindness, exertion is necessary in order to wish for the welfare of living beings.

In the case of compassion, whenever we see those who are suffering, we feel compassion, wishing them to be free from their pain; this also requires some exertion. Likewise for sympathetic joy, one needs to make effort if one is to cultivate the wish that the good fortune of others may continue or increase. That is why a complete stillness or stability of the mind cannot be attained.

Some people might take care of sick persons with loving-kindness and compassion, but when the outcome is not what they imagined it to be, they get upset and angry. And if the care-givers verbally or physically act out that anger, the two parties might not want to see or speak to each other anymore. It sometimes happens that people end up in custody or prison because their speech or action is based on heedlessness. These are indeed unpleasant experiences, but they can only arise when the practice of loving-kindness is not stabilized with equanimity.

When you help and assist other beings within the framework of loving-kindness and compassion, you may reach your limit and become attached to the idea that mettā and karuṇā should solve the problem. Then the practice of equanimity needs to be cultivated. You should reflect about kamma and that all beings fare according to their kamma. With the
development of equanimity, the mind settles down, becoming still and stable.

Of course, you should aid other living beings as much as you can. You should help them lead a happy and peaceful life. Only when you are absolutely unable to help and assist anymore should you try to develop equanimity. Not being able to help and assist anymore refers to circumstances where either you or the other person has crossed over a certain threshold so that mettā and karuṇā are impossible to cultivate. You may also need to use equanimity as a last resort, if you become too tired from trying to cultivate loving-kindness when the mind is not completely free of defilements.

You are only able to adequately develop loving-kindness and compassion if they are not clouded by greed or hatred. For example, you have to be careful that compassion is not accompanied by anger. Some people cultivate loving-kindness that is accompanied by lust. At first their loving-kindness is pure and genuine. Later, their mettā becomes infected by craving and lust, and so people end up experiencing many ill effects. Be careful that this does not happen. All these ill effects happen because equanimity has not been developed: you should develop equanimity.

Brahmavihara is a noble way of life. If purifies the environment and generates an atmosphere of peace and tranquility which is very much essential for a smooth and peaceful life.

With the aid of Mettā a human being learns his lesson to think for the welfare of his surrounding people. Through this noble attitude, selfishness and meanness are eradicated.
Normally problems start when we spoil the interest of someone in order to gain personal benefit. This is the root of almost all conflict in a family, in a society, and even in the international field. In order to attain national integrity and providing international peaceful co-existence, we have got to develop fraternity and loving kindness only.

**The blessings gained by the cultivation of mettā paritta**

It is certain that *paritta* recital produces mental well-being in those who listen to them with intelligence, and have confidence in the truth of the Buddha's words. Such mental well being can help those who are ill to recover, and can also help not only to induce the mental attitude that brings happiness but also to overcome its opposite. Originally, in India, those who listened to *paritta* sayings of the Buddha understood what was recited and the effect on them was correspondingly great.

The Buddha himself had *paritta* recited to him, and he also requested others to recite *paritta* for his own disciples when they were ill. This practice is still in vogue in Buddhist lands. The Buddha and the *arahants* (the Consummate Ones) can concentrate on the *paritta suttas* without the aid of another. However, when they are ill, it is easier for them to listen to what others recite, and thus focus their minds on the *dhamma* that the *suttas* contain, rather than think of the *dhamma* by themselves. There are occasions, as in the case of illness, which weaken the mind (in the case of world lings), when hetero-suggestion has been found to be more effective than autosuggestion.
The blessings gained by the power of loving-kindness

The utterances of the compassionate Buddha are never void of loving-kindness. He walked the high-ways and by-ways of India enfolding all within the aura of his loving-kindness and compassion, instructing, enlightening, and gladdening the many by his teaching. The reciters of the paritta are therefore expected to do so with a heart of loving-kindness and compassion wishing the listeners and others welfare and happiness and protection from all harm.

Loving-kindness (mettā) is an active force. Every act of one who truly loves is done with the pure mind to help, to cheer and to make the paths of others easier, smoother and more adapted to the conquest of sorrow, the winning of the Highest Bliss.

C. A. F. Rhys Davids commenting on amity (mettā) writes: “The profession of amity, according to Buddhist doctrine, was no more a matter of pretty speech. It was to accompany and express a psychic suffusion of the hostile man or beast or spirit with benign, fraternal emotion with metta. For strong was the conviction, from Sutta and Vinaya, to Buddhaghosa’s Visuddhi Magga,196 that “thoughts are things,” that psychical action, emotional or intellectual, is capable of working like a force among forces. Europe may yet come round further to this Indian attitude.”197

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196 Vism,p.313
197 Dialogues of the Buddha, part (iii), p.185.
The need and the relevance of Practicing Loving-kindness

One should spend some time every day to practice loving-kindness. We recommend that you repeat the following outline every time you practice loving-kindness meditation. If you know a better structure other than this you may follow it. Read each paragraph once and then close your eyes and reflect upon the meaning of that paragraph for ten seconds. Open your eyes and read the next paragraph. You might take more than an hour to read these passages and feel loving-kindness in your entire mind and body. Do it every day. This alone is a wonderful meditation to overcome resentment that has been troubling you for a long time.

1. May I be well, happy and peaceful. May no harm come to me. May no difficulties come to me. May no problems come to me. May I always meet with success. May I also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life.

2. May my parents be well, happy and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May no difficulties come to them. May no problems come to them. May they always meet with success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life.

3. May my teachers be well, happy and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May no difficulties come to them. May no problems come to them. May they always meet with success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life.
4. May my relatives be well, happy and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May no difficulties come to them. May no problems come to them. May they always meet with success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life.

5. May my friends be well, happy and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May no difficulties come to them. May no problems come to them. May they always meet with success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life.

6. May all indifferent persons be well, happy and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May no difficulties come to them. May no problems come to them. May they always meet with success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life.

7. May all unfriendly persons be well, happy and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May no difficulties come to them. May no problems come to them. May they always meet with success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life.

8. May all living beings be well, happy and peaceful. May no harm come to them. May no difficulties come to them. May no problems come to them. May they always meet with success. May they also have patience, courage, understanding, and determination to meet and overcome inevitable difficulties, problems, and failures in life.
Prayers in the Mahāyāna Tradition

Introduction

After prayers in the Theravāda tradition, I will discuss in detail in the light of prayers in the Mahāyāna tradition citing from Mahāyāna Buddhist scriptures.

Prayer in Zen

‘In our service after reciting a sutra, we offer a prayer to dedicate the merit. According to Dogen Zenji we are not seeking for help from outside because we are firmly protected from inside. That is our spirit. We are protected from inside, always, incessantly, so we do not expect any help from outside. Actually it is so, but when we recite the sutra, we say a prayer the usual way.

In one of our dedications of merit we say, ‘May the two wheels (the Dharma Wheel and the material wheel) of the temple go smoothly, and may calamities which the country and the temple may face, calamities like war, epidemic, famine, fire, water, and wind, be averted.’ Although we say this, actually the spirit is different. We do not observe our way, or recite our sutra to ask for help.

That is not our spirit. When we recite the sutra, we create the feeling of non-duality, perfect calmness, and strong conviction in practice. If that kind of feeling is always with us, we will be supported. Dogen Says, ‘If we do not practice our way with everyone, with all sentient beings, with everything in the world, on the cosmic stage that is not the Buddhist Way.’
The spirit of *zazen* practice should always be with us, especially when we recite sutras or observe ceremonies.

It is not a dualistic or selfish spirit, but is calm and deep, with firm conviction. When we practice in that way, we are always one with the whole Buddha World, where there is no karmic activity, and our everyday life will be protected by the kind of power which pervades everywhere.’

**Prayer in Japanese Buddhism**

All over Japan, you will notice grey stone statues wearing red bibs and caps. You come across them tucked between urban shops and telephone poles, beside busy highways, at the crossing of rural dirt paths in the rice paddies and in old wooden shrines in the cool bamboo forests. These figures are images of the much beloved *Jizo* Bodhisattva. A bodhisattva, an “enlightenment being,” is one who has decided to turn back from complete union with the divine mystery (in Buddhist terms, delayed entering nirvana) to work in the world of human suffering. The name *Jizo* means “earth treasury” or “earth womb.” *Jizo* is the guardian of all things that emerge from the earth, and the protector of those on physical or spiritual journeys. *Jizo* became the special guardian of women and children, whose lives were considered perilous journeys in old Japan because of frequent epidemics, the risks of childbirth and infant mortality as high as 50 percent.

Bodhisattvas are revered not as unapproachable idols, but as embodiments of energies that we ourselves can cultivate. *Jizo* has both masculine and feminine characteristics, including benevolence, optimism, determination, fearlessness and full involvement in the world. *Jizo* is said to walk through hell realms unafraid, rescuing beings from misery, and is
called the patron saint of lost causes, much like the apocryphal saint Christopher. Dressed as a simple monk, *Jizo* carries the six-ringd pilgrim staff in the right hand and the bright jewel of truth in the left.

A particular form of *Jizo*, the *Mizuko Jizo*, emerged after World War II to relieve suffering caused by the death of an infant or young child. *Mizuko*, meaning “water baby,” is a term for unborn fetuses, which float in a watery world. If children die early, they are taken back into the realm of the gods where they resided before birth, guided by *Jizo* Bodhisattva, who shelters little ones who might be confused by the events of a brief life and sudden death. The devastation of war plunged many people into poverty and early death from starvation, tuberculosis and radiation exposure. The government, which before the war had favoured large families, reversed its policy and passed a law encouraging birth control through abortion -- the only effective form of contraception until the pill was made legal in January 2000. Thus many Japanese women have experienced the death of several children through abortion, miscarriage or disease.

In the West, we think of each human life as solid and discrete, beginning at conception and ending at death. The Buddhist view is of waves appearing and disappearing endlessly on a great ocean of life energy. When cause and effect combine in a certain way, a wave arises, appearing to us as an individual whom we can see and touch and love. When death occurs and it disappears from our view, we mourn our loss.

If we could see clearly that it has only rejoined that ground of being and nonbeing from which it emerged, that it has indeed returned home, we would find great comfort. The *Mizuko Jizo* ceremony was developed in
Japan to help families who had lost infants. The *Mizuko Jizo* is portrayed as a child-monk, or as an adult monk holding a baby, with other children taking shelter in the folds of his long robes. A family could dedicate a statue of Jizo to the memory of their child and place it in a *Jizo* garden or cemetery associated with a temple.

Often these cemeteries, with hundreds or even thousands of *Jizo* statues, are located next to the playground of the temple kindergarten, a visible affirmation of the harmony of lively activity and quiet repose, of birth and death. Families bring toys, food and handmade bibs or bonnets to place on the *Jizo* statues. Passing strangers, including school children, will make offerings to the statues, praying for their own safe journey in life and a peaceful transition for any children who have died.

The *Mizuko* ceremony is now celebrated at a number of American Zen temples. During an hour of silence, participants make remembrance tokens, bibs, hats and simple toys for the children they wish to recall and honour. The group then gathers in the *Jizo* garden to chant and dedicate their offerings to the children, placing them on or around a *Jizo* statue.

The garments and toys are left in the garden to weather slowly and return to the five elements, as we and all life forms do. At our temple, families have come to honour children who died through miscarriage, abortion, illness or abuse, as well as twins who died during infertility treatments and adult children who died by suicide. The simple but deeply moving ceremony offers a palpable easing of the weight of suffering that surrounds the death of a child. This is the particular gift offered by the holy being *Jizo* Bodhisattva.
Prayer in Pure Land Buddhism

Pure Land Buddhism centers on faith in Amitabha Buddha, the Buddha of Infinite Light Infinite Life. Amitabha has promised rebirth in his Pure Land to all those who single-mindedly invoke his name. Amitabha’s Pure Land, called “The Land of Ultimate Bliss,” is a pure realm where the ills of our world do not exist. Once reborn in the Pure Land, we are freed from the defilements and fixations that block the path to enlightenment here in our mundane world, and we can continue our spiritual progress under the direct tutelage of Amitabha and the assembly of saints and sages. Pure Land believers show their faith in Amitabha’s promise by taking a vow to be reborn in Amitabha's Pure Land. They practice their faith by reciting the name of Amitabha Buddha, (‘Namo Amitofu!’ or, ‘Namo Amitabha Buddha’ ‘Homage to Amitabha Buddha’) by contemplating his qualities, and by visualizing his image.

Praising a Buddha’s virtues and keeping a Buddha in mind at all times has been practiced since the earliest days of Buddhism. Indeed, the act of taking refuge in the Buddha means to put one's trust in the Buddha as an honored teacher. In the Pratyutpanna Sutra, an early Buddhist text, Shakyamuni Buddha talks about the practice of Pratyutpanna Samadhi, in which one can directly perceive the Buddhas of the Ten Directions face to face.

The object of Pure Land Buddhism is rebirth in the Realm of Bliss. This may be seen as literal rebirth into the Buddha-realm called Sukhavati and/or as experiencing the direct realization of the realm of the Purified Mind, in which a person becomes one with the limitless Compassion and
Wisdom which are the prime characteristics of Buddha Amitabha. Pure Land Buddhism rests on the following tripod: Faith; Aspiration or the Vow for Rebirth; and Practice - single-minded effort aimed at Buddha Remembrance Samadhi, “Buddhanusmrti” in Sanskrit, “Nien-Fo” in Chinese. Buddhanusmrti means “To stay mindful of the Buddha,” and has been a central practice of Pure Land Buddhism since its beginnings. Nien-Fo also refers to the recitation of the Buddha’s name, among other practices.

The Pure Land tripod of Faith, Aspiration and Practice was modified in 12th century Japan. The 18th vow of Dharmakara was interpreted to mean that one only needed to recite Amitabha’s name to attain rebirth (see next section). The teacher Shinran further narrowed this interpretation by saying that the Nembutsu (Japanese for Nien-Fo) is recited until the Mind of Faith manifests itself, and that faith in Amida Buddha (the Japanese term for Amitabha) is sufficient for rebirth. The Japanese Pure Land schools are still characterized as “faith-only” schools, while classical Pure Land Buddhism still relies on the tripod of Faith, Aspiration and Practice as expedients.

Whenever Pure Land Buddhism is discussed these two important concepts usually arise. Self-Power refers to the methods we practice on our own, the power of our own mind. Other-Power refers to the power of the vows of Amitabha Buddha which facilitate rebirth in the Realm of Bliss, as well as the manifestation of these vows through the transference of Amitabha’s own merit to us.

In classical Pure Land Buddhism, Self-Power and Other-Power work together. Through recitation, meditation and visualization practices, vowing to be reborn and manifesting the mind of faith, we attain Buddha
Remembrance *Samādhi*, uniting one’s Self-Power with the Other-Power of Buddha *Amitabha*, the essence of Universal Compassion and Wisdom. In Japanese Pure Land Buddhism however, there is an exclusive reliance on Other-Power. Reciting the Buddha’s name with faith is all that is necessary, and Other-Power practices are seen as essentially useless. A person is totally reliant on the Primal Vow of *Amida Buddha*; essentially, the saying of the Buddha’s name arises solely from the power of *Amida’s vows*.

This causes Japanese Pure Land Buddhism to be more of a salvation-based form, unlike the classical Pure Land Buddhism that originally developed in China. Recitation is one of the central practices of Pure Land Buddhism. It involves the concentrated and heartfelt repetitive recitation of “*Namo Amitabha Buddha*” (Homage to the Buddha of Boundless Compassion and Wisdom). In Chinese this phrase is “*Namo Omito-Fo,*” in Japanese, “*Namu Amida Butsu.*”

**Prayers in the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition**

**Prayers to different Deities, Buddha and Bodhisattvas**

Who *really* is *Chenrezig*, deity with a white body and four, sometimes one thousand arms? Who is this deity for whom the Tibetans nourish a special devotion and whose meditation is now also practiced by many Westerners?

First, we need to understand that *Chenrezig* is both an appearance, the divine manifestation as well as an essence, the inner reality, with one not excluding or contradicting the other. The appearance of *Chenrezig* is the symbol of his essence made manifest. Through this appearance we can
approach the essence of Chenrezig. The appearance does not exhaust the essence anymore than the essence negates the appearance. To pretend that Chenrezig only has an existence outside ourselves would be a mistake. But it would also be a mistake to see him only as an abstraction. Grasping the link between the two aspects of the deity (appearance and essence) is necessary in order to understand both his nature and meditation.

Chenrezig is the mode of being of the mind that is the union of emptiness and compassion. He is the awakened nature of each being's own mind, the love and compassion primordially present in the dharmakaya [pure transcending awareness]. Chenrezig is within us because love and compassion are not qualities added to the mind. These qualities are part of the awakened state even if, for the moment, this state exists only as a potential for us. Saying that Chenrezig is the ultimate nature of the mind that does not negate his form manifestation. The essence expresses itself through an appearance. Chenrezig exists on the level of definitive meaning and also on the level of literal meaning where he appears in the form of the deity by which he is known.

He is the visible expression taken by all the Buddhas to help us activate the love and compassion that are present only as a potential one in us and to reveal the ultimate Chenrezig to ourselves. When we do the meditation of Chenrezig, if we see love and compassion grow in our mind, it is a sign that our practice is fruitful. Every person whose heart is moved by love and compassion, who deeply and sincerely acts for the benefit of others without concern for fame, profit, social position, or recognition expresses the activity of Chenrezig. Love and compassion are the true signs revealing the presence of Chenrezig. The mind of Chenrezig can work in the form of a
human, an animal, a plant, or an inert thing. His mind is always the expression of compassion.

The Six-Realm Prayer

By the power of accumulating negative Karma from beginning less time, sentient beings, through the force of anger, are born as hell beings and experience the suffering of heat and cold. May they all be born in your presence, Perfect Diety.

By the power of accumulating negative Karma from the beginning less time, sentient beings, through the force of greed, are born in the realm of pretas and experience the suffering of hunger and thirst. May they all be born in your perfect realm, the Potala.

By the power of accumulating negative Karma from beginningless time, sentient beings, through the force of stupidity, are born as animals and experience the suffering of dullness and stupidity. May they all be born in your presence, Protector.

By the power of accumulating negative Karma from beginningless time, sentient beings, through the force of desire, are born in the human realm and experience the suffering of excessive activity and constant frustration. May they all be born in the Pure Land of Dewachen.

(This prayer, the vajra words of prayer to the Sublime Chenrezig, was composed by the Mahasiddha, Tang tong Gyalpo, who remembered them from a previous incarnation when he had been the monk Pema Karpo, who addressed this prayer one-pointedly to the Sublime Chenrezig while doing the Nyung Ne practice from his twentieth to his eightieth year.) By the
power of accumulating negative Karma from beginning less time, sentient beings, through the force of jealousy, are born in the realm of the demi-gods and experience the suffering of fighting and quarreling. May they all be born in your realm, the *Potala*.

By the power of accumulating negative Karma from beginning less time, sentient beings, through the force of pride, are born in the realm of the gods and experience the suffering of change and falling. May they all be born in your realm, the *Potala*.

**Prayers for the Time of Death and Transition**

**Practice One**

First make sure you are comfortable, and assume the meditative posture. If you are doing this practice as you are coming close to death, just sit as comfortably as you are able, or practice lying down. Then bring your mind home, release, and relax completely.

1. In the sky in front of you, invoke the embodiment of whatever truth you believe in, in the form of radiant light. Choose whichever divine being or saint you feel close to. If you are a Buddhist, invoke a Buddha with whom you feel an intimate connection. If you are a practicing Christian, feel with all your heart the vivid, immediate presence of God, the Holy Spirit, Jesus, or the Virgin Mary. If you don't feel linked with any particular spiritual figure, simply imagine a form of pure golden light in the sky before you. The important point is that you consider the being you are visualizing or whose presence you feel *is* the embodiment of the truth, wisdom, and compassion of all the *Buddhas*, saints, masters, and enlightened beings.
Don't worry if you cannot visualize them very clearly, just fill your heart with their presence and trust that they are there.

2. Then focus your mind, heart, and soul on the presence you have invoked, and pray: ‘Through your blessing, grace, and guidance, through the power of the light that streams from you: May all my negative karma, destructive emotions, obscurations, and blockages be purified and removed, May I know myself forgiven for all the harm I may have thought and done, May I accomplish this profound practice of phowa, and die a good and peaceful death, And through the triumph of my death, may I be able to benefit all other beings, living or dead.

3. Now imagine that the presence of light you have invoked is so moved by your sincere and heartfelt prayer that he or she responds with a loving smile and sends out love and compassion in a stream of rays of light from his or her heart. As these touch and penetrate you, they cleanse and purify all your negative karma, destructive emotions, and obscurations, which are the causes of suffering. You see and feel that you are totally immersed in light.

4. You are now completely purified and completely healed by the light streaming from the presence. Consider that your very body, itself created by karma, now dissolves completely into light.

5. The body of light you now are soars up into the sky and merges, inseparably, with the blissful presence of light.

6. Remain in that state of oneness with the presence for as long as possible.
Practice Two

1. To do this practice even more simply, begin as before by resting quietly, and then invoke the presence of the embodiment of truth.

2. Imagine your consciousness as a sphere of light at your heart, which flashes out from you like a shooting star, and flies into the heart of the presence in front of you.

3. It dissolves and merges with the presence. Through this practice you are investing your mind in the wisdom mind of the Buddha or enlightened being, which is the same as surrendering your soul into the nature of God. Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche says this is like casting a pebble into a lake; think of it plummeting down into the water, deeper and deeper. Imagine that through the blessing your mind is transformed into the wisdom mind of this enlightened presence.

Practice Three

The most essential way to do the practice is this: Simply merge your mind with the wisdom mind of the pure presence. Consider: “My mind and the mind of the Buddha are one.” Choose whichever one of these versions of the phowa feels more comfortable, or has most appeal for you at any particular moment. Sometimes the most powerful practices can be the most simple. But whichever one you choose, remember that it is essential to take the time now to become familiar with this practice. How else will you have the confidence to do it for yourself or others at the moment of death? My master Jamyang Khyentse wrote, “If you meditate and practice in this manner always, at the moment of death it will come easier.”
In fact you should be so familiar with the practice of phowa that it becomes a natural reflex, your second nature. If you have seen the film Gandhi, you will know that when he was shot, his immediate response was to call out: “Hey Ram...Hey Ram!” which is, in the Hindu tradition, the sacred name of God. Remember that we never know how we will die, or if we will be given the time to recall any kind of practice at all. What time will we have, for example, if we smash our car into a truck at 100 mph on the freeway? There won’t be a second then to think about how to do phowa, or to check the instructions in this book. Either we are familiar with the phowa or we are not. There is a simple way to gauge this: Just look at your reactions when you are in a critical situation or in a moment of crisis, such as an earthquake, or in a nightmare. Do you respond with the practice or don’t you? And if you do, how stable and confident is your practice?

I remember a student of mine in America who went out riding one day. The horse threw her; her foot got stuck in the stirrup, and she was dragged along the ground. Her mind went blank. She tried desperately to recall some practice, but nothing at all would come. She grew terrified. What was good about that terror was that it made her realize that her practice had to become her second nature. This was the lesson she had to learn; it is the lesson, in fact, we all have to learn. Practice phowa as intensively as you can, until you can be sure you will react with it to any unforeseen event. This will make certain that whenever death comes, you will be as ready as you can be.
Using the Essential Phowa Practice to Help the Dying

How can we use this practice to help someone who is dying? The principle and the sequence of the practice are exactly the same; the only difference is that you visualize the Buddha or spiritual figure above the head of the dying person. Imagine that the rays of light pour down onto the dying person, purifying his or her whole being, and then he or she dissolves into light and merges with the spiritual presence.

Do this practice throughout your loved one’s illness, and especially (and most important) when the person is breathing their last breath, or as soon as possible after breathing stops and before the body is touched or disturbed in any way. If the dying person knows you are going to do this practice for them, and knows what it is, it can be a great source of inspiration and comfort. Sit quietly with the dying person, and offer a candle or light in front of a picture or statue of Buddha or Christ or the Virgin Mary. Then do the practice for them. You can be doing the practice quietly, and the person need not even know about it; on the other hand, if he or she is open to it, as sometimes dying people are, share the practice and explain how to do it.