

Guided Meditations on Relative Bodhicitta

by

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The purpose of this edit is to support MSB students with their study of the *Guided Meditations on Relative Bodhicitta* CD and is by no means a substitute for listening to Rinpoche's guided meditations directly.

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Introduction

"My religion is very simple. My religion is kindness."
-- His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

Kindness and compassion are qualities that form the foundation of any genuine spiritual path. The following guided meditations give clear instructions on how to nurture these attributes based on the fundamental realization that all beings long to be happy and find freedom from suffering. Whether or not one is Buddhist, the essence of these meditations will serve only to enrich and deepen one's kind heart.

Guided Meditation #1

Shamatha means a calm abiding state without hindrances. The mind and the body are in this state, and the body is restful.

Most of you have probably experienced this state, so when you practice shamatha, you know you're not just searching through an ocean for some jewel that doesn't exist. That's important. The point of this guided meditation is to get to the shamatha state. Of course, this meditation has to be practiced over and over again, but from the beginning, based on your experience, you will know roughly how to get there.

Sit up straight. If you can sit in a full lotus like the Buddha under the bodhi tree, or in a half lotus, that is good. But what's more important is keeping your spine very erect. Sitting on a cushion can be helpful. You can join your hands on your lap, or, as in the Dzogchen lineage, put your palms on your knees. Keep your shoulders balanced and relaxed—not pulled back too far, and not too crunched in.

For the gaze, with eyes partly closed, look downward about two meters in front of you. You can breathe through your nostrils or your mouth. Your head is a little bit down, with your chin closer to your neck. Curl your tongue and rest it against the back of your upper teeth. Or, if that's too difficult, just leave your tongue as it is.

Breathe very naturally. Don't breathe too hard, or too shallowly; and don't hold your breath. If your breath is not natural, it's important to make it so.

That is the physical posture. Every detail of the posture is significant. They all help clear the energy in the body and calm the mind. So let's first get the posture right.

If there is tension anywhere in your body, instead of trying to fix it, bring your mind there. Relax and let go of the tension with your out-breath. All tensions in the body are created by wind moving through. Bring your mind there, bring your awareness there, and let go of the tension when you exhale. Soon, you'll realize the tension is gone, unless it's a big tension. But even a big tension can be resolved, if you work this way, over and over.

Once you are comfortable in your body and feel that you are settling, start to count your breaths. Count up to 21, counting each out-breath and in-breath together as one. You can count with your fingers on each knee: 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10. Do two rounds of ten, and for the final number use your pinkie again.

Now don't move. Just be there. Check your mind. Is it calmer? Is it in the calm abiding state? Check your body. Is it in the calm abiding posture? If it's still not fully there, you can go back to counting.

THE FOUR IMMEASURABLES

1: EQUANIMITY

Now close your eyes. And think, "I'm going to develop a mind of limitless equanimity."

Bring up someone you have resentment, anger, or judgments toward. With an exhale, let go of those feelings.

Then bring up another person toward whom you have neither aggression nor attachment. Make these two people equal in your mind, with no aggression or attachment to either.

Then bring up someone for whom you have a lot of love and care, but also a lot of attachment. With your out-breath, let go of the attachment. Let go of what tugs on your heart. Just keep your love and care. Love is a feeling of tender heart, tender connection. Care is similar, but with an emphasis on having that person's best interest in your mind.

Now create this scene in your mind. You have a father, a mother, and a sworn enemy who's about to kill you. According to this script, get the image as clear as possible in your mind. Reflect on the script, the storyline. You are the director and you are in the movie.

Reflect upon your relation to your father, to your mother, and to the sworn enemy who's about to kill you. Feel the emotions of love, care, and attachment to your parents. Feel the fear, anger, and aggression toward your sworn enemy who's threatening your life. Then dissolve the scene and immediately create a new one.

Now you are sitting on a porch holding your baby on your lap. A dog is coveting a fish that you are eating. You give it a piece of fish, but it wants more. You feel irritated. You kick the dog and say, "Shoo! Go away!" Your child is crying. You rock your child and try to breastfeed as you eat. The dog won't away, which makes you more and more angry. Your child keeps crying. You feel your heart going toward your child's need, as you breastfeed and rock to calm the child down. And you are trying to finish your lunch. Create this scene vividly, reflecting on the script.

Then, all of a sudden, you realize the fish you are eating is your previous life's father. The dog you are kicking is your previous life's mother. The child you are holding is your previous life's sworn enemy, who killed you.

Look at your relations to these beings and your feelings toward them. See how they have changed from one lifetime to another. See how there is no basis for any of the solid feelings you have toward enemies and loved ones, no basis for all your attachment and hatred.

Then come back to the people of your present life from the first contemplation: the person you resented, the neutral person, and your loved one. With your out-breath, let go of your attachments to your loved one even more. Keep just the tender love and care.

Then try to bring that tender love and care to the neutral person, reflecting on how he or she has been similarly dear to you in past lives.

Then think that the person toward whom you've had resentment, anger, and judgments, has also been, in many lifetimes, a dear loved one. So why not spread your love and care to this person?

If you are struggling, know that you are just struggling with your mind. Know that this mind, which is struggling to hold on, is the cause of all your suffering. So put more effort into working with your mind.

If you can extend your tender love and care to these three people equally, then spread it even more, extend it to all sentient beings. Spread it out limitlessly, like the limitless sky. Extend it to all beings that live. And then stay there, with the calm abiding feeling of equanimity, and with the tender love and care.

Now check your mind. Compare it to how it was before. Is it more clear, alert, and calm? If it is more clear, alert, and calm, where does that come from? It comes from your concentration, your practice of shamatha with the four immeasurables as the object. Concentration on the script and the scene unfolds your mind. Make a note of your mental state.

2: LOVING-KINDNESS

Then think, “Now I am going to practice loving-kindness.” Create another scene. This time you are living in a city like New York. You have your father, your mother, your wife or husband, your children, and your close brothers and sisters living nearby you. Get that scene clear in your mind. Work on the script to make the scene clear and vivid.

Then reflect in your mind what happens to your father, to your mother, to your husband or wife; what happens to your children, to your close brothers and sisters, to your relatives and friends. Reflect on how what happens to them concerns you. If something good happens to them, you are happy. If something bad happens to them, you are sad, pained. Reflect on how in your daily life you wish your children to be happy; you do everything you can to make them happy. Reflect on how you want your spouse to be happy; you want all the causes and conditions for your spouse to be happy. You go through your whole day trying to cater to your loved ones’ happiness. Reflect on how you want your parents to be happy; how you want your brothers and sisters to be happy; how you want your friends and relatives to be happy. You cater to their happiness, doing anything you can to bring about the right causes and conditions.

This is called loving-kindness. It is not attachment, because attachment is to yourself more than to them. Loving-kindness is just focused on them. Realize how one is clean, while the other is not.

Then reflect on your own desire for happiness. That desire is always there. The search for the causes and conditions to fulfill your happiness is always there. This desire for happiness and its causes and conditions is what you naturally extend to your loved ones.

Now think about how all the people in New York have that desire for happiness and are searching for its causes and conditions. At first, you can exclude your enemies and the people you dislike. Think about all the people running around on the street and riding the subways—the New Yorkers, the tourists, everyone. Embrace their wish to be happy as your wish. Embrace their search as your search.

Extend that loving-kindness, which you already know how to extend to your loved ones, to all the people in New York. For the time being, you can exclude your enemies from this wish, unless you don't need to.

Extend that loving-kindness to all the people in New York. Feel their wish and search for happiness as deeply as you feel your own. Feel how their wish is always there. Feel how much they are struggling in their search for happiness.

Create scenarios about how much they are struggling. Create realistic scenarios about their search for happiness. Whenever they move their body even one inch, it is in search of happiness. Think about how early they have to get up, how late they have to go to bed. Think about how hard they work, all through the day, for that happiness. Feel their struggle in search of happiness.

Wish them to have the happiness they are searching for. Imagine how happy they would be if they could fulfill their happiness. Imagine how happy you would be, as a witness to their struggle. Imagine how much relief you would feel if they found that happiness.

That is your natural loving-kindness. Embrace that, and wish all of them to be happy, and to have the causes and conditions of happiness that they are searching and struggling for.

Now extend that wish, those warm, kind feelings, to all the people in New York, and include those you dislike. Try to extend it to those who have caused you harm and pain. Reflect on how this is all due to karma, which always changes. Reflect on how your enemies were once no different from the people you think of as neutral, or from your close ones. They have also been close to you. So work specifically on being kind to them. Devote some time to working on your mind specifically to be kind to them. Reflect on the equanimity scenario.

Why do we feel resentment or anger? It is because we are hurt. Can hurt or pain come about without our own karmic involvement, either in this life or the last life? No. So take responsibility for your karma, and in exchange for your pain, extend loving-kindness. Work on the pain, work on the aggression, work on the judgment, let go of them when you exhale.

Make any thoughts going toward your enemies be kind. Think, "May they find their happiness, may they find their sources of happiness." Work to have kind thoughts, kind feelings, a kind heart toward all the people of New York, including the ones you didn't use to have these thoughts about.

Realize how all beings in samsara, in the universe, have this longing to be happy. They are all searching for happiness. So extend thoughts and feelings of loving-kindness toward all beings, limitless as space. Even though you cannot count all the beings, extend to all them.

Then let go of conceptual thought. Just be with your state of mind. See where your mind is now, how it is calmer, clearer. You have not only more peace in your mind, but a deeper, more tender heart. Know that that comes from your shamatha practice of the four immeasurables.

3: *COMPASSION*

Then think, "Now I'm going to meditate on compassion." Take pleasure in your mind. Enjoy what you are doing with your mind. And then create another scenario.

You are wherever you are, say Los Angeles. You have parents, a spouse, children, friends. Somehow your child has gone down the wrong path. Your child has gotten into drugs and gangs; has come under the influence of negative friends; has committed a crime against other people; is in prison. Your child is about to receive capital punishment.

Your heart goes out so much to your child. You feel so much compassion. Feel how you would want to save your child from such punishment. You would do anything to find a solution, so that your child would not be executed. How would you feel in the day, how would you feel at night? Whom would you plead? Whom would you solicit?

Though this scenario is not real for you, it does happen, and it is real for those it happens to. Putting yourself in their shoes makes you feel so compassionate, so concerned, so deeply wanting to save the child, willing to do anything.

Realize this is your mind, your compassionate mind. Recognize the compassionate potential within you. Compassionate mind can manifest in you. Then go back to the scenario.

Forget that you are here imagining. Be as if you are there. Feel all the emotions. The time is coming closer. You feel tremendous compassion as the time approaches. Day and night you think about how to save your child. What can you do? Are you angry? Who can you get angry with? Can you get angry with the law, the legislators, the child himself or herself? Can you get angry with the friends, with yourself? Who can you get angry with, and what is the point of getting angry?

So you can only feel tremendous compassion, which is your heart going to the pain about to be inflicted on your child. You imagine what your child must be going through, and you go through it as well. You feel vulnerable, but still look for any possible ways to save your child.

You are willing to sacrifice anything. If you could sell your house and save your child, you would be willing. If you could sell your car and save your child, willing. If you could use all your savings and save your child, willing. Look at your mind, willing to do so much out of compassion. Because of compassion, your mind is not tight, but very generous. If you have to smile, you will smile. If you have to plead, you will plead. If you have to do anything, you will do it, because of the urgency to save your child.

Now dissolve that scene. Create a scene of animals being lined up to be slaughtered right in front of you. They can't run, they can't escape. They have no control over their life. They can't say what they like or what they don't like. They are about to be slaughtered for food, for clothing, for their bones.

These animals don't want to suffer. They go through all their suffering just as your child does. So why not have the same compassion?

In this way, generate compassion toward all the animals who are about to be slaughtered. Today alone, how many chickens will get their heads chopped off? Think

about that and extend your compassion toward them. Wish them to be free. Wish them to be free from any karma they have created.

Think about all the pigs in the world that will be killed just today. Wish them to be free. Wish them to be free from such suffering, and from the causes of suffering that they have created. Think about all the cows and bulls that will be slaughtered just today. Extend your compassion to them. Wish them to be free from suffering and the karma of suffering. Think about all the lambs, sheep, and goats that will be slaughtered today. Extend your compassion to them and wish them to be free from suffering and the karma of suffering.

Think about all the seafood that, today alone, will be caught and consumed. In their wish to be free from suffering, these creatures are no different from your own child. Wish them to be free from suffering and the karma of suffering.

Be willing to at least practice compassion. At least plead to the buddhas and bodhisattvas to come to these animals' aid. Solicit anyone who has any power to come and help them. Dedicate all your merit on their behalf. Vow to dedicate all your merit to empty the suffering of samsara.

Then go to all the different realms at your leisure. In a similar way, reflect on the sufferings there, and extend your compassion to those beings: in the hell realm, the hungry ghost realm, the human realm, the asura realm, and the god realm. Beyond these, in the form realm and the formless realm, there are the suffering of change and the suffering of everything composite. So extend compassion to all beings and wish them to be free from all suffering. Wish that their karma to be caught in the circle of existence come to an end.

Wish that the suffering of samsara come to an end for each and every being. Plead to all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Solicit all virtuous beings to have compassion. Dedicate all the merit you have accumulated or will accumulate, in the past, present, and future, on the behalf of beings.

And then let go of the conceptual mind and just rest. Reflect upon your mind. See how it has become awake, agile. See how your heart, which was previously hard as a rock, has become soft, tender, moist with compassion.

This is your compassionate mind. This mind comes from the practice of shamatha on immeasurable compassion. Do not mistake this for suffering. This compassion ends all your suffering and all the suffering of beings. It is the seed of Buddhahood. A single teardrop falling from your eye purifies many lifetimes of negativity. So don't be afraid to cry on behalf of these beings.

This time you are crying for beings. In all our past lifetimes, every time we have cried, we have cried for ourselves. This time, the tears are the same, but their source is different. We have cried so much for ourselves, that if we gathered all our tears, they would be equal to an ocean. But there has been no benefit. A single teardrop from this kind of compassionate cry purifies so much of our wrongdoing. So be happy that you have the compassionate mind. And then rest again.

4: SYMPATHETIC JOY

Then think, "Now I am going to meditate on sympathetic joy." Create a scenario of immense suffering in samsara, the kind of suffering that we all experience cycling through the six realms.

Create a scenario of two people suffering in the environment of hell. They are pulling a big cart full of heavy objects by straps tied to their foreheads. The person on the right thinks, "Since we both have to be here and suffer pulling this big load on our foreheads, why don't I do it alone?" So he asks Yama, "May I pull this alone and give my friend a break?" And Yama says, "All beings suffer for their own karma. No one can take another's karma." Yama smacks that person's head, and he becomes free from hell.

That person in hell was the Buddha, our own Buddha. That was the first time the altruistic mind was born in his heart. From that point, he went through five hundred negative lifetimes and five hundred positive lifetimes as he practiced the six paramitas and perfected the Bodhisattvayana path. In the end, under the bodhi tree, he became enlightened; he became free from the suffering of samsara and the circle of existence. And then, like the sun, he illuminated the world, where there is so much ignorance, by his wisdom.

So rejoice in his freedom. Rejoice in his enlightenment and the causes of his enlightenment. Rejoice in all the benefit that he brings to the world.

Rejoice in the similar altruistic mind of all the bodhisattvas. Rejoice in their purification of the obscurations of samsaric mind, and in the freedom and qualities that they have gained. Rejoice in the shravaka arhats' and the pratyekabuddhas' abandonment of samsara. Rejoice in their cessation of samsara and its causes, and in the peace and bliss of their state of mind. Realize that somebody has done this. So why not rejoice as if it were your own accomplishment?

In samsara there is no ultimate happiness and freedom. You shouldn't think that there is when there isn't. Nonetheless, you can understand that what's not your cup of tea could be someone else's. You can serve a cup of tea the way someone else likes it, as long as there is no harm.

So rejoice in any kind of freedom or happiness that beings in samsara have. Rejoice in the happiness of Brahma, Indra, the gods and goddesses. Rejoice in the happiness of human beings who have wealth, leisure, food, housing, clothing, name, fame, power, family, children, good physique, talent, reputation, glory. Rejoice fully in anyone in samsara who has anything positive, that they enjoy as their cup of tea. Wish to serve by dedicating yourself to the welfare of all beings in samsara, and to bringing them out of samsara.

Rejoice without any hesitations, jealousy, or competitive mind. Samsara is so full of suffering, so if anyone gains any freedom or happiness, why not rejoice, even if it's within samsara and the realm of delusion? You don't want to be caught in that delusion, but you can still see what is a cup of tea for others and rejoice in serving that. You want to be a spiritual person who realizes delusion is delusion and obtains the state of natural nirvana. Yet one who prefers hot water to espresso can still serve espresso to those who enjoy it.

So with this attitude, rejoice in anyone in samsara who has any freedom or happiness by any means. Wish them to have more and more; never decreasing, always increasing. And then wish them to be ultimately free from the suffering of samsara.

Then let go of your contemplations. Come back to your state of mind and see whether it is happy, gay. Know that this happy state comes from your vicarious satisfaction in what others have. This is the true state of happy, gay mind. It is the

cleanest state of mind. You can always maintain this by practicing sympathetic joy, taking vicarious satisfaction in others' happiness and freedom.

Know that all these capacities are in your mind. Your mind has the capacity to concentrate. You can visualize the scene, which is called *nampa*. In your mind, you can run through a script, which is called *migpa*. *Nampa*, *migpa*, and concentration (*tsechik*) make the shamatha, or *shiné*, practice come out of your mind.

If you have the obstacle of having a wild mind and going off, you have to bring your mind back. If your obstacle is sleepiness and not being able to keep up, you have to keep up by doing it. But if you keep practicing, then most of the time, you will have no obstacles. If you concentrate on the scenes and the script, and work with the states of wildness (*göpa*) and dullness (*chingwa*), the capacity of *shiné* will naturally be there.

And now, having practiced shamatha based on the four immeasurables, we must give birth to aspiration bodhicitta. To do so, recite these lines three times:

*Just as all the buddhas of the past
Embraced the awakened attitude of mind,
And in the precepts of the bodhisattvas
Step by step abode and trained,*

*Just so, and for the benefit of beings,
I will also have this attitude of mind,
And in those precepts, step by step,
I will abide and train myself.*

Now close your eyes and make a genuine wish to be enlightened like the Buddha Shakayamuni, to save all beings from the suffering of samsara, and bring them to their own state of enlightenment.

That is the instruction on the shamatha practice.

Guided Meditation #2

Loving Kindness

Close your eyes, and imagine limitless space. In the same way that space is limitless, sentient beings are innumerable. The deepest desire and longing of all sentient beings is for happiness, and the causes of happiness.

Now meditate on your own desire and longing for happiness, and the causes and conditions of happiness. This desire is constant. Just as this is the case for you, clearly realize that it is the same for all sentient beings. You and all others have the same longing, the same deep desire and wish. There is no difference between you and other sentient beings.

How intense this longing is, and how constant. There are so many ways in which we try to achieve this happiness. Realize that the same happens to all beings: there is no difference between you and other sentient beings.

We are caught in our own self-absorption, and fail to realize what is universal, and what happens to all sentient beings.

So try to eliminate your self-absorption. Try to understand what is universal to the minds of all sentient beings. Make a connection between what is happening in you, and what is happening in everybody else. Recognize that all sentient beings are equal.

And then wish all beings, including yourself, to be happy, and to obtain the causes and the conditions of happiness, both on the relative and the ultimate level.

In terms of the relative level, think of all the ways in which sentient beings wish to have their needs fulfilled, from someone who is hungry and wants food, to anything that could

possibly be desired or wished for by sentient beings. Make the aspiration prayer for all these wishes to be fulfilled, and for all the causes and conditions of happiness to arise.

And then pray, over and over again, “May all sentient beings be happy and obtain the causes and conditions of happiness.”

Use yourself as an example, and come to know the wish of all beings, the universal wish. Aspire to fulfill the universal wish of all sentient beings. Why limit your prayer to yourself? Why limit it to only some people? Make your aspiration include all sentient beings.

Is there any point in wishing solely for your own happiness? Is there any point in wishing for only some people to be happy? Realize that this kind of segregation has never made any great difference, and is based upon our biased mind. This bias consists of our own attachments. Our attachments have not led us in a good direction in the past, and will not lead us in a good direction in the future.

Therefore, try to make your wish impartial. Cover the whole of space, and include all sentient beings.

And then think, “May all sentient beings be happy and obtain the causes and conditions of happiness.” Repeat this in your mind again and again. Go deeper and deeper into what you feel as you repeat this line of the prayer again and again.

And then look at how intense your mind is: recognize your mind’s deep longing, your constant effort, your twenty-four hours a day non-stop desire. Realize that it is the same for all beings, and make their longing and desire equally important to your own.

Think of how wonderful it would be if every sentient being could attain happiness. Then think of yourself, or a small number of beings attaining happiness, and what a limited achievement that would be. Why not pray for all beings to attain happiness and the causes of happiness?

And then repeat, “May all beings be happy, may all beings obtain the causes and conditions of happiness.”

When you are happy, how does it touch you? When you obtain the causes and conditions of happiness, how does that make you feel? How do you experience joy and happiness? It is exactly the same for all sentient beings, so try to visualize this.

And then repeat the prayer in your mind again, and again, and again.

From time to time, reflect on how hard your heart has become, and that it does not feel very much, or contain the genuine wish for the happiness of all sentient beings.

Develop a sense of sadness and renunciation and again wish for all sentient beings to be happy and to enjoy the causes and conditions of happiness. Repeat the prayer over, and over, and over again.

And then think how wonderful it would be if you could open your heart wider, make it more tender, and deepen your concern and care for all beings. Pray for the welfare of all: inspire yourself, wish, and then repeat the first line of the prayer to yourself again, and again, and again.

Realize that the attainment of every positive worldly and spiritual quality—the path to the higher realms of worldly nature, such as the human and god realms, the path of liberation from samsara, and the path of enlightenment—depends on our genuine wish to develop a good heart.

Realize the significance of cultivating a good heart, and wish all sentient beings to be happy and to obtain the causes and conditions of happiness.

Think of all the goodness that you have received, both in the past and the present. This

goodness is the result of the kindness of all sentient beings: someone other than yourself has given it to you.

If it were not for others, you would not have a body, and you would not have even been born: you would be wandering in the intermediate state like a lost soul, forever and ever. So this body, and the privilege of sight, hearing, and all the other senses and functions of the body, are received as a gift from others. Here, the significant others are your own parents.

So, by remembering the various ways in which your parents expressed their kindness to you, make the wish to express the same kindness to all sentient beings, and think, “May all beings be happy and obtain the causes and conditions of happiness.”

And then consider how you would not have survived if you had been abandoned at birth. Instead you were embraced, nurtured, fed, clothed, educated, and shown how to fit into society. Able as you are now, your qualities come from the kindness of others, and particularly from the significant kindness expressed by your parents.

On this basis, wish all beings to be happy and to attain the causes and conditions of happiness.

Realize that all beings have at some point been your parents. Just as your current parents have cared for you in this life, all other beings have cared for you in the past. Feel the deep kindness that you have received from your own parents, and remember that you have received the same kindness from all beings without exception. On this basis repeat, “May all beings be happy and obtain the causes and conditions of happiness.”

In all the various ways mentioned here, and in other ways, try to make this wish genuine. You know it is genuine when you feel that your longing for happiness, that is constantly on your mind, and the various ways in which you attempt to achieve that happiness, become a longing for the happiness of all sentient beings.

And be glad if this aspiration arises naturally. Until that point arrives, vow to train your mind, so that one day, you will reach this point. Pray to the buddhas and bodhisattvas, for the welfare of all beings and for your mind to reach this point.

Compassion

Now we come to compassion. Think about all the physical, mental and emotional suffering that you want to avoid, and the unfortunate circumstances, causes and conditions that threaten your well-being.

You want to be free from suffering and the causes and conditions of suffering. How reactive you are, and how immediately you move to reject, abandon or distance yourself from your suffering. In various ways, whether they are successful or not, you try to overcome and eliminate the causes and conditions of suffering.

Your involvement in eliminating your suffering is constant and intense: you don't appreciate suffering. Realize that sentient beings are all the same, and that what's happening inside you is happening inside everybody. This longing, and these reactions are universal.

Then think about why you are only concerned with yourself. It is far more appropriate to be concerned about the suffering of all sentient beings. Therefore wish for all beings to be free from suffering and the causes and conditions of suffering.

How unnatural it is to be concerned solely with your own suffering when everybody is in the same situation.

Wish that all beings might be free from suffering and the causes and conditions of suffering. Repeat this wish in your mind, over and over again: "May all beings be free from suffering and the causes and conditions of suffering."

Realize how intense suffering can be when it arises in your own mind, and that the pain,

suffering, anguish and depression of all other sentient beings is equally unbearable. Therefore, wish for all beings to be free from suffering and the causes and conditions of suffering.

Realize that you fail to appreciate suffering. It makes you fearful, depressed, desperate, and anguished, and you want to get rid of it as soon as possible. This is also the response of every other sentient being. So why not realize that all beings are equal in their wish to eliminate suffering and the causes of suffering?

Repeat this prayer again and again: "May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering."

Think about some small suffering you might experience, such as a headache, or a little burn on your body, and the fact that all other beings have the same cares, concerns and attachments.

And then think about beings undergoing immense physical suffering: beings who are butchered, roasted, chopped up whilst still alive, boiled, burnt, or killed by weapons.

Or think about beings who are ill. Just as there are degrees of illness, so are there degrees of pain. Bring all this suffering into your own experience. Forget that they are others, and experience this suffering as if it were your own. How intensely would you long or wish to be free of suffering? How desperate, depressed, anguished or fearful would you feel? What would be your motivation in these circumstances?

So this is what we do as we meditate. We wish for the suffering of all sentient beings to be eliminated. Wish for them all to be free from suffering and from the causes and conditions of suffering, from dormant karmic seeds and from the manifest karma that has come to fruition through causes and conditions. Wish for all sentient beings to be free, and repeat this wish again and again.

When you yourself suffer, suffering is not an intellectual thing: so realize that the suffering of beings is real. Therefore wish all beings to be free from all kinds of suffering, without any bias towards or against any particular type of suffering. Repeat your prayer over and over again.

Remember that all these beings have been your mother, and have protected you from suffering and the causes of suffering. From birth onwards, they saved you from your own vulnerability to suffering. They transcended all limitations in order to find ways of protecting you. They gave you their life's energy and resources, their physical, mental and emotional strength. Each and every one of them has been your parent at some point.

Now, when they are in so much pain and suffering, how dare you forget them? How could you? How ignoble. Wish for all of them to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering, more so than you would for yourself. If you cannot manage that, make your wish for all sentient beings equal to what you would wish for yourself.

Then, reflect on your own suffering, on how self-absorbed you are, twenty-four hours a day; how concerned, unhappy, depressed, and fearful you are. Think how, in a larger context, your suffering is insignificant, and yet you are completely trapped and absorbed in it. Think about how embarrassing that is.

And then consider how much you need to develop kindness and compassion, and the wish for all beings to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

Realize that the attainment of buddhahood depends on compassionate mind. It is the very essence of bodhichitta; it is the heart of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. The realization of the paths and bhumis, and all its benefits depend upon bodhichitta. Bodhichitta in its very essence is compassion. What a boon it would be to develop genuine compassion, the authentic wish for all beings to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. Repeat this wish over and over again.

Also consider how wonderful it would be to liberate yourself from self-absorption. The only way to do this is to develop compassion. The only way to eliminate the pain of being absorbed in your own concerns, and of turning a small amount of suffering into something huge inside your mind, is to develop the genuine compassion that transcends self-absorption.

And then wish all beings to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. Repeat the line again and again, “May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.”

As you recite this prayer, realize that all suffering is relative. Relative to the suffering of others, your suffering is so small, so try to forget your suffering. Your focus is on the suffering of all, so wish for all beings to be free from suffering and the causes and conditions of suffering.

Pray to the buddhas so that you may develop genuine compassion, and a longing and concern for the suffering of all beings, a longing for all of them to be free from the immediate experience of suffering and the conditional experience that is to come.

Pray to the bodhisattvas; vow to follow, embrace and cultivate their compassionate heart.

Joy

Next, think of someone who is happy and of whom you are jealous. How could you be jealous because somebody else is happy? Since your aim is to develop bodhichitta, loving kindness, compassion, and a good heart, how could you possibly be jealous?

Instead inspire yourself to be genuinely happy that both you and this other person have obtained the causes and conditions of happiness, whatever the cause of the other person’s joy.

Consider the other person’s joy as if it were your own achievement, and rejoice from deep

within your heart, without a hint of jealousy. Completely overcome your jealousy. See how jealousy ruins your attempts at cultivating a kind and compassionate heart, and a universal, supreme bodhichitta.

It is also extremely rare for someone to be really happy and to obtain the causes and conditions of happiness in samsara. So when somebody is happy, it is far more appropriate to rejoice than to be jealous and condemnatory. So therefore rejoice, from deep within your heart.

Remember that all these beings are your parents. Therefore, when they are happy you can rejoice. Think that all other sentient beings are exactly the same as you. When you are happy, you must enjoy and appreciate your happiness, as it is the result of your merit. In the same way, when somebody else is happy they must enjoy their happiness, because it is the result of their merit. So what is the point of being jealous? How unnatural, and how ignoble jealousy is.

Therefore, rejoice deeply, with a pure heart. Rejoice with a fresh mind, and embrace other people's happiness as if it were your own happiness. Since there is no difference between you and other sentient beings, rejoice in other people's achievements as if they were your own.

Then rejoice in the achievements of the supreme beings, the buddhas and bodhisattvas. Rejoice in the freedom that they have gained, and the noble qualities that they have achieved.

Whenever you hear any good news, rejoice; whenever you see or come to know about something that is good, rejoice, instead of becoming jealous or neutral.

You must rejoice, without a trace of indifference or jealousy, as if the achievement were your own, or that of a mother-like sentient being, whom you love. Then repeat the third line of the prayer again and again, "May all never be separated from the great happiness, devoid of

suffering.” Wish them to attain more and more happiness, and continue to recite the prayer.

Equanimity

Then, realize that you must develop loving kindness, compassion and sympathetic joy in equal measure towards all beings. Every sentient being has been your parent, and is in the same situation as you: every sentient being desires to be happy, wants to obtain the causes and conditions of happiness, and desires to be free from suffering and the causes and conditions of suffering.

There is not one way in which you are different from other sentient beings, and so you must develop equanimity towards all beings.

Passion, aggression and ignorance blind us. Remember that life changes. Throughout our past lives, into the present and on into the future, our relationships, feelings, love, care, and compassion, if they are based on ignorance, all change.

As passion and aggression are not reliable, you must develop equanimity in relation to loving kindness, compassion and sympathetic joy. These qualities are based on something real, something which is untainted by passion, aggression and ignorance. They are based on relying on all sentient beings as if they were your mother and father, as they all have been. Regard yourself and others as equal, and wish for all sentient beings to be happy and free from suffering.

Then, reflect on the fact that we are all deluded. In reality, samsara and suffering truly do not exist: they are only a delusion and a dream, and we are all bound to that delusion.

Therefore, on the basis of the four immeasurables, wish that all mother-like sentient beings might obtain freedom from the delusion of samsara and suffering; may they obtain the true nirvana of the innate, enlightened dharmakaya.

Bodhichitta of Aspiration

Wish, “May all sentient beings be the object of my motivation to attain enlightenment. May I single-handedly bring them to liberation, and work until the end of time to bring them all to enlightenment.”

In this way, generate aspiration bodhichitta. Aspiration bodhichitta is genuinely longing to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all mother-like sentient beings. It is praying that all sentient beings become free from suffering, and attain relative happiness, and the ultimate happiness, which is enlightenment.

So pray over and over again to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all mother-like sentient beings.

Whatever practice you do, do it on this basis. In the same way that the intention to travel to Bodhgaya is formed before you begin your journey, ensure that this intention is always guiding your practice. Make your practice the journey to enlightenment itself.

Think to yourself, “May I attain enlightenment for the benefit and welfare of all mother-like sentient beings. May I attain enlightenment so that I can bring all mother-like sentient beings to enlightenment. May I attain enlightenment so that I can free all mother-like sentient beings from the suffering they experience in the cycle of existence.” Make this wish very strongly, genuinely and deeply. Make it an integral part of the beginning, middle and end of your practice of the Dharma.

Equalizing Yourself with Others

Then, to continue with the practice of aspiration bodhichitta, first see all sentient beings as equal to yourself. Just as you desire happiness, all sentient beings desire happiness, and there is no difference whatsoever in any aspect between you and all other sentient beings. You are completely equal to all other sentient beings, in every respect.

You and all other sentient beings are equal in sharing a deep longing and desire for happiness. Just as you desire to be free from suffering, all other sentient beings wish to be free from every aspect of suffering too. There is no difference between yourself and other sentient beings. You are completely equal to all other sentient beings, and they are completely equal to you. There is no difference whatsoever.

It is really important for you to realize that there is no difference between you and all other sentient beings. It is also important to essentialize this realization in your life, as best as possible, and in every action. Genuinely believe this, and always keep this thought at the front of your mind. Abandon all logic and reasoning which support your own self-importance, and cause you to act selfishly.

Meditate on this, and you will see that you and all other sentient beings are truly equal. You feel this equality in your heart to the extent that you can express it in everyday life, and you can recognize when it is present in, or absent from your actions. Then you can move on to exchanging yourself and others.

Exchanging Yourself with Others

Exchanging yourself with others takes you a step further. Visualize a human being or an animal in tremendous pain. Animals have the same desire to be happy and to be free from suffering that you have. They also experience happiness, and suffer tremendous pain when it is inflicted on them by others.

Imagine a lobster, or a crab. Visualize this lobster not only as a sentient being, but as your own mother. And now this mother-like sentient being is being boiled: boiled alive, plunged into a pan of boiling water. Think that this being has been your mother in countless lives.

How does this make you feel? How your heart goes out towards this sentient being. How incredibly painful it must be for your mother to endure this suffering, which is inflicted on her without her having done any wrong, or caused any harm to anyone in her present life.

The lobster is boiled, alive. Feel this suffering and pain. See how horrible it is, how terrible it is, that such suffering could exist in samsara.

Tonglen

If this brings you a feeling of compassion, using this compassion as your base, take this suffering upon yourself in your mind, in the form of a dark cloud. And then send out your kind and compassionate thoughts and feelings, without any stinginess or hesitation, so that all your merit is shared with this mother-like sentient being. Believe that this being is liberated from its suffering immediately, and has obtained the causes and conditions of enlightenment.

First practice with one being as your object. And then think that, just as this being suffers, there are innumerable humans and non-human beings who suffer just as much. Whoever you can imagine is going through similar pain, and your heart opens to them, feels compassion, and goes out to them.

Try to take the suffering of these beings into yourself, in the form of a black cloud. And then extend your positive thoughts and emotions, your merit, to these beings, in the form of white light. As the light touches all sentient beings, they are freed from suffering and attain all the causes and conditions of enlightenment.

From time to time, reflect on how resistant you are to opening up, how afraid you are, and how concerned you are for yourself. Realize that this is just your ego protecting itself. In order to attain enlightenment, your ego must gradually dissolve. Therefore, realize that it is extremely important to practice exchanging yourself for others, and then do the practice, using your breath as the medium.

Think of the all the suffering in the lower realms, and practice tonglen. Think about the suffering of all sentient beings, and practice tonglen.

As your practice grows stronger and stronger, and you feel able to practice in a way that increases your compassion and opens your heart further, you develop the fearlessness and strength of bodhichitta in the core of your heart: you gradually dissolve your selfishness, self-protection and your grasping onto ego.

For now, this is just an intellectual practice. To be able to actually do this, you must progress a long way along the bhumis. So aspire to make this practice real, as in the story of the master who was teaching, and who fell off his throne when somebody hit a dog with a stone. People thought the master was really pretentious until he showed them the bruise on his body that was in the same place that the stone had hit the dog.

There are many stories like this one which show how tonglen is practiced in the bhumis. How wonderful it would be if you could do this at some point in the future. For now, train your mind, develop bodhichitta, and purify your obscurations.

Considering Others More Important than Yourself

If an action is genuinely carried out for the sake and welfare of all sentient beings, we should have no fear or concern for ourselves at all, not even about giving up our own life. In one of his previous lives Buddha Shakyamuni was a prince who gave all that was dear to him to others: he even gave his body to a starving tiger. We should admire and applaud such stories of courage, and aspire to give birth to the freedom, strength and fearlessness which arise out of bodhichitta, and from considering others to be more important than ourselves.

We should aspire to serving sentient beings genuinely, without the slightest regret, concern, fear or attachment. We serve them by placing more emphasis on their enlightenment, their liberation and their freedom from suffering, than on our own.

If it is to bring benefit to mother-like sentient beings, even if it involves going into the depths

of hell and endure the pain for eons, we should do so as a swan dives into a lake, without hesitation.

How wonderful it would be to realize our true nature, to bring bodhichitta and its qualities of magnificent power, strength, fearlessness and selflessness to fruition, and to cherish the abandonment of selfishness.

We should cherish, praise and applaud whoever possesses the quality of selflessness, and the genuine strength and fearlessness that arise from the selflessness that is deeply rooted in loving kindness and compassion.

And we ourselves should aspire to such selflessness.

These are all practices based on the advice for the generation of aspiration bodhichitta. This is too much for us right now, as we can only imagine doing these practices in our mind. But we can exercise our mind, and take the suffering of others on ourselves, offer them our own well-being, and give them our own happiness and merit and everything positive. All these practices can have a tremendously powerful effect on the mind. As we progress, the possibility of us manifesting as bodhisattvas also arises.

Engagement Bodhichitta

To practice engagement bodhichitta, begin by sitting quietly. First do a little bit of shamatha practice, just to calm your mind. Focus on the breath, relax your mind, and then meditate on the meaning of Prajnaparamita. Recite the words of the Prajnaparamita, such as the Heart Sutra. And as you recite, contemplate and meditate on the words.

If you don't recite the whole Heart Sutra, then at least recite verses that praise the Prajnaparamita:

“Beyond words, beyond thought, beyond description,
Prajnaparamita.

Unborn, unceasing, the very essence of space.
Yet it can be experienced as the wisdom of our own rigpa.
Homage to the mother of the Buddhas of past, present, and future!

Prajnaparamita, inexpressible by speech or thought.
Unborn, unceasing, with nature like the sky.
Which can only be experienced by discriminating awareness wisdom.
Mother of the Victorious Ones of the three times, I praise and prostrate!"

You could also recite

"Form is emptiness; emptiness also is form.
Emptiness is no other than form,
form is no other than emptiness."

You could continue with the section that begins

"In the same way, feeling, perception..."

Repeat the lines in your mind, and then meditate deeply on them. You can do the same with all the other parts of the Heart Sutra, or meditate on the whole sutra.

And then, read from Nagarjuna's text, *The Root Verses of the Middle Way* (Skt. *Mulamadhyamakakarika*, Tib. *uma tsawé sherab*):

"Everything that arises interdependently is unceasing and unborn,
neither non-existent nor everlasting;
neither coming nor going,
neither several in meaning, nor with a single meaning.
You the teacher of peace, who pacifies all complexity,
completely Enlightened Buddha, perfect among human beings,
to you, I prostrate!"

And you can do the same with other verses that speak to you, and which elucidate absolute nature. Repeat the lines, and then meditate on their meaning.

And then at some point, let go of conceptual mind, and rest as best as you can in the non-conceptual state of mind.

At the end, dedicate any merit gained through your actions for the benefit of all mother-like sentient beings, so that they too can receive this merit. May this merit relieve their suffering, and ultimately liberate them from the illusions of samsara. Ultimately, may this merit bring them to enlightenment. May they realize their own enlightened nature, and obtain all enlightened qualities.