



PAINTING BY SANJIE ELLIOT

## Loving-Kindness is the Best Medicine

Our mind—not our body—is who we really are, says **TULKU THONDUP RINPOCHE**, and the mind that is calm, joyful, and deeply loving is the foundation of true health and healing.

*The essence of loving-kindness is wishing joy for others.  
Like a loving mother for her child,  
Serve others by offering all, your body, wealth, and merits,  
And bear all the hurts caused by them.*

—RIGDZIN JIGME LINGPA

THE BUDDHA SAID, “Mind is the main thing and it is the leader.” The body is not our identity. Mind is our identity. It is who we are. So from the Buddha’s perspective, working with the mind is the basis of health and healing. If our mind is loving and peaceful, we spontaneously will become stronger and wiser, even if our bodies have difficulties. The way to achieve this is through the practice of loving-kindness.

According to Tibetan medicine, a calm and joyful mind will help to balance the four elements—earth, water, fire, and air—that are the building blocks of our body, and make the circulation of our energy system function normally. And at the end of our life, when our mind leaves the body and begins to migrate, the healthy experiences we have generated through the practice of loving-kindness will assure us a peaceful and joyful rebirth. So if we honestly wish to take care of ourselves and serve this planet in a meaningful way—to heal ourselves and others—it is true loving-kindness that

we must generate firmly in our own heart and mind.

Loving-kindness (*maitri* in Sanskrit, *metta* in Pali) is not simply a quality we have. It is an important Buddhist meditation that we can learn to practice regularly, and the most powerful form of generating healthiness. Loving-kindness, along with compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity, is one of the four immeasurable attitudes that heal the temporary ills of our life and awaken the enlightened qualities that we all have inherited.

As the first of the four immeasurable attitudes, loving-kindness is the foundation for the others. It is based on having the following wish: “All beings, who have no joy, may they always have joy and the causes of joy. How happy I would be for all to have joy. I will work for all to have joy. I pray to the Buddha of Loving-kindness for joy to arise in the lives of all beings.”

The second of the immeasurable attitudes is compassion, which involves making this wish: “May all the suffering beings become free from sufferings and the causes of sufferings.”

The third, sympathetic joy, takes the form of the wish: “May all who are enjoying happiness never be separated from happiness.”



Avalokiteshvara, the embodiment of compassion

The fourth, equanimity, is to have the same loving-kindness toward every sentient being that you have toward your own loving mother, with no attachments or hatred.

If we have true loving-kindness, we experience all the other immeasurable attitudes: compassion for those who are suffering, joy for those who have happiness, and a feeling of equanimity toward all beings. We also practice the six perfections, the *paramitas*, which form the basis of the bodhisattva path: generosity, morality, forbearance, enthusiasm, tranquility, and insight.

Loving-kindness is first a thought created by our mind—our stream of consciousness—and it is also an experience enjoyed by the mind. As soon as loving-kindness, unconditional love, is awakened, and for as long as we maintain it, our mind will remain in ultimate peace and joy, without falling into attachment. Any unhealthy energy that prevents our good nature and qualities from blossoming, such as jealousy, resentment, greed, or ego-clinging, will not be able to arise. We will spontaneously give rise to positive words and deeds that promote peace and joy in our family, neighborhood, community, and indeed the whole world—directly or indirectly, at a visible or invisible level.

The thought of wishing joy for all beings is not vague, shallow, or superficial. It emerges from the depth of our hearts. It causes our mind, body, and life to blossom with positive

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## A Loving-Kindness Meditation

THERE ARE DIFFERENT WAYS of meditating on loving-kindness. Based on many Buddhist teachings, I will teach you a meditation in which loving-kindness is generated mainly by thinking of and feeling the unconditional love of the Buddha of Loving-kindness and Compassion (*Avalokiteshvara*). We do this through the power of our devotion—the energy that opens our heart with joy and trust—to the Buddha.

We use four tools to build this meditation:

1. seeing positive images of Avalokiteshvara, the Buddha of Loving-kindness, and his blessings;
2. thinking of these with positive words and prayers;
3. feeling the energy of loving-kindness;
4. trusting without doubt in the power of devotion, loving-kindness, and the Buddha's blessings.

In ordinary life, because of our usual habits, we let our own perceptions of external objects and situations control our life. For example, when we perceive a person coming at us as a murderer, we will feel frightened. Instantly, everything turns into a world of terror. But as soon as we recognize him as one of our best and kindest friends, the whole situation turns peaceful and joyful.

Similarly, as soon as we see and feel the Buddha image as a presence of omniscient wisdom and unconditional love, our mind will change from a negative or neutral state to one filled with positive thoughts and feelings. To the extent that we appreciate and enjoy the unconditional love of the Buddha, to that same extent will our heart transform and blossom into a heart with unconditional love. That is why in Buddhist meditations we visualize the Buddha with enlightened qualities, pray to him or her, and receive blessings for waking up our own inner pure qualities, such as loving-kindness.

### Opening Meditation

It is important to start the meditation with enlightened intention (*bodhichitta*). Think, “I am going to meditate to develop loving-kindness in the hearts of all beings.”

### Main Meditation

In the middle of a pure and boundless sky, visualize the beautiful Buddha of Loving-kindness sitting on a giant blossoming flower and shining moon cushion. His youthful body, with white complexion, is a body of radiant light—clear, luminous, and intangible—as if the light of thousands of moons is shining.

His mind is omniscient and knows all simultaneously. His heart of loving-kindness ceaselessly cares for all beings as if they were his only child. His boundless

## by Tulku Thondup Rinpoche

power fulfills the needs of all whose hearts are open to such an opportunity.

The Buddha of Loving-kindness is the embodiment of all the enlightened ones—the Buddhas, saints, and sages. He is the manifestation of the true nature and pure qualities of the whole universe. He is the reflection of the buddhanature and true loving-kindness of your own mind, as if you were seeing your own reflection in a mirror.

When you see and feel the Buddha's presence and qualities, your mind is transformed instantly. All the walls of hesitations and limitations that prevent you from making any spiritual progress melt. All the negative thoughts and emotions that cause the various kinds of suffering cease. The cycle of positive views and feelings—the cause of everlasting peace and joy—is set in motion.

*First Prayer:* Pray to the Buddha with devotion—the energy of total joy and trust—from the depth of your mind. Singing the prayer-mantra in sweet melodies, hear and feel all the sounds of the world, and the sounds coming from the breathing energy waves of every particle of your body, as the sound of joy and celebration. Your heart and every particle of your body are boundlessly blossoming with the energy of devotion to the Buddha, like flowers blossoming in the warmth of sunlight. Repeatedly sing:

*Om ma-ni pad-me hung [hoong],  
O Buddha with jewel [symbolizing loving-kindness] and lotus  
[symbolizing omniscient wisdom],  
please heed me/us.*

Then see and feel that the Buddha's omniscient wisdom, unconditional love, and boundless power emanate from his body in the form of infinite, rainbow-like beams of light. All your mental and emotional afflictions and physical sicknesses—visualized in the form of darkness or filth in your body—are dispelled by the brightness of light, washed away by the flood of nectar-of-light, wiped away with the wind and the brush of light, or burnt down with the fire of light.

At this time, every particle of your body is filled with the bright light of Buddha's omniscient wisdom, unconditional love, and boundless power. Feel intimacy and bliss as the Buddha's light of unconditional love caresses every particle of your body. While your body is enjoying the blessings, your mind is being purified, healed, and transformed, as in reality your mind is the one initiating and enjoying all the transformations.

Then meditate on a loved one, such as your loving mother, by visualizing her in front of you clearly and thinking, “Mother, you gave me my life, raised an infant into a person. You sacrificed for me and always kept me in your warm, loving heart. Sometimes you made mistakes, as you too have been the victim of harsh emotions—I fully understand that. You cherished me as the most precious thing in the world—I clearly remember

that. I always worried for your happiness, and today I am so fortunate to have a great gift—the blessings of the Buddha and the pure love of my own heart—to share with you. How happy I am!” Then with great love, while singing the mantra, meditate, pray, purify, heal, and transform her with Buddha's blessing lights, as you did for yourself earlier.

Next, share the same meditations with a neutral person, then with someone you are in opposition with, and finally with all beings by recognizing them as your loving mothers in your infinite past lives.

The goal of loving-kindness is to serve all, but it is important to start the meditation with oneself and then with a loved one. In that way, you will experience the loving-kindness directly, vividly, and deeply, without wandering into superficial or general ideas and vague or shallow feelings.

*Second Prayer:* At this time, a great transformation is taking place in you. All the thoughts and feelings of your mind and body are transforming into thoughts and feelings of loving-kindness. The Buddha of Loving-kindness is not only in front of you, but also in your mind and body. Recognize it. Then whatever you say or do, all are the words and expressions of loving kindness—the true source of joy for you and for many others. Feeling that your whole mind and every particle of your body are fully blossoming with the sounds of the energy waves of loving-kindness, sing:

*Om ma-ni pad-me hung,  
O Buddha with jewel and lotus,  
the Fivefold Wisdom is in me!*

*Third Prayer:* As soon as such loving-kindness is awakened in you, and as long as you remain in it, whatever you see, hear, and feel will be the images, sounds, and feelings of loving-kindness. Realize this. Seeing, hearing, and feeling every being and the whole universe as the pure land of the Buddha and loving-kindness, sing:

*Om ma-ni pad-me hung,  
O Buddha with jewel and lotus,  
the Fivefold Wisdom is in all!*

### Final Meditation

Contemplate by resting in the awareness of ultimate peace—the true loving-kindness, the result of the meditation—without grasping at it or thinking about it.

### Closing Meditation

Conclude the meditation by offering all the merit created by the meditation to all beings, who are each regarded as your mother. This merit is the cause of realizing the absolute loving-kindness. Make aspirations for all to benefit from loving-kindness. ♦

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