



BUDDHISTISCHES
MEDITATIONSZENTRUM
PANCHEN LOSANG CHOGYEN

The Four Immeasurable Thoughts

Based on several teachings by Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche

The Prayer

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to abide in equanimity, free from the discriminating thoughts of anger and attachment that hold some close and others distant. May they abide in equanimity.

I myself will cause them to abide in equanimity.

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings had happiness and its causes. May they have happiness and its causes.

I myself will cause them to have happiness and its causes.

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from suffering and its causes. May they be free from suffering and its causes.

I myself will cause them to be free from suffering and its causes.

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were never separated from the happiness of higher rebirth and liberation.

May they never be separated from these.

I myself will cause them never to be separated from these.

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

Introduction

The purpose of meditating on the four immeasurables is to strengthen our bodhicitta. Just as a mother constantly thinking of her child who is sick intensifies her wish to free the child of its sickness, so too by meditating on the four immeasurables we can strengthen and expand our bodhicitta.

Each time we meditate on these four thoughts we collect limitless skies of merit and it is particularly rich to do it with tong-len since this strengthens our bodhicitta.

Depending on how much time there is, one can meditate on all four immeasurables each session or on just one of the four, spending more time and going more deeply into that so the mind changes. You can recite each one many times but even if you only recite it once, the important thing is to make the meaning harmonious and oneness with your heart and mind.

If you do this meditation well it will benefit the world. You can overwhelm sentient beings who are evil-minded and would harm others. You can overwhelm them and bring them to the Dharma. When you do this meditation for one country like the USA, you create the cause to become the leader of that country. If you generate loving kindness for the whole world, that becomes the cause to be a leader for all sentient beings. If you want to help sentient beings you have to become their leader so you can change their minds and change their actions. So it is very important to do the actual meditation, not just reciting words. And when you do this, particularly think of the terrorists who cause so much destruction in the world. This creates the cause to have control over them so you can guide them. Of course, it may not happen right away but as you create more and more merit it happens. So think of the terrorists and the leaders in mainland China who cause so much harm; by changing their minds so many other people will benefit.

The Four Immeasurables

Begin by reflecting on the **disadvantages of the self-cherishing¹ thought²**:

1. The self-cherishing thought has been extremely harmful to me in the past since beginningless rebirth and also to others.
2. It not only interferes and blocks me from obtaining ultimate happiness and liberation but even this life's happiness and peace right now.
3. The self-cherishing thought will continually harm me forever in the future. It will never allow me to achieve ultimate happiness and peace.

Think, "The self-cherishing thought does not allow me to obtain liberation and enlightenment, or the happiness of future lives or even the moment to moment happiness of this life. It is the greatest obstacle to achieve happiness and realizations and to do perfect work for other sentient beings and myself."

Now do the first meditation on Immeasurable Equanimity³:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to abide in equanimity, free from the discriminating thoughts of anger and attachment that hold some close and others distant.

May they abide in equanimity. I myself will cause them to abide in equanimity. Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

Sentient beings are suffering in samsara because they are under the control of anger and attachment that discriminate some sentient beings as close and others as distant, so generate the immeasurable thought of equanimity.

First the immeasurable wish:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to abide in equanimity, free from the discriminating thoughts of anger and attachment that hold some close and others distant.

After that the immeasurable prayer:

May they abide in equanimity

Then the immeasurable thought of taking responsibility for others:

I myself will cause them to abide in equanimity.

And finally the immeasurable request:

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

While you are reciting the prayer you can do the tong-len practice. Think about how sentient beings suffer because they are under the control of discriminating thoughts such as anger and attachment and how this makes them create so much negative karma.

When you think of the human beings on this small earth that we see when we travel around, it is unbelievable how much they suffer. Even just their problems are unbelievable. This is without thinking of the suffering of the naraks, the animal realm, preta realm, devas and other human continents. All these problems are due to the discriminating thoughts.

For example, right now your friends and people you know are going through so many problems and so much suffering due to being under the control of the discriminating thoughts of anger and attachment. When you think about it, when you look at the world, it is so unbearable for your mind. There are so many beings and they are suffering so much, repeatedly. It is not that they suffer just once from these discriminating thoughts of anger and attachment, they are constantly tormented their whole lives. Whether they live for thirty or forty or even one hundred years, they suffer and endure problems their whole lives due to these discriminating thoughts. First there is great mental suffering and then physical suffering. Mental ill health leads to physical ill health.

While you are reciting the prayer three times, take all this anger and attachment on yourself along with all the problems caused by them. Take on the true cause of suffering and the true suffering, the two obscurations. Take this right into your heart and onto the self-cherishing thought. It is the self-cherishing thought that causes everything undesirable that you and others have to experience and interferes with the success of all your wishes and those of others. So take all the problems and sufferings caused by the discriminating thoughts of anger and attachment as well as the anger and attachment into your heart. Think they enter in the form of pollution and destroy your self-cherishing or ego. It becomes completely non-existent.

You can particularly think of those delusions that disturb your mind most, such as anger, jealousy, clinging-attachment or desire. Mindful of how they torture you, never giving a moment of peace, think how numberless other beings have to experience the same suffering and take these disturbing emotional thoughts onto your own self-cherishing.

Think that you are taking these from every hell being, every hungry ghost, every animal, every human, every sura and asura being, and every intermediate state being. Take from every single living being including your enemy.

His Holiness explained the tong-len practice when he was giving the Lama Chöpa commentary. He said to visualize taking on the sufferings of others along with their causes in the form of pollution, or as fearful sharp weapons (like the wheel of sharp weapons that Vajrabhairava holds) that completely destroy the self-cherishing thought, or in the form of ugly, terrifying creatures that completely devour the self-cherishing thought. Use whichever method is most effective.

If you visualize them in the form of pollution then you should absorb them into the self-cherishing thought, the I that you feel inside the heart, inside the chest. Not outside, in the belly or the head, but right inside the chest. The I that makes you think, "I am the most important one. This I is the most precious and most important one." This is the I that you care most about, always concerned that it might get cold, or it might get a headache, or it might get sick or it might fall down! You are always trying to protect this I against something that might happen to it. This I is what you cherish most among sentient beings.

When you do the tong-len practice everything is absorbed onto this I and it becomes completely non-existent. It is like when you see a mirage: there is an appearance of water in the distance because of the way the sun reflects off the hot sand but when you actually reach the spot where the water should be, there is not even a drop of water there, it never existed. In the same way, the I that you have always cherished so much is completely non-existent right there. When you feel this non-existence of the I, that there is not the slightest trace of an I existing where you believed it to be, then you are seeing the "emptiness on the I". Try to experience this as much as possible.

If some fear arises when you are meditating on emptiness, for example when you are reciting the Heart Sutra, it means that your meditation has been worthwhile. Why worthwhile? Because the meditation has affected your mind. Fear arises because the meditation was able to harm the ignorance grasping the I. If your meditation is unable to harm the ignorance grasping the I, fear will not arise. Even though the I is merely labeled on the base of the aggregates, it does not appear to be merely labeled but appears as though it were existing from its own side. Ignorance holds that truly-existent appearance to be one hundred percent true and then self-cherishing arises which holds this falsely appearing I to be very precious and important.

When your meditation comes nearer to the object of ignorance—the truly-existent I which is in fact completely non-existent—you start to become aware of the non-existence of this I. That which is false appears as false. As this awareness of the non-existence of the I you have cherished so much arises, fear also arises. So when you do this meditation, the pollution is

absorbed onto the I or the I is devoured, and then the I that you cherish so much becomes non-existent. Meditate on this emptiness by concentrating one-pointedly on it for a while.

There is no such thing as I existing on these five aggregates—each one is not I nor is the collection of all five the I. When you look for it, you discover that the real I is totally non-existent. Totally empty. But this doesn't mean that I doesn't exist. The I does exist but it exists as a mere imputation. It exists but it's like it doesn't exist. The label and the base appear indistinguishable and I appears to exist from its own side. Then you let yourself believe that appearance and you create the root of ignorance holding I to be true. From this ignorance come the three poisonous minds⁵ and the 84,000 delusions. We let our mind believe that the I and the aggregates exist from their own side and the minute we do that we open ourselves up to all the sufferings.

When you finish the meditation on emptiness you can repeat the practice of taking or move on to the next immeasurable thought of loving kindness.

At the end of each immeasurable it is important to generate the strong determination:

“Now the stable realization of immeasurable equanimity, etc. has been generated in my mind and in the minds of all sentient beings.”

And feel great joy.

When you come to dedicate, recollect the awareness you previously generated of the precious I you cherish so much being completely non-existent. Even though that truly-existent I does not exist, still there is an I that is left—one that is meditating and performing the action of dedicating. This is the I that is merely labeled on the aggregates. Because the mind is doing the action of dedicating the body, possessions and merits to all the sentient beings, there is the thought, “I” am dedicating to other sentient beings. So this “I” is merely labeled on the aggregates according to that activity. Dedicate your merit to other sentient beings with this awareness that the I is merely labeled, that it is a dependent arising. Just as you have realized the I doing the dedication is merely labeled on the aggregates, so too are your merits, body and possessions, as well as the sentient beings. They are all merely labeled.

When you generate the four immeasurable thoughts of equanimity, immeasurable loving-kindness, compassion and joy, first of all you create infinite merit just by generating each one of these. But on top of that, if you can do the tong-len practice with each one, then by taking on the suffering of infinite sentient beings, infinite merit is accumulated. And when you do the dedication you dedicate to all the sentient beings so again infinite merit is accumulated. Through knowing this skillful means and putting it into practice you can accumulate inconceivable merit in a very short time; then that much work is finished⁶.

The remaining immeasurable practices—the immeasurable thought of loving kindness, immeasurable compassion and then immeasurable joy—follow the same pattern explained for the immeasurable equanimity.

Next is Immeasurable Loving Kindness⁷:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings had happiness and its causes. May they have happiness and its causes.

I myself will cause them to have happiness and its causes.

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

The immeasurable wish:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings had happiness and its causes.

The immeasurable prayer:

May they have happiness and its causes.

The immeasurable thought of taking responsibility on oneself to attain every happiness for others:

I myself will cause them to have happiness and its causes.

The immeasurable request:

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

When you recite the verse for immeasurable loving kindness, do the practice of giving. Think that you give away your body (which you can imagine to be a wish-fulfilling jewel), your merits and all your possessions to every single being in all six realms⁸.

When you do this practice of giving don't just give those things that ordinary people regard as being happiness because these are simply in the nature of suffering. Of course you do want to offer sentient beings temporary happiness, but if you only think of sensory pleasures it is very limited, the real happiness is the ultimate happiness of enlightenment. So even though you recite the word "happiness" in your heart you should be thinking "enlightenment".

When you say "please bless me to be able to do this" the meaning of "blessing" is to receive every single quality of Guru Shakyamuni Buddha yourself. Whatever activity we do our main objective should be to cause happiness to all sentient beings. Our wish is to cause every single being to experience perfect happiness up to and including enlightenment. So when we ask for blessing we are asking to be successful in accomplishing this.

We are not asking for something that doesn't exist! The Guru-Buddha to whom we are directing these requests has all these qualities. Buddha is a perfect object of refuge, one who is free from all sufferings and without the slightest discriminating thought towards sentient beings. Buddha only has compassion towards everyone, whether the sentient being worships Buddha or not, whether the sentient being criticizes Buddha or praises him, from Buddha's side He works equally for all sentient beings. It is because of these reasons that we can receive blessings no matter how much negative karma we have created and no matter how evil we may have been.

What is the meaning of "blessing"? In Tibetan the word is jin-lab. Jin is quality, the realization of the merit field, lab is transformation of the mind. So we are requesting our mind to be transformed into the practice, into all the qualities that the merit field has. We are not just

asking for inspiration, we are asking to receive the blessing of all the realizations from guru devotion up to enlightenment. We are asking to develop all the infinite qualities of the Buddha's holy body, speech and mind. We are asking to transform the mind into the path and to actualize all the qualities that the merit field has.

We train the mind in tong-len and in daily life we should also practice this by helping sentient beings however we can. When others are bearing hardships take them upon yourself and give the profit to others: like carrying a heavy load for others.

Give over your comfort and happiness to other sentient beings. Don't just do the visualization and then when others actually need help, do nothing! The point of doing the visualization is to train ourselves to help others.

Start by doing small things that bring happiness and comfort to others and gradually build up. Sooner or later we will even be able to make charity of our bodies as the Buddha did. As our bodhicitta gets stronger and stronger we will eventually be able to do perfect work for others just as the Buddha does, emanating countless forms to be able to benefit them.

At the end of the meditation think:

"Now the realization of immeasurable loving kindness has been generated in myself and all sentient beings".

And rejoice.

Next is Immeasurable Compassion⁹:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from suffering and its causes.
May they be free from suffering and its causes.
I myself will cause them to be free from suffering and its causes.
Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

The immeasurable wish:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from suffering and its causes.

The immeasurable prayer:

May they be free from suffering and its causes.

The immeasurable thought of taking responsibility:

I myself will cause them to be free from suffering and its causes.

The immeasurable request:

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

With the third verse, immeasurable compassion, again take on the sufferings and causes of sufferings of all sentient beings. Each time you do the practice of taking the sufferings of sentient beings, you collect infinite merit.

Take on the whole package of sufferings that each being has to experience in each realm the sufferings themselves but also all the causes of those sufferings—the delusions and karma. Feel this with every hell being, every hungry ghost, every animal, every human, every sura and asura, every intermediate state being. Take their sufferings right into the heart and think that this destroys the object of ignorance, the emotional I and the self-cherishing thought completely.

Each time we generate compassion, loving kindness and equanimity we are working for all the people in this world. We are working for all the people in Iraq and other violent countries. Every time we meditate on the wishful thought of loving kindness, however many sentient beings you direct this thought towards you create the merit to be born that many times as a wheel-turning king and you create the cause to bring those sentient beings to enlightenment.

[Note: Rinpoche puts the mainland China officials in his heart when he generates loving kindness. This creates so much merit and then you can dedicate for them, for their happiness.]

Every time we meditate on compassion we make our minds closer to compassion for all sentient beings and that brings us closer to generating bodhicitta. This is not just the limitless compassion of the arhats but the great compassion of the bodhisattvas. Bodhicitta has two intentions: seeking happiness for others and for self. When you have bodhicitta it is an incredible blessing for the whole world and for your own country. Bodhicitta is the total transformation of the mind, there is no thought of seeking happiness for self, the only thought is to benefit others. This brings blessings and benefits to all beings in the area and so much happiness and prosperity.

By entering the Mahayana path, as you go deeper and deeper, you are able to offer more and more benefit to sentient beings. Ninth and tenth level bodhisattvas can do incredible benefit for sentient beings. Once they achieve full enlightenment even every second they can illuminate numberless sentient beings. Even each beam from a buddha's holy body is able to liberate numberless sentient beings and buddhas manifest numberless forms to fit the needs of each sentient being in every second. Very high bodhisattvas who have achieved the realization of the path of unification are able to manifest as boats or bridges for sentient beings and buddhas can effortlessly manifest these things and bring sentient beings to enlightenment, guiding them from life to life.

So here when we are meditating on the lam-rim, it's not a simple thing. This is what liberates oneself and liberates others. We are liberating ourselves every session, every day, accumulating so much merit. Practising guru yoga benefits all sentient beings, so every day that we practice it, so much work is done to enlighten sentient beings.

Even when we recite a mala of OM MANI PADME HUM, we should dedicate it to all six-realms' sentient beings, including those in Iraq and Afghanistan. Everything we do is for others. We study, we practice and we become good examples and an inspiration to the world, to many sentient beings, able to transform their minds into the path of compassion. We study and we practice and then as much as we can, we educate other sentient beings in compassion and wisdom. It goes on like this. By meditating and practicing compassion we are able to benefit other sentient beings and bring so much peace and happiness to the world. We ourselves practice Dharma first by understanding karma and delusions, taking vows and stopping giving harm to others, then on top of that we develop compassion and try always to benefit them.

Otherwise, we could become like all those violent people and terrorists.

At the end of the meditation think:

“Now I and all sentient have generated immeasurable great compassion in our minds.”

And rejoice.

Finally, there is Immeasurable Joy:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were never separated from the happiness of higher rebirth and liberation.

May they never be separated from these.

I myself will cause them never to be separated from these.

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

The immeasurable wish:

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were never separated from the happiness of higher rebirth and liberation.

The immeasurable prayer:

May they never be separated from these.

The immeasurable thought of taking responsibility:

I myself will cause them never to be separated from these.

The immeasurable request:

Please Guru-Buddha, bless me to be able to do so.

After making this request think that you receive all the qualities Guru Shakyamuni Buddha has to be able to offer every happiness to others.

Do the practice of giving. This time, give away all your three times merits and all the temporary and ultimate happiness including enlightenment that will result from these merits. Give everything to all beings. Think that they receive whatever they need, whatever they want. What they really need is the guru and teaching, what they want are the usual objects of desire.

Each time you give your body, you collect infinite merit; each time you give your merits of the three times, you collect infinite merit; and each time you give your possessions, you collect infinite merit. So rejoice and dedicate¹¹

Conclusion

The practice of generating the four immeasurable thoughts can be repeated more than once. The purpose is this: just as when her one beloved son is sick, a mother will think about him more, over and over, and her compassion will thus increase, by reciting the prayer of the four immeasurables and doing the meditation many times over, your loving-kindness and compassion will increase. There is no rule saying, "If you recite it more than three times you will be jailed, or kicked out or something!" His Holiness mentioned and it is sometimes mentioned in the scriptures that when you are not with a group of people, you can generate bodhicitta by reciting the prayer seven times. In the Vajrayogini practice it says to recite the prayer seven times. So, you can recite it many times in order to expand the bodhicitta.

These four immeasurable thoughts are not only to be generated at the beginning of the practice, they are to be carried over into our daily lives and continually implemented in practical ways. What the prayer is saying is "I'm going to do this all the time from now on, even in the break times. This is how I am going to benefit and offer service to other sentient beings." That is the idea contained in this prayer.

The idea is to generate the thought, take the vows and carry on the practice even between sessions. You shouldn't have the idea that break times are a break from practicing—they are a break from sitting practice, not from practice itself.

It is very important to practice these four immeasurables. This is making a very important decision in life, how you are going to live your life and offer service to others. When we engage in this practice our life is totally transformed into Dharma. It changes from being a meaningless life into a meaningful life. Instantly our life is exalted and transformed from being ordinary.

Notes

¹ Rinpoche uses the term "self-cherishing thought" so I will keep it here. However there is a trend in the West to change this translation of the Tibetan term to "self-centred cherishing" in response to our widespread cultural predisposition towards self-hatred. The Mahayana is not promoting self-hatred, far from it, as Rinpoche would say, putting all the blame on the self-cherishing is "truly loving oneself".

The evolution is like this: observing the combination of our body and mind (the five aggregates which include feelings and emotions) we wrongly project onto them a "truly-existent self" and then grasp onto this as "I", "me" and "mine" as distinct from others. Then we cherish this "I" more than we cherish others.

Self-cherishing means being overly concerned with one's own happiness at the expense of others and ironically it is a factor in self-hatred. So the enemy in Mahayana thought transformation and the target for our tong-len practice when we do these meditations on the immeasurables is the destruction of this over-concern about ourselves. Being overly concerned about ourselves is actually the cause of all our sufferings and problems so we need to exchange or switch this over concern for ourselves into a concern for others in order to bring about genuine happiness for ourselves and others.

We are not trying to generate and increase our self-hatred because in reality there is no self to hate, rather we are trying to see that it is our over concern with a self that doesn't exist that is causing, has caused and always will cause all our problems and suffering.

² The way to meditate on the disadvantages of self-cherishing is explained by Kyabje Pabongka Rinpoche in Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand. It is contained within the method for generating bodhicitta taught by Manjushri to Shantideva called exchanging self for others. This can be found in Chapter Eight of Shantideva's Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life. It is important to study these and other teachings by Lama Zopa Rinpoche on this subject such as The Third Power: The Power of Blaming the Ego in Practicing the Five Powers Near the Time of Death. The more you study, the more deeply you can reflect on these three outlines given here and that will strengthen your practice of these immeasurables.

³ What is equanimity? There are three types and the one we are trying to generate here is immeasurable equanimity. This is the mind that wishes all sentient beings to be free from biased thoughts of attachment towards some and hatred towards others, so consequently they have no desire to cling to or harm any other being.

This mind of equanimity doesn't mean thinking all sentient beings are the same in a cold, distant or numb way. Rather it means not seeing any reason to give rise to thoughts of attachment or anger towards others. As Khunu Lama Tenzin Gyaltzen Rinpoche, one of Lama Zopa Rinpoche's teachers, said: "There's nothing to get attached and nothing to get angry".

All sentient beings are the same in wanting happiness and not wanting harm. When the mind becomes equanimity our actions also become equanimity so we no longer help some people and not others. This mind is an essential foundation for cultivating unbiased, unconditional compassion and love, which again are the foundation for the special intention and bodhicitta. Without this attitude we will always be biased and can never develop stable compassion or love.

When sentient beings are free from attachment and hatred so many of the thoughts and actions that torture their minds and cause them suffering are ceased. So there is peace in the mind, a deep satisfying peace.

⁴ Form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors, consciousness.

⁵ Anger, attachment, ignorance: the three root delusions which are said to give rise to 84,000 other delusions. [

⁶ Rinpoche does not mention here and I do not have a direct quote but clearly it is implied that by doing the practice with skillful means the merit of fortune is collected and by holding the practice with the wisdom of emptiness, as explained above, the merit of wisdom is accumulated. In this way both the method and wisdom aspects of the path are completed.

⁷ What is loving kindness? The love expressed here refers to a mind that focuses on all sentient beings and sees that they are devoid of happiness. This mind is free of any discriminating thoughts and it observes all beings equally and unconditionally and wishes them to receive every possible happiness. Our love is normally biased, conditional and limited to a few individuals, but this is the love of an untrained mind and it is not stable. However, every mind can be trained to produce a genuine and limitless love.

Why does the mind that views all beings equally and sees they are devoid of happiness wish them to have happiness? Why should that thought of affection arise? It does so by having trained oneself to view sentient beings as close, precious and kind. These meditations are contained in the Sevenfold Cause and Effect Instruction: recognizing all beings to be your mother, remembering their kindness and wishing to repay their kindness; and in the Exchanging Self for Others Instruction: thinking in depth about the kindness of others in the advantages of cherishing others. See Compassion Training.

When we develop immeasurable love, first there is the wish for all these beings to have happiness, then the prayer that this might happen and finally the resolve to take complete responsibility for this to happen. Just as a mother loves her only child and wishes to do everything she can to bring it happiness, so does this love view every living being without exception. This is the Mahayana form of love or "great love" since it takes responsibility for the happiness of every living being. From such a great love accompanied by great compassion comes the superior intention which gives rise to the precious mind of bodhicitta—the wish to achieve enlightenment in order to be of greatest benefit for all sentient beings.

Of course happiness can mean different things to different people, but as Rinpoche often points out, when we generate immeasurable love we are not only wishing for others to achieve the usual objects that bring them happiness—since these are in reality only contaminated happiness—our deepest prayer is for them to achieve the ultimate forms of happiness, which means liberation and enlightenment. Since all happiness can only arise on the basis of a cause, we wish for them to have both happiness and all the causes of such happiness.

The benefits of generating this kind of pure love for even a moment are explained in the scriptures and they are astounding. Refer to Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand and Lama Tsongkhapa's Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path, Vol. 2 along with Geshe Sopa's commentary to this in Steps of the Path to Enlightenment, Vol. 3

⁸ Rinpoche has commented in the past that when he does this practice he wishes all the Chinese officials and leaders as well as all the billions of people in China to have worldly happiness and enlightenment. Although he has said not to announce this publicly when leading the puja, clearly it is a teaching for us and a guide for our own practice.

⁹ What is compassion? Geshe Sopa Rinpoche writes: "the object of great compassion is any living creature suffering any type of misery...it does not only focus on those who have immediate pain; it encompasses all beings who are born in the three realms of samsara under the power of karma and the mental afflictions" (Steps on the Path to Enlightenment, Vol. 3). Therefore, in order to generate compassion we need to know all these types of suffering [see note 7] and we also need to know that they arise from causes which can be eliminated and that therefore it is possible to cease all these sufferings and there is a path that leads to that cessation. In other words, we need to understand the four noble truths. Once we know that all this unbearable suffering is unnecessary and removable, of course a mind that has already generated great love will naturally want to work towards this goal.

As with immeasurable loving kindness, immeasurable compassion grows in stages from the wish that beings be free from all their sufferings and causes, the prayer for that to happen, and finally the acceptance of full responsibility oneself to bring such a situation about.

Great compassion precedes bodhicitta and the strength of one's compassion determines the strength of one's bodhicitta and how quickly one can complete the bodhisattva path. Having generated great compassion that takes responsibility to free all sentient beings from suffering, one then strengthens that by the special intention that says "and I will do this by myself alone!" That is, no matter how hard it is, no matter how long it takes, no matter how difficult, one takes on the personal responsibility to free every single sentient being from suffering by oneself alone. The next step is to see how one could do this, and the conclusion is that it is only possible by becoming a fully enlightened and omniscient being, a buddha. So bodhicitta is generated: the wish to achieve enlightenment in order to benefit all beings. See Compassion Training: Sevenfold Cause and Effect.

¹⁰ These can be gleaned by studying the sections on the small scope and medium scope of any lam-rim text, such as Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand. The Buddha taught eight, six or three general sufferings (medium scope) and then specific sufferings for each of the six realms of existence, such as the characteristics of the 21 hell realms; the six general sufferings of the three types of preta; the six general sufferings of the two types of animals; the seven specific sufferings of humans in this world; the sufferings of the demigods; and the sufferings of the desire, form and formless realms. Even arhats and bodhisattvas have suffering due to not having removed the subtle defilements from the mind. Only a buddha is truly free of all suffering and all causes of suffering. So you can take on the suffering of all unenlightened beings along with the causes of those sufferings but do not take from your guru who is inseparable from the buddhas and simply manifests an ordinary aspect in accordance with our ordinary karmic appearance.

Not only does every single being experience suffering but that suffering is continuous, beginningless and will never end until it is ceased by the achievement of enlightenment. There is also not one single suffering that others are undergoing that we have not also undergone numberless times or will not have to experience again

numberless times. The only difference between ourselves and the beings in these realms undergoing various sufferings is that at the time of death a virtuous karma ripened that threw us to a more fortunate rebirth. But at any moment our breathing could stop and a non-virtuous karma could throw us into the deepest suffering realms. Right now we are exhausting our previous virtue by experience this fortunate rebirth, if we don't work hard to create more virtue but instead are thrown to the lower realms, there will be no opportunity to create virtue there and we will only create the causes for more suffering. We need to have deep aversion to our own suffering in order to be able to generate deep aversion to the sufferings that others have to undergo. Therefore we need to meditate intensively on the suffering nature of samsara.

Ven. Tenzin Palmo told me many years ago that during her retreat she would begin contemplating the sufferings from the very lowest hells and then move up gradually till she got to the highest realms, at which point she would be crying by seeing that every single being, no matter their appearance or situation or belief, was suffering.

¹¹ Although I have not seen any specific advice from Rinpoche on this, I would assume that if you are going to continue on with your practice at this point, you will do the dedication at the end. If you choose to finish the session, at least dedicate with the prayer for bodhicitta, the short or long dedication from the King of Prayers, by remembering emptiness, the long-life prayers and increasing mantras. All of these can be found in FPMT Essential Prayers Vol. 1. There are also specific prayers mentioned by Rinpoche at the end of the appended Compassion Training, which seem particularly appropriate in this case.

Quelle: www.lamayashe.com/article/chapter/prayer-and-practice