

6 Altruism and the Path of Engagement

While Disciples and Hermit Sages come from the Great Sages (the Buddhas),
(All Perfect) Buddhas evolve from Enlightened Altruists;
Hence the (prime) causes of a Victor's heritage are: the (altruist's)
Compassionate mind and bias-free openness, the (twin) spirits of enlightenment.
So honoring love, which alone acts as the seed for this bountiful harvest of Victors,
As the water that nurtures it, and as the endurance that brings the crop to fruition,
Before (explaining the altruist's life), with gratitude I bow to compassion!

(Chandrakirti, Central Way Introduction¹)

To Distill the Essence of (These) Precepts: The Genuine Spirit of Altruisms

Now that we've gleaned from Chekawa's text the essential practice of compassionate openness and explored its application in daily life, it's time to turn to the path of ethical discipline and moral development mapped out in his four remaining points. Chekawa's fourth point—integrating a lifelong practice—focuses on the gradual integration that occurs in the long transition from building motivation and insight to final realization. One way to locate that transition is with the help of the five stage map of contemplative practice we surveyed in chapter 3. While the five stages on this map—accumulation, application, insight, meditation, and mastery—have the same names in this context, here they map a distinct path of contemplative life: the path of socially engaged practice.²

According to the tradition of Nagarjuna, as explained by Chandrakirti and Tibetans like Tsong Khapa, this path extends the classical path of personal self-healing by conjoining the deepest levels of concentration with more profound wisdom as well as with the altruistic spirit of universal compassion. To locate the path of compassionate moral development described in Chekawa's fourth and fifth points, we'll need to place it in multi-disciplinary context: juxtaposed with the five stages of socially engaged meditative progress on the one hand, and with the fifteen topics of reflection on the path of socially engaged insight on the other.

For simplicity, we'll align Chekawa's fourth point, integrating practice, with the first two stages of meditative progress—accumulation and application—as well as the first five themes of reflection—grounding, clearing, building, reorienting, and inspiring. His fifth point, measuring progress, lines up with the last three stages of meditative progress—insight, meditation, and mastery—as well as the last ten themes of reflection—the ten transcendent virtues of generosity, ethics, tolerance, endurance, meditation, wisdom, technique, affirmation, power, and intuition. The sixth and seventh points offer lists of commitments and pledges meant to provide practical precepts for building an altruist's life in the world.

You Must Apply Them With the Five Powers

To begin, then, Chekawa's precepts on lifelong practice first urge us to move beyond the initial phase of intellectual learning or familiarization, "To *distill the essence of the (basic mind-clearing) precepts.*" Over and above the preliminary exercises he prescribes in the third point for assimilating the basic precepts of mind-clearing—the four preparations of correcting vices, cultivating virtues, welcoming opposition and building trust—Chekawa directs us to integrate practice and metabolize those basic precepts by building five motivational powers that deepen reflective learning. As in the path of personal self-healing, these powers start out as basic contemplative faculties—effort, wisdom, mindfulness, concentration, and confidence—innate in us all.³ Through continuous cultivation over time, they gradually become potent forces for good and eventually mature as the exceptional motivational powers of a highly contemplative mind.

In contrast to the more circumscribed form these powers take on the path of self-healing,⁴ the form they take on the engaged path of social healing is more inclusive and expansive.⁵ The effort to heal and free oneself takes the special form of compassionate motivation to benefit all; the wisdom to renounce vice takes the form of targeting and uprooting self-reifying habits; the mindfulness to cultivate virtues takes the form of planting seeds for change in the present moment; concentration through deepening mindfulness takes the form of familiarization through repeated practice; and the confidence to pursue inner freedom takes the form of positive endurance in the development of a new self and world. Extending Chandrakirti's agricultural simile for the altruist's path, I like to call these five powers: preparing the ground; weeding; seeding; nurturing; and enduring. In what follows, we'll first see how each of these five forces of behavioral change help us "*distill the essence*," and then we'll align each of them with phases on the engaged path of contemplative practice and with one of the themes of reflection on the path of socially engaged insight.

Among the powers Chekawa prescribes to motivate progress on the path of social-emotional development, the first three—preparing, weeding, and seeding—line up with the accumulation stage of engaged contemplation, in which the basic mindset, insights, and life-skills that lay the foundation for an altruist's life are gradually acquired and integrated. The last two—nurturing and enduring—line up with the application stage, in which we begin to apply that new foundation to transforming our knee-jerk responses to the daily challenges of our lives. As for the way these motivational powers align with the growth of empathic openness on the engaged path of insight, they expand on the basic points of the mind-clearing practice unpacked in the last two chapters. Preparing the ground expands on building the foundation of equanimity and genuine compassion, as in Chekawa's point one and the first half of point two. Weeding corresponds to exposing and cutting through the self-reifying, self-protective habit which is the taproot of compulsive life, as in the latter half of point two. Seeding, nurturing and enduring correspond to taking adversity as an opportunity to plant seeds of non-clinging, non-violence, and non-delusion, as in point three. We can also recognize in these emerging powers the four reflections of Shantideva's method of exchanging self and other, the quintessence of which is the final shift realized in the genuine spirit of enlightened altruism.



Figure 6.1 Shantideva, Master of the Altruist's Way of Life

Preparing the Ground: Leveling our Interactions with Others

To begin with, Chekawa advises that we start distilling the essence of mind-clearing by directing all our efforts towards building realistic empathy and authentic compassion for all life. So the work of preparing the ground of our life for the cultivation of our natural altruism must begin with the prodigious effort Thomas Nagel aptly calls, “climbing outside of our own minds.”⁶ While the idea of an altruistic spirit and way of life appeals to the idealist and the enlightened realist in us all, the learning curve which the stress-reactive animal and traumatized child inside us must climb to actually experience and respond to the world in an impartial way cannot be underestimated. In fact, our instinctive and conditioned resistance to seeing all life fairly and objectively is so enormous that many individuals and social groups throughout history have assumed that it is fixed by nature or God and beyond our power to change.

Growing research on social evolution, emotional intelligence and the neurobiology of the prefrontal cortex, as synthesized by pioneering psychiatrist Dan Siegel, have conclusively shown that optimists like the Buddha and Nagel were right: all humans have the innate capacity to see others objectively, as equal to

ourselves.⁷ The discovery of mirror neurons that specialize in helping mammals like us put ourselves in others' shoes has been further amplified by findings that the prefrontal cortex which is unique to humans includes multiple structures and pathways dedicated to helping us control primal appetites and self-protective instincts in light of our empathic awareness of the needs and wishes of other individuals and larger social groups.⁸ Add to this the recognition that our nervous systems are naturally plastic and continually reshaped by our moment to moment attention and action, and the pessimistic faith that we are incapable of living up to altruistic ideals is fast losing ground.⁹ In its place is the pragmatic question of how much time, attention, and effort we can and should devote as individuals and groups to exercising and building our emotional intelligence and higher social skills.

This is where Chekawa's first power comes in. Effectively, it tells us that our progress on the path of positive social-emotional development is limited only by the effort we channel into feeling and caring for others as equally sensitive and deserving as ourselves.¹⁰ Since the only genuine source of that effort is the strong motivational force that comes of feeling spontaneous empathy and concern for others, this precept not only points the way to our becoming more engaged with all life but also makes clear that there is *no other way* for us to become so engaged.¹¹ With this look at the first power we need to distill the essence of clearing the mind, it's time to align this ethical step on the altruist's way with the steps of contemplative practice that help build the mindfulness and awareness which make such progress possible.

The Universality of the Noble Truths: The Engaged Accumulation Stage, Part I

As you may recall from chapter 3, the accumulation stage of contemplative practice is sub-divided into three phases. In order to map the socially engaged accumulation stage alongside the ethical path of clearing the mind, we can roughly align these three phases with the first three of the five powers. The main distinction is that here, these phases travel the contemplative path with a broader, more inclusive perspective of empathic awareness which sees how the causality of suffering and happiness affects not just our own body-minds but all life around us as well. As on the path of self-healing, this phase involves bringing mindful attention to our body-mind, building the capacities for bodily self-regulation, fear modulation and response flexibility supported by our prefrontal cortex.¹² And while we explore the four noble truths with the four scopes of mindfulness, as on the path of self-healing, in this context we apply the resulting insights—impermanence, dissatisfaction, emptiness, and selflessness—equally and simultaneously to our own lives and to the lives of all other beings. This begins the long process of enhancing self-regulation with the social capacities for empathy, communication, and insight supported by other regions of prefrontal cortex.¹³ This provides a solid grounding for the contemplation of our equality with all other life, and a natural extension of the realistic empathy we feel for ourselves to all others, whether near, far or seemingly indifferent to us.

The First Reflection on the Path to Altruism: Equalizing Self and Other

Along with the power of preparing the ground and the practice of extending mindfulness of the noble truths to all, our first steps towards an altruistic life are guided by the first reflection on the socially engaged path of insight. The theme is one we've encountered already in Shantideva's fourfold method of building compassion. His method begins with recognizing the basic equality of self and others, a reflection I like to call grounding. By freeing us from the self-enclosing bias of our traumatized self, this reflection keeps us from poisoning our social life with the misguided habits of aversion, confusion, and clinging. Through conceiving a more objective sense of ourselves as one among countless equally sensitive beings, we clear our hearts and minds for the social emotions of empathy and equanimity, the ground for cultivating a mindset of compassionate openness towards the world.¹⁴ In this sense, reflecting on the equality of all life naturally inclines us to extend our mindfulness of the causality of suffering and happiness to ourselves and others impartially.¹⁵ And this expanded horizon of mindfulness multiplies and intensifies the growth of empathic concern, so that our motivation to end suffering and cultivate happiness builds exponentially with the number of beings we include in our ever-widening circle of family feeling.¹⁶ It is this social-emotional calculus that turns the effort we might normally channel towards our own personal self-healing and change into a power forceful enough to prepare the ground for a brave new altruistic life and world.¹⁷

Weeding Out Reactive Ways: Clearing the Field for Positive Interactions

As we level the ground of our life with others and prepare to turn it over for the growth of equanimity, empathy, and compassion, we will inevitably run into a whole field of blocks, held in place by the network of self-indulgent habits, rooted in instinctive self-reification, fearful clinging, and traumatic reactivity. To distill the teachings of open-mindedness so essential to the practice of mind-clearing, we will need the analytic discernment and focus to expose and clear our cognitive bias and emotional blocks along with the instincts that anchor them. In practice, this is possible only when we've built and refined our innate faculties of insight and wisdom into a power-tool that can deepen and speed the process of self-analysis. Since most of the habits and instincts that block our compassionate openness have been incorporated into the landscape of our mental life so intimately that we're effectively blind to them, the actual process of deepening our surface flashes of insight into a genuine clearing takes patient and persistent analysis.

Continued familiarity with the healing insights and principles like those of the noble truths helps stimulate the deepening reflection it takes to actually see blind spots that are so close to home. And once the habits that have been blocking us and our interactions all along are plain, we must begin the painstaking work of dislodging them from our mental lives, along with the tangled network of traumatic memories and emotions that ties them into our deepest and most conservative instincts for self-protection. The self-corrective edge of our minds must be guided and powered by a reflective analysis and intuitive wisdom far more sharpened and determined than even our most unquestioned assumptions and firmly held beliefs. For in this process of weeding the field of our minds, the precise discernment that helps us distinguish the weeds of reactivity and roots of misperception from the crop of unbiased sensitivity and objective awareness is the ultimate power-tool of social self-healing and self-transformation.

The Altruist's Due Diligence: The Engaged Accumulation Stage, Part II

The power I've called weeding lines up with second phase on the accumulation stage of socially engaged contemplative practice, expanding on the art of due diligence we explored in chapter 3. As on the path of self-healing, once deep mindfulness of the noble truths starts to correct our traumatic view of our bodies and minds, we begin to gather the healthy willpower to let go of negative habits and build positive ones systematically and proactively, one at a time. The main distinction at this phase is that, on the engaged path this process helps us purge negative habits and build positive ones not just regarding our personal lives but regarding our perception of and interaction with others as well. Given this, the process of due diligence in this phase of the engaged path progresses through the same four levels as it did on the path of personal self-healing. And here as well, this phase involves a progressively more clear and continuous awareness of the moment-to-moment causality of suffering and happiness, empowering us to use our momentary choices to weed out unhealthy habits and their roots, while clearing the ground for seeding and cultivating healthy new habits and ways of being.¹⁸

The Second Reflection on the Altruist's Path: Breaking the Traumatic Self-Habit

Alongside the motivational power of weeding and the contemplative step of the altruist's due diligence, this phase on the path is guided by the second reflection on the engaged insight path: the second step in Shantideva's fourfold method of building compassion. Traditionally, reflecting on clearing the traumatized self from our minds is based on a deep contemplation of the personal and social costs of our ingrained habit of self-defeating self-indulgence. The gradual deepening, intensification, and, refinement of this self-analytic reflection is indispensable if we're ever to build the power of weeding traumatic distortions and stress-reactive emotions from our personal and social lives. As the contemplative art of due diligence suggests, however, this reflection may progress not in great leaps and bounds but rather in the humble, incremental work of exposing reactive habits one at a time.¹⁹

Seeding the Ground: Planting Compassion with Every Step

The third power Chekawa recommends is the power of mindfulness focused on meeting each interaction every day as an opportunity to plant the seeds of an altruistic life in the world. Once we have the power of

wisdom to clear our minds and our lives for the cultivation of empathy, care and concern, we must act quickly, decisively, and persistently to put our best intentions into practice. Simply paying lip-service to altruism, even sitting and meditating every day on love and compassion for all living beings is not enough to make an altruistic way of life a reality. If the devil is in the details, the authentic spirit of social emotions like acceptance, love and care lies in the nitty-gritty choices we make in each and every one of interactions with others, no matter how seemingly random or insignificant. Unlike the abstract ideal the tradition calls sentimental compassion, the power of seeding only works in the soil of particular one-on-one interactions, as an extension of the natural, embodied capacity for love and care we experience in true intimacy and parenting.²⁰

Building Mind-Power: The Engaged Accumulation Stage, Part III

Having explored the mindful power of seeding virtues, the third step on the ethical path of social engagement, it's time to align that motivational step with the corresponding phase of contemplative practice. As on the path of personal self-healing, this final phase of accumulation involves combining renunciation and diligence with deepening mindfulness and concentration, to the point where they can be forged together into power tools for change known as the four bases of mental power.²¹ These bases involve building the motivational energy to initiate healthy habits by developing a concentrated will, concentrated effort, concentrated mind, and concentrated analysis. The distinction here is that the motivational energy built on this path is not just the energy of self-acceptance and self-care but also includes the more expansive energy of love and compassion that reaches out to help oneself and others simultaneously and equally. Taken together, these newfound forces of will, effort, mind, and analysis give us leverage over the most ingrained habits, by building the initiative to seize the opportunity of the moment for change and the motivational energy to take on resistances and build new strengths.

The Third Reflection: Realizing the Benefits of Building Love and Compassion

Alongside the ethical power of seeding and the contemplative practice of strengthening the mind, the last phase of the altruist's accumulation stage lines up with the third reflection on the engaged path of insight: realizing the benefits of building love and compassion, the third step in Shantideva's fourfold method. Mindfully seeding and energizing new habits of social engagement is guided by the insight that our social motivations of love, joy, care, and equanimity provide the motivation we need to plant the seeds of a truly altruistic way of life that benefits ourselves and others equally. As we saw in chapter 4, the healing shift from a reactive rut of self-enclosure to a proactive stance of social engagement depends on the reflective awareness that building our social-emotional intelligence is the most effective way to secure our interests as individuals and as social animals, especially in the unnatural condition of civilization.²²

Nurturing the Crop: Applying Full Concentration to Cultivating Care and Love

The power of concentrated practice I've called nurturing is often described as a process of deepening familiarization through repeated focus and increasing immersion. The growth of this power reflects a pivotal stage in our moral development: the increasing stability, intensity and exclusivity of our commitment to making compassionate openness our sole way of being in the world. Having gathered the motivational energy, constant mindfulness, and radical insight we need to plant our feet firmly on the path of positive social engagement, we now arrive at the pivotal step of pouring all our focus and presence of mind into nurturing that new way of life. Of course, this transitional step cannot happen in a single leap, but requires us to gradually shift more and more of our energy, focus, and insight towards that new direction, until finally it seems to burst into being. In reality, that new way of being—immersed in compassionate openness—can only actually grow by applying caring effort one meditation and one day at a time.

While we are accustomed to conceiving of change as the flick of a switch or a binary choice we make once and for all, in fact radical shifts in our emotional life occur in a much more incremental way than change within our conceptual minds.²³ So while the cognitive spark of enlightened altruism may take place in an

instant, the affective work of building compassion must take place over a seemingly inconceivable length of time, traditionally “three incalculable eons.”²⁴ As we’ll see in parts 3 and 4, when we discuss the process-oriented practices of role-modeling imagery and sublimation, this slow alchemical process of change is linked to the physical chemistry of altering the network of neural pathways, energies, and transmitter drops that support the workings of consciousness.²⁵ On the path of social healing, this incremental change is described in terms of the gradual accumulation of the positive psychophysical energy of social-emotional self-worth or merit.²⁶ And the way in which we generate this positive energy is by investing more and more of our attention, more and more of the time, into positive social intentions and actions motivated by genuine equanimity, empathy, love, and compassion.²⁷

Heat and Peak: The Engaged Application Stage, Part I

To support this new phase of development on the ethical path, we move to the next stage on the path of contemplative practice: the stage of application. Here, our powers of compassion, wisdom and mindfulness are such that we can begin to apply them in earnest to the alchemical process of self-transformation. Our progress in this phase depends on building our capacity to commit ourselves to that new way of being, by focusing and concentrating our minds single-pointedly on the non-dual spirit of compassionate openness, its budding form. Through deepening our ability to embody this spirit in progressively more profound meditation and daily practice, our single-minded focus gradually gathers the nurturing power to bring our budding altruism to the point of nascent enlightenment. The long, slow process of this stage goes through the same phases as it does on the path of personal self-healing, traditionally called heat, peak, tolerance, and triumph. The difference is that here, it is the application of compassionate openness that motivates our efforts to build single-minded focus, rather than the determination to reach personal freedom of mind.

As applying the spirit of compassion to deepen concentration brings us to real inner stillness, called quiescence, we gradually enter a euphoric flow that sparks a natural high or inner heat akin to the endorphin high of physical exercise.²⁸ The positive energy of this state gives us greater leverage over negative habits, allowing us to pry our consciousness free of emotional blocks and to realize more intense and expansive compassion. As we continue applying ourselves, quiescence deepens to single-pointed concentration, where it can turn analysis into a surgical power-tool that cuts through all the learned misperceptions that make up our acquired false views and block our full capacity for radical openness of mind. Having reached this peak experience of intellectual insight, we gain greater leverage over our mental blocks, allowing us to enjoy more accurate and continuous knowledge of the nature and workings of our own and others’ body-minds.²⁹ This further empowers us to break free of the confusion that maintains compulsive emotions, reinforces traumatic habits, and blocks our ability to initiate and maintain healthy alternatives including positive social intentions and actions.

The Fourth Reflection: Exchanging Self-Indulgence for Enlightened Altruism

Alongside the moral power to nurture compassionate ways and the contemplative work of developing euphoric heat and peak insight, this phase of social self-transformation lines up with the fourth reflection on the engaged path of insight: the reorientation of our lives from myopic self-enclosure to the objectivity of genuine altruism. This radical perspective-shift is the theme of the fourth and last step in Shantideva’s fourfold method of building compassion. This insight reflects the gradual transformation of our sense of self and world from the childish position of craving love and care from others to the adult position of building our own capacity to care equally for ourselves and others. This shift from seeking parenting to self-parenting and from there to volunteer-parenting all in need also reflects the reversal in the flow of give and take with our world, based on the mature art of taking care and giving love.³⁰

In traditional terms, this final insight reflects a fundamental transformation in our mental life, in which the regressive centering of our lives on reactive habits and stress instincts finally gives way to the emergence of the native genius for altruism hidden in the depths of our minds.³¹ As we bring higher awareness to this budding genius, through the reflection on exchanging self-indulgence for altruism, we foster the gradual process of nurturing a whole new self and life, a process that will eventually culminate in our becoming enlightened altruists. In this painstaking, day-to-day process of application, we slowly gain the power to re-

parent ourselves, not as an ordinary parent but through an enlightened awareness that sees and nurtures our full potential to radically transform ourselves and our world.³²

Anticipating Fruition: Allowing True Altruism to Ripen

The power of confidence I call endurance is the fifth and last power Chekawa advises to bring the process of social self-transformation to fruition. As our minds and lives coalesce around the spirit of compassionate openness, this power prepares us to actually begin and endure the journey to come, the journey which will eventually lead to a fully mature form of enlightened altruism. Endurance allows the cumulative force of all the previous powers to bear fruit, by deepening our combined concentration and insight to the point where we can expose and dispel any lingering shadow of doubt which might hide remnants of our self-indulgent sense of self and world. While the first power of preparing the ground helped uncover our innate compassion and the second of weeding helped clear away the main blocks to radical open-mindedness, the last three work together to seed, nurse and ripen the embodiment of compassionate openness which eventually culminates in the heroic confidence and visionary spirit of enlightened altruism.

Psychologically, this fifth power has to do with the capacity to anticipate, prepare for and endure the long process of gradual development through persistent practice and consistent application, akin to the foresight, planning, commitment, and pacing it takes to train for and run a marathon. Since the basic training for positive moral development through contemplative learning involves all three disciplines—of ethical motivation, contemplative self-regulation, and transformative insight—technically the power of endurance prescribed at this point is closer to what we'd need for a triathlon! Of course, as in health training, so on the path of altruism, the ultimate goal of undertaking and enduring intense periods of application like those prescribed by these powers is to build long-term faculties of motivation, self-discipline, and self-knowledge that can then become a natural part of a healthier, more effective way of life.

Tolerance and Triumph: The Engaged Application Stage, Part II

Given this brief overview of the fifth step on the ethical path of social engagement, we turn now to see what steps on the path of contemplative practice we need to support the power of endurance. Growing out of the breakthrough insight of the peak phase on the engaged application stage, further application of effort in compassion and concentrated self-analysis deepens our capacity to transcend a reified sense of self versus others. This increasing confidence in our emptiness insight gradually leads to an intuitive wisdom called the tolerance of the ultimate ungraspability of all things,³³ basis for the application phase of tolerance. In this phase, we begin to disarm reflex fears of losing our boundaries with others or relaxing our compulsive grip on what we identify as “I” and “mine,” by overcoming learned self-reifying distortions and the traumatic reactions to others they trigger.³⁴ As a result, we're more able to tolerate the complexity and range of our everyday social life.

Finally, in the phase called triumph, our rational confidence and conceptual insight into emptiness dispels all the self-reifying views we've acquired or developed since childhood, along with the post-traumatic reactions they rationalize.³⁵ Such de-reifying insight has a profound and far-reaching impact on our capacity to see ourselves objectively, and represents a new milestone in the development of contemplative faculties current researchers call meta-cognition, non-judgmental awareness, and radical acceptance.³⁶ Here again, while these phases describe the growth of confidence through more unambiguous and concentrated insight, they are far from sudden black-and-white changes. Instead, this latter part of the engaged application stage involves repeated, consistent analysis of traumatic distortions and stress-reactivity stirred up in the course of interactions with the people we meet in the world, near, neutral, and far, as well as those we encounter as resistances in regular meditations. This fine-brush working through then frees us to immerse ourselves more decisively in the new self and life we're choosing to develop around the spirit of compassionate openness and the ethos of enlightened altruism.

The Fifth Reflection: Conceiving the Spirit of Enlightenment

Alongside the power of endurance on the altruist's path and the contemplative practice of tolerance and triumph on the engaged application stage, the fifth reflection on the engaged path of insight involves fully and finally conceiving the authentic spirit of enlightened altruism. As we saw in chapter 4, this reflection comes as

the fruit of a long process of building our natural faculties of love and compassion and gradually expanding them to support a whole new way of being in the world. This work involves first reorienting our sense of self to line up with the positive energy of compassionate openness and then building and stretching that sense and energy through the gradual art of reversing the flow of give and take.

Guided by the insight that there is no conflict at all between truly caring for self and truly caring for others, this reflection involves an all-out commitment to building the mindset and response set of social engagement as the best way forward for all humans in today's civilized age.³⁷ Along this gradual path of compassionate openness and responsibility, we move through a phase of expansion and a phase of awakening. In the first, we stretch the intimate responsiveness of nurturing love into the all-inclusive responsibility of heroic resolve. In the second, we lift our sights from simply helping and caring for others to the final solution of awakening the altruist in us all. It is here that the slow growth of our own altruism finally reaches full maturity. Key to this maturity is acknowledging that, given the inexorable limits to what one person can do for others, the best way to leverage our investment in all life is to become not just an ordinary altruist but an altruist's altruist, a model who can truly inspire and guide others to develop their own will and ability to help. It is this final turn that makes altruism truly enlightened, and guides the final reflection on this phase of the altruist's path.

Of course, given our limits, this fifth reflection guides us towards the conclusion that, to make the biggest possible difference one being can make in the world, we must transform ordinary altruism into enlightened altruism. This means committing to a path of radical self-transcendence which enhances the maturity of altruism, both by deepening it with the meditative power of single-minded concentration and by expanding it with the reflective power of self-transcendent wisdom. This extraordinary path of altruistic self-transcendence is what makes up the remainder of the ethical path of altruism in the socially engaged teaching tradition. And the gateway which leads into that path, with its ten steps or stages of altruistic self-transcendence, is the reflection that guides us to conceive the mature motivation we need to commit our minds and lives to that end. That motivation is what I've called the spirit of enlightened altruism or the spirit of enlightenment.³⁸ Shantideva celebrates this pivotal moment of reflection in his *Guide*:

As rare as it may be for someone blind
To find a jewel (lost) in a garbage heap,
So by some lucky accident
I have conceived the spirit of enlightenment!
It is the supreme medicine that heals
The (basic) condition of all living beings,
And a shade-giving tree that offers shelter
For the weary who wander the ways of cyclic life.
It is a great bridge by which all beings
Can be released from the realms of misfortune,
And the rising moon of awareness
That relieves the torment of their compulsions.
It is the great sun that completely dispels
The fog of delusion from (all) beings' (minds),
And the quintessential cream that rises
When the milk of the teachings is churned.³⁹

These Same Five Powers are Vital to Practicing the Engaged Precepts on Dying

One crucial aspect of the commitment to a self-transcendent form of altruism is the way we face the inexorable limitations of aging and dying. This next precept in Chekawa's text advises us to incorporate our normal anticipation and experience of aging and dying into the work of cultivating altruism by relying on the same five powers. Traditionally, this is said to involve transcending our ordinary sense of death as a final limit by using the five powers to direct our minds towards a voluntary incarnation in a future life, optimal for the development of altruism. With a modern outlook, we can pursue an analogous practice by using our minds and lives to make a transformative impact on individuals in other generations who can carry on our altruistic work into the future. Just as systematic methods of land clearing, irrigation, and agriculture laid the physical foundations for the multi-generational work of civilization, so the systematic clearing and cultivation of traits like empathy and altruism is vital to the intergenerational work of building the social-emotional infrastructure

for civilized happiness, individually and collectively. This extends the generative phase in the natural cycle of human development, in which all the seeds of love and care we've planted with family, friends, colleagues, and those we may have helped in our life and work begin to take on special meaning as vital to our contribution and legacy.⁴⁰

Wherever we are on the path of altruism, this last precept urges us to round out our efforts to carry through and beyond our present lifespan. The five motivational powers, two stages of contemplation and five reflections we've aligned with Chekawa's fourth point—integrating a lifelong practice—help prepare us to embark for real on the journey of enlightened altruism that will occupy us in the rest of this chapter. In his text, this journey is mapped within the fifth point—measuring success on the path. In terms of the path of contemplative practice, success is mapped into three final stages: insight, meditation, and mastery. And the engaged path of insight is mapped by reflections on ten transcendent virtues which support what are traditionally called the ten stages of enlightened altruism.

All Teachings Coalesce in a Single Intentionality: Becoming Sheer Openness

Given our look at the path which leads to the spirit of altruism, we return to Chekawa's text, and consider point five: measuring progress on the path. As we grow out of our traumatized self-enclosure into a more mature sense of self and other, another seeming split appears between our practice of compassion and our growing insight into the emptiness of all people and things. This continues throughout the initial phase of meditation on emptiness, in which we oscillate between the seemingly polar insights of spacious equipoise and illusory aftermath. As we saw, progress over time is measured by the gradual resolution of that apparent polarity, as we begin to realize that radical openness and unconditional compassion are in fact two sides of the same coin: a truly objective experience of reality. So, progress along the path of clearing the mind for social engagement can be measured first of all by the gradual coalescence of the teachings of self-healing, compassion, and emptiness into the mature compassionate openness traditionally called the spirit of enlightenment. Of course, technically speaking, this oscillation continues to be slowly resolved through this and the remaining nine stages of the enlightened altruist's path.⁴¹

Beyond the convergence of distinct aspects of thought and practice in one realization, Chekawa's precept also suggests the practical coalescence of that unifying spirit with the countless moment-to-moment intentions and actions that make up our everyday lives. To yield a whole new way of life, our integration of the spirit of enlightenment cannot be limited to unifying insights on the meditation cushion, but must be woven into the fabric of our hearts, minds, and lives in such a way that it increasingly unifies all we think, do and say with the spirit of enlightened altruism. Traditionally, the work of integration in this phase increasingly brings this spirit into all our intentions and acts, public and private, right down to the most prosaic activities of daily life, including eating, drinking, waking, and sleeping. As Shantideva says,

I will regard my body as a boat—
A basis for coming and going—
And to realize the aims of all beings
I should transform it into a wish-fulfilling gem.⁴²
I should perform all acts for others' happiness.
This excellent quality is precious and rare,
And with it, I'll savor the pure joy and happiness
Which arise from actions that benefit others.⁴³
Whatever I do in any context,
Whether to benefit myself or others
I should try to practice
The (altruistic) discipline prescribed for that context.⁴⁴

Direct Realization of Emptiness and the Ultimate Spirit of Enlightenment

The spirit of universal compassion which is the fruit of the five first steps on the altruist's path must be prepared for the final ripening of the ten stages of enlightened altruism by the catalyst of self-transcendent insight. As on the path of personal self-healing, here as well, our cultivation of healthy motivations and actions initially depends on our having confidence in a rational inference about how suffering and happiness

work, rather than on a direct perceptual realization. So, however committed or stable our spirit of compassionate openness is, until now it is still only considered conventional in that it still depends on forms of reasoning that help us override our default misperception of ourselves as intrinsically separate from others. When Chekawa says our progress on the altruist's path can be measured by the coalescence of all practice into one intentionality, he is referring to a form of compassionate openness that is not just an ideal but is based on a direct realization of our total interdependence with everyone and everything around us. Since it involves a direct intuitive perception of our ultimate lack of any unrelated identity, such a compassionate openness is traditionally called the "ultimate" spirit of enlightened altruism.

While at first blush it may seem idealistic or romantic to think ordinary human beings can so completely transcend our innate self-enclosure or self-protectiveness, the fact is that mammals in general and humans in particular are naturally prepared to see and treat our kin as inseparable or indistinguishable from ourselves. If, to paraphrase Shantideva, parents see their children's bodies as extensions of "self" while children see their bodies exclusively as "mine," is it really unnatural or unrealistic for the altruist to take a parental view towards all life, seeing and treating all beings as part of one family, one body, while less mature others still maintain a myopic, child's eye view? As our working conception of compassionate openness is fully validated by our perception of our total interdependence with life, it gains the unequivocal certainty and uncontrived immediacy of a direct realization of how things are and work. This realization in turn dispels any lingering self-protective doubts, allowing the ultimate spirit of altruism to emerge as the unifying intentionality guiding our every thought, feeling, and action in the world.

Personifying Enlightened Altruism: The Contemplative Stage of Engaged Insight

As on the path of personal self-healing, the third stage of contemplative practice on the path of social engagement is the stage of insight. The main event on this stage is the breakthrough in meditative insight that galvanizes our moral development by letting us see the true nature and workings of suffering and happiness. Essentially, this stage gradually takes us beyond the virtual insights of the application stage to direct personal experience of how things are and work.⁴⁵ This direct, intuitive feel for the true nature of our lives and our world stands as an unmistakable counterpoint to the delusions and distortions we learned to mistake for reality. What distinguishes this stage from the same stage on the path of self-healing is that our insight opens out from our own self-imposed isolation to take in the alienation of all living beings.

Despite the powerful, galvanizing effect the breakthrough insight on this stage has on our compassionate openness with others in the world, the mental and emotional blocks to our fully embodying the ultimate spirit of enlightenment remain. These persistent obstacles continue to limit our moment to moment ability to act on or even see our inseparability from others in daily life, outside of our meditation sessions. The cognitive dissonance this leaves between our highest breakthrough insight and our daily experience with others creates a tension that further motivates us to progress through the next nine stages of enlightened altruism. The gradual progress on these stages consists in progressively working through the affective and cognitive blocks that obstruct our full embodiment of compassionate openness, by applying our realization of emptiness to help disarm and dissolve these blocks, one degree at a time. While the work on the first through seventh stages is mainly focused on overcoming the affective blocks caused by stress-reactive emotions that reinforce self-indulgence, called blocks to freedom, from the latter part of the eighth stage through the tenth, the focus shifts to exposing and dissolving the instinctive reifications that subtly block our wisdom, called blocks to objectivity or omniscience.

The Sixth Reflection: Transcendent Giving and the Joyous Stage of Altruism

With our altruistic spirit freed of any artificial distinction between self and others, our natural tendency to give protection, help or guidance to others in need is purged of any lingering tendency towards sentimental involvement. Once our social engagement has become a spontaneous and unconditional response based on seeing the objective reality of what is and needs to be done, we finally cross over into the brave new world of enlightened altruism. The traditional litmus test for such genuine altruism is whether we're making any reified distinction between the three aspects of any altruistic action like generosity, namely: the altruist who helps; the recipient of help; and the helping interaction. Engaging with others with such complete freedom from preconceptions about any limits or boundaries to what we can, should or want to do for them frees our natural empathy and altruism of any learned or innate restraints, allowing us to cultivate social-emotional virtues or

qualities in an open-ended way. Such unrestrained cultivation of altruism is what is traditionally called the vehicle of transcendence. And the realization of direct insight into emptiness and selflessness at this stage opens the gateway for that vehicle, by freeing us from habitual blocks to the transcendence of any preconceived limits to our altruistic engagement. Since it clears the way for the cultivation of self-transcendent altruism, the direct realization that frees the unconditional spirit of enlightenment is also called the “eyes” of the other transcendences.

If the door to our first acts of enlightened altruism is a breakthrough in insight, why is our reflection at this stage focused on giving? While the fundamental shift on this stage is hidden deep within our inmost perception of ourselves in relation to others, the most obvious manifestation of this inner shift is our move into a truly generative way of being. In a biological sense, the zone or sphere of true altruism is made evident by the more or less unrestricted flow of protection, aid and guidance between individuals and within social groups. In traditional terms, such natural generosity is seen as the single most important cause of the evolution of human life, as well as the emergence of abundance within any social groups.⁴⁶ In Buddhist social theory, this kinder, gentler animal spirit is the primary cause of the accumulation of wealth by individuals and societies. And, if we understand the importance of trust, free exchange, and the free flow of capital in market economies, this insight lines up well with current views in the emerging science of behavioral economics or neuroeconomics.⁴⁷

Apart from the importance of spontaneous generosity in social evolution or behavioral economics, its impact may be more clearly seen in its effects on positive moral development and social psychology. In terms of moral development, as we’ve seen, Buddhist psychology anticipated the contemporary findings of positive psychology. The basic social actions of giving or sharing with others presupposes a mirroring capacity not just to empathize with their needs but also to vicariously enjoy their well-being and success.⁴⁸ A generative stance of contributing whatever we can to those around us expands our possibilities of enjoying whatever it is we have to share, effectively multiplying our experience of abundance and gratitude geometrically. And this powerful social-emotional calculus is what gives this first stage of enlightened altruism the experiential quality of expanding our joy, leading the tradition to name it “The Joyous.” My effort to translate this effect into the mathematical language of calculus or economics is neither imposed nor new. Such a quantification of the multiplicative economics of positive social emotion and interaction is very much part of traditional descriptions of altruism, which figure the gain at each successive stage exponentially. Here is Nagarjuna’s thumbnail sketch of the altruist’s development on this stage:

Just as eight levels of Monastic Sages
 Are defined within their (Individual) Vehicle,
 So are the ten stages of altruism
 Within the Universal Vehicle.
 The first of these is the Joyous,
 Since (at this stage) the altruist rejoices
 At breaking free of the three bondages,
 And joining the family of Transcendent Ones!
 Through the maturation of this triumph
 Transcendent generosity becomes supreme.
 It ripples through a hundred worlds
 And s/he becomes a great lord on earth.⁴⁹

The three bondages—the grossest levels of attachment, aversion, and pride—are what bind the traumatized self into the repetitive cycle of stress and trauma that blocks our way forward through genuine altruistic development. So breaking the grip these exert on our capacity to see and treat others as “myself” or “my family” clears the way for the natural social impulse to share that powers altruism at this stage. Nor is the economics of altruism traditionally limited to psychological well-being. This is clear from traditional descriptions of how the positive energy generated by such social intentions and actions accumulates and exerts a transformative effect on the expression of physical traits, giving rise to the thirty-two signs and eighty marks of a fully mature enlightened altruist. Here are a few such verses from Nagarjuna’s *Jewel Garland*:

When others seek your wealth and possessions,
 Through the discipline of spontaneous generosity
 Your shoulders will be broad, your expression pleasing,

And you will become a leader in the world.⁵⁰

Through providing good housing
Well (furnished) with comfortable carpets,
Your complexion will be as fine

As pure, polished gold.⁵¹

Through speech that is eloquent and pleasant,
And by responding to (others') eloquence,
You will have open shoulders,

And a (broad,) lion-like chest.⁵²

In the realm of social psychology, the power of generosity harnessed at this stage is explained in terms of four forms of giving that foster social cohesion: offering aid; offering reassurance; offering guidance; and offering a positive example. These forms of generosity clearly show how the journey of enlightened altruism is not just a matter of personal moral development. It is a powerfully effective form of non-violent social action, which helps to build enlightened communities that support, foster, and cultivate the growth of altruism as a way of life. The social psychology of the altruist or bodhisattva is described at great length within the social theory of perfected or enlightened worlds, called Buddha-fields.⁵³ The utopian social theory of this engaged tradition is also distinguished from Western utopianism by its profoundly psychological vision of human social and cultural development. Rather than advancing from the outside in, mainly through political or economic action, this kind of utopia proceeds from the inside out, through the psychosocial ripple effects of the moral development of individuals. In this sense, it bears a family resemblance to Freud's notion that civilization must be recreated in the psychological development of each of its members. It differs in that it extends his understanding to what nowadays we might call positive social psychology: the advancement of civilization by the leadership of psychologically minded, psychosocially active altruists.⁵⁴

Of the Two Witnesses, Hold the Primary: Internalizing Self-Transcendence

This second precept in Chekawa's treatment of measuring progress addresses the crucial next step in the maturation of altruism: internalizing the wisdom of emptiness as the one, ultimately reliable frame of reference for judging one's own mental progress and the progress of others. The "witnesses" this precept refers to are traditionally defined as outer versus inner. An outer or external witness refers to valid moral judgments about our intentions and actions we gather socially by soliciting or receiving them from reliable others. The inner or internal witness refers to valid moral judgments we arrive at reflectively by monitoring and examining our own intentions and actions. What this precept describes is the gradual growth of our conscience from the outer-directed mode of childhood to the self-directed mode of adulthood.

Of course, the process of internalizing the judgment of reliable adults is basic to the formation of our normal adult conscience. On the contemplative path, this product of normal development must be revised in light of the fact that our biological parents lacked the higher perspective or objectivity of fully reflective individuals like enlightened altruists. Once we've personally realized the emptiness of any and all the mental constructs we previously reified as "I" and "mine," our mind has accessed a new degree and kind of objectivity, relatively free from the usual biases that made our habitual mindset subjective, blinded, and self-enclosed. Given this radical breakthrough, we begin to have inner access to the selfless objectivity that makes truly wise and magnanimous individuals like altruists so much more reliable. From this point on, as we begin to apply that breakthrough to exposing and correcting learned and innate biases, the balance in our moral judgments can safely begin to tip more and more towards the inner witness of our objective self-knowledge. So the natural life cycle of emerging adulthood is recapitulated here at the higher level of contemplative self-transcendence, leading eventually to the higher integration and maturity of an enlightened altruist.

Removing Our Blocks to Objective Altruism: The Stage of Engaged Meditation, Part I

If we align this pivotal moral step with the contemplative practice we need to support it, the task of internalizing objective self-knowledge aligns with of the work of deepening single-minded concentration and insight on the engaged stage of meditation. As on the path of personal self-healing, the stage of meditation here involves the gradual elimination of ever subtler forms of instinctive confusion and compulsive emotion, a

process conceived as moving slowly through nine successive levels.⁵⁵ The many traditional metaphors for this process—like washing stains out of a cloth—emphasize the incremental, painstaking nature of the gradual dissolution of compulsions and misperceptions, in both the contexts of personal and social self-healing.⁵⁶ The main difference is that clearing our minds and opening our hearts on the socially engaged path of altruism requires us to work through even deeper and subtler levels of stress-emotion and self-reification, in order to free us from self-protective reactions to social stress in the world.

The way this clearing out of the mind is reached is by combining progressive degrees of insight with deeper levels of concentration. Traditionally, this stage involves applying our breakthrough insight into emptiness to seeing through the emotional blocks that cloud our judgment about the workings of our own and others' minds. And, on the meditative side of the process, these deepening insights require the ever deeper levels of concentration traditionally mapped onto the increasingly more refined states of equipoise called the four formal contemplations and four formless absorptions. These progressive levels of equipoise and insight lead to the gradual purging of blocks to unconditional compassion and empathic objectivity in the course of the nine successive stages to come on the path of enlightened altruism.

In fact, the patient working through of blocks on the engaged meditation stage is so much a part of our progress towards transcendent altruism that it spans four of the five steps of moral development and eight of the nine stages of reflective growth remaining on the path. Since Chekawa measures progress in this phase in terms of four steps in moral development, it makes sense to map the engaged meditation stage into four parts, each of which lines up with one of the steps he highlights and two of the reflective stages on the path of altruism. The moral step of internalizing self-knowledge lines up with the first part of the engaged meditation stage and the second and third stages of altruistic reflection, known as the Impeccable and the Brilliant.

The Seventh Reflection: Transcendent Ethics and the Impeccable Stage

The moral step of integrating self-knowledge and the initial contemplative work of the engaged meditation stage are guided by the seventh reflection on the altruist's insight path: the reflection on transcendent ethics. The gist of this reflection is the understanding that our capacity to help others in the long run is mainly hindered by our identification with self-limiting habits of thought, expression and action, rooted in our instincts for self-protective clinging, defensiveness and self-reification. In the language of the mind-clearing practice, when our contact with others who are mired in distress triggers our own, in order to raise the level of the interaction we must "*drive all blame into one*" by targeting and disarming our own traumatic self-image and reactive habits. Ultimately, our worst enemy in proactively engaging the needs of others is our own lingering attachment to seeing ourselves through the debilitating eyes of self-indulgence, self-pity and, myopic self-enclosure. So progressively applying the insight of emptiness to exposing and dispelling traumatic distortions and the stress-emotions they mobilize frees us to grow into and live up to our highest values and ideals.

Beyond the moral psychology of this stage, the principles of transcendent ethics are a crucial part of our reflection. Traditionally, transcendent ethics involves a hierarchy of values, starting with caring effectively for oneself, and then naturally expanding the circle of care, one individual and group at a time, based on one's actual social-emotional development and capacity. In principle, of course, this gradual path of expanding engagement is self-transcendent in the sense that it embraces all beings everywhere, excluding none; and in that it embraces them unconditionally, regardless of any destructive intention or action and/or any potential harm to oneself or one's near and dear ones.

Of course, this does not mean that self-transcendent ethics makes a virtue of self-denial or self-sacrifice. If we must in any way neglect or endanger ourselves for the sake of helping many more others, it is an unavoidable moral cost which we must somehow make up to ourselves. Any case in which a conflict between self-interests and altruistic interests is resolved in favor of others is not based on a utilitarian calculus—the greatest good for the greatest number—but rather on a situational and intimately personal weighing of what might harm or help each and every individual involved. This weighing includes ourselves as having perfectly equal rights to well-being, but it also factors in our having greater capacity to make a difference for others and make up any harm to ourselves. It is the natural awakening to such an insight and ethos that is celebrated in rituals honoring the altruist's conceiving the spirit of enlightenment, the wish to help all beings however possible, especially to awaken them to their own potential for altruism. Here is Shantideva's poetic description of this earth-shaking event:

From this moment on, with no sense of loss,
I offer my body, my resources,
And all my virtues acquired at all times

To help all living beings, (all like) my mothers.⁵⁷
 Until they (themselves) reach Nirvana,
 May I support all forms of life,
 Throughout the realms of existence
 That stretch to the ends of space.
 Just as all those Blissfully Enlightened before
 Conceived the spirit of enlightenment
 And realized all (ten) stages
 Of an enlightened altruist's education,
 So will I, for the sake of all beings,
 Conceive the spirit of enlightenment
 And realize all the stages
 Of an enlightened altruist's education.⁵⁸
 Now my existence has become truly fruitful,
 And this human life has acquired great meaning;
 Today I've joined the family of the Transcendent,
 And become an enlightened altruist!⁵⁹

Of course, such aspirations are not just generic in the sense of being ideals we need to gradually live up to, but they are also generic in that they involve very general commitments to help others in any way possible. Traditionally, the development of any particular altruist is guided by personal pledges and commitments to help living beings in very particular ways. This specific intentionality is not only conveyed in the stories of Shakyamuni's past lives as an enlightened altruist, but also in the iconography of the socially engaged teaching tradition. For instance, the archetypal altruists that guide the practice of medicine and self-healing, such as the *Healing Mentor*, are said to have been motivated by special vows to heal various kinds of illness, physical, mental, and spiritual. Likewise the *Healing Mother* is said to have been inspired by a personal vow to promote longevity, freedom from stress and fear, and the supreme freedom of self-transcendent compassion. Such archetypal figures are meant to encourage budding altruists to entertain boundless hopes for their potential to make a very particular, very real difference in the lives of countless others. Here is Nagarjuna's description of the Impeccable stage.

The second (stage) is called Impeccable
 Because the (altruist's) ten (positive) acts
 Of body, speech and mind are impeccable,
 And s/he lives them out naturally.
 Through the maturation of this triumph
 Transcendent ethics becomes supreme.
 S/he becomes a great leader who heals the world,
 Master of its glorious (lands) and precious resources.⁶⁰

The Eighth Reflection: Transcendent Tolerance and the Brilliant Stage

Growing out of these effects on our own moral integrity, the deepening selfknowledge and self-analysis in this phase have a natural ripple effect on our realistic acceptance of others. The moral step of gaining truly objective awareness of others and the contemplative work of seeing through their traumatic habits are guided by the eighth reflection on the altruist's path: the reflection on transcendent tolerance. With our own self-knowledge and self-mastery expanded and our sense of dependence on others diminished, the playing field is now clear and level enough for us to see and accept other's limits without confusion or fear. Protected by the certainty that we no longer have any need to experience or react to other's distress as a life-or-death trauma, we are free to focus our energies on tolerating and working through whatever feelings their distress prompts in us. Instead of triggering a slip back into a childhood rut of powerlessness, an interaction with distressed others now calls up a mature sense of self-efficacy and a proactive readiness to approach and take on the challenges that overwhelm others.

In effect, this shift toward increasingly unconditional distress-tolerance is a cultivated extension of the growth of self-confidence in the parenting phase of normal human development. Just as an experienced parent has overcome the limited empathy and expertise which at first made childrearing seem overwhelmingly

stressful, so the altruist has overcome any default limitation of empathy and caretaking. As part of the conscious cultivation and extension of such stress tolerance, the altruist gradually leaves behind any hint of intolerance or prejudice towards others. By systematically facing and mastering the malignant distortions and destructive emotions within our own minds, we undergo a radical desensitization to the archaic forces that limit our human nature. This yields a sense of unconditional family feeling towards all life, akin to that expressed in Tertullian's famous aphorism, "Nothing human is alien to me."

As a final fruit of cultivating tolerance of our own and other's distress, our capacity to face and endure any obstacle is increased, immeasurably enhancing our ability to achieve all aims and master our full potential. So transcendent tolerance not only has the fruit of vastly enhancing our social effectiveness, but also increases our self-efficacy in general. This is because frustration is the single greatest obstacle to our persisting and progressing in the face of challenges, be they our own limitations or others'. Tolerance is a rate-limiting skill not just for pacifying anger, but also for recovering from any addictive or obsessive attachment. Finally, tolerance is equally critical to the mastery of our own capacity for attention, mindfulness, and concentration, since the power to hold our minds focused depends on our ability to resist the de-centering pulls of fatigue and distraction without getting frustrated enough to break our concentration. Here is how Nagarjuna describes the achievement of this stage:

The third is called Brilliant
Since the pacifying light of wisdom dawns
As the contemplations and powers evolve,
Extinguishing (gross) attachment and hatred.
Through the maturation of this triumph
(The altruist) perfects skills like tolerance and effort,
Completely ends (all) desirous attachment
And becomes a great leader of (humans and) gods.⁶¹

Always Rely Exclusively on the Happy Mind: Pure Positive Energy and Focus

The eighth step Chekawa maps on the altruist's path of moral development involves harnessing the power of enthusiasm and passionate flow to the development of transcendent endurance and single-mindedness. Beyond the obstacles of self-limitation and frustration lies the pitfall of fatigue, which makes us vulnerable to inertia, discouragement, and a sense of inadequacy. The moral force we need to pull us out of these pitfalls and keep us on the uphill path of altruism is the capacity for the single-minded immersion in the flow of positive energy focused on truly positive aims and goals. While this indispensable step may seem like a kind of forced self-denial or perfectionistic striving, the real development at this point on the path springs from a profound shift in motivation and affect that is distinct from any imposed obligation or top-down imperative. This is the fundamental shift in our core, baseline affective state from a survival-based stress-reactive emotional tone to an abundance-based radically proactive emotional tone.⁶²

The moral step of learning to *rely exclusively on the happy mind* reflects both a shift to a new motivational bias in favor of positive states and aims, as well as a conscious commitment to cultivate an acquired taste for genuine and continuous happiness. While the very idea of such a shift may seem arbitrary or unrealistic, the young fields of positive psychology and interpersonal neuroscience offer ample support for two surprising conclusions: that we have a vast untapped potential for positive social-emotional attunement,⁶³ and that consciously cultivating that capacity appears to be the most effective strategy for adapting to the unnatural, overwhelmingly social and cultural environment of civilized living.⁶⁴ While our instinctive bias and our modern cultural conditioning both predispose us to rely on the survival-based "animal spirits" of compulsive acquisitiveness, aggression, and insecurity, it is becoming increasingly clear that this aversive mindset actually fuels a vicious cycle of hyperactivity and fatigue which drives us to distraction and burnout.⁶⁵ On the other hand, positive emotional states like contentment, enthusiasm, and joy seem to support far more stable endurance and effective performance in the social and cultural activities that make up the bread and butter of civilized life.⁶⁶

Removing Our Blocks to Objective Altruism: The Stage of Engaged Meditation, Part II

The contemplative practice we need to support this moral shift towards positive states and aims is the work of applying deeper levels of concentration and insight to overcoming blocks to immersion in flow states and single-minded absorption. Whereas the initial phase of the engaged meditation stage focused on seeing through reified views of self and other that block our capacity for transcendent ethics and tolerance, this phase deepens and focuses the emptiness insight on seeing through our identification with aversive emotions and survival aims that block our cultivation of self-transcendent endurance and concentration. It is supported by our deepening capacity for direct realization and single-mindedness, based on the power of meditative endurance supported by an increasingly all-consuming immersion in mental and physical bliss and plasticity.

From this new experiential platform of euphoric mind/body states, we finally feel safe and sure in our capacity to live in positive motivations and aims, and so are more able to release our habitual identification with the self-protective emotions and aims that lock us into the cycle of stress and trauma. Key to this immersion in positive states is a readiness to let go of any forced control over our mind/body processes and relax into the increasingly unfettered flow of realistic enthusiasm and optimism.⁶⁷ Here, our new positive flow is focused on breaking instinctive clinging to self-reifying views and survival aims, freeing us to realize the deepest meaning of the noble truths: the truth that our entire involvement in compulsive life was based on nothing more than a nightmarish delusion. This breaking of the first link of the cycle of stress and trauma also naturally frees us to feel an inseparable identity with and compassion for all living beings trapped in the grip of that primordial delusion. Traditionally, it is said that these breakthroughs free us to disarm and dissolve the finest levels of our gross stress-emotions and the grossest levels of our moderate stress-emotions. This second phase of the engaged meditation stage brings us two thirds of the way to complete freedom from the instinctive emotions that block our path to fully enlightened altruism.

The Ninth Reflection: Transcendent Endurance and the Radiant Stage

Aligned with the moral step of relying on positive mind-states and the contemplative phase of using emptiness to release our minds from self-protective emotions, progress at this point is guided by the reflection on transcendent endurance. The big picture here is that, as the scope and depth of our altruistic resolve grows, we can easily get discouraged by the seemingly endless, extreme and intractable nature of the various kinds of suffering undergone by all living beings. If we are to truly engage with all the suffering of all life around us, we must have not just certainty about our interdependence and the capacity for cultivating transcendent generosity, ethics and tolerance, but also what is known as the “armor” of transcendent endurance. In essence, this involves an unshakable motivation that’s only possible because our minds are immersed in our work with a passion that helps dissolve hesitations, resistances, and doubts and makes us effectively one with our process and aim. In terms of contemporary stress-research, transcendent endurance confers a high degree of resilience in the face of potentially overwhelming stress and challenge that enhances our sense of self-efficacy and protects our positive motivation and action from fatigue and burnout.⁶⁸

Beyond the role of endurance as an armor against caregiver stress, fatigue, and burnout, the traditional reflection extends to two other indispensable roles this capacity plays in the maturation of enlightened altruism. One of these has to do with the importance of cultivating self-transcendent endurance when it comes to actually engaging and persisting in altruistic activities that benefit others. This aspect of the reflection is meant to prime us to steadily increase our capacity not just to sustain motivation but also to follow through on our intention to help by expanding our ability to persist in specific helpful activities. Another aspect of the traditional reflection involves recognizing the role of transcendent endurance in constantly extending our capacity to persist in moral self-discipline. This aspect of the reflection aims to counteract any natural tendency to let ourselves off the hook at some point in our responsibility to ourselves or others, by consistently stretching our sense of moral responsibility as our capacity to help continues to increase. To wrap up our look at this reflection, here are Nagarjuna’s comments about the achievements on this stage:

The fourth (stage) is called Radiant
Since the light of genuine insight shines
When (the altruist) cultivates the distinctiveness
Of the faculties conducive to enlightenment.
Through the maturation of this triumph
S/he rules those in the Conflict-Free (Realm),
By being supremely skilled
In dispelling self-reifying views.⁶⁹

The Tenth Reflection: Transcendent Meditation and the Invincible Stage

After developing self-transcendent endurance, the rest of our work on immersion in positive states and pacifying disturbing emotions is guided by the reflection on self-transcendent meditation. The focus of this tenth reflection is on the necessity of mastering unwavering single-mindedness in order to deepen our immersion in euphoric flow, and with it, our ability to stay continuously focused in confronting subtler levels of disturbing emotion and primal confusion. The vital contribution of the deepest levels of concentrative calm is evoked by the name of the stage. As we've seen in our prior discussions of meditation, these deep levels are far beyond the entry-level practice of calming the mind familiar to us as mindfulness meditation. Of the nine levels of concentrative quiescence identified on traditional maps, mindfulness is the leading force only through the fourth, and awareness only through the sixth. The deepest levels that support transcendent meditation are the three most profound levels known as quiescence, single-pointedness and equipoise.⁷⁰ This stage is called Invincible because, with the stabilizing platform and laser-sharp focus of one-pointed concentration and meditative equipoise, the altruist on this stage cannot be derailed or deterred from the flow of compassionate openness by any of the disturbing influences of toxic emotion or self-deceptive confusion.

Of course, such complete mastery of the deepest levels of concentrative absorption is not simply a mental feat or profound state of trance. Its power consists in the fact that such concentration is only possible when the mind/ body's core network of bliss and plasticity has come under conscious self-regulation. The capacity to fully access and tap the flow of mental and physical ecstasy is what finally gives the altruist the willpower and mind-power to stay immersed in compassionate openness, while having the presence and clarity to stop clinging to or identifying with the innate demons of self-indulgence, self-protection and self-reification.⁷¹ While such concentration may be harnessed to the most profound non-conceptual peace of mind, to profound self-transcendent insight, or to a combination of both, the transformative power of such deep meditation lies in the way it allows the mind to pour itself at will into our aim or object, as completely as water poured in water. This deep, unitive quality in turn supports an intuitive awareness that yields a direct, fresh, and unmediated experience of whatever we're focusing on or undertaking in daily life, as well as the development of extraordinary faculties, such as empathic omniscience, supernormal sensory acuity, or extraordinary memory and recall.⁷²

In terms of contemporary research, such profound concentration would appear to reflect a capacity to self-regulate the neural processing of internal reward which mediates all goal directed activities from aim-seeking and satisfaction to the modulation of neuroplasticity and the reinforcement of learning.⁷³ Since this core mind/brain system is also involved in the aversive conditioning of trauma and the reinforcement of addictive craving and compulsive behavior, gaining the capacity to consciously modulate it is of enormous help in unlearning such negative habits as well as enriching plasticity and the learning of positive alternatives.⁷⁴ Although at present we have only preliminary evidence to support such a reading, these are compelling enough for us to assume that the reflection of this stage may refer to such a profound achievement.⁷⁵ We'll return to our hypothesis about this achievement in part 4, when we explore the process-oriented map of the nervous system and its potential overlaps with our own. To conclude, here is Nagarjuna's description of this stage on the altruist's path:

The fifth (stage) is called Invincible
Since (the altruist) can vanquish all demons.
By developing subtle, healing intuitions
(Based on teachings) such as the noble truths.
Through the maturation of this triumph
S/he rules those in the Joyous (Realm),
And eliminates the (emotional) sources of all
Addictive and fundamentalist views.⁷⁶

The Measure of Having Learned is Elimination: Moving Beyond Emotional Blocks

Chekawa's next precept describes the altruist's moral development as the gradual removal of even the subtlest obstacles to complete emotional freedom and unbiased objectivity. Of course, in our mapping of that process,

the next step on the path is the unlearning of the most subtle levels of reactive emotions which block our inner freedom and lasting happiness. While we may have a hard time imagining that we can live in such lasting inner freedom and peace, it helps here to remember that plasticity and altruism have become the watchwords of our contemporary neuroscience⁷⁷ and positive psychology.⁷⁸ The moral step of fully overcoming emotional blocks to inner freedom and peace of mind is possible not just as a limiting case of the normal life cycle of moral development but also a predictable outcome of the self-mastery and self-transcendence achieved on the last step of immersion in positive states. What is distinctive about the culture of Indic contemplative science is the insistence that this exceptional maturation is accessible to all human beings and can be systematically reproduced given the right education and methods.⁷⁹ How? By conjoining the very deepest levels of blissful single-mindedness with the self-transcendent insight and art of emotional healing, an altruist at this stage can eliminate ever-subtler levels of reactive emotion that tie us in to the cycle of stress and trauma and so block our freedom to live in unconditional peace with ourselves and unwavering compassion for others.

Removing Our Blocks to Objective Altruism: The Stage of Engaged Meditation, Part III

To support the final work of clearing emotional blocks, the third phase of the engaged meditation stage combines the power of concentrative equipoise with the single-pointed scalpel of transcendent insight to expose and cut through the misperceptions that rationalize our identification with the subtler compulsive emotions of stress and trauma. By allowing our minds to stay immersed in the spacious equipoise that realizes the emptiness of our traumatic experience of self and world, the combined force of concentrative quiescence and self-transcendent insight brings us at last to a genuine cessation of the acquisitive, aggressive and self-protective instincts which are the root causes of compulsive life. This direct, intuitive realization in turn frees the mind from its emotional blocks to three forms of self-transcendent wisdom: the relative wisdom that recognizes the causal power of quiescence and insight to stop the cycle of stress and trauma; the ultimate wisdom that realizes the emptiness of the false self and world created by the misperception and reification of the confused mind; and the empathic wisdom that applies these two personal realizations to understanding and healing the self-inflicted suffering of all other life.⁸⁰

The Eleventh Reflection: Transcendent Wisdom and the Engaging Stage

The moral step of eliminating blocks and the contemplative phase of realizing moments of true cessation are guided by the reflection on transcendent wisdom. Without the wisdom to expose and disarm self-protective instincts and habits, even the deepest meditative absorption will not fundamentally change who we are and how we live. This is why combining meditative self-mastery with self-transcendent wisdom is seen as the ultimate, rate-limiting step in overcoming our self-imposed blocks to complete freedom *from* compulsion as well as freedom *of* moral development. But if the work of this stage is to free the mind of its natural entanglement with innate stress-emotions, why is wisdom as or more critical here than meditation?

You may recall from the last chapter that the engaged teaching tradition of Nagarjuna makes the case that the altruist's life of compassionate openness in the world requires her to cut the network of stress and trauma at its taproot: the self-protective, self-reifying habit. The reflection at this stage is that the deeper we want to go in disarming and resolving subtler and subtler forms of negative emotion, the more indispensable self-transcendent insight becomes. While this wisdom or enlightenment may be far more profound than any healing experience we're used to in everyday life, even in psychotherapy, it may help to demystify it by realizing that it heals in much the same way as waking up from a nightmare or recovering from a trauma.⁸¹ When we know for certain that we are not alien to our world and that our struggle for survival is effectively done, that knowledge certainty frees us to disarm our stress-protective emotions more deeply and decisively than any moral imperative or act of willpower ever possibly could.⁸²

Given this decisive break with the self-protective, self-reifying habit at the root of compulsive life, here we begin to finally break free of even the subtle compulsions that block our full potential for compassionate openness. As a result, we can begin to approach and engage in the way of being of enlightened altruists like Shakyamuni. So this stage of altruism is called Engaging. With a genuine freedom from any alienated or compulsive sense of self, here we can proceed with no hint of self-inflation or self-congratulation. Nagarjuna's description of this stage alludes to the cultivation of the distinctive qualities of an enlightened altruist, the seminal forms of the distinctive qualities of a fully enlightened individual. Traditionally, these are numbered at

eighteen, beginning with the six transcendent virtues cultivated thus far, along with the four arts of social cohesion, the non-abandonment of any living beings, and so on.⁸³

The sixth (stage) is called Engaging
Since (the altruist) engages the qualities of enlightenment.
By practicing transcendent insight and quiescence,
S/he attains cessation and develops (them).
Through the maturation of this triumph
S/he rules those in the Pure Fantasy (Realm),
Has no detractors among the (Buddha's) disciples,
And tames those with the pride of arrogance.⁸⁴

The Twelfth Reflection: Transcendent Technique and the Expansive Stage

As we master the moral step of eliminating blocks and the contemplative art of realizing cessation, our progress on the altruist's path is guided by the reflection on self-transcendent technique. With the removal of even the subtlest emotional blocks to freedom and clarity of mind, our capacity to climb out of our own rut of self-pitying self-protectiveness grows to the point where we can see ourselves and others with equal wisdom and act with truly objective empathy and effective compassion. This capacity to stand outside our traumatized self and see the self-inflicted causality of suffering quite precisely, combined with our new ability to disarm our compulsions by seeing how empty and costly they are, translates into a gradual expansion of our skill in helping others see and heal their own self-defeating habits. This enhancement in both awareness and expertise makes up transcendent technique: our technical mastery of the art of inspiring, guiding, and teaching others to heal themselves.

Because of this expanded scope of altruistic outreach, this stage is called the Expansive. In effect, it reflects not only the deepening of our newfound capacity to cut the causal network of stress at its roots, but also the natural spin-off of that capacity in our dealings with others. This natural expansion of our altruistic capacity is also facilitated by the fact that our growing ability to realize the freedom and clarity of cessation makes it more and more accessible outside formal meditations in our daily dealings with others. In effect, on this stage the oscillation between our spacious equipoise and our dreamlike aftermath insights begins to dissolve, and we grow able to draw on our transcendent wisdom in the midst of our compassionate action. Here is how Nagarjuna describes the achievements of this stage:

The seventh (stage) is Expansive
Since the extent (of the altruist's art) greatly expands,
Because s/he can enter the equipoise of cessation
(Instantaneously) from moment to moment.
Through the maturation of this triumph
S/he leads those in Control of Others' Fantasies,
And with genuine intuitive realization
Of the noble truths, becomes a master teacher.⁸⁵

The Mark of Having Learned is Being Endowed with Five Kinds of Munificence

Relying on the foundation of self-transcendent wisdom and empathic art, the altruist in this phase of moral development enters the final stages of cultivation that will eventually result in full maturity and integration. As we begin to grow into mature altruism, breaking out of our reactive self with wisdom and reaching out to others with empathic art, our new way of being begins to take on individual shape, based on whom and how we aspire to help. Cheka-wa's yardstick here is standardized to the fivefold typology of native geniuses and altruistic styles recognized in the engaged teaching tradition. Within that typology, the variety of individual gifts and paths is categorized in terms of what are called the five families of enlightenment.⁸⁶

These families are usually identified by symbols that represent their special gifts for transforming compulsions into altruistic intentions and actions. The wheel family transforms aggression into peace-making and non-violent activism. The jewel family transforms acquisitiveness into universal compassion and compassionate giving. The lotus family transforms clinging into contemplative self-healing and empathic art. The sword family transforms competitiveness into altruistic leadership and unbridled compassionate action.

The scepter family transforms pride into self-transcendent wisdom and unconditional love. The traditional commentary on this precept lists a sample of five types of enlightened altruist that line up with these families, which I like to call the moral altruist, the inspired altruist, the contemplative altruist, the active altruist, and the transcendent altruist.

Of course, these are “ideal types” or archetypes rather than fixed and rigid categories. Within each there is a wide range for the diversity of different individuals and their specific aspirations and missions. Yet there’s also a common pathway by which each individual must progress in finding and developing a mature altruistic vocation. That common pathway is the final clearing away of any trace emotional blocks to freedom of mind and a shift in focus towards the removal of cognitive-perceptual blocks to compassionate objectivity. As the altruist’s mind is increasingly cleared of the layers of misperception that have accumulated over the years and across generations, the primal instincts for self-reification that cloud the mind’s full potential to see reality as it is can be gradually unlearned. This process not only seals the transformation to a transparent inner life of radical open-mindedness but also enhances and guides the development of a social life of compassionate engagement. As we’ll see, this final phase of meditative transformation is guided by the penultimate stages of self-transcendence, focused on the cultivation of self-transcendent affirmation and power.

Removing Our Blocks to Objective Altruism: The Stage of Engaged Meditation, Part IV

Supporting the step of growing into our altruistic role and mission is the final phase of the meditation stage on the engaged path of contemplation. Given the full realization of transcendent wisdom and healing art, self-analysis, and emotional self-mastery have reached the point where we can stop the reinforcement of stress-reactive habits and uproot the instinctive emotions that anchor them. As our ability to extinguish these instincts ripples out from our meditative breakthroughs to free us in every moment of our lives, we gradually complete the removal of even the subtlest emotional blocks to lasting peace and freedom of mind. With our minds consistently settled, clear, and positively energized, we can now begin the final work of clearing away the most insidious of its instinctive blocks: the self-deceptive instincts to reify, identify with and cling to traumatic distortions of self and world that cloud the natural clarity and objectivity of consciousness. This final process of clearing the mind is vital both to free our emerging, proactive self from any lingering identification with trauma and to enhance the capacity of that new self to engage others and the world with a radically open and caring mind.

A person who can identify with the selfless mind within or beneath our biased constructs of self and world gains an optimal capacity to see people and things as objectively as a living being can. This capacity is invaluable both in knowing and caring for one’s own life and in knowing and caring for others. In a sense, such a selfless awareness can climb into other’s minds like a highly intuitive therapist, or an omniscient narrator in a novel. Far from a passive accident of neural function, such an enlightened consciousness can support an expanded, objective form of self-efficacy like that Thomas Nagel described as “the objective self.” Yet it is equally far from conventional views of the mind of God, conceived as a unitary person, being or spirit, ultimately distinct from the minds of ordinary living beings. Instead, it is a self-transcendent potential within us all, akin to what the Greeks called our *daimon* or native genius.

Climbing out of our own myopic standpoint is not only vital to seeing things from the standpoint of others—in the big picture of interdependence—but also to understanding how people and things actually work, so that we can effectively help ourselves and others. Viewed in this light, these final stages help us see the Buddhist map of the altruist’s path in perspective as mapping the cultivation not just of enlightened altruism per se but of a socially engaged, enlightened form of human genius.⁸⁷ Given this, the fivefold typology of munificence Chekawa mentions may be read as a comprehensive framework of such altruistic genius. In particular, we can re-translate the five ideal types I glossed above in current terms, as moral genius, psychological genius, creative and contemplative genius, organizational genius, and scientific-philosophical genius. Seen in light of this ambitious quest to reach the highest levels of human performance and social self-efficacy, we may better appreciate why the reflections that guide this phase are on self-transcendent affirmation and power.

The Thirteenth Reflection: Transcendent Affirmation and the Immovable Stage

The moral step of growing into our altruistic genius and the contemplative work of removing the grossest

blocks to objectivity are guided by the thirteenth reflection—on self-transcendent affirmation. By applying the combined force of transcendent wisdom and technique to cut through our confused identification with a traumatic sense of inadequacy, we are freed to immerse ourselves unconditionally in the flow of self-transcendent wisdom, empathic communication and compassionate action. As a consequence, the affirmative commitments and pledges that planted the seeds for our distinctive mission as altruists now begin to bear fruit in artful mastery of mind, speech, and body, without our having to rely on conceptual thinking or conscious effort. In the language of Chandrakirti, we have finally reached the state of unconditional compassion, in which we respond to others' needs and wishes spontaneously, while staying immersed in the non-conceptual flow whose twin faces are spacious equipoise and illusory aftermath. So while we seem to others to embody the pure enjoyment and emanation of perfect altruism, our experience is one of unwavering immersion in pure open-mindedness and objectivity. Hence this stage of harvesting the fruition of our affirmative commitments and pledges is called Immovable. Chandrakirti describes this in his *Introduction*:

This pacified body is radiant, like a wish-granting tree,
And without conceptuality, like a wish-fulfilling jewel.
It remains, for the benefit of the world, until all beings are freed,
And appears to those who are free from fabrication.
Just as a potter with great strength
Expend great energy turning his wheel for a long time,
And later, though he invests no more effort,
It turns and appears to produce a pot,
So one abiding in the body with the essence of truth,
Without making (the least) effort now,
Engages in deeds wholly inconceivable
By the nature of his (prior) vows and the virtues of beings.⁸⁸

Here is how Nagarjuna describes this stage:

The (ever) youthful eighth (stage) is Immovable
Because (here, the altruist) never moves
From non-conceptual (flow), and the scope of her
Mental, verbal and physical acts is likewise inconceivable.
Through the maturation of this triumph,
S/he becomes the master creator of a thousand worlds,
And is unsurpassed by saints, hermit sages or disciples
In expressing the meaning of (contemplative) teachings.⁸⁹

The Fourteenth Reflection: Transcendent Power and the Pure Genius Stage

As the reflection on transcendent affirmation comes to fruition, the moral step of growing into genius and the contemplative phase of removing the moderate blocks to objectivity is guided by the fourteenth reflection, on self-transcendent power. Here again, by applying the combined force of transcendent wisdom and technique to cut through our confused identification with the self-reifying instinct itself, we are freed to fully realize and immerse ourselves in our capacity for selfless objectivity. As a consequence, we realize the full, unbridled genius of our natural minds, and can apply this genius without any hindrance to optimize our effectiveness in helping others. So this stage of realizing and harnessing the unbounded power of our minds is called the stage of Pure Genius. Here is how Nagarjuna described it:

The ninth stage is called Pure Genius
Because, like a crown prince,
(The altruist) has gained genuine personal experience,
And so has excellent intelligence about this (reality).
Through the maturation of this triumph,
S/he becomes the master creator of a million worlds,
And is unsurpassed by (contemplatives) like saints
In reading the minds of living beings.⁹⁰

When Adept Despite Distractions, You Have Learned: Altruistic Self-Mastery

The final step on the altruist's path of moral development is the culmination of all the self-correction and cultivation practiced throughout all prior steps and stages. In the course of this final moral advance, the altruist's embodiment of compassionate openness becomes totally unconditional, since no internal blocks are left to hinder it and no adverse circumstance can obstruct its full natural expression. Also due to this step, the altruist's pure open-mindedness and unconditional compassion, along with the spacious and illusory intuitions supporting them, become fully and finally integrated, continuous, and inseparable. Given the full ripening of the altruist's self-mastery, his/her qualities finally mature into the eighteen distinctive qualities of enlightenment, including unflinching correctness, poise, memory, concentration, non-dual insight, equanimity, will, energy, mindfulness, awareness, wisdom, and freedom; as well as continuous wisdom through all mental, verbal, and physical actions, and unhindered vision of the past, present, and future.⁹¹

The Contemplative Stage of Engaged Social Mastery

The culmination of the altruist's moral development is supported by the final stage of the engaged contemplative path, in which fully integrated transcendent wisdom and empathic art yields the union of blissful freedom of mind with pure objectivity. This integrated mastery is possible thanks to the removal of even the subtlest blocks to omniscience, which frees the mind to immerse itself fully and finally in the ultimate emptiness of all people and things while simultaneously seeing the relative causal workings of suffering and happiness precisely and objectively, just as they are. This full maturation of altruistic genius makes the altruist on this stage a master of the art of empathically understanding, inspiring and guiding all individuals and communities, fostering the transformation of their countless life-worlds. Traditionally, the fruition of this stage is unpacked in terms of the eighteen qualities listed above, together with the ten powers of enlightenment, four forms of fearlessness, and four forms of valid knowledge.

The ten powers reflect the expertise about human development gained on the altruist's path to self-mastery. Traditionally, they are listed as: the power of knowing right from wrong; of knowing the developmental consequences of actions; of knowing the inclinations of other minds; of knowing the various types of personality; of knowing the range of capacities of different beings; of knowing the universal path of self-healing; of knowing how contemplative states remove afflictions and blocks; of knowing our own (and others') evolutionary past; of knowing the death and posterity of living beings; and of knowing the end of suffering. As in the modern practice of psychotherapy, these powers of knowledge are understood not as supernatural powers but as expert capacities based on the gradual development of natural faculties for introspective self-knowledge and empathic awareness of other minds. Reflecting the mastery that grows along with this expertise, the four forms of fearlessness here are: fearlessness in facing reality, ending afflictions, facing the persistence of blocks, and progressing on the path to success. Finally, the four forms of valid knowledge are vital to the altruist's empathic art of communicating his/her mastery and confidence, including knowledge of conventions of language, of the meanings of words, of the aspects of the referents of words, and of the prosody that expresses nuances and emotional tones.⁹² In short, the fully mature altruist is not only a master of his/her mature form of altruistic genius, but also a fearless leader and a great communicator.

The Fifteenth Reflection: Transcendent Intuition and the Cloud of Truth Stage

The moral step of unconditional realization and the contemplative work of clearing the subtlest blocks to objectivity are guided by the fifteenth and last reflection on the altruist's path: the reflection on self-transcendent intuition. With the final taints that might bias or cloud the natural, selfless clarity of the altruist's genius removed, s/he is free to finally and fully master the direct, intuitive wisdom which endows all his/her intentions, expressions, and actions with the qualities of perfect guidance. S/he effectively becomes a natural and spontaneous source of abundant nurturance to all, regardless of the diversity of their needs, capacities, and aims. Since the altruist on this final stage of self-mastery becomes a source of valid teaching and guidance that nurtures the growth of altruism in all beings, the stage is called the Cloud of Truth or Cloud of Teaching. Here is how Nagarjuna describes this culmination:

The tenth (stage) is the Cloud of Truth,
Since the altruist showers (the world) with a rain

Of healing truth, and (her/his empathic art)
 Is consecrated with the brilliance of the enlightened.
 Through the maturation of this triumph
 S/he comes to master the states of creative genius
 And is the (world's) supreme authority (since s/he)
 Masters the objectivity of inconceivable intuition.⁹³

Points Six and Seven: The Commitments and Pledges of Everyday Altruism

Of course, the higher stages of the path leading to fully mature altruism naturally strike us as so far beyond our present capacity or potential that it may seem the province of the lucky few virtuosos or professional contemplatives. While the contemplative lifestyle and community structured by the monastic code of discipline may allow monks and nuns to aspire to develop such mature altruism, the five moral precepts that guide lay practitioners outside the monastery are hardly enough to bring a day to day practice of enlightened altruism within reach. Of course, there are the eighteen pledges of an enlightened altruist, but these are not as complete or down-to-earth as the commitments of the monastic code. It is here that the practice of mind-clearing can be an invaluable bridge, offering a lay ethos and discipline of compassionate living that can build on the five precepts and help us approach an altruist's way of life in the everyday world.

Of all the formats in which the mind-clearing has been taught and practiced down to our day, Chekawa's seven-point format provides the most complete, tangible and accessible set of guidelines. So having cross-referenced his map of the moral path of mind-clearing with the contemplative map of the engaged five stages and the map of the fifteen reflections on the altruist's path of insight, we now turn to survey the ethical guidelines Chekawa offers in points six and seven of his text. The first of these is a list of eighteen commitments, meant to prepare us to avoid the main pitfalls that lead to digressions or simply block progress towards an altruist's life. The second is a list of twenty-two pledges, meant to point us in the direction of everyday actions that gradually prepare us to embark and progress on the path towards an altruist's life. Given limits of space, I'll simply list these with some brief clarifying notes.

The Eighteen Don'ts: The Commitments of Clearing the Mind

- 1-3. *Always Reflect on the Three Principles*: Humility, Integrity, Impartiality
4. *Transform Your Intentions But Stay as You Are*: Maintaining Anonymity
5. *Don't Mention (Other's) Handicaps*: Practicing Transcendent Tolerance
6. *Don't Even Think About the Limitations of Others*: Radical Acceptance
7. *Purify Your Worst Addiction First*: Keeping it Real And Grounded
8. *Give Up Any Expectation of Results*: Keeping the Focus on Process
9. *Give Up Your Diet of Poison(ous Vices)*: Releasing Negativity
10. *Don't Indulge Self-Righteousness*: Mind Your Motivation
11. *Don't React to Insults*: Monitor Your Social Stress Reactivity
12. *Don't Wait in Ambush*: Restrain the Urge for Revenge
13. *Don't Go for the Jugular*: Restrain Your Attack Urges
14. *Don't Lay Your Burden on Others*: No Dumping or Passing the Buck
15. *Don't Pervert the (Authentic) View*: Avoid Exploiting the Teaching
16. *Don't Aim for the Top of the Heap*: Restrain Competition
17. *Don't Make Your Genius a Demon*: Don't Indulge Grandiosity
18. *Don't Seek Satisfaction in the Miseries (of Others)*: Avoid Malice

The Twenty-Two Do's: The Pledges of Clearing the Mind

1. *Practice All Yogas as One*: The Art of Compassionate Openness
2. *Subdue All Resistance With One (Art)*: Practice Giving and Taking
3. *At the Start and End (of Each Day), (Practice) Both the Two Actions*: Motivation and Dedication
4. *Tolerate Both (Good and Bad), Whatever Comes*: Maintain Equanimity
5. *Guard Both (These and Your Other) Vows as Your Life*: Maintain Commitment
6. *Master the Three Hardest (Challenges)*: Expose, Reduce, and Eliminate Blocks
7. *Nurture the Three Principal Roots*: Affirmation, Dedication, and Preparation
8. *Practice Three Kinds of Relentlessness*: Trust, Effort, and Wisdom

9. *Become Triply Inseparable (from the Practice)*: In Body, Speech, and Mind
10. *Practice Perfect Impartiality Towards Objects*: of Desire, Aversion, Indifference
11. *It Is Vital to Learn Profoundly and All-Inclusively*: Be Thorough and Rigorous
12. *Meditate Constantly on Special Cases*: Intimates, Enemies, the Disagreeable
13. *Don't Depend on External Conditions*: Cultivate Unconditional Care
14. *Take Up the Principal Practice Right Now*: Practice the Urgency of Now
15. *Don't Be Wrong-Headed*: Avoid Debasing the Contemplative Life
16. *Don't Be Erratic*: Practice Patiently and Consistently
17. *Learn Decisively*: Make Your Learning and Practice Count
18. *Break Free with Both Investigation and Analysis*: Complete Your Self-Analysis
19. *Don't Boast About Practice*: Work with Relentless Humility
20. *Don't Indulge Frustration*: Guard Your Practice with Transcendent Tolerance
21. *Don't Be Temperamental*: Break Your Addiction to Drama
22. *Don't Expect Thanks*: Trust Your Inner Leader

The Seven Point Mind-Clearing: Building a Rigorous Practice in the World

While Chekawa's lists of commitments and pledges are meant to help structure a rigorous daily practice that can bring consistency and genuine change within reach, surveying them all at once may still feel overwhelming. In practice, these precepts are not meant as rules we can immediately live by, but rather as pointers and guidelines for applying mind-clearing in daily life. Rather than trying to memorize and live by them all at once, the tradition is to simply read the three pages of precepts that make up Chekawa's text, including the ethical precepts of points six and seven. The idea is that, through familiarity over time, one or more of these pithy reminders will naturally come to mind in relevant situations, offering us an alternative to our habitual instincts and habits. When I teach these two points, I encourage people to pick out the few precepts that seem to hit home, since they likely address what they know to be their "worst addiction." By reflecting on these in a sustained and continuous way, we may find ourselves gradually gaining in insight and presence of mind, without our having to mount some superhuman, perfectionistic effort to change. This, I believe, is consistent with the healing pedagogy of the mind-clearing, and so I'll try to simulate how such anecdotal reflection may work in our closing meditative experiment.

Meditative Experiment 6: Using Commitments and Pledges

As before, start settling into a peaceful space and a comfortable, stable posture. Then cleanse your breath by exhaling an extra-long sigh or alternate-nostril breathing. Let your next breath be as gentle and fresh as possible, waiting patiently for the air to fill your receptive body as effortlessly as you can. Let this fresh, restorative breath start your shift towards a kinder, gentler rhythm of breathing centered at your heart. And as you feel that shift, take your gentler breath-rhythm as a focal point for gathering, settling, and centering more and more of your vital energy and awareness on your breathing body. As your body begins feeling lighter and clearer, scan and balance all your sensations, then immerse and bathe your mindfulness in the clear flow of primal awareness, and finally, stretch part of your attention upwards to scan the waves and currents of thoughts, images, and emotions that fill your waking mind.

Now open this all-inclusive mindfulness outwards to the world around you. While staying tuned to the healing energy and awareness within, imagine your mindfulness setting up a firewall around you that filters out any distractions or triggers coming in from the stress-world. Lightened and uplifted by your meditative body-mind, imagine you're on top of the world, and look down with care on the lives of all those around you in the city, country, and planet. Try to see through the surface disruptions of stress and the noise of idle chatter to feel your way into the healing energy that keeps us all growing and the pure open-mindedness that keeps us all learning. As you scan the variety of beings on all continents, imagine all those near and dear, unknown to you, and against you living in five different levels of stress and trauma, driven by the stress-emotions of anger, greed, clinging, envy, and pride. Imagine the hellish lives of beings driven by violence on the bottom tier; the ghostly lives of beings driven by greed just above them; the human condition of those driven by clinging in the midst of the stress world; the titanic struggles of those driven by envy in the upper tier; and the god-like lives of those driven by compulsive pride and self-satisfaction on top.

As you survey the various struggles of those in the world outside your firewall, notice and try to release your unrealistic bias to favor the dear, avoid the remote and ignore the unknown, and work instead to embrace all living beings with equal acceptance and care. In their presence, try, a breath at a time, to shift

your energies from clinging to love, from indifference to care and from aversion to tolerance. Keep taking others in with care on the in-breath and sharing your love, care, and peace on the out-breath, until you feel yourself gradually move towards a leveling sense of equality and interconnectedness with all life. Let your heart and mind break free of the death-grip of your self-enclosing survival instincts, like a cornered animal or traumatized child suddenly released into a safe haven of unconditional freedom and abundance.

Now feel your heart, warmed by the breath of your giving and taking, beginning to melt through the remaining stress-knots that bind you, thaw out your tender-heartedness and fully open up to the world. As you breathe in and out, taking in all beings with care and sharing yourself with equanimity and love, imagine the rainbow heart-drop of your empathy building, a breath at a time, until it fills your whole body as a flame fills a lamp or a nectar, a vase, flowing out of you like a rainbow wave that ripples out in all your interactions with others, connecting your heart and theirs in one boundless, unifying field. Now try to melt your sense of self into that connective field and feel your awareness and sensitivity stretch into every life around you, until you find yourself in their shoes, sensing their aims and needs as if each was your only child.

Take some time breathing your way into this objective self, sending loving breath from your heart-drop and feel it rippling out through your connective field-self to all the other hearts, and gathering in breath with care from all the other hearts back into yours. Try a breath at a time to feel your way into the varied textures of all their lives, sensing their various levels of compulsion and struggle. Imagine your in and out breath travelling like waves out and back through your connective field-self, taking in their needs for security, help, and direction and giving back what you can in the way of protection, aid, and guidance. The more you tune in, the more you'll begin to feel the pull on your heart strings of all the fear, thirst, and confusion of the various kinds of beings around you, triggering your own negativity in response to theirs. Now try to prepare yourself to resist those triggers by reflecting on five key commitments and pledges of clearing the mind, one for each of the root compulsions driving beings in the stress-world.

As you focus on beings living hellish lives at the lowest common denominator of violence, repeat mentally or out loud the commitments,

"Don't go for the jugular" "Don't wait in ambush" and/or "Don't retaliate to verbal abuse." As you tune into the struggles of the insatiable living ghostly lives impoverished by a sense of scarcity and greed, repeat mentally or out loud, *"Give up any expectation of results,"* and/ or *"Give up your diet of poison(ous vices)."* As you take in the struggles of animals and average humans living traumatic lives of fear and clinging, repeat mentally or out loud, *"Transform your intentions but stay as you are," "Don't depend on external conditions"* and/or *"Tolerate both (good and bad), whatever comes."* As you feel the compulsion of those struggling to be larger-than-life, consumed with envy, jealousy, and competitiveness, repeat mentally or out loud, *"Don't aim for the top of the heap"* and/or *"Don't seek satisfaction in the miseries (of others)."* And finally, as you sense the self-imposed isolation of fortunate beings living lives at the top of the food chain, intoxicated with complacency, self-satisfaction, and inflated pride, repeat mentally or out loud, *"Don't turn your genius into a demon," "Don't indulge self-righteousness"* and/ or *"Don't be temperamental"*

Try to welcome these pulls as part of the growing pains of your altruistic new self and of all those around you, and harness the energy freed from reactivity to the reflection that the only true solution for life on this planet is for you and all in your field to cultivate our human genius for altruism so we can all work together for the good of all. Finally, let this spark of inspiration ignite in your heart the spirit of enlightenment that wills the good of all by choosing an altruistic life in the world and offering it as an example to all those you touch with your field-self. As you begin to feel this spark ignite your heart, imagine the warmth and light it generates rippling out on the breath as a rainbow wave that travels through your field self to all other hearts in the world, lighting the spark of their own altruism. Imagine that rainbow wave splitting into a whole spectrum of healing energies: the pure white of tolerance disarming the hurt and angry; the gold of generosity satisfying the insatiable, the ruby red of mindfulness calming all fears; the emerald green of affirmation turning envy into team spirit; and the sapphire blue of wisdom turning pride into objectivity.

Now, as the inner light of altruism dawns at once in all the hearts in the world, imagine it merging into one tidal wave of rainbow lights and nectars that travels back from the ends of the earth, transforming the planet into a peaceful utopia, until it returns to your space, and coalesces into your heart as a rainbow drop of clarity and joy. To close, let the world and all its life return to their current condition, and let yourself return to normal, while holding the drop of the spirit of enlightenment in your heart. Commit whatever insight or energy you've gained in this mediation to your ongoing study, reflection, and practice, for your own benefit and for the sake of the whole world around you.