

### THREE

## BEING HERE NOW IN LOVE AND COMPASSION

### *The Spirit of Enlightenment*

Let's begin by visualizing our jewel tree again. Let your habitual identity and self-image go into a sort of meditation mode. When I say this, I don't mean that you're supposed to be sitting rigidly without moving and getting aches and pains. When I say, "Meditate together" in this book, sometimes I'll lead you into a meditation, but mostly we're learning, we're thinking, and we're in this presence of the wish-granting jewel tree and its radiation and its beautiful, luminous, rainbowlike jewel energies. You can be relaxed. Shift around, change your position if something aches. Don't worry about it. Close your eyes or partially close them, sit in a balanced posture, breathe evenly and gently. Open up a field of vision above your forehead, not looking with the eyes but looking up into the center of your forehead, where the third eye would be if you were a fierce deity. Looking up that way, sit comfortably, let yourself feel vast and spacious, calm. Let the world dissolve around you. Whatever you identify as your town, home, or apartment building, era, country, continent, and planet...let these all dissolve from your awareness. Let yourself be sort of unsure where you are. Let yourself feel a kind of gentle, spacious voidness, a feeling of freedom floating...

And then, arise from that with your mind to find yourself on top of the world on a grassy bluff looking down over Lake Manasarovar, the giant crystal lake. You can barely see its far shores. You're at fifteen thousand feet. The air is pure and clear, there are fluffy clouds in the sky. In front of you is an island, a jewel island with all kinds of mythic creatures prancing around its gardens. The center of the island is a giant tree that springs out of the earth like a Jack and the Beanstalk type of thing, going way up into the heavens,

out of sight.

This giant tree is glistening, made of a jewel substance, luminous like a Christmas tree, except in place of the Christmas ornaments there are flowers, thrones, and in all these flowers and on all these thrones are seated enlightened beings, human and divine. Whoever you want to see is there. You can have Buddha. If you're a Tibetan Buddhist, you would have your own personal lama or mentor, who would be dressed in the form of Lama Tsong Khapa, Milarepa, Karmapa Lama, or His Holiness the Dalai Lama. In the mentor's heart would be the Shakyamuni Buddha, the historical Buddha of twenty-five hundred years ago, and in Shakyamuni Buddha's heart would be a little Vajradhara with his consort, the divine buddha form, male and female in union.

If you are a Christian, you may have Jesus there. Perhaps in his heart God would be on his throne. Perhaps Mary would be there, perhaps in her heart would be Jesus and within his heart God. If you're a Muslim, you could imagine Muhammad being there, not as an icon, but as he was historically, or in your own imagination. If you're Jewish, you can think of Moses or one of the great rabbis, Rabbi Akiva. If you're Hindu, you can have Krishna or Rama or Sita, Radha, the goddess Shakti, or Shiva. If you're a Taoist, you can have Lao-tzu there, or Chuang-tzu. Or as a humanist, you can have Plato, Socrates, Pythagoras. Or you could have all of them there. To the entire pantheon of great teachers, you could add your teachers of this lifetime, your third-grade French teacher, your history teacher, your civics teacher—whoever was meaningful to you, who opened your eyes, taught you the alphabet, made you understand something new about your life, about yourself. Your parents could be there.

In the presence of these people, you feel secure. You feel they have a knowledge superior to yours. You feel that you have learned from them or could learn from them. I myself think of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, indivisible from all the teachers I've ever had, very kind teachers, Geshe Wangyal, Ling Rinpoche, Serkhong Rinpoche, Tara Tulku, Locho Rinpoche, Yeshe Dhonden. I see my own personal history, all the teachers, fused into one being who looks like His Holiness the Dalai Lama. I have thought of all of them as his emanations, and he is fused with Tsong Khapa, then Atisha,

then Guru Rinpoche, then Nagarjuna, then Shakyamuni Buddha, and then fused with Vajradhara.

I refer to these great teachers often, so here is some background on them. Tsong Khapa attained full enlightenment in 1398 and then taught for twenty-one years in such an intelligent, energetic, and charismatic way that his movement transformed the whole of Tibet and brought it into a genuine renaissance regarding its embodiment of the Dharma. Some credit him with keeping the traditions in bloom for five hundred years longer than they had been expected to last. The first Dalai Lama was his disciple, as was the first Panchen Lama, though their reincarnation lines were not called by those names for another few centuries. Atisha was a Bengali prince who renounced his kingdom and revived the teaching of the spirit of enlightenment of love and compassion for India itself, and then moved up at the end of his life into Tibet, where he renewed the Dharma with his inspiring example and eloquent wisdom.

Guru Rinpoche is more or less the supernatural emanation of Amitabha Buddha, the Boundless Light Buddha who presides over the Blissful Heaven in the Western direction, the destination of the hundreds of millions of followers of Buddhism's Pure Land school, currently flourishing in China, Korea, Vietnam, and Japan. He was invited to Tibet by the emperor Trisong Detsen in the eighth century; there he tamed the bloodthirsty mountain warrior deities of the Tibetan military empire and began the millennium-long process of making Tibet safe for the Dharma.

Nagarjuna was a great doctor, philosopher, and adept of India, credited with rediscovering the Mahayana—universal vehicle—teachings with the help of the dragon kings from under the ocean, teaching the profound teaching of voidness and relativity in an unrivaled way, serving as personal preceptor of several south Indian kings, then voyaging to America on a dragon's back and teaching there for several centuries before returning to India to kindle the Unexcelled Yoga Tantras of esoteric practice and attainment—he is believed to have lived around six hundred years.

Shakyamuni Buddha is the buddha of our historical era, born an Indian prince more than twenty-five hundred years ago. After living it up for twenty-nine years, he achieved the transcendent attitude and departed for the jungle

to discover the meaning of life. After six years of ascetic meditation and deep critical inquiry into himself and the world, he opened into a complete understanding of everything, and then he spent the next forty-five years teaching men and women from all nations and all walks of life, inventing the monastic community or Sangha to give them shelter and stipends to support them during their own study and practice.

Finally, Vajradhara is the divine, sapphire blue, rather sexy (often appearing in union with an exquisite sapphire blue or ruby red consort, in fact indivisible from himself/herself) buddha who is the esoteric emanation of all buddhas whose pleasure is to teach the Unexcelled Yoga Tantras, such as the *Esoteric Communion* and the *Superbliss Wheel* Tantras. These Tantras are the superhigh technologies of spiritual development that bodhisattvas use to accelerate their evolutionary progress to full buddhahood by learning to control their extremely subtle dreamlike minds and bodies in order to compress countless lifetimes of evolution into a single or at least several lifetimes—sort of like psychoneurogenetic engineering technologies of spirit and body, of wisdom and compassion.

That's my own pantheon, and don't worry if you do not recognize some of them. There are countless hosts of such historical and legendary beings in the jewel tree field, all of them so realized, so at one with "the force" that they can appear in light body or "astral" form anywhere to help anybody at any time, just as Obi-Wan would appear in transparent emanations at important moments in the *Star Wars* universe.

For your own jewel tree, you install your own pantheon so that you feel you're in the presence of your highest mentors. And then you feel that they really are there. You don't just think you're having an unstable vision of them. You think of them as really being there in this wish-fulfilling jewel tree, a giant tree that fills the whole space in front of you, radiates jewel lights to flood you with positive energy.

These beings *are* there, and they're looking at you, and they're saying, "How nice. So-and-so is just meditating there. He's trying to pick himself up by his own bootstraps, trying to contemplate, becoming more aware. She's traveling the path to enlightenment. What a wonderful thing." And they smile down at you.

From their glistening smiles, light rays radiate and flow toward you, and those light rays are diamond, crystal, coherent light, laser, liquid, gentle though flowing, ruby, emerald, topaz, sapphire, the whole spectrum flowing toward you. Amethyst liquid jewel light flowing into you, filling you up with light, making you feel energetic and buoyant, lifting you from your sense of heaviness, driving out of your mind your usual worries about your own self-identity and self-image, such as “I’m so-and-so. I understand only this much.” You are lifted out of your own self-imposed limitations, the inner voice that talks to you and inhibits you.

These thoughts and habitual monologues inside are washed away by a Niagara of jewel light that flows down from this gem tree and fills you up in a glowing, glistening being. And you become your whole potential. Any sense that you have of “Well, I’m going to learn this teaching, I’m going to meditate, but of course it’s going to be me doing it. I’ll come out of it afterward and then maybe I’ll go back later, but I’ll be the same old me”—that whole attitude dissolves, just floats out of you in the form of dark, shadowy, little scuttling thoughts. You just sort of drop your thoughts and embrace the light. You feel good in it, feel everything is possible, feel open to new understanding, feel open to seeing your own faults in a new way and rising above them and using them to bring yourself into new, virtuous qualities.

Then you notice in the field around you on this bluff that’s looking over the lake out of which the great giant gem tree springs, you notice that all beings are around you, all in human form, and toward your left are the beings that you like and to whom you feel attachment. In front of you are the beings that you don’t know and you have a kind of ignorant disinterest in, and to the right of you a little bit are the beings that you don’t like and you’re quite aware that they don’t like you. In fact, just thinking of them being there makes you feel nervous and ill at ease and sort of restless and paranoid at first. You feel aversion, even anger and hatred toward the beings to the right; you feel ignorance and disinterest toward the beings straight in front; and you feel attachment and fondness toward the beings to the left.

And you immediately think, “Why am I reacting like this to these beings? The ones I like now, I like because they’re nice to me and they’re friendly

and I get along with them and they do nice things for me. If they started being nasty to me over a regular period, I would pretty soon move them over to the right-hand category and put them with beings I don't want to see, beings I don't like. So, in fact, my liking them is just because they're nice to me. The beings in front of me, I simply don't know them. They may be the nicest, most beautiful people with great qualities, and I may become very attached to them if I get to know them. And the beings to the right of me, whom I don't like, they're just mean to me. Maybe I was mean to them. Maybe they're getting revenge. In fact, I know now that some of the beings in the 'like' category have been in the 'not like' category, and some of the beings in the 'most not liked' category were very dearly liked in the past. So there's nothing intrinsic in these beings that makes them that inherently likable or inherently unlikable. It's just my attachment and aversion and my ignorance that separate these three beings into these three categories."

So you try to equalize, be a little less attached to the loved ones, be a little less averse to the disliked ones, and take a little interest in the unknown ones, realizing all of the great potential that they have. And these beings, all of them, all three groups of them, are looking at you, and they're seeing you begin to glow. They're noticing that your usual form changes a little bit and you start to radiate and you start to luminesce and then the light flows out toward them as it overflows from you.

They don't see the refuge gem tree; they're not looking at it. They're looking at you. But, in fact, the light of the wish-granting gem tree from you flows to them, and they feel happy, those who like you. They feel interested and intrigued, those who don't know you. And they feel annoyed and competitive, those who know you and dislike you, but that gives them a little stimulus, and they feel challenged and quickened and awakened.

And so, back from them comes a kind of stimulating energy, whether it's competition or whether it's interest or whether it's fondness and love and gratitude. This energy loop comes back to you as encouragement, just as you send to your mentors energy of feeling loving and secure and friendly and peaceful and grateful for their blessing.

This jewel tree landscape is the setting for our path of meditation for each of our chapters and for all of the themes in our practice, the steps of thought toward enlightenment that we are undertaking. We can sometimes even keep this sense of refuge alive in our daily life, and retain a feeling of this heavenly host there in the sky. The whole of Tibetan culture became like this, after many centuries, with people visioning their mentors, Guru Rinpoche or Milarepa or Tsong Khapa, in their meditation sky. They visioned such beings as looking after their welfare, as concerned for them, especially Tara and Avalokiteshvara, the female and male Buddhist archetypes of compassion, the angels of compassion. And they began to feel that these beings were always present in the space around them. To symbolize the noble beings' presence, the people went into the mountains, and they carved *Om Mani Padme Hum*, the mantra of great compassion, plastering these letters all over the mountains. And they carved giant buddhas and bodhisattvas and angels and mentors and lamas and deities in all the hills and mountains. As you would ride around Tibet, you would be reminded all the time of the presence of all the enlightened beings shining about you and lifting you up out of your ordinary negative habits and putting you into the mode of seeking your own evolutionary fulfillment, of seeking happiness, of seeking to fulfill your deeper wishes for yourself and for all beings. They created this wonderful culture in which everything became a way of reminding you of your highest aim in life as a human being.

This is the beneficent environment that we're dwelling in during this retreat. We're setting up the pantheon of teachers and deities around us in the jewel tree. And we have withdrawn from the other environment, where stealth bombers fly overhead; where satellite dishes of the big corporations radiate consumer sitcoms; politicians control the White House; hungry, starving people are all over the planet; religious and ethnic violence and hatred are everywhere; the earth is being polluted, the ozone layer depleted, and a future seemingly lost. We drop out of that environment and into this different realm, where all the bodhisattvas are hovering in the starship of the wish-fulfilling gem tree and radiating their light around us, making everything possible for us in this context.

Now that we're in this environment, we turn to the next steps on the path to enlightenment.

## THE MOTIVATION OF COMPASSION

Whenever we meditate or practice or learn something or even as we go through the day, we should always think about our motivation. Why am I here giving this meditation? Is it just because this is my job? Is it because I want to become rich and famous? Is it because I want to be healthy or have more fun? Is it some sort of self-centered purpose like that? Is there something I want to get out of it right now in this life?

Or is it because I care for all beings? Is it because I want to become enlightened and awakened for the sake of every being? Is it because I'm not content anymore to be temporarily happy myself as an egocentric, separated person, but I want to have the real, deep happiness that comes from knowing that others I love are happy, and also from finally knowing that everyone is happy?

This motivation, our main topic in this chapter, the motivation of the bodhisattva, is known as *bodhichitta*, the will to enlightenment. *Bodhichitta* is the spirit of becoming perfectly awakened and perfectly wise, perfectly compassionate and loving, so that we are capable of helping all other beings become perfectly happy and perfectly wise themselves. This is really the motivation with which I should do whatever it is that I do, every day. I should remind myself of the fundamental opportunity of every human being to find the teaching of freedom. I should be motivated in everything I do toward that for myself and for others.

Inevitably, however, more selfish types of motivation do creep into our attitudes. Unfortunately, that motivation condemns whatever we do to yielding a lower result.

When we're learning, we should always try to avoid the faults of prideful thinking, such as I already know it all anyway. Even if we've heard something a thousand times, we should think, "I'm going to learn something new this time from this. I'm going to see more deeply. I don't really know what it is all about; I just heard the words." We don't want to have the flaw of the covered vessel: however much you try to put in a covered vessel, no matter how big and beautiful the vessel is, it just falls off, splashes on the floor, and spills because the vessel's lid prevents anything from going in.



A second potential flaw in learning that we should avoid is that of the leaky vessel. If we do not exercise mindfulness and memory, we hear something with one ear and it goes out the other. When our mind is wandering and we're paying no attention, just as whenever the best elixir is poured into a cracked vessel, it leaks right out.

The third flaw we should avoid is that of the poison vessel. It doesn't leak and its lid is open, but inside it are mixed the poisons of egocentric greed, delusion, and hatred. This is like when we're doing or learning something in order to gain power, revenge, or profit, so we're mixing our mind and learning with greed. We're doing something to confirm or rationalize our existing ignorance.

We want to avoid all these things and be receptive, attentive, and mindful, motivated by learning, realizing the aim of our human life, which is to become free and wise and loving.

With that thought in mind, let's review the stages of the path as if it were a kind of arpeggio, a scale of notes to run through on the piano of the mind. And so, the first set of notes that we learned in the last chapter leads up to the mind of transcendence. There are four main notes in that arpeggio, and the first is appreciating our precious human embodiment endowed with liberty and opportunity. What a wonderful life we do have, with access to the great teachings of liberation, omniscience, and awakening, with the time and the understanding and the assistance and the community that help us put these into practice. So remember that note. Quickly play it in your mind and resonate with it.

The second note is the immediacy of death. Remember that we shouldn't go on acting like we're going to be here forever, as we habitually do. You should recognize that you definitely will die. Reflect on who you are without the body-mind complex to which you attach your name. Subtract yourself from the relationships you're in, realize that you will die out of them. Possessions, friends, loved ones, name, fame, superficial knowledge—all will be gone. Play that note of mindfulness with the first.

As you play that second note, reflect on the certainty that you don't know when you will die, and you could die at any time. Every moment could be

your last. And when you do die, only the Dharma—reality itself or knowledge of that reality—and how you have incorporated those teachings of the nature of reality into your life by means of openness and generosity and patience, only those subtle innermost qualities of your soul will benefit you.

To play the third note, you interconnect that infinite moment of the present with the cause and effect of karma. As you sound the third note, you see that everything about your current moment is determined by all of your past actions of body, speech, and mind, and that everything positive about it came from your positive actions, and everything negative about it from your negative actions. Every action that we take now, even the subtlest thought or mental action, every word and physical action leads to an infinite result in the future, either positive or negative. Each little tiny thing in the present moment is infinite in its effects. There is tremendous intensity in this awareness, tremendous mindfulness of even the subtlest element in our being.

When we sound the fourth note in this arpeggio of the mind, we remember the inadequacy of all egocentric life states, including being a god, king, billionaire, star, whatever it is we think it would be great to be. Even if we think of being a buddha as being a big shot, that is an egocentric state, although to be a buddha, of course, is to be totally selfless. We have such notions of a buddha as being powerful, the “go-to guy,” because we can’t imagine a selfless being. It’s virtually impossible for us to think of how we could be here and yet at the same time be all the other people who are here. As a buddha, we could be all the other people in the town, and all the other people in the city, and all the other people in the country, state, and universe at the same time that we are responsibly who we are here. Such a vast, cloudlike being is inconceivable to us.

So, naturally, we are beings that are enclosed in our own little envelopes of our senses—our eyes, ears, nose, tongue, and skin. With our mind, we imagine things beyond what we sense, but still we’re basically enclosed inside this sheet of skin and five senses. So we imagine all other beings are like that, too, but then we sound the fourth note in the scale, the inadequacy of all states of such a being. And we recognize that our individual struggle with the rest of the world and all the other beings will always be a losing struggle. It will always lead to suffering. Samsara is the suffering cycle of life

based on self versus other, on the false habit of absolutizing the self, thinking, “I’m it, I’m the one.” So the fourth note is the deep acknowledgment that all states, even the seemingly highest states, are inadequate, are fundamentally suffering compared to the happiness of enlightenment and the wisdom of selflessness.

Once we sound these four notes—the preciousness of our human life endowed with liberty and opportunity; the immediacy of death and the essentiality of the soul at death; our interconnection through cause and effect of evolutionary action of everything infinitely; and the suffering and frustrating inadequacy of all relative states of the egocentric being—we gain a great relief. We feel a wonderful, buoyant energy of transcendence. We excuse ourselves from all paltry ambitions, to be rich or famous or powerful or muscular or beautiful or whatever temporal, temporary state or even divine state we have imagined. We give up any ambition toward any of that. So, therefore, we free ourselves from all of the things that we do to make money, to be famous, to be powerful, to have possessions, to be liked by many people, all of this anxious activity that we nervously and expectantly do all the time based on ephemeral goals that are ultimately worthless and ultimately unsatisfying.

It is a tremendous thing to be free of all of that. That is why monks and nuns are actually always smiling and cheerful, why they have a kind of presence. People like to hang out with them because they don’t have the same set of wants and desires as people who are seething with worldly ambitions. This is the mind of transcendence, the transcendent attitude.

Now you can conceive of yourself as a free person spending your free time reading this teaching. You’re not reading it because you’re getting a material benefit. You’re reading it because you’re free and you’re enjoying the prospect of greater and greater freedom. You feel happy, you feel relieved. When you think of your ambitious friends studying, working and strutting and saving and investing and nervously looking at the Internet, you realize that they’re caught on a treadmill, like ants rushing in and out of an anthill, grabbing something and rushing over to the other place. You realize the worthlessness of all of those aims.

You feel relief, and you feel pleased because you really respect yourself

now. You really respect your human embodiment, the evolutionary achievement that you are, the awareness you have of the suffering nature of any sort of habitual state, and the sense of interconnection with its enduring optimism that nothing you do gets lost, even if the planet does get destroyed next week. If you are in a positive frame of mind, if you are aiming at the positive, you go on infinitely. You'll be reborn in another life, and you'll be in a better state because you'll be more generous, more loving, more wise, more open.

So you feel really cool. And then you begin to look around, and now we come to the stage of the path that we're focusing on in this chapter: the spirit of enlightenment of love and compassion. But it cannot be developed without the transcendent attitude at heart. Compassion for others relies on compassion for oneself as a foundation.

True self-appreciation is, "Why would I waste my human brain playing a video game? I have this fantastic engine of freedom and openness and awakeness, why would I waste that by not meditating on ultimate freedom, by not cultivating love and compassion, not being transcendent and dropping out?" Being a monk or a nun—or being like a monk or a nun—is not mere denial, it is being good to yourself, avoiding many common sufferings, anxieties, and preoccupations. In fact, it is fabulous to be a monk or a nun. It is one of the great things you can do for the world, to be a monk or a nun, and for yourself. A person who really loves himself recognizes, "I'm so fabulous a being that I'm going to protect myself against wasting any of my time just habitually making money, paying mortgages, producing children, growing food, any sort of involuntary thing. I'm not going to waste my time doing any of that. I'm going to just beg some food from people who like to give food—there are some who do, who don't think that there's any other thing they can do, although eventually I'm going to disabuse them of that. Even as they're feeding me, I'm going to say, 'Well, you really shouldn't be working to earn the money to make this food to feed me. You should join me and just drop out and be on vacation and seek freedom, because that's what the human life is for, seeking freedom.' Of course, many people will not do that anyway, even though I urge them to, but they'll still feel a little more free because I'm seeking freedom."

Buddha not only taught the great teachings of love and compassion, he taught whatever specific beings need to become liberated. He is not the founder of a dogmatic religious institution but he is instead the ultimate teacher, the ultimate educator, who, having realized that beings can only find their freedom and make their lives fulfilling and achieve their happiness by learning, by cultivating their understanding, was forced to be an educator. He couldn't just be a prophet, although he did prophesy. He couldn't just be a founder of institutions, although he did found institutions. He couldn't be giving orders from God, because he found out that God didn't really know what to do. The gods asked him what should they do, they were his disciples. All of Buddha's vehicles were for everyone.

Now, we come to the heart of the Buddhadharma, to compassion. If you wanted to say in one word what is the essence of Buddha's teaching, of the enlightenment teaching, it would be compassion. The statement of Nagarjuna, the great master of two thousand years ago in India, crystallized this. He said, "Voidness is the womb of compassion." In Sanskrit this reads, *shunyata karuna garbham*; in Tibetan, *tong nyid nying jey nying po jen*, which may be the most beautiful phrase ever in Tibetan, too. By the void, he means freedom, our realization that reality is totally relational, which we realized in our first four-step meditation. When we discover our freedom, this discovery flows immediately into universal compassion for all beings. When we *feel in our hearts* complete oneness with others, we feel completely relieved and fully blissful ourselves, but we can no longer bear for them to suffer. Freedom is the womb of compassion. If there's anything that might serve as the motto of Buddha's revelation, of Buddha's gospel, his good news, it is "freedom, the womb of compassion."

#### IS NOTHING SACRED? THE TRUTH ABOUT EMPTINESS

Too many people think that all Buddha realized under the bodhi tree was that the world sucks, that everything is horrible, life is horrible. People, myself included, feel frightened of all the pains and sufferings of life. Yet we can get even more fearful of our future when we go beyond the modern materialistic view that we suffer only in this one life and then become nothing, and we realize that our awareness has an infinite continuity, and *we can never get away from our awareness*. Therefore, there's the danger that we'll suffer in

infinite future lives. We become so frightened of that idea on a deep, subliminal level that we long for obliteration, we long for oblivion.

Selfishly, we think there's nothing we can really do for others except just mention the appeal of oblivion to them—"Hey, why don't you get oblivion, too, because we're just all going to suffer together. There's nothing we can do for you. So let's jump into the oblivion; it's good enough for us, and we'll just be gone." We meditate, or we do this or that practice, and basically we think that Buddhism is some kind of marvelous yogic meditative technology for achieving an altered state. We can call it awakening, we can call it enlightenment, or many other grand things, but we basically are waiting for the day when we will be obliterated. We talk about vast empty space, and we think we're going to leave the problems of life, of interconnection, of bumping into beings and things and stubbing our toes, and having obligations and complications, and we think, "Wow! Wham! I go into infinite space! I reach infinite solitude, infinite quiet. Nobody bugs me forever. What a great thing."

I tease people in some Dharma schools when they tell me they had a great meditation session. I say, "You really were into it, and you stopped your mind and you stopped your body, and then the only big letdown was the end, when...darn it, *you were still here.*" You had to get up and wash the dishes, change your underwear. So you felt you hadn't made it, you hadn't succeeded. You hadn't achieved that enlightenment you view as an absolute obliteration, freedom, or minimalist Nirvana.

This view of enlightenment as oblivion is completely wrong. It is foolish. It is breaking the basic law of the Buddhist worldview of interconnectedness, which was Buddha's great revelation. This interconnection is freeing; it can free us from suffering. There is no noninterconnected thing. There is no nothing. That is the simple hub of his teaching. There is no such thing as nothing. *Nothing* is the word for that which does not exist. Therefore, no one is going to become nothing. You cannot become nothing. It is impossible. It is a misexpression, it is a mistake. It is misknowledge.

To get a sense of the distorted working of our mind in our unenlightened state, think about how deeply you feel there is such a thing as "nothing." We want to meditate on "nothing." We can have experiences as if we're in a

realm of nothing, really concrete, and we can become convinced that nothing is a real thing in a place, and no one can convince us it isn't. Our mind is set. It's very difficult to transcend this conviction once we gain that experience. It reminds me of the Gahan Wilson cartoon that depicts people bowing before an ornate throne that is labeled "Nothing." Our minds try to make "nothing" sacred.

But logically, you can understand there is no such nothing, and therefore, any experience you are having is the experience of your mental picture of such a thing. Your picture of nothing is a sort of dark, empty space. The fact that you can make a concrete picture of something that in principle could not be pictured proves that you are living in a world of your own imagination. It does not prove that the world really is what you are imagining it to be.

So, there is no nothingness Nirvana. Emptiness is not nothingness. It is voidness—knowledge of which is freedom. These terms refer to the fact that there is no absolute thing-in-itself within anything that is its substantial, independent essence. This supports the fact that all things are totally interrelated. There's no independent thing in us that is not related to other things—no mind that is not related, no speech, no body, no physical thing, no soul that is not related. That does not mean they all do not exist. It just means that there is no thing in anything that is not related to everything else.

That's what emptiness means. We are empty of any isolated essence, of any nonconnected essence. We are free of any such nonconnected, isolated, alienated essence. That is what it means. Enlightenment is realizing that freedom at the deepest level. And therefore, enlightenment is realizing our inexorable interconnectedness. The vast space of reality is nothing but the surface of the interrelations of all things. All of the interconnected things are the reality of emptiness. Therefore emptiness, voidness, freedom are the womb of compassion, the sensitivity and will that refuses to accept anyone's suffering, that automatically wills everyone's happiness.

"Emptiness is the womb of compassion" means that in realizing emptiness, we are free of the illusion that we have carried from the beginning of time that "I am the one." We accept there is no absolute one thing in us that's apart from everything, no essential, real us, no irreducible part that we can sort of get back into and withdraw into and get away from all of the

burdens of connections and obligations. When we get rid of that absolutized place of self, we break through nothing, which is our last reification, the last made-up thing we impose on reality. We break through it, and we find we are face-to-face with everything.

Being face-to-face with everything, we are most compelled to pay all of our attention to other living beings, especially the ignorant ones who are suffering, who think of themselves as isolated from the rest of the world and are therefore struggling with the rest of the world, who don't know their own emptiness, who don't know their own reality and freedom, and who think they're bound in their struggle to get away from their bondage of connection into some absolute self-center that is apart from everything. They attract our attention because they are points of agony and suffering. Our mind through emptiness expands vastly and embraces them as if they are us. Their suffering is ours at that point, although fortunately, because we know reality, because we don't leave emptiness, because freedom is infinite, we're solidly within that emptiness. We solidly are that emptiness. Therefore, we can bear being aware of their theaters of agony as if they were virtual realities. We see them with a kind of binary double vision. We see them as suffering, realizing how awful it is for them, and therefore we completely dedicate ourselves to compassion, to helping them become free. Yet we're not dragged into their suffering because we also see a deeper reality of sheer bliss within them, as well as in everything else.

So you see, enlightenment is not an escape. Enlightenment is not some sort of obliteration. Enlightenment is fully being here now, but the now is of infinite duration and the "here" is of infinite extension. It is not a here and now that is an isolated, private moment of my own. It is a here and now that includes all the vast sky full of mother living beings. Each moment is *shunyata*, voidness or freedom, the womb of compassion. How can we refine that compassion, develop it to the point where it is *bodhichitta*, the will to enlightenment, or as I prefer to call it, the spirit of enlightenment? Some people call it the "mind" of enlightenment, but I like "spirit."

#### BECOMING A BUDDHA

There are two kinds of spirit of enlightenment. One is called the "aspiring"



spirit of enlightenment, and the other is called the “venturing” spirit of enlightenment. The first, “I wish I could be a buddha, a perfectly enlightened being, perfectly blissful and perfectly aware so that I could help all other beings become perfectly blissful and perfectly aware; I want to be happy, and I want to be happy in such a way that I can make all other beings happy,” is based on the acknowledgment that if anybody else is unhappy, I can’t really be happy, not perfectly happy. The venturing spirit of enlightenment begins from the moment the aspiring spirit engages all your gears, the rubber hits the road, and you take the vow of the bodhisattva to become a perfect buddha yourself to deliver all other beings from suffering and help them become buddhas themselves. We’ll talk about this view shortly, but there’s a wonderful story about the great sage Asanga that illustrates the drive to enlightenment. Asanga meditated for twelve years in the attempt to see Maitreya Buddha. After six years he was about to give up, when he saw a rock grooved out by generations of birds building nests on a ledge. The soft brushing of the rock by their wing tips had gradually worn a hospitable home for them and their offspring. Seeing the effect of such subtle persistence, he was renewed in his determination.

The aspiring mind can be called the “will to enlightenment,” but the venturing mind is more of a “spirit” than a “will,” since here you are already fully engaged in the transcendent virtues, you are activated in the work of inclusion of all beings into bliss, and even without consciously willing anything, your very atmosphere, your morphic field of resonance, is simply filled with the orientation toward freedom and enlightenment for all. Your spirit is then one with the spirit of all enlightened beings, it is the pure force, the infinite energy of love, the ocean of energy that insists on and sustains the happiness of all sensitive beings.

This is of course something mysterious and ultimately inexplicable—though that won’t stop me from explaining it as much as possible. When you are realized in freedom, you can feel the sea of bliss that is reality engulfing all others, but you don’t ignore that their unhappiness still is their unhappiness to them, and you are they, and therefore your happiness is incomplete. No one is completely happy until everyone is completely happy. Therefore, the buddhas are compelled to be inexhaustibly present to all of us. They will not be perfectly happy until all beings are perfectly happy. “You’re

not excused, Buddha. You still have to worry about me.” You can think that way. The bodhisattvas don’t mind.

In a way, however, you do escape unhappiness, because you have that other, deeper vision where you see you’re already there. You see all moments of time as interpresent in the enlightened vision. This moment contains every instant of past, present, and future of all beings. The future is here now. The past is still here now. So, in a sense you have escaped. You are really free. Nirvana is embodied in a present that seems to be caught in a specific flow of time and space with specific limited beings. That is truly the miracle of what is known as the “Nirmanakaya,” the emanation body of the buddhas. When you become a buddha, not only do you not have an end of life, you have infinite life; you become able to become present, to manifest presence as emanation, as incarnation, to infinite numbers of beings simultaneously. Your will or spirit of perfect compassion of that time can be perfectly present to everyone. The best way, of course, to be present to all for their sake is as a teacher, because the best way that they achieve happiness is not just by some salve, some palliative applied from without, but by their own understanding opening them from within to their actual own reality, so they have their independent freedom themselves.

In a lovely statement in Maitreyanatha’s *Universal Vehicle Discourse Literature*, the future buddha says, “There is not one buddha and there are not many buddhas. Buddhas are neither one nor many.” You can’t say there are many buddhas because all buddhas are one in the body of reality. They share the same body of reality, which is infinite and absolute. But you can’t say there is only one buddha, because each individual being evolves to buddhahood and enjoys her or his own communion with all other buddhas in oneness. Each enjoys it individually, so in their form bodies, in their beatific bodies, all buddhas are distinct, so that your buddhahood does not somehow subsume my buddhahood. Shakyamuni’s buddhahood doesn’t prevent us from the joy of our own buddhahood, even though when we achieve our own buddhahood we realize we are one with Shakyamuni. We are the same being as Shakyamuni, yet we individually enjoy being the same being, each of us. Isn’t that lovely?

How do we get this compassion, this *bodhichitta*, the spirit of enlightenment? How do we give birth within ourselves to a new spirit, a quantum leap in our evolutionary process, a guarantee of positive progress life after life, almost like a shining new soul, a soul of enlightenment? The *Mentor Devotion* puts forward these amazing verses, which reveal the soul of Tibet, the heart of its friendliness and charm:

*As I think how these sorry beings were all my mothers,*

*How over and over they kindly cared for me—*

*Bless me to conceive the genuine compassion*

*That a loving mother feels for her precious babe!*

*Not accepting even their slightest suffering,*

*Never being satisfied with whatever happiness,*

*I make no distinction between self and other—*

*Bless me to find joy in others' happiness!*

*As I see my chronic disease of cherishing myself,*

*As the cause that brings me unwanted suffering,*

*I resent it and hold it responsible—*

*Bless me to conquer this great devil of self-addiction!*

*As I see that cherishing my mothers makes the blissful mind,*

*And opens the door for developing infinite abilities,*

*Though all beings should rise up as bitter enemies—*

*Bless me to hold them dearer than my life!*

*In short, the fool works only in self-interest,*

*The Buddha works only to realize others' aims;*

*As I keep in mind these costs and benefits,*

*Bless me to equally exchange self and other!*

*Self-cherishing is the door of all frustration,*

*Other-cherishing, the ground of all excellence—*

*Bless me to put into essential practice*

*The yoga of exchange of self and other!*

There are two major precepts for conceiving the spirit of enlightenment in the Tibetan tradition, both coming from the Buddha. One comes via Maitreya and Asanga and is called “The Sevenfold Cause-and-Effect Precept of Mother Recognition.” And the other comes via Manjushri and Shantideva and is called “The Exchange of Self and Other.” The person in our generation who is the main holder of this second precept of practice is His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The teaching of Shantideva animates His Holiness the Dalai Lama’s “common human religion of kindness,” as he calls it, the basic human religion, not any particular religion, but the basic love that is beyond religion. The Panchen Lama put the teachings of the two precepts together in an eleven-step process, which we’ll embark on next.

The first of the eleven steps is called the “meditation of equanimity,” which we do every time we enter the refuge field. Remember where you are, before your jewel tree with its pantheon of enlightened beings.

In a certain sense, all beings are equal from the Buddhist point of view,

because all beings have the buddha-soul. Not that there's some little fixed golden-and-platinum buddha sitting in a little vacuum chamber in each one's heart, but in the sense that they're all free. Freedom is their real nature, their very reality. So, they are all free from being fixated on any particular structure, ignorance, and suffering; they have the evolutionary potential to achieve buddhahood, the perfection of evolution, the full opening of all of their abilities, compassionate and intelligent abilities. Given the infinite time that we all have to spend here in life, since we can never get away from our awareness and its continuity, we all will inevitably become buddhas sooner or later. It's just a matter of when, in your own time line, in your own perception of time.

In Buddha's perception of time, since our future moment is ever present, we already have all attained enlightenment. But he's aware also that it makes a huge difference to us in our time lines whether we do so sooner or later. Therefore, the buddhas make tremendous effort, even in their blissful leisure, to help beings accelerate their progress in their evolution toward buddhahood.

Remember the beings around us on the bluff, overlooking the crystal lake, who are looking at us. The ones we love now are those who are nice to us now, who are kind to us, who do things for us and make us happy. Therefore, we love them. If they started being nasty to us, we would not like them so much, and sooner or later, we could become their enemies. We hate other beings, because they're nasty to us, because they are mean, they have hurt us, they've injured us, insulted us, or deprived us, they've been ungrateful to us, so we paranoidly invest them with a notion of real implacable evil.

In fact, those whom we now hate have been our loved ones in the past. Those whom we now love have been our enemies in the past. Those whom we don't know have been both enemies and loved ones. If we truly loved all of them, and if we truly understood the full vastness of each being—that each being (including ourselves) is capable of malevolence as well as benevolence, and each being has been that way in many previous lives—then we would realize that they're all equally related beings. Because we've all been connected with all beings infinite numbers of times, we may as well positively think of them all as beings that we care about.

After all, if even our worst enemy were really happy—not happy by achieving vengeance on somebody, which is never satisfying because he would have to get more vengeance on the next one—but if he were really contented and happy, he'd be nice to us. He'd stop being our enemy. So we really want him to be happy. We want our enemies to be satisfied and happy, because then they'll leave us alone, and they may even be nice to us. And the ones we don't know, we certainly want them to be happy so they won't become enemies. They'll be happy and therefore be nice, share their happiness. And the loved ones, we already want them to be happy.

Equanimity is the foundation of the spirit of enlightenment. The great love or compassion that we are seeking to conceive, the new soul we seek to give birth to, must be universal. It must orient itself toward all beings. We cannot leave a single one out, even Hitler, Genghis Khan, Saddam Hussein, or even Lucifer or any demon. Any person you think of as the most evil person, you want him to be happy. You want him to be a buddha, really, or you won't have the great love and you won't have the great compassion. You can't get it if you exclude anyone. So, the first step of the eleven-step process is the step of perfect equanimity.

The second step, which is also very powerful and profound, is called the step of "mother recognition." It is based on coming into an awareness of the infinity of life. This insight came to the Buddha on the night of his final enlightenment, as he sat under the bodhi tree. As he deepened his diamondlike concentration on the nature of reality, his mind drilled far into the past and he remembered millions and countless trillions of his previous lives, each one in total detail. It is not usually mentioned in the basic description of that amazing *samadhi* of his, but of course, when he remembered a particular life, he clearly remembered his mother in that life, whether animal, divine, or human. The next insight he achieved was the insight into all the previous lives and all the future destinies of other beings. He therefore remembered being mothered by countless trillions of beings. Indeed, as his unstoppable gaze went past the event horizon into the infinity of the past, he recalled having been the child of the infinity of beings. And he remembered just who his mother was in countless instances. He achieved the recognition of all beings as his mother.

While we may not expect to achieve such a vision right away, we can move in that direction and feel a sense of remembrance of a few previous lives, from which we can infer a beginningless past full of them. At the very least, it is essential to have the vision of the continuity of life. You don't have to have a precise vision of transmigration or reincarnation. Buddhism is not dogmatic in its verbal formulations about relative reality. It's always open to further development because freedom means that all descriptions of relative reality are hypotheses awaiting further evidence, to be proven or disproven. They're not dogmatic laws. But the law of the infinite connectedness of everything is as close as you can get to a law of nature.

And compassion depends upon it. Everything is interconnected infinitely, and therefore, we have been here infinitely, we will be here infinitely. You and I have been living here together in this world, and in other worlds, since beginningless time. That means infinitely. You and I have been related to each other in every single conceivable way. And *you* means all of you, all you infinite numbers of beings. You, the microbe who's crawling around my intestine now, as an egocentrically driven being, a delusion-driven being, you have infinitely been that; I have infinitely been that. I was a microbe in your intestine. But we also were human beings together, infinite times; we were enemies, infinite times. We killed each other, infinite times. We fought with each other. We didn't know each other, infinite times. We were related intimately, infinite times.

The most altruistic way in which we relate to each other in normal biology is when I was your mother, or you were mine. At that time, I let you live inside my body. I fed you with my blood and my vitamins and my calcium. And then I gave birth to you with great labor. And then I fed you from my breast with my milk, and I did that for you an infinite number of times. You did the same for me an infinite number of times. All of you did. Infinite numbers of times you gave me human life, just like you sacrificed your life for me, which is the most altruistic thing in our normal, egocentric, self-versus-other universe that someone can do for another, give his or her life for another person. Then you're reborn again, off, back into whirlpool.

But the mother gives her life as a daily investment. We all did that for each other, an infinite number of times. This is the meditation of mother

recognition. It's impossible to do this meditation if you identify only yourself, even your continuity self, your relative self, as birth to death, that's the end of it. If it were so, of course, you would not have been related to all beings—you would have had only one mother. You will find it hard to recognize the mother in all beings.

Please, meditate deeply on this. And take your recognition of universal motherhood into connection with your mother of this life. If you had trouble with your mother of this life, try to go back to remembering when you were at the warm breast, held in the loving cradle of her arms, and then try to see all the beings as your mother.

I did this mother meditation and really melted down. I got to the point where I would really have trouble in the subway, because I got this weird *déjà vu* feeling with people. When you meditate on the mother recognition, when you see a person, and he looks like you've met him, you don't want to look away in case you do know him, and you don't want to be rude. You also don't want to seem to be coming on to him, if you don't know him, because then he'll think you're weird. It can be sort of hard to get through the sea of faces, because everyone looks "familiar." Every living being becomes familiar—like a member of your family—through the recognition of the mother in each of them.

The third step is remembering the kindness of the mother. Even if you had trouble with your mother, even if your mother handed you over to a nanny or an au pair, it doesn't matter. Even if you were not breast-fed (I wasn't, apparently, my mother and I both imprisoned by forties' medical theories!), this really works. However difficult your family, you wouldn't be alive today if they hadn't cleaned you, fed you, cared for you, kept your blanket on, cured your colds. You would not be alive. Even though maybe you're a little demented because they were harsh with you, you still are alive, and that took effort, and they gave you that effort. The point is, in your meditative state, go back and remember your childhood. In the wish-granting gem tree's luminous energy, in the radiant jewel light field, you can quickly remember your infancy. Tears will come to your eyes. Hairs on the back of your neck will rise. You'll feel so sentimental. How kind my mother was to me! And then you'll diffuse that sentimental feeling of the dependency of the



small child to every being as giving you the couchy-coo and delighting in you, looking at you with loving eyes, and seeking your happiness and your comfort and your satisfaction and your pleasure—that is all they are living for.

After we get the sentimental feeling and tears come to our eyes, we move to the fourth step, which is the step of repayment of kindness—gratitude. We've had equanimity, mother recognition, remembering of kindness, and now gratitude for the kindness, the wish to repay it. Here we reflect on how we want to repay all these mother beings' kindness, how we want them to be happy and comfortable and not to suffer. We know that the real way not to suffer is to achieve enlightenment and realize selflessness and true reality and freedom, and to achieve the deep, upwelling inner bliss of freedom. And that's what we want. We want to be their mother of enlightenment now, the mother of all mothers. We want all others to be free. That is how we will repay their infinite kindness. And that is, therefore, the fourth step, of gratitude in repaying their kindness.

This then leads to the fifth step in this special system from the great teacher Tsong Khapa and the Panchen Lama, the equal exchange of self and other. In this step, we ask, "What do all beings want?" We think of our equality with them, and we think that they want happiness, just as we want happiness. None of us wants to suffer. My enemy, a person unknown to me, my friend—all want to be happy, and that's what I want.

Suddenly I realize there are so many more of them than there are of me. And I also realize that I have been looking for my own happiness since beginningless time, and I have remained this egocentric being seeking my own happiness, preoccupied with my own state of what can I do, what can I get, how great am I, how much have I got, how happy am I? And it's never been satisfactory, all this time.

If I think back to when I have thought of others' happiness, however, I realize that then, temporarily at least, I didn't worry about how unhappy I was. At that time, I realized that their happiness is more germane to me than my happiness. So, I realize I'm going to try something new here. I'm going to switch my self-preoccupation for being preoccupied with them. I'm going to extend my mother gratitude repayment to them by being their mother,

thinking only of their happiness, like a mother does. I'm going to adopt them as my children, all beings. And, most importantly, I'm going to exchange self-preoccupation for other-preoccupation. It won't hurt me at this point to recognize that the self-preoccupation I have been engaged in since beginningless time has not produced self-satisfaction, certainly not a lasting one.

Being human is a marvelous state of existence relative to so many other life-forms, and being endowed with liberty and opportunity is the most wonderful evolutionary moment in a being's career. Still, having human life is not really satisfying in and of itself. I'm never satisfied. I'm restlessly dissatisfied at all times in pursuing the wish to be self-satisfied. That drive of self-preoccupation has let me down every single time, and all I do is slave for my self-preoccupation. I try to go out and get what my self-preoccupation tells me I need and want, and it's never good. It's never enough. And it never satisfies for more than a second. And it doesn't even satisfy a second when I'm thinking of how much it satisfies.

So, it doesn't hurt to put a little enlightened self-interest into your creation of altruism at this point, and to exchange self for other. Become other rather than self. Become preoccupied with others, and cherish the happiness of others rather than obsessing over the happiness of self.

Now we move on to the sixth step, which is the step of universal love. In this step, I will all my happiness to my mother beings. I visualize them as having happiness and the cause of happiness. And I look at all my mothers from the point of view of seeing them through to happiness. And when I see all the beings as happy, and I look for their happiness, they look so lovely and beautiful to me, because beings that are happy are beautiful. Beauty in a being, in fact, is happiness in that being. A being that is unhappy is not beautiful. Even if objectively a person has certain alluring endowments, high cheekbones, or abundant hair, unhappiness makes him or her dull and downcast and keeps that person from being beautiful. When angry, even the most well-proportioned person looks ugly. The beauty in a being is the being's happiness, and so, when I look at the mother beings' happiness, they look beautiful.

When I visualize all my mother beings as happy and beautiful, in a way, I

let myself fall in love with them. Being in love with someone is wanting his or her happiness. It is not wanting to possess him or her for our happiness. That's possessiveness and desire for control. But when we're really in love with others, we want only their happiness. We forget about our happiness, and then, therefore, ironically, we get very happy, because we temporarily stop worrying about how happy we are. *When we forget about how happy we are, we become happy.* That's why people like to be in love, because when they're in love, they focus only on the beauty and the happiness of the beloved other. The moments when they stop to think whether or not their love is requited, that's when they feel dissatisfied. That's when they feel unhappy. This sixth step is the step of great love, of universal love.

The seventh step is universal compassion, which involves looking at the beings, having been in love with them, and getting over this being in love with them a little bit. We have seen them as lovely and happy, in the previous rosy view of the lover, seeing the happiness and the beauty of the beloved. Now we become more like the doctor, who looks at the health of the beloved, and who sees how unhappy the beloved really is. We look at them and realize they don't all have minds of transcendence: They are too preoccupied with their own self-fulfillment; they are chasing illusions of being happy; they are filled with the paranoid feeling of "being the one," the one that is unappreciated by the universe; they're struggling with the universe; they are born infinitely again and again in unhappy lives and suffering; they're being eaten by other beings, consumed, exploited, and abused by them. Even when they eventually become gods, they just indulge themselves and waste their time, and then they're terrified when it comes time for them to die as gods.

Remember the previous meditation on the suffering of all the different states of egocentric life in the universe, and see that your mothers are always falling into those states endlessly. They wish for their own happiness, but they act only to develop their own unhappiness. They're selfish, self-centered, and confused. They're angry and impatient and irritated, and they never really have happiness. You see that, in fact, all your beloved mothers are not happy. And when you feel that, then you feel, "This is intolerable. They must be free of this suffering that they have, and they must have the cause of the freedom from that suffering." When you feel that way deeply and intensely, this is universal compassion.

Love and compassion are like two sides of a coin. My love wants to reach out and give my happiness to them, make them happy from my happiness. The compassion wants to reach out and take away their suffering from them, and bring their suffering away from them and back upon me. Once you really see the beings as your mother, you feel a kinship and familiarity with them, your way of connecting is through love, and you will your happiness to them. Through compassion, you will their suffering to come to you. And you turn it into bliss and send it back as happiness. This is how you have the connection of love and compassion.

The eighth step is thinking of the disadvantages of cherishing the self as opposed to cherishing others, and how this self-cherishing habit and self-preoccupation habit has led one endlessly and beginninglessly into samsaric, egocentric life states of endless frustration, endless unfulfillment, and constant struggle with the universe.

All the lamas in the jewel tree in harmonious accord describe self-cherishing as the constant inner desire to gain happiness for ourselves, the preoccupation with our own comfort and pleasure. This preoccupation has caused people to commit all the ten deeds that have negative evolutionary effects, such as killing others, taking their possessions, and so on. These deeds are the cause of all our suffering. It is ironic but no less true: It is the very desire for your own happiness that produces your ceaseless unhappiness.

*As I see my chronic disease of cherishing myself,*

*As the cause that brings me unwanted suffering,*

*I resent it and hold it fully responsible—*

*Bless me to conquer this great devil of self-addiction!*

The ninth stage is the stage of thinking of the advantages of other-cherishing, and realizing how others really are the source of all of one's happiness.

For example, whenever someone is really happy, it is because of the love

of others. Whenever someone does something for someone else and gives to others, he or she feels happy. Whenever someone develops higher ethical sensitivity, it is because she or he thinks of others. Whenever one develops the greater strength of tolerance and patience, it's when others irritate her and she learns to overcome that. Think about a ring that you love—and the connections it gives you to others. Somebody else made it, somebody else found the stone and mined it, and somebody else fashioned it into a beautiful ring. Your clothes come from fabric that someone else created, some mother living being. Wool came from mother beings who grow it on their bodies as their fur; then it was shorn from them. Then spinners and weavers made the cloth, and others sewed it into its shape as a garment. When you have food, it's because some farmers grew and cared for it, and somebody shipped it in a truck, and drove it, staying awake in the truck, and somebody cooked it.

Everything good in our life comes from others. If we enjoy poetry and words, it is because of language, and language comes from others who communicated in previous generations. Even our body comes from others, from the cells of parents who developed genes over billions of life experiences, from billions and billions of other beings. Our mind comes from others, our speech comes from others.

Others make it possible for us also to become buddhas. Without others to feel compassion for, we couldn't have compassion. Without others' suffering, we would never feel compassion. Without developing compassion, we couldn't evolve to the state of buddhahood. Wisdom alone would leave us too quiescent and too complacent. If it weren't for our communion with others, we would never evolve the magnificent embodiment, the great giant multiple butterfly embodiment of buddhahood, the infinite bliss of buddhahood.

Therefore, there's a tremendous advantage to living fully aware that the real source of our happiness lies in other people and their happiness. We usually think of a wish-fulfilling gem tree as being populated by exalted other beings, our mentors, the Buddha, the bodhisattvas, Jesus, Mary, the Goddess, the gods. We think of them as powerful and happy and able to make us happy. But actually, you can consider ordinary living beings to be wish-granting gem trees, too. We become wealthy, for example, karmically and evolutionarily, only by giving gifts, and if there were no one to receive the

gifts, we would not be able to develop generosity, and we would not be able to evolve wealth and substance. We become ethical only by thinking of others, and thinking how our acts affect them, and imagining how they are, and developing empathy and sensitivity, and therefore, through ethics, we develop the human life-form. And without patience, which is the root, the true source of beauty, we couldn't develop beauty. Being beautiful or handsome comes from being patient in many, many lives, and you could never be patient if there weren't others who make you irritated, who injure you and harm you. Therefore, people who bug you are also like wish-granting gems.

We couldn't have creativity and effort and enterprise if there weren't others to spur us on to do these wonderful things, like become buddhas for their sake. We couldn't have meditation and concentration, even, because we wouldn't have others to distract us, and from whom we wanted to move away to develop concentration. Finally, we couldn't have wisdom or selflessness without others, because no one would be there to teach us of selflessness, those like Nagarjuna and Buddha, and others who had realized the great teaching of selflessness.

And, so, the ninth step is the stage in which we reflect on the advantages of our thinking only of the happiness of others. Only when we focus on the happiness of others, and accomplish the happiness of others, do we really feel happy. When we are lifted out of ourselves, and exalted in some way in our orientation toward others, then we're really happy. Whenever we are preoccupied, we are really unhappy. As soon as I think, "How happy am I?" I feel unhappy, because it's never enough. And when I'm thinking only, "How happy are they? Oh, it's great, they're a little happy," I ignore my unhappiness, I forget about my little aches and wounds and pains, and I feel perfectly happy, directly or indirectly. So, that's the ninth stage, which the *Mentor Devotion* describes in these words, worth reflecting on, over and over:

*As I see that cherishing my mothers makes the blissful mind,*

*And opens the door for developing infinite abilities,*