

The Four Immeasurables: Sublime Qualities of True Love

*Compassion and love are not mere luxuries.
As the source both of inner and external peace,
they are fundamental to the continued survival of our species.*

- His Holiness the XIV Dalai Lama -

The Four Immeasurables – Loving-kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, and Equanimity – are the sublime expressions of love: the essential nature and radiance of the enlightened heart. They are also known as the Four Limitless Ones, The Four Sublime States, and the *Brahmaviharas* or Divine Abodes.

These four qualities of true love are said to be sublime, lofty, noble, and most excellent for they are the right and ideal way of relating with all living beings. These sublime qualities of love provide the answer to all situations we may encounter in our lives. They are the great removers of tension, the great peace-makers in social conflict, and the great healers of wounds suffered in the struggle of existence. These noble qualities of love level social barriers, build harmonious communities, awaken the slumbering generosity within us, and revive the joy and hope long abandoned.

These four qualities of love are called *immeasurable* because their capacity to purify the heart and generate positive energy is beyond measure. In addition, as this sublime love grows within us through sincere practice, it extends immeasurably to all living beings throughout all realms of existence.

Through deep contemplation and dedicated practice of The Four Immeasurables, we transform our delusion, greed, self-centeredness, and negativity. We heal the afflictions of anger, hatred, loneliness, sorrow, and unhealthy attachments.

In this way of practice, we develop a noble heart filled with the abundance of wisdom, compassion, and love. In time, these sublime qualities of love become natural and spontaneous – a constant life-affirming attitude radiating from our heart bringing benefit and happiness to all. These immeasurable qualities of love are also called *abodes (vihara)* because they should become the constant dwelling places of the heart and mind; where we feel at home. They should not remain merely places of rare and short visits, soon forgotten.

In other words, our minds should become thoroughly saturated by these qualities of love. They should become our inseparable companions, and we should be mindful of them in all our daily activities. The Buddha tells us: "Cherish all living beings with a boundless heart, radiating kindness over the entire world." He suggests we remain in this loving state of being at all times. This he calls the "sublime abiding" (divine abode).

May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness

In this first verse, we generate the mind of *Love (Loving-kindness)*. From the very depths of our heart, we radiate in all directions the sincere wish for all living beings to have happiness and the causes that bring happiness.

The immeasurable quality of Loving-kindness is boundless, open, and pure – an all-embracing love, dedicated to serving the highest welfare of all beings. Like a nurturing mother who protects and cares for her children, this sublime Love brings comfort, tenderness, warmth, and understanding to those in need. Always unconditional, free of self-interest, attachment, or expectation, Loving-kindness seeks no reward or compensation. This Love is the very heart of generosity, sympathy, and benevolence.

In this way, Loving-kindness opens the heart and dissolves resentment, anger, hatred, possessiveness, and selfish desire. Our Loving-kindness – our sincere wish for all beings to have happiness – must extend even further than those to whom we feel close. Our Loving-kindness must extend to and embrace all living beings throughout all realms of existence for it to become sublime, limitless, and immeasurable.

May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering

In this second verse, we generate the mind of *Compassion*. From the very depths of our heart, we radiate in all directions the sincere wish for all living beings to be free from suffering and the causes that bring suffering.

The immeasurable quality of Compassion (Mercy) is a wise heartfelt motivation to relieve the pain, sorrow, and suffering of others. This sublime Compassion arises from our genuine concern for others and manifests as selfless acts of physical and spiritual charity. With true Compassion, we have deep insight into the causes of human suffering. Therefore, we are able to serve others in wise, loving, calm, and skillful ways, without being overwhelmed by our feelings of pity, grief, or sadness.

In this way, Compassion opens the heart and dissolves cruelty, selfishness, and narrow-mindedness. Our Compassion – our sincere wish that all beings be free from suffering – must extend even further than those to whom we feel close. Our Compassion must extend to and embrace all living beings throughout all realms of existence for it to become sublime, limitless, and immeasurable.

**May all beings never be separated from the
supreme joy that is beyond all sorrow**

In this third verse, we generate the mind of *Sympathetic Joy*. From the very depths of our heart, we radiate in all directions the sincere wish that all living beings never be separated from the supreme joy that is beyond all sorrow.

The immeasurable quality of Sympathetic Joy is our genuine ability to rejoice and delight in the happiness, success, and good fortune of others. With this sublime quality of Joy we are able to truly appreciate and be inspired by the positive qualities and virtuous deeds of others.

In this way, Sympathetic (Altruistic) Joy opens the heart and dissolves envy, jealousy, aversion, self-centeredness, and dualistic views that create separation between people. Our Sympathetic Joy – our sincere wish for the unceasing joy and good fortune of others – must extend even further than those to whom we feel close. Our Sympathetic Joy must extend to and embrace all living beings throughout all realms of existence for it to become sublime, limitless, and immeasurable.

**May all beings abide in equanimity
free from attachment and aversion**

In this fourth verse, we generate the mind of *Equanimity*. From the very depths of our heart, we radiate in all directions the sincere wish that all living beings may abide in Equanimity free from attachment (self-centered desire) and aversion (hatred/hostility).

The immeasurable quality of Equanimity is an imperturbable composure of heart – a love that embraces all living beings and circumstances with equality, wisdom, and serenity. With this sublime Equanimity, our love is impartial, rightly discerning, balanced, not carried away by emotion, and free of attachment. We do not distinguish between friend, enemy, or stranger, but regard every sentient being as equal.

In this way, Equanimity opens the heart and dissolves prejudice, attachment, aversion, uncaring indifference, anger, and hostility. Equanimity is the culmination of The Four Immeasurables; it is the most essential yet difficult to cultivate, the guide of the other three. Our Equanimity – our sincere wish for all beings to abide in Equanimity – must extend even further than those to whom we feel close. Our Equanimity must extend to and embrace all living beings throughout all realms of existence for it to become sublime, limitless, and immeasurable.

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