

# **A STUDY GUIDE FOR SERVICE AS A SPIRITUAL ACTIVITY IN BUDDHISM**

This study guide is meant to be of use to the three main schools of Buddhism Theravaden, Zen and Tibetan Buddhism. The basic material was adapted from the Naropa University Master's Thesis by Charlene P. Kane, MDiv. Although written from the Vajrayana point of view, the study does address the other perspectives. Our intention is to include more information from the Theravaden and Zen teachings as the curriculum develops over time.

## **Study Overview**

### **Three Yana System**

#### **Hinayana**

#### **Shammatha**

#### **Maitri,**

#### **Karma**

### **Hinayana Summary and the Cultivation of Compassion**

#### **Mahayana**

#### **Compassion**

#### **Relative and Absolute Bodhiscitta**

#### **The Paramitas**

#### **Summary of the Mahayana**

#### **The Vajrayana**

#### **Summary of the Vajrayana**

#### **Resources**

#### **Choosing a Volunteer Project**

## **WEEK ONE**

### **An Explanation of the Three Yana (Way or Vehicle) System**

Adherents of the other vehicles of Buddhism - Hinayana and Mahayana - might perceive a difference between the three vehicles, because it is not their practice to include the Vajrayana in their studies. But here we will study all three, as there is no contradiction or conflict. All three approaches are valid and true. The goal is the same attainment of enlightenment.

#### **Introduction**

Tibetans believe that every person whose heart is moved by compassion, who deeply and sincerely acts for the benefit of others without concern for fame, profit, social position, or recognition expresses the activity of the deity \* Chenrezig, (of whom the current Dalai Lama is an incarnation). Compassion is the most important religious practice. Compassion is sensitivity to the sufferings of others and attempts to relieve that suffering. It is the realization that we are all interconnected.

According to one legend, Chenrezig made a vow he would not rest until he had liberated all beings in the realms of suffering. After working diligently at this task for a very long time, he looked out and realized the immense number of miserable beings yet to be saved. Seeing this, he became despondent and his head split into thousands of pieces.

The pieces were reassembled as a body with a thousand heads, allowing Chenrezig to assist the myriad sentient beings all at the same time.

The Tibetan Buddhist approach to compassion is not solemn, but rather a joyful recognition that we can actually be of ultimate benefit to all sentient beings.

The Venerable Thrangu Rinpoche, Tibetan meditation master and scholar, said "In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition compassion is founded on the recognition that, whether or not you can benefit a person is their immediate situation and circumstances, you can generate the basis for the ultimate benefit. And the confidence in that removes the frustration or the misery which otherwise somehow afflicts ordinary compassion. So, when compassion is cultivated in that way, it is experienced as delightful rather than miserable."

Compassion refers to the totally unbiased mind that aspires to the liberation of all sentient beings from suffering, equally. Compassion is said to become great only when, through proper training of the mind, such an aspiration becomes spontaneous and no longer requires any conscious effort to arise. Progressive training through the three yana system establishes one's connection with suffering, one's aspiration for liberation from it, and finally, one's own liberation synonymous with the liberation of all sentient beings. The journey emphasizes the uncovering of the awakened heart of bodhicitta (awakened mind) through meditation practice.

Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche taught, `Bodhicitta has two aspects: that of emptiness and that of compassion. Meditation on emptiness (lack of intrinsic permanent existence or substance) without compassion is not the Mahayana path; meditation on compassion with

the aspect of emptiness is not the path either. We need both emptiness and compassion together." Through meditation practice bodhicitta is recognized as spacious and tenderhearted. Its application in daily life is sharpened through training in various practices.

Buddhism is unique in that each person must individually bake the bread. We have been given the recipes, as a lineage of teachings, but through our own experience we taste what compassion is, and that taste, that experience continually informs us.

Throughout the yanas compassion is regarded according to each level, so to initially present only one definition of compassion is somewhat misrepresentative. At the level of the Hinayana, or smaller vehicle, the primary motivation is the individual's own liberation from samsara (world of suffering and illusion). Compassion at this level is a seed, showing itself as a growing familiarity with one's own condition, and a sense of kindness about one's situation. At the level of the Mahayana, or greater vehicle, compassionate motivation becomes the intention to attain enlightenment for the benefit of all as one becomes intimate with the suffering of others. In this respect compassion also becomes the means to skillfully attain the Mahayana goal. At the level of the Vajrayana, the diamond vehicle, or the vehicle of indestructibility, one is connected with vajra (indestructible) sanity. Compassion at this level manifests as the sacred outlook of total egolessness. Compassion in this yana is also intimately interwoven with devotion. A central focus of this devotion is the guru, who is the epitome of wisdom, compassion, and freedom.

## **WEEK TWO**

### **The Hinayana**

Compassion begins with self-concern. There is no value judgment placed on this fact. It is simply how things are. This is a reality that all great Buddhist teachers were aware of. We do not suddenly find ourselves in a position of selflessly helping others. A closer look at the bodhisattva (enlightened being) shows that their earthy pragmatism and impeccable ability to help others was hard-won after a long and arduous journey of development. We can all take this journey. It starts at home, with the self.

If we look closely we will see that self-concern began early in our life. It happened starkly, when that all too brief period of having all of our needs met by others seemed to abruptly end. Our conscious memory most likely begins when our sense of complete self-centeredness was broken through, and self-reliance was foisted upon us. We were asked to take care of our own needs to a great extent. The world suddenly filled up with more "No" than "Yes" experiences. Sometimes we stamped our feet in anger and were punished by parents or other authority figures. The world as we knew it had become very complicated.

Into young adulthood the same conditions seemed to prevail. We had many tasks to fulfill such as completing our education, finding a job to provide us with food, clothing and shelter, as well as the responsibility of forming relationships with other people, perhaps getting married and having children of our own. But even in successfully negotiating all these tasks there was a basic sense of life being filled with many hassles. The self-regard and sense of entitlement that started as early as we can remember prevailed and evolved into a gnarly ball that included anger, resentment, confusion, and fear. We felt cornered and claustrophobic. We felt caught.

Buddhism has a name for this condition. It is called samsara. The Sanskrit word literally means journeying through a cycle of existences without a knowable beginning. On a very personal level we might have an intuition that at one time we didn't suffer, maybe when we were an infant. We don't know this for sure. We only remember an existence of one thing leading to another in an unbroken chain of events that never culminated in full happiness. Often it takes a crisis in our lives to make us stop. We confront the extent of our suffering and the self-pity it generates. This is not yet genuine compassion or even a sense of empathy for others. This is merely the beginning. What we have accomplished is that we have generated enough courage to face the reality of our situation head on. This will most likely be present as a very self-centered phase in our journey, but the key is that we have awakened to our suffering and are prepared to get at its source.

The traditional Sanskrit word for the Buddha's description of suffering is dukkha. It has usually meant suffering in the sense of unpleasant sensations as well as the conditioned aspect of everything material and mental. Recently, the American Theravadin monk Thanissaro Bhikkhu has adopted unusual new translation equivalents to more clearly convey their meaning. He chose to translate dukkha not as suffering, but as stress, because, "the term is used to cover not only out-and-out pain but also the more subtle levels of burdensomeness experienced even in deep levels of meditative absorption."

Trungpa Rinpoche called this subtle stress on the ego as the state of "needing confirmation," "a sense of inadequacy," "sort of funky," and "being by oneself and wanting to look for something interesting." Even when things are going well for us there is a sense that things could change on a dime, leaving us with a continuous residue of anxiety. A part of samsaric suffering is the realization of impermanence. Impermanence as a reality just is, but our refusal to see it clearly creates suffering. This is poignantly seen nowadays in the recent surge in plastic surgery. We know we are getting older, but still we play the game of beat the clock. This not only robs us of the opportunity to synthesize our life experiences and allow the wisdom to shine through, it also leaves us unable to sit back and relax as old dogs, content to enjoy life as a moment-to-moment experience. Instead, we are unsettled and insecure during each and every present moment.

Bringing the mind's attention to rest on the very cusp of this dilemma is the first task of Hinayana discipline. To do this we must STOP. We must acknowledge our painful bewilderment, and develop a sense of wanting to help ourselves. In this way we are tuned into the first two of the Buddha's Four Noble Truths\*, the truth of suffering, and the truth of the origin of suffering.

Because our life feels stressed, compassion for others is difficult. We usually reserve our most heroic efforts to be compassionate for our interactions with family and friends, but even that becomes difficult. As our parents age and become cantankerous and nitpicking, we find ourselves avoiding their phone calls. Children grow into challenging adolescents and young adults. Close friends may not evolve at the same rate as we do, and we find the same old conversations with them boring and tedious. If we divorce, perhaps we must confront the horror of feeling we may now hate the very person we once loved.

***\* Study Opportunity. Select a volunteer (s), or have each person in the group research the Four Noble Truths. The report of this research can form the basis of a study session combing the use of original textual materials with personal experiences and interpretations.***

Because our very near and dear ones tax us so, it seems beyond our abilities to be compassionate towards mere strangers, such as homeless folk, policemen who ticket us, or incompetent store clerks. We also feel righteous about our politics, taking a stance against whole nations of people we do not know. It seems we can depend on no one for comfort, least of all ourselves. Perhaps the stress of life becomes so intense that we become physically and emotionally ill, and seek some sort of intervention. This intervention may take the form of meditation practice.

## WEEK THREE

### Shamatha

The Sanskrit word shamatha refers to taming and quieting the mind. Sometimes it is called "peaceful abiding" or "tranquil abiding." The technique of this particular meditation is to become familiar with an object by repeatedly placing the mind's attention upon it. This object could be an internal sound or mantra, or an external object such as a candle flame or a flower. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition one initially places light attention on the breath. Repeated daily exposure to this practice causes some rather extraordinary changes off the cushion. At first they are difficult to articulate. It is as if a tight rosebud begins to open up and we observe each petal. Perceptions separate out and become more distinct, as separate dharmas, or units of experience.

***\*Practice and study opportunity. Introduce sessions of meditation. Additionally, a volunteer(s) can research the Zen Ox Herding pictures and bring copies to the study group. Calming the mind is the equivalent of taming the ox.***

Mental processes prove more disconcerting. One begins to feel little slips or gaps in reality. The sense that life is impermanent begins to be stamped on every personal experience. Through meditation one begins to see that not only is life "out there" a chain of separate experiences linked together, but that one's very self seems to be a chain of perceptions, thoughts and feelings, all held together by a thin veil of cohesiveness that becomes suspect. Once one begins to notice this looseness in the very construction of one's own personality - it's a slippery slope. Things fall apart. The self falls apart. Something very soft and ineffable, something poignant and bittersweet but without much substance begins to arise in one's experience. Tears flow. Laughter erupts. One's very solid sense of self is let go. A newly spirited but undeniable experience of self emerges.

Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman writes, "Realizing your selflessness doesn't mean that you become a nobody, it means that you become the type of somebody who is a viable, useful somebody, not a rigid, fixated, I'm-the-center-of-the-Universe, isolated-from-others somebody. You become the type of somebody who is content never to be quite that sure of who you are - always free to be someone new."\*

***\*Study opportunity: How does this perspective compare and contrast with the Western psychological concept of the "ego." Here is an opportunity to invite a professional psychologist from your congregation to present a short talk on the current view of the ego and its relationship to good mental health.***

The origin of suffering, the second noble truth, as the Buddha described it, comes from grasping onto a solid sense of self and reality. With shamatha we begin to touch into this original pain. At the same time we experience a new feeling of fluidity. This points to the third noble truth, the cessation of suffering. The dawning possibility that suffering as we know it can cease is an extraordinary thought.

## **WEEK FOUR**

### **Maitri (Loving Kindness)**

Trungpa Rinpoche describes the embryonic development of compassion at the Hinayana level as "cheerfulness with guts." There is a certain courage needed to stay with the unraveling of one's whole sense of reality. At the same time one actually begins to feel better in the process. At an elemental level maitri develops. Maitri, the Sanskrit word for loving-kindness, begins with a growing sense of familiarity with the way things are, and extends out, as a sense of friendliness towards others. The price we pay for this new, relaxed attitude is the death of ego as solely self-centered me-ness.

With the precision and gentleness that meditation allows us to introduce into our lives, we don't have to wait until we are at death's door to enjoy ourselves. Every moment can be cared for. Learning to care for ourselves, and our own happiness is often something we neglect until we have very little time left. The attitude of maitri is to introduce that caring attitude right now. We can take a turn down a new path.\*

***\* Practice opportunity: Introduce the Hinayana Metta meditation practice***

The fourth noble truth outlines such a path. The Buddha was generous in that he didn't ask us to invent a path; he gave us a very good one to follow. The Eightfold Path gives us guidelines on how to conduct ourselves as we go about the business of living. This is especially important as shamatha leads to vipashyana, which is a spontaneous insight that arises from our hearts and minds as a result of the open and aware condition created by shamatha. Our sense of egolessness forms itself anew as prajna or wisdom. The codes of conduct known as shila ( moral precepts) offer us a protective container as our compassion and wisdom grow.

The Hinayana is known in as the path of individual salvation. Early disciples of the Buddha listened to his teachings on the four noble truths, which contained three essential facts about our reality; suffering, egolessness, and impermanence. Both the investigation of these truths and responsiveness to them brings about immense relief to the individual. The discipline of mindfulness cultivation in shamatha (calm abiding) opens up into expanded awareness of the environment in which one exists. Vipashyana, or insight meditation, arises from mindfulness. It is at this point that the effects of karma become clear.

## WEEK FIVE

### Karma

(deed, action, intentional or willed action, the effects of action and reaction)

The subject of karma is deeply complex. In Western culture karma has become a mainstream word. It is usually used to point to the fact that "what goes around comes around." For instance, if one plants seeds of discord, full blown disharmony is the end result. Karma implies more than just bad luck. It implies that individual intention has some responsibility in outcome.

The second way in which karma is referred to is more complicated. This has to do with the idea of rebirth. This concept is generally misunderstood. One might hear a comment from someone such as, "I would like to be reborn as a bird, it would be so much fun to be able to fly." This is a simplistic interpretation of a highly sophisticated religious belief system. What aspects of karma need to be fully understood from the Hinayana perspective?

At this level the Buddha felt that too many questions about the afterlife were moot. In fact, he often remains silent as an answer. His point was clear: Take the basic teachings and apply them, and don't worry too much about philosophical debate on questions about that which is not revealed.

The Hinayana examination reveals that intentions lead to emotions and they in turn lead to one's actions

***\*Study opportunity: Research the Nidanas and introduce the Wheel of Life. It would be fruitful to explore a painting of the wheel and its details.***

If we can correctly align our intentions then the following actions will be beneficial. The emphasis is placed on restraining from doing harm to self and others. From there we can develop the intent to benefit others. But until we ourselves are thoroughly processed in basic dharma, directly helping others is not always advised. It depends a great deal on the individual and the situation. As the Vidyadhara, the Venerable Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche would say to his social activist students "Be sure not to make more of a mess."

Until one has become saturated with the dharma, and one's mind has been thoroughly tamed and trained, all acts of compassion will be tinged with a sense of attachment. This attachment indicates an investment in outcome. We might be convinced that we could help to change another's bad karma. At the least, we feel we can alleviate another's suffering. This is an elemental view of karma. We have not yet developed the insight to truly appreciate the far-reaching effects of myriad causes and conditions in a particular situation. Our sense of omniscience is displaced. It may even prove dangerous to another.

The watchword of the Hinayana conduct and discipline is restraint. We restrain from creating problems with others. The traditional Refuge Vow taken at this stage signifies that we understand the basic teachings of Buddhism. We give ourselves over to them, as Buddha, dharma, and sangha, or community. At this level our renunciation expresses that we are repulsed by the effects of samsara, and resolve to

untangle the knot of the tight ball in which we are caught. If we take this teaching to heart we can appreciate its value not only for ourselves, but for others as well. Proper restraint is generous. By not inserting ourselves into every situation, we allow the situation to have space. We don't cause karmic formations. We simply relax and observe. This is the best way to invite compassion onto the scene. Compassion is not something we do. It is not something we are. We can say that compassion is simply space.

## **WEEK SIX**

### **Summary of The Hinayana & The Cultivation of Compassion**

Compassion begins with self-concern. This is not problematic. It is simply the starting point.

The first two noble truths teach us to look at our own suffering, and to investigate its origins.

The last two noble truths tell us we can transcend our suffering, and give us a path.

Meditation is a practice on the path that calms the mind, and allows insight into the causes and conditions of suffering to arise.

Meditation presents solutions through the utilization of prajna (wisdom).

The watchword of the Hinayana is restraint.

Taking the Refuge Vow symbolizes our desire to untangle the samsaric knot. This invites space into a situation, as the ground of compassion.

*Discussion opportunity: participants should address the following questions in a round table discussion.*

*How is compassion basically viewed in Buddhism? Do you feel this view is one that you as a Westerner can accept and practice?*

*Why is compassion seen as joyful in Tibetan Buddhism? Do you agree? If so, how does this impact your daily activities?*

*Why do we need to practice emptiness and compassion together? Give examples of how one might do this in daily life.*

*Is samsara a problem?*

*How does meditation cut karma?*

## WEEK SEVEN

### The Mahayana

The compassion of the Mahayana or Great Vehicle arises out of one's total familiarity with emptiness. The term emptiness can be described as appearances stripped of all personal interpretation. It might also be described as “no thing.” that is, no phenomena have intrinsic substance, or are permanent and unchanging. Emptiness is the fundamental nature of this self. As well, emptiness is the nature of all phenomena. Compassion arises from the realization of the emptiness of the internal self as well as the external world. Compassion is a natural and automatic manifestation of the realization of emptiness, or in Sanskrit, shunyata.

The realization of the experience of egolessness eventually leads to compassion, if one's individual ego does not die of shock in the process! When the Buddha first delivered his full-bodied teaching on emptiness, a discourse known as the Heart Sutra, members of his audience collapsed in reaction to this radical teaching.

***\* Study opportunity: members of the study group could read the Heart Sutra out loud and discuss its teachings.***

The Buddha did not present a body of teachings based on a personal savior in the form of a god, nor did he speak of a soul, or a heavenly afterlife. He pulled the rug out completely, identifying all personal reference points as essentially groundless in nature. In his book entitled *A Handbook of Tibetan Culture*, Graham Coleman writes, "The ultimate nature of reality is the total absence of inherent existence and self-identity." Emptiness itself has no reference point, as it neither comes nor goes. One cannot hope to dwell in the nondwelling of emptiness. There is no one dwelling. Egolessness means that no one is home! Emptiness is the nonexistence of perceiver, perceived, and the act of perceiving.

It is impossible to have a full appreciation for the deep nature of compassion expressed by the bodhisattva,\* one who treads the Mahayana Path, without first incorporating a thorough understanding of emptiness.

***\* Study opportunity: obtain Shanti Deva's The Bodhisattva's Way, read and discuss. Also read in Thich Nhat Hahn's "Call Me by My True Names."***

Shunyata literally means the openness that is the result of this realization. Basically, this refers to the ultimate nature of reality as the absence of inherent existence and self-identity. Its synonyms include 'ultimate truth' and 'actual reality.' In the philosophical tenets of the Mahayana, particularly Madhyamaka, different interpretations of emptiness are elaborated. The Madhyamaka is named after the 'Middle Way' between the extremes of eternalism and nihilism, which was expounded by the Buddha in the earliest sutras, Nonexistence in this system does not point to voidness. It is the reality that nothing exists as a separate entity, or as a lasting independent substance. Therefore, shunyata is the interdependence of form and emptiness, or the interplay of appearance and emptiness. If one is brave enough to withstand the shock of having one's entire worldview deconstructed, and bears up under the initial emotional and conceptual upheaval it causes, as well as hold the

intellectual tension with a precise and gentle awareness, gradually a new level of relaxation and acceptance will be attained. With continued meditation practice the warmth of compassion arises from the expanse of acceptance.

## **WEEK EIGHT**

### **Compassion (Sanskrit: Karuna)**

In Buddhist literature the term is often used as a short form for 'great compassion' which refers to a totally unbiased mind that aspires to the liberation of all sentient beings from suffering, equally. When radiating warmth and acceptance comes from shamatha discipline it is known as maitri, and initially benefits the individual. At the level of vipashyana meditation, relaxation extends outward from the self and becomes more panoramic, and environmental. This is connected with the Sanskrit word karuna, or compassion. Karuna has a vibratory quality, a sense of intended movement. It is like a mother who wakes up in the middle of the night and sits up in bed, suddenly alert, pokes her spouse and asks, "Did you hear the baby cry?" It is as if she felt the cry before she heard it. Karuna is this kind of compassion; it is compassion with a bit of a kick. Karuna is always on-call. Karuna is proactive.

Trungpa Rinpoche said, of compassion. "Compassion contains fundamental fearlessness, fearlessness without hesitation. This fearlessness is marked by tremendous generosity. This generous fearlessness is the fundamental nature of compassion and transcends the animal instinct of ego. Ego would like to establish its territory, where as compassion is complete open and welcoming. It is a gesture of generosity which excludes no one."

Three levels of compassion are described: compassion with reference to beings, compassion with reference to reality, and compassion without any reference points. Each represents successively deeper levels of compassion.

The first level we can see in our ordinary lives. It is the compassion that we automatically extend to another when we see them in pain. The second level arises through insight meditation practice. We begin to have a very deep understanding of karma. With a deeper knowledge of causation and how it relates to suffering, we are inspired to move toward relative bodhicitta. The third, compassion without reference points, is the deepest level of absolute compassion. It is knowledge of the inseparability of emptiness and compassion. Reginald Ray writes, "Genuine compassion, driven solely by the needs of the other, requires a mind of emptiness. But emptiness also implies compassion, since to be truly empty means to be without any self-preoccupation, and this expresses itself naturally and spontaneously in warmth toward others."

It is utterly important to remember that realization of emptiness in which one is not completely available to others is not a genuine realization, from the Mahayana perspective. Trungpa Rinpoche said, "The fundamental characteristic of true compassion is pure and fearless openness without territorial limitations."

The traditional metaphor is of the moon shining in the sky and reflected in a hundred bowls of water. As Trungpa Rinpoche put it, "The moon does not demand, it just shines." If there were a thousand bowls of water, the moon would equally shine on each, as well. Rinpoche says we should be like the moon: "That is the basic openness of compassion; opening without demand. If you will just "be," the life flows around and through you."

Compassion infused with a dynamic, proactive nature is known as bodhicitta, or awakened heart. It is the joining of the direct and straightforward maitri developed in shamatha meditation with the widened awareness and outward responsiveness that is characterized by vipashyana. Trungpa Rinpoche said, "It is the continuity of the experience we have derived from our Hinayana discipline that brings us into the Mahayana."

*\* Discussion opportunity. This is an ideal place in these studies to begin or continue in depth with group members experiences of compassion: feeling it, acting on it and receiving it. What is the experience like when it is positive, what is the experience like when it backfires? This discussions can range from the personal situation to the volunteer or service situation.*

## **WEEK NINE**

### **Relative And Absolute Bodhicitta (Awakened Heart)**

Relative bodhicitta is practiced on the basis of the ordinary, conceptual mind. Reginald Ray writes, "Relative bodhicitta is not only the attitude of sympathy toward others and feelings such as loving-kindness and empathy; in addition, it also involves a series of practices. These practices collectively sharpen upaya or skillful means. Tarthang Tulku explains the application of skillful means as a three-step process: "The first step is to become aware of the reality of our difficulties, not simply by intellectual acknowledgment, but by honest observation of ourselves. Only in this way will we find the motivation to take the second step: making a firm resolve to change. When we have clearly seen the nature of our problems and have begun to change them, we can share what we have learned with others. This sharing can be the most satisfying experience of all, for there is a deep and lasting joy in seeing others find the means to make their lives fulfilling and productive."

Absolute bodhicitta arises out of direct realization of shunyata. Trungpa Rinpoche writes, "When you begin realizing nonexistence, then you can afford to be more compassionate, more giving. Understanding shunyata means that we begin to realize that there is no ground to get, that we are ultimately free, nonaggressive open. We realize that we are actually nonexistent ourselves. We are not - *no*, rather. Then we can give. We have lots to gain and nothing to lose at that point. It is very basic." Regarding this view of the world through the lens of absolute bodhicitta, Reginald Ray points out that this does not mean we regard ourselves and the world as one great void. He writes, "Ultimate bodhicitta may reveal the illusory or "empty" nature of our version of the world, but this does not mean that there is nothing there at all. In fact, at a deeper level, ultimate bodhicitta is the awareness of a reality that is so intense, so boundless, and so ungraspable that the most accurate way to speak of it is to say nothing at all. Thus one speaks of the "emptiness" of ultimate reality, which does not mean that it is a total void, but rather that is utterly beyond our ability to speak or think about it. But, through the path, we can most surely touch it and taste it, although such "experience" does not occur within the framework of ego." Access to this experience is gained through meditative practices..

***\*Study opportunity: Invite a qualified teacher to speak on Mahamudra and Dzogchen views on the nature of reality do not obviate engagement in the world.***

The union of ultimate or absolute bodhicitta with relative bodhicitta is the way in which the bodhisattva comes to the practice of compassion, as both wisdom and skillful means.

***\* Discussion opportunity: Discuss the nature of skillful means as applied to working with others.***

We could understand sentimental compassion as compassion with attachment, which is not the genuine compassion of the bodhisattva, which is completely unbiased in this respect. Absolute bodhicitta requires that we continuously strive for a deeper intimacy with shunyata. Again and again we contemplate the view. We can support this cultivation

process by reading texts and commentaries, and attending teachings given by qualified instructors. The attentive wakefulness that is the ground of compassion at the level of the Mahayana comes from the lessening emphasis on ego. Wakefulness is, in this context, the loss of ego, the loss of my-self, and me-ness. Attentiveness to others automatically arises out of the loss of ego-centeredness. The Mahayanist develops a noble heart that is ready, willing, and able to serve others. Fearlessness arises out of both egolessness, and the increasing interest and desire to know others, to become familiar with their situation. One is steady and upright, and has a sense of personal discipline, and at the same time one has the energy to spontaneously respond to others. Here, the disciplined attitude is marked by an absence of aggression. The bodhisattva is a peaceful warrior.

The Mahayana is an inspiring path. If one connects with the Mahayana one has a vision of a new kind of universal society, a society that uplifts the individual and at the same time creates strong community. When one feels a burning desire to move towards and work for the creation of an enlightened society it is said that one has awakened bodhicitta. One's heart and mind are in alignment, bolstered by the realization of basic goodness in all. Sometimes this basic goodness is referred to as buddha nature. This is the locus of mother compassion, the manifestation of that inborn potentiality that exists as buddha nature. This potentiality to do good is boundless and limitless. It has the quality of richness, like pure gold. The experience of touching into this richness is profound.

“Buddha nature, tathagatagarba or sugatagarbha, exists within the heart of all sentient beings,” writes Reginald Ray. He says, "To speak in this way, however, makes it sound as if buddha-nature might be a thing, an existent among other existents. This is emphatically not the case, for the buddha-nature is emptiness."

Although buddha-nature is pure and free of defilements of itself, it is, nevertheless, covered over by erroneous intellectual and emotional obscurations. It is like gold buried under a man's house, covered in soil. In order to uncover the gold, three things are necessary. First, there must be an awareness of the existence of the gold, by having it pointed out, second, the aspiration to find it must be firmly in place in the mind and heart, and third, exertion must be applied to actually dig it up. This process is represented in full by the vow of the bodhisattva.

## WEEK TEN

### The Bodhisattva Vow

"The bodhisattva vow has two aspects: aspiring, in which one comes to see what the bodhisattva commitment entails and forms the aspiration to make it; and entering, in which, through the bodhisattva vow liturgy, one makes the actual commitment," writes Reginald Ray. Aspiration represents a shift in perspective. While at the Hinayana level impermanence, egolessness, and suffering have been contemplated, and meditated on, and high levels of realization attained, liberation is still infused with a sense of personal accomplishment. There is still a subtle knowledge veil remaining.

At the Mahayana level this remainder is eventually dissolved as the realization of emptiness manifests as the merger of view and practice.

The aspiration, known as the *spirit of awakening*, has two phases. In the first phase the mind of awakening has arisen due to aspiration but does not yet express a true generosity. In the second phase the awakening is expressed by accumulation of merit and knowledge. Merit accumulates in one's mind-stream as a result of virtuous activity, and it is a source of well-being within samsara. It is also known as spiritual power, merit, or virtue.

The spirit of awakening develops into the heartfelt wish to liberate all beings. From that time on a stream-of-merit flows uninterrupted. It is a part of a buddhafield of awakened mind; of one's teacher and the environment. Bodhi literally means awake. It means to turn on the light of enlightenment. Bodhisattvas reside in this light of the Buddha; indeed, to be in the buddhafield is to be inseparable from the Buddha. However, Bodhisattvas are initially seen as Buddhas in terms of potentiality.

In the third chapter of the *Bodhicharyavatara*, the aspiration expresses itself in the form of sacred metaphor:

Like the earth and the pervading elements,  
Enduring as the sky itself endures,  
For boundless multitudes of living beings,  
May I be their ground and sustenance.

Thus for every thing that lives,  
As far as the limits of the sky,  
May I provide their livelihood and nourishment  
Until they pass beyond the bonds of suffering.

Of the vow, Trungpa Rinpoche says, "We actually present ourselves as the property of sentient beings: depending on the situation, we are willing to be highway, a boat, a floor, or a house. We allow other sentient beings to use us in whatever way they choose. As the earth sustains the atmosphere and outer space accommodates the stars, galaxies, and all the rest, we are willing to carry the burdens of the world."

*Entering* entails the actual liturgy of the vow. Reginald Ray outlines the power of the vow, "First, it represents an acknowledgment, opening up, and empowerment of the

enlightenment within us. Second, it binds us with the gentleness and compassion of our inherent wakefulness."

The vow ceremony itself is cause for great joy and celebration. One is not taking the vow as a solitary superman or superwoman, but as part of a new family: the golden lineage of countless realized ones. The vow taker expresses this in the actual words of his or her pledge: "I, so and so (by name) will practice, the good which grows from being liberal, ethical, and concentrated, now and for evermore, thus emulating the Tathagatas, Arhants, Samyaksambuddhas, Exalted Ones and the Bodhisattva Mahasattvas living on a high level of spirituality, who in ancient times developed an attitude directed towards unsurpassable perfect great enlightenment."

After *aspiring*, and *entering*, there must be an *application* phase, which entails training in the precepts, and practices. The power of the vow's words must merge with their profound meaning.

## COMPASSION FATIGUE

It is not uncommon for a newly committed "bodhisattva wanna-be" to take a leap into what is perceived as compassionate action. That which sounds logical in the teachings, and what is etched on the heart as inspiration, seems quite different when put to the active test. Often practitioners will throw themselves into the full-bodied work of the bodhisattva and will initially experience what is known as the helper's high. It has been scientifically shown that when we move to help someone else, or even when we simply gift someone with kind words, the systems of both give and receiver are flooded with "feel good" chemicals, such as serotonin and oxytocin. It seems that our very genes are programmed for altruistic activity. When they are switched on we are rewarded with "warm fuzzies." This may work for awhile. But after a period of time we get hung up and find ourselves at the other end of the spectrum, suffering from compassion fatigue: feeling burned-out, unappreciated, or even angry.

Our speedy and aggressive minds catch up with us. It is very common when bridging the Hinayana and Mahayana to experience a certain destabilization. We might not have counted on this. We have flown out into space, leaving all reference points behind. We are soaring. Then suddenly our wings grow weak and we crash. We crawl back to our samsaric world and nurse our wounds. What happened? One answer could be that our habitual, self-concerned patterns run deep. We know them and maybe we dislike them, but they are more familiar than flying. The Mahayana skyway with its many options and choices, and our fear of so much freedom drives us back into narrow-mindedness. This is not cause for alarm. It is normal. For a very long time we will be jumping back and forth between our usual patterns of neurosis and a more enlightened, open attitude.

***\* Discussion opportunity: members of the group who have been providing service for others may take this opportunity to share their experiences.***

We might not have been actually generating genuine compassion, but rather compassion with attachment. When we do this the Universe will give us signs and indications, usually in the form of some kind of suffering, such as extreme exhaustion, or hurt feelings. A

sense of humility will help us through our mistakes. If our intention is relatively pure, our stupidity will be forgiven. If our efforts to be compassionate were permeated with arrogance we may have to bear a bit of teasing, or worse yet, some form of harassment, or injury by the very ones we tried to help.

After the mistakes pile up and compassion fatigue sets in, a temporary retreat may not be a bad idea, to brush up on the all important skillful means aspect of the Mahayana. Or, it might be possible we didn't pay attention to any lessons on skillful means the first time around, and that is why we encountered so many difficulties when we went out to save the world

## WEEK ELEVEN

### The Paramitas

Six virtues are cited to help us develop relative bodhicitta. They are known as the six perfections, or in Sanskrit, the paramitas. These paramitas are like supportive rafts that carry us from one shore to another. They bridge the gap between who we are and what we aspire to become. These six virtues are beautifully laid out so that each one serves as a foundation for the next one. They are a foundational training for the development of skillful means. They are the backbone of Mahayana aspiration and development.

*\* Study opportunity: different members of the group research the paramitas and report. This is an opportunity for several meetings on the obvious and subtle meaning of the paramitas and people's experience of them in their lives.*

### Tonglen Meditation Practice

Our daily lives are already filled with what Kaethe Weingarten calls the "common shock" of suffering, in her book of the same name. She writes, "By the time the average child is 12 years old in the US, he has seen eight thousand murders and a hundred thousand acts of violence on network television." The events of September 11, 2001 shocked the nation. The action in Iraq has left us reeling. When we read news reports of tragedies both near and far, our hearts automatically embrace the victims. *Tonglen* is a radical practice in that it invites taking in all the pain of a particular situation without positioning ourselves for or against either side. One simply takes in suffering and breathes out relief.

Weingarten, who teaches in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, describes this natural response to suffering as "compassionate witnessing." It is a manifestation of what psychologists call the "tending instinct." *Tonglen* is a combination of both, and as well, seeks to transform pain by transcending its conventionally negative connotations through a clear understanding of its root nature, as emptiness/appearance.

This, however, does not mean losing heart. Through tonglen one may touch into the transparent and insubstantial nature of suffering and at the same time impregnate the situation with the lubricating warmth of mother compassion.

*Tonglen* properly done is not emotionally numbing. At the same time one must be able to hold one's seat and not freak out. Off the cushion, as well, we need to work with a knowledge of our limitations, and allow ourselves to be gently pulled by our ideals, and not pushed by our emotions. We cannot simply turn off suffering because it is in our face. Even the Buddha's father could not protect his son from the suffering of humankind. The exchange is always taking place. *Tonglen* acknowledges what is already there and offers an elegant, deeply compassionate management technique, by simply embracing both suffering and relief as part of the wakefulness of the Mahayana Way of the bodhisattva.

*Tonglen* is a simple yet powerful practice. It can uncover repressed material in an individual that may require therapeutic intervention. Without a thorough grounding in preliminary meditation practice there is a danger that *tonglen* will become heavyhanded

and solemn. This straightforward practice is really about touch and go. One lightly touches in and acknowledges suffering, then one let's go into emptiness. Off the cushion it is the same. One must have a thorough understanding of what it means to mix mind and space in order to fully utilize the tonglen approach. Tonglen is best introduced one-on-one, coached by an authorized teacher who is familiar with the practitioner's mind. Once the groundwork is properly laid out tonglen can be so totally incorporated that it is practiced spontaneously, and indeed will arise as a natural response to suffering at any level. It is a matter of having the proper orientation, and fine-tuning one's awareness.

***\*Practice opportunity: This would be an appropriate time for a qualified teacher to introduce Tonglen practice.***

The *Mahayana* is known as the Greater Vehicle because of the inspiration to serve all beings in a display of boundless karuna. In the Tibetan Buddhist system, this inspiration blossoms into the diamond vehicle, known as the *Vajrayana*.

## **SUMMARY OF THE MAHAYANA**

### **The Cultivation of Compassion**

At the Mahayana level, maitri expands into compassion: concern for all sentient beings.

Compassion manifests as both relative and absolute bodhicitta.

The Mahayana vow taker aspires to become a realized one, or bodhisattva, and manifest total egolessness, to benefit all beings.

The Mahayana path of development includes the practice of the paramitas, and tonglen..

The Mahayana path at its fruitional level blossoms into the Vajrayana.

***Discussion opportunity: Participants should hold a round table discussion relating to the following questions:***

***Can a Bodhisattva change a person's karma? Can we as caregivers change another person's attitude, or actions?***

***Why does Trungpa Rinpoche talk about compassion as generous fearlessness? How do you view generous fearlessness, and does it have any application in your life?***

***Describe "compassion fatigue" and give an example from your own personal experience. What is the main cause of compassion fatigue?***

***Choose one of the six Paramitas and describe how practicing it has caused transformation in your life***

***Describe Tonglen. Describe how you would work with it on the cushion, and then how you might work with it off the cushion in a situation of heightened emotion.***

## WEEK THIRTEEN

### The Vajrayana

The Vajrayana catapults the practitioner beyond the concepts of form and emptiness. It is the fruitional aspect of the Mahayana perspective. What is the nature of reality in this sphere beyond all reference points? There is a famous saying, "Before enlightenment, mountains are mountains. After enlightenment, mountains are mountains." Certainly one's world does not disappear. This would be a solipsistic view. What vanishes are impure imputations. One is fully awakened to the Prajnaparamita's two truths of the absolute and the relative

Although the Vajrayana is known as the Diamond Vehicle, we can see that it elucidates the teachings of the Hinayana. Trungpa Rinpoche was making this clear when, as stated earlier, he said that at the level of the Hinayana all-pervasive suffering is basically groundless. The purpose of moving through the three yantras is to grow thoroughly familiar with this groundlessness as one's working basis, so that mother compassion is fully liberated. She can then move about the world spontaneously benefiting all sentient beings.

At the Vajrayana level we magnetize situations that need our help. In describing the individual's experience of the Vajrayana, Trungpa Rinpoche said, "The world is so magical that it gives us a direct shock. It is not like sitting back in our theater chair and being entertained by the fabulous world happening on the screen. Instead, it is a mutual process of opening between the practitioner and the world. Therefore tantra is very dangerous. It is electric and at the same time extremely naked."

Tantric ideology has enjoyed an immensely popular commercial reputation in recent years, especially in Western culture, so much so that, like karma, tantra has become a household word. It has been misinterpreted as being mainly a sexual practice. Complex Tibetan Buddhist symbology and soteriology have been reduced to one more technique for increasing sexual bliss. However, ultimately the tantric teachings are sacred in ways beyond the general public's imagination, and are protected by "self-secrecy," meaning that their wisdom can only be revealed to the fully ripened individual. In this respect, tantra is self-protective. To relate to the teachings in a superficial way is to simply glance at the tip of an iceberg. The Vajrayana is impenetrable and unfathomable to the ordinary, uninitiated person. The aggressive Western mentality of grabbing at what looks like just one more way to satisfy ego's insatiable appetite, even if that be an enlightened activity, is the usual, tired stance of arrogance that pervades this culture.

For this reason, the "self-secrecy" of Vajrayana is further protected from outside influence and interference by keeping its practices off limits to those who have not taken a vow of commitment, known as the samaya vow, with a personal teacher who is authorized to impart the teachings. This is truly an act of compassion. It protects those who are not ready to receive the Vajrayana teachings. The guru is central to the practice of Vajrayana, and it is only through this relationship that one is able to receive transmission of the lineage wisdom. Judith Simmer-Brown writes, "A student opens to the guru's instructions through devotion. Intellectual understanding, striving, and merit alone can never open the gates of wisdom in the Vajrayana sense. Only devotion has the power to activate the path and to awaken the student's nonconceptual realization.

Devotion is described in Vajrayana Buddhism as the unmediated encounter between guru and student, so that the mind of the guru and the mind of the student meet as one. This encounter is experienced as an unfabricated nakedness, such that all strategies for masking or achieving are exposed and the fundamental awakened mind is seen as it is."

Practitioners who follow the Vajrayana path are often shocked at the brilliance and vibrancy of their world as it naturally manifests. The only magic they performed in order to receive this affect was to experience the world as it is without the usual filters that are utilized to reduce fear. Moreover, when one begins to see that the notions of samsara and nirvana are also conceptual overlay, the true nature of reality is experienced as "alpha pure."

The Vajrayana world is not a new world. It is our world, once we release the impediments that hold us back from thoroughly experiencing it, and when we allow ourselves to simply be who we are. What arises from this practice is "alpha pure" reality, as buddha nature. When we understand this fully and can sustain ourselves in this open field, mother compassion also appears, and she sticks around.

Because of our ability to see through the joke we have played on ourselves and subsequently release our dualistic views, we become cheerful. This cheerfulness is the touch of mother compassion. It is the twinkle in the eye, the light step, and the movement to create beauty in the environment. Mother compassion resonates in the food we prepare for family and friends, the flowers we send to a sick friend, and the new baby we hold in our arms. Mother compassion resides in the ink on the paper when we write a note of comfort to an anxious family member. She dances on our lips when we smile, She rests in the calmly folded hands in our lap. She can also manifest ruthlessly, compassionately striking down any frivolous duplicity of ego's games.

Vajrayana helps us to see both the panoramic view and all the details of a situation simultaneously. Life is a rich tapestry. We are fearless because we now see how to live compassionately, not as saints or angels, but as our genuine selves. This is why the Buddha was so joyfully triumphant and exuberant when he confronted his ego and at last realized its insubstantiality, and he declared, "How I see you, O builder. All your rafters are broken, your ridgepole is shattered. Never again need you build a house for me."

When one is liberated one finds their home at last, in the world. One can wander anywhere and be at home because one's home is one's heartfulness. Instead of the isolation of me-ness, one finds community everywhere. Edward Podvoll writes, "Relaxing one's personal territory and being able to open up to the experience of others is a fruition of true community."

The three Yana journey begins with the individual at the level of the Hinayana and ends with deep commitment to community at the level of the Vajrayana. This is not the narrowly bound sense of community of family, friends, town and country. It is a vast community in a time and space without measure. It is neither solid space nor spacious fringe but ". . . rather it is the total situation in which these two polarities can exist and maintain themselves. We are looking at the ground in which both liberation and confusion can maintain themselves and also dissolve."

## **Compassionate Inquiry**

At the level of the Vajrayana, compassion renders every life experience workable. Here Tibetan Buddhism refuses to maintain the illusory, habitual patterns of separating good and bad, dark and light, right and wrong. How can this radical belief (sometimes called "crazy wisdom") allow us to function in our conventional lives? First of all, because the basic ground of everything is viewed as sacred, there is a sense of respect for and receptivity to all situations, just as they arise. As well, one maintains a "don't know" mind. One can be curious about a situation before jumping in and attempting to manipulate it. This "middle way" stance allows for what master teacher Pema Chodron calls "compassionate inquiry." Pema reminds us that when we feel like we are freezing up or are feeling dreadful it is a sign that old habits are being liberated. The key is to stay with the situation, and because the shakiness isn't going to go away, we can move closer and get to know it. Practicing compassionate inquiry is to remain awake, even when our coping mechanisms begin to fall apart.

## **The Magic of Ordinary Life**

Vajrayana forces us to wake up and see that life is magical, just as it is. All situations, even the most catastrophic, are opportunities for growth and new insight. Panic keeps us on our toes so that we don't miss these precious opportunities.

The Vajrayana way of thinking and being is needed in the world. When we live with a Vajrayana mindset we actually inspire others around us to do the same. They can absolutely count on us because they know we do not fake life. We do not con life. We take life on its own terms and engage wholeheartedly. This is compassionate living because it is true, genuine, and fearlessly fun.

A Tibetan teacher once said to me, "Vajrayana is easy. Everyone, everything is your Yidam. Practice in that way and you are doing Vajrayana twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week." A yidam is a personal deity that manifests the qualities of enlightenment that are also the qualities of our enlightened selves. In this way, we can practice as if everyone and everything is also enlightened mother compassion.

Vajrayana is not something outside of us that we wish to embody. We embody it already, all the time. We can easily see it actualized in our daily life. Vajrayana is about breaking through the samsaric comfort zone. The suffering around us already is touching us. When we have the courage to not disengage, but to move into a situation, mother compassion naturally shows up. She embraces whatever emotional content is coloring the situation. And it is ordinary. It is workable. We can stay present. This is how the Vajrayana is the practice of all three yanas. In the Hinayana we learned how to calm ourselves, and ground ourselves in the present moment. At the Mahayana level we extended out to fully embrace the other. And finally, at the Vajrayana level we engage with magic. The magic is that we have discovered the extraordinary quality of ordinary situations, and we also see that magic is ordinary mind, but mind that has actualized to its fullest potential. Therefore, we don't flip out on the magic of the Vajrayana. We are not freaked out by it. Everything is at our disposal and we know how to work with everything. Mother compassion never leaves us now. Every action is an action of compassion, naturally, and automatically.

## WEEK FOURTEEN

### Summary of The Vajrayana

At the Vajrayana level, emptiness or space is completely realized and is the (groundless) ground of compassion. It manifests in the bodhisattva as fearlessness and skillful means.

Relationship with the teacher, as guru, allows the teachings on compassionate wisdom to be fully incorporated and utilized. In Tibetan Buddhism, this relationship is sealed with a samaya vow.

The magic of the Vajrayana is realized as ordinary everyday life, without our imputations of good/bad, right/wrong, black/white, etc. In this way, sacred world manifests.

#### **Beyond Buddhism**

How we relate to the teachings is entirely personal and individualized. Because of this, we must remain alert for signs of spiritual materialism. That is, holding on to our accomplishments. The cultivation and maintenance of compassion can be tricky and slippery. The instant you think you are touching into compassion it is gone, because compassion is the heart's emptiness.

The art of practicing compassion is touch and go. The better we are able to practice this light touch the more we will experience authentically compassionate moments. It is a play-by-play practice and each day offers countless individual opportunities to be present, gently touch into a situation, and let go of one's agenda and desire for a specific outcome.

Compassion goes beyond Buddhism when we practice compassion not simply because we think it is ethically correct, but because it feels right and good. Even when situations prove tangled and unpleasant, compassion soothes them and irons out some of the worst wrinkles. In his book, *An Open Heart, Practicing Compassion in Everyday Life*, H.H. The Dalai Lama wrote, "We shall not generate compassion for all beings overnight. If we are able to diminish our selfish instincts and develop a little more concern for others before our death, we have made good use of this life."

To go beyond Buddhism is to be happy because we can do it. We can open our hearts just a little bit more, even in the most difficult of situations. We may make some mistakes along the path, but if our heart is set with the right intention, we can sleep soundly, knowing the day's work, and indeed, our life's work, is basically sane and good.

*Discussion opportunity: participants should discuss the following questions in a round table format:*

*What distinguishing mark separates the Vajrayana from the Mahayana?*

*How does one experience non-duality on the conventional level?*

*What is compassionate inquiry? Give a personal example of how you have used it in your own life.*

*How is the Vajrayana actualized in everyday life? Have you seen it manifest in your own life? Describe.*

*What does it mean to you personally to go "beyond Buddhism"?*

## RESOURCES

Chodron, Pema. *The Places That Scare You: A Guide to Fearlessness in Difficult Times*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001.

Dalai Lama XIV. *An Open Heart: Practicing Compassion in Everyday Life*. Edited by Nicholas Vreeland. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2001.

Dalai Lama. *A Flash of Lightning in the Dark of Night, A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1994

Khyentse, Dilgo Enlightened Courage, *An Explanation of Atisha's Seven Point Mind Training*. New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1993

Mipham Rinpoche, Jamgon. *Gateway to Knowledge, Vol. 1*. Kathmandu: Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1997.

Santideva. *A Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of Life*. New York: Snow Lion Publications, 1997.

Simmer-Brown, Judith. *Dakini's Warm Breath: The Feminine Principle in Tibetan Buddhism*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 2001.

Tulku, Tartang. *Skillful Means*. Oakland: Dharma Press, Second edition 1991.

Trungpa, Chogyam. *Journey Without Goal: The Tantric Wisdom of the Buddha*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1985,

Trungpa, Chogyam. *Shambhala, The Sacred Path of the Warrior*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1988.

Trungpa, Chogyam. *Orderly Chaos: The Mandala Principle*. Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1991.

## **WHEN THE GROUP IS READY Choose A Volunteer Service Project**

1. Is the group ready? Take a consensus.
2. If the general feeling is that people are inspired, and would like to try a volunteer project take the next step which is to explore possible areas for projects.
3. Discuss with whom you would prefer to work: children, youth at risk, single moms, prisoners, families, elderly, the disabled, animal welfare, environmental situations. Pick one area.
4. Would you prefer to volunteer as a group, or are you willing to work in one on one situations, and then bring your volunteer experience back for group discussion?
5. How much time would you like to spend: a morning, a day, one day a week for a period of time, as long as the project may take? The suggestion is to start small and see how it goes.
6. Contact the Volunteer Connection which hosts information for several hundreds of community projects. It is located at 2885 E Aurora Ave, Ste 32. It is best to call for an appointment to review the project listings, 303 444 4904 or email [vc@volunteerconnection.net](mailto:vc@volunteerconnection.net). You can also check out project listings on the website [www.volunteernconnect.net](http://www.volunteernconnect.net)  
A staff member sends out selected project listings to faith-based organizations on a weekly basis. She would be happy to add your congregation to the list of recipients.
7. The experience of the volunteer project should become the topic of a further session of the study group. Did the rubber hit the road? How did peoples' experiences relate to the six paramitas? How easy was it to feel compassion for the people you were helping? Review *The Four Immeasurables* and relate them to volunteer service.

### **Futures: Long-Term Service Opportunities**

When and if the group or your congregation reaches the point that they would like, either as a group or as individual volunteers, to commit to ongoing service. Please contact Restoring the soul: Faith and Community Partnerships at 303-938-9916 or [restoringthesoul@netzero.com](mailto:restoringthesoul@netzero.com). We would be delighted to help you select a long-term project for collaboration with a service agency.

Our goal is to support a new paradigm in volunteering: Collaborations are formed in direct relationship to the capacity of the partners. Faith communities offer to provide anywhere from 3 to 50 or more volunteers on an ongoing basis, depending on their capacity at a given time. A collaboration might consist of more than one congregation partnering with an agency with a flexible number of volunteers from each, thereby meeting the total number of volunteers needed for a particular project. The ongoing needs of Boulder County human service agencies are so extensive that valuable partnerships can be formed to meet a range of criteria.

## **Innovative Approaches**

We have defined a new volunteer arena for this project. Human service agencies have said that volunteerism is crucial to their operations but often, in terms of bottom line, the time it takes to put short-term projects in place, train and oversee them, is very costly. Restoring the Soul has undertaken to ask faith communities to commit to several year's support of a project. In this way, even if individual volunteers only commit to serve for six months, the faith community itself has committed to man the project for several years, enrolling additional volunteers from its congregation as necessary. This allows the service agency to actually build a long-term program on the basis of the faith community's commitment. This is an exciting paradigm for collaboration.

The second innovative approach is in response to faith communities' desire to build the strength of their own community while serving others. Often a volunteer project, such as mentoring, is based on a one-to-one relationship. The faith community cannot act as a group in the project, which is often the preferred format. The model that we are encouraging, and which has drawn significant interest, is the creation of a study group within the congregation made up of its volunteers. The study group explores the meaning of service within the particular spiritual path, both historically in scripture and commentary, and in the personal experience of service. The procedure enriches the volunteers and reinforces internal community. We are also in the process of formulating a model for interfaith study groups, in which all the faiths in a particular collaboration meet and share the history and experience of service