

the warm heart

When old friends meet and exchange stories, they delight in each other's happiness and commiserate with their misfortunes. Such delight, with its associated feeling of warmth in the heart, is the meaning of love. Love precedes compassion: when the person we love is unhappy, we want their troubles to cease. According to Buddhist teaching, loving-kindness, the combination of love and compassion, is the source of all happiness in the universe.



om mani padme hum. Photo: Lenny Foster

Loving-kindness is an essential component of life; just as mothers nourish their babies' bodies with milk from their breasts, they nourish their babies' minds with the warmth of loving-kindness. Medical science recognizes that babies

By Ven. Thubten Gyatso deprived of loving attention become emotionally retarded and even the development of their nervous system is impaired. It is not only babies: throughout life we all depend upon loving-kindness for our happiness and mental and physical security.

In the mid-seventies, before I became a Buddhist, my interest in Tibetan medicine took me to northern India where I met Dr. Drolma, a Tibetan woman practicing in Dharamsala where His Holiness the Dalai Lama lives with a community of Tibetan refugees. I could not help but compare her medical office with the outpatients' department of the hospital in Australia where I had been recently working, not to mention her diagnostic techniques of taking the pulse and observing the bubbles on urine. The great difference was in her relationship with her patients. She loved them and they loved her, the room was filled with the warmth of loving-kindness, so different to the impersonal attitude in my outpatients' department where the patients were more often seen as diseases rather than as human beings. Whatever the merits of her diagnostic method and her fascinating herbal remedies, I became convinced that the renowned therapeutic efficiency of Dr. Drolma was due to her power of loving kindness.

I felt embarrassed. With the attitude of arrogant superiority of being a Western doctor, I had asked Dr. Drolma to teach me about Tibetan medicine. She explained to me the method of pulse diagnosis and urinalysis, but she did not say a word about loving-kindness, she simply demonstrated it. Later, I was to

study Tibetan medicine in more detail – the chapter on ethics in the medical text is only about loving-kindness. In medical school, the only ethics we had been taught was how to avoid being sued in court!

A Buddha is simply a person who has overcome the obstacles to pure, unconditional, loving-kindness. These obstacles are rooted in the confused, mistaken idea of self that is innate in us all and manifests in our disturbing emotions of selfishness, anger, greed, pride, and so on. The wisdom that understands the true nature of the self is the antidote to all these obstacles. Thus the inner attainments of wisdom and loving-kindness are the actual objects of Buddhist worship and aspiration. To gain the inspiration and courage needed to overcome selfishness and train their minds in wisdom and loving-kindness, Buddhists use external symbols like that of Chenrezig just as a Christian is inspired by the crucifix, a symbol of loving-kindness and self-sacrifice for others. From the Buddhist point of view, the self that is sacrificed is not the person who exists, it is the self that we mistakenly believe we are. The meaning of self-sacrifice is, in fact, the destruction of an illusion.

In Chenrezig's right hand is a vase containing the elixir of life – loving-kindness. In his left hand is a perfect mirror that reflects things as they are without distortion, symbolizing wisdom. These two ideals are also contained in Chenrezig's mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum*. *Om* encapsulates all the qualities of Buddhahood, *Mani* is the jewel of loving-kindness and *Padme* is the lotus flower of wisdom. When people recite this mantra, they should be thinking, "I shall attain Buddhahood, the jewel of loving-kindness in the lotus of wisdom." ❁

Ven. Thubten Gyatso (Dr. Adrian Feldmann), is an Australian monk who is the resident teacher at the FPMT center in Ulaan Baatar, Mongolia.