

# keeping the balance

In the teachings of Buddhism it is said that you take the temporary benefit of alleviating the suffering of sentient beings as a basis, and on that basis you work towards final enlightenment. A human being has two potentials: to live a more sane life and to turn into the highest form of consciousness, and to become enlightened. Half the Buddha's teachings show how to live healthily as a human being and, based on that, the other half shows how to transform into an enlightened being.

Buddhists, I think, often over-emphasize working towards realizing their own enlightened qualities rather than really helping others in day-to-day life. They sometimes take advantage of the Buddha's teachings, which say that through practicing the six *paramitas* you benefit other beings, but that the main point is that you realize enlightenment. Some-



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For a Buddhist practitioner, working to alleviate a sentient being's immediate suffering, and ultimately relieving it through becoming enlightened, are both important. **TSOKNYI RINPOCHE**, reincarnation of the yogi Drubwang Tsoknyi, and author of *Carefree Dignity*, explains compassion in action.

As long as it helps any being, then social service is a Dharmic action. If, on top of that, the being helped is also interested in final liberation, then you can also benefit him or her in that way. If people are not interested, then you can just benefit them in a temporary way. But in any case you who are doing this action must have no expectations at all – or at the most a little expectation! This expectation, however, needs to be compassion-based, not self-centered. Compassion-based expectation means to feel happy if you see a good result when help-

ing people. That is different to feeling, "Through helping this person many people know about me and now I am famous, and so I'm happy."

If you are burnt out doing social service I think you need to develop compassion, self-compassion coming first. And

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times practitioners think that helping others is not that important and that by staying in retreat, they are being of more benefit. They stay in a nice cocoon, in nice meditation halls, with hot water, sending a little email, enjoying – but not really enjoying – spiritual happiness. If, however, like Milarepa, they think, "It's OK if I am hot or cold, any circumstance is fine by me, I just need to get rid of the *kleshas* in my mind," and they really think of compassion, then that is an excellent way of doing retreat.

I like this idea of compassion in action – to practice peace in the mind with compassion as the outcome. Peace comes through meditation practice – shamatha, mahamudra, dzogchen. You have to know how to deal with suffering when it comes directly to you, so that you do not get caught up in your own world of suffering. By knowing how to liberate emotions and seeing that you are no longer bound by them, a sense of genuine compassion arises.

Bodhisattvas are not totally enlightened. The stories of bodhisattvas describe how they give even their eyes to people in need, and how they sometimes spend many years serving someone else, like a slave, with altruistic motivation.

compassion does not mean running away from the world. Compassion is really like being a bodhisattva – a courageous person who is willing to take any suffering and aspires to attain Buddhahood for the benefit of other beings. So it's important to emphasize compassion, loving-kindness, and mindfulness in your meditation. Deity practice is very good, but you will not feel admiration for Buddha when you are completely wasted or burnt out, so just rest in the peacefulness of shamatha and practice, based on that, loving-kindness towards yourself. Then slowly you can start helping in small ways.

You should not think you will save all the world. From the point of view of establishing an aspiration and all the connections that will come from that, it is important to make a huge aspiration. That doesn't mean that you are able to really accomplish it. You cannot do that at the outset; you will do so slowly, slowly. So think, "I will clean one cup for my center," and when you finish, appreciate that. We are missing the appreciation. Don't clean ten cups, and leave them half finished. Better you clean only one cup and finish the task nicely. As long as your mind is growing then your activity will also grow. ☸