

Compassion

by the 17th Karmapa Thinley Taye Dorje

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Thaye Dorje, His Holiness the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa, shares the following teaching on compassion, on the anniversary of His Holiness the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa's parinirvana:

Mahabodhisatva Chandrakirti, who lived in the first half of the seventh century CE, started his famous work, the *Madhyamakavatara* (Introduction to the Middle Way) with the lines:



‘Shravakas and Pratyekabuddhas are born from the Muni king
[meaning: *Buddha Sakyamuni*];
Buddhas are born from Bodhisatvas;
And, from the mind of compassion, non-duality and Bodhicitta,
Bodhisatvas are born.’

This particular quote by the great Buddhist master Chandrakirti is a part of my daily prayers and practices, not just because I am a Buddhist – but because I am a human being. The quote speaks to my consciousness, which allows me to recognize, understand, and accept that the saying ‘love conquers all’ is justified. In other words, these four lines are part of my daily practice, because they are true.

Why? Because, ultimately, what really matters, what is worthwhile, is genuine care. It is only through genuine care that we can find joy. ‘Genuine’ means unconditioned, and ‘joy’ means being free from all forms of anxiety and pain, which in Buddhist terms means being free from *karma* and *klesha* (afflictive emotions).

In this ever-changing and brief, abrupt life, the only meaningful thing that we can achieve is compassion. Compassion is the only substantial thing, we can leave behind for others, and it’s the only substantial thing, that we can take with us. No matter how great the power, the financial fortune, the fame that we might amass, at the end of our life’s chapter, and on the journey from one life to another, compassion is the only gift that we can take with us and pass on to others.

Compassion defies the logic and laws of life, transcending birth, ageing, illness and death. Compassion is the only quality that can help us understand these four stages of life not as something terrible but as truth, impermanence, and nature. Therefore, it helps us to find courage to live meaningful lives. Suddenly, through knowing and accepting the impermanence of life, we discover much more joy, much more purpose in life.

Compassion gives birth to extraordinary beings, such as the *Shravakas* and *Pratyekabuddhas*. These are individuals just like ourselves, but who achieve the courage to let go of the source of life’s anxiety: the ego, which harms all sentient beings. Compassion also gives birth to other extraordinary beings, such as the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas, who develop the courage to share the experience of compassion with all sentient beings – even though they know, that there is no limit to the number of sentient beings.

Therefore, should we wish to cherish anything in life, it should be none other than compassion. A compassion that is unconditioned, like a mother’s love for her only child. For her child’s sake, a mother is willing to sacrifice even her own life. What kind of person might this child might become in the future? Such a question is irrelevant, when it comes to a mother’s love and compassion.

May we see our human existence as a precious human existence, which will enable us to cherish qualities like this, not next year, not tomorrow but right here, right now.

Source: <http://www.karmapa.org/karmapas-teaching-compassion/>