

BUDDHISM: SUMMARY TABLE 5

SEVENFOLD MEDITATION ON COMPASSION (TIBETAN BUDDHIST TRADITION)

1. In the first stage, you generate a sense of equanimity towards all beings. You reflect upon the fact that everyone is ultimately equal in terms of their desire for happiness, and in their demands on your help. Just because a person is your mother, your friend, or your enemy in this life does not mean that they are inherently related to you in that way; it is merely an accident of karma. Since we have been trapped in cyclic existence since beginningless time, chances are that, at some point or another, everyone has been related to everyone else in all possible ways. By thinking in this way, you develop an unbiased attitude towards others.
2. Based on the conclusion we draw in the first stage, we reason that every sentient being that we can imagine has, at some point in the past, been our mother.
3. We further reflect that, as our mother, they showed us infinite kindness, and have suffered and gone to great trouble on our account.
4. At the present, all these beings who were once our mothers are undergoing tremendous suffering, and are badly in need of help. Because they demonstrated such kindness to us in the past, we realize the need to help them in order to repay their kindness.
5. The last three steps reflect an increasing level of conviction that they must receive this help. In the fifth stage, you cultivate feelings of love for all these suffering beings, and learn to spontaneously generate the hope that they all might someday find true, solid happiness.
6. In the sixth stage, one fortifies this sense of love into active compassion, generating the thought, "May all beings escape from suffering (dukkha) and find happiness." You go from just hoping to actively wishing them happiness.
7. Finally, in the seventh stage, you generate what the Tibetan Buddhists call the Unusual Altruistic Attitude. More than just hoping that all beings find happiness, more than actively wishing for their happiness, you take the vow, "I will make sure that all beings find happiness, even if I have to do it myself!"