

## The Four Gifts

The four gifts are a powerful practice of generosity that can be offered to the world every day; the gifts of your stability, calmness, care, and happiness. These qualities are contagious and bring out the best in others and in oneself. This is an altruistic practice generally applied when engaging with others.

- 1) **The gift of your stability** - The first gift, which serves as a foundation for the others, is your gift of stability; your mental and emotional maturity; your wisdom, strength, and dependability; your sense of balance and fairness; being confident, durable, resilient, flexible, and in control; being a reliable friend/sibling/spouse/parent/son/daughter/leader/worker; a person who contributes to a more stable communal environment. Stability may be the very thing we want most but rarely recognize it. We want every apple to taste as sweet, every movie to be as exciting, and every friend to be as loyal. The truth is, the development of mental/emotional discipline and stability is the path to all valued qualities and the foundation for all freedom and liberation.

### How to become more stable

As with all goals, the first step is to understand the importance and benefits of the practice, while cultivating an aspiration to be more stable. It is important to understand that genuine stability can only exist internally (within one's mind), for the external world is simply too chaotic to support any reliable stability.

- Confidence is key in cultivating stability - to stop doubting, and start believing in yourself, your potential, and the strength of your beneficial influence on others
- By experiencing, appreciating, and desiring the contentment that arises from stability
- By being mindful of reactions - taking information in with a cool and rational mind
- By taking a minute before acting/responding - allowing space for wisdom and skill
- By not personifying other people's problems - often we are mere bystanders to problems
- By seeing language as a flowing river - notice how words often flow in emotional, ill-rational, and inconsistent streams. Discern what is important and what is not, let most of it pass by, especially offensive/discursive speech; respond to what is significant and important
- By always keeping a little of your attention inward, to yourself. This creates a slight distance between you and the world - allowing space for wisdom and skill
- By being present - not being consumed by worries of the future or regrets from the past

- 2) **The gift of your calmness** - now, you build upon and improve that stability by adding the next gift of your calmness; your spaciousness, contentment, patience, clarity, and ease; projecting a sense of harmony; being cool-headed, rational, and a generous and interested listener.

### How to cultivate calmness

The first step is understanding the importance and benefits of the practice, while cultivating an aspiration to be calmer. Calmness is cultivated by slowing down, focusing on the breath, being mindful and in the present moment, and by practicing contentment. The practices of meditation, mindfulness, yoga, and Tia-Chi are excellent methods for becoming calmer.

- 3) **The gift of your care** - the next layer is your gift of care; your love, compassion, and concern towards others; your warmth, kindness, and sense of communal responsibility; being considerate, generous, openhearted, and helpful to others.

### How to become more caring towards others

Again, understanding the importance and benefits of the practice, while cultivating an aspiration to be more caring, is the first step.

- By seeing others as people just like yourself—recognizing our shared humanity
- By realizing the positive potential that is created through caring for others
- By realizing the suffering that arises from self-cherishing
- By discovering and taking delight in the joy that comes from helping others

- 4) **The gift of your happiness** - Lastly, the gift of your own happiness is the cherry on top. Quite possibly the greatest gift you can give to the world, for when you are happy you are at your best; you are more patient, accepting, loving, forgiving, understanding, and generous; while also being smarter, healthier, more emotionally balanced and productive.

**How to cultivate a daily attitude of happiness** - Once more, understanding the importance and benefits of the practice, while cultivating an aspiration to be happy, is the first step. Meaning, waking each morning and setting your intention to be positive, cheerful, energetic, and constructive. Of course, this is easier said than done, for obstacles and suffering are an undeniable and constant factor of our lives.

- By cultivating appreciation (the most effective method) - contemplating the preciousness of life, the potential you have daily access to and the opportunities that allows.
- By accepting reality - accepting the world as it is (and not what we think it should be), by first accepting that problems do—and will always—exist, then to use wisdom, compassion, effort, and perseverance to remedy/overcome obstacles.
- By realizing emotions are not merely reactionary, but also habitual, and can also be actively generated, cultivated, and sustained.

#### **Assessing success in this practice**

Success should not be seen as the eventual mastery of these qualities in the unforeseeable future, but instead it should be seen as incremental successes in its daily cultivation—to be a little better each and every day.

#### **The four gifts seen as enlightened behavior**

When combined, the qualities of the four gifts contribute to the cultivation of enlightened behavior (wisdom, maturity, altruism, grace, benevolence, civility, contentment, etc.) which makes us more magnetizing to others, making us appear more attractive both physically and in persona. These qualities enrich others, ourselves, and society, bringing out the best in us all.

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### **The Four Gifts Aspiration**

May my stability nurture maturity, wisdom, and self-control in others.

May my calmness soothe the wounds of those waged in life's daily battles.

May my care bring hope and inclusion to those feeling vulnerable or marginalized.

May my happiness inspire others to seek out their highest potential and greatest good.

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*Notes:* This aspiration is recited each morning or when needed to reaffirm the practice.

Alternatively, one can simply recite: Stable, calm, caring, and happy.