

*Questions for Reflection*  
*Talk 10, Series 12*

The Dalai Lama says that with altruistic motivation every action accumulates good virtues--the limitless power of salutary merit. (This is the Merit of Soto Zen's formula, Wisdom + Merit.) And he also says in order to induce this unusual resolve, it is necessary to have compassion in which one cannot bear to see either the manifest suffering of others or their oppression by unwanted internal conditions that result in suffering. So we need compassion, altruistic motivation and finally altruistic motivation in our every action. Here are some questions for you to answer in order to begin this undertaking. Take your time. Record your answers so that you can add to them later.

1) Do you consider yourself a compassionate person? Please state your evidence for whatever answer you give.

2) Consider that no matter how compassionate you are right now, you don't come near the compassion of the Dalai Lama. Therefore there is room to improve. Please either make a personal plan to improve your level of compassion (like choose one sentient being a day toward whom to extend your conscious compassion) or use the Dalai Lama's plan: Get in touch with your compassion and extend this feeling toward your neighbors--one by one, to those living on this side and that side of the street, then, to the whole country, to all of humanity and infinite sentient beings.

3) The other technique for developing altruism is called equalizing and switching self and other. Here, one should investigate which side is important, oneself or others. Choose.

Then he shares with us his own meditation: Imagine that in front of you on one side is your old, selfish I, and that on the other side is a group of poor, needy people. And you yourself are in the middle as a neutral person, a third party. Then, judge which is more important--whether you should join this selfish, self-centered, stupid person or these poor, needy, helpless people. If you have a human heart, naturally you will be drawn to the side of the needy beings. Keep track of your progress. Notice small signs of your compassion and altruism steadily growing.