

INEXHAUSTIBLE MIRACLES

Contents

<i>Foreword by Roshi Joan Halifax</i>	xi
<i>Introduction</i>	I
1	
THE PERFECTION OF GENEROSITY	4
<i>Developing Generosity</i>	8
<i>Four Aspects of Generosity</i>	9
<i>The Threefold Expression of Generosity</i>	12
2	
THE PERFECTION OF MORALITY	16
<i>Increasing Our Wholesome Qualities</i>	17
<i>Making Unwholesome Actions Harmless</i>	18
<i>The Three Unwholesome Actions of Body</i>	21
<i>The Four Unwholesome Actions of Speech</i>	24
<i>The Three Unwholesome Actions of Mind</i>	27
<i>Actively Helping Others</i>	29

3

- 33 THE PERFECTION OF PATIENCE
- 34 *The Patience of Willingly Enduring Suffering*
- 35 *Patience Based on Compassion*
- 36 *Patience Based on Wisdom*
- 38 *The Patience of Not Retaliating Against Someone Who Has Harmed Us*
- 41 *Patience to Face the Nature of Reality Without Fear*

4

- 45 THE PERFECTION OF EFFORT
- 47 *The Four Aspects of Wholesome Effort*
- 48 *A armor-like Effort*
- 50 *Effort of Action*
- 54 *Effort for the Welfare of All Beings*

5

- 58 THE PERFECTION OF CONCENTRATION
- 59 *Two Ways of Cultivating Concentration*
- 63 *Increasing Our Concentration Through Mindfulness*
- 66 *Increasing Concentration Through Calm Abiding Meditation*
- 70 *Spontaneous Concentration*

6

- 72 THE POWER OF COMPASSIONATE BEINGS
- 74 *The Power of Awakened Mind*
- 76 *Cultivating Power*
- 79 *Manifesting Power*

7

THE PERFECTION OF COMPASSION	81
<i>Conditions That Give Rise to Compassion</i>	83
<i>Cultivating Compassion</i>	83
<i>The Twofold Expression of Compassion</i>	86
<i>Three Ways of Manifesting Compassion</i>	87
<i>Boundless Compassion</i>	89

8

THE PERFECTION OF ASPIRATIONAL PRAYERS AND DEDICATION	91
<i>Prayers of a Compassionate Being</i>	93
<i>The Object of Our Prayer</i>	94
<i>Unsurpassable Prayer</i>	97

9

THE PERFECTION OF SKILLFUL MEANS	101
<i>Skillful Investigation</i>	102
<i>Skillful Transformation</i>	105
<i>Skillful Means of a Compassionate Being</i>	106

10

THE PERFECTION OF DISCRIMINATING AWARENESS	109
<i>The Benefits of Discriminating Awareness</i>	111
<i>Developing Discriminating Awareness</i>	117
<i>Contemplations to Develop Discriminating Awareness</i>	120
<i>The Realization of Discriminating Awareness</i>	123
<i>Discriminating Awareness Giving Rise to Fivefold Wisdom</i>	125
<i>Heart Sutra</i>	131
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	137

Foreword

I am writing this foreword to Tempa Dukte Lama's wise book on the great teaching of the Paramitas or Perfections as I sit in Kathmandu. We have recently returned from Humla, where my good friend Tempa was born and raised. It was a great privilege and joy to travel with him to his homeland after so many years away from this precious and powerful part of the world.

Ten years ago, we walked to Mount Kailash together with other pilgrims. On our return from that journey, I invited him to come to Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe, New Mexico. I found I was with a remarkable person of great integrity, and I thought that his time in the United States might be beneficial for him, and as well beneficial for our sangha in the United States. He has established a Bön center in Pittsburgh where he teaches regularly and has also started a Bön publishing company. He is, as well, an adept *thanka* painter and poet.

Thus began an enduring friendship and collaboration that has also

been further enriched by the recent pilgrimage to his homeland and Mount Kailash, where he taught the dharma with me and Roshi Enkyo O'Hara, as we served in our Nomads Clinics along the way.

Tempa lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico for nearly six years. Nearby was the place where the atom bomb was invented. He and I often talked about the importance of cultivating the path and fruit of the Paramitas, as we lived and practiced in the shadow of Los Alamos. We both felt that the great path of compassion was the most important thing to realize in this lifetime.

In Los Alamos, scientists and workers, among other things, create weapons of war. But the Paramitas, the perfections, are natural processes of mind that foster peace and harmony, strength and receptivity. These mental processes are based in the experience of bodhicitta, a mind that is dedicated to awakening in order to help others to be free of suffering.

The Paramitas are the very heart of our being. They are the practice of going to the other shore. The other shore, we learn, is in fact wherever you are at this very moment, where you sit, where you walk, where you live, and where you die. This other shore is your daily life, your every day existence.

For Tempa's book, I would like to reflect on just a few of the Paramitas. For example, Dana Paramita is the practice of generosity. Tempa would ask you to turn toward your life generously. Practice letting go. Practice letting go of opinions of the world and of yourself. The only mind that will carry us to the other shore is the mind of generosity.

In Tempa's book, he goes into great detail about the Paramita of generosity, telling us how to develop this precious mental quality, including the four aspects of generosity, and the three-fold expression of generosity.

Tempa then goes on to unpack the perfection of morality or Shila. We can turn to the practice of Shila; the Paramita of precepts, at these times with great relief. Our world seems to have lost its moral compass. How can we awaken to our true nature, we might ask, to our most kind and ethical nature? Why not be a Bodhisattva now? Tempa encourages us to live our lives authentically. We can simply be our truest selves each moment. We can be the genuine, full-flavored person that we are, and we can help each other. Tempa gives us guidance on how to increase the wholesome qualities of our mind, and delineates unwholesome qualities of body, speech and mind. He then goes into detail on how an ethical life is based on our capacity to help others.

Tempa then brings in the spirit of Shanti Paramita, the perfection of patience. In my tradition, we associate this Paramita with the practice of fundamental inclusivity. We practice in order to reject nothing, to transform all that comes to us that is harmful. And as with my tradition, Tempa tells us to be patient in hardship, and not run for the easy way out.

And Virya; the Paramita of effort, or, whole-heartedness. Tempa gives us guidance on how to strengthen our health, our minds, and our hearts. Then we can bring our best energy forward in the world; then we can serve. Tempa writes skillfully about the four aspects of wholesome effort, as well as other qualities of the Paramita of effort, including effort toward cultivating the well-being of others.

He also addresses the Paramita of concentration; the perfection of mindfulness, as well as the power of compassionate beings, the perfection of compassion, the perfection of aspirational prayers and dedication, the perfection of skillful means, and the perfection of discriminating awareness.

He concludes his discerning book on the Paramitas with a rendering of the Heart Sutra that is very inspiring.

Tempa's deep study, long practice, and realized relationship with his teachers have made it possible for him to bring us the essence of the great perfections. This is an inspiring and wise book, full of rich detail on the practice of the ten perfections.

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Until all beings are free from the cyclic continuum of suffering
may I cultivate the heart and mind of compassionate beings
may all sentient beings throughout space have complete happiness
may all sentient beings be free from suffering
and the causal seeds of suffering
may all sentient beings never be separate from
the happiness that is free from suffering
being free from the duality of happiness and suffering
may we realize the immeasurable mind of equanimity.

Introduction

The Ten Perfections are the keys that open the door to inexhaustible miracles in our life. They are the actual practice of compassionate beings through which we perfect the actions of our body, heart, and mind. The virtuous qualities of the awakened mind arise in us when we engage in actions that are truly beneficial for ourselves and others. These qualities become the skillful means for clearing the obscurations that afflict us.

To truly help others, we have to become a Buddha. This is the heart drop of the Buddha's teaching: to become a Buddha, we have to cultivate the mind of awakening. The mind of awakening is of two kinds: the aspiring mind and the mind of actual action. The mind of aspiration is our wish to awaken in order to help all beings. When we have established ourselves into wholesome aspiration and practice the Ten Perfections, we have the awakened mind of action.

We all have the potential to awaken. We all want to be compassionate; however, the conditioning of affliction makes it difficult for us to be

compassionate. For instance, we feel compassion for those who are close to us, but not for beings whom we do not know. This means that our compassion is conditional and not yet boundless. Through the practice of the Ten Perfections, we can free ourselves from the grasp of conditioning and make our love and compassion boundless. The Ten Perfections are the manifestation of compassion in our living experience.

Practicing the Ten Perfections is at the heart of the path of renunciation, which is the basis of the path of compassionate beings. If we do not engage in actions, feelings, or thoughts that arise from the afflicted mind, we will not experience pain and suffering. And we will not create the causes for future delusion. This is the essence of the practice of renunciation. As compassionate beings, we practice renunciation in the form of letting go without attachment or aversion. The process of letting go has to be natural and spontaneous so that it is truly liberating, rather than an obstacle for us. Through the practice of the Ten Perfections, we develop the skill to let go.

The Ten Perfections are divided into two parts. The first five are the causal Perfections: the Perfections of generosity, wholesome conduct, patience, effort, and concentration. The second group of five are the Perfections of fruition: the Perfections of power, compassion, aspirational prayers, skillful means, and discriminating awareness.

The causal Perfections help us to know the self and to develop the skill to transcend it. They help us grow by providing the qualities that we need on our path. This is like providing nutrients, water, and sunshine for a plant that we are cultivating. Our care will enable the plant to bear fruit. Once the fruit is ripe, the plant gives it to all other beings. As compassionate beings, we nurture our wholesome qualities through the five causal Perfections. Once our practice bears fruit, the Perfections

become a skillful means to help all beings. The qualities of the Ten Perfections and their expressions in our lives are infinite.

Through the practice of the Ten Perfections we gradually realize the ten stages of the path of compassionate beings. These stages reflect the true nature of the mind. To be a complete path, all Ten Perfections are needed since they complement each other. To manifest our awakened nature, we need three essential elements: wholesome view, wholesome conduct, and meditation. The view is to realize the selflessness of all beings. The conduct is the practice of the Ten Perfections. Meditation is the integration of our view and conduct. When these three elements are present together, they help us connect with our innate purity and our wisdom. Through this threefold practice we recognize the meaning of our inherent pure nature in our life.

If we stay connected with the understanding that we are not separate from everything else, there will be fewer chances to harm others and ourselves. This understanding will become our motivation and bring us to the path of practice. If we truly practice with this understanding, we will surpass the practice of the Ten Perfections and realize our awakened nature.



THE PERFECTION OF

Generosity

Generosity is a simple, yet profoundly meaningful practice of compassionate beings. It is the basis on which all virtuous activity unfolds. Generosity gives birth to the Ten Perfections. It is the mother of all the wholesome qualities of a compassionate being.

The essence of generosity is the non-dual quality of giving and receiving. This essence is openness, the unification of giving and receiving. It provides space for our heart and mind to accept everything as it is. Acceptance is not possible without openness. When we are attached to what we are giving, or when we hold on to expectations, our giving is conditional. It is only when we are truly open that generosity becomes unconditional. Then the act of giving becomes the connection between two beings. This connection manifests itself as a space where the giver and receiver nurture each other.

Openness means freedom from desire-attachment. Generosity enables us to dispel the conditioning of desire-attachment and free ourselves from

the mind of greed, which disintegrates our egotistic self-centeredness. Then we go beyond the judgmental conditioning of our mind and become a true compassionate being. When the mind is free from the obscuration of desire-attachment, there is no fear. When we give and receive free from fear, we manifest eternal joy because we connect with another, and because we transcend the self through giving. Seeing the benefit of what we give makes us happy, and it makes the other happy as well. Our experience of joy, in turn, strengthens our openness. When we experience the joy of giving, we have reached the first stage of realization on the path of compassionate beings. This first stage is called “Joyful.”

When generosity becomes a spontaneous manifestation of our true nature, it becomes the Perfection of Generosity. At this stage, our generosity expresses itself in a myriad ways. You can give a smile, and this small act of smiling can benefit many beings. It can change someone’s life. The way you talk, the way you walk, the way you dress, the way you eat, the way you cook, the way you wash the dishes, the way you appreciate everything can contribute to the welfare and liberation of countless beings who are stuck in the state of their conditioning. When we smile, this connects us with this very moment of our living life. It does not take anything to smile or to offer a gentle sense of humor, but it gives so much in return. So, if it does not take anything to smile or to give our sense of humor, why is it so difficult to share some of our joy with the world when it is needed most?

Giving the gift of a smile can help us connect with others and ourselves. It allows us to touch the softness, warmth, and ease in our heart and to release our mind from the subconscious pressure of stress, fear, and the chaos of emotions. When we smile, our heart and mind can become one, and our body and the movement of our energy enter into

a state of ease. From that state of being at ease, we can taste the nature of great joy. Our smile provides space for others to be who they are. It helps others to release the pressure of judgment and lack of confidence. By offering a smile or our sense of humor from our heart we can give others the strength to connect with us and with this very moment. A smile is like a mirror that reflects the nature of openness and compassion within oneself and others.

One day, as I was planning to visit my family in Nepal, I went to the mall to buy a gift for them. At that time, I had a brand new driver's license and only a few weeks of driving experience. Fortunately, I managed to drive up to the mall safely. When I had bought the things I needed and returned to the car, it would not start. I tried a few times, but could not get it started. I did not know what to do. My knowledge of cars was very limited. The thought came to me to look for the glimpse of a smile, and to ask that very person for help.

Maybe it wasn't the right time of day to look for the glimpse of a smile. It was six o' clock, and people were coming out of a long day of work and rushing to their home to be with someone who had been waiting all day long for their return. On the other hand, there I was waiting for a smile. I passed over a hundred faces that evening but did not find a single face with a glimpse of a smile. Some people were very much in a rush. Others were busy talking on their cell phones. Some looked tired and stressed. Some were arguing and expressing their anger over the cell phone. In the hour of waiting, all kinds of faces passed by—but there was not a single face with a little smile.

So I returned to the car and began to meditate and do prayers. What turned my mind toward prayer were the very faces that passed by me. Those faces touched my heart and broke it open. They opened me to the

wisdom that allowed me to understand that I was not the only one who was facing a difficulty at that moment. This helped me to accept every face with compassion and respect. I felt that the people I was looking at may have been through stressful, demanding, and exhausting days. It was a very short moment of prayer, yet it was very powerful, taking me into a different space and time that was free from stress and nervousness. The glimpse of a smile began to shine through my own face.

Sometimes we are so disturbed by a situation or incident that we let our affected nature carry us away from our basic strength. To be able to respond skillfully, we have to go beyond the incident. Within the periphery of the incident, everything is affected by it. How do we do this? In Bön practice, there are many ways to do this. One of the most important practices is the use of an antidote. The best antidote of all is to recognize what we are feeling. For instance, when we are frustrated, at that moment we have to recognize our frustration. This recognition has a powerful effect on our mind. It takes us beyond the part of ourselves that is affected by a situation. Once we truly realize our state of being without being disturbed or carried away, the gift of this realization is that it will allow us to genuinely work with our state of mind. We are no longer fighting with what we feel but working toward our liberation.

I walked out of the car and went into the mall to call the manager of the Buddhist center where I was living at that time. He told me not to worry and that he would be there in about half an hour. This was such a relief. While I waited for him, a large green pickup truck came and parked next to me. A handsome man with a cowboy hat and boots walked out. He looked at me, and, with a smile on his face, walked toward me.

He said, “Your smile tells me that you need something,” and asked whether everything was okay.

I told him that the car would not start. He suggested the battery might be dead. Then he went back to his truck for a jumper cable and started the car.

Sometimes we are not aware of these small acts and their contribution to the nourishment of our life and the lives of others. Our smile and our simple expression of kindness can indeed benefit many beings.

Developing Generosity

We are all gifted with the inherent potential of kindness and generosity. It is part of our nature. Yet, this nature of generosity is obscured by the five poisons of ignorance, desire-attachment, anger, pride, and envy or jealousy. These five poisons are like a dark cloud that covers the sun. In the case of generosity, the main obstacle is desire-attachment. To clear this obstacle and uncover our true nature of generosity, we have to engage in the actual act of giving in a way that is skillful.

Generosity of heart and mind is not limited to giving to others. It can be expressed both through giving and through receiving. We may become so focused on giving that the giving itself becomes an obstacle for our capacity to receive. Our inability to receive is the greatest mistake of a compassionate being. If I cannot receive you as you are, this is where suffering begins.

To cultivate a generous heart, we begin by being kind to ourselves. When we truly practice generosity, we are like a lamp that illuminates the darkness around it, while at the same time being self-luminous. The lamp is not attached either to its self-luminosity or to its capacity to give light. We can only help others and give to others with the quality of non-attachment if we are able to embrace ourselves with the same attitude of compassion. As the vessel through which we give, we need

to embody self-luminosity so that we do not cause suffering to ourselves when we try to help others.

If we are truly skillful, our act of helping will never become a burden on our life. Then we are like a lamp that does not differentiate between itself and its surroundings, but simply gives its light equally to all without effort and without distinction.

Four Aspects of Generosity

The generosity of a compassionate being is pure in four respects: our intention, the nature of the object we give, the situation and needs of the one who is receiving, and our capacity and skills to give. Giving can open our heart and mind if it is unified with a wholesome, pure intention. When we give with a wholesome intention, we truly see the suffering of another and wish to help him or her, from the bottom of our heart, without seeking any benefits for ourselves. We simply give, seeing the other's need for what we are giving. If our motivation to give merges with ill intentions, this will feed our ego instead of accumulating virtues or clearing karmic traces.

Impure intention is intention that is mixed with the three poisons of ignorance, desire-attachment, and anger. We may think that we are giving to help another, but subconsciously we hold on to expectations of gain and fame. Then our motivation is no longer pure. It has lost its power to transform the suffering of others and the pain and suffering we experience due to our greed and attachment. In a more extreme case, we give with the intention to harm or destroy someone. As a compassionate being we have to renounce any impurity in our intention. If we master the twofold practice of renouncing impure intention and strengthening our wholesome intention we are truly a compassionate being.

The second aspect of the generosity of a compassionate being is the purity of the object that we give. As we give, we may not be aware that the object we are giving can cause harm to others. Any material, mental, emotional, or verbal object that can cause harm to others or ourselves is impure. This is why we need wisdom and discernment in combination with generosity.

The third aspect we need to consider is the situation of the one to whom we are giving. Purity with regard to the situation of giving means that we know what the other really needs. It also means knowing the state of our being, our strength, and our resources. Sometimes we try to give what we don't have or what we are not ready to give, and we become hard on ourselves. This is not a compassionate way of helping others or ourselves. The Buddha Way is to be compassionate with ourselves when we give.

In our practice of generosity, we need to have both compassion and wisdom. We need to consider whether what we give may cause pain and suffering in the lives of others or in our own life. When we help someone, we may be so moved by her or his condition that we are not able to see clearly what the other needs. Or we may give without considering whether this is really the right place and time.

For example, when we see someone who is a victim of addiction, we may want to give in order to ease the other's suffering. Yet, if we give the object of their craving, this may not be helpful but may instead feed the condition of addiction. On the other hand, if we decide not to give, we need to do this skillfully so that we do not become the victim of guilt. When we are strong and skillful, we will be able to make a clear choice to free the other from the causes of her or his suffering.

There are moments when not giving becomes a true compassionate act of giving. At the wrong time even a wholesome act of giving can

cause conflict. Giving at the wrong time or place means that the other is not really suited to our act of generosity. They may be so conditioned that giving is useless. They may not be ready to process our gift. This is like pouring water into a container that is upside down.

The fourth aspect of generosity concerns our capacity and skills in giving with respect to the three times of past, present, and future. Sometimes giving causes fear or distress in us rather than generating a state of joy. This is why we have to make a clear decision before we give. Do we really want to give? We need to ask ourselves this question so that we can be completely open and become one with the act of giving.

In our lives we may experience difficulties and pain because of our confusion and inability to make clear decisions. Being able to clear our mind opens the door to liberation. If we want to give, we must clear our heart and mind so that we do not have doubts, expectations, or a lack of faith in the positive effect of our giving. When we have cleared our mind to give, this enables us to drop the act of giving and the object we have given from our mind. Making a clear decision to give also provides determination and patience so that we are able to accept any hardships we may encounter while giving.

With respect to the present moment, skillful giving is our capacity to spontaneously manifest our heart and mind of generosity. When our generosity manifests spontaneously, it has become effortless; the manifestation of the clarity of our mind. Having a clear mind means that we know the four aspects of giving: our intention, the object we are giving, the one who is receiving, and our skills involved in giving. We do not insist on giving, or force the other to accept, when he or she is not ready or does not want our gift. When our mind is not clear, giving becomes a struggle or burden. Sometimes we want to give and we do give, but the

lack of skill in our giving destroys its essence. For instance, we may give with anger. When we give with anger, we may throw the object that we are giving, making our act of giving impure.

With respect to the future, skillful giving means that we let go of what we have given. We abide in joy by reflecting on our generous act. If we do not let go, the resulting regret can generate unhappiness in us. This may in turn lead to anger and from there into depression. We become frightened or judgmental: "I should not have given it, now I do not have it!" Be happy with what you have given. Feel joy about what you have been able to do for another. Contemplate on your generous actions so that your generous heart and mind can expand and become boundless.

The Threefold Expression of Generosity

As compassionate beings we express generosity in three ways to support the body, feelings, and mind of others: giving material gifts, giving the truth, and giving non-fear. While practicing generosity, we always stay in touch with the four aspects of giving that we talked about earlier.

When we give material gifts, we can practice small acts of giving such as giving a spoonful of food or a drop of water. We can give in medium ways by giving larger material objects. Finally, great acts of generosity involve giving one's own limbs and organs to others without attachment. This is the true Perfection of Generosity. However, any generous act that is free from attachment and given with wholesome intention is a true gift of a generous heart and mind.

Giving the truth can be teaching the truth, giving initiation for practices, and teaching the doctrine of the path of awakening. It also means showing others the way, giving advice, and encouraging and empower-

ing others to be healthy and happy. We can give ourselves and others this gift of empowerment. Through our self-care and gentle self-acceptance we empower ourselves to listen to our inner voice and our feelings instead of ignoring our happiness and our suffering. Empowering others means that we show the way to those who are lost in the cloud of delusion and conditioning. We become a model for others to reflect on their own true nature. We do this by being honest, compassionate, loving, and self-caring.

We may feel that in order to give the truth we need to have a lot of knowledge and wisdom. Yet, if we really have compassion and the deep intention to help others, there is no need to feel that we do not have the necessary wisdom or knowledge. Having the intention to help others is wisdom. Through this wisdom we will have the strength and clarity to show others the way or to help them find it. Our compassion and compassionate listening for someone can be a powerful skillful means to help this person find their way.

To give non-fear, we provide a refuge for others and protection to those who are in danger. We may protect our planet. We may protect animals that are at risk when crossing the road or animals that are being hunted. We can protect others from becoming the victims of their afflictive conditioning. When we become a refuge for others in this way, we give non-fear. To practice giving non-fear we resolve that we will not engage in any action of body, speech, or mind that could harm others or ourselves or cause others to feel afraid. This means that we renounce all actions that arise from afflictive emotions. For example, acting out of anger, lying, or gossiping can cause others to experience fear.

If we do not act out of afflictive emotions, we give non-fear. We give non-fear when we have the heart and mind to accept others the way they

are instead of getting angry with them. If we lack this acceptance, we give fear because we make it more difficult for others to accept themselves. By becoming angry with our friend we scare each other. That is giving fear. Like the sun, the light that dispels the darkness, and like a refuge that protects us from cold, compassionate beings observe their actions and refrain from doing anything that will frighten or cause harm to others.

How many of us give fear to others or to ourselves? We give fear to ourselves by putting pressure on ourselves and constantly thinking that we have to be better. We give fear to ourselves by worrying about what may or may not happen. Our attachment to a particular outcome can give us fear. If we are afraid, this will feed and increase our insecurity. If we are frightened by our own conditioning, the gift we can give to ourselves is to be stable and not afraid. We can initiate this by asking what we can do to be at peace. We can ask ourselves how we can manifest so that our presence can empower ourselves and others to be happy.

Sometimes in our lives we become the victim of misfortune and have to face great external and inner difficulties. We may be so affected by our situation that we are no longer able to recognize or trust in our natural potential of healing and our strength to take care of ourselves. We begin to feel that the answer has to come from outside ourselves. Doing our best to help others who are in this kind of difficulty is a genuine act of compassionate giving. This act provides a space for those who are in a vulnerable state and who need a safe place of refuge. When we give non-fear, we are there for the other in such a way that she or he can take refuge in our presence. When we give non-fear, we are role models for others and we give them the strength to recognize who they are and move forward.

Most of us have conditioning that limits our capacity to give non-fear from a clear, unafraid, and unaffected mind. But we can do our best. We need to make a strong wish to help others in this way, and then do our best without judging ourselves and without having too many expectations.