



MEDITATIONS ON EXCHANGING SELF AND OTHERS

BASED ON THE EIGHTH CHAPTER OF MASTER SHANTIDEVA'S
GUIDE TO THE BODHISATTVA'S WAY OF LIFE



Master Shantideva, GUIDE TO THE BODHISATTVA'S WAY OF LIFE, 8.95-96

यदा मम परेषां च तुल्यमेव सुखं प्रियम्
yadā mama pareṣāṃ ca tulyameva sukhaṃ priyam
तदात्मनः को विशेषो येनात्रैव सुखोद्यमः
tadātmanaḥ ko viśeṣo yenātraiva sukhodyamaḥ

Given the fact that both myself
And others are exactly the same
In wanting happiness,
What difference could there ever be
Between us, what reason that I work
Only for happiness for myself?

यदा मम परेषां च भयं दुःखं च न प्रियम्
yadā mama pareṣāṃ ca bhayaṃ duḥkhaṃ ca na priyam
तदात्मनः को विशेषो यत्तं रक्षामि नेतरम्
tadātmanaḥ ko viśeṣo yattaṃ rakṣāmi netaram

Given the fact that both myself
And others are exactly the same
In not wanting pain,
What difference could there ever be
Between us, what reason that I protect
Myself and not all others?

Week One's Meditation

Treating Others and Yourself the Same

After having done the preliminaries, picture a person who irritates you, an enemy. It could be someone you know personally or someone from the public sphere (e.g., a politician you disagree with).

Get the image of this person very clear in your mind. Locate him or her in the setting with which you associate them. Visual this person with that aggravating look on their face; imagine they are saying some typically irritating thing. Feel how you feel when you encounter this person: judgmental and angry. Think especially about how *different* you are from him or her. "I'm not like him or her *at all*."

Now think about how ultimately superficial the differences are that separate you – social, economic, political differences; differences of race, upbringing, background; differences of opinions and perspectives; etc. Next consider your fundamental similarities – like you, this person just wants a happy, secure life for himself or herself and his or her family and friends; like you, he or she is just trying to avoid pain, unhappiness, fear and anxiety.

Try to get a strong sense of how alike you really are in the most fundamental ways. All you both really want is to just live a peaceful, happy, meaningful life. And don't you both have an equal right to that kind of life? Why would you think that your claims to such a life would be any different, let alone superior to, this person's claims? Why have you so callously regarded this person as so different from yourself, so undeserving of the basic decency you expect others to show to you?

End the meditation by resolving to try to see this person differently from now on, as a *human being* just like you, and not as some kind of vilified and dehumanized caricature.

Dedicate the merit of the meditation session to a world where all beings treat each other with equal respect and consideration.



Master Shantideva, GUIDE TO THE BODHISATTVA'S WAY OF LIFE, 8.120, 129

आत्मानं च परांश्चैव यः शीघ्रं त्रातुमिच्छति
ātmānaṁ ca parāṁścaiva yaḥ śīghraṁ trātumicchati
स चरेत्परमं गुह्यं परात्मपरिवर्तननम्
sa caretparamaṁ guhyaṁ parātmaparivartananam

Anyone who really wants
To quickly reach some shelter for
Themselves and every other being
Must exchange themselves and others;
Must carry out the very highest
Of every secret practice.

ये केचिद् दुःखिता लोके सर्वे ते स्वसुखेच्छया
ye kecid duḥkhitā loke sarve te svasukhecchayā
ये केचित् सुखिता लोके सर्वे तेऽन्यसुखेच्छया
ye kecit sukhitā loke sarve te'nyasukhecchayā

The total amount of happiness
That exists in the world has come from
Wanting to make others happy.
The total amount of suffering
That exists in the world has come from
Wanting to make yourself happy.

Week Two's Meditation

Exchanging Yourself for Your Loved One

After preliminaries, visualize a loved one, preferably someone you live with or see on a regular basis. Get the visualization very clear. Start with the outline of the person and then fill in his or her features. When you get good at this, you feel you are really in the same room as the person you are visualizing.

Think about what you know about this person – his or her likes and dislikes, the things that upset and please him or her, all of his or her little idiosyncracies, etc.

Now exchange yourself with the loved one. Just trade places. “You” are now “him” or “her.” Try seeing the world as they see it. Really inhabit their body, their very being. *Be* him or her (who is now “you”). Practice being this person for a while and see how things look and feel from this perspective.

Next, turn your attention to the old “you.” Look at the old “you” with the eyes of the new “you.” What do you (the new “you”) want, expect, hope for from (the old) “you”? What sorts of things about (the old) “you” bother (the new) “you”? What sorts of things could (the old) “you” do that would really make (the new) “you” happy?

Conclude the meditation by switching back to your old “you” and reflecting on what you’ve realized about how you could make your loved one’s life easier and happier.

Dedicate the merit to cultivating a life where you are more attentive to the needs and desires of those you love and live with.



Master Shantideva, GUIDE TO THE BODHISATTVA'S WAY OF LIFE, 8.140-141

हीनादिष्वात्मतां कृत्वा परत्वमपि चात्मनि

hīnādiṣvātmatām kṛtvā paratvamapi cātmani

भावयेष्यां च मनं च निर्विकल्पेन चेतसा

bhāvayerṣyām ca manam ca nirvikalpena cetasā

Make those who are inferior to you
And so on be yourself; make yourself now
None other than the others.
Practice the attitudes of jealousy,
And competitiveness, and pride
Without any misgivings at all.

एष सत्क्रियते नाहं लाभी नाहमयं यथा

eṣa satkriyate nāham lābhī nāhamayaṁ yathā

स्तूयतेऽयमहं निन्द्यो दुःखितोऽहमयं सुखी

stūyate'yamaṁ nindyo duḥkhito'hamayaṁ sukhī

“This one should receive the honor,
But not us; we should never get
The things he always does.
He should bask in praise, and we
Should be belittled; he should have
All happiness, and we the suffering.”

Week Three's Meditation

Exchanging Yourself for Your Inferior

Do the meditation preliminaries. Then visualize someone you regard, in one way or another, as inferior to you – poorer, less educated, less talented, less attractive, less fit, less spiritually aware, less politically correct, etc. You must be honest; there are plenty of people in your world you regard this way. Pick one.

As with the last meditation, be sure to get this person's image very clear in your mind's eye. See them as they normally appear to you, in the usual place, wearing the usual clothes, and so on. Visualize them as a living presence, not as a picture.

When you have their image clearly appearing before you, recall how you feel in their presence – how much smarter, prettier, thinner, richer, moral, politically advanced, etc., you are than this person! Be really, really honest with yourself about your own sense of superiority. Feel the pride, the arrogance, the vanity, well up in the face of this inferior.

Now switch. Exchange yourself for this inferior other. Become him or her. Spend a few minutes feeling things as they do, seeing the world as they would. Think about any details about their life you might know – their favorite kind of music, the car they drive, who they live with, etc. – and fill in your own sense about what it is like to be (this new) “you.”

Now look back at the (old) “you” with the eyes of the (new) “you.” How does it feel to be so inferiorized? To be so patronized? To be the object of another's sense of superiority and scorn? Begin to cultivate a strong sense of jealousy (“Why should he or she have thus or so, and not me? Why shouldn't I have what this other one has?”) and resentment (“Why does he or she think so little of me? Why does he or she put me down? Who does he or she think he or she is, anyway?”). Get into it! Feel strongly this sense of injustice! Cultivate the feelings of jealousy and resentment – in relation to (the old) “you.”

End the meditation by switching back to the old “you,” and recall to mind how “you” and your attitude of superiority appeared to the (new) “you.” Resolve to remember what you experienced in meditation the next time you encounter this “inferior” person.

Dedicate the merit of the meditation to being more aware of how your own assumptions, attitudes and actions affect others.



Master Shantideva, GUIDE TO THE BODHISATTVA'S WAY OF LIFE, 8.162-163

अन्येनापि कृतं दोषं पातयास्यैव मस्तके

anyenāpi kṛtaṁ doṣaṁ pātayāsyaiḥ mastake

अल्पमप्यस्य दोषं च प्रकाशय महाजने

alpamapyasya doṣaṁ ca prakāśaya mahājane

And even if others do something wrong,
I will see to it that I change it around
So that I can take the blame myself.
Even if I do the very slightest thing wrong,
I'll make sure that I admit it
To as many people as I can.

अन्याधिकयशोवादैर्यशोऽस्य मलिनीकुरु

anyādhikayaśovādairyaśo'sya malinīkuru

निकृष्टदासवच्चैनं सत्त्वकार्येषु वाहय

nirkṛṣṭadāsavaccainam sattvakāryeṣu vāhaya

When others begin to get some fame,
I'll make sure I add some more,
And see to it that they outshine
Whatever fame I might enjoy.
I will command myself to work
For every purpose, acting as if
I were the least of servants.

Week Four's Meditation

Exchanging Yourself for Your Superior

As always, start your meditation session with the preliminaries. Now visualize someone who is better than you in something you value – someone who is smarter, who is more professionally accomplished, more sophisticated, more famous, better looking, more popular, richer, more successful, better at something you've been working at. As before, really work at visualizing this person in front of you, in all their detail. Feel their presence.

Then think about how envious you are of them. Just admit it. Realize how much you would really like to have the advantages they have. How unfair it is that they are smarter, richer, better looking, more accomplished, etc.! Recall, and then accentuate, your own sense of jealousy and resentment in the face of this person and what they represent for you.

Now switch. As in previous meditations, really work at fully inhabiting the life of this other who is now "you." Bring to mind any and all details you may know about them and the circumstances of their lives, and then "own" that life. "You" are now in that life. Feel especially what it's like to be better at this thing the (old) "you" is jealous of. How it feels to be smarter, better looking, more successful. How good it feels to be good at something! How nice that everyone is speaking so highly of me! How much satisfaction there is in this accomplishment, this talent, this popularity, this advantage! Feel the pride, the sense of superiority!

Then look back with the eyes of the (new) "you" at the (old) "you." Look back at the (old) "you" with condescension and scorn. How unpleasant to be around someone like this, someone who is filled with resentment and envy for what is rightfully mine! How unseemly to be so jealous of me! Why do they think they should have what I so richly deserve? Who do they think they are, anyway? Why can't they see that I am just enjoying what God just endowed me with, or what I accomplished myself through my own efforts? Really get your backbone behind this attitude of pride and condescension, and feel strongly how nasty it is to have someone like (the old) "you" around resenting (the new) "you" and feeling envious.

Then switch back. "You" become the old "you" again. Reflect on what this "you" looked like from the point of view of the superior. Resolve to try to remember these insights the next time you think about or encounter him or her.

Dedicate the merit of the meditation to becoming a person who is without ill will and envy and who rejoices in the happiness and successes of others.