

Transforming Problems Into Happiness

Introduction

It is very important to think in detail of the benefit of problems, since this is the main method of generating with increasingly greater strength and determination the thought of liking that which is generally regarded as miserable. Recognizing undesirable situations as desirable is one of the most powerful thought-training practices you can do. This is the way to transform suffering into happiness. In the meditation below, there are a number of ways to meditate on transforming problems into happiness. You can use each of them briefly in a single session, or just focus on one technique and spend time with it, using different techniques each time you do the meditation.

Preparation

Check your posture to make sure your spine is straight, shoulders are back and relaxed, mouth and jaw are relaxed. Take a few deep breaths in and out and feel the weight of your body on the cushion. Bring your awareness solely to the breath. If it helps to concentrate your mind, count ten or twenty-one inhalations.

Motivation

Spend a moment to set your motivation for this meditation. Feel in the depths of your heart your longing for happiness, your wish to be free from suffering, your wish to be free from the constant disturbances of body and mind that you experience. (Pause).

Now, think of others – those you know, those with whom you work, those you read or hear about in the news – think of animal beings, spirit beings, those trapped in a hellish existence, and think of those who are tormented by the shortcomings of having fame, money, beauty, and the pain of separating from those things. Recognize that all living beings are just like you, they just want happiness, they don't want to suffer.

How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to have happiness and the causes of happiness. How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to be free from suffering and the causes of suffering. How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to be inseparable from the happiness that is beyond all suffering. How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were to abide in a state of perfect blissful equanimity, free from attachment and aversion. May I cause all sentient beings to abide in this way, May I myself abide in this way.

I am trying to engage in a spiritual path. I have met the perfect teachings that will bring me to enlightenment. Still, even though I try to engage in virtue, I am constantly met with obstacles, problems, and difficulties – both internally and externally. During this degenerate time, if I am not able to transform problems into the path of enlightenment, I have no chance. I will easily become overwhelmed by all the challenges. Therefore, in order to attain enlightenment as quickly as possible and not be discouraged by problems, I will do this meditation on transforming problems into happiness, for the benefit of myself and all living beings.

Body of the Meditation

Bring to mind the biggest problem in your life right now. Perhaps it is a difficult relationship, or a disharmonious work or family situation; maybe you have health problems, lack of energy or depression; maybe it just seems that there are forces working against you and that nothing ever seems to go smoothly. Be specific. If your mind has trouble choosing, allow a number of problems to present themselves to you. Allow yourself to feel very strongly the mind that is thinking of this thing as a "problem". Notice how the mind just wants to push it away and get it out of your life. Feel the discomfort of the unhappy and discontent mind.

Using Guru Devotion

What if this problem is just a test from my teacher? Perhaps he/she is testing my patience, or testing my resolve to persevere in Dharma. Perhaps he/she is testing my ability to have a compassionate mind. What if this person/situation is, in reality, a manifestation of my teacher to teach me or assist me in purifying my negative karma? Perhaps this is really a gift and not a problem at all? The more sincerely I am devoted to my path of spiritual awakening, the more likely it is that this is, in fact, my teacher guiding me. How lucky I am!

Using Renunciation

As long as I am in samsara, under the influence of karma and delusions, what do I expect? Do I think there are supposed to be no problems? Living in samsara *means* having problems and suffering. Why do I continue to endure this? Why don't I make the effort and just get out of samsara? Why do I keep thinking there will be happiness in samsara? I am kidding myself! This problem is a perfect reminder that there is no point to stay in samsara, no matter what happiness I experience, it will always end up like this, in suffering. Without this problem, I might be deluded into thinking that happiness in samsara – the happiness of this life – is actually possible; and I might miss this opportunity to attain the secure state of liberation. Now, with this problem, I am reminded of my shortcomings, my inability to be happy in the face of challenges. It is helping me to reduce my pride and helping me to generate a true mind of renunciation, without which I can never be free. How lucky I am!

Using Bodhichitta

I am not the only one experiencing this problem. There are countless living beings that are experiencing this same problem right now. They are feeling this same frustration, pain, depression, physical discomfort, etc. right now. (Pause and reflect deeply on others who are suffering.)

Not only that, but I have Dharma. I know why I suffer and I have the remedy to free myself of problems forever. All I have to do is make effort. But the majority of living beings have no idea why they are suffering. They do not know what causes suffering and so they do not know how to stop it. They suffer and suffer and do not understand why. They are in such despair. (Pause)

Any sentient being from the animal realm, or the realm of craving spirits, or hell beings would trade that life in an instant for an entire lifetime of this very problem. My problem would be blissful happiness in comparison to the sufferings they have to endure

all the time. How can I be so self-absorbed to think only of myself and my small problem compared to the real problems that beings face – and they have no way out! This is a terrible situation that living beings have to endure. (pause)

Others did not create this problem for me. I created this problem. I created the karma that is now ripening as this problem. Those very beings who seem to be causing me harm are only causing harm for themselves in the future, but I am exhausting my negative karma through this experience. Because of this experience, I will be free of future suffering and they will have to suffer in the future. This is unbelievably sad.

May I take this suffering, this problem upon myself on behalf of all other living beings. By my experiencing this very discomfort, problem, this suffering state of body or mind, may all others be free of just this very suffering. May I myself quickly attain the state of enlightenment and stop all this suffering forever.

Using Emptiness

Now, ask yourself, "Why is this a problem?" Was it a problem an hour ago, a month ago, a year ago? When in my mind did I start to perceive "problem"? (Pause) Is it possible that someone else in this story might have a different perspective and not see it as a problem at all? (Pause) Is this problem real? Lasting? Permanent? Where *exactly* is the problem? Could it be that this isn't a problem at all?

Spend some time examining all the components that are making this a problem such as sights, sounds, smells, tastes, sensations, consciousnesses - including your mind that labels "problem." Was there a problem before my mind labeled "problem"? See if you can pinpoint the real identity of the problem. Think of the word "problem" over and over again. Recite it like a mantra. It is just sounds, it doesn't mean anything in and of itself at all, just like this problem. If you cannot find the problem when you look for it, allow your mind to rest in the absence of a solid, real, findable "problem".

Resolve

From now on, I will not allow the self-pity mind to take over and keep me trapped in the suffering of believing in the appearance of problems as problems. Problems are happiness and the causes of happiness in disguise. By remembering my teacher, the shortcomings of samsara, bodhichitta, and emptiness, I will transform the appearance of problems into happiness.

Dedication

By virtue of making this effort, may I easily transform all difficulties of my life into the path of awakening. May I quickly become exactly what is needed to benefit for living beings. May the sufferings and problems of all living beings ripen upon me and may my happiness and its causes ripen upon others.

Colophon

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