

Uniting Wisdom and Compassion Meditation on the Three Types of Compassion

This meditation on the three types of compassion can be done by working with yourself first, and then working with your dearest friend as a starting point for working with others. From there, move on to your next best friend, continuing through others in that category of friends until you have can generate the same level of compassion for all those who are your friends. Continue this way through using examples of neutral people or strangers until you have an equal compassion for those in that group. Move on to those who are difficult for you, starting with those are least challenging, working your way through those who are stronger enemies in your life until you have the same level of compassion for all those you find challenging. In this way, your compassion for all beings can be of equal strength and rooted in the wisdom that understands their situation clearly.

Preparation

Spend a few minutes focusing on the breath to calm the mind, using whatever technique for observing the breath that you prefer. Whenever the mind wanders from the breath, gently return your attention to the breath.

Motivation

Set an altruistic intention for engaging in this meditation by cultivating the motivation of bodhichitta, the aspiration to achieve complete enlightenment for the benefit of all beings.

Body of the Meditation

1. Compassion Observing Mere Sentient Beings (Compassion Seeing Suffering Beings)

*Homage to that compassion for migrators who are
Powerless like a bucket travelling in a well
Through initially adhering to a self, an 'I,'
And then generating attachment for things, 'This is mine.'*

1.3

In meditation, imagine a bucket traveling in a well, tied to a wheel, controlled by the operation of the mechanism, going down into the dark depths and up to the brighter top over and over again, being drawn up with great difficulty and strain, and easily

descending back down to the bottom, involved in a process the order of which is difficult to determine, and while clattering against the sides of the well, being battered and broken.

Then contemplate the various points of the example of the bucket in the well:

1. Just as the bucket is tied by a rope to the wheel, so we are bound by past actions contaminated by the afflictive emotions of lust, hatred, and ignorance.

2. Just as the turning of the wheel depends upon a person operating it, so our wandering in cyclic existence depends upon consciousness.

3. Just as the bucket travels down to the bottom of the well and up to the top, so we travel among the stations of cyclic existence, being born over and over again as hell-beings, hungry ghosts, animals, humans, demigods, and gods.

4. Just as the bucket descends easily in the well but is difficult to draw upward even with hard work, so our own tendencies of mind – our lust, hatred, and ignorance – are such that we are easily drawn down into lower states of existence, but to change the momentum of this movement to lower states and move toward higher ones we must make a great deal of effort.

5. Just as with the wandering of a bucket in the well, the temporal order of what happens first, in the middle, and last is difficult to determine, so our afflictive emotions, actions, and sufferings mutually lead to each other, making it impossible to determine in general the order of these three.

6. Just as the bucket is battered against the walls of the well, so we are battered by the sufferings of mental and physical pain, the suffering that occurs when pleasure leads to pain, and the suffering that is comprised by the mere fact of being caught in an afflicted process of conditioning. Powerlessly, sentient beings are wandering among bad states and better states.

When, through the above analytical meditation, a vivid sense of the pain of the being you are observing becomes manifest to you, within a sense of closeness and affection towards them, contemplate the compassionate thought, “*How nice it would be if this person were free from suffering and the causes of suffering!*”

Then cultivate the next level of compassionate thought, “*May they be free from suffering and the causes of suffering!*”

Finally, cultivate the great compassion that takes responsibility for protecting that being from suffering, thinking, “*I will free them from suffering and the causes of suffering.*”

2. Compassion Observing Phenomena (Compassion Seeing Evanescent Beings)

[Homage to that compassion for] migrators seen as evanescent and Empty of inherent existence like a moon in rippling water. 1.4ab

In meditation, imagine a lake; there is a light breeze, and the water is covered by ripples. It is a cloudless night. A full moon is reflected in the water, and notice how the reflection of the moon in the water shimmers, flickers. Then switch to the person you are working with and see that person as evanescent, transitory, impermanent like the shimmering reflection of a moon in rippling water.

Then, within the realization of the impermanence of that being, and yet their tendency to conceive just the opposite, contemplate the first compassionate thought, “*How nice it would be if this person were free from suffering and the causes of suffering!*”

Then cultivate the next level of compassionate thought, “*May they be free from suffering and the causes of suffering!*”

Finally, cultivate the great compassion that takes responsibility for protecting that being from suffering, thinking, “*I will free them from suffering and the causes of suffering.*” While generating compassion in this way, maintain that awareness of the being you are observing as impermanent and yet conceiving themselves as solid, static, and unchanging.

3. Compassion Observing the Unapprehendable (Compassion Seeing Empty Beings)

In meditation, imagine a calm lake on a cloudless night. A full moon is reflected in the water, but you don’t know that a lake is there. You actually are looking at the reflection of a moon in water, but you think you are seeing the moon.

First, gain the experience of slowly looking over the image of the reflection of the moon, going over every part of it, realizing that every part of it is not a moon, that the whole thing together is not a moon, that there is nothing there at all which is a moon.

Then, remaining in that experience of a vivid appearance of a moon but the utter lack of a moon, view the person you are working with and understand that the person, however vividly they appear, does not exist inherently, even though they appear to exist in their own right. Understand that beings and all phenomena arise in dependence on their causes and conditions, in dependence on their parts, and in dependence upon mere imputation, such that they could not possibly exist in and of themselves as they seem to do.

Then, while holding the understanding of that being as empty of existing independently or inherently, reflect on the fact that, in spite of this reality, they have the strong tendency to adhere to the opposite, drawing themselves needlessly into recurring suffering in order to satisfy this kind of self when there is no such self at all.

Then, within the realization of the emptiness of inherent existence of that being and yet their tendency to conceive just the opposite, contemplate the first compassionate thought, “*How nice it would be if this person were free from suffering and the causes of suffering!*”

Then cultivate the next level of compassionate thought, “*May they be free from suffering and the causes of suffering!*”

Finally, cultivate the great compassion that takes responsibility for protecting that being from suffering, thinking, “*I will free them from suffering and the causes of suffering.*” While generating compassion in this way, maintain that awareness of the being you are observing as empty of inherent existence and yet conceiving themselves as existing independently, intrinsically, and substantially.

Dedication

Conclude the meditation by dedicating all the positive potential you’ve created to the welfare of all sentient beings through your own attainment of buddhahood. You can make additional dedications as you wish.

Body of meditation adapted by Don Handrick from *Cultivating Compassion*, by Jeffrey Hopkins, Broadway Books, 2001 (Please note that this book was later published by Snow Lion Publications as *A Truthful Heart*.)

Translation of verses by Jeffrey Hopkins, *Compassion in Tibetan Buddhism*, Snow Lion Publications, 1980