

Meditation on Compassion

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Before getting to the heart of this morning's talk, let's spend a few minutes placing both our body and our mind in an open and receptive state.

As far as the body is concerned, whether we are on a cushion on the floor or on a chair, try to sit in as comfortably upright a posture as possible. Think that we are like a tall, straight redwood tree, rooted in the earth yet reaching up to the sun. Remain relaxed and well grounded, yet upright and alert.

Then take a series of cleansing breaths. That is, breathe in slowly, deeply, and comfortably through the nostrils, hold it for a little while (but not until it becomes uncomfortable), and then gently expel the out-breath. As we are breathing in deeply and slowly through the nostrils, feel that the air we are inhaling is vibrant, permeated by a light energy that is in the nature of clarity, loving-compassion, and all the other qualities of enlightenment.

This energy enters deeply into us, permeates our entire being, and begins to loosen or dissolve any blockages it may encounter. Any feelings of tightness or restriction, any sleepiness or confusion, any residue of anger, attachment or the other delusions that may be interfering with the clear, unimpeded flow of energy within us is gently dissolved by this radiant light energy. These interferences are in the form of thick fog or smoke, and as we exhale, slowly and thoroughly, we let go of these interferences completely, gently expelling them with the out-breath. They drift away from us, like smoke from a chimney, and evaporate into empty space. Without forcing it in any way, continue to breathe in the cleansing light energy and to expel any thick, fog-like energy with the out-breath.

In this way we can dissolve, let go of, and gently expel not only the delusions and their karmic residue, but even our sense of the body's heaviness and solidity. As we continue to breathe in and out in this fashion, we can feel ourselves growing lighter, as if our body were slowly transforming from a gross physical object into a spacious body of light...allowing our awareness to expand...allowing us to experience the mind's innate clarity.

After a while, we can relax our conscious control over the breath, and simply let it come and go as it will. We focus our attention instead on whatever feeling of clarity, freedom, weightlessness, light, joy, or even bliss that we may have experienced as a result of the cleansing breaths we had taken. Even if there has only been a *slight* shift in our feelings of openness and well-being as a result of our breathing meditation, we focus our attention gently but firmly on that experience itself...so that our mind and this experience of unfolding, of relaxation, of light, of joy, of bliss become unified, totally pervading one another.



The main body of the meditation

Then recognize that at this very moment each of us is seated at the very center of a vast assemblage of beings, human and non-human alike, numbering in the millions and billions. And realize as well that the vast majority of these beings are experiencing anything but the open, spacious, fully conscious, light, joyous, and blissful experience that we have just tasted. Instead, they are trapped in the self-created prisons of their petty, limited ego-identities, searching here and there for pleasure and happiness, but experiencing nothing but repeated frustration, disappointment, dissatisfaction, pain, and suffering. Although they are ignorant of the way things truly exist and are consequently under the sway of such powerful and destructive emotions as hatred, attachment, jealousy and the like, each one of these beings, without exception, has the potential for experiencing pure, blissful, and fully liberated consciousness. Each being has within him- , her- or themself this infinite treasure, this potential for full enlightenment in the nature of everlasting happiness and joy. And yet this treasure is unknown, buried, obscured by delusion and ignorance and the accretions of karma...and thus they feel trapped, fragmented, alienated, and alone.

At this moment, through exceedingly good fortune, we have had the opportunity of being introduced to a powerful method for arousing this blissful, spacious, unencumbered, potentially enlightened consciousness within ourselves, as explained in the precious teachings of tantra as revealed by Shakyamuni Buddha. So as we listen to, study, and think about these precious teachings, let us expand our motivation so that we are not engaging in these activities for our own selfish reasons, wishing to extract some pleasure merely for ourselves alone. Instead, let us cultivate the pure and boundless bodhicitta motivation, wishing to use our knowledge of this tantric path in order to help all other beings without exception discover the indwelling treasure of their most subtle consciousness, and thereby experience infinite and everlasting happiness and fulfillment. In this way, any of the activities that we engage in, even thinking about one line of the Buddha's teachings, becomes a powerful cause for our experience of enlightenment, shared with all the beings inhabiting this universe.

And then, to conclude this introductory meditation in which we are setting our motivation to be as expansive and all inclusive as possible, let us recite the six-syllable mantra of the Buddha of Compassion:
om ma-ni pad-me hung. (*often pronounced OM MANI PEMAY HUNG*)

As we recite this mantra, feel that we are allowing our compassionate motivation—our wish for all beings, without exception, to know limitless happiness and fulfillment—to be shared with all beings in the universe. First, turning our thoughts to all of those who are currently experiencing the most intense suffering and pain—such as those caught up in war, famine, and all other forms of mental and physical torment—let the sound of this mantra, together with the radiant light energy of compassion and love, radiate forth from the very center of our heart. Let this blessed sound and light reach all beings, calming their suffering the way the rays of the full moon relieve the suffering of heat, bringing them peace of mind, happiness, a sense of well-being, and finally complete spiritual fulfillment. Then, as we continue to recite the mantra, spread this wish for peace, happiness, well-being, and fulfillment to all beings, until we are all joined together in universal compassion:

Conclusion

Then conclude this meditation by imagining that all this loving, compassionate energy, emanated outwards from the center of our own heart towards the ends of the universe, returns and dissolves back into us, like snowflakes dissolving into a still lake, inducing a blissful experience beyond words and expression. Allow this experience to permeate our entire being.

Dedicate the Merit