

Meditation 22

Alternating Meditation with Prayer to Transform Our Emotions

We can also use a more extensive alternating meditation to work with our emotions. To do that, we begin with contemplation. For example, we might begin by reflecting on our aversion to and judgment of the actions of someone who's harming the environment. We might remind ourselves of the teachings and meditations we've learned about karma. We could reflect on the fact that they're only going to suffer in the long run from what they're doing, and so we might choose to intervene in order to protect them from the consequences of their actions. We might consider how we could balance the short- and long-term benefit of that person with the short- and long-term benefit of all those they're harming.

Having reviewed or contemplated the teachings we've been exposed to in relation to this person and why we want their welfare, we let go of the effort to contemplate. Without effort, we let our conceptual understanding sink in for as long as it feels like it's making an impact on our mind.

Then, we go to the next effortful practice. We generate compassion for everyone who finds it difficult, in the midst of adversity, to genuinely want the welfare of others—those we perceive as enemies as well as those we perceive as compatible wayfarers on our life's path. We generate compassion, and then we let that effort go, allowing the compassion sink in.

We make a commitment to whatever arises from our compassion—for example, to strengthen our love and compassion, to grow and stabilize our capacity so that, no matter what we encounter, we're able to continue to be a force for benefit. Whatever that commitment looks like for us—to our formal practice, to our informal practice, to a certain kind of activity—we make that commitment and let it sink in as we let go of the effort.

Then, we pray. Through prayer, we open the door to the infinite positive qualities that are facets of our true nature. Perhaps we can't conceive of such positive qualities in ourselves, but we can conceive of them, or we've experienced them, as embodied outside of ourselves in a particular object of faith or refuge. We may experience ourselves as separate from the pure embodiment of positive qualities, but, through the process of prayer, that apparent separation relaxes, creating the possibility of a recognition less bound by duality. Our mind and heart open, and we rest in that openness. We access deeper wisdom, opening our awareness to those qualities, so they can be awakened and actualized for the sake of all beings.

In between each of these effortful practices, we rest the mind, letting go of fixation on whatever we do or don't want to happen. When we let go of the effort, we also let go of the habit to that fixation, the habit to solidify attachment and aversion to a particular outcome. We let what is, be.