

SUNLIGHT ON SHADOWS: Embracing Great Compassion

Meditation 42

Combining Three Equanimity Meditations

We start by establishing pure motivation, and then we imagine someone we have a lot of judgment, pride, and righteousness toward. We imagine this person in front of us and walk ourselves through a reasoning process, reminding myself: This person, just like me, wants to be happy. Every single thing they're doing is because they think it will bring benefit. They aren't doing it because they want to suffer. Just as I've done so many misguided things in the course of my life when I thought something would benefit me or those close to me, maybe this person is doing what they're doing because they're trying to avoid some kind of pain or suffering. Maybe they're trying to blame and punish everybody and everything around them for their suffering. How many times have I blamed others for my own misfortune, for my own suffering, for my own difficulties, just like this person is doing?

Their concern for their own welfare is so overwhelming that it wouldn't even occur to them to think about those around them much less take them into consideration, listen, or respond with empathy or compassion. There's just too much suffering, too much desire for their own welfare—just as has been the case with us.

We remind ourselves that this person, who's behaving in these ways just as we've done, has a true nature of limitless purity, like the crystal. Everything they're doing is adding more ore to that crystal, further obscuring their positive qualities and ensuring more suffering for themselves and others now and in the long run—just like we've done so many times. Go through the process of considering how all our natures are inherently pure, and yet, out of not knowing that, we grasp at all of these outer labels and identities. How could we possibly repay any kindness they might have shown us in long-forgotten times?

Next, we imagine others who are behaving in similar ways as this person. Maybe they're in the same organization or the same neighborhood and are making similar choices, behaving in similar ways, and are motivated by similar kinds of poisons of the mind. All these people are behaving in this way out of a misunderstanding of the causes of benefit and the causes of harm, just as we've done so many times, lost in the blindness of our desire for happiness and our aversion toward suffering, disregarding the suffering of those around us.

The tragedy is, everyone we're imagining just wants to be happy. They want things to get better. They're not trying to make things worse, and yet, in the very course of trying to make things better, they make things worse for themselves and for others—just as we've done so many times. We're aware of the deep-rooted tragedy here. Even though their minds are filled with limitless positive qualities—such as generosity, faith, trust, patience, kindness, and wisdom—they instead act out of

superficial negative emotions—just like we’ve done so many times.

What if all these people had been kind to us—the kindness of the kindest mother—and are now lost in their confusion, flinging around the causes of suffering for themselves and others, flailing around in the course of trying to find happiness, and creating the opposite for themselves and others? How would we repay that kindness now? How would we think about and respond differently to them?

We next imagine people who behave differently from those in the previous scenarios and who we also judge harshly. They make choices we find disgusting or terrifying. We think about how many times we’ve made choices that others—like our parents or people close to us—found terrifying or disgusting. People in our neighborhood or our organization might have been horrified by some of our choices. Did we care about them when we made those choices? Did we care about the impact of our actions on others any more than these people care about the impact of their actions on us?

The people we’re imagining behave in these ways in the very course of trying to find benefit—just as we’ve done limitless times—even though their mind and heart are endowed with limitless positive qualities. And their lives could be going in such a different way. They could be creating limitless merit, but, instead, they’re creating so much harm. We think about how these individuals are just like us, may have been kind to us, and consider how we might interact with them differently.

Keep expanding this meditation to include people behaving in different kinds of ways. For example, imagine someone who has shown you great kindness but who you’ve come into conflict with. Remind yourself: This person, just like me, thinks their way is the best and only way to find happiness. Just like me, in the very course of trying to bring about happiness, they’re producing the opposite and creating conflict. How could I respond differently?

Walk yourself through that process with more and more types of people—people you love, people you feel neutral about, and people you have aversion toward—and continue to expand the visualization to include all living beings—two-legged, four-legged, no-legged, many-legged. Just like us, the true nature of each one is a state of limitless purity, but, out of not knowing that nature, each one produces the opposite of what they want, again and again. How can we orient ourselves differently to repay their kindness, in our lives, in our work, and in our communities?

At the end of your practice, dedicate the merit of your meditation to them with the aspiration that whatever virtue you’ve created may be the cause of short- and long-term happiness for them and all others, throughout time and space.