

SHORT COURSE IN COMPASSION TRAINING

Supplement to Online Course in Meditation

THE NECESSITY OF COMPASSION

Why it is fundamental to meditation training

THE GOAL: TO HEAL ALL SUFFERING

The fundamental reason that all Buddhas appear in the world is to save sentient beings.

Kihwa

TWO DEFINITIONS

Compassion

- The wish that all sentient beings be free of suffering

Lovingkindness

- The wish that all may enjoy happiness

WHY COMPASSION IS IMPORTANT

The awakening of the mind toward enlightenment starts with compassion and is dependent on compassion at every stage.

Sutra of Perfection Enlightenment

Compassion builds bodhicitta, the aspiration for enlightenment

Bodhicitta leads to the practice of the six perfections: giving, morality, patience, effort, concentration, wisdom

Practice of the perfections leads to enlightenment

TRADITIONAL TEACHING ON COMPASSION

I should eliminate the suffering of others because it is suffering just like my own suffering. I should take care of others because they are sentient beings just as I am a sentient being.

If the suffering of many disappears because of the suffering of one, then a compassionate person should induce that suffering for his own sake and for the sake of others.

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WHAT IS SUFFERING?

Slides 8–16 set out several related explanations of the meaning and origins of suffering according to the tradition

SENTIENT BEINGS SUFFER

- Consciousness is what continues before and after this life according to the Buddha
 - To be capable of thought means we have minds
 - The mind and body are not separate (no dualism)
 - Consciousness is more basic than the brain
- “Sentience”
 - Being sentient comes as a result of our having consciousness
 - Being sentient means we have the capacity for feeling, sensation and thought
 - We are able to experience pain because we have consciousness
 - Having the capacity for feeling means we can suffer

SUFFERING

- First Noble Truth: there is suffering (*duhkha*)
 - “Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering. To be conjoined with what one dislikes is suffering and to be separated from what one likes is suffering. Not to get what one wants is suffering. In short, grasping at the five aggregates (*skandha*) is suffering.”
 - Life is filled with unsatisfactoriness
- Objects of this world are not worth pursuing—grasping
 - They are subject to impermanence, suffering and nonself
 - Turn toward the radical nonattachment of nirvana

THREE TYPES OF SUFFERING

The “suffering of suffering”

- Unpleasant or painful sensations associated with the physical body or the mind
- E.g. pain, grief etc.

The suffering of change

- Nothing is permanent
- Pleasure will eventually be replaced by disappointment and loss

The suffering of karma

- Negative thoughts and emotions lead to nonvirtuous actions that create karma
- Karma means that past actions can lead to suffering at any time
- This is “cyclical existence”

KARMA AND THE ORIGIN OF SUFFERING

- Karma: the universal law of cause and effect of actions
 - Virtuous actions create pleasure in the future
 - Non-virtuous actions create suffering
- Karma accounts for all the happiness and suffering in the world

DESIRE LEADS TO SUFFERING

All sentient beings are in cyclical existence because of their possession, from beginningless time, of attached love, craving and desire....

This tendency...is abetted by the existence of all desires, and therefore it is able to empower the continuity of samsara.

Sutra of Perfect Enlightenment

THE ROLE OF THE SELF IN SUFFERING

All the happiness there is in the world

Arises from wishing others to be happy.

All the suffering there is in the world

Arises from wishing oneself to be happy.

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THE WHEEL OF SUFFERING



Self-clinging and suffering

At the root is the mistaken belief that you are a “self” with an intrinsic nature

This is ignorance—the principal wrong view

This wrong view lies behind all suffering

GET BEYOND THE SELF

*If one does not let go of self
one cannot let go of suffering,
as one who does not let go of fire
cannot let go of burning.*

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HAVE COMPASSION FOR YOURSELF

When people become more compassionate toward themselves they are more compassionate toward others

WE HAVE A FALSE VIEW OF WHO WE ARE

Our usual sense of a self is deluded

- Suffering isolates us—the instinct for self-protection
- “Self-esteem” builds up self-identity, separation

We are conditioned to hate ourselves

- Western notions of “success” are destructive
- Western parenting lacks kindness and contact
- We live in a culture of repression, violence and cruelty
- Advertising teaches us to view ourselves as inadequate
- We are shaped by negative views of human nature—religious views, racism, authoritarianism etc.

SELF-COMPASSION

A healthy self

- Modern developmental psychology considers individuation to be an important accomplishment
- A positive sense of self

Unhappy self

- Negative self-worth is an inverted view of the self
- But still a form of self-awareness

Individualism

- An ideology based on antisocial attitudes and behaviour
- Winners and losers, putting oneself first, egotism

Delusion

- The idea of a permanent self is false

Train to be self-compassionate

- Put yourself in perspective
- Learn to treat yourself with compassion

THREE ASPECTS OF COMPASSION THAT CAN BE LEARNED THROUGH MEDITATION

Self-kindness

- You can learn to stop judging yourself
- Say goodbye to the harsh internal critic

Common humanity

- We are not isolated
- No need to believe you are the only one things happen to

Mindful awareness

- You can learn to stop over-identifying with views of yourself, labelling yourself as "stupid, foolish, ugly, important etc."
- Instead, pay attention to what is really going on

TRAIN YOURSELF IN SELF-COMPASSION

Say to yourself

I am deserving of happiness

I wish to be free of suffering

I wish to be happy

Meditate on self-compassion

- Try using this mantra for a period of time:

"May I be well and happy."

COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

May all beings be well and happy

THE WAY OF THE BODHISATTVA

*At first, one should meditate intently
on the equality of oneself and others, as follows:
"All equally experience suffering and happiness.
I should look after them as I do myself."*

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BODHISATTVA VOWS

I vow to deliver innumerable sentient beings.

I vow to cut off endless vexations.

I vow to master limitless approaches to Dharma.

I vow to attain supreme Buddhahood.

- These vows express the determination to seek your own awakening not for yourself but for the sake of others
- They are commonly recited every day in Chan/Zen centres and temples

TRAINING IN COMPASSION

Three exercises to develop altruism and bodhicitta and to reduce selfish attachment

METHOD 1: TONGLLEN

How to practice tonglen

- Tonglen means giving and receiving
- Start the practice by saying:
 - *Just like me, [this person] wants to be happy.*
 - *Just like me, [this person] does not want to suffer.*
- On the in-breath take in the suffering of the object person
- On the out-breath give compassion to the object person
- Continue in this fashion for several minutes

Choose three types of object in sequence

- Carry out the breathing exercise in three rounds of practice, one for each of three objects:
 1. A neutral person
 2. A friend or relative
 3. Someone who causes you difficulty

METHOD 2: MANTRA

Meditate using a mantra

You can train yourself in compassion by meditating with this mantra

"May all beings be well and happy."

How to use a mantra

- Do not voice the words
- Say them silently inside yourself repeatedly and unhurriedly
- Do not think about the meaning of the words
- Let the words continue on their own
- Locate the mantra low down in the body

METHOD 3: COMBINE WISDOM AND COMPASSION

Act on the self

- To benefit yourself practice wisdom and virtue
- To achieve wisdom and virtue act out of compassion to save all beings
- To keep a mind of compassion towards others you need a spontaneously freed mind
- This will make you joyful and able to maintain concern for all beings

Action for others

- Keep a mind of compassion toward all sentient beings
- To act in order to save others means your actions are those of a Buddha
- You can endure all pain and save all beings