

**Introduction to Mindfulness Meditation
and
Overview of the Teachings of the Buddha**

Session Five: Meditation on Compassion

Meditation on Equanimity

The Hindrances

Antidotes for the Hindrances

Meditation on Compassion

There are 4 brahma-viharas, meaning heavenly abodes which are beautiful and powerful states of consciousness. So far we have studied 2 of these, loving friendliness (metta) and sympathetic joy (mudita). Today we will learn a meditation for the last two, compassion (karuna) and equanimity (upekkha). These meditations have been taken from Sharon Salzberg's book, "Loving Kindness - The Revolutionary Art of Happiness" which is in the lending library.

Loving friendliness is a feeling of unconditional love towards self and others. Compassion is a stirring of the heart when we see suffering in ourself or others and a wish to relieve that suffering.

The traditional phrases for the meditation on compassion are:

“May you be free of your pain and sorrow”

“May you find peace”

But use phrases that are meaningful to you. You send your compassion out in the following order:

1st - to someone with great physical or mental suffering. Think of a specific individual and while directing the compassionate phrases to them, be aware of their particular difficulties.

2nd - to yourself

3rd - to your benefactor (traditionally, this was to your teacher who was the Buddha or a

monastic). Think of someone who has been really supportive of you.

4th - to a neutral person

5th - to a difficult person

6th - to all beings

Remember that all beings face great potential suffering no matter how fortunate their immediate circumstances may be!

This meditation does not eliminate suffering. What we are doing is being able to acknowledge suffering, to open to it and respond to it with a tenderness of heart which allows us to join with all beings and realize we are never alone.

Meditation on Equanimity

The traditional phrases for this meditation are:

“All beings are owners of their kamma (karma)”

“Their happiness and unhappiness depend upon their actions, not upon my wishes for them”

Some other suggested phrases that I like to add to the above are:

“I will care for you but cannot keep you from suffering.”

“I wish you happiness but cannot make your choices for you.”

This meditation is offered in the following order:

1st - to a neutral person

2nd - to your benefactor

3rd - to a friend

4th - to an enemy

5th - to yourself

6th - to all beings

To help me to meditate on equanimity while thinking of an enemy, I change the last 2 phrases to:

“I will care for you too as another suffering human being, but I cannot keep you from

suffering”

This wording helps me to not focus on whatever current action they are doing that is distressing me, but to focus instead on the fact that they are another human who is subject to suffering.

“I wish you true happiness but cannot make your choices for you.”

It is easier for me to wish my enemy true [spiritual] happiness; I associate his/her worldly happiness as at the expense of others.

When I send the equanimity phrases to myself, I change them to:

“I am the owner of my kamma.”

“My happiness and unhappiness depend on my actions, not my wishes or hopes”

“I care for myself and I am determined to follow the path of peace”

“I wish myself happiness and I am determined to make skillful choices”

By practicing all 4 of the brahma-viharas you will find that the spirit of love, compassion and joy is balanced by equanimity and that equanimity is enriched by each of the other brahma-viharas. The practice of the 4 together will lead to a deep feeling of well being. Barriers between different parts of ourself and between ourselves and others can be melted.

The Hindrances

When you feel blocked in your meditation practice, this is an opportunity to develop insight. Stand back and look at what you are doing / experiencing. What is the obstacle? The answer is that it is one or more of the five hindrances. The hindrances are 5 specific unskillful qualities. They are:

a) **Desire** - for a sensory experience. This is different from preference for something. This refers to attaching your happiness to attaining this experience and thus suffering if the experience doesn't occur or doesn't occur to a certain standard. Examples of sensory experiences are seeing beautiful scenery, a great movie, a work of art or tasting delicious food or hearing wonderful music or smelling a pleasant scent or experiencing a pleasant physical sensation such as a massage, the warm sun, an orgasm or experiencing an enjoyable mental state such as peace or excitement or happiness. Desire can also be for existence or for annihilation of self.

b) **Ill-will** / anger / hatred / irritation / annoyance

c) **Restlessness and worry**

d) **Sloth and torpor** - sloth is low energy in the mind and torpor is low energy in the body.

e) **Doubt** - about whether your spiritual practice will be beneficial or not or if it is the “right” spiritual practice for you.

They are called hindrances because they hinder our ability to gain insight into how to be released from suffering. Desire seduces us into believing that satisfying our desires

will bring us lasting happiness. Ill-will and restlessness and worry create tunnel vision so we don't realize the suffering we are creating for ourselves. Sloth and torpor lead to lack of motivation to get us out of our doldrums or daydreaming. Doubt takes away our motivation to practice meditation.

Our possibility for transforming suffering into happiness comes not in repressing the hindrances or in creating a split between ourselves and them but in acknowledging them when they arise without identifying with them i.e. this suffering is who I am! Investigate the hindrances to see that they lead you away from strengthening the conditions for happiness. Once we feel the hot coal in our hands, we will drop it immediately.

The hindrances are expressions of our untrained minds. We never deserve judgment or criticism for experiencing them. In the same way that we bring forth infinite patience and perseverance in training our children or pets to know what is safe and what is not, the invitation of Insight Meditation is to call forth the same kind of patient effort for ourselves. We do not repress or reject the hindrances but rather we cultivate a relationship to them with awareness, metta and perseverance. Creating this skillful relationship is how transformation begins.

Once you have identified which hindrance has arisen, review the **following** skilful means (antidotes) to overcome that hindrance.

Antidotes for the Hindrances

a) Sensual Desire (greed)

Desire is insatiable. Fulfillment of desire can never satisfy desire; can never bring us lasting happiness. The mathematical equation of happiness = $\frac{\text{satisfaction}}{\text{desire}}$

Therefore, there are 2 ways to be happy: 1. Have enough money to meet all your desires. (Doesn't work because desires are insatiable.) 2. Cultivate a simple life style with few desires. Thus the secret of happiness is developing the capacity to enjoy less.

Desire brings us contraction and separation rather than spaciousness and connection. In meditation, we separate desire itself from what is desired (its object) and examine desire itself. Notice how desire takes us out of the present moment, into the future. Notice how it creates contraction, restlessness or doubt and perhaps thoughts that may not be realistic. When desire arises, do not judge yourself (the nature of the untrained mind is to desire) but recognize it, acknowledge it, notice how it is affecting you and let it go, through one of the following techniques:

1. Contemplate impermanence....the truth of change. See desire as just another passing experience. You can acknowledge desire with, "Desire, welcome. I see you have come to visit. I know you well. You are a frequent guest. But I am not entering into a conversation with you or getting involved in any of your stories. So you are free to leave at any time." There is no need to struggle. This is the same as #4 - letting be, but bringing in the awareness of impermanence as the

desire fades.

2. Concentration. Aim the mind at breath or metta or some other object so that there is no space for desire to arise.
3. Cultivate non-greed ie. generosity.
4. Experience the unpleasantness (suffering) that comes with desire (wanting something that you don't have at this moment). Or contemplate the unattractive aspects of the desired object. Or talk to yourself about how desire is unsubstantial and that afterwards there's just an empty feeling.
5. Let go of the desire to change something that is currently unpleasant by accepting it, letting it be. Practice this by sitting still with minor discomfort during meditation letting go of the desire to be comfortable all the time).
6. Desire may be a cover for unacknowledged, difficult emotions. Investigate what is going on in your emotional world. Try to experience your difficult emotion without identifying with it i.e. I am this difficult emotion!). Hold it with awareness and spaciousness. This creates the conditions for coming back to balance and harmony. With this, the strength of the desire evaporates.
7. Moderation in eating - more training in letting go.
8. When you desire something, don't look at its whole, look at its parts. This can help you let go of your desire. The traditional meditation to help you when you are lusting after a person and this is inappropriate because you are celibate or married to another etc, is to meditate on the body parts....so instead of focusing on the beautiful person, you think about their internal organs, blood, urine, bile etc.
9. Noble friends and noble conversation. This means associating with others who are not slaves to desire. One aspect of Noble conversation is not **indulging** in desirous talk with others.

b) Ill-will / Anger / Hatred

When we meditate, we often develop ill-will towards ourselves because we are critical of how our meditation is going or we have aversion to pain in our body. And in our daily life, ill-will towards ourselves, others or situations commonly arises. The goal of the antidotes is summed up in this verse from the Dhammapada:

In this world
Hate never yet dispelled hate.
Only love dispels hate.

Try the following antidotes:

1. Metta meditation (loving friendliness) and metta conduct. "May this pain be held with kindness." "May I hold this aversion with kindness."

2. Use the holding techniques discussed in lesson #3.
3. Use concentration on your breath or on a general sense of your whole body posture, or on sound etc. so there is no room for aversion to arise.
4. Cultivate an interest in the experience that triggered the aversion. Or see if you can separate your internal dialogue of the experience from the actual physical experience. This may allow the aversion to evaporate as in the holding technique. Call on your resources as a spiritual warrior to bring forth the energy to drop and keep dropping your stories.
5. Cultivate joy. Eg. if there is pain in your body, focus on some part of your body that is comfortable or that is functioning eg. contemplate the blessings of having a knee, or leg, or shoulder or whole body that functions.
6. Contemplate the Buddha's teachings on how unskillful actions sow the seeds of suffering through cause and effect (kamma).
7. Ask yourself the question, "What good would it do to harbour this malice?"
8. Listen to Ajahn Sona's talk, "Five Ways to Overcome Anger". Found on the website birken.ca
9. Noble friends and conversation. This means associating with those who hold an attitude of metta much of the time and who do not speak in anger or rehearse anger by repeatedly telling stories of how others have stirred up their anger.

c) Sloth and Torpor (lethargy and drowsiness)

Sloth refers to the mind (drowsiness, falling asleep, dullness of mind) and torpor refers to the body (lethargy, feeling heavy, lack of driving power, sinking quality). In summary, they are states of low energy. Acknowledge that this is your experience. Awakening energy by exerting effort to connect with a chosen object such as one of the objects below is the direct antidote to heavy drowsiness. (Do not use sloth and torpor as an object of meditation....find a different object).

1. Visualize a brilliant ball of light.
2. Go for a fast walk.
3. Realize that life is uncertain, that death is certain, so right now is the best time for mental cultivation.
4. Effort leads to energy. Therefore, becoming fascinated with each moment as it arises leads to energy.
5. Count breaths to help stay present.
6. Mentally scan touch points of the body. Continue until you feel alert.
7. Open your eyes and stay with body scanning or your breath.
8. Open your eyes, look at the light, rub your cheeks, pull your earlobes, move your

limbs or stand up. Put a cool, wet cloth on your neck.

9. Stand on your head.
10. Repeat what you know of the Buddha's teachings or your understanding of what brings about your happiness. Energy comes from knowing how important meditation is for us.
11. Noble friends and conversation. This means associating with those who practice the antidotes to sloth and torpor when they arise and who don't indulge in sloth and torpor.

d) Restlessness and Worry

1. Substitute a calming meditation for your worries ie. let go of the restlessness and direct your mind back to your breath or posture or metta etc. Refrain from acting on any thoughts that come up. Persevere in your commitment to sit. Separate the anxiety from what you are anxious about and see it as the hindrance of restlessness. An attribute of restlessness is monkey mind. We strengthen our meditation practice not by getting lost in thoughts but by returning from thinking to our meditation object. Another attribute of restlessness is physical agitation. Do not be mindlessly reactive to physical experiences such as pain or itching. Recognize them, acknowledge them and then, if necessary, adjust your posture with mindfulness.
2. Recognize the discomfort of worry. This will lead you to dropping the hot coal.
3. Learn the Dhamma (teachings of the Buddha) and direct your mind to them.
4. Feeling shame and fear of your unruly mind is given as an antidote. Because so many individuals in our culture have been wounded with shaming (this wasn't true in the culture the Buddha grew up in or in Buddhist cultures even today) this may not be a skillful antidote for some.
5. Associate with wise and mature people. This means spending time with those who know how to deal skillfully with restlessness and worry when they arise.
6. As a last resort, suppress the unwholesome thoughts by clenching your teeth and pushing your tongue against the roof of your mouth.

e) Doubt

Doubt creates all kinds of story lines that seduce us into thinking that the doubts are true....that we are inadequate, that the path is inadequate etc.

1. Investigation - make inquiries, ask questions and study the teachings until the

obscure points become clear.

2. Practice meditation. Once you experience the benefits of meditation, doubt disappears.
3. Commit to one teaching. If each time you hit a stumbling block, you go in search of a new guru, you will never make the effort to go deeper into the practice to discover its fruits.
4. Look at your thoughts and determine if they are skilful ie do they bring happiness....do they contribute to your well-being?
5. If remorse for past actions causes doubt in your ability to benefit from meditation, think of the story of Angulimara, a serial killer who became enlightened.
6. Learn the Dhamma.
7. Associate with wise and mature people. Talk to others, especially teachers.