

A kind heart

The meditations on this CD will help us to develop greater peace of mind, happiness, and to improve our relationships through learning to cherish others.

A kind heart is a special mental attitude that cherishes other people at least as much as we cherish ourselves. It is grounded in the following commonsense thinking: 'Just as I wish to be happy, so does everyone else; and just as I do not wish for the slightest suffering, nor does anyone else. From this point of view we are all the same. Therefore there is no reason to consider my own happiness or my own suffering to be more important than anyone else's.'

Thinking and acting in this way has many practical benefits for both ourselves and others. For one thing, it helps us to overcome our instinctive self-cherishing attitude, which is the source of all our unhappiness. If our wishes are not fulfilled or we experience problems we become unhappy. Why? It is only because we are preoccupied with our own happiness. People who have overcome self-cherishing never feel unhappy, even when they are sick or dying.

It is because of our instinctive self-cherishing that we commit negative actions which give rise to an endless stream of problems for both ourselves and others. If we self-cherish we would never think, say or do anything negative or harmful. If we cherish others we will naturally perform virtuous actions, and as a result experience great happiness in the future. One way or another, all virtue and happiness come from cherishing others.

Our ordinary view is that we are the centre of the universe and that other people and things derive their significance principally from the way in which they affect us. Our car, for example, is important simply because it is ours, and our friends are important because they make us happy.

Strangers, on the other hand, do not seem so important because they do not directly affect our happiness, and if a stranger's car is damaged or stolen we are not that concerned.

This self-centred view of the world is based on ignorance and does not correspond to reality. By practising the meditations presented here, we can develop a realistic view of the world based on an understanding of the equality and interdependence of all living beings. Once we view each and every living being as important we will naturally develop good intentions towards them.

Cherishing others is not so difficult -all we need to do is to understand why we should cherish them, make a firm decision to do so, and then meditate repeatedly and sincerely on this decision.

Gradually we will develop a deep and powerful feeling of cherishing for all beings, including those whom we presently dislike.

If we then carry this special feeling into our daily life it will have an extremely beneficial influence on everything that we think, say and do.

The five stages of meditation

Generally, meditation sessions have five stages:

1. Preparation

Initially, the purpose of this stage is to:

At this stage you can also engage in traditional Buddhist preparatory practices for purifying hindrances, accumulating merit and receiving inspiring blessings. For more detail, see *The New Meditation Handbook*.

The initial preparations are all included in the guided meditations. If you would like to spend more time calming distracting thoughts, you can begin with a few minutes of simple breathing meditation as explained in the *Meditations for Relaxation CD* in this series.

2. Contemplation

The purpose of the second part, contemplation, or analytical meditation, is to bring to mind the object of meditation. This is done by considering various lines of reasoning, contemplating analogies and reflecting on the meaning of the instructions such as those given in the guided meditations. Note that these instructions are intended only as guidelines and you can supplement and enrich them with any other reasons and examples you find helpful.

3. Meditation

When, through your contemplations, the object of meditation appears clearly, you leave your analytical meditation and concentrate on the object single-pointedly.

This single-pointed concentration is the third part, the actual

meditation.

At first, your concentration may be poor; you may be easily distracted and often lose the object of meditation. Therefore, to begin with, you may need to alternate between contemplation and placement meditation many times in each session.

Both contemplation and meditation serve to acquaint your mind with virtuous objects. The more familiar you are with such objects, the more peaceful your mind becomes. By training in meditation, and living in accordance with the insights and resolutions developed, eventually you will be able to maintain a peaceful mind continuously, throughout your life.

4. Dedication

At the end of each session, dedicate the merit, or positive energy, produced by your meditation towards attaining a positive goal that you wish to achieve. If merit is not dedicated, it can easily be destroyed by, for example, anger.

5. Subsequent practice

It is important to remember that these practices are not confined to your activities during the meditation session but should be fully integrated into your daily life.

Deep experience of these practices is the result of practical training over a long period of time, both in and out of meditation. Therefore, you should practise steadily and gently, without being in a hurry to see results.

Med 1: Cherishing Others

The first meditation is the principal meditation, and success in the other two depends upon gaining experience of this one first. As with the other two, this meditation can be done by focusing on just one person, a group of people, or all living beings in general. You simply decide before the meditation begins and bring that person or group of people to mind at the appropriate point.

Imagining them in front of you or beside you, think about how they experience problems, fears and suffering, and how they long to be free from all of these.

You try to feel how their wish to be free from problems and suffering is just as important to them as your wish is to you, and then you concentrate on this realization.

Next, you think about how much they want to be happy, to experience peace and to enjoy life. You try to feel how their wish to experience peace and happiness is just as important to them as your wish is to you, and then you concentrate on this realization.

Finally, you draw your thoughts to a conclusion, thinking, 'It makes no sense to wish for my happiness and not theirs, or to wish for myself to be free from suffering but not them.'

Then you develop a sincere wish for them to be happy and free from suffering as if you were wishing this for yourself.

This wish is your object of meditation, and you hold it in your mind without distraction.

This is true cherishing, and pure love.

Med 2: Taking away Suffering

The second meditation is a practical meditation on compassion, which is a sincere wish to protect others from suffering.

Again, you begin by bringing to mind the person or group of people you want to focus on during the meditation.

You think about the suffering, problems, and fears they experience and how they long to be free from them, and you develop a strong wish for them to be completely free from all their suffering and problems, as if you were wishing this for yourself. This wish is the nature of compassion.

You then imagine that all their suffering, fears and problems gather in the form of thick black smoke, which you mentally draw out of them and into your heart centre at the very centre of your chest.

1. The other people become completely free from all forms of suffering, problems and fears, and experience deep inner peace
2. Through the power of your selfless, compassionate wish, the smoke entering you destroys any trace of selfishness in your heart, and all your self-cherishing
- together with the smoke - vanishes into emptiness.

This visualization of other people completely freed from suffering and yourself completely freed from self-cherishing gives rise to an experience of deep inner peace and joy.

This feeling is your object of meditation, and you concentrate on it without distraction.

Med 3: Giving Happiness

The third meditation is a practical meditation on love, which is a sincere wish to give happiness to others.

Again, you begin by bringing to mind the person or group of people you want to focus on during the meditation.

You think about how much they want to be happy, to experience peace and to enjoy life, and yet how difficult it is for them to find true happiness, and how when they do experience a little happiness it is short-lived and quickly turns into frustration, disappointment and eventually more suffering.

You develop a strong wish for them to experience pure, lasting happiness and peace, as if you were wishing this for yourself.

This wish is the nature of love.

You then imagine that through the power of this pure, loving wish, your body transforms into the nature of a wishfulfilling jewel that has the power to fulfil all the wishes of all living beings.

You feel as if your body is pervaded by blissful light, which is the nature of pure love.

This light radiates out from your body, like light radiating from the sun, and reaches the other person.

You imagine that their body and mind are completely pervaded by this light, and that they experience pure lasting happiness and deep inner peace.

Strongly believing they are experiencing this inner peace, you feel joy in your heart.

This feeling of joy at the happiness of others is your object of meditation, and you concentrate on it without distraction.

A web of kindness

All living beings show us tremendous kindness. Our body, for example, is the result of the kindness not only of our parents but of countless beings who have provided it with food, shelter and so forth. It is because we have this present body with human faculties that we are able to enjoy all the pleasures and opportunities of human life.

Our skills and abilities all come from the kindness of others; we had to be taught how to eat, how to walk, how to talk, and how to read and write.

Even the language we speak is not our own invention but the product of many generations. Without it we could not communicate with others nor share their ideas.

All the facilities we take for granted, such as houses, cars, roads, shops, schools, hospitals and cinemas, are produced solely through others' kindness.

When we travel by bus or car we take the roads for granted, but many people worked very hard to build them and make them safe for us to use.

The fact that some of the people who help us may have no intention of doing so is irrelevant. We receive benefit from their actions, so from our point of view this is a kindness. Rather than focusing on their motivation, which in any case we do not know, we should focus on the practical benefit we receive.

Everyone who contributes in any way towards our happiness and well-being is deserving of our gratitude and respect. If we had to give back everything that others have given us, we would have nothing left at all.

Wherever we look, we find only the kindness of others. We are

all interconnected in a web of kindness from which it is impossible to separate ourself. Everything we have and everything we enjoy, including our very life, is due to the kindness of others. In fact, every happiness there is in the world arises as a result of others' kindness.

Our sense that we are an island, an independent, self-sufficient individual, bears no relation to reality. It is closer to the truth to picture ourself as a cell in the vast body of life, distinct yet intimately bound up with all living beings. We cannot exist without others, and they in turn are affected by everything we do. The idea that it is possible to secure our own welfare while neglecting that of others, or even at the expense of others, is completely unrealistic.

Contemplating the innumerable ways in which others help us, we should make a firm decision: "I must cherish all living beings because they are so kind to me."

Cherishing others reduces our anger

Cherishing others reduces and eventually eliminates all the pains and problems we bring upon ourself as a result of anger.

Anger is by nature a painful state of mind. Whenever we develop anger, our inner peace immediately disappears and even our body becomes tense and uncomfortable.

It is impossible to enjoy ourself when we are angry, and even the food we eat seems unpalatable. Anger transforms even a normally attractive person into an ugly red-faced demon. We grow more and more miserable and, no matter how hard we try, we cannot control our emotions.

One of the most harmful effects of anger is that it robs us of our reason and good sense. Wishing to retaliate against those whom we think have harmed us, we expose ourself to great personal

danger and embarrassment.

Anger is particularly destructive in relationships. A couple may genuinely love one another, but, if they frequently get angry with each other, the times when they are happy together will become fewer and further between.

If we learn to genuinely cherish others we will gradually become free from all these problems. External conditions will not disturb us, and our friends, our family, and the people with whom we live and work will become happier.

From this we can understand how beneficial it is to train in these meditations and learn to cherish others.

Advice from the heart

The following is a selection of quotes from a famous text by the great 11th century Buddhist master Atisha. They are intended as practical advice for cherishing others during our daily lives, and they are as relevant today as they were when they were first spoken:

- Generate compassion for lowly beings, and especially avoid despising or humiliating them
- Have no hatred for enemies, and no attachment for friends
- Do not be jealous of others' good qualities, but out of admiration adopt them yourself
- Do not look for faults in others, but look for faults in yourself, and purge them like bad blood
- Do not contemplate your own good qualities, but contemplate the good qualities of others, and respect everyone as a servant would
- See all living beings as your father or mother, and love them as if you were their child
- Always keep a smiling face and a loving mind, and speak

truthfully without malice

- Since you cannot tame the minds of others until you have tamed your own, begin by taming your own mind
- Since hatred is rife in these impure times, don the armour of patience, free from anger If you are interested to find out more about this text, or in introductory books on other aspects of Buddhist meditation, please visit www.tharpa.com