

# assignments 3D

## readings

Excerpt from Shantideva's *The Way of the Bodhisattva*

Translation by Padmakara Translation Group [*modifications in brackets, footnotes omitted*]

### CHAPTER 8: MEDITATIVE CONCENTRATION

90. Strive at first to meditate  
Upon the sameness of yourself and others.  
In joy and sorrow all are equal;  
Thus be guardian of all, as of yourself.

91. The hand and other limbs are many and distinct,  
But all are one—the body to be kept and guarded.  
Likewise, different beings, in their joys and sorrows,  
Are, like me, all one in wanting happiness.

92. This pain of mine does not afflict  
Or cause discomfort to another's body,  
And yet this pain is hard for me to bear  
Because I cling and take it for my own.

93. And other beings' pain  
I do not feel, and yet,  
Because I take them for myself,  
Their suffering is mine and therefore hard to bear.

94. And therefore I'll dispel the pain of others,  
For it is simply pain, just like my own.  
And others I will aid and benefit,  
For they are living beings, like my body.

95. Since I and other beings both,  
In wanting happiness, are equal and alike,  
What difference is there to distinguish us,  
That I should strive to have my bliss alone?

96. Since I and other beings both,  
In fleeing suffering, are equal and alike,  
What difference is there to distinguish us,  
That I should save myself and not the others?

97. Since the pain of others does no harm to me,  
I do not shield myself from it.  
So why to guard against “my” future pain,  
Which does no harm to this, my present “me”?

98. To think that “I will have to bear it”  
Is in fact a false idea.  
For that which dies is one thing;  
What is born is something else.

## APPENDIX 2

### EQUALIZING SELF AND OTHER

The following passage is taken from *The Nectar of Mañjushrī’s Speech*, by Kunzang Pelden. It explains stanzas 90 to 98 of chapter 8, giving the metaphysical basis for the meditation on equality of self and other, and thus the whole practice of compassion according to Mahāyāna Buddhism. At the same time it throws interesting light on the teachings on reincarnation and karma (subjects frequently misunderstood), and shows how these are in agreement with the view that neither persons nor things possess an essential core that is solid and unchanging.

[90] Two things are to be practiced on the level of relative bodhichitta: meditation on the equality of self and other, and meditation on the exchange of self and other. Without training in the former, the latter is impossible. This is why Shāntideva says that we should first meditate strenuously on equality of self and other; for without it, a perfectly pure altruistic attitude cannot arise.

All beings, ourselves included, are in exactly the same predicament of wanting to be happy and not wanting to suffer. For this reason we must vigorously train in ways to develop the intention to protect others as much as ourselves, creating happiness and dispelling suffering. We may think that this is impossible, but it isn’t.

Although they have no ultimate grounds for doing so, all beings think in terms of “I” and “mine.” Because of this, they have a conception of “other,” fixated on as something alien—although this too has no basis in reality. Aside from being merely mental imputations, “I” and “other” are totally unreal. They are both illusory. Moreover, when the nonexistence of “I” is realized, the notion of “other” also disappears, for the simple reason that “other” is only posited in relation to the thought of “I.” Just as it is impossible to cut the sky in two with a knife, when the space-like quality of [non-self] is realized, it is no longer possible to make a separation between “I” and “other,” and there arises an attitude of wanting to protect others as oneself and of taking them as one’s own. As it is said, “Whoever casts aside the ordinary, trivial view of self, will discover the profound meaning of great Selfhood.” Thus, for the realization of the equality of “I” and “other,” it is essential to grasp that “I” and “other” are merely labels without any basis in reality. This vital point of [non-self] is difficult to understand, difficult even for a person of high intelligence. Thus, as the teachings say, it is of great importance that [non-self] be clearly demonstrated and assimilated.

[91] The way to reflect upon equality is as follows. We can distinguish the various parts of our bodies: hands, feet, head, inner organs, and so on. Nevertheless, in a moment of danger, we protect them all, not wanting any of them to be hurt, considering that they all form a single body. We think, "This is my body," and we cling to it and protect it as a whole, regarding it as a single entity. In the same way, the whole aggregate of beings in the six realms, who in their different joys and sorrows are all like us in wanting to be happy and not wanting to suffer, should be identified as a single entity, our "I." We should protect them from suffering in just the same way as we now protect ourselves.

Suppose we were to ask someone how many bodies he had. "What are you talking about?" he would reply. "I have nothing but this one body!" "Well," we continue, "are there many bodies that you should take care of?" "No," he will say, "I take care only of this one body of mine." This is what he may say, but the fact is that when he talks about "his body," he is doing no more than applying a name to a collection of different items. The word body does not at all refer to a single indivisible whole. In other words, there is no reason why the name body should be attached here [to these items] and why it is inappropriate to attach it elsewhere. The word body is fastened, without ultimate justification, to what is merely a heap of component items. It is the mind that says "my body," and it is on the basis of this idea of a single entity that it is possible to impute the notions of "I," "mine," and all the rest. To claim, moreover, that it is reasonable to attach the name "I" to "this aggregate," and not to "another aggregate," is quite unfounded. Consequently, it is taught that the name "I" can be applied to the whole collection of suffering beings. It is possible for the mind to think, "They are myself." And if, having identified them in this way, it habituates itself to such an orientation, the idea of "I" with regard to other sentient beings will in fact arise, with the result that one will come to care for them as much as one now cares for oneself.

[92] But how is it possible for such an attitude to arise, given that others do not feel my pain, and I do not feel theirs? The meaning of the root text may be interpreted as meaning that, while these sufferings of mine have no effect upon the bodies of other living beings, they are nevertheless the sufferings of my "I." They are unbearable to me because I cling to them as mine. [93] Although the pains of others do not actually befall me, because I am a Bodhisattva and consider others as myself, their pains are mine as well, and are therefore unbearable to me.

How is it that when suffering comes to me, the pain affects only myself and leaves others untouched? In my present incarnation, just as from beginningless time until now, my mind entered amid the generative substances of my parents as they came together. Subsequently, there came into being what I now identify as "my body." And it is precisely because I seize on it as myself that I am unable to tolerate its being injured. But within suffering itself, there is no separation between "my suffering" and "another's suffering." Therefore, although another's pain does not actually afflict me now, if that other is identified as "I" or "mine," his or her suffering becomes unbearable to me also. Maitriyogin, the disciple of the Lord Atīsha, did indeed feel the suffering of other beings as his own. This was the experience of one who had attained the Bodhisattva grounds of realization. However, even on the level of ordinary people, we can take the example of a mother who would rather die than that her dear child should fall sick. Because she identifies with her baby, the child's suffering is actually unbearable for her. Other people who do not identify

with the child are for this very reason unaffected by its pain. If they did identify with it, the child's suffering would be intolerable for them as well.

Moreover, a long period of habituation is not necessary for this kind of experience to occur. Take the example of a horse that is being put up for sale. Right up to the moment when the deal is struck, if the horse lacks grass or water, or if it is ill, or if it has any other discomfort—all this will be unbearable for its owner, while it will not at all affect the client. But as soon as the transaction takes place, it is the buyer who will be unable to stand the horse's suffering, while the seller will be completely indifferent. Within the horse itself, there is no basis whatever for the distinction "this man's horse" or "that man's horse." It is identified as being this man's or that man's according to how it is labeled by thought.

In the same way, there is not the slightest reason for saying that the notion of "I" must be applied to me and not to another. "I" and "other" are no more than a matter of conceptual labeling. The "I" of myself is "other" for someone else, and what is "other" for myself is "I" for another. The notions of "here" and "there" are simply points of view, designated by the mind in dependence on each other. There is no such thing as an absolute "here" or an absolute "there." In just the same way, there is no absolute "I" and no absolute "other." It is just a matter of imputation. And so, on account of this crucial point, the Dharma teaches that when "I" is ascribed to others, namely, sentient beings, the attitude of accepting and taking them as one's own will naturally arise.

This is how Buddhas and Bodhisattvas claim sentient beings as their own selves in the way explained above, so that even the slightest pain of others is for them as if their entire body were on fire. And they do not have the slightest hesitation in doing so, just as when the Buddha claimed as his own the swan that Devadatta had shot down with an arrow. Similarly, Machig said that in the centuries after her, perverted practitioners of chöd would with violent means subjugate the wealth-gods, ghosts, and demons, whom she had taken with the crook of her compassion—meaning by this that she had taken these gods and spirits to herself as beings whom she cherished.

As we have said, taking sentient beings as one's own does not require lengthy training. For example, if you tell someone that you will give him an old horse, no sooner are the words out of your mouth than the other person has already appropriated the horse and cannot bear it if the horse is in distress. Still it might be thought that, because one has drifted into such bad mental habits, the thought of taking others as oneself will never arise. But the Lord Buddha has said that in all the world, he never saw anything easier to educate than the mind itself, once it is set on the right path and steps are taken to subjugate it. On the other hand, he also said that there is nothing more difficult to govern than an untrained mind. Therefore, if we do not let our minds stray onto wrong paths but train them, it is perfectly possible to bring them into submission. Conversely, if we fail to subdue our minds, it will be impossible for us to overcome anything else. This is why the teachings say that we should strive to subdue our minds.

[94] Shāntideva's justification for the necessity of eliminating suffering is presented in the form of a probative argument. His thesis is that he will eliminate all the sufferings of others, that is, the sufferings that will not bring them any ultimate benefit. His reason is that their

suffering does them no good and, by way of example, he says that he will remove it just as he removes his own discomforts of hunger, thirst, and so on. By a similar procedure, he says that he will benefit others and make them happy, because they are living beings, and, once again by way of example, he will do this in the same way that he attends to the comfort of his own body. [95] Since there is not the slightest difference between ourselves and others (in that all want to be happy), what reason could we possibly have for not working for the happiness of others? It does not make sense that we should work only in our own interest. [96] In the same way, there is not the slightest difference between ourselves and others in that no one wants to experience suffering. Therefore what reason do we have for failing to protect others from suffering? It does not make sense that we should strive only to protect ourselves.

[97] Now suppose someone were to object saying, “Yes, I am affected by my own suffering, and therefore I have to protect myself. But when suffering happens to someone else, nothing at that moment is actually hurting me, therefore another’s suffering is not something I have to protect myself from.” But major and obvious sufferings (from the sufferings of the next life in the hell realms to the pains that will come tomorrow or next month), or the more subtle kinds of suffering occurring from moment to moment—all such discomforts, great or small (due to lack of food, clothing, or whatever), are located in the future. They are not actually harming us in the present moment. If these future pains are not tormenting us now, what do we have to protect ourselves from? It makes no sense to do so. [98] But we may think that these sufferings are not the same as those of other beings. For even though such sufferings are not affecting us now, we protect ourselves nevertheless because we will experience them in the future. But to cling, on the gross level, to the aggregates of this life and the next life as constituting a single entity, and to cling also, on the subtle level, to the aggregates of one instant and the next as being the same thing, is a mistaken conception, nothing more. When we reflect about our present and future lives in the light of such arguments, [we can see that] the entity that dies and passes out of life is not the same as that which is born in the succeeding existence. Conversely, that which takes birth in the next life, wherever that may be, is not the same thing as that which has perished in the previous existence.

The length of time spent in the human world is the result of past karma. When this is exhausted, as the final moment of the human consciousness ends, it creates the immediate cause [of the new life], while the karma that brings about birth in a hell realm, or whatever, constitutes the cooperative cause. Wherever people are subsequently born, whether in hell or elsewhere, they have at death a human body, whereas at birth, they will have the body of a hell being and so on. In other words, the previous consciousness now terminated is that of a human, while at the moment of the later birth, the consciousness is that of a hell being. The two are thus distinct. When the mind and body of a human come to an end, the mind and body of the following life come into being. It is not that there is a movement or transmigration of something from a former to a subsequent state.

As it is said:

*Like recitation, flame, and looking glass,  
Or seal or lens, seed, sound, astringent taste,*

*The aggregates continue in their seamless course,  
Yet nothing is transferred, and this the wise should know.*

When, for example, one uses a lamp to light another lamp, the later flame cannot be lit without dependence on the first; but at the same time, the first flame does not pass into the second one.

If the earlier entity is terminated, however, and the later one arises in such a way that the two are quite separate, it will be objected that, in that case, the effect of former actions is necessarily lost, while (in the course of the subsequent existence) karmic effects will be encountered that have not been accumulated. But this is not so. Phenomenal appearances—which arise ineluctably through the interdependence of causal conditions—cannot withstand analysis, they lie beyond the scope of both the eternalist and nihilist positions. The assertion that karmic effects are not lost is a special feature of the Buddhist teachings. It lies within the exclusive purview of an omniscient mind, and it is thus to be accepted through reliance on the word of the Conqueror.

As it is said:

*What arises in dependence on another  
Is not at all that thing itself—  
But neither is it something else:  
There is no break, there is no permanence.*

All we have are relatively imputed terms. While being neither identical nor different, [earlier and later moments of consciousness] appear. Consciousness manifests in different ways according to karma, whether good or bad. But in itself, it consists of moments of mere knowing, clear and cognizant, arising uninterruptedly in like kind. The notions of permanence or discontinuity do not apply to it. Thus the results of karma are not lost, and one never encounters karmic effects that have not been accumulated.

If, on a more subtle level, one considers the momentary nature of phenomena, everything in the outer or inner sphere consists of point-instants. The earlier moment ceases and the later one supervenes so that the one is distinct from the other. Likewise, when the karma for remaining in the human state provides the circumstances, and the final moment of consciousness [in that state] provides the cause, the following moment of consciousness comes to birth and arises in like kind. But the two moments are separate.

## reflection

Reread the verses and commentary above again, using the Contemplative Reading technique.

What is your opinion of Shantideva's argument for the equality of beings? Do you think this approach can produce a lived sense of equality of self and other?

Write down questions about terminology, theory, philosophy, or practical implications.

# wholehearted engagement exercise 6

This exercise is a formal meditation practice, undertaken on the cushion, and should follow a period of shamatha. Before beginning on this exercise, please check in with yourself as to your fluency with exercises 1-5 in the Wholehearted Engagement series.

If you have not engaged these earlier exercises consistently, returning to the earlier exercises to cultivate and strengthen familiarity with experiential analysis may help.

If you have engaged these earlier exercises consistently, it helps to ease out of shamatha by using any sense contact present before you to experientially analyze the five omnipresent factors before continuing to this next step of experiential analysis.

## EXPERIENTIAL ANALYSIS: EQUANIMITY

Practice open awareness as in Wholehearted Engagement Exercise 5. Then practice either one or both of the following approaches to cultivating equanimity.

### WELCOMING PAST EXPERIENCE INTO THE PRESENT

Take a few quiet moments and recall three times in your life when you felt touched by a sense of commonality and connection to all beings and things of this world.

Then remember three times when you acted out of a sense of universality towards another, expressing through thought, word, or deed an unconditioned connection to someone or something else.

Allow your memories to birth a fresh instance of universal connection now.

Although the exercise begins with memories, you are now in the midst of the experience of commonality flowing in the present. Allow the present experience to blossom.

Stay with your present experience and use experiential analysis to explore the contours of its arising, abiding, and ceasing, even as you remain within the openness of experience.

### MEDITATION ON EQUANIMITY

From Traleg Kyabgon. *Mind at Ease* (Shambhala Publications 2003)

*In this practice, when Rinpoche instructs to think, ponder, or imagine, try to shift away from intellectual, discursive thought and towards experiential analysis.*

This practice begins by meditating on a loved one. Evoke the image of someone you are particularly fond of or have deep attachment to, and when that person is vividly present in your mind's eye, ponder your past and future relationship. Perhaps that individual was a nonentity to you in the beginning, then became an acquaintance, and is now somebody you are extremely fond of. Then imagine that this individual will not remain a friend in the future. Contemplate the changing circumstances that might adversely affect your

relationship with that person, and notice how your feelings can move from deep affection and fondness to indifference and aversion.

Meditating in this way allows us to develop a shift in how we view others, including those whom we hold dear. We develop a greater appreciation for the fact that the individual in question is not some kind of self-existent being. Instead, who we think the person is and what he or she means to us is greatly affected by our and their changing circumstances as well as the changing circumstances of the relationship.

Next, perform the same meditation in relation to someone for whom you feel intense dislike. Visualize someone who is a constant thorn in your side, and deliberately make all the person's unpleasant attributes vividly clear. Think about the person you dislike in relation to the past. He or she may have initially been insignificant to you or may have actually been a close friend. Then think about the person in relation to the present, and then move into the future and imagine further changing circumstances. For example, that person might move to another city or country and become insignificant once more. Or the person could become an ally, perhaps because you are brought together by a common enemy.

The third step is to imagine someone with whom you are unfamiliar or about whom you have no definite opinion. Think of that person in relation to his or her past and future. Perhaps in the past that person was a friend but due to the shifting pattern of your circumstances has drifted away and now hardly features in your life at all. Think of examples of changing circumstances, and imagine that this person has become your friend again or has become an adversary through a different set of conditions.