

# Generating Bodhichitta 1: Equalizing and Exchanging Self with Others

**Preparation:** Start with a 5-minute breathing meditation. Focus the attention on the breath (the sensation of the breath flowing in and out at the opening of the nostrils). Let all thoughts go, like clouds floating through the sky. If distractions arise, be aware of them without getting involved and without judgment, then gently bring the attention back to the breath.

**Motivation:** When the mind is calm and quiet and you feel relaxed and focused, create an altruistic motivation for the meditation session. Think that you are meditating not just for your own individual intellectual or emotional benefit, but you are taking the time now to meditate and develop your mind to reach the state of enlightenment where you can most skillfully benefit all beings. (Spend as much time as you need to feel this motivation in your heart.)

## **Body of the meditation:**

### *Preliminary step 1: Equanimity*

Meditate on equanimity – that all beings, whether friend, enemy, or stranger are equal in wishing to be happy and to avoid suffering. If you like, you can visualize before you 3 specific individuals – a friend, a stranger, and an enemy (someone who annoys you or creates problems for you). Contemplate that the differences we perceive between these 3 beings are merely a product of our *attitude*, rather than something inherent residing in those beings themselves. Contemplate the infinite different types of relationship that you have had with each of these beings

### *Preliminary step 2: The Kindness of All Sentient Beings and Repaying Their Kindness*

Everything good that we have in our lives, every possession, all our food, clothing, and shelter, all our good experiences, come to us in dependence on others. Without others, we would have none of these things. They work so hard so that we can have the good things in our lives.

Also, all of our inner qualities, our good characteristics, have developed in dependence on others. Only because of others have we been able to practice morality and generosity. Only because of those who have been our enemies have we been able to practice patience. And only because of practicing these virtues have we received their good results: a human rebirth, our own qualities of ethics, generosity, and patience. It is only thanks to others that we have anything good at all in our lives.

Think deeply about all these ways that sentient beings are kind to us. Then, contemplate how important it is not to ignore their kindness but to repay their immense kindness in the best way possible – by bringing them long-lasting happiness and by alleviating their sufferings.

### *Step 1: Equalizing Self with Others*

When we think “myself”, this has great importance in our minds. But when we think “others”, this feels like it has much less weight, much less importance. This is how our self-cherishing mind relates to the world. To correct this unbalanced view, contemplate as follows:

Think of how all sentient beings are just like you in wanting to be happy and to avoid suffering. You and every other sentient being are exactly the same in this. Contemplate this again and again.

*Step 2: Shortcomings of the Self-Cherishing Thought*

All the suffering in the world comes from the desire to obtain one's own happiness only. Thus, all problems, all suffering comes from the self-cherishing thought. Our rebirths in the lower realms, every time someone accuses us of something we have not done, all the harm and suffering that we experience now and have experienced for beginningless lives, have come to us because of the self-cherishing thought. Contemplate deeply the disadvantages of following the self-cherishing thought over and over again.

*Step 3: The Advantages of Cherishing Others*

All the happiness in the world comes from cherishing others. Cherishing others leads only to happiness, to the elimination of problems. Wealth, wonderful experiences, a good heart, liberation, enlightenment – all these come from the altruistic practice of cherishing others. Think about the benefits of cherishing others again and again.

*Step 4: Exchanging Self with Others*

Think about when you were a child at a birthday party. When they cut the cake, what was your first thought? To get the biggest piece of cake! We think of ourselves first and think of others second. This is the typical way that the self-cherishing thought thinks. But when we exchange self with others, then we put others into the place previously occupied by ourselves – that is, we put others first and ourselves second. Contemplate this fully. Think of all the various ways in which you can put others first and yourself second in your life, day to day, and in your thoughts.

TONG-LEN PRACTICE

*Step 5a: Taking (Compassion)*

Contemplate the sufferings of kind sentient beings until an unbearable feeling of sadness arises in you, wishing to be able to eliminate all their sufferings. Then, think about taking away that suffering from all sentient beings and taking it onto yourself. For example, think: May all their sufferings of heat and cold ripen on me. May all their sufferings of hunger and thirst ripen on me. May all their sufferings of pain and ignorance ripen on me. May all their illnesses, depression, difficulties and problems, sufferings of all kinds, ripen on me.

You can go one by one through the 6 realms, starting from the hell realms and moving upward to the preta realm, the animal realm, and then through the 3 higher realms. Contemplate taking on the sufferings of all the beings in each of the realms of samsara.

\*\*This can be a difficult meditation to do, especially at the beginning. If it is too difficult to start off like this, then one can start by taking on one's own sufferings of today, tomorrow, this life, the next life, and so on. This helps to prepare the mind for thinking about taking on others' sufferings; it also helps one to become realistic and responsible for one's own sufferings and for having created the causes to experience those suffering results.

*Step 5b: Giving (Love)*

Generate a strong feeling of love toward sentient beings, wishing them to receive every happiness. Then, think about actually providing them with everything that they need to

be happy. Contemplate transforming your body into whatever sentient beings wish for and need. Think about the beings in all 6 realms, starting from the hell realm beings. Imagine, for example, that your body transforms into a wonderful, perfect cool environment for those in the hot hells; into a wonderful, perfect warm environment for those in the cold hells; into a beautiful environment with wonderful food and drink for those in the preta realms; into a lovely, safe, and perfect environment for beings in the animal realm; into a pure realm without war or disease or physical sufferings, and without depression or cruelty or other mental sufferings for those in the human realm; into an environment not of mere pleasure but of true bliss for those in the god realms; and so on.

*Step 5c: Conjoining Giving and Taking with the Breath*

You can do the previous 2 steps of taking and giving conjoined with the breath. When you inhale, imagine taking on the sufferings of sentient beings. With each breath, contemplate taking on a different suffering from different beings each time. As you breathe in these sufferings, imagine that these sufferings congeal into a huge meteorite that crashes into the heavy black mountain of the self-cherishing thought at your heart, destroying it completely into dust. At your heart remains only the openness, light, and space of the mind that cherishes others.

From that wonderful open space at your heart, as you exhale, imagine giving to sentient beings whatever they wish for to be happy. With each breath, contemplate giving different benefits and happiness to different beings each time.

*Step 6: Extraordinary Thought*

Contemplate like this: It is unbearable that sentient beings are so overwhelmed by suffering and cannot have the happiness they wish for and deserve. I cannot depend on someone else to help them to overcome their suffering and to achieve happiness. I must do this myself, by myself alone! There is no other way. Think about this again and again until it permeates your heart through and through.

*Step 7: Generating Bodhichitta*

Contemplate as follows: The only real and true benefit that I can give to other sentient beings is to completely take away their sufferings and to bring them perfect, everlasting happiness. This means bringing them to enlightenment. Nothing else will suffice. But in my current ordinary state, I am still controlled by delusion and karma; I cannot even liberate myself at this point, much less liberate others. The only way that I can become able to enlighten other sentient beings is to become enlightened myself first. So, for the sole purpose of liberating all other sentient beings (ALL) from suffering and leading them to perfect, complete enlightenment, I must, as quickly as possible, achieve the state of supreme enlightenment.