



BUDDHIST PSYCHOLOGY, WEEKS 7 & 8

MEDITATION ON DEALING WITH NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

This meditation isn't meant to be completed in one or two sittings, but a few points at a time, over the course of the next two weeks. We recommend you at least review all the points in part one before selecting one or more antidotes to meditate on in part two. All quotes are from Chapter 4 of the course book, Buddhist Psychology.

FIRST FEW MINUTES

Touch in with your motivation for this meditation. Begin by connecting with your actual motivation. Then, see if you can expand from there to include a longer view, and expand the scope using what you can recall from the first two modules to shape your intentions. Recall your wish to reduce and remove these mistaken ways of seeing. Have the intention to gain a greater understanding of working with your own mind in order to lessen your day to day suffering and lead you further on the path to enlightenment.

PART ONE: THE AFFLICTION

1. Identifying the affliction

“We can begin by examining whatever afflictive emotion is plaguing us right now and seeing it for what it is.”

Bring to mind the negative mental state you have chosen to work on. Spend a moment recalling how it felt to have this affliction recently. How did it feel in the body? How did it feel in the mind?

Have the intention to be notified when this affliction next arises, so you can observe it directly in the present moment. What were the warning signs in the mind, such as discomfort, agitation? What were the warning signs in the body?

This way you can build up a profile of your affliction, what to watch out for, when to take action, what options you might have.

2. Keeping an open mind

To some degree you have already decided this emotion is a negative one, but this step is about strengthening that conviction as you work through the promise this state makes, and its potential disadvantages.

Resolve to examine this mental state with an open mind. Stay open to the possibility that this emotion is not negative. If every part of your mind were fully and completely convinced of the destructive nature of this emotion, you would not find it difficult to overcome. This, therefore, is a very important step.

3. What does the affliction promise?

Take a moment now to recall a recent instance of this emotion. In particular, recall as clearly as possible your own feelings and thoughts as you experienced it.

Now look within these to find the message, or promise the emotion is giving you. This may take some time. If nothing surfaces right now, go ahead and move to the next point.

Once you find the promise or message, ask yourself, ‘does it deliver’? Does this emotion fulfil its promise? Is its message true?

Does your affliction bring short term, medium term or longer term satisfaction?



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4. Meditating on the disadvantages of your chosen affliction

Now consider the ways in which this emotion causes you trouble or brings you difficulty. This must be the first step, Geshe Tashi says, for “once we understand the disadvantages of something, we naturally try to avoid it.”

In the course book he writes, “You only become convinced of the disadvantages of anger when you explore them repeatedly, and this process can only occur within the framework of meditation. Eventually, the awareness of the disadvantages of anger you are building up in moments of calm will slowly seep down into your emotional life.”

Spend a few minutes considering the disadvantages of your target affliction. What are the negative impacts on your mind, on your physical well-being, your ability to rest and sleep, on your relationships with others? Engaging in your affliction repeatedly will turn it into a habit, which will deepen over time. What are the longer term implications of this? Where is it taking you?

As you finish, resolve to include these disadvantages in your in your action plan for dealing with this affliction.

5. “It is important to recognise that all mental events are impermanent.”

Notice how this affliction is only one part of your mind, one that comes and goes, and one that increases and decreases in intensity. Think back to when it definitely wasn’t present. Will the same affliction always be present with the same object in the future? If you can achieve some lessening of the affliction, why not more? If you can achieve a temporary cessation, why not a complete one?

6. Whatever negative mindset we have, Geshe Tashi tells us that “the key is to view it as nothing more than an internal emotion.”

Consider the degree to which this emotion is a problem within your own mind. If it is, then consider that you have the power to change it without relying on external change.

Geshe Tashi adds, “There is no way we can force all beings to be our friends, nor can we demand that everyone be sweet and generous.”

Now reflect on this quote from Shantideva on the impossibility of dealing with all the external “causes” of our affliction, and why instead, we should work on our mind.

“Where would I possibly find enough leather
With which to cover the surface of the earth?
But (wearing) leather just on the soles of my shoes
Is equivalent to covering the earth with it.”

7. Geshe Tashi says that if we find ourselves less able to deal with an affliction, we can try and get some physical distance from the person or situation. We can take a walk to combat the lethargy of depression, or the anxious thoughts running through our mind.

We can also try to gain some mental distance or perspective. As Geshe la says, “When we are lost in our anger, we need to broaden our minds.”

We can practice this by opening up to our senses. When our attention is caught up in the story of the affliction, we can divert our energy to our awareness of sounds and sensations, and what is going on in our body and mind. When you find yourself in the midst of a



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destructive emotion, set the intention to ask yourself, ‘What can I hear? What can I feel? What can I see around me?’

8. With awareness around our anger, and a bit of distance, Geshe Tashi asks us to look objectively at why anger arises in the first place. This means looking beyond the immediate conditions (our boss, the government, our partner) to the main cause. Ultimately, what we will find is that the cause of our problems is the deep-seated discontent in our minds, which itself arises from our fundamental confusion. Our afflictive emotion only breeds further confusion.

Take a moment to consider this.

In conclusion, resolve to gain an understanding around the deepest causes of our affliction, our afflictive views.

9. Examining our logical narrative

In the course book, Geshe Tashi says, “We should be aware of the role that intellectual justification plays in developing, sustaining, and increasing anger. We may think that anger is just pure emotion, but anger always has a cognitive aspect—a rhetoric that drives it.”

Whatever emotion you are working with, take a few moments now to become aware of the reasons and justifications which reinforce that emotion. Look to see if it is indeed irrational to blame the person or the situation. Observe the faults of the affliction’s reasoning, and how such reasoning drives habitual unskilful behaviours. Can you ‘answer’ those faulty reasons with ones that are more in line with reality?

10. Replaying a scene

Another way to meditate on the disadvantages of your affliction, Geshe Tashi tells us, is to replay scenes in which you have been under the influence of this affliction in the past.

From the distance and perspective of your meditation, look at the suffering this affliction may have brought to you and to those around you.

Consider how you might have handled the situation differently if your affliction had not driven your behaviour.

DEDICATION

In conclusion generate a determination to gain a greater experiential understanding of how your mind works and to experience the longer term benefits. As much as possible try expanding these benefits to others around you, widening the circle of your care and concern.



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PART TWO: THE ANTIDOTES

Review the following antidotes, and then feel free to pick one or more to meditate on this week. Depending on your chosen affliction, some may be of more use than others.

1. Equanimity

Equanimity is the first step or basis for all love and compassion-based antidotes. While we pick the grossest affliction to work on first, we start with the smallest antidote and build from there. In this spirit, try cultivating equanimity as one potential solution or antidote to your affliction.

Consider that everyone is motivated by a wish to be happy or content and to avoid suffering or distress. We go about trying to satisfy these urges in different ways, but underneath all these surface differences, we are all equal.

We all have a mind and body that brings us problems. We are all born, we age, we experience a full range of mental and physical suffering, and we die.

Instead of intentionally helping some, harming others and disregarding the rest, we can make the wish and determination that all beings have happiness and its causes, become free of suffering and its causes, and get to follow a path that leads them out of suffering.

2. Offering the victory to others

In the course book, Geshe Tashi writes, “Instead of trying to cause harm to someone who has harmed you, you do completely the opposite and actually try to help that person. This is the victory, because it becomes the cause of happiness for both of you.”

What might it feel like to help the person who is triggering your afflictive emotions? What might the results be?

Take a moment to consider that you do not help someone by being their doormat.

3. Engaging with the opposite mental state

Geshe Tashi says that the best strategy for actually dealing with our afflictive mental state is to bring in the opposite mental state, like bringing water to fire. We can start small with someone who causes us milder difficulties.

Assess or research what the opposite mental state might be for your target affliction.

For aversion-based afflictions, for example, take a moment to practise generating the beginnings of love and compassion with the heart-based emotions such as friendliness, care, concern, kindness, or tenderness.

When it comes to the ignorance-based afflictions, consider that ignorance either overestimates a situation, exaggerating it; or underestimates something, devaluing it. To deal with ignorance, Geshe la says, we must see the situation for what it is. By initiating perspective around a situation, we can always move closer to reality.

4. Practising patience

To practice patience, Geshe Tashi says, we need to have a content mind.

To give this kind of mind a chance, he says, we need to step outside of the justifications and narratives of our afflicted mind. Here we can use the practice of engaging with the senses to broaden our perspective, or take steps to gain some distance from the event.



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Then we can think, 'I am acting unskillfully because I am controlled by my affliction. Maybe it is the same with the other person, maybe he is controlled by his emotions and is suffering just as much as I am? And furthermore, maybe I have contributed to the situation both at a surface level and at a much deeper causal level?'

Consider that if we are sometimes ruled by our negative emotions, it is likely the other person is too. Would it be more logical to take the affliction as the enemy, rather than the person ruled by it?

Consider that our spiritual maturity has grown through unpleasant experiences and will continue to do so. Consider that working in a healthy way with those who we have aversion to can actually enrich and ennoble our lives.

5. A meditation on love

Geshe Tashi writes: "Love, according to Buddhism, is wishing someone to be happy. It is nothing more than that. It is not attachment or lust; it is a simple and beautiful emotion."

Bring to mind the ways in which you are not happy. Now imagine bright white light at your heart, spreading out and filling your whole being with light and the sincere wish that you be happy. Think to yourself, 'may I be well, may I be happy, may I be filled with loving kindness.'

Bring to mind some specific ways in which a person or number of people are unhappy and are suffering. Imagine a bright white light at your heart, shooting out like a laser beam and filling them with white light bringing contentment, happiness, and fulfilment. Think to yourself, 'may they be well, may they be happy, may they be filled with loving kindness.'

6. A meditation on compassion

Compassion is wishing others to be free of suffering.

Gently allow yourself to become aware of your own suffering. Quietly determine to be free of this suffering.

Imagine bright white light at your heart, spreading out and filling your whole being, entirely removing all pain and suffering. Think to yourself, 'may I be well, may I be free from suffering.'

Bring to mind some specific ways in which a person or number of people are in pain and suffering. Imagine a bright white light at your heart, shooting out like a laser beam into their bodies, hearts and minds, filling them with white light, and entirely removing all pain and suffering. Think to yourself, 'may they be well, may they be free from suffering.'

DEDICATION

In conclusion generate a determination to gain a greater experiential understanding of how your mind works and to experience the longer term benefits. As much as possible try expanding these benefits to others around you, widening the circle of your care and concern.