



# The Buddha Project

IDMT Year 3-Term 1

8 November 2025

Advantages of cherishing others



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## Introduction

Last week we studied the disadvantages of self-cherishing, something Tsongkhapa argues and is in the reader as well. In the reader you will see the meditation starts with equalizing all sentient beings, then reflecting on the disadvantages of self-cherishing and then reflecting on the advantages of other-cherishing.

Today we looked at the advantages other-cherishing. Next week we will practice Tonglen: exchanging self and others, and then slowly add elements until we get to the combined meditation of Lama Tsongkhapa known as the Seven-cause (*or point*)-and-effect-meditation. That is our final goal.

It is helpful when you become familiar with the meditations on the disadvantages of self-cherishing and the advantages of other-cherishing; where both are rather complex. When we go deeper into this practice, it is good to be familiar with these meditations as I cannot repeat all details every time. It is better when you reflect on these meditations the upcoming weeks, rather than me repeating everything every time. Thus we can slowly build things up.

We will focus on the mind of awakening and from February onwards, we will dive deeper using the mind of awakening to cultivate emptiness.

As I cannot lead a meditation without talking, until I can directly intervene in your mind. Practicing and repeating the meditation on your own will cultivate this felt sense of all living beings. I highlighted some aspects of it during the meditation.

It feels very powerful to cultivate an awareness of all living beings and wanting to become a Buddha for their welfare. Please explore that felt sense yourself. We will add different elements to the meditation in the upcoming weeks.

Maybe you noticed for example the four immeasurable thoughts (the four Brahma-Viharas) are within the awakening mind. In earlier stages of IDMT we looked at the succession of the four immeasurable thoughts. One could say that they are *something together*, they are mutually purifying. Looking at the Brahma Viharas in succession, the basis is equanimity. The next step is seeing all living beings as equal and rejoicing in the fact they can become free of suffering and be happy. These are all necessary elements and our goal is to generate the mind of awareness that guides all living beings towards happiness.

## Other-cherishing

The mind of awakening is a very complex phenomenon. Samsara creates a paradox of a self (*to be Permanent, Unitary and Independent*), where in fact self-cherishing and self-grasping are profoundly disempowering. If they were empowering, we would feel powerful but most of us do not feel powerful. This is what the Buddha highlights.



Other-cherishing is surprisingly empowering. It is important you find time to explore this paradox before the next meditations.

Self-cherishing is based on an unrealistic analysis of the world and of the way we exist; it cannot lead to satisfaction as it is the wrong roadmap. Other-cherishing through the mind of awakening is a good roadmap to the well-being of others and ourselves. We will gradually explore this together.

However, information alone is not enough. Intellectual contemplation is not enough, it is more important to discover the felt sense. There will be a summary of the meditation on the website and it really is worth your while to break the meditation into pieces and explore the different aspects. For example, the reflection we contemplated last week, about the hindrances provoked by self-cherishing, are thieves of our contentment.

Self-obsession does not only not-bring happiness, self-obsession actively brings discontent and disturbs the mind. Where on the other hand, when we direct the mind to the well-being of others, we are naturally liberated from the hindrances.

When I teach about other-cherishing, I always get the question: *am I no longer allowed to care for myself?* Please, try to find that out for yourself by practicing this meditation; only you can answer this question.

The paradox is self-obsession does not produce happiness for the self, because it does not even know how that self exists. Other-cherishing, when it is well developed, leads to everything you ever sought.

To highlight some aspects:

- The sense of 'I' is very oppressive  
It is the basis of all mental unhappiness. It makes us feel alone
- Other-cherish frees us from the neurotic self-focused thinking.  
It is misery to be caught in thoughts like, '*I'm not good enough,*' or '*do I live up to expectations?*' etc. You are all experts in this, just as I am.
- The easiest answer to oppressive thinking is to think about someone else.  
Not as self-punishment, by the way: '*I'm so not good enough I better think about someone else.*' That is where things might go wrong, that is not the point.  
When you genuinely cherish someone else, you confirm '*I am powerful enough to care for you.*'

Other-cherishing is powerful because it implies strength and something beautiful, without thinking it to be the medicine for thinking '*I am not good enough*'.

This is not a form of altruism at the cost of yourself. This perspective allows altruism to imply something about yourself without the need to think about it.

- It is deeply paradoxical loving someone else is profoundly empowering and implies something beautiful about you.

When you try to love someone else in order to empowered and to show this beautiful altruistic aspect, it is egotism. We replenish the self by pretending to forget the self. A very challenging aspect of this practice.

When the COVID crisis started in the Netherlands, the Maitreya Institute in Amsterdam just obtained a Zoom subscription and rather than cultivating difficult ideas, we spent practicing vipassana together for seven weeks. My goal was not



Vipassana but to understand seeing each other every morning made everybody think about *others* every morning. COVID made our alienation more visible where the easiest way to understand we are not alone (or alienated, disconnected) is to think about others.

We cannot exist on our own.

If you ever suffer from an oppressive sense of self, then cultivate other-cherishing, not as self-retribution, but as a self-expression; it is very healing.

- Yet another paradoxical element: self-cherishing makes us the worst consumers ever. During a four-course meal, self-cherishing makes us think about dessert when we have soup. To be with the other person across the table during the meal, creates the possibility to have a complete meal. Other-cherishing brings contentment; a other-cherishing mind does not want to go anywhere else. It wants to be in the present moment with all other living beings; the other-cherishing mind alleviates you from the oppressive sense of self and brings contentment and happiness in this very moment.

This is something very important to explore, to test, to probe. For the uncultivated mind, problems lead to more problems. When challenges arise, we often ask: *'Why me? Why now? Shouldn't we adjust?'* This questioning makes suffering immensely heavier than necessary.

When we blame someone else, we heap on anger and we are the victim of that anger. Thus here is a ripening of unfortunate karma and as a result create more unfortunate karma, thus fuelling this circle of misery.

- When we cherish others, misery falls away.

And remember the unfortunate experience was created in the past by self-cherishing in the first place. This is no victim blaming, it is taking power, we become actors rather than victims.

It is exquisite, as the moment you are able to response wholesomely, the problem is still there, but there is happiness as well. A negative karma has ripened, but it will not lead to a negative rebirth.

Karma ripens only once, then it is gone. Something unpleasant happened in the past, and now it's gone: you are free. Rejoicing to be free from this negative karma creates the causes for happiness and for the qualities of a Buddha to arise. Other-cherishing in moments of suffering makes the mind at ease, it empowers the mind and creates room to develop the immense qualities of the Buddha; other-cherishing is a perfect tool.

- Maybe more difficult to digest: we are dependent on other-cherishing to experiencing the awesome qualities of the Buddha. To love, to be patient, to be generous and appreciative are like little freedoms: to be loving is at least not to be angry.

The mind cannot observe the same object in two contrasting ways at the same time. Any wholesome emotion is also a freedom of an unwholesome emotion. Freedom equals happiness.

it is important to remember: when act wholesome in order to prusue happiness, it



becomes an ego trip (*one thought too many*).

When compassion, kindness, or generosity arise in the mind, it is important to see how the mind responds. When compassion or kindness arise, as a result of other-cherishing, it is better to cultivate gratitude. That beautiful emotion of kindness arising in you, is cultivated by you on the one hand, but given on the other hand. Without other sentient beings, towards whom would you be kind? Other-cherishing needs the other, hence kindness is a gift, a gift from all our mother sentient beings. A gift from the Buddhas, a gift from the mind to you.

To look at other-cherishing from this perspective – to know there is kindness and happiness but *they are not mine*; I am grateful for them. To keep this perspective creates the possibility to grow.

It is challenging to deeply understand and that is okay. We all keep making mistakes for a while. Otherwise we would already be Buddhas.

I appreciate the Jataka stories; the Bodhisattva does silly things in these stories, sometimes I even look clever reading the Jataka stories. When I read the Jataka of the Golden Geese; I am happy I managed to escape their silliness. Whatever my path is, at least I am slightly beyond that point.

To cherish others is to never be alone. Our loneliness, our sense of loneliness, is imposed on the mind awareness through ignorance.

I see many meditators desiring to do long retreats, to go to mountain caves, to go to forest hermitages – everything to escape other sentient beings. My hut in Burma was full of sentient beings and the most difficult sentient being there was **me**. The reason monastics stay in the monasteries for up to ten years is it teaches monks to cherish the community above yourself. When you are able to other-cherish over self-cherishing, then you can go into solitude - you will no longer bring your inner enemy. I meditated for three years as a member of the community in order to give to the community. The purpose of community is to keep the Dharma in this world for the welfare of all sentient beings. Meditating in solitude did not need to be about me at all. To just sit and wanting to contribute is happiness. Then you are even able to survive bed bugs. These are important things to keep in one's awareness.

Pursuing enlightenment for yourself might sound like it could be quicker than becoming a Buddha.

However, the paradox is pursuing individual enlightenment is harder than the practice of a bodhisattva. To sit on your own overcoming your problems, you will find your list is long and you have to fight hard to overcome these problems.

When you just sit down and direct the mind towards others, filling your heart with kindness and care, then the mind is protected against the hardship that sometimes meditative life can bring. The bodhisattva path might be longer, because the qualities to be developed are unfathomable. At the same time, the path is lighter as it is held by the joy compassion brings.

And I do hope you learn to feel rather than just to understand.



When you wake up in the morning to meditate and you seek individual freedom, it's difficult bargaining with the snooze button on your alarm. Things become much easier when you start your day contemplating on the connectedness with all living beings, it is profoundly empowering.

## The Seven Points of Mind Training

(Reader page 32)

So far we studied the *conventional awakening mind*, something we will come back to. Page 32 describes the Tonglen-meditation we will practice next week. I will give a commentary on these verses as they are exquisitely applicable.

*2.3.2.2 Training in conventional awakening mind  
Train in the two—giving and taking—alternately.*

*These two are to be mounted on the breath.  
Three objects, three poisons and three sources of virtue.  
In all activities, train by applying slogans.*

*Begin the process of taking with yourself.*

The second line reflects on a constant mindfulness of the content of the mind. In this case, the three objects (third line) refers to the three types of feeling. To us, feelings are badly conditioned, conditioned by self-cherishing with all the misery created by self-cherishing. As long as we are not enlightened these feelings will arise, as we argued in year 1 of the IDMT.

As a Buddhist practitioner, we know we do not have to re-act automatically on feelings. This highlights that in the untrained mind, feelings produce immediate responses:

- When feelings are pleasant, desire and attachment arise.
- When feelings are unpleasant, aversion, resentment, jealousy and depression arise.
- When feelings are neutral, we re-act indifferent to things.

Impelled by motivation and by beginning insight we can transform this moment by:

1. Realizing feelings are not inherently part of the object, feelings are aspects of mind.
2. Understanding feelings are selfless.

Feelings do not say anything about us, feelings are conditioned phenomena.

3. Feelings are empty of inherent characteristics, have no intrinsic existence.

Transforming feelings is a deep antidote; looking at feelings from the context of these three points sets you free from an *automatic re-action* to them (*offering the possibility to response*). Through that, we get access to the three sources of virtue.

- non-ignorance,
- non-hatred, and
- non-desire.



It is an eye-opener to recognise unpleasant feeling as a path to liberation of negative karma and to generate freedom. In Buddhist psychology, we talk of generation. Rather than re-creating and making the same problems more difficult, we use feelings as a path to and as part of freedom. To deeply see unpleasant feeling (created by negative karma) as a path to liberation is profoundly empowering: this karma is then gone.

This understanding gives you agency, you become the owner of the difficulty, not the victim. Related to pleasant feeling, when desire or attachment arise – it is so much more pleasant not to indulge in it! In the supermarket the bag of chips appears attractive and you buy it: you immediately feel guilty. After eating it within 10 minutes you feel even more guilty. And the morning after you might even feel worse.

When you let go of desire, hatred, or any other feeling, recognizing the ability not to indulge in them is much more enjoyable and brings empowerment.

Non-ignorance over ignorance gives a sense of not being a victim to the circumstances. In contrast you have agency because you then have choice. When a bag of chips appears attractive and you buy it, it feels like empowerment, but that is an afterthought. That's the problem with all unskillful emotions. As we have seen in the past, the mind is distracted first, and then it brings a second distraction. This is also explained in the twelve links of dependent origination. The identification with unskillful actions is always afterwards.

But we don't recognise this; to see these thoughts for what they are (non-self) and to let go of them is creating a choice. And to act on choice is personhood. The Seven Point of Mind Training provides this opportunity.

## In all activities, train by applying slogans

Line four of the text says *In all activities, train by applying slogans.*

*Slogans* refers to memorizing reflections of other-cherishing that you like. Because our mindfulness is fragile, chances we are always mindful of other-cherishing all day long are low and it is okay to be realistic.

At the very beginning of my ordained life I felt immensely happy. And on the second day, there was this big disappointment: ordination did not make me holy. And maybe every newly ordained secretly hopes this, and the community around you believes it. Then, you wake up in the morning and you are still you. However, you also realize you have many trainings and the worry is how am I going to keep them with this mind? Luckily, the first group of trainings is limited. You don't get all 253 basic rules in one go, but it is still many: *'how am I going to keep them?'* If I forget to put the top on the toothpaste, or to close the toilet, if that is already difficult to remember, then what about all these training-rules? You need ways to remind yourself of your training. I did that by putting post-its everywhere. Keep things small, no great plans. As the mind is

silly: I come up with silly solutions. That is what the mind needs. That is basically what the text says, but in a more inspiring way. Be mindful of moments and expressions of the mind of awakening, memorize them and make them into a habit – and then reflect on what you memorized.

The commentary gives some basic examples, e.g. *exchanging self and others*, or *giving and taking*.

Reflect all day long, for example ‘*may the sufferings of all beings ripen upon me*’, and ‘*through my virtues may they all achieve happiness*’.

## Bodhicitta

Our tradition is so rich in beautiful texts on Bodhicitta. If you ever want references, I am happy to give them.

I am always reading at least one text on Bodhicitta. These texts keep my wish to become enlightened fresh. These verses sort of echo through my upper chamber. There is no ‘self’ living there, so there is lots of space to reflect on Bodhicitta. This way you keep an awareness of your ethical identity. Remember we discussed mindfulness is able to hold on or to remember different things, a very complex phenomenon. Mindfulness

1. Remembers the object and
2. Remembers the instructions on how to meditate.
3. In the background, mindfulness also remembers you as an ethical identity: ‘*I am a Bodhisattva practitioner and a follower of the Mahayana.*’

The opposite, forgetfulness not only leads to forgetting the object and instructions they also forget you (*as a practitioner*).

When you look at moments of anger, you come to see these moments are selfless in an unpleasant way, they are complete animations. there is no agent. You just get sucked into unfortunate behaviour. This is what the text highlights: we need something to hold on to, in order to remember what we try to accomplish.

I referred to *the body of sentient beings*, an argument from Shantideva, where he argues the *self*, the *person*, is imputed; *self* refers to a collection of things.

In a more narrow sense, *self* is the collection of the five aggregates; the collection of individual moments of mind. This collection is the underlying cause for *self* to arise. Shantideva argues this impels the left hand taking care of the right hand; and also this present moment cares for later moments.

The boundary between me and others is artificial.

One could argue the five aggregates and my moments of mind are essential because without them I don’t exist. The Mahayana and the Buddha would then argue this is true for all other living beings as well. This definition will lead to the conclusion others are part of what defines you; you parents therefore are also ‘*my-being*’, as is my family, and the farmers feeding me, and the bees pollinating plants. My-being would include everything & everywhere.



Shantideva argues the *self* is not only imputed on the five aggregates or on moments of mind; ultimately, the *self* is imputed on all living beings. When Shantideva speaks of *the body of all living beings*, he refers to the *totality of living beings*.

When I seek myself, in the end I find everyone.

This *moment of me* is necessarily depending on the contribution of all living beings, directly or indirectly. It is impossible to draw a line.

## Process of taking with yourself

Line 5 in the text states '*Begin with the process of taking with oneself*.'

The commentary explains that the practice of taking harm from others onto oneself has interesting and practical applications.

The practice starts with the other person is your later you. To reflect on '*may all the suffering of this moment ripen upon me now and may all happiness I experience in this moment, may all the freedom and all the joy that I experience, may that be given to my later self*.'

This practice allows you to play with the distinction between *the later person* (who will know me) and who I am now (and I do not know this later person). I have no idea who that person is at 80 years old. I have to find him, or maybe I will never meet him.

*This later person* is even more removed from me than the people around me, as I can get to know you, you are in the present. You are more accessible to me than *my 80-year-old self*.

The commentary advises us to reflect on this relationality (*the person I am and the person I will be*), we depend on each other. The person I will be knows about my life. The fulfilment of my present-self is dependent on the person I will become. Maybe, by then I know what my function was in this life. He depends on me: what I do today, matters to him and hopefully he will think about this moment with gratitude.

It is very helpful to start practicing other-cherishing contemplating on a later moment of oneself; it provides the possibility to practice with the notion of identification.

It is also a good way to overcome procrastination, our present mind can be very self-cherishing at the cost of a later moment of mind. We all had moments where we needed to study and our present moment thought: *later*. And when this *later* moment came, we felt badly treated by this earlier moment of self.

This practice allows you to understand this later moment of self is neither inherently the same, nor inherently different: *I* am its cause, and *the later-self* is my fruit. That is why this person is not the same. This person (*my later self*) might have a very different function than I have today. This person's self-understanding might be very different from my self-understanding today. But you can't say that we're different either. Because that person is the continuity of me. Somehow what I am today will ripen into *my later self*.

This relation exists between us as well. To me, you are my conditions. Your presence here changes me, and I change you.

But, I am not inherently different from you because then we would not affect each other, I would be independent from you. We are not the same either, because then I would be the only person in the world that needs to eat and you would be satisfied when only I eat; but you will get hungry as well.

In the near future we will start practicing contemplating on the *person we are* and the *person we will become*, exploring the relation between the two and to see what effect this has on the mind. What do we experience when we cherish the *future-self* rather than the *present-self*.

## Valuing next life over present life

Lama Zopa Rinpoche often argued that the practice of Dharma begins with valuing the next life over the present one and that is what line 5 of this verse tells us as well. The obsession with ourselves in this life is an obstacle to enjoy it.

It reminds me of my high school exam in the French language. I had to explain an article on how Dutch people go on holidays to southern France: they work hard all year, and when they are finally free they start *looking for experiences*. They spend weeks collecting experiences and come back to Holland more exhausted than they left. There has been no reflection on the underlying argument to have holidays: to rest and come back revitalized. It is a paradox.

The Dharma explains the first benefit of cherishing later moments relieves and frees the present. Prioritizing next life over the present life is not an escape of the present: it liberates the present from obsessions. It is a compassionate opening to understand the person you are today is neither the same nor different from the future person, very important to understand.

### 2.3.3 Transforming Adversity into the Path of Enlightenment

*When all the world is filled with negativity,  
transform adversity into the path of enlightenment.  
Drive all blames into one.  
Meditate on the great kindness of all.*

We will still encounter difficulties (unless you become Buddha now ☺). Rather than being despondent regarding these struggles, we practice to be able to transform them. Mahayana Buddhist texts like to overstate things a bit, they like drama and I fully appreciate it.



The text does not start with experiencing a little negativity, it starts by '*when all the world is filled with negativity*' which opens to the possibility to reflect on your current situation – and it is not as bad as you thought, things could be worse.

These texts are brilliant once you start to contemplate them. You then *practice* the lines rather than *reading* them, questioning why does the text start with such a dramatic sentence – for this is not the world you live in. When you live in southern Sudan at the moment, you do live in a horrible world.

But we read about the context we live in. the texts are never arguments to someone else, they are not normative. We don't study this text so we can wiggle our finger at someone else, the text is about us. Driven by our obsessions, we forget the suffering of others. It is not a good timing to tell people in southern Sudan what to do (related to the Dharma), when militias are killing everyone – they cannot; we can.

[Chekawa Yeshe Dorje](#) shares his personal practice: this is what I did, and you might want to consider it.

And as we want to prepare ourselves we do. There are great examples of people who did and I want to try and do the same. [Palden Gyatsov](#) wrote an autobiography. He had been imprisoned in China and was protected by the other-cherishing mind. He described only once danger did arise: the danger of losing compassion for his torturers. That is the freedom we could have when we train our minds. Even in a world of nothing but negativity, even then to be able to transform into a path to awakening as Palden Gyatsov did, with decades-long imprisonment and torture brought him close to awakening. He was an exquisite and extraordinary practitioner. He was free while imprisoned. From his perspective, his torturers were imprisoned, not him.

The third line of this verse therefor says *Drive all blames into one.*

*Into one* refers to self-cherishing, the very source of our misery.

## Meditate on the great kindness of all

Shantideva argues the only enemy we have is self-cherishing. All other enemies derive from self-cherishing.

The last line of this verse explains: Meditate on the great kindness of all. Of course all living beings have been our mothers and of course we depend on them. But that is not what this line relates to, the great kindness of all is what allow us to overcome self-cherishing, thus giving us Buddhahood.

When we meet a beggar in the street and we give him money to feel good about ourselves (= *self-cherishing*), we diminish the person in front of us. Give the beggar a money because you deeply realize he is important and a necessary condition to your existence, he is part of who you are, he is a Buddha to be. When we only think about him, we become a generous person overcoming self-cherishing thanks to him.

Mostly, we read about the misery in the world and find it a nuisance – we gain trouble. It is much healthier to think with care for them; may they be happy, may I realize freedom for them, then they will give us Buddhahood.



That is the paradox. By moving from self-cherishing to other-cherishing you get what you ultimately desire: freedom. You will become Buddha for the welfare of all living beings, Buddhahood is that easy.

These verses are a good way to look at the meditation. In the time to come, test this meditation; look at the different aspects and try to feel them. You cannot talk the mind into awakening. Sometimes we try too hard, feeling is everything, let your heart grow. When we talk about refuge, it is a trust-relation. The role of three jewels and the guru is to facilitate trust in ourselves while forgetting ourselves.

At one point we forget about self-cherishing and know what other-cherishing leads to.

- We have an experience with someone outside.
- A measure of freedom is found through other-cherishing.

Earlier I spoke of a dear friend, Joan Halifax, who lives in Santa Fe, a great Zen master. She is in her eighties had open heart surgeries and is recovering while she is thinking about when she can go back to Japan to care for others.

To be with a person like that and to experience someone who is formed by other-cherishing is interesting. She is such an adult and powerful human being. She is now the fruit of a lifetime of practice, a lifetime of caring about others. The happiness and the fulfillment that this individual radiates and empowers us because you then know it is possible.

In relation to the three jewels, in relation to one's guru, one can start to practice without over-focusing on oneself, just allowing the process to unfold.

It is very encouraging to gradually have similar experiences, to have a day or a moment of other-cherishing and to look back at it and to think: *that was fulfilling*. I did not think about myself, and yet I was whole. Then your practice starts to go somewhere and you are able to let go. You know what it leads to, without the need to think about the result. That is real refuge; to let go and let the path unfold itself.

Out of appreciation, I would like to dedicate.

We always do the same prayers so they become part of the story by which we make sense of ourselves.

Memorize the prayer book.

## Prayers

## Closure

May we all become enlightened soon.

I highlighting the last few weeks a number of times: the Vinaya says the Dharma is in the world, as long as there are arahants meditating in the forest. When we continue like this, very soon there will be no forest left.

We have a precious human rebirth. Enjoy it. Enjoy it.



Thank you for being here.

Thank you for your practice

Feel your way to enlightenment, please do – it is very rewarding.

