



Attachment to Self

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Geshe la: Like one's self every living being has an innate desire to be happy and to avoid suffering. We all have a right to overcome suffering and to gain happiness. In terms of this condition, we all are equal and it is important for us to see the equality of all beings. Once we have developed the mental power to see that others are like us then we are capable of seeing that the others are more important than one's self because others are infinite, limitless where we are merely one person.

There is a relation between our happiness and the suffering of others. It is clear that when others are happy, then we also will be happy. If others aren't happy, we can't be happy either. This means that the suffering of others affects us and our suffering or happiness affects others.

If we have gained the ability to see the all beings as equal then we are able to see that there is no particular reason to become so attached to one's own interests and welfare.

It is important for us to see the disadvantages and negative effects of a self-cherishing attitude, and the advantages and positive effects of cherishing others. Many of our day-to-day psychological pains are the direct result of the self-cherishing attitude. Since we live with this attitude our mind becomes very narrow and weak, therefore our state of mind is easily affected by external conditions such as someone using harsh words or looking disdainfully toward us. The self-cherishing attitude causes us to live within a very limited frame of mind. There is no sense of openness and freedom and is again easily disturbed and influenced by discursive thoughts and emotional pain.

In contrast, there are many advantages and positive effects to cherishing others. It is not easy to disturb one's state of mind by external conditions and one will have a great sense of openness and freedom within one's frame of mind. One will have the mental power to deal with external conditions or situations more positively, without harming or hurting others, without affecting and or disturbing one's mental state.

According to Buddhism, the self-cherishing attitude is the root cause of universal suffering. The cherishing of others is the root cause of universal happiness. If we learn and try to gain this understanding or concept then we are able to see that there is no distinction between one's self and others. This understanding will certainly help overcome the self-cherishing attitude and help one to be able to appreciate the cherishing of others.

The very immediate result of this practice is that one can engage in an ethical way of life, consciously be able to abstain from harmful actions toward others, and become capable of cultivating all manner of beneficial, wholesome actions.

Anger and hatred do not arise within us without causes it only arises when there is cause

within us. Anger and hatred is not created or caused by external material factors rather, it is only caused by our inner confusion and misunderstanding. The actual cause of arising anger and attachment is within us. The innate arising thoughts of 'I' and the innate arising thoughts of 'others' is the root cause of the arising of attachment and anger. The two thoughts stop us from seeing the equality of every being and the interconnectedness with others. We then make distinctions such as 'you' and 'I'.

An Indian sage from the third century said, "When there is thoughts of 'I', then there will be thoughts of 'others'. Between these two thoughts, there arises attachment to oneself, and aversion to others. Then there arises all the other delusions and afflictive emotions."

Through the practice of exchanging one's self with others, we should try to overcome from these two thoughts that make ourselves distinct from others. Only then is one able to engage in Bodhichitta, the strong wish to seek Buddhahood, to be able to benefit others and finally bring them into ultimate everlasting peace by means of making the Dharma teaching available to others according to their needs, desire, wish and mental disposition.

Student: Geshe la, what is a good way to overcome envy? I find myself often envious of the success of others, especially when they make big financial gain.

Geshe la: Actually this is easy. The reason we experience jealousy is that we have not yet fully understood the true meaning of suffering. If you look closely, the feeling of envy of others makes you ill and will not change the others' situation. You will not get the others' material and you will be in trouble. If you have clear understanding in this way it helps you not to feel envious, or to not feel envy.

Secondly, although it seems to you that others are materially superior, in reality, they are under the influence of mental and psychological pain. They fear losing the material things. Their mind is full of suspicion. They are still dissatisfied, still hungry, not living with a sense of contentment and may not be able to use these material things in effective manner. If you think in this way, it will help you overcome envy.

Thirdly, there is the concept of suffering uncertainty. This means that today's rich people can be tomorrow's poor, and today's poor, can be tomorrow's rich! This is a reality in our human society.

Student: Psychology teaches us that you must learn to love yourself before you can effectively love others. How do you reconcile the self-love with self-cherishing and know the difference?

Geshe la: It's easy! If you sincerely love yourself, then why do you indulge in or engage in unwholesome actions that cause you problems or suffering. This makes it clear that we really don't know how to love one's self.

When we talk about love there are two kinds. One is the love under the influence of misconception and the other is the love that is under the influence of wholesome and right views or thoughts.

According to Buddhism, if one truly loves one's self, then one should take care of one's mind, change many of our unpleasant or bad behaviors and characteristics and build a sense of respect and appreciation for all living beings. Doing this will return all good things. The self-cherishing attitude, which is not a proper attitude, we engage in all kinds of improper action that return the undesirable consequences.

Student: But doesn't your teaching encourage the focus to be on 'others' first?

Geshe la: We have to love ourselves and try to be good. Only then one can focus on others in terms of making others good and making others happier. Without making oneself good and perfect, there is no way to make others happier. Focusing on others first doesn't mean ignore one's self. Focusing on others and taking care of others is nothing more than taking care of one's self.

