

A Meditation on the Disadvantages of Cherishing the self and the Advantages of Cherishing Others

There is no difference between myself and others. Twenty-four hours a day I am trying to obtain something good for myself and to avoid any unpleasantness, problems or suffering. Others are also trying to do the same. Whatever they are doing, however they dress or act or speak, just like me they are trying to be happy and avoid pain.

Their happiness is no less important to them than mine is to me. And the suffering they experience hurts them the same as it would hurt me. In that respect, we are equal. No one has more right to happiness than anyone else.

However, there is a difference. I am only one person while others are innumerable, countless. And just like one dollar is very little compared to one million, one person's happiness is quite small compared to the happiness of infinite others' happiness.

In order to shift my self-centered attitude to one that is more concerned with the welfare of others, I will contemplate the advantages of cherishing others and the disadvantages of cherishing myself by reflecting on my own life experience.

Try to think of very specific examples from your own life as they relate to the following statements:

When securing my own happiness first is my main motivation, such an attitude creates a very narrow perspective. From that self-centered attitude, many fears arise that make me feel nervous and uptight. When things don't work out the way I want them to, they often appear worse than they really are. I exaggerate their importance because it has to do with me, my happiness. I can't tolerate the slightest hardship or inconvenience.

I approach new situations with the thought, "What is there for me to gain?" Being so concerned about getting something for myself, there is no room for relaxation in my mind. Instead, many opportunities for getting upset arise.

I expect others to like me, treat me with respect and help me if I need it. Therefore, I'm disappointed when they behave otherwise. Cherishing my own happiness more than others, I become overly sensitive and easily offended or hurt; the slightest criticism becomes unbearable. I often feel uncomfortable.

Because I'm looking out for my welfare most, I am at risk of conflicts with others. My exaggerated self-concern creates a barrier between myself and others and creates a sense of alienation. Being insensitive to their needs, I overlook the impact of my actions on them. Or, I act against their wishes, not being aware until it's too late. Because I reject them, they appear negative to me and I see many faults with them.

My self-centered attitude is the source of most of my delusions and suffering. Because of it, I become competitive and envious towards others. Instead of rejoicing in their good fortune and sharing in it, I belittle them and have no tolerance with their mistakes.

Because of attachment to myself, I fail to practice even basic ethical behavior towards others and negative emotions obscure my mind. This prevents the development of concentration which also impacts developing any wisdom. Therefore, the whole path to liberation is blocked due to this attitude.

This egotism prevents me from respecting others, especially spiritual teachers. It stops me from developing love and compassion. It tightens my heart and brings spiritual suffocation. It's actually a huge obstacle to creating peace and happiness in my life!

Being more concerned with the happiness of others than my own happiness reverses this egoistic attitude and all of its shortcomings. The negative states of mind – attachment, anger, ignorance – become less powerful the more I cherish others.

When thinking of other's happiness is my main motivation, such an attitude creates an expansive mind. With that attitude, there's no cause to feel afraid or nervous and uptight. If things don't work out the way I want them to, I can try to make changes where possible and accept where I can't. Focusing on the happiness of others makes it easier to tolerate hardships or inconveniences.

I approach new situations with thoughts, "How can I help? Who can I be a friend to?" Being concerned about others allows for relaxation in my mind with fewer opportunities for getting upset. Cherishing other's happiness, I'm less sensitive and feel comfortable around others.

Because I'm more concerned with others' welfare, there's less risk of conflicts with them. Concern for others dissolves the barrier between myself and others and creates a sense of affection. Being sensitive to their needs, I'm careful to think of the impact my actions may have on them. Because I feel affection for others, they appear appealing to me and I see their good qualities.

Being concerned with others is the source of most of my happiness and peace of mind. Because of it, there's no competitiveness or envy towards them and it's easy to rejoice in their good fortune. I am more accepting and patient when others make mistakes.

Because of caring for others, I'm careful to guard my ethical behavior towards them and opposing negative emotions when they appear and obscure my mind. Keeping good ethical discipline is the basis for developing good concentration and wisdom.

Cherishing others allows for respecting others, especially spiritual teachers. It inspires me to further develop love and compassion. It opens my heart and brings spiritual liberation. It's the main way to creating peace and happiness in my life!

Cherishing others is a great remedy for low self-esteem and guilt. In fact, the more I care for others, the more satisfied I feel.

By caring for others, the focus is taken away from me, and my mind widens its perspective. My problems appear less important and don't bother me as much. When I cherish others, I feel close to them. Communication becomes easier and they also feel drawn to me.

Having done this contemplation, see what conclusions you can draw from your experiences that will impact your future behavior towards others. Make a strong determination to practice seeing others as important and cherishing them. Then finish the meditation by dedicating the merit.

Dedicate

*Adapted from a meditation by Ven. Chantal Carrerot as found in the book **Spiritual Friends: Meditations by Monks and Nuns**. Wisdom Publications, 2001.*