

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche

*Meditation Month 2022: The Bodhisattva's Path of Meditation*

Week Two: "Switching Seats: Understanding Ourselves and Others"

January 10, 2022



Welcome back. How was last week's meditation? I hope you had a good time. Normally, with any kind of practice of meditation, at the beginning there are a lot of ups and downs. Sometimes you might feel like, "Oh, I did great." Some days, you might feel like, "Oh, there's no hope for me." It's OK. Those ups and downs are normal. We can learn from ups and downs, and we can grow from ups and downs.

This week, we'll explore the second practice, what we call exchanging self and others. Last week, we tried to understand ourselves and others. You have this feeling of looking for happiness and not wanting to suffer all the time. That is not only true with you—it's with everybody else, with all beings. In the end, we all are looking for something that we want, and we don't want something that is an obstacle for us. We're looking for happiness, and we don't want to suffer. We understand that to be true with all of us, and at the same time, we understand, at a deeper level, that we have this great quality of what we call basic innate goodness.

Today, we are going to practice this deeper level to really understand about other and yourself. It's what we call extension (or exchange) of you and others. In this way, you imagine or sense that you become other and other becomes you. In the text, *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, it is recommended that you exchange with three people in your life: someone you think of as less than you, someone you think of as higher than you, and someone you think of as equal to you.

Normally, we have ego or pride. We don't appreciate the people we think are less than us, and we might have jealousy and envy toward people above us. Especially, we have competition with people who we see as the same or equal to us. Through these three types of people that make us not at peace, we have jealousy, desire, hatred, pride, confusion, and ignorance. Through that, we may sometimes feel very upset or depressed. We may sometimes feel very low self-esteem. Sometimes we feel like we're nothing. So many *kleshas*, or emotions, may come. But then we can understand that at the basic level, they all have love and compassion, and they all have

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awareness, meaning this wakeful presence of our mind. The nature of this awareness is wonderful. Without awareness, you cannot hear me or see me. There's also wisdom. Everybody has their unique wisdom, quality, and talents. We understand that, and at the same time, we understand their perspective.

What you project about them is sometimes wrong. It's partiality, not the full picture of others. We are stuck in our own perception about others. How can we free that? If you do this exchange of self and other, it can help you to understand others, develop listening skills, avoid misunderstanding, and build better communication skills. There's a lot of benefit in our lives.

Let's try this practice together. First, we can practice with someone we think is higher than us. Keep your spine loosely straight. It doesn't matter where you are—on a cushion, on the chair, on bed, on sofa, on the ground. Please close your eyes and feel your body. You can feel your body through sensations, the sensation of the gravity in the body, sensations of cold and womb, sensations of pain or pleasure, or sensations of numbness. We can feel our body through sensations, and it doesn't matter what kind of sensation: pleasant or unpleasant, happy or unhappy, tight or relaxed. It doesn't matter. The important part here is to just observe. Just be with the sensations of what we call mind and body together.

Now think of somebody above you—maybe your boss, maybe someone in a higher position than you, maybe your family members or someone in your social circle or institute. If that person is higher than you, you might normally be afraid of that person. Maybe you're jealous, or maybe you don't like that person. Maybe that person is not fair or doesn't understand you. Because of that, that person is mean or not good. We have a lot of projections.

Now, think of that person as you, and now you become that person. Think of yourself as that person looks at you. Whatever you project about that person, now you can project about yourself

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through the eyes or positions of that person or the positions of that person. On a deeper level, that person is the same as you. They don't want to suffer, they don't want problems, and they're looking for happiness, every moment, every breath.

Now, please relax your mind and body together. Now, think about somebody you normally want to compete with all the time, your competitors. Through that competition, you may get a lot of stress. Your mind cannot become calm and at peace. The moment that you see this person, all these kleshas and strong emotions may arise.

Now, you can think of yourself as that person and that person as you. Whatever you normally project to that person, now you can project to yourself through the eyes of their person or through the position of that person. On a deeper level, that person is the same as you, wanting to be happy, not wanting to suffer.

Now, you can think about a person you think of as lower than you where normally, you are proud in comparing yourself to those people. Now, extend yourself to that person. If you're proud, you can project to yourself, or if you're jealous, you can project to yourself. The same as with your boss or people higher than you, you can do the same thing. That person is the same as you on a deeper level, looking for happiness, not wanting to suffer. That person has basic innate goodness.

All these three persons—higher, same level, lower than you—on a fundamental level are the same. They're all looking for happiness and don't want to suffer, same as you. Wish them: May all of you have happiness and the causes of happiness. May all of you be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.

This practice has finished, so this is just one example, but you can choose the style whatever your way. The basic thing is you look at yourself through the eyes or positions of the other. This

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way, you can understand others better, and at the same time you can understand yourself better.

This exchanging of self and other practice is finished, and next week, we will explore an even deeper practice, what we call *bodhicitta*. Bodhicitta is developing love and compassion to all beings and wanting all beings to connect with their true nature.

Hopefully, we will meet again. Thank you