

2-2. The practice of exchanging oneself with others

When we encounter a predicament, a broad mind will help us to overcome the difficulty easily and will continuously increase our positive mind, and our ability to tackle hardships. When our mind is narrow, not only are we unable to solve problems, but our suffering will increase. So being able to let go of attachment is the best method to solve our problems, as Shantideva said, "If a problem can be solved then what is there to be worried about? If the problem cannot be solved, then why worry?"

When we see someone else is suffering, are we able to put ourselves in their situation and understand or experience what they are feeling? What type of help do they really need? If there is no help available, how would they feel? In this way we can better understand the suffering of others. We can gradually be free of our indifference and become sympathetic and compassionate.

When we ourselves are confronted with afflictive emotions or suffering, remind ourselves that, just like us, all sentient beings have experienced all forms of pain and suffering. The suffering of the sentient beings in the three lower realms is many times more extreme than ours! No matter how much suffering we are experiencing, we are still born as humans. Think of the beings who are truly suffering in the three lower realms! In comparison, our suffering does not amount to much?! In addition, as humans, there are other people whose suffering is far more extreme than ours! When we contemplate this, harbouring our narrow-minded selfish wish to benefit ourselves will gradually diminish. Then we may have the heartfelt aspiration, "Despite all the pain and suffering that I have experienced, I am willing and happy to bear the suffering and all the eternal causes of suffering of all sentient beings. For all the three worlds, all the roots of positive action, all merit, equanimity that I have accumulated, I offer to all sentient beings that have been my parents."

When we truly have some kind of happiness, remember that every single sentient being wishes for happiness. They endure all kinds of pain and suffering, from which they are not able to escape. How great it would be if I could transfer all my happiness to them! We wish from our heart that they may joyfully receive this offering of ours. We should visualise this in as much detail as possible. However, if we practise this superficially, for our own physical and mental benefit, it amounts to self-cherishing rather than compassion.