



Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche Teachings

How to take difficult situations on the path of inner transformation

On December 1st, 2011 Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche spoke at the University of Freiburg to doctors and psychologist as well as the general public on how to improve the well-being of body and mind.

Today I want to greet everyone with a Tashi Delek and especially Prof. Schmidt and the psychologist Mr. Haas. I very much enjoyed the discussion we had today and want to thank both of them. As all of the listeners here are familiar with meditation, I was asked on this occasion to talk more in depth about the Buddhist point of view. Therefore I will do my best. Generally, when I give public talks, it is difficult to elaborate in detail on aspects of Buddhism, but because all of us present here have some experience with meditation, it will be easy for me today to do so.

The main topic is how to take the conditions, the environment, the situation, whether they are favourable or not, on our path. I will touch on the following three topics:

- 1) our environment
- 2) our physical state
- 3) mind training

1) Our environment. It is not only us Buddhists who claim that the mind is what is most important and what is in control. I believe that psychologists also agree. But in addition to that, the environment and outer conditions influence the feelings of well-being and suffering. If we ask what kind of environment we need, there are two factors:

Firstly, we need an environment, which is in accord with our preferences and our individual situation. For example some people like to stay in a well-lit place, whereas others prefer somewhere darker. Similarly, some people like to live in the city while others in the country. It is important to find an environment that is in tune with our needs. Generally, Buddhism as well as doctors highly recommend to seek out a natural environment like parks, lakes or rivers, forests, plants, oceans.

The second factor is that sometimes we have grand wishes, which are not in accord with the situation we are in. Our wish could for instance be to live in a palace of a king who rules the world. It is important to adjust our wishes to our actual situation, which means to consider our education, experience and intellectual capacity, or else we will suffer. For example when we think of education, if we don't have teacher-training but find ourselves in a teaching position, we will feel embarrassed and cannot fulfil the expectations. Such environment will therefore be problematic for us.

Now let's talk about experience. We would appreciate being presented with the opportunity to build a house like this one. But if we only studied this kind of architecture through books without having gained experience through repeated application of our knowledge, we would feel overwhelmed. It is not sure if we would be able to handle the task.

Our intellectual scope is to apply our education and our experience appropriately. If for example, we work for a company but give our job up to join another company and then also quit that one to take up another job, we are not using our education correctly according to the time and situation we are in. In such a case, we are not able to show what we know to others. It is important to be patient and to establish a connection for a longer period of time in order to demonstrate our knowledge fully. It is not enough just to have the education and the experience; we also have to carry our work through.

So when we speak of environment it does not only mean to seek one according to our preferences, but also one that is suited to our particular situation and where we can apply our intellectual scope.

2) Our physical state. That our physical state depends on our general condition is nothing I need to tell you. If through exercise our body is straightened, the channels in our body are straight. If our channels and our muscles are straightened, the inner energy is straight. By inner energy I mean the movements of the mind and what steers the blood and other body fluids up and down our body. Therefore, there is a strong connection between the body and the mind.

The channels, the inner energy and the body fluids are the main constituents of the body. If they are in good condition, the mind, which relies on them, becomes unobscured and clear. For example, when asleep, the body is in a particular state. When excited, the body is a particular state. This shows that the body affects and influences the mind greatly. Generally, yoga and Tsa Lung exercises are beneficial kinds of exercise, but as a practitioner of both, I see a difference between exercises that make the body firmer and those that make the body suppler. In my opinion, it is more important to make the channels of the body and the muscles suppler. Maybe some people, like bodybuilders, are getting angry with me, but that is my conviction.

It is said that there are four factors, which benefit the body: food, sleep, massage and meditative absorption. This is general, as ascertained by the Buddha's teachings and the Himalayan medicine. If you are interested to know more about this, Wilfried Pfeffer of the Kailash House is here. He is an adept, so please ask him. So there, I have spoken briefly about environment and physical condition.

3) Mind training. Today the main topic is mind training. Subduing our mental suffering is what we call practice or gaining familiarity with something. There are three stages to it:

- i) Distraction from suffering
- ii) Regarding suffering as an enemy and subduing it
- iii) Employing methods to eradicate the suffering from its root

i) Distraction from suffering - Our mental suffering arises from jealousy, anger, attachment etc. One method to dispel these uncomfortable feelings is to get distracted from them. What kind of distractions are we talking about? Watching a movie or going for a hike, for example, can take our mind off problems, but it is not an adequate way of getting rid of the problems altogether. This is comparable to someone in a war, who cannot defeat his enemy because he is hiding somewhere at the side-lines.

If we suffer greatly on the mental level, we may call on our acquaintances and friends to keep us company, or very sadly we may deal with it by drinking a lot of alcohol and taking drugs. These are ways to hide or run away from problems and can be called distractions.

In the Buddhist texts two points are mentioned. The first one is called '*physically going into seclusion*', which means distracting oneself from suffering by going to a secluded place like a very quiet place or a forest. In short it means distracting one's mind from worries by removing oneself from the place associated with them. To remove oneself physically far away from the situation is not meditation though. For example, Westerners are very happy when they come to the East. They say it is very relaxing, because they get distracted from their difficulties at home. But if they stay for a long time in the East and get immersed the political and economical problems, it becomes just the same. For me it is nice to be here. If you ask why, it is because I am not very familiar with the country's situation. Therefore I always say that I actually don't want to know too much about it, because I think the problems will then start. When you go to the East and get acquainted with the locals, you feel relaxed. So this is not employing a real antidote neither, just a distraction. This is what we call a merely physical retreat.

The second point is '*distracting oneself from conceptual thoughts*'. This means not to think about stories of the past and not to hatch plans for the future, but to get a hold of our mind and relax it away from the present object it engages with, whether it is good

or bad, beneficial or harming, without meditating on deities or something similar. This helps to alleviate our mental disturbances.

I will tell you about one such meditation which distracts the mind from worries and gives it some rest. Generally, after working hard we yawn, which relaxes the body and the mind. The body does it naturally and effortlessly. It is a kind of meditation, which distracts us from our thoughts. Normally our body posture during meditation should be relaxed, meaning neither too loose nor too tense. First I will demonstrate and then you can join me. Usually when we get tired we yawn and this is what we are going to do here. Please watch me. Breathe in slowly through your nose. Then hold it and breathe out completely through your mouth saying HA. Then rest the mind naturally without entertaining different thoughts as if breathing out the mind with the breath. Remain without thoughts. Now everyone, let's do it once. When I snap my fingers breathe in and at the next snap breathe out. Expel the breath completely from your body. First breathe in through the nose and then breathe out through the mouth. This has nothing to do with religion. It helps when experiencing physical or mental problems. There is one important point you should be aware of, though. If we employ this method immediately after working very hard, we might get dizzy and fall down. It is better to first meditate for just five minutes to relax and then do this breathing exercise. Through the energy of breathing out, our thoughts stop naturally. Rest naturally in this state. When thoughts surface, breath out, remaining relaxed.

In some tantras it is said that the moment of yawning presents one of the best opportunities to realize the nature of mind directly. This method is one of the stages given in the pith instructions to remain in equanimity in the Buddhist view. Even though I did receive this instruction, I have had no experience of it yet. What we need at this moment is to pacify our thoughts for a while, but this is a method to take a rest. It is a way to avoid suffering, but isn't a real antidote.

ii) Regarding suffering as an enemy and subduing it. The second stage is to subdue our difficulties head on. It is as when two strong people face each other but are not able to hurt one another. This is what we mean by saying in English *'How to apply the antidotes to afflictive emotions'*. It is an antidote, which functions as a competitor. Here the main point is to understand the problems and that our afflictive emotions are at their root. To classify them, we have causes and conditions for the afflictive emotions, their essence, their amount and their function. Having travelled a lot in different settings I have met many people who are very knowledgeable. Some of them are religious, some atheists, philosophers, doctors, scientist etc. When we discuss with each other and share our experiences, all of us, religious or not, suffer from the following four states of mind: jealousy, anger, desire and lack of understanding. In this point we are all the same, I think. When I talk now about these four points, it is not from a religious point of view. Whenever one experiences jealousy someone else will suffer. The methods of distraction from jealousy etc., which I have mentioned, are no means to fight emotion as such. I don't need to mention how much trouble jealousy etc. causes. We all know

that from our own experience. You are psychologists and doctors, so you meet many people with mental illnesses. I guess there are many here who have gained some experience through them. For example, when jealousy arises, if we distract ourselves from it by watching a movie, going for a massage or on a trip, we run the risk that when we meet our object of jealousy again, we get even more enwrapped in the emotion. Additionally, many of these ways of distraction often require some financial means. Although going to a park close to our house, meeting up with friends or staying on our own might be cheaper, we will still need some kind of external condition.

There are two stages to subduing our afflictive emotions. Even though we don't need a special kind of environment, we need something, which we can use to directly counteract emotion. In the case of jealousy the antidote is to rejoice; for anger it is to use patience; for desire it is to feel satisfied and for lack of understanding it is to cultivate understanding. For jealousy, rejoicing has to be employed at the same time. The same goes for anger and patience, so the antidote can act as an opposing force. Just as we need water to counteract strong fire burning, we need to look for the appropriate antidotes when difficulties arise.

I will give an example for patience. Firstly, we have to understand that simply enduring and having patience are two different things. If two people of different sizes are in a fight and the smaller one endures the actions of the bigger, because he can't defeat him, doesn't mean he is practicing patience. This is called inability. To practice what is called patience is to reflect on the disadvantages of giving in to anger. When we understand the main reason why friends who shared a close bond separate; countries, families etc. don't get along, we can bear the difficulties of remaining patient and stay in a peaceful state of mind. This is what we mean by patience.

Talking about jealousy by using an example: two people are studying medicine. One becomes more learned and part of a circle of scholars, but the other doesn't achieve this. He might feel this is unfair and suffer. At that time he needs to reflect deeply about this feeling of unhappiness and how it can be alleviated. *'Even though I worked hard, I didn't achieve this position. We were in the same class and he succeeded, so good on him!'* Rejoicing in this way, our problems acquired through our jealousy will be pacified. Most people never use these antidotes, therefore I ask you to try once or twice. I am sure that you will experience a new state of mind. It is important to meet whatever troubles us with the appropriate antidote. There are many methods taught to relief the mind of its agonies. This is one way. Not everybody has the time to meditate and these afflictive states of mind like jealousy, desire etc. hardly occur when we are alone, but rather when we are in company of others. Therefore, we need to rely on a method that counteracts these states of mind at the moment that they occur. Although we can additionally study a meditation technique related to a religion or used by psychologists to help with a mental disorder, it is necessary to understand how to confront our negative emotions, like how to practice patience and how to rejoice.

As I said before, to meditate and to get a massage we need a special environment and time requirement. As we are all very busy, this is hard to provide. We need to have an approach that helps us to deal with the situation as it is at the time it occurs and which relieves us from our unhappiness. This is important, I think.

So the antidote to anger is patience. The antidote to jealousy is rejoicing. The antidote to desire is being content with what we can afford within our financial means. It is not sure if we need someone else's wealth. The antidote to a lack of understanding is to use one's own feelings to develop understanding for someone else's situation. For this we don't need any special circumstances or a special time. We can use these at any time during our lives.

As we don't have time to go into detail for each of them, please reflect on this or study a book on this topic, so that you can gain some additional understanding, which would be good, I think.

I know an Indian doctor, who is very famous. But he has very high blood pressure and is a diabetic. Maybe being very angry harms him, so he makes himself laugh whenever he gets upset. But I don't see him practicing patience; it looks like he is forcing himself. He never asked me for a technique. I could have told him one, but because he is a famous doctor, I didn't get the opportunity. What method is there to prevent the anger from arising, instead of forcing oneself to laugh? What way is there to relax one's mind? I think it is beneficial to learn a lot about techniques on how to prevent anger from arising. For example we need to think about the factors, which lead to anger in order to avoid it. To laugh the moment it is already there is difficult, I think.

In short, to use these four antidotes at the time these four states of mind arise, is to subdue them head on.

iii) Employing methods to eradicate the suffering from its root - Now I will talk about the third stage, where we don't just subdue the afflictive emotions, but eradicate them entirely. This is especially connected to Buddhism. By practicing the Buddhist view of emptiness and interdependent origination, the cause of suffering, the afflictive emotions distinguishing phenomena as being good or bad, is dissolved. Here is an example. If there is a multi-coloured rope here in a dim light, we might confuse it for a snake and get scared. If at that moment someone explains that there is no snake but only a rope, we will relax naturally. Our fear is pacified when we understand that what we mistook for the truth is not the truth and therefore it is empty (of inherent existence). This mistaken perception is corrected when we understand the bad visibility and the different colours arising interdependently to be the causes and conditions for our confusion. Then we will also lose our fear.

Concerning the aforementioned two methods of dealing with afflictive emotions, Palden Chödrakpa said: "Because love is not the opposite of delusion, it can't well cut through

the wrong (perceptions).“ Sometimes love can arise due to delusion, sometimes delusion due to love. For example, when a friend that you love very much gets hurt, we get angry with the perpetrator out of this love. Some psychologists say, that anger can arise out of compassion. Therefore, delusion and love are not the antidotes to one another. In this way, having these two extremes, good and bad, the good can subdue the bad, but it cannot entirely eradicate afflictive emotions causing the problems. For example when I see the table in front of me for the first time, I just see the shape and the colour. To subdue the thought that the table is bad, I can think that it is good. Although thinking that the table is good is a better concept, it can lead to wanting to own the table and so on. In short, if we prescribe a true existence to things, we will give rise to many conceptual thoughts. Or this vase with flowers, for instance: At first glance I see the form and the colour. Then I notice the size, I decide whether it is beautiful or not and think that it doesn't have a lot drawings on it. Like this, many different thoughts arise one after the other through which afflictive emotions come about and lead us to suffering.

My monk's shawl, for example, is just a piece of cloth when it is in the shop. At that stage we don't have many thoughts about it. If you buy it, you might tie it around your neck and it is impossible not to attach the concept '*shawl*' to it. If I buy it and wear in the fashion I do now, it becomes part of the monk's clothing and we attach this name to it. If a Punjabi from India buys it and wraps it around his head, we'd call it a turban and attach that concept to it. In each case, we would regard the cloth as being truly that what concept we attach to it. Each way of seeing it has its own way of bringing the concept into individual existence and all other concepts are regarded as being wrong.

So every concept comes with its own reasoning, making us believe that it truly exists only in the way we perceive it. Examining if there actually is a table, we won't find there any essence to it.

There are two groups of practitioners of meditation. One says that there is no point in thinking about material things. The other says we should examine material things directly to see how they come into being. If we engage in wisdom contemplation, we need to investigate our object. This wisdom arises through investigation. Through investigation, we find out that there is nothing that we can identify as a table, but that it is empty of inherent existence. Having settled the mind in this understanding of emptiness, no conceptual thoughts can arise. Without an object, the cause for our afflictive emotions, which is viewing the object as truly existent, cannot come into being. With this reversed understanding, all the afflictive emotions are cut off entirely, like the root of a tree.

We have to examine the following way. The table can be divided into the upper and the lower part and its four sides. Every one of these parts we can divide further until we reach the atomic level, which turns into emptiness. If we can maintain this state of mind, thoughts about the table being good or bad are pacified naturally right from the

start. There is also a way of discussing in stages the meditation on the antidotes to our experiences (of anger, jealousy etc.)

As we don't know when we will meet again, I want to share a few important points. Having meditated on emptiness for a few days, we might come to think that we have mastered it. Let's not be overexcited. Because we normally have so many thoughts, we are just taking a break from them. It is like a small child getting tired from playing a lot. A few days later many thoughts come up again and we remember many things from the past, which usually never cross our minds. We will certainly get tense and will not be able to sit still, thinking we cannot stand it. This is again being like a child who rises again to play wildly after it had had some rest. Both of these states are said to be signs that the mind is being pacified. They are signs that our meditation is going well. We need to be careful, because if we strain ourselves, we can get mentally unstable. Therefore it is good to do a number of short meditation sessions. When the conceptual thoughts gradually subside, we can prolong the meditation sessions and do fewer of them.

Sometimes thoughts arise lacking any kind of basis. Sometimes thoughts are triggered by memories. We have to know that they are all delusions and leave them as they are without trying to manipulate them. Then they will calm down by themselves. It is like stirred-up water being left alone. The impurities in it settle down to the bottom and the water becomes clear. We need to meditate like that. Herewith, I have finished. Thank you.

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