



Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche Teachings

Happiness

Today, the main topic is happiness. All of us, from the smallest ant to the largest whale, in all our activities are striving for happiness. That is very clear. I will tell you about happiness based on my knowledge of Buddhism, but also from my personal experience. But I won't be able to give you a method that you can use from tomorrow on by which you'll be happy forever as a sort of Christmas gift.

First, I will talk about what happiness is. Happiness is a mental state, a pleasant feeling of well-being and serenity. It is a state, in which we don't feel regret for what happened in the past and aren't worried about future nor do we have disturbing emotions like anger or jealousy. Our mind rests in its natural state and is relaxed. We all have an experience of this. Children's minds for example are very straightforward. When they do something wrong, they are scared of their parents and won't relax until their parents forgive them. They will feel remorse and be very unhappy. Likewise, we are unhappy and feel regret when we make mistakes. This is a basis for unhappiness. Therefore it is important to let go of the past and in future try not to do anything that we might regret later.

Also, if we are worried and feel insecure about our future, we can't be happy. This often results from trying to do something beyond our knowledge, education and circumstances. If we plan our actions according to our circumstances and capabilities, there is no need to worry. But many of us try to achieve something that is beyond our experience, our expertise, our means etc. Then, of course, we feel insecure whether we can reach our goals. When I teach at the monastic university and I am well prepared and I know the text well, then I teach with a lot of interest and with self-confidence. But if I haven't prepared, naturally, I worry how the class is going to go and if I can explain correctly.

When our mind is in the present and judges on whatever it perceives like this: 'This is good, this is bad, I like that, I don't like that, this is my friend, this is my enemy' etc., then all sorts of emotions like anger and jealousy can arise. This is of course problematic for the mind.

The mind is most relaxed when it doesn't feel regret over the past, has no unrealistic hopes for the future and isn't entangled in negative emotions at present. This is what we call happiness. We need to understand that.

But often we think it is not possible to be in such a state in our society. So what does that mean? That we will never be happy or that we have to leave our life? I say, that there is a way to be happy in the society we live in. That is my main point here.

There are two ways of dealing with difficulties. One is to distract us from them. The other is to face them, to examine them, to ask ourselves questions about these problems so that we can deal with them and eventually overcome them.

Distraction means that when we face stress or problems, we watch a movie, go for a walk, talk to friends, meditate etc. In this moment the problems really vanish, because we cover them up. But the causes of the problems haven't been resolved, so they can easily arise again at any time. There are some methods like music therapy or yoga, where we can feel their impact quickly. Relaxing during meditation and calming the mind down in a quiet atmosphere without any distractions is just taking a rest from all the frantic activities. It is like resting after having worked out. But after resting, the mind carries on as usual and any kind of problem comes up again. So again, meditation in itself is not a direct remedy for problematic situations. We don't face directly the problems and the causes and conditions from which they arise. What we need is a method to deal with the circumstances that cause us problems without having to hide from them. We need a method that works right at that moment.

I have discussed and exchanged experiences with a lot of psychologists, doctors and scientists during my travels and came up with some methods, which are not necessarily Buddhist, but are based on our shared human nature. They are a kind of human Dharma.

These methods are:

- 1) The wish to benefit others – the foundation for happiness
- 2) Against negativity – train in seeing the positive aspects
- 3) Against jealousy – train in rejoicing
- 4) Against anger – train in patience

1) The wish to benefit others

Some people think that benefitting others is directly contradictory to benefitting oneself, that we need to give up something for the sake of others. But that's wrong. When we are kind towards others, we create healthy relationships, which in return are good for us, too. That is also clear when we think of our experience. Most of us have a partner. So, have a look at when the partnership is at its happiest – is it when we have each other's well being in mind, or just our own? If we only seek our expectations being fulfilled, any relationship is difficult. When we have expectations such as "My parents should talk to me only in this way." or "My partner should wear this kind of clothes.",

we base our relationship on certain requirements which hinder a mutually beneficial bond.

Naturally, we are always the happiest when we think of others and are mutually interested in one another. It is important, therefore, to understand how others think, but we also know that this mental attitude doesn't easily arise by itself. Understanding needs to be cultivated. Anger, jealousy and the intention to harm others seem to arise more easily. We need to keep in mind that all beings strive for happiness and want to avert suffering. Depending on how much value we give to this basic condition, we will develop the wish to benefit others. If we understand that others are just like us, we will treat them better, have more respect, behave more altruistically, be more straightforward and honest. That is for sure. It is important not to discriminate amongst people based on their social status, culture or religion, but to view everyone as equal based on common humanity. If some people make us angry or jealous, we tend to forget that they are like us in their quest for happiness and their aversion to suffering. We lose our respect for them and contemplate ways of harming them. This is clearly a painful, unhappy state of mind. Happiness is based on respect for others, being able to bond with them and maybe even regarding them as more valuable than ourselves. This is not just a Buddhist explanation. It is the nature of things. We should ask ourselves: When we regard others as being the same as us, are we able to fool them or harm them? Usually not. Another question might be: 'Why should we care for others? Everyone has to take responsibility for their own life. My life is mine, and their life is theirs.' The answer is that we all depend on others. No one can exist alone. Whether we want to acknowledge it or not, we all live in dependence on others. If we understand this connectedness, we get to the root of why we need the intention to benefit others.

To have a happy home, for example, depends only to a small degree on the building we live in. More important is how the family members get along. When we work, then of course we rely on computers or machines, but more important for our wellbeing it is our relationship with our co-workers. If we get treated badly, we are unhappy. If we are considerate of others, our speech and behaviour will reflect that and others are more likely to react in the same way. Our intention to harm others will also reflect in our speech and behaviour and will likewise come back to us. Having no respect or consideration for our family members and colleagues will make it impossible to have a happy family life or work environment. No matter how much meditation we may do, how many movies we may watch and how many massages we may get, it'll be very difficult to be happy.

Unless we want to wait for the holidays or the weekend to be happy, we need to make friends at work and in our family. Or else we may suffer five days a week and relax only on Saturday and Sunday. That would be failure at life. Benefitting others is the basis for happiness. We need to be careful not to apply some sort of business-scheme, though, thinking 'if I am kind to him, he has to reciprocate'. This is very destructive.

Now we are close to Christmas and sometimes we buy presents for someone based on what we got from them the year before. If we gave something nice the year before, but

received something inferior back, we might think about buying something less nice this year. But if we give something to our partner or children out of love, we will never be calculating. We just give them something they like. Even if we don't get something equally nice back, we will naturally feel happy and satisfied, just because they enjoy our present.

These days we often hear the phrase: "I don't care." Sport celebrities or actors will say that. Then we get in the habit of saying that, but if we don't care, who will? Therefore it is important that we care for others. Saying others are not important, we lie to ourselves, because during our time at work we depend on our colleagues and at home we depend on our family. It is the nature of things that happiness can only come about through good relationships. We are fooling ourselves if we believe anything else.

2) Training ourselves in seeing the positive

Going to Rome over the weekend for a holiday one may think: 'Oh, this is no good, they don't do it the German way; the food isn't good; this place isn't beautiful', one may quickly perceive everything as being wrong. The entire holiday will be unpleasant. Nothing will be good enough. But trying to think in a positive manner: 'Oh, this is a different country with a different culture and different ways of going about things.', the tension will immediately subside. One positive thought is more effective than an hour of meditation, going for a walk, watching a movie or any other way of distraction. We need to change our way of thinking so no matter what we perceive, it won't trouble us.

Today everyone came here to listen to my talk. Anything else is secondary, like the condition the room is in, for example. But shortly after coming here, you might think: 'I'd really like to have a table in front of me and an armchair would be more comfortable.' That's when the problems start. I have a glass of water in front of me and you don't, which as such is not a problem up to a moment when you might think you needed one too. It can get worse by thinking: 'Why did he get two cups of water in the last hour and I got nothing?' When we get emotional and angry, there is no end to the questions. The more questions we ask, the angrier we get. But if you turn our thoughts around and think: 'He has to talk for so long, of course he needs some water. I am just listening and relaxing, so for me it's not so important', then immediately you'll relax and start enjoying the talk again. Meditation, getting good advice, watching a movie and so on doesn't really help if it doesn't change our mind in a positive manner. A positive thought can solve a lot of our problems immediately. It is like pouring water on fire. That is what we need.

There is a joke of two men going to a party in their best clothes. On the way there, a bird flies over and lets some droppings fall. One man gets really angry and returns home thinking his clothes are ruined, he smells and everyone will laugh at him in this state. The other man brushes the droppings off, looks into the sky and says: "I am so happy cows can't fly!" Then he gets to the party and has a good time. The situation is the same for both men, but one is more relaxed, sees the good side in what happened and eventually enjoys the party. The other one, taking the situation very serious, doesn't get

to have a good time. It's just the small difference in the way of thinking that makes the difference.

See everything as being okay, satisfactory and so on, everything will be pleasant. If we concentrate only on flaws, on what isn't working and so on, we will be permanently living in an unpleasant surrounding. Here is an experiment: take what you dislike most in your apartment and try to find its positive aspects. After a while we appreciate it more. Being able to do that, we can see the positive in everything.

3) Against jealousy – train in rejoicing

Jealousy is the reason for many of our problems. Here is a story: Two elderly women went to the temple. One was quite rich and could afford to offer a lot of butterlamps. The other was poor and could afford but one butterlamp, though she was happy for the other woman had the means to give so abundantly. Then, the poorer woman recited prayers very well and for a long time, whilst the other one wasn't so good at it. The richer one was impressed by the other's praying and thought it beautiful. When they came out of the temple, though, a thought crossed the rich woman's mind and she returned into the temple, asking the other one to wait outside. When she got in front of the Buddha statue, she requested: "Don't listen to nice words. Look, who offered you more butterlamps!" So as long as the two women were in the temple and rejoiced in each other's activities, they were happy. But the moment jealousy arose in the mind of the richer woman, her happiness was gone.

What we call jealousy is a mental state of not being able to bear to witness someone else having what we want for ourselves. 'Why does he have a better job, car or house than me?' That is the way we think when we are jealous. If jealousy had the power to bestow upon us what we want, there might be a valid reason for feeling that way. But this is not the case. The situation is usually beyond our control. All that jealousy will achieve is our own suffering. It has no effect on another. That's the way it is. We need to accept that. Trying to hide from someone who makes us jealous, might lead to some temporary success, but then again someone else comes along who makes us jealous and then someone else after them. We can't hide from everyone forever. Jealousy towards a colleague will cause us to suffer whenever we meet him. That can be eight hours a day, every working day. So, what can we do? Give up the job and look for a new one? Is there a guarantee that we will never get jealous at the new job? We can't always run and hide from these situations. Nor can we constantly try to compete with that colleague if the overall goal is to be happy.

But if we rejoice in the fortune of another, we neither need to quit our job nor do we need to compete constantly. Plus we will be happy and better enjoy our work. The first step is to let go of jealousy and be happy for the other. If we have worked for ten years, have given our best but haven't been promoted to become vice-president of the company whereas our colleague got the job, we should think that he worked just as hard as we did and at least he made it. So good for him. The more we think like this, the less jealous we will be. We need to train ourselves in these ways of thinking, to really

feel happy about what others have achieved. That is actually not very difficult and can eliminate a lot of our problems. In the beginning it might feel a bit strenuous to rejoice in something that actually makes us jealous. Just keep trying. Slowly you will see the other person in better light. If he used to do ten things we couldn't stand, suddenly we can appreciate one or two. From that point your view will develop and in the end you will be able to rejoice whole-heartedly in the other person's actions. You will also change in your behaviour and stance towards that person. Even though they never actually harmed you, being jealous anything they do is upsetting. When the jealousy is gone, you will feel calmer around them.

All negative states of mind obscure the real situation, especially anger and jealousy. We can no longer clearly perceive the actual situation, and engage in misleading thoughts. For example, if someone we feel jealous of tells us that there isn't a chair available for us, we might think he won't give us a place to sit on purpose. We won't even consider the reality of the situation. I have a friend who gave up her job as a TV news presenter because her colleague got involved with the boss, got promoted and eventually married him. My friend got so jealous she couldn't bear working with the other woman anymore and quit her job. But after a couple of years, she felt sorry, because it was a good job and actually the promotion of the other hadn't influenced it. Eventually she might also have got promoted. When she was caught up in that jealousy, though, she wasn't able to appreciate the job that she had, the good working environment and facilities. The jealousy had overshadowed everything.

We have to train ourselves in rejoicing over what others have by appreciating their work and realize that they are just as deserving as we are. It makes no sense to think that just because we didn't get something, no one should have it. Another way of training is to join others when they praise our object of jealousy. Even if at first the praise kindles our jealousy, we should just praise them too and slowly we can really praise them from the depth of our heart. All jealousy naturally disappears. This might look like children's game on the surface, but if we look into it more deeply, these kinds of methods are way more effective than just meditating or trying to hide from our object of jealousy. If our mind can generate the power to see 100% faults in our enemy, even though he might only be half that flawed, that same mind could also have the power to think in the opposite way. In fact, our mind is naturally good. Just through temporary conditions it is obscured like clouds obscure the sky. It can be made more positive through some effort.

4) Against anger – train in patience

The Buddha said that anger is an agitated state of mind. The antidote to anger is patience and when we train in patience we have to think again and again about the destructive aspects of anger. Then at the moment when anger arises we can recall this and think: "Now I have to be careful or else anger will take over and this will not end well." Sometimes the reason for our anger is valid, sometimes not. But no matter if we are right or wrong, anger will only harm us. The basis for patience is the wish to benefit others, as I mentioned in the beginning. When we think that the other person wants to

be happy just like we do, we will immediately become more patient. If we don't care about the wellbeing of others, our patience also fades.

Ten people working together means ten different ways of thinking. Even between family members there are different opinions. We need to acknowledge these differences and understand that we cannot always have our way. That is the meaning of patience. We have a saying that patience is like the ocean. There are all sorts of things in the ocean. Jewels, rubbish, fish, waves etc., the ocean can accommodate everything. The same way we need to be able to accommodate whatever comes along – good or bad. This is one of the main wisdoms for a happy life. If we can be like that, we will have a healthy kind of self-confidence. We all know what it is like to lose patience. Then, we cannot use any of our qualities. Whatever we studied, whatever we know, we can't show it in public when we tense up. The most successful of people are the ones who can deal with difficulties and without taking them too seriously. Neither do they get swept away by good circumstances. Whatever happens they stay calm and thus are able to act according to the situation using their skills.

Some of the methods I have talked about today might seem like games, but they are what we call mind training. If we train well in it, we can be happy wherever whenever. If we use these methods well in our lives, then from the moment we say 'good morning' to the moment we say 'good night' we can be relaxed and happy. The biggest enemy to our happiness is to dislike the people we live and work with, the situations we find ourselves in etc. A famous adept in Buddhist philosophy called Shantideva once said, If the whole earth was covered with thorns, there wouldn't be enough leather to cover it in order to protect our feet; But once we cover our feet with leather, it is the same as if the earth was covered in it. In the same way we get upset by all sorts of situations and we think we need to change the whole world, then that is not possible. But if we can protect our mind, then it is the same as wrapping our feet in leather. Nothing will upset us anymore.

In this way I have presented to you some aspects of mind training, which will protect our happiness in every day life.

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