



Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche - Teachings

How to be in reality through meditation

No diplomas are needed to exercise kindness.

Every time we slip, we can simply try again and do it better next time. Spiritual traditions provide us with a range of tools that we can use anywhere at any time according to our capacities.

We don't need to be in a Dharma centre, a monastery or yoga shala. Love, compassion, kindness, warmheartedness can be trained and once we have developed and familiarized with them, they are at our disposal.

Meditation is an important factor in this regard and this is why I want to talk a little more in detail on this topic and link it with observing reality. In other words, how to be in reality through meditation.

The main purpose of spiritual practice is to eradicate afflictive emotions, develop altruism and recognise our true nature. The goal is to reach enlightenment, being fresh, wake up or be awakened - any of these expressions is suitable. Most important is to first weaken and then to completely banish our inner enemy of afflictions, so that our positive qualities can shine through unimpededly.

For this we have to train our mind and observe it really carefully as to when and how destructive emotions, like anger, jealousy, hatred, lack of trust and so on, surface. They are branches connecting to a deeper source. When we cut some branches of a bush, other branches will still continue to grow or new ones will appear. If we want to get rid of the bush entirely, we need to uproot it.

So if we are bothered by our anger and we learn how to control or even overcome it, our jealousy might still be intact and thriving. Our ego is still there. It expresses itself differently. When it gets angry, the anger is a sort of a masked bodyguard, defending our rights. Jealousy is more silent and uses many arguments why someone does not deserve what they have and why we should have it instead. Desire asks us for gratification and tells us that happiness is attainable the moment we get what we are craving and that until that time we are doomed to be miserable.

Each of these emotions comes with its unique make up and a range of antidotes can be used to counteract them individually. A suitable antidote for anger is compassion aimed at another person, but it is not so potent with regards to desire. Love and compassion

can help, but by themselves they cannot fully eradicate the emotion. Another component is needed: wisdom.

We develop wisdom through meditation, where we need to make sure to direct it to the root of our afflictions. Just enjoying the silence and a feeling of lightness might be enjoyable, but it is not enough. As I often say to my students, it doesn't really matter how many hours a day we meditate, but what kind of meditation we do, how we do it and what effect it has.

A main ingredient for a successful meditation is to gain an insight into reality and utilize it to counteract our unwholesome states of mind. Understanding reality is the key to resolving our emotional problems. It is unbiased and does not depend on anything like the holy scriptures of this or that religion, a certain culture or philosophical view. Reality is reality. And to realise reality we need wisdom.

There is a famous story of three blind people touching an elephant: One touches its trunk and says: "An elephant is very soft, round and long, like a hose". Another touches the belly and says: "An elephant is so big, like a balloon". Another touches the tail: "An elephant is thin, like rope". As each of them just explores one physical part of the animal, they get quite different impressions on which to base their judgement. But none of them is able to grasp the elephant,, as they lack a complete understanding of its body, let alone its character, movements, likes and dislikes etc.

We often operate just like these blind people. We get a hold of a piece of information, which, though correct in itself, we spin into a story to believe to be true. But if we want to acquire wisdom, we need to investigate the topic for a while, look at it from different angles, study it, contemplate what we learned, analyse it, gain some experience with it etc.

The basis of the Buddhist view is that, in reality, all phenomena, physical and mental, come into being through interdependent origination, while nothing has an intrinsic, individual essence. In other words, there is no independent self either in an individual person or in anything else that appears. The investigation into this is done in two phases: 1) all phenomena arise from causes and conditions - an apple arises from an apple seed - or relationally - right can only be determined, if there is a left as well. That is interdependence. 2) if we try to find something singular, unchanging, permanent that is 'apple' or 'right', we cannot find anything. This is called emptiness or the empty nature of all phenomena in Buddhism.

Any physical object we can observe right now is caused by something existing yesterday that is similar. But the exact object of yesterday has disappeared, the object of today will be different in some sense, even if just some molecules changed or something new was created like a loaf of bread, which yesterday was just a bunch of ingredients like flour, salt, water etc. So no phenomena has an inherent, unchanging essence. Everything is empty.

Gaining a merely theoretical understanding is quite easy. This view is in itself not very hard to understand. To grasp these principles intellectually is called *knowledge*. But to integrate them experientially into our every day lives until we have gained absolute certainty in their validity, so they become our basic mode of viewing all phenomena, is called *wisdom*. Then interdependence and emptiness are our modus operandi.

As long as we have no understanding or just the theoretical knowledge of this view, our minds get stuck easily in concepts and rigid belief systems, which again facilitate afflictive emotions to arise. But if we can transcend all these categories of right and wrong, good and bad, desirable or repulsive and so on, because we know that none of these categories, nor the objects that they are attached to, ultimately exist, we can achieve some inner peace. Our mind is then attuned to reality.

Meditation is an important tool to lead our mind to this wisdom through an analytical process, in which we deeply investigate the nature of reality. Some types of meditation simply bring a thought to a halt, cutting through the mental chatter to enter samadhi (meditative absorption). Don't get me wrong, this is a very powerful tool to get a handle on our mind's activities, but samadhi is not the main method to eliminate afflictions fully. Only wisdom is capable of doing that.

Let's say for example that I get angry, because I witness something that I do not like, I do not think is fair etc. In meditation I can then observe this mental and physical reaction of anger. I become aware that "I am getting angry". This is the first step - to bear witness without judging or becoming involved with the anger. Anger itself is impermanent. Could I hold this forever? Impossible. Nothing can be held unto forever.

The mind is traditionally likened to muddy water. When we stir muddy water to clear it, it will only get more dirty. It can get clear when we let the mud settle on the bottom by itself. This is the method we use here. Just be the watcher. Don't get involved in the anger and it will naturally disappear. This is the shamatha way, which deals very effectively with anger. But it still does not touch the basis of the anger, the seed of anger.

Let's say our anger is directed at a person called Thomas, whom we have identified to be our enemy and who has all these negative qualities. Using analytical investigation, we look into what makes him our enemy. Is it his nose? Or his hands? Maybe his eyes? Where is the person Thomas as such? Is he in any of these body parts? Or outside? Or in the mind? Whatever we investigate in this way will disappear. We won't be able to find anything that is Thomas ultimately. Once we have reached a point where we have gained a deeper understanding that this enemy is something we have created based on our judgements and causes and conditions coming together, we meditate on it. That's the ultimate realm.

Norway, July 2019

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