



Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche - Teachings

How to control negative emotions in daily life

Firstly, I would like to thank the organisers (Yangchen & Vicky) on my behalf & the audience for arranging today's teaching. The topic is "How to control our negative emotions". I am going to speak about this topic based on the Buddha's scriptures and my own experience.

When the organisers asked me what I should teach here, I chose 'How to control our negative emotions'. Being here now, I am very happy to have chosen this topic because recently I went diving, which I enjoyed very much. You know, not many people go diving, because you have to face the physical as well as the mental situation of being under water.

This is a refreshing topic. Today we visited the very important Parthenon temple, which also made me so happy that I chose this topic. I asked my host while we were visiting this temple, why would people destroy such a beautiful building? It's so pretty, I cannot imagine that somebody can do this!

She said, "It's ignorance!" That's a very good answer. I really like it, because it is part of today's topic of "How to control our negative emotions". So, in order to deal with them we have to go through certain stages using different methods:

- one method is to **avoid our negative emotions.**
- another method is to **make ourselves numb to our negative emotions.**
- another one is to **have a different way of understanding of how to get rid of negative emotions** and I will explain what this means.

So, there are certain levels, let's say three levels of dealing with negative emotions which are very important to go through.

In the traditional way of describing negative emotions, we talk about the three poisons (desire, anger, ignorance). To elaborate more there are: desire, anger, ignorance, ego, doubt and pride. So, these are the six, they are the root of negative emotions. We traditionally describe negative emotions like this.

But on a social level, having negative emotions means having sadness, anxiety and anger. These three are the main ones. When traveling in different countries I get to speak with

many different people. Normally, these three emotions are the major topics whenever we talk about negative emotions.

When we look at avoiding the negative emotions, like fear, sadness and anxiety, who or what is making you angry, anxious or sad? Your colleague? Maybe the present situation in Ukraine? There are many different ways. When you get anxiety, certainly at that time, it is best to just not think about it, nor talk about it, and to not watch any news on the topic at all. This is a certain psychological approach, and it's not really an antidote, but for me, it is important. This is one level of reducing anxieties and fears. This is one method.

Sometimes emotions are so disturbing in your life, it's better to cut them off immediately by not thinking about the topic. If someone is making you angry, it's better to just not look at that person nor not talk about him or her. This action sometimes is really helpful, however, it might not work all the time or in every situation, like when that person is your colleague for example. Then you have to deal with seeing them every day and this situation we cannot ignore in the long run. This is the important thing. But listening to music, going to see friends and talking about something else also help to avoid the negative emotion. This is one part.

Sometimes making ourselves a little numb towards our own negative emotions is very helpful. For example, if you are going to lose your job, I'm sure you will be very sad and you have to deal with these things. But at the same time, even if such a thing is happening, you can tell yourself, 'I am alive, I'm not sick, I have things to eat for a few months', and this kind of thinking is like a very soft layer, but still, it helps. This type of thinking is making the emotion become a little number, because you are not focusing on every detail, you are not acting on it, rather you're kind of suppressing it.

This kind of practice exists in the teachings in Buddhist literature. It's good, but it's not the ultimate way of controlling negative emotions, because it is only exchanging one thing for another, like making a trade as we do with children, saying: 'You do this and I will give you a chocolate'. So the children will do it, and then they don't care what it is they are doing, but they have another kind of thought. Similarly, you are trying not to feel the negative emotion. That's what I call "numbing your negative emotion". This kind of idea is taught by spiritual and religious teachers as well as by psychologists. Especially in psychology, this is the therapy. Now there is a big wave, and a big step towards this kind of approach. To me, those ideas are very much derived from the literature and teachings of Buddha.

Nowadays **mindfulness** is openly used and everyone talks about mindfulness. What type of mindfulness? The mindfulness which helps you become aware of the negative emotion that is arising; without trying to make it go numb or avoiding it, rather trying to look at and deal with it. This is how they describe the method of bringing awareness into the emotion: looking at it with detachment, not acting on it, just letting it come until it appears. Nowadays, this topic of teaching a method to control negative emotions is very popular. And it is exactly the way in which it has been taught up until now, ever since Buddha gave his first teaching. So, in my conclusion on today's topic, I want to describe all types of therapy.

When you are experiencing sadness, anger or anxieties - just **be a watcher!** And here, the psychological way of teaching and the teaching of Buddha are both similar to what they say nowadays.

How to watch? The first step is to know that you are not the anger; you are not the sadness. You take a different vantage point, so you have to be separate from the negative emotion. When the negative emotion arises, you don't act on it, you don't talk to the negative emotion and you don't answer to what it is.

For example, not talking to the negative emotion sometimes means: "Oh, I'm so angry with him or her, why does he or she treat me like that?" So you ask questions, and you give yourself answers: "Yes, I am so innocent, but still he or she did such a thing to me". In that way you are gradually making the problem bigger and bigger, to become more than it is. That's what it means to talk to your negative emotions. So when you talk like that, you really destroy your sleep and you cannot enjoy the present. It goes deeper and deeper.

Therefore, don't talk to your negative emotions, don't act on them to detect something, just watch what happens: the anger comes, I have had this anger before, but now it's gone. Maybe I am having another kind of wave, but this is just a wave, it's not really me. It will come and I know there is a time when it will go. Knowing this is the awareness in the situation.

This way you also know that if you don't act on the emotion, it will not destroy your self. Therefore, whenever a situation comes, just be a meditator and be in the awareness and look at it. Keep the knowledge that it will come and it will disappear! That's the main point.

Nowadays, psychologists and also spiritual teachers talk about this. This is a very common kind of method and it's very, very useful.

Now I want to make a few further steps. For me, this has been a very, very powerful antidote to my negative emotions. That is applying the emptiness view. It is a really powerful antidote which doesn't only use being a watcher. It starts with knowing that the anger, sadness, a certain situation or certain reasons are coming up, but you don't act on them, you just watch and you let the emotion pass. That is really good. Now be aware, there are more steps. This means: the origin of negative emotion, **how does it come about?** That's very important. **What is the root?** Here we are talking about letting it come and letting it go, but how many times are we to let it come and go?

The common psychological point of view doesn't talk about the possibility that any person could get rid of negative emotions. Rather they explain from the beginning, this is the way our emotions are, that's why we always experience them. If we see a tiger in front of us, fear makes us run away (to protect ourselves). This kind of view is in the common psychological thinking, so there is no further step to really get rid of negative emotions!

For me it's not by belief but by logic, that I can see a path to manage negative emotions and even to not let them arise at all.

Therefore, we need to investigate further: **How and in which way do these types of emotions come about? What are the causes and conditions?** These points are very important to know because then you can really deal with the negative emotions.

There is a Tibetan saying (I don't know how true it is): When a dog tries to bite you, you should throw a stone, because wherever the stone lands, the dog will chase after it and bite the stone. Sometimes, they do. And some of the Tibetan native dogs are so fierce when they bite you, it is really quite dangerous. So it happens that most of those very aggressive dogs don't have teeth because they bite the stones, thrown by people who are afraid, and break their teeth. That's what they say. I don't know if all dogs do this. But for a lion it doesn't matter how far or where you would throw the stone, the lion will directly charge at the person, they go directly to the source. So this gives you an idea, that here, the main thing is that we have to deal with the source of the negative emotions.

When you look at the source of negative emotions, I want to go back to today's place - the Parthenon. You said, they destroyed such a beautiful building because of ignorance.

They were ignorant, and that's the topic I want to come to. **The texts say, ignorance is the fundamental source of negative emotions.** Said in another way, they are our **attachment**. Now, I want to connect the topic of attachment with my recent diving experience.

For around the first ten minutes, this dive reflected what I had experienced during my first dive in Tenerife. Everything was the same and I had to manage certain things, but there was no fear. The guide also trusted me and I was quite flexible. We were down around nine meters deep going through a narrow passage between two hills. I could even touch both sides. We continued for around six to seven meters, then suddenly there was the big open blue sea, you know it is fully blue. So, just within a second, we crossed this cliff, and we were out there. I couldn't see any bottom. Then, I was looking around for direction but everything was only blue. Immediately fear arose and suddenly the fear was fully there.

So here I want to share some of my experience. The moment I felt the fear, I tried to transform my conceptual mind into Dzogpachenpo, rigpa and to bring it there, thinking: "Oh, what is the fear? How is it?" That really helped. Really, immediately all the fears dropped. That's how you can go into inner nature. Then after a while, again, a second thought came:

The fear, that's my attachment thinking: "Oh, the situation in the water is like being on a mountain. I can see some rocks and a very big cliff, even though I'm not standing on it, still the situation in the water is the same, the depth is the same. But when I couldn't see the bottom, that created the fear, because mentally I had decided that it was so deep, I might fall off." You see, the reflection came from a situation outside of the water and I reflected that onto the situation I was facing in the water. So, there, that is the source of the arising of fears.

The path of ignorance is the mixing up of one situation we have experienced with another. If I really were on such a high cliff, I could have fallen from there. So, that knowledge of feeling like I could fall and which also exists in reality, I brought into the water, because it looked like the same situation but I mixed it up. And not only was I bringing it there, I kind of trusted it was there, I trusted that I would fall down even though it was not similar, but I made it the same and I mixed it up. That's the path of ignorance.

In that case, as psychologists also explain, we put a situation of the past into the future. So, here I'm using the experience that exists in reality but mixing it up with the present situation. It's kind of the same only using different words, but it's describing the same mechanism.

Being in the inner nature means not just thinking about it, but realising it: "Oh, first step, it's not the same situation, it doesn't describe the present situation. I'm under water and I will not fall down." And at the same time releasing this unnecessary fear; that is how to release and go into our inner nature. Being into the inner nature, fear and everything connected to it immediately drops away.

After a while, I thought "Oh, if I die, I think I could manage." I got kind of confident, thinking about the bardo. We've talked about the bardo before, though I don't know how you are familiar with it. But just at that moment, being there deep under water I got this kind of feeling.

I began to enjoy the situation and that gave me the space to really look and think. Even though you are only playing, there is a time when there is a movement in your mind. If you don't have the concept of fear but are in a relaxed way of thinking, you can get a lot of knowledge. So, at one point I thought: "Oh, if I didn't have a guide, how could I orient myself?" Everything everywhere is just blue and there is no way to recognise upwards or downwards. I was not afraid, because I was aware the guide was there. This was my kind of thinking, trying to figure out how one can recognise the direction without a guide. In this way I got the space to think.

Then, again I fell into fear: "Where did he go? Where is he? Oh, he is up there." Then I began to turn back and decided to not go very far from the cliff but keep circumambulating this cliff. I enjoyed it so much.

Therefore, in order to manage the fear and anxieties, it's really, really helpful to deal with the source of the negative emotions. That was a very powerful experience for me. That's why I am very happy I chose this topic.

Conclusion: If we look at our life as a diving excursion the way I experienced it for around fifteen minutes, what do we need in order to control our negative emotions? During this time, which methods did I use?

- I used the method of numbing my emotions;
- I also avoided cause and conditions of my emotions;

- At one point I used the view, to which I had been introduced by the guru. I went into the inner nature and I came out again;
- Also, at the time I used the ordinary common technique of looking whether the guide is near me and also to not go too far from the cliff.

So, with the help of this kind of management of my fear and anxieties, I actually want to go diving again. Because in the end, I could maintain the happiness there! If I had remained too anxious, too afraid, too stressed, then I wouldn't have enjoyed the dive and I would never want to go again. But, I do want to go and maybe again and again.

So, what this also shows is that there is a difficult time, and certain things you have to learn; there is an action and certain things you do; and it's also necessary to go through ups and downs. All these processes are necessary. When I consider these fifteen minutes, when I think about diving, it makes me smile and feel very joyful. That means, that I was able to maintain my happiness, I succeeded in controlling my negative emotions. That's the conclusion.

The important thing is to be aware that the negative emotion is arising, not getting involved and to know the source of the negative emotion, that is to say, our judgment. Normally, I call it [our mental structure](#).

We structure 'good' and 'bad', 'right' and 'wrong', and there are so many things that we structure and we bring that structure everywhere. Being in the ocean I used the structure of being on a high cliff from where I could fall off. That kind of situation I brought into the water, and I structured the situation accordingly.

That's what we call fabricating. Fabricating onto phenomena by making a structure for phenomena and not going beyond these structures.

So, if you want to get rid of negative emotions there are many different ways of explaining it. For me, it's to deal with the source of the negative emotion. This means, to go beyond the negative mental structure and to be there. It really gives you inner pleasure.

Can you imagine, the second I crossed this cliff, and it must have been thousands of meters down, immediately the fear came. It was very fast.

If I had panicked there, you can imagine what could have happened. Of course I would have had a helper but a lot could have happened, not the least getting injured on the very sharp edges of the cliff, glass and lots of corals. But being into the inner nature gives you such rest in inner space! In other words - going beyond the mental structure.

Now, you might think, this guy is sharing his experience of diving. But he is a monk, he mustn't have any issues of normal life. You might think this.

To that, I want to speak a little. You know, I have multiple kinds of actions I am dealing with. Just to let you know, that's why I'm using this method. And some of you here, and in Germany, there are many people who spend time with me and know that my ego is quite normal, not so up, not so down. Most of the time I guess I am on an equal level.

In real life, I am also facing governmental documents which can be a big headache, and normal life issue like finances, and then also taking on many responsibilities. Just today, I already taught a group in Nepal and Tibet, and just before we went to this great temple and now I am talking to you. Somehow the general feeling is not super energetic, but there is an energy to deal with all these situations and that comes from this technique.

So, that's it. I'm done. Finished. Those of you who have this kind of situation, please use this technique and just jump there. In the beginning, it will feel a little bit difficult, but afterwards, you begin to enjoy it.

Athens, June 2022