



Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche Teachings

How to overcome afflictive states of mind

First of all, please give rise to the mind of enlightenment for the benefit of all mother-like sentient beings. We have here many Buddhists in the audience and every time you attend a Buddhist talk, you are asked to give rise to bodhicitta. It might sound quite trivial to you by now and you don't regard it as being important anymore. We think Mahamudra and Dzogchen are important, but bodhicitta isn't.

But the realized lamas say that it is harder to meditate on bodhicitta than it is to meditate on emptiness. They know this from experience, but as I don't have much experience either way, I can't comment on that. Most of you also study Buddhist texts and from them we know that unfabricated bodhicitta is what makes any practice an authentic Mahayana practice. If we lack it, we are not practicing Mahayana.

Patrul Rinpoche said that bodhicitta is supreme amongst all practices. Without it we cannot engage in Dzogchen or Mahamudra etc. as we will not follow the genuine path. My point here is, never underestimate the value of bodhicitta but always remember its significance. We need to not only mouth the words or think about it conceptually, but give rise to it from the depth of our hearts. As methods for developing our compassion as a basis for bodhicitta we can use the three contemplations of 1) regarding all beings as equal; 2) exchanging ourselves with another and 3) seeing all beings as having been our mothers. We should train in those again and again, especially when our compassion lessens. The moment we feel true compassion for beings we won't have any difficulties helping them. Wanting to do whatever is necessary to benefit them becomes a natural reaction to their suffering without having to make any effort. We automatically develop understanding and empathy. Our Buddhist practice will, as a result, improve dramatically. Please don't forget that!

Now we will get to the main part of this talk, on how we can overcome negative states of mind. When we speak of subduing negativities, we first need to understand what these are. We study carefully what Mahamudra, Dzogchen, Madyamika and yogic practices are, for example, but when it comes to mental afflictions, we just say we need to abandon them. That is it. But we need to investigate further. We need to examine

our mind minutely and see how anger, jealousy and so on, arise. How does it feel? How do I act under their influence? What are the consequences? The Buddha explained the mind in great detail in his texts. He described the positive states of mind, the neutral and the negative ones, what the different functions are; so we can look at our minds and identify the dominant emotions. Is it anger, attachment or any of the other ones? In the Mahayana texts the Buddha spoke roughly of 51 mental states, and in the Hinayana of 46. Of course, we don't have the time to talk about all of them now, so I will speak of 1) their essence, 2) how they arise and 3) how we can get rid of them.

1) Essence of afflictive states of mind– Afflictions are born out of an agitated mind

Generally we speak of three mental poisons– ignorance, attachment and aversion. But there are many ways of enumerating them. In the Abidharma the Buddha mentioned six root afflictions, from which all others result: ignorance, attachment, anger, pride, unfounded doubt and wrong view. An example for unfounded doubt would be thinking that our friend has betrayed us though she didn't in fact do anything wrong. This kind of suspiciousness can make us very unhappy. But if we doubt in a positive way, for example when we think someone certainly helped us although we are not sure, it will make us happy.

These mental poisons bring us suffering whether we are Buddhists or not. The more we reduce them, the happier we will be. It is up to us.

2) How afflictions arise

Unwholesome states of mind mainly arise for three reasons.

The first reason is having habitual tendencies towards afflictions we have cultivated over long periods of time. Psychotherapy seems to have the same approach when looking for the causes of anger, anxiety and soon by examining a person's childhood to see if something then triggered a current problem.

The second reason is being close to the object that triggers the negative emotion. For example, if we fancy an actor and see him, immediately attachment arises and we think how we could be like him etc. With children we can see how desire develops the moment they see some chocolate or ice cream. It's instantaneous.

You foreigners really like Asian countries. You are very happy here. The main reason is that you are removed from the sort of situations, which normally cause negative feelings. When I go to another country, I leave my responsibilities and everyday problems far behind. That is very relaxing even in Europe where everyone is so busy. The reason is that I simply don't have to deal with anything that could upset me.

When I visited Germany a journalist asked me whether I liked it there and why. I told him, that I thought Germany was great, because I don't have much background information. I just see the pretty houses from the outside and the clean environment. Apart from that, I have no idea what is really going on there. So I enjoy myself there very much.

A few days ago, though, I met a couple of foreigners who told me they wanted to leave Nepal after having lived here for some years, because no one is ever on time and there are so many other problems. They had stayed there long enough to know how Nepal really works, its political situation, the sort of difficulties there are. So wherever we stay for a longer period of time, we accumulate circumstances and conditions which trigger all sorts of unwholesome emotions.

The third reason is conjuring afflictive emotions through inappropriate thinking without needing an object. That includes sitting alone at home and for example pondering on the business we are involved in, how we could improve it, what could harm it etc. It happens to many meditators and yoga practitioners. From the outside, their bodies are in a perfect meditation or yoga posture, but their minds are occupied with thinking about things like how nice it would be to go swimming or to have some nice food. So even though there is nothing actually there to provoke these thoughts, they get churned around in our minds and with them all sorts of mental afflictions come up.

Those were the three reasons – afflictions arising through habitual tendencies, through the power of the object and through inappropriate thinking. We need to reflect on these three points and see whether there is some truth in them. It is a kind of psychological analysis. When do these unwholesome thoughts arise? What sets them off? Which ones are predominant? etc. Then we will start to understand them better. We know what situations are difficult for us, how we react and how we might be able to avoid negativities in future or how we could counteract them.

3) How to gradually overcome afflictive states of mind

The most important point is to create a wholesome environment for us to be in. If we don't have that but aspire to meditate on Dzogchen, Mahamudra or any other high practices, we will not succeed. We should be in a situation, which does not encourage negative emotions. As I said before, when I come to Germany, just knowing that I am removed from my everyday hassles helps me to be more relaxed and happy. I don't need to put much effort into that nor does this come about through the power of my meditation.

I think a lot about how we can be in society and live our lives according to the Buddhist teachings and pacify our minds without needing a special meditation practice. So I have laid out the following five points.

1) Be honest – If we are honest a lot of our problems naturally subside. Most people who follow a religion are not very honest in their everyday dealings. They think that they are great practitioners, engaging in high sorts of meditation, but then conduct themselves disparagingly when out in society. But when we are dishonest, arrogant or engage in any other negative behaviour, we give rise to many afflictions. That is why the Buddha first taught the vehicle of humans and gods where engaging in the ten virtues is important. That is the basis to train in first. If we do not base our practice on that but try to immediately proceed to more advance practices, we are not following the unsurpassed Buddha's path genuinely. We will go on a mistaken path and not progress. Through acting in a straightforward, honest manner a lot of problems are prevented from the on-set. The opposite of honesty is to be deceitful. Wanting to deceive others is a fundamental cause for being unhappy and it creates various kinds of suffering. This is not just a Buddhist saying. It is a fact.

2) To speak and to listen, equally –When we have something to say, we should also listen to the response that we get. That is very important. Just to talk but then not pay attention to what the other person says is not okay. If we want the others to listen 100% to us, we need to reciprocate in the same way.

3) Courage to admit our own faults – Most of us can hardly accept that they have done something wrong. Even if deep down inside we know we are wrong, we can simply not say that it is so. I think that people who can acknowledge their mistakes without making excuses are heroes. For example, I have a Tulku friend who loves to play cricket very much. But whenever he doesn't play so well, he finds something to blame it on. Either the bat is too heavy or the ground is not flat enough or whatever. He can never admit that he did something wrong.

The moment we can stand by our faults, a lot of problems and the negative emotions that go with them are brought to a halt before they get out of hand.

4) Benevolence – Here I am not even speaking of the mind of enlightenment, where we aspire to benefit all sentient beings. As a first step I mean just to be kind to the people we interact with on a regular basis like family members, friends, colleagues, neighbors etc. It is so important to cultivate warm-hearted relationships, where we are concerned with the well-being of the others and reduce our selfishness. Again acting in this way will reduce afflictive states of mind drastically.

5) Being able to bear difficulties –When we cannot have patience when we are in difficult situations, we often make them worse. There are a lot of people who get interested in Buddhism and then enthusiastically proclaim that they will practice Buddhism from now on until the end of time. But with the practice, some difficulties are bound to arise and being faced with them they immediately give up. Others are fascinated by some activity, find out everything about it and fully engage in it. But then

if just one small thing happens against their wishes or expectations, they give it all up and blame everyone and everything for it except themselves. Acting this way, we will neither accomplish anything in a worldly context nor in a spiritual one.

We have a saying. We need to have a chest (also a synonym for courage) as wide as an ocean, which accommodates earth, water, stones, fish, jewels and also garbage. Everything fits. Similar to this we should have the inner space to deal with happiness, suffering, disappointments etc. If we have this confidence and courage to face patiently whatever happens in our life, a lot of problems will disappear quite naturally.

To heed these five points I have just mentioned, we don't need to study much, meditate or become learned in the different philosophical views. If we can just keep them in mind when we go about our daily lives, already we will have a lot less to struggle with. We can use them as guidelines to live by. As an example, if we drive a car according to the traffic rules, the traffic lights etc., we won't have many problems. Of course we might run out of gas or the engine breaks down. But the problems we might get with the traffic police or other drivers are reduced significantly as opposed to us just driving around mindlessly.

It is important that we don't think of a Buddhist practice as being something high and very difficult to do. We need to see how we can apply the teachings in our normal day-to-day lives, how they can help us to conduct ourselves in society and so on. Then it can help us to do better and eventually reduce our problems. That is my main point. Then we really practice Buddhism by getting rid of our mental afflictions through using our wisdom.

We need to develop our wisdom in order to uproot our negativities. The wisdom we need is the wisdom of selflessness. Whatever practice we engage in, it needs to be connected to it or else we, based on the Buddhist thought, we can never get to eliminate mental afflictions. As Nagarjuna said, there is no other way than the realization of emptiness to overcome afflictions, which lie at the root of all suffering.

For example, when I see a mala and think of how beautiful it is, that I want it but don't have the money, I might want to steal it - all sorts of thoughts may come up. If at that moment I can use the five points I have just talked about, I will immediately recognize that trying to steal it would be wrong and I will refrain from it. At the same time I will also rid myself from all the problems that would come from stealing it. But still one might feel uneasy, because the wish to possess the mala has not been satisfied. This can be dissolved by applying the view of emptiness. Talking about contemplating emptiness, we should not just mouth the words, but use the five kinds of reasonings to examine that all phenomena are empty in nature. We don't necessarily need to be Buddhists to study and contemplate these reasonings. So when this thought arises of this being a nice mala, we can look where in fact this nice mala is. In the first bead or the second or

in the thread that keeps it together. Then these nice-mala thoughts immediately crumble and with them also all the thoughts of wanting to have it. This is how contemplation on emptiness can benefit us in overcoming afflictive states of mind.

We can also use this line of reasoning when we become aware of thoughts like: 'I am so important. I am so good. I need this or that. I am suffering. I am facing all these problems.' Then we should look where this I is supposed to reside. The moment we understand that there is no I, all our problems vanish. The longer we remain in this understanding, the longer we are free from afflictions. The more we hold on to a solid perception of I, the more we will suffer. That is how meditating on emptiness can benefit us. It is also the state of mind in which we should meditate on deities, recite mantras, do yoga etc. This is why for some people problems dissolve when they meditate on deities or when they recite mantras. They enter into a subtle kind of consciousness, which transcends the crude kind of consciousness that is fiercely attached to an I.

Boudha, Nepal, October 2012

Translated from Tibetan by Daniela Hartmann

Edited by Zuzi Griffiths