



Dolpo Tulku Rinpoche Teachings

Living a positive life

Today's topic is about living a positive life, and regaining mental balance.

In this context, I want to introduce four points that I regularly practise:

1. Travelling to foreign countries
2. Unconditional love
3. Having a positive outlook
4. Laughing joyfully

Paying attention to our mind is very important, because it rules our world. It determines how we perceive both ourselves and our environment, and whether or not these perceptions make us happy, or bring us suffering.

Focusing on these four points enables us to gain control over our mind, so that we can steer it towards a wholesome direction.

If we are more prone to look at everything from a negative perspective, then everything will indeed appear difficult. If we are able to take a more positive stance on what happens to us, then both our environment, and the people we deal with, will seem easier to cope with.

Our mind functions like a projector, and projects whatever is happening within it to the outside world. This is actually very easy to understand, and one of the fundamental principles of Buddhist Philosophy. Talking to physicians and psychologists, they confirmed to me that our mental attitude actually accounts for 80% of our perception.

I'd like to tell you a funny story to illustrate this point. There was once a man who owned a horse that ran away and disappeared. He looked everywhere for it, to no avail. At the end of the day he went to the temple, gave thanks to the deities - or to God, whatever you prefer - and left with a big smile on his face. A few people who knew what had happened had watched him in the temple, so they asked him why he showed such gratitude for the loss of his horse and why he was so happy about it. He answered: "This

morning I left my house with the horse, but then it broke loose and ran away, and now it is lost. Had I stayed with the horse, I'd be lost too! I was spared through the gods' mercy! Of course I am happy and grateful."

Obviously this man was not very bright, but the moral of this story is, that because he could find a positive twist, he was not only not bothered by the loss of his horse but quite the opposite - he considered himself lucky! It really does not matter that he was not very clever. What matters is his positive attitude.

For us, the same thing is true. What others think is not important. We need to keep our optimism intact. This is one of the main keys to lead a happy life. There is no need to delve into religion, psychology or neurology. We are not able to bring about happiness through external gadgets like mobile phones, computers etc. We need to foster happiness internally by resolving that whatever we encounter today, we will find a positive angle. This determines how our day develops.

Now, I will discuss each of these four points in detail:

1. Travelling to foreign countries

I started to travel internationally in 2008, and since then, have visited quite a few countries. I see this is as a great gift, because it has opened up my mind and strengthened my character. I am learning how to accept different cultures, peoples, philosophies, religions, and even political systems without reservation. I have developed deep respect towards both the many differences and also commonalities that I have encountered.

I was not originally fully aware of this benefit connected to travelling.

My thinking was that I would see other countries, visit their cities and the countryside, but, I discovered this external aspect is not as important compared to the internal learning process I experienced.

I learned a great deal about the development of cultures based on different social factors, climate, and historical events. It was only with time that I started to appreciate the degree to which I have been influenced by Himalayan culture, its cold weather and Buddhism.

Now, I understand more deeply how every culture is modelled towards its geographical place and that it does not make sense to compare one culture with another. Mutual respect is therefore crucial. Travelling is a wonderful learning experience without formal studies. It taught me how to adapt to other people, how to support them and to consider the conditions they live in. It can be quite exhausting at times, but if my aim is to forge connections and help others with my knowledge about Buddhism it is an indispensable part of my life. Heartfelt respect is essential and this stems from empathy.

These days, we witness many wars and incredible destruction. Children lose their parents, and parents are forcibly separated from their children. Many people are without shelter, cannot find work, and do not know if they will get food the next day.

How does this happen?

Wars come into being, because certain people sit down and intentionally plan and execute warmongering actions. This is only possible because of a lack of respect and empathy towards other people, their cultures and environment. The only thing that is important to them are their own interests.

Travelling, however, has the potential to open our hearts and minds, because we need to adapt to new circumstances. One's own thinking becomes more flexible and so appropriately, respect and empathy grows naturally.

Sometimes people ask me how I personally deal with my experiences during my travels. I answer, that I deliberately let go of all pre-conceived ideas and experiences I had about the country beforehand, so that I can be unprejudiced towards all of the new experiences I might have. This ensures that I will not encounter a situation where I feel a contradiction to my Himalayan culture which could result in my irritation or disappointment.

2. Unconditional love

There are generally two types of love. Firstly, there is 'conditioned' love based on certain preconceived ideas, and then there is 'unconditional' love.

Conditioned love is when we are connected to some kind of commonality. We love someone else because we are related to them, or, we have the same interests, memories etc. These people appear very appealing to us. This appeal is based on certain conditions and when these disappear, this love also crumbles.

Unconditional love is more of a spontaneous response of the heart, rooted in the understanding that every being strives for happiness and well-being, but wants to avoid suffering.

For example, we might meet a homeless person in the street and our heart goes out to him or her instantly, just because we are witnessing a fellow human being in distress. This is enough to trigger a sense of connection. Their difficulties, hunger, insecurity about where to sleep the next night is something we can feel, and connect to directly.

That is unconditional love.

Another example is when we are in the middle of an argument with our partner and we are just about to say something really hurtful, but we bite our tongue, because we realise the damage we would cause to the other. We understand that the other person is the same as us in their wish to be treated fairly and lovingly. This is also unconditional love. Even at difficult times in the relationship, we want the other to be well. This is also crucial to engender forgiveness, not just for our partner, but to anybody.

Eventually, the goal is to broaden this love, this deep wish, that others should be free from suffering and enjoy lasting happiness. This is towards all beings, no matter what

our relationship with them entails, where they live, which religion they adhere to, which social background they have etc.

Whether or not we like them does not even matter, - we just love and give love because all beings deserve love. With this fundamental attitude of benevolence, we can criticise, and also defend ourselves, whenever appropriate, but still remain loving.

Let's think of someone controversial like Donald Trump. Some people believe he is the greatest; others despise him. If we can simply see him as a person, a sentient being, then from this basic approach we can engender love for him, but still hold him accountable for his actions.

It is important to separate a person from his or her actions. This attitude prevents us from developing deep-seated loathing, or even hate, as we are the ones who suffer most from these sort of feelings.

To preserve love even in difficult situations, transcends all borders that we have created based on religion, culture, nationality, personal views etc.

Just try it. Find out for yourself what benefits you. We might think that being compassionate and empathic is dangerous and makes us vulnerable. Maybe our enemies will take advantage of us, but, in reality, love will strengthen us. It enables us to make the first step forwards in a disagreement and to reach solutions, which would be impossible, if we flat-out reject someone. This is true boundless love.

3. Having a positive outlook

A 'positive outlook' means to perceive the positive in any given situation, and to choose it as the starting point for our thinking and actions.

We can only reach this point if we undergo some mental training, which enables us to look at a situation realistically and to decide what we can do in order to preserve or facilitate a good outcome.

In most cases it is easier for us to see what is not working, what we don't like, or to fear a horrible outcome.

In front of me, everything is yellow, for example. The wall is painted yellow, the cup and the table are yellow. I have a choice concerning my attitude towards this fact. I can enjoy it by thinking that yellow is a warm, cheerful colour or I can contemplate how boring it is to have just a single colour here, and how nice it would be if there was also something blue or red.

My mood can be significantly influenced by just a small difference in thinking. This is true for every moment of our life. We can judge something to be beautiful or ugly; as pleasing or off-putting. Take this to heart - often it is just a matter of perception, which we can control by training our mind.

Each one of us knows someone, who is constantly in a bad mood and complains all the time. Work is upsetting, the family is crazy, the partner is stubborn, the weather is too

hot or too cold, the politicians are all corrupt and so on. No matter how hard we try to convince them of something good, they cannot see it. Their mind is a professional in pessimism. This is actually very dangerous. If fifty percent of all perceptions are negative, then there is no way to be happy. We should therefore be very careful and actively look for the positive aspects in whatever we encounter, so we do not get sucked into a depressed mind-set.

The popular example of a ,glass half full', is very appropriate. If we are quite thirsty, we might think ,half a glass' will never be enough. So when we drink it, we won't be satisfied. But if we think that at least we have that much, that it will at least alleviate our thirst a little, we will feel more content.

When we learn to be content with what we have, then we will be okay even in very difficult situations and places. Our colleagues, friends and family members will also appear nicer and more warm hearted, if we appreciate them. This is crucial in order to lead a happy and satisfied life.

If we foster a poverty mentality, a chronic dissatisfaction, then we can never enjoy any happiness even in the beautiful moments. We can spend time in the most beautiful hotel with the most loving people, but we will still find something, that we do not like. In the worst case we will perceive people who love us as enemies, and battle with them.

In this regard, I also want to mention hypersensitivity, which I encounter to a fair degree with meditators and yoga practitioners. They get so absorbed with their feelings - mentally and physically - that any sensation tips their inner balance. The real aim in practising yoga or meditation is to become more resilient in our daily lives. But often it is the other way around. I meet people who need complete quiet, only a certain degree brightness, just this brand of incense etc., and only then can they be spiritual and experience inner calm. To be so sensitive is in fact completely counter-productive to a true spiritual practice.

In Vajrayana, the predominant Buddhist school in the Himalayas, we train in seeing ourselves and all other beings as deities and our environment as a pure land. All our perceptions should be flawless. This is at the heart of our training, which is our primary support to overcome our negativity.

I'd like to tell a story here about a married man with two children. He felt burdened by the responsibilities of a family life and was stressed out. To solve his predicament, he went to the local temple to meet with the resident monk. The monk listen patiently to the man's many complaints and said at the end, the man should buy three chickens, add them to his household and come back the following week. When the man came to see the monk again, he was irritable and told him the week had been very difficult. The three chickens contributed to the havoc in the family and his life was even more stressful. The monk just smiled and told him to get three dogs and again report back a week later. The man had his doubts, but, because the monk was revered as being very wise, he went out and bought the three dogs.

During the following meeting the man was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. The dogs were chasing the chickens around the house and the situation was completely out of control. There was not one quiet minute for him to relax. The monk's advice proved

useless! The monk asked him for more patience and promised, that he knew how to solve the all the man's problems - he needed to add another three goats to the mix! The man just needed to trust him, then he'd find peace. So the man bought three goats, brought them home and complete chaos ensued. A week later he went furiously to the monk, told him that all his recommendations were nonsensical and he'd never consult him again. The monk calmed him down and told him to get rid of all the animals immediately. When the man returned a week later, he was smiling broadly and professed how wonderful he felt. His home was so peaceful with just his family around! This was the best feeling ever!

The story illustrates that even though nothing had fundamentally changed about the man's family life, he was way more content and appreciative when his perspective shifted. Fundamentally it was not his family that were at the root of his problems, but actually his attitude towards them.

4. Laughing joyfully

Laughter is the best medicine to combat stress. Most of the time we only laugh, when we have reason to. For example when someone tells a joke or we watch a funny movie. But actually, this is not necessary. We can start with a smile and then just laugh. This is done in laughing yoga. Just laugh. Certain physical movements like yawning and laughing cause our inner channels to vibrate and this loosens blockages and tensions throughout the body. It is easy to also combine laughing yoga with meditation. We should sit in a meditation posture on a chair or on the floor. The most important point is to have a straight spine and a relaxed body. And then just laugh. In the beginning it feels a bit strained, but it quickly gets to be more normal and actually is fun. Just try it! You will definitely enjoy it.

I hope my talk was able to provide you with a few thoughts on how to improve your daily life. That is my wish!

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