



The State of Mind

transcript of a teaching given August 29, 1997

Geshe la: According to Buddhism, our individual mind plays a very important role in our day-to-day lives. That means we can be much happier if our minds are calm, positive, and undisturbed by negative thoughts and emotional feelings. We will be very unhappy and gloomy if our mental state is negative, unwholesome and disturbed. So, it's very important for us to cultivate the calm and wholesome state of mind and attitude so that we are able to live happily. For example, if your mind is in a calm and wholesome state, you will find good taste in ordinary water. But if your mind is disturbed you will not even find good taste in champagne! This is very clear for everybody, in the same way, all our pleasant experiences and unpleasant experiences depend on our state of mind. So, now there is a reason for us to cultivate a calm and wholesome state of mind in our lives. We cannot expect something simply to bring us happiness without cultivating happiness within ourselves.

Many of our day-to-day problems are caused by negative emotions and feelings of mental unhappiness. Negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, depression, bitterness, hatred and self-hatred. All these negative emotions are directly caused by a self-centered attitude and the sense of making distinctions between oneself and others. Usually the anger arises in us as self protection, but it will only harm us rather than making us happy.

Whenever anyone causes us some problems, we get upset and angry about that. This is our normal human tendency. If we are careful enough, we can stop the causes of the anger and therefore stop anger from arising. One's feeling of mental unhappiness is the primary cause for arising anger. This is due to our self-centered ego or attitudes. The anger can be diminished by the practice of compassion and by searching for the solution to rid ourselves of this anger. Our main problem is that we consciously increase the intensity of anger by feeding it through means of constantly thinking of how such and such people hurt me, or unfair, etc. Because we hold these things in our minds the anger increases and increases.

Whenever we get upset or angry, the best thing to do to rid ourselves of this anger is to not pay attention to it and to focus on one's naturally coming or arising breath. This helps us to calm down our mind. It provides us the opportunity to see the more effective solution to work with the undesirable situation. One of the Indian masters has said, "There is no reason to be unhappy about something, if it can be remedied. There is also no reason to be unhappy about something if it cannot be remedied. If the thing can be remedied, the feeling of unhappiness about it are meaningless. If the thing cannot be remedied at all then feelings of unhappiness about it will not help but will only cause further problems".

The most important practices to deal with these emotional problems is to increase one's awareness and to live in the present. Actually there are many ways in which to deal with these emotional problems. It really takes time to explain each and everything in detail. All these techniques are purely involved with one's mental exercises. So I'm going to leave time for

discussion. It will be more fruitful for you to ask me questions that require particular answers rather than talking in general. So now I welcome questions.

Student: In modern psychology, depression is suppressed anger, how does not paying attention to the anger get it to dissipate?

Geshe la: You are right. In some cases, it really helps to pay attention to anger and to express it. But according to Buddhism, this is a very short-term relief. Not paying attention, and finding the wholesome solution to get rid of anger is considered to be one of the long-term benefits. It depends upon the individual, in what way they choose to solve it. Here I would suggest to choose the most wholesome way. There is a Tibetan expression, "If the Conch shell is blocked, the technique to clear it is to blow in it and the blockage is removed.

Student: Geshe la, what is a good technique for not allowing fear to stop us from moving on in our lives?

Geshe la: In Buddhism, we say, many of our fears have no reason. Likewise, there are some fears that do have reasons. So, what kind of fear are you asking about?

Student: Fear of our culture.

Geshe la: Please explain what you mean by fear of our culture.

Student: Fear of the conflict that I perceive. The disregard for others, the lack of compassion. Hostility, it feels hostile out there at times. I think these things create a sense of loneliness for me.

Geshe la: Lack of compassion is very dangerous in human society because we humans have to survive with relationships that give us support and hope for our survival. We human beings are connected to each other. There will naturally be a rising fear to disconnect from these close relationships. Feelings of abandonment and loneliness. Actually, every human being faces fear of death because the fear of death is caused by a sense of self that holds our identity. We live with this strong sense of self and so, we have fear of losing this identity. Usually, the fear of loneliness can be overcome by cultivating genuine compassion and calmness of mind. If we are able to live within the frame of calmness of mind then naturally the feeling of fear of loneliness will be diminished.

Student: Lack of compassion is most noticeably present in states of angry rationalization. How do we invoke the will to be calm at such times ?

Geshe la: According to Buddhism, and Buddhist practitioners, it is important for us to first clearly understand or to become aware, that an undesirable situation or circumstance is unfair to us and is generating a feeling of justifiable anger. It is very difficult to realize our own faults that are hiding under our big ego and it is very easy to understand or realize the faults of others. Therefore, in many cases, when bad things happen to us we have a tendency to directly blame others. In Buddhism, we are not looking at whether the current situation is fair or unfair to

us. It is important to look behind the current situation. In this way we can find the cause that brought the undesirable situation about.

Student: Geshe la, in thinking about impermanence and death, most activities seem futile and useless and I become disinterested. Is this healthy?

Geshe la: If you are a sincere practitioner, it is a great mistake to be disinterested. In some cases, whether you think about death or not, death will come naturally. You don't need to expect. In that case you are right. The main point in thinking about impermanence and death is a technique to overcome, or to work with, the unexpected phenomena of death. I think that if we do not know how to die peacefully then we really do not know how to live peacefully, because death is part of our life. Thinking on impermanence and one's death, manipulates our minds and helps us to generate genuine renunciation, the true wish to search for liberation, the everlasting peace.

Student: I read on the internet that if you do a practice on the lunar eclipse it is increased a hundredfold. Is that true? Do Buddhists believe this?
(The lunar eclipse was on the 31st.)

Geshe la: Yes, this is right. Whatever you practice on that day, it increases hundred times. This means if you recite one single mantra on that day, it's the same as reciting a hundred mantra on another day. The same applies to any negativity. Therefore, in Tibet, people take a day off and spend their time meditating, doing prostrations, recitations, circumambulations, making offerings and holding positive thoughts.

Student: Geshe la, some old angers settle in the body as illness. Can you speak about releasing the emotion, and healing the illness?

Geshe la: Please do not think that one single technique can suffice for all. Firstly, it is important for us to understand the disadvantages of negative thoughts and emotions. Secondly, it helps to let go of them. Do not hold onto, or live with, this unpleasant environment by means of perpetuating it. The mental technique takes time, but if you try, it will work for you.