

Dealing with Suffering

There is one special technique that I think we should focus on. Instead of escaping from suffering, we should learn how to face it. This is the special method that the bodhisattvas of the past practiced, studied, and taught.

If we are taught how to avoid suffering, how to escape from suffering, or how not to face suffering, then we become very fragile. At the same time, there is no way to free ourselves from suffering because we still have the cause of suffering. We have afflicting emotions and the confusions of limitless lifetimes until now. There is a lot of expectation caused by not facing suffering. Instead, if we learn how to face suffering in a positive way as part of the bodhisattva's path, we may become a warrior. Then the end of suffering may result.

When we have learned how to face suffering, we don't have to search for happiness and peace. This is a very special method. It is like alchemy, the transformation of metal into gold. Here, suffering is transformed into happiness and joy. (An audience member asks, "But how?") Of course, it must be said, this is not easy. It is tough. It requires a lot of strength. It needs experience and mindfulness. These are very important qualities that we need in order to utilize suffering as a path toward enlightenment.

Now, how to use it? First of all, we must look at our own mind. We suffer physically from sickness. Then we suffer from anger, desire, pride, jealousy. We experience much suffering from these emotions. At the same time, they force us to create negative karma which causes yet more suffering in the future. Instead of being overcome by these afflicting emotions, we must confront them and see what they are actually doing for us. If we do that, we would not be confused. However, when we are confused, we are enslaved by these afflicting emotions.

When anger arises, see it as the real cause of your suffering. It is not another person who causes your suffering. That person is temporary. Anger is the real cause that creates pain in the chest or stomach. At that time, we have to see what a great opportunity we have to work with the afflicting emotions. A person who is angering us should cause us to be very grateful. This person has given us such a great opportunity to grow. This person has actually helped us to see our anger and to work with it. Practice that!

There are two different qualities. One is weakness and the other is strength. Sometimes, we may think that something is weakness, but in reality it is a great strength – not allowing anger to rule us. If someone asks you to give something, you gain the opportunity to practice generosity. You won't get upset with a person who peacefully and calmly asks you to give something. By his asking, you get to practice generosity.

How is the person who comes to you and incites anger a problem? It is the same thing. Say to yourself, "Ah! This person is giving me the opportunity to practice patience. Without any effort on my part, this fell like a jewel into my hand. The person who gave me this opportunity is a friend of enlightenment. I should be very happy to have such enemies!"

Through this example we see that all other problems and suffering are wonderful, because they provide purification. The pain and suffering that I am experiencing are actually purifying my negative karma. This purification is a special practice leading toward enlightenment. We should see any kind of suffering as not being permanent, but rather as impermanent and temporary. The suffering of the present time will not last until the end of samsara. It will end after a time, in this life the next.

This practice is a method to purify all the negative karma that we have accumulated from limitless lifetimes. There is such a joyful feeling. Of course, there is pain, but still there is joy in knowing that we have this wonderful Dharma teaching. If we had not received it, then we would not know what to do. Because we are in samsara, however, we know how to face suffering and how to deal with it. What a great opportunity we have! What fortunate persons we are!

In the midst of the cares and suffering of life, one can experience these things. That's why, as I mentioned, we need strength of mind, mindfulness, awareness, and experience. Each is a very important factor. Without these factors, no matter what we do, our practice will not bring any fruit or result. Develop bodhicitta without any doubt, knowing that this is the way to end suffering and achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all sentient beings.

*A public talk by Khenchen Konchog Gyaltshen Rinpoche, unknown date or place.
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