

DEALING WITH EMOTIONS

THE BUDDHA TAUGHT THREE PRINCIPAL WAYS to deal with negative emotions. The first is to keep a certain distance from emotions, trying your best to avoid them. You go to a peaceful place where you don't get emotionally involved, a place without many temptations. Doing this is called *abandoning emotions*. You haven't cut emotions at their very root, but there is not much "reinvestment" taking place. The second method is *transforming emotions*, and the third is called *acknowledging the nature of emotions*.

The first technique, abandonment, is prevalent in the Hinayana teachings. You may have noticed skeletons hanging on the walls of some Buddhist temples, or images of skeletons painted there, especially in Burma and Thailand. In Tibet too there are a lot of paintings of skeletons in the temples and some hanging there as well. This is for the benefit of monks and nuns, an antidote for desire arising in their minds. When desire arises, they're told: "Consider the body's interior. Peel the skin off, and what's inside? Are you attracted to that? We are all carrying a portable toilet in our gut. Do you have desire for that? When a dead body is opened up and you see the rotting organs, how do you feel? What if you found yourself lying in bed next to that person?" The Hinayana tradition has a lot of instructions of this type. However, this kind of attitude creates another hindrance—the emotion of disgust, as in "How filthy!" or "People who don't brush their teeth, how disgusting!"

Along this line, Shantideva asks in *The Way of the Bodhisattva*, "Honestly, what is it that you are so attracted to?" He makes you consider a whole series of attractive objects, one after the other, and then ruins your attachment to each. But each time it is ruined, you have a new problem. You are no longer attached to that particular object, but your

attachment, your desire, is still alive, and it reaches for something else. You ruin a particular desire, but then a substitute replaces it. To remove the substitute, another remedy is necessary. This is how we end up with 84,000 types of Dharma teachings.

The Dzogchen system teaches that if you continue like that, grasping at one thing after another, the process could be endless. The Dzogchen principle here, however, is that it is not necessary to rely on another remedy. When anger or desire arises it can be allowed to dissolve into itself. Only when you are unable to let it be naturally liberated must you resort to an external remedy. If an emotion doesn't get freed immediately, then you simply give it a little more room. Allow two or three minutes, then let it go. For example, if the anger is really intense, you don't try to let it go right away. You give it a little love, a little sympathy, a little room, and it starts to soften. You recognize its essence within that softening.

In a certain context, an intense emotion could actually help rigpa become more fresh and vivid. The strong emotion can bring a certain further strength. As a matter of fact, as you progress you discover that each emotion can be accompanied by a sense of basic wakefulness. You have heard that the five poisons are the five wisdoms, right? This teaching is very interesting and very important but also quite risky. There is a danger in a sentence like "The more emotions, the more wisdom." Yet, honestly, it could be for real.

Often you see that important, powerful people have most vigorous minds. They can be very bright, very intelligent, but full of ego at the same time. They can have strong passions as well as being very compassionate. They can become incredibly furious, have strong drive, be very clever, and also be totally stupid in another area, with huge blind spots. If a person in an important position wasn't competitive, he or she wouldn't have the drive to keep going. Because of ego's drive, the dominant part of the person's energy goes into the patterns of the five poisons and not the five wisdoms. That is why office bosses can be so aggressive even though they are quite bright. They become boss because they are intelligent, but you may not like to work with them because they can also be infuriating.

These kinds of people exemplify the certain potential inherent in strong passions. Along with the passions, existing simultaneously with

them, there is the potential for their transformation—for allowing the five wisdoms. These wisdoms are connected with the five buddha families, which are naturally related to certain types of people, certain types of mind-sets, and particular Vajrayana deities.

It is taught that Vajrayana practice is especially suited to people whose emotional states are more forceful. I am not quite sure I can explain this difficult point satisfactorily. There is something on my mind about this topic, and I often try to express it, but I'm not sure I have been able to really articulate it yet. While I teach, I always look at people's faces to see whether they are getting the point, to see if I'm getting through or not. That hesitation actually clouds me over. If people don't get this point correctly, it could be very dangerous. One might think, "All right! I get aggressive and pushy, but that is okay because the teacher said that's how one should be to express basic wisdom." How about that? Not good, right?

There is another type of person who prefers to be like a vegetable—a good, pure, organic vegetable. This person likes to remain uninvolved, doesn't have much emotional drive, doesn't get too angry, too passionate, or too jealous. However, he is also not overly compassionate either; he doesn't try to reach out to other people. Still, he is good and decent, quiet and relaxed. I am not saying that's bad, but a certain gutsy strength seems to be missing.

Sometimes you find practitioners of Dzogchen who have fierce negative emotions, ablaze like fire, but at the same time, when these emotions are not that active, these people can be very intelligent, very sharp. Sometimes they are very loving, very kind, very compassionate; sometimes they are full of devotion. When they get angry, they rage, but they can also be very sharp. When such a person who has both intense passions and a very sharp mind connects with a qualified master, he or she may truly understand the Dzogchen teachings; that's how it's taught. For someone whose emotions are in 100 percent full bloom, it is also possible that intelligence or sharp-mindedness can be 100 percent activated, that devotion or compassion can be 100 percent fully manifested. There are a lot of people like that in this present age.

A Vajrayana practitioner is not supposed to criticize the emotions as something awful. Rather, one should let go of the grasping within an emotion and recognize its pure quality, using the strength of the emo-

tion to recognize rigpa. That's a very important point. But the emotion *must* be liberated through this process. What does it mean for an emotion to become liberated? It doesn't mean we prevent an emotion from arising, like closing the door. Nor does it mean we should take hold of whatever arises, whatever unfolds, with a clinging to "I" and "other." Rather, just allow it to dissolve, dissolve, and again dissolve; then the energy in the emotion becomes full-fledged, fully blossomed. This most vital point—that the emotions are the five wisdoms—is an extraordinary, unique feature within the Vajra Vehicle of Secret Mantra. Failing to understand this point correctly can become a grave mistake. But when you really understand it, there's major progress in understanding. Truthfully! There wouldn't be much success from trying to suppress the emotions, trying not to feel. I have given this issue a lot of thought, and I feel this point is really precious, honestly! The main quality of Vajrayana is how to deal effectively with emotions.

Now, while you don't suppress an emotion, there is no benefit from just getting carried away by the emotion and doing whatever it says. It would be very easy just to kick back and surrender to the emotions, but that is not the Dzogchen way. Say you leave the door to your house wide open, and fifty emotions march in. The emotions tell you, "Get up now. Let's go rob that bank! You have to come along." If you reply "Okay, no problem, I'll join you," you're finished. The Dzogchen approach is not to fight with the emotions, true, but you don't obey them either. This is entirely different from closing your doors and windows and pretending not to be home when the emotions come knocking. So what do you do? Just let the emotions come right in. You're sitting down, and they each point a rifle at you, saying, "If you don't come with us, we'll shoot!" What to do? At that moment, you surely need the key instruction of Vajrayana. If you let yourself get overwhelmed and join forces with the emotions, you are no different from an ordinary person. And if you try to prevent them from entering, by closing all the doors and windows, then there's no adornment, you're just sitting there all alone, like in shamatha. We need to allow rigpa's natural strength to be fully present. Faced with rigpa's natural strength, fully manifest, all the emotions lose their power and become part of rigpa.

To truly liberate emotions through the practice of rigpa, you have to make sure that you have recognized rigpa to begin with. Recognizing

your own nature basically means that dualistic mind is introduced to itself, to its own basic nature—which, as you have heard by now, is empty in essence and cognizant by nature. You must also have heard that these two cannot be separated in any way whatsoever; they are an indivisible unity. Cognizant nature means a natural intelligence, an alertness that is simply present, completely aware of what happens. Rigpa is not a dim-witted, vacant state of mind. It is not absentminded, unaware of what is going on. Nor is it a conceptual manner of being aware. There is a certain presence in rigpa, but that mindful presence is not made deliberately. It is intrinsically present together with this empty essence. It is simply a matter of this state knowing itself.

Let me illustrate this point with a candle and its flame. Let's say there is no electricity in the room, only a lit candle. Do you need to turn on a flashlight to see the flame? No, the flame is self-illuminating. You could say it has two aspects: it illuminates darkness, and it illuminates its own flame. But take this chant book in my hand, for example: do you need a flashlight to see it? Yes, because it is not self-illuminating. To see the chant book you need two things: the flashlight and the book; just like you need a subject and object to conceptually know something. But rigpa is entirely different. Rigpa is a *self-knowing natural cognizance*. It's as if a flame could know itself.

The pointing-out instruction for recognizing mind essence involves dualistic mind being introduced to itself. Mind is led to know its nature. We are told how to recognize our empty cognizance. To put it in a nutshell: your basic state of mind is not *another* state to arrive at later. This present way of experiencing simply acknowledges that it is actually empty in essence and, while not losing track of being empty, is still able to perceive and to function.

This mind is supposed to recognize its emptiness, but not as an object. The moment this mind recognizes emptiness, rigpa is an immediate actuality. If this cognizance sees its own emptiness as a separate object, then there is duality in that the knowing becomes the subject, with emptiness as its object. That is the opposite of recognizing rigpa. The moment of rigpa is alert, casual, spontaneous, not meditating, not keeping hold, not rejecting. All five senses are open. It is not a thing but a beautiful, fresh moment. We also call this moment *ordinary mind*.

First, acknowledging it is called *recognizing one's nature*. Next, we must be decisive about what is recognized. This is more complicated, because who really decides? Is it conceptual mind that settles it? Or is it rigpa itself that decides? Or is it your teacher who makes up your mind—"The guru said so, so it must be true"? Or will modern technology validate it for you? Could you go to the Rigpa Lab and check your heart and brain with instruments to decide if your rigpa is fine and fit, if your nonduality is in good shape?

How do you resolve this point? It may be tough to have to immediately endorse our own experience, but we can decide upon it if we feel even 60 percent confident that it's actually rigpa. As the basis for verifying, we use our teacher's words, the words of an authentic scripture, and our own experience. When our state of experiencing rigpa really *is* rigpa, there is within that an automatic feeling of certainty. To arrive at that certainty you need to give some time to the process, and you also need to have passion. There is a point at which the certainty is built-in, automatic certainty. Once we get to this natural, unshakable certainty, we feel so sure that even if the Buddha himself came before us and said, "Hey, you're wrong, it's not rigpa!" we would thank him for coming, but it would not change our certainty at all. At a certain point the qualities of empty essence, cognizant nature, and unconfined capacity become so utterly obvious that we *really* know. At this point, we have gained the certainty that whatever occurs in our minds can be freed by itself.

This process of resolving and settling the authenticity of rigpa seems to have two aspects. One aspect is that we don't doubt "today's rigpa." The other is confidence regarding how we deal with phenomena and emotions—how we deal with whatever occurs in our minds, within our field of perception. We must decide on recognizing the *self-knowing wakefulness*, rigpa, in whatever the moment may be. In a moment of anger, recognize rigpa. In a moment of desire, recognize rigpa. If you already know how to recognize rigpa, do not resort to another remedy to pacify or destroy that particular emotional state. In other words, no matter which of the 84,000 different types of negative emotions may well up, once we have recognized rigpa, the solution to any state is simply to recognize rigpa again and again. There is really no other way. Unless we make up our minds in this way, we might be scrambling endlessly for ways to cope with various situations. Without certainty in rigpa as the

universal remedy, there would always be a need to *do* and *apply* in the present moment, to run for cover or prepare for battle, instead of simply recognizing the very essence of rigpa right here as the single remedy for whatever emotional state may take place.

We can place an object in midair, but does it stay there? No, it doesn't. In the same way, emotions have no foothold in the moment of recognizing rigpa. Emotions cannot remain in the face of rigpa. I am not saying that emotions can never happen in a Dzogchen practitioner. Paltrul Rinpoche phrased the vital point this way: "The way they arise is the same as before, but the way they are freed is a major distinction."

Let's say there is a fairly advanced yogi in a crowd of people. The way he or she gets angry or experiences a thought is exactly the same way all the other people do—there is no difference. But how that emotion or thought is subsequently allowed to dissolve is entirely different. I am not talking about a completely realized yogi, which would be a different situation, but just a fairly advanced practitioner. The point here is that thoughts, emotions, and perceptions do occur during the state of rigpa. As a matter of fact, they should. They occur while we are training, and we use them as training opportunities. Trying to block off perception in order to train throws us into one of the two extremes of eternalism or nihilism, and we never have the middle way that is so tremendously valuable. Just as our basic ground is neither permanent nor nothing, rigpa, which is part of the ground, is also neither permanent nor nothing.

In my teachings, I first emphasize the way to be sure you have the right rigpa. After that point, the arising of phenomena is the basis for training. Phenomena, appearance, experience, feeling, or perception—all are called *nangwa* in Tibetan. There are many kinds of *nangwa*, both subtle and coarse. Something appears in the mind, whether it is a vision, a memory, an emotion, an experience, or a perception. Since perceptions occur, they can be liberated within the vast expanse of emptiness. Based on these perceptions, these *nangwa*, we can have liberation or confusion. It is also on the basis of *nangwa* that we can become an accomplished being, a *siddha*. In short, *nangwa* is whatever comes from and through the natural cognizance of mind. It is said, "While empty, phenomena appear, and while appearing, they are still empty." That is the way we work with phenomena, with our perceptions. In this tradition, we do

not seek to merge perceptions as the object with the perceiver as the subject. Instead, we allow perceptions to be freed upon arising.

I have mentioned nonfabrication as a key point of meditation training. We are supposed to simply let be in the continuity of rigpa, without fabrication. You could also say that meditation training means *not losing the continuity* of rigpa. The first meditation moment is that of seeing the nature of mind. Let's say that this first moment is allowed to endure for three minutes. The meditation is still fresh; we say that the continuity of the view has endured. The first moment of recognizing is allowed to continue, so that after three minutes it is still the first moment. But during those three minutes, at the various points where we are just about to get distracted from the continuity of rigpa's awakened state, the onsets of distraction must be freed upon arising. How? The awake quality of cognizant nature re-recognizes its own emptiness and *freed upon arising* happens.

The key point of the meditation training is nonfabrication—not plotting or constructing the natural state, just allowing the continuity of the view to carry on. Whenever this is the case, there is no distraction. If distraction does occur, simply remind yourself to recognize again and start afresh. That is how to continue the training.

Let's say that rigpa continues for a three-minute period and that during this time perceptions do occur. We do not need to expect that the duration of rigpa will be without anything happening. It *is* possible that nothing will happen; that could either be the completely naked state of rigpa, or it could be the blind alley of having blocked off all perceptions. Therefore, the presence or absence of sensory input does not define the true state of rigpa. There can be rigpa with perceptions, and there can be rigpa without sensory impressions. The yardstick is whether emptiness is recognized either during perceptions or in their absence. Please understand here that "emptiness" does not mean going blank. But, while perceiving, if the perceived is kept hold of, this is also wrong. The teachings say: "Neither stuck in being empty nor fixated on perceiving."

Within emptiness, we can welcome perceptions. Here, emptiness is not a theoretical construct; emptiness means *the recognition of not clinging*. I am not discussing the philosophical articulation of emptiness as that within which perceptions occur, because, as a matter of fact, all experi-

ence already occurs within emptiness and always has. There is nothing new about that. I am talking about *actually* acknowledging this spacious quality and allowing perceptions to occur within this recognition.

Take the example of a strong warrior. He might not look like much if he's just sitting down. He needs a circumstance, a setting, to display his power. Some opponent must appear and challenge him with a weapon. Then he stands up and shows his full strength. You see this in the movies—the hero needs a villain so that he can demonstrate his full might. In the same way, rigpa needs the occasion of an emotion to rouse its natural strength. Once this strength is roused, the emotion has no chance. It has to give up. Like a nicely burning fire—the more wood you throw at it, the more it blazes up. Sometimes you can even toss water on a really hot fire and it simply vaporizes; the blaze seems even more intense than before. We need that type of strength in dealing with emotions. If we try merely to evade them, acting as if we have nothing to do with them, then that innate strength is unable to manifest.

Here is another example. On the narrow roads in Nepal you find cows, chickens, people, everything, all sharing the space. Nepali cows are very peculiar in that they can sleep in the middle of the road. Exactly where it is busiest, they just peacefully lie down and sleep!. Imagine you are driving in Kathmandu. You are not a great driver, just acceptable, but still you're not too sure about which pedal is the brake and which is the accelerator. All of a sudden, a chicken darts out in front of you. First you remember, "Well, I have two legs, and there are two pedals. Now, which one is the brake and which one is the accelerator?" If you have to think about it like that, by the time you've figured it out, there is no more chicken—it has become chicken curry. Likewise, if in the presence of a strong emotion you first have to think, "All right. Shamatha. . . breathing. . . aaahh . . . let me see, where is my mind?" First, you try to find your mind, then that there is no mind. As a matter of fact, you don't have time to do that, do you? And second, the emotion will have already gotten hold of you if you need to think it out laboriously like that, so is too late. You might then think, "Okay, I'll let it go," but it has already caught you. It is very difficult to liberate thoughts or emotions with that level of skill.

Conversely, the moment a good driver sees a chicken, he immediately slams on the brakes. The sight of the chicken makes him put his foot on

the brake. He doesn't have to think; the braking reflex is automatic. Without a chicken, there's no need to brake; because of the chicken, he steps on the brakes. Applying this analogy to the emotions, we could say that the thought or emotion throws you back into rigpa. In other words, when you are able to practice this way, the odds of you getting really sucked into emotional states will be less and less. The very moment an emotion arises, you acknowledge the wakeful knowing, and the emotion is like a drawing upon water. We need to be like that. The past masters said that freed upon arising is the most important of the three ways of liberation.

I consider this principle of not suppressing emotions very important when you have children. You look at your children and train them accordingly. Some children are very smart, very aggressive, very feisty—they may seem like they're about to break the whole table, right now; it's that sort of energy. But then the next moment they can be so loving and kind, so beautiful, so relaxed, so clear, so juicy. They can be very naughty, full of energy, and at the same time so pure, so full of life. I have noticed that in many Western countries children are constantly told, "Don't do this! Don't do that! You shouldn't, you can't!" To always restrict children hampers their natural ability as they grow up and curbs their strength. They might be given very reasonable, psychologically correct explanations as to why they shouldn't do this or that. In Tibet children get told not to do things and are sometimes given a whack, while in the West it is said sweetly, with a kiss on the cheek. Whether it is done roughly or sweetly, the children are still being suppressed. This will cause them to be timid as adults, to hold themselves back. Sometimes I see children around eleven or twelve years old who already have adult worries in their minds. I can see their minds almost ready to start thinking because you give them too much reason to do this or not to do that. They do something a little bit wrong and are made to feel in the wrong. They are psychologically trapped. I don't feel that this is such a healthy way to bring children up. It teaches children to have no self-confidence.

I am suggesting here that we could treat our mind as if it were an energetic kid. We need to teach our mind, as well as our child, to be in charge of itself—to teach it how to steer itself. This is really necessary, rather than imposing all sorts of external restrictions. The other way

may be very reasonable, of course, but it's like Mom and Dad are constantly arranging a ring of thorns around the child. No matter what direction she moves, they warn, "You will bump into a thorn and it will hurt you." Eventually the child becomes trapped, unable to move, because there are thorns in all directions. She hasn't even had the chance to touch them yet, to learn from her own experience, but Mom and Dad have told her not to—it'll hurt! The child thus becomes completely surrounded by psychological thorns. I don't think that is very healthy.

I have children myself. I have one daughter who is about nine. I have been observing her very carefully, and I've observed that the healthiest situation is when her mind is educated, so that she can think for herself. This is something like what you find in Daniel Goleman's book *Emotional Intelligence*—allowing people to take charge of themselves. I am now teaching her a bit of meditation practice. I am not teaching her any psychological meditation, no teachings on the theory of impermanence. There seem to be too many psychological theories being bandied about, upsetting people and causing worry. I honestly feel that the problem is too much psychology, not too little. I am not teaching my daughter any psychology right now, but just allowing her to be at ease with herself, peacefully, and then telling her to be aware of her thoughts as they occur. I tell her, "It's not such a big deal—thoughts happen, just let them go." Children often take their thoughts very seriously. So if I succeed in undoing her tendency to take her own thoughts too seriously, she can adjust: "Oh! I can change my state of mind!" She can let it go. Then she will feel more confident because she is in charge of whether or not she changes her state of mind. Therefore, as she grows up, she won't take life too seriously and have all the problems that come with taking it too seriously. I feel that children who are brought up this way improve as they grow.

Let me restate my point. Children have a certain energy that is part of their basic character, and I don't think that it is our job to make them be psychologically different, to somehow shape them into *not* being that way. Rather, we should teach children to be in charge of themselves and steer themselves. Some children can be so wild one minute, and the next so loving and compassionate. To disturb those qualities is not healthy. Those energies *are* the children. If you do meddle with this, it's like their spark, their radiance, is reduced. On the other hand, if they're not taught

how to be in charge of themselves and you just allow their energy to manifest in an uncontrolled form, it can grow into excessive patterns, and that is no good either.

Let's apply this to ourselves. If every time a thought occurs we tell ourselves, wagging a finger, "You are bad, you have a thought!" and we do this again and again—"You are bad, you have a thought, you are bad!" we'll start to feel guilty every time a thought occurs. The thoughts get very timid; they don't dare arise. The thoughts start to shrink back in fear, and more and more fear is created. From the Dzogchen perspective, so what if a thought arises? It is no big deal. Emotions arise, fine, no matter. Emotions have a right to arise, and you have the right not to cling to them. We should neither disturb the emotion's freedom nor our right not to get influenced and carried away.

If we educate ourselves in this way, we become much more capable of moving in any direction we choose. We become flexible people who are unafraid of ourselves. Most people suffer from being afraid of themselves, afraid of not being able to liberate the thought or emotion that is about to arise. At the moment the thought arises, they single it out as no good. You often hear that negative emotions are bad, but you don't know how to let them go. All these negative traits have been in you. But you can't *not* be how you are, so what do you do? For the unrealized person, there is only one solution: be depressed about it. All spiritual systems say negative thoughts are bad. You cannot find any that say negative thoughts are good. Really, are there any? Maybe some of them say that you should express them, let them out, but that is still because they know that negative thoughts are no good, that if you did not let them out you would just keep them festering inside. It is merely a different way of phrasing the same depressing information.

The main point is to be free of negative thought and emotion. The methods of getting rid of these differ, of course. There are oceans of books written about how to do so, from both spiritual and psychological points of view. We all understand that attachment, aggression, closed-mindedness, and all the other selfish emotions make problems for people. There is a broad agreement that negative emotional states are difficult, painful, and bad because they cause problems for ourselves and for others. Everybody is in agreement about that. But how to be free, for real? That is not a settled matter. There is a lack of clarity about how to

be truly free. No matter how much it is explained or discussed or thought about, the problem remains largely unsolved. Honestly, there is only one solution: set your buttocks down on the meditation cushion and train in how to be free. As far as I am concerned, that is the only way.

There are two ways of being free. One is the general way: when an emotion is present, you use a remedy against it to make it subside and to ensure that it does not arise again. The second is the particular Dzogchen style, in which you don't apply a separate remedy but simply recognize the self-knowing wakefulness within the emotion so that it dissolves. In fact, one recognizes that the emotion does not exist to begin with.

I would like to tell a story about Angtrin, a remarkable yogi who lives in Tashi Jong, northern India. His spiritual tradition is the Drukpa Kagyu but his practice is Nyingma, Dzogchen, like me. When he lived in Tibet, he practiced meditation a lot and became very peaceful. He stayed in solitary retreat for six years, and the retreat situation was very comfortable, very nice. In those days, people would bring food to yogis on retreat, or if the yogi had his own ingredients, he could cook up a nice little meal for himself. There was lots of firewood around; when the sun was shining it could be quite warm; and one might even see a wide-open vista of sky. There were trees all around and various animals could be seen in the forest. The yogi might have some pride: "I am practicing the Dharma. I am very happy; it is very comfortable for me here. There are no negative emotions, no difficulties, no obstacles. I'm still young." After six years Angtrin felt that his practice was going very well indeed. But then he thought, "Well, who knows, maybe this practice has just turned me into a tranquil vegetable." So he asked his master, Khamtrul Rinpoche, "Wouldn't it perhaps be better if I went to a scary place, a rough, rugged, unpleasant place?" Khamtrul Rinpoche said, "Yes, definitely, you should go to such a place," and he gave directions to a particular location.

Arriving there, Angtrin found a huge cave where the sun never shone, with water trickling down the entrance. In the evening, a large flock of pigeons flew around inside, making a lot of noise while shitting down on him. The first day he didn't know what was going on. He put out various containers to collect the water trickling down, but when he

drank from it, he said, "What is this? It has a strange taste." Later he realized it was urine from the pigeons. The cave was cold and damp, noisy, and scary at night. As he practiced there he found that his former peace of mind was tracelessly gone. He thought, "My practice has gone to pieces. Now what should I do?" And he felt that whatever he had done in the past didn't amount to much, so now he really had to practice. It was very difficult in the beginning, with the restless pigeons flying around in the dark. It was like being in the bardo, with all the turmoil and noise. Angtrín tried to cultivate this inner strength of rigpa by not surrendering himself to the distraction, by not getting carried away with the noise. He trained like that over and over again. He stayed in that place for maybe another six years. And now, whatever happens, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, *really* doesn't affect him. He doesn't care anymore. But that doesn't mean that he ignores everything.

I believe that when Angtrín dies, he probably won't have that much trouble in the bardo. For him, all emotions are, as they say, subsumed within the expanse of rigpa. In other words, he's free. Until we reach that level, we need to practice. We must grow used to this freedom. Use as a yardstick your ability to cope with whatever emotion arises. We shouldn't aim at just feeling good when practicing. We must transcend being hijacked by the current emotion, being on the defensive against it, or trying to get rid of it. We reach this gradually, as we become more and more stable and confident in empty essence, cognizant nature, and unconfined capacity. Then we discover that the emotion does not necessarily run us over, and we don't need to get caught up in it either. We don't have to prevent or suppress the emotion. Rather, we simply allow it, spontaneously and naturally, to become an embellishment of rigpa.

STUDENT: I was going to ask about anger. I noticed I was feeling angry last night and this morning, and also feeling bad about myself for feeling angry. In practice I tried to recognize who was angry, but the thoughts kept coming and coming. Next, I switched to supported shamatha and then unsupported and then back to rigpa, which I'm not good at anyway. I wondered if you could help me—I'm not sure what to do.

RINPOCHE: Continue practicing, that's good.

STUDENT: Which practice?

RINPOCHE: All the practices—do the *ngöndro*, do yidam practice, practice shamatha, practice vipashyana, recognize mind essence, supplicate the guru, contemplate the four mind-changings, everything. Do prostrations and train in exchanging yourself with others, sending and taking. When you get angry, then think, “Fine, I am so lucky that this anger comes here! May this anger deplete the anger in all other beings; may this bring an end to anger in everyone else!”

STUDENT: But perhaps it perpetuates anger. If you have anger, there’s the possibility of creating more anger.

RINPOCHE: It’s impossible to be only angry, as if anger were an absolute. There’s always a combination of different factors. As a matter of fact, nothing exists completely on its own—there’s no entity like that. There’s always a support, some kind of prop to support the anger. Either it is attachment, or the feeling of “me” or of something that “should have happened but didn’t.” There are all sorts of thoughts that team up to justify to oneself the reason to be angry. And if some of these are taken away, the anger cannot really hold itself up as easily as before. Sometimes the issue is that “I didn’t get what I wanted” or “It didn’t go my way,” and because of that attachment, as well as the deluded notion of “I,” there is a platform for the anger. Or it could be: “I came all the way up to Nagi Gumpa. I didn’t come up here to be angry, but now I’m angry! This is really bad; what should I do? I must not be angry. Now I’m angry with myself for being angry.” And it gets worse and worse. This is also possible.

At the moment anger arises, as with any other emotion, take a care-free attitude: “Well, I may not understand the Dharma completely, but that’s how I am at present. Now I’m angry. Sometimes I’m not angry, so what? It doesn’t matter that much; just let it come, let it go.” If you take that kind of unworried attitude, the anger doesn’t have that much of a hold, so it can’t get entrenched. As I mentioned, the ego belief is anger’s basis. If the ego is allowed to just dissolve, anger cannot lie around by itself, completely disconnected. It too must dissolve. If you’re really smart, then cheat the ego. To cheat the ego, what must you do? You befriend ego, not as in being its real friend, but just acting like you’re a friend of ego. Then ego thinks, “Great! He’s very honest with me, no problem.” *[Laughs]*

STUDENT: Is it possible to love your anger?

RINPOCHE: Sure, definitely. This is an important point. It is difficult, but possible. Giving love to the anger means giving space to the anger, telling the anger, “You seem to be so crowded here. Why don’t I give you a little more room?” Giving it room could be called love, love as *giving space to*. Love here does not necessarily mean obeying anger blindly; it is another type of love, which is just to give room. It’s like when your brain, your head, is really tired: giving love to the brain is to give it a break, a rest. When you’re angry, you feel very confused. It’s like there’s a traffic jam in your emotions—you don’t know what to do or how to deal with it. So just give it space, open up, don’t cling, but love and accept what’s going on. Don’t immediately judge the anger or any other emotion as being awful; just give it some room, give it space.

STUDENT: When anger comes up, I have tried some “looking and seeing.” I find the anger is still there, but it doesn’t possess me. I have a little bit of distance.

RINPOCHE: That’s very good, because now you are not giving all your energy to the anger, and when you are not infusing it with energy, slowly it deflates. That is entirely different from thinking, “I must get rid of it, rid of it, rid of it.”

Take this example: There’s a balloon in front of you, representing the anger, and the pump to inflate it is located right under your bum. You’re meditating. You’re saying, “Meditation, rigpa, letting go of the anger. I don’t want anger. I don’t want anger. Rigpa come back. I don’t want anger.” [*Rinpoche rocks from side to side*] Doing this, you are pumping, pumping, pumping, and the balloon inflates more and more. “I must let anger go. Rigpa must let it go.” You’re still pumping, pumping, pumping, and the balloon keeps filling up. Automatically, you’re linked to the anger, although this is not an event that unfolds in physical space but in your mental field. Different rules apply here—if it were happening out in physical space, then you could throw something at the balloon, pop it, and the whole thing would be over. But in the mental field the energy of a situation comes from your mind, your attention, so giving credence to the anger actually pumps it up.

Shantideva mentioned that if you want to walk on a smooth, soft surface everywhere you go, it won’t help to cover the entire earth with soft leather. As a matter of fact, it is impossible, so it’s much more practical to just put leather under the soles of your feet, so that wherever you

walk you are touching that soft leather. Similarly, we cannot control all the objects we experience, to have them be just right, although we surely try. Ordinary people fool themselves with their dualistic clinging to subject and object. meditators can fool themselves by trying to orchestrate their meditation experience. One could cling to the feeling of bliss or of being clear. But it is much better to sort out the perceiver, to handle the mind—then everything is automatically right. This is an enormously important point. ‡

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