

Bhante Buddharakkhita

*Overcoming Difficult Emotions in a Chaotic World*

Week 3: “Redirecting the Mind”

August 15, 2020



*Namo Buddhaya, Namō Dharmaya, Namō Sanghaya.* I pay homage to the Buddha, dharma, and sangha.

In this session, I'm going to talk about three more methods of overcoming difficult emotions in this chaotic world. As you know, this world is chaotic, and you need to have so many tools in the toolbox to deal with it. In this session, I'm going to cover three more methods: one is replacement of a difficult emotion with its opposite. The next is reflection on the danger of the difficult emotions. The third is the redirection method whereby you redirect your mind to something else, something wholesome. These are very effective methods.

The Buddha gave these methods in a discourse, which is called *Vitakkasanthana Sutta* in Majjhima Nikaya, which is a discourse on overcoming destructive thoughts. It's very effective. Though in it the Buddha was talking about how to overcome obsessive thoughts, it's equally important on how to deal with difficult emotions.

The first method is called replacement. You replace a difficult emotion with a wholesome emotion. So you reflect on how unwholesome emotions such as greed, hatred, delusion, fear, anxiety is just like having an old peg; that's actually the simile Buddha used, when you have all the peg you want to remove, you bring in new peg and use it to knock out and replace the old one.

So the same thing happens in Africa here, when you get a thorn. Here in Africa sometimes when you walk in the forest you are pierced by a thorn. To get that thorn out, you have to break off a new one, and then use it to remove the first thorn. In other countries they may not know thorns, I don't know. But let's say you have broken glass in your skin, you've stepped on it; you have to use a tweezer to get out of broken glass, right? So you replace it. This replacement method is very effective.

I'll give an example. Let's say anger is arising in your mind. You have to be mindful, as we talked about, but sometimes mindfulness may not be enough to approach anger. So here it applies to mindfulness. Don't abandon mindfulness. Mindfulness is very important throughout all these ways of dealing with difficult emotions. You use mindfulness to select another method, another tool, that can allow you to overcome the difficult emotion.

If you have anger, you substitute it or replace it with lovingkindness. When you have cruelty, you replace it with compassion. What do you do when you have delusion? Some people don't

Bhante Buddharakkhita

*Overcoming Difficult Emotions in a Chaotic World*

Week 3: "Redirecting the Mind"

August 15, 2020



know when they are deluded, how can they substitute? You substitute delusion with understanding, with wisdom. A lot of fear is arising these days, "How are we going to survive in the future in this uncertain world?" So you substitute fear with courage. I'm healthy, I'm alive, I'm breathing, no? So that gives you courage to live your life, instead of being afraid that now we are all going to die, the whole world is going to die of COVID-19 and nobody's going to live—no way! People are going to live. We have survived a lot, many pandemics, in the past. Human beings are very resilient. But there are many people who freaking out. We are going to survive. So, for me, I have courage I'll survive and people will survive. So, this method is basically simple; you just substitute the opposite, you substitute unwholesome emotions with wholesome emotions. Very simple.

The next method is reflecting on the danger of these difficult emotions. Let's say when anger arises, when fear arises, when anxiety is arising, can you be mindful of the repercussions, the consequences, of these difficult emotions? That alone can actually help you to disengage yourself.

For instance when you're driving a car is a very good example. When you're driving a car on a highway, you look ahead and see a police officer, a cop, 30 meters from where you are. You've been speeding. What do you do? Do you continue to accelerate or do you remove your foot from the gas and slow down? If you're going to slow down that means you must have reflected that "Okay, I'm going to get a ticket. This ticket is going to be very expensive, 50 dollars per ticket." I don't know in other countries but in Uganda tickets are expensive. So once you reflect that they are going to pay a lot of money because you're speeding then that helps you to slow down, slow down to normal speed, and then you don't get a ticket.

When we have difficult emotions and don't reflect on the danger of these emotions, then we are going to be inundated with these difficult emotions because we didn't reflect on how dangerous and stressful this emotion is and we are going to get a ticket. The ticket we get is not given by traffic police, but the ticket is losing peace of mind. We become stressed, we become so exhausted. By the time when you are really hijacked by a difficult emotion you are very exhausted. I have a name for exhaustion, I call it "flat tire syndrome." You look like a flat tire, out of life, demoralized, because you are hijacked by emotions.

But once you reflect, "Oh, these emotions are arising, anger is arising, fear is arising. It's dangerous, it's very stressful. I'm not going to be able to sleep very well or concentrate. I'm not going to be happy, I'm not going to enjoy this meal if I continue to be angry like this. Then you

Bhante Buddharakkhita

*Overcoming Difficult Emotions in a Chaotic World*

Week 3: "Redirecting the Mind"

August 15, 2020



see say, "Let me drop this train of thought that is bringing this anger." Then you do it because you reflected on the repercussions of certain emotions.

In my experience, I've seen many people do things without reflecting on the consequences of what they're doing. And that's very common when emotions come up. People just say "I am enjoying my anger." It's as if some of these emotions come with some kind of a nice kick. Sometimes people feel very strong, some people feel "Yes, I have a right to be angry." It gives you a nice kick, basically. But when we look at it we realize it brings a lot of stress. So you need to reflect on that. And you can also reflect on positive emotions: you see when you have lovingkindness, it brings happiness. So it's about reflecting on the results of afflictive emotions. That will help you overcome and reduce this line of thought.

Then lastly, the other method which I found out to be very effective is redirecting your mind. Redirecting your mind when there's a difficult emotion—anger, fear, or anxiety—means that when you are caught up in this difficult emotion, you can now turn your mind to something else that is wholesome.

This is very common, actually, when you're talking to somebody, and somebody can interrupt and say, "Hey, excuse me, I want to talk to you." You said no, just wait, give me two minutes. "No, no, I want to talk to you." And then if someone gives you five minutes, ten minutes, and you keep on talking to that person, by the time that you come back to the person you were talking with in the first place, you start asking, "What have you been talking about? I forgot." So this is a method of redirecting, at least you lose the grip of this difficult emotion.

In other words, you lose the momentum if you redirect your mind from one place to another. Let's say if anger is arising and then you just redirect your mind to the breath. Take a deep breath. Take another deep breath, another, slowly. Now I've redirected my mind from anger to the breath. This has a very therapeutic effect because you calm your mind. In fact, even from a biological point of view, it causes us to switch from what we call the sympathetic nervous system to the parasympathetic nervous system. The sympathetic nervous system brings us stress. But when you cross to the parasympathetic nervous system, it's very calm and relaxing.

This method is about buying time. You buy time when the emotion comes. You can take a little break. You redirect your mind, maybe to the body, come to the body, be mindful of the body. Maybe think about wholesome thoughts where you are generous, where you're kind,

Bhante Buddharakkhita

*Overcoming Difficult Emotions in a Chaotic World*

Week 3: “Redirecting the Mind”

August 15, 2020



compassionate. So you turn your mind towards a wholesome state of mind. You redirect your mind. This is very important.

So we've talked about replacement of an emotion with its opposite. We replace a difficult emotion with a wholesome emotion. We've talked about reflecting on the danger, the degradation of this particular emotion. WHEN you reflect like this, then the emotion will lose its grip on you, it will lose momentum. We also talked about redirecting our mind, you redirect your mind from unwholesome states of mind or difficult emotions towards wholesome states of mind. These three methods that we have discussed are very effective in dealing with difficult emotions in this chaotic world. In the next session we'll talk more about another method of what you call retracing the emotion, the springboard of emotion, and also resolution, making a strong resolution not to be caught up in emotion. Thank you very much for listening.