

IV

THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING: ADDICTION TO NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

We are addicted to negativities. Believe me, no matter how much you think you're not, we're all addicted to negativities. We're addicted to hatred; we're addicted to obsession; we're addicted to attachment; we're addicted to jealousy; we're addicted to fear. We like it. Even if we don't like it, we get into it because we're addicted.

You don't have to take a training course to learn how to hate a person. You don't need to go to school to learn attachment or obsession. Obsession comes up like this: you look at it, you like it, and you want to touch it again and again and again. That's how you get addicted to it. That's the reality. Jealousy also happens immediately, without learning. Something happens and jealousy pops up in our life. Look at the causes—our addiction to negative emotions and the activities that we engage in—and you will see that it is no wonder that we suffer. If we don't suffer, who else will?

Your mind is no secret to you; my mind is no secret to me. My mind may be a secret to you, your mind may be secret to me, but your mind is no secret to you. So look at it, look at how your mind functions. Your mind is more busy and naughty than a wild crazy monkey. If there is a wild crazy monkey in the temple, what happens? The monkey will jump all over the place, knock down all the candles, drink all the water, and if there's anything to be eaten, eat it. It will be jumping everywhere.

Our minds are much faster, much quicker, much more damaging than a wild crazy monkey. Even though we try to sit in a holy way, our minds don't see the holy way at all. They are bumping here and jumping there, caught by attachment, like a magnet picking up all the metal, zoom! What you are thinking of doesn't have to be something fantastic, but the mind will make it fantastic. Your mind will trick you. If you are obsessing about a person, you make the person ten times or maybe a hundred times better than they really are. You reduce the size and build up whatever you have to build up and cut whatever you have to cut. It's like getting the best artist available and shaping that image. You imagine that and then you obsess about it. Then, when you don't get it, you suffer. The person doesn't pay attention to you, and you suffer. That brings jealousy. Then you hate. That is how obsession becomes suffering, all the time.

That happens not only with persons, but also with things, fame, health, food—

everything! It's like overeating. A little too much of anything is not good for you, even if it's healthy. Too much brown rice is not necessarily great. Too much wheat grass juice is not necessarily great. Attachment creates two effects in our minds: one is positive, nice, smiling, and beautiful, and one is negative, hating, and hurting. They both come together in the mind.

Love and hate also function together. Each action we take, even how we look, even how we say hello, creates pain and pleasure for other people. We create pain, and it hurts people. But when we create pleasure, it also hurts people, because we're not capable of 100% pure love—we're not there yet. We don't yet know the "joy that has never known suffering."

So, how can we stop hurting our selves and others? Buddha discovered the answer and shared it with us, but to understand it, we need to examine our minds very carefully. Ask yourself: "What makes me hurt myself or other people? What kind of mind makes that come up?" As you will discover, we don't function at all without mental direction. Without the mind, we are a dead body. Mind moves first and makes us do this and that. Mind makes us function. Even walking, sitting, going to the toilet—for every single thing we do, the mind comes before the action.

Our job is to observe that mind. As yourself: "What kind of thoughts and emotions make me do things?" Everything that we do that hurts us or other people follows some thought or emotion of anger or hatred or obsession or, most importantly, fear. Fear makes us do all kinds of things. Fear, hatred, obsession—these are the negative mental faculties.

Sometimes we think we have no control whatsoever over these feelings. It seems that way because we are addicted to them. It's like people who are addicted to a substance, like drugs or alcohol, and it looks like they can't do anything—they have to have it. It's the same with people addicted to negative emotions, like us. We do the same thing. It is nothing but an addiction.

But though our addiction to some completely huge emotion rolls over us and feels completely controlling, it's not permanent. It is impermanent. Not only that, but it is preventable, avoidable. It's not just treatable, like some chronic illness that still gets you in the end, but completely correctable and preventable. If you go to an AA program, you can prevent it. I don't mean that Buddha made an AA program, but our addiction to negative emotions is preventable and correctable. We don't have to suffer.

Negative emotions are reversible, and you don't even have to submit to them in the first place. You don't have to entertain them. But we do, all the time. This happens because we don't recognize them, we don't know what's happening until our negative emotions have completely rolled over us and soaked us. We have a saying in Tibet about some clever people, "They are so witty, not only have they sold the item to you and taken your money, but they have already recycled it before you

even know it's been sold."

So that is our problem. The answer is to recognize and acknowledge. It's nothing to be ashamed of. Everybody has the same problem. Some people don't want to say it. They try to smile and cover it with makeup. Denial keeps us from recognizing the problem. Denial never gives us the room to help ourselves at all. So do not deny: recognize, acknowledge, and remember.

Once you recognize a negative emotion, even though it's too late to stop it, it doesn't matter. Better late than never. Even if it's past tense, you can still say, "Oh, that's what happened. That's fine." So acknowledge it. When you acknowledge problems in the "past tense," it helps you to acknowledge the present, too. That helps you to acknowledge a negative emotion even before it comes up, and that's how you prevent it.

Negative Emotions and the Ego

Behind all the negative emotions is the ego. Ego is the problem. By the word "ego" I refer to the combination of fear and confusion. Traditionally in Tibetan they call this *ma rig pa*, which means "ignorance," but that doesn't make much sense here. The senior guru of His Holiness the Dalai Lama in his teaching in Delhi in 1980 used the word "ego," not in the sense that the psychologists used, but in the normal usage such as when we say, "That is your ego talking."

Ego has complete control over us, and makes us do exactly the opposite of what we want to do. We want to be good. The definition of what is good for me is not hurting anyone, being kind, compassionate, but ego makes us angry, hateful, obsessed, and jealous. All these emotions are the results of ego. Ego produces this. And truly, if you sit down and meditate, look inside yourself, you will see it, how ego makes you do everything in the name of protecting you.

Then you begin to see the real enemy, the real challenge: your opponent. Ego gives us the idea that we must be better than the other one. It is natural; we all have it. If you pull back, sit down, meditate, and try to figure out how your mind works within yourself, you will clearly see it. Oh, that's the enemy. Avoid it. Or cut it out. Or kill it. Go beyond. Overpower it. If not, at least protect yourself. Right? So hold it, don't lose it, hang on there! Think. You will get it. We do not need Buddha to discover this. Just you and me, we sit down together, all by ourselves.

Think about how your mind works. Make yourself the observer. Move away from your mind, like a little fellow that goes outside, and look back at yourself to see how your mind is working. And hey, you have such a show there. You don't have to go to the movie theatre. You don't have to watch television. There's a tremendous show there, and it is completely relevant to your self. You will see how we build the "me." It is all about "Protect me, me, me, me! I want to be happy. I'm the one. I want, I, me,

I, me, me, me! If anyone acts against my happiness, what I will do is kill them.” Right? It’s there, in our minds. Believe me, honestly. You don’t have to tell anybody else; tell yourself. Watch, you have it. We all do. And that makes us react like a porcupine, ready to shoot anybody who comes in our way: Boom!

Where is that beautiful person we want to be? It’s gone. It has become a porcupine. That is caused by ego, which is traditionally called ignorance. Ego is the combination of confusion, fear, and also a little bit of self-cherishing all together. That is the source of all our negative emotions. Our negative emotions make us do the negative things, although we don’t want to. With or without knowing, sometimes even knowingly, we do it with a little chuckle, hey-hey-hey, but we do it. We can’t help it. That is the ego influence.

We are addicted to our negative emotions. And that makes us do negative things. Because the original source is confused, we think if we push the person out who is in our way, then we are going to be completely happy and everything will be wonderful. We don’t realize that if we get rid of one layer, another layer pops up. We all do this. As a society we do it, as individuals we do it. Look at our history for the last two hundred years or so. We think there’s an enemy out there. We fight with them, and when we get done with them, we think we will be happy.

But enemies never end. Yes, we got challenged head on by Hitler, and we had World War II. The peace didn’t last very long, and within a couple of years, Communism popped up. And then we got over that, and then all these dictators popped up. And then we got over them or not, but very soon Al-Qaeda and all these extremists popped up.

It is never ending because of the ego within us. That is true for nations, society, families, and true for the individual. Buddha found the key. We have to handle the emotions over here. The change and what you can do is over here. Because this is the causal level, not the result level, the change is not at the gross level, but at the subtle level. These are our own deeds, and if we deal with them directly, it is much easier to handle the change from our own side.

That is how our lives are really functioning. One after another, one layer after another, it continues. We are confused because of our egos. The Noble Truth of the cause of suffering is actually the ego. It is the “me, me, me.” Why? Because if there is no “me,” then the question of “my” does not arise. And if there is no “my,” there is no need for attachment. And, if there is no “me,” there is also no “you” and therefore, no ground for hatred. That is very simple to say, but very hard to realize.

Ego is grasping at something called “me” within me that seems completely superior, almost supernaturally superior. Everything we do is for the purpose of protecting that, making that prosperous, developing that. Entertaining the ego is the cause of suffering. Not only should we not entertain the ego, but we should

completely wipe out the ego. If we can do that, we'll be free of suffering. That is Buddha's discovery. That is the goal of our spiritual practice. Just opposite those negative emotions are love and compassion. That's also what the Buddha discovered. When you wipe out your ego, you're left with nothing but love and compassion.

Physical, Mental and Emotional Sufferings

The question is: the pains and sufferings that we experience—physical, mental, and emotional sufferings—where do they come from?

The sufferings in the hell realm, for instance, where do they come from? In Shantideva's *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* (Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life), we read:

chak sey sang shey su ye je mey so te dang jig le jung

...who made the charcoal burning grounds?

Buddha's reply is:

te dan te don tom je je dig sem ye mo tu way sung

All of them come from our negative emotions.

According to the experience of the Buddha, all our sufferings come from our negative emotions. Mental, physical, emotional sufferings, all come from our negative emotions. Do you get it? Hatred, obsession, jealousy, fear, those types of minds cause our sufferings. You are not going to find any pain that does not come from those negative emotions.

Addiction to negative emotions and negative actions are the causes of suffering. Nothing else. No one made the fire ground and the fireballs that are supposed to be hitting individuals in the hell realms. Nobody gets any individual addicted to drugs. It is the individual who does it.

Fighting

Even when two people are very close together, like two peas in a pod, there is still the addiction of fighting. You scream and yell. Maybe the roof will fall on you, or you may be landing down the stairs. Who knows? That is also suffering.

No one is made to fight. Fighting is also an addiction. One has to watch all the time. Otherwise, early in the morning, you'll already be screaming, and someone else could hear you on the telephone.

Why, when two people love each other, do they fight? Because of jealousy or

dissatisfaction. "I want it this way, you want it that way!" I'll say, "I want red wine." You'll say, "I have to have white wine." That's just an example.

Depression

Among the mental sufferings, a big one is depression. Depression is part of addiction. You are addicted to sitting and doing nothing and not moving, afraid and addicted to fear, and you just can't shake it off. And then because the addiction builds up, it becomes worse and worse and worse.

Depression is like the dull, overcast weather we have here in Michigan. I was hired by the University of California, Santa Barbara, for one week as a visiting professor. I had to give six lectures, which I did, and then came back! The weather is very nice over there, but the weather here makes you depressed! The usual Michigan gray weather! However, you can have a sunshine mind! Why not? The mental capacity of the human being is unlimited and can do all kinds of things. That is why we should not let any of those pains overpower us.

Remember Spaulding Gray, the brilliant person who wrote *Swimming to Cambodia*? When I met him the first time, we did a Tricycle benefit together in New York. He was such a brilliant and wonderful person. Then, year-by-year, he got deeper into depression. That depression became so difficult for him.

One time he came to see me at Jewel Heart in New York. At that time he was still okay, but quite depressed. Then the last time [I saw him] was when he came to see me at Jewel Heart in New York, brought in by a common friend. His depression was so bad, you can't do anything; he was just not there. So even a brilliant person like him finally committed suicide by jumping into the water in New York.

Even if you don't do anything, depression will eventually change, because it is impermanent. At the end of the lowdown, miserable time is going to be a high up and happy time. High up and happy also doesn't stay there. At the end, it goes down to deep suffering. That is true reality.

One of my dharma friends told me about a dream. In the dream, he fell into the earth, thirteen layers down or something. Way down below, you know, like in a well. He was stuck there. But then some kind of wind came and made a little piece of paper fly out of there, and that paper flying out of there happened to be him!

Laziness

All this is very easy to say, see, and understand, but in practice it is hard. Talking about myself, I can see that as soon as I do some exercise or even if I just walk, my physical body feels better, but my laziness is such that I do not walk. I know that if I don't walk, being the couch potato that I am today, I'll just get bigger and bigger. I could end up paralyzed—I know that for sure! However, I cannot make myself

move. I say "I'll walk today," then "I'll walk in the evening," then "I'll walk tomorrow!" The mind of walking is there, but the mind of walking *now* is not there! That is how laziness works.

For me being lazy is an addiction. I'm addicted. When you are overcome by addiction, you need more than knowing about it. You really have to act. One good thing with Western people is this: if you have the knowledge and the understanding, you act. Persons like me, we have a lot of knowledge about things, but we don't act. We just keep on doing whatever we do normally every day. The sun rises, and the sun sets; we get up, and we go to sleep. We have the information, but still we don't act. But in the West, the good thing is that people act. That is your advantage and you should take that advantage. One you have the information, apply it. Do it and do it now, because tomorrow you never know. When is tomorrow coming? One of the great teachers, Gungtang Jampalyang, said:

Whether tomorrow comes first, or the so-called future life, one never knows.

So therefore it is better to act now rather than wait for tomorrow. Tomorrow may never even come. See? I have the information in my head. Without thinking it pops up in my head just like popping out of a computer. However, can I act? No, I can't, because I'm addicted to being lazy and doing nothing!

For example, we know we should get up early in the morning. I don't mean at 3:30 am or 4:30 am or 5:30 am. I mean reasonably early. But we think, "Yeah, it doesn't matter. If you need to sleep seven hours or eight hours or whatever, it doesn't matter. Whenever you get up, that's fine." We all think that way.

But for the purpose of stopping our addictions, I think it is important for the individual to have discipline from the early morning, when you get up. Yes, it's true. On the weekends, because you don't have to work, you sleep late, and on weekdays, you get up early. However, that causes you not to have discipline. Since you sleep in on Saturday morning, you also sleep in on Sunday morning, and so by Monday, you love to sleep because you've picked up the habit. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that he gets up every morning at 4:30 a.m., wherever he is, even when he's traveling. No matter what time, which place, wherever he arrives, he gets up at 4:30 am. When he's at his place in Dharamsala, he gets up at 3:30 am. Here, we begin to go to bed at 3:30 am!

The point is that when you have that discipline and make sure you don't sleep beyond 7:00 am, when you are up, you've got to do something. So what are you going to do? It gives you an opportunity to do your prayers. Or it gives you the opportunity to do your exercise. Discipline begins at the beginning of the day. Once you keep on going with the discipline, then it goes throughout your day. No problem.

I've been doing that. When I was a kid, I had to get up early in the morning. If I did not get up by 5:00 am or 5:30 am, I used to get hit on my knees with a stick, and I would wake up with pain. I would have to get up immediately. This is how in old Tibet they disciplined kids, by hitting them. The point is that no one was angry. No one had hatred. It was just a part of the discipline; they hit you all the time. We even used to have a saying, "your ear is on your butt!" It means until you get a hit or a spank on your butt, you won't move, because you can't hear the message! Hitting is a bad thing, of course, no doubt about it. However, it might have protected the person from doing something wrong.

If I had been hit for not doing my exercise, I would be half the size that I am today. And no, I'm not inviting anyone to hit me! So the discipline really begins at the moment you open your eyes. That is the time to begin cutting the laziness, at the time when you are lounging around in the morning, having a cup of coffee with no disturbance. If you can begin to discipline yourself at that time, there is a better chance of discipline throughout the day.

There is a Tibetan saying:

If you did right on the 1st day of the month, you'll do right until the 15th of the month.

It means, if you have discipline and do the right thing the moment you get up early in the morning, it will carry you for at least half a day. And within half a day, again motivate yourself. That will carry you through the other half of the day. That is how one should work against one's addictions.

Food Addictions

People may think, "You are diabetic because you had too much sugar!" That is true! I had too much sugar when I was young! I was obsessed with sugar. I used to eat big rock candy every night, and in the morning when I woke up, all my blankets were stuck to my face! Every morning! I mean, if I didn't become a diabetic, who else would become a diabetic? Right? In the early 80's, I used to eat those Amy Joys donuts—twenty-four of them at a go! Twelve at the place where I would have a cup of coffee, and then I took another twelve to the late Mrs. Yuthok's house and ate there, too! That is how I abused my physical body, because of my addiction to sugar! The consequence of that sugar addiction is that you become diabetic.

On top of that, there is high blood pressure because of our addiction to salt and soy sauce. Some of my friends went to China and saw this soy sauce factory. What happens is that they put soybeans in there and hire a lot of the workers to walk over the soy beans in order to make the soy sauce. Yes, that's what they do! When it comes in the bottle, it looks nice and beautiful, with a wonderful label and all of that.

We don't mind paying four or five dollars. But look at how it's made! People walk on it, you know, dozens of people, and they lose their sandals and their underwear and everything in there! Honestly! Even if we have total knowledge of that, we cannot stop using soy sauce because we're addicted to the taste. Without soy sauce, no matter what you do, the food doesn't taste right.

Who Can Help?

These are the real sufferings we have. Who can help? Nobody, except ourselves. Actually when you have to depend on a second or third person's help, it's not good. You have to help yourself. You yourself have to understand reality, what is happening, and then try to act on your understanding.

How do we deal with this? Can we deal with it? Yes, we can! We do have one tool, which is willpower and determination. If we cannot apply this, we fall all the time. But as long as you keep in mind that you want to overcome the addictions, as long as you don't submit, every time you hesitate, you will make it. That's what we do in our prayers, in our commitments. Remember the example of the dead-tired, over-loaded donkey pulled and pushed and dragged uphill? That's what we do today with our commitments. We drag our feet as much as possible, but somehow, we have the good sense not to break them completely. No matter if it's two in the morning or three in the morning, we still do it. In a way, it's great.

But on the other hand you don't have to torture yourself doing that. If you have strong willpower, you can easily fulfill your commitments first thing in the morning or whenever you have time. You don't have to torture yourself. If we could apply the same method of dragging our feet until the last minute to our addictions, we would have less suffering, for sure!

But if you hope to end them in one day—like making a New Year's resolution and saying, "No more fighting!"—it's never going to work. One has to see to it that the addiction gets reduced. This week should be less than last week. Next week should be less than this week. The week after that should be less than that week. So, week-by-week and month-by-month, you will reduce your addictions, not only fighting, but all addictions: drugs, alcohol, sex, whatever. All of them should be able to be reduced day-by-day, week-by-week, month-by-month, hour-by-hour.

When the addiction is popping up, at that time, you have to recognize and realize, "Hey, here you are! You've come back again to haunt me!" If you realize that, it's great! But sometimes you lose. You realize, yet suddenly some friend will say this or that, and you may react badly, although you might have promised yourself, "This will be the last time." All that will happen. Don't worry about it. We're not Buddha yet, but keep up the determination. Don't submit. Don't say to your self, "I lost it, so I might as well let it go for a while. Then next time when something happens, maybe

then I will stop.” That is a terrible idea. That will make you lose completely. So even if you lose now, it’s fine. But next time, you should stop.

Cigarette smoking is one addiction, as an example. The same thing goes for hatred. The same thing goes for obsession. Look at Buddha, 2600 years ago, who came up with all these ideas and thoughts. He was not stupid at all. He recognized that the cause of suffering is either the delusion cause—our addiction to negative emotions—or the karmic cause. Without the delusion cause, there will be no karmic cause, because one doesn’t act without thought. It is the mind that creates the ideas.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION/MEDITATION

1. What negative emotions or habits are my addictions? What steps have I taken in the past to overcome them? What more might I do?
2. Do I agree that negative emotions and their consequences are preventable and avoidable? Why or why not?
3. In what ways have I experienced that the “cause of suffering is actually the ego”?