

Trungram Gyalwa Rinpoche
The Power of the Third Moment Method
Week One: “Recognizing Emotions as They Arise”
January 1, 2018



Hello. My name is Trungram Gyalwa. At [the age of] 18 months, I was recognized as a reincarnate lama. At age 4, I entered a Tibetan Buddhist monastery in the Himalayas. Thereafter I went through training in traditional monasticism and in higher Buddhist studies. I started meditation when I was a teenager.

Welcome to this four week dharma talk program. I am at Dharmakaya Center for Wellbeing in upstate New York. During this course I am going to talk about something I call the “Third Moment Method.”

In everyday life we are besieged by emotions. A driver cuts us off and we feel angry. A coworker gets a promotion and we are jealous. A gooey cookie looks so tempting we forget our diet.

Some emotions, such as compassion, love, and kindness can be helpful. But emotion can also be unhelpful, sometimes even destructive. When that happens, we react in a way that has negative consequences. For example, we send a nasty email that we regret right after and have to spend a lot of time cleaning it up.

We need a method that can help us [handle unhelpful emotions] in real time, not afterwards. This is why we have the Third Moment Method. The Third Moment Method not only helps us overcome our negative emotions and reactions, but also helps us access the essence of our mind so that we can see reality.

In the next four weeks we will focus on four main things. First we will cover the nature of our emotions. Second, we will discuss karma, intentional action, how causes and conditions play into our emotions, and how to break the cycle of karma. The third talk will be on the three moments (sensing, arising, and reacting). Lastly we will focus on how to practice the actual Third Moment Method.

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The Third Moment Method is especially needed in our time. Why? First of all, it embodies the core of Buddhist practice. When I think of the entirety of Buddhist teachings and then distill them into a single practice, I think of this method. Of course, there are many valuable teachings. Generally, they are based on wisdom or compassion. They teach us why we should avoid negative emotions such as hatred and jealousy, and how we can cultivate compassion, love, kindness, and wisdom. They teach not only why, but how, step by step, we can do that. Those valuable teachings deepen our understanding and inspire us. They give us reasons and explanations that lead us to our own first-hand experiences through meditation.

But understanding these reasons and explanations requires time. First you need time to understand what the teacher is saying, and then you need time to understand whether it's really true or not. The teachings are also logical, so you must use logic to understand them. Logic requires your mind to be clear and unbiased; otherwise it doesn't work. The biased mind can skew the truth by using logic to serve its purposes and intentions.

When we face [negative] emotions, however, we don't have time to use logic, nor do we have an unbiased mind. We need a well-honed skill that we can use immediately without much effort.

That's why the Third Moment Method is the teaching for our time. It helps us look into our emotions at the very moment that we need the teaching most. [It helps us] understand that emotions are truly unsubstantial. They are like clouds or fog. They look like they are there, but when you really look into them they dissipate. Not only that, but when you look into [an emotion] and stop to understand the nature of mind, you get a glimpse of what is known as unity of emptiness and bliss. Because it takes only a moment, the Third Moment Method can be practiced anywhere, anytime.

To use this method, we must understand our emotions and the nature of mind. It may seem counterintuitive to think of emotions as clouds because emotions are very powerful, so let's look

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at the nature of mind first. The teachings say that the nature of mind is fundamentally good. It's clear, unbiased, and open. It has the potential to learn and to attain enlightenment. It is drawn toward all the positive things: virtue, love, compassion, peace, and friendship. It wants to be loved, it wants to be educated, it wants to be informed. That means it is fundamentally good. If something is drawn toward good things, it is good.

When we look at the sky, it is always clear. But if there is a cloud, our attention is usually drawn toward the cloud rather than the clear sky. The sky has a quality that doesn't change—it's there and it's clear. Clouds are the ones that move, but they are unreliable because you can never point out what is there. The moment you point it out, it moves somewhere else. Clouds are the metaphor for our emotions, our thoughts.

Traditional Buddhist teachings mention five types of harmful emotions: greed, hatred, ego, arrogance, and jealousy. They are destructive because they steal our energy. They make us weak and we suffer. Not only that, they make us want to spread our suffering to our surroundings, to our loved ones, to whoever is next to us. These emotions are not only destructive to ourselves but also to our loved ones.

That's why it is important to work with them. Is there a way to see the truth of our emotions as they materialize? Is there a way to know that they're insubstantial—that they're something we can work with?

This is why we have meditation trainings. The way we look at our emotions and the way we deal with them changes us but this requires time, space, and energy. Sometimes when we are disturbed by emotions they steal our energy and we're unable to do traditional contemplative meditation. We need something that we can use without spending too much energy or time. That's the Third Moment Method.

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In our next talk, we will learn how our karma causes conditions that affect our emotions and how we can break the vicious cycle of negative emotions by using the Third Moment Method.