

Dungse Jampal Norbu
Compassion in Polarizing Times
Week Two: “Diving Into the Mind”
March 11, 2019



Hello everyone, thank you for joining me once again. My name is Jampal Namgyel [Dungse Jampal Norbu] and this is *Compassion in Polarizing Times*. In the last episode, we spoke a little bit about the search for happiness and what it's like to live in an environment full of polarizing opinions.

It's a difficult situation to feel ungrounded culturally. It's difficult to feel as if we don't have a sense of place, or we don't have a sense of confidence in a country, time, and age when polarizing views are popular and in vogue. Poles of good or bad, “Which one do you like better?”, black or white, right or wrong, this or that, Apple or Google, that kind of thing. It's all about choices. It's all about sides, and at this juncture finding a sense of peace and happiness can be a bit disorienting as long as we continue to look for happiness and peace outside of ourselves. As long as we fall into the mistaken trap of materialism, we find ourselves further and further away from our own internal understanding of happiness and our own internal path of spiritual development.

In this episode, I'd like to talk more about self-reflection, diving into the mind, and diving into our own experience to develop a better understanding of how we experience happiness, how we experience suffering, and what it means to pursue those. All our relative experiences of good and bad, or right and wrong fully depend upon our relationship with the world around us.

In the last episode, we talked about how our relationship with the outer world is really what determines how we view something as good or bad or right or wrong, not the object itself. For example, it is not hot sauce itself that is pleasurable or painful, but our relationship to it. Looking within our minds and determining what our experiences have been is self-reflection, and self-reflection is the first step on any spiritual path. Looking within the mind, we start to develop an understanding of what the causes of joy and suffering are.

Joy arises from a sense of peace. Joy arises from a sense of fulfillment. But most of all, joy arises from an absence of suffering, negative emotions, depression, anger, jealousy, pride, and confusion. In Tibetan Buddhism, these are known as the five *kleshas*: passion, aggression, stupidity, jealousy, and pride. These five negative emotions compose the majority of all experiences of suffering. When something happens to us that we don't want, when we don't get the things that we want, when we don't triumph over the obstacles that are in our path, or when

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we feel lonely, depressed, or anxious, all of these negative experiences can be summarized into one or a combination of the five negative emotions. The five negative emotions make up the bulk of suffering.

To understand what these five negative emotions are, it's important as a practitioner to not just remember the words: the lists of negative emotions, the teachings, and the exclusively academic side. While an understanding of lists and how things work is an important aspect of all philosophy and spiritual traditions, we also need to have a personal encounter with our own mind, to have that “aha” moment where we see that negative emotions are not necessarily who we are. They are thoughts, they are feelings, they are things that arise in our life and things that move away from our life. They come and they go. They are not our defining elements. They do not define who we are and because they do not define who we are, negative emotions can be overcome.

Negative emotions can be curbed and any habit or suffering that arises out of them can be transformed into something else. If this were not the case, then unfortunately a spiritual path would not be an option. But it is an option. It is an option because we are not doomed to always be angry. We are not doomed to always be attached and possessive. We are not doomed to always be crippled by arrogance and attachment to oneself.

With self-reflection we can see negative emotions arise. The more we notice them and the more we self-reflect, the greater ability we have to recognize negative emotions like anger. As we recognize and understand anger and we understand our tendencies when we are angry, we also give ourselves more choice when under the influence of anger. A choice to act, not to act, to be better, and to make intelligent decisions. Without any understanding of how anger arises in our life—a personal, deep, self-reflective understanding of how anger arises—we will be a leaf in the wind as negative emotions arise and we are carried off by their tide. Through self-reflection, understanding and choice become possible. Seeing how anger arises, upon noticing that anger has arisen, we have the choice to let the emotions stay, to not act, to let the anger simply show its head and then wait and let it fizzle out.

My teacher has a great example; when a hot pan is on the stove fed by the fire underneath, if there's a little oil in the pan there's a lot of crackling and sizzling as the oil boils in the pan. This is like the experience of anger. Intense, visceral, and charged into every particle of our physical

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being. Anger is an intense physical sensation. But the moment we notice that there is that heat, the moment we notice that we have that experience, we have the choice to turn off the cause. We have a choice to turn off the source of that fire, but when we turn off the fire, the pan doesn't immediately go cold. We still have experiences of frustration and intensity, but the anger will fizzle away over time.

No emotion is permanent, and so there is no reason for it to define who we are or to control our state of being. All of this comes with self-reflection and looking even further at the five negative emotions and any experience of suffering that we have. What is the cause of negative emotions? What is the cause of the five *kleshas*? All emotions have one thing in common. All negative emotions have one thing in common and that is the intense emphasis on self, on ego, on me, and mine.

This isn't to say that 'I am a bad person' or that 'my sense of self is bad.' There really is no good and bad in this situation. But our deep attachment to that sense of self, our deep neurosis around cherishing and protecting our ego and our identity, to become something fixed, to become something important, to become something permanent, translates out into all the five negative emotions. One cannot have anger without a sense of attachment to self. One cannot have pride without an attachment to the sense of self. One cannot have possession, attachment, and neurotic craving without that very same attachment to a sense of self. All negative emotions and thus all experiences of suffering come from a deep attachment to the sense of self, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. But it is where suffering is, and as sentient beings, it is our natural goal to move away from suffering and to find happiness.

We find happiness by letting go of the cause of suffering, letting go of that attachment to the sense of self. We are freed up to enjoy ourselves more. We are free from experiences of neurotic emotion. We are freed from experiences of the five negative emotions. The best way to let go of the cause of suffering and attachment to the sense of self is through altruism, kindness, and compassion. By developing compassion, a sense of care for others, and a sense of understanding for others, we find ourselves becoming happier people by letting go of those negative emotions.

Again, this is deeply rooted both in the philosophy of Tibetan Buddhism, but also in our own experience and our own ability to self-reflect. No practice would be complete without that firsthand encounter and ability to observe our mind and our happiness on a personal level, free

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from attachment to self, negative emotions, and all the causes and conditions which make up suffering. This is what a spiritual path is for. This is how we naturally find a way to open up our lives: by letting go of the cause which blocks us from enjoying our time on this planet.

I'll leave it here for today. But in the next episode, I would like to get into how one dives deeper into self-reflection and especially mind training. This is mind training in compassion, kindness, and the ability to transform our world, to give ourselves more choice and to become happier people. Thank you.