

The Nature of the Mind

As taught by Ven. Geshe Sangey Thinley at Jam Tse Dhargyey Ling on Sunday 4th July 2004

The main purpose of studying and practicing Buddhism is to train and subdue our minds. Subduing our minds means we should have a good heart and mental mind-stream or attitude.

The nature of the mind is pure and clear.

This is usually obscured by disturbing emotions and delusions and we have to try and free ourselves from these.

They are not the ultimate nature of the mind; they are temporary and can be separated from the mind. When we talk about good heart or mind, it doesn't only refer to religious believers; it's valid for all, and can benefit all living beings. With a mind based on good feelings like love and compassion, we can have good and positive relationships with others. Without it, it's very difficult to cultivate genuine human relationships.

Human beings especially depend on each other heavily. It's obvious that without others we could not survive, we depend on them for food, clothing and other basic necessities. These all stem from other beings and their kindness and effort. Irrespective of knowing other people or not, having warm feeling and thoughts towards them is very important. With this kind of positive mental attitude, we can cultivate positive energy and relate to others in a good way. For animals it is a bit easier as they can eat grass and drink water without being so dependent on others.

To contemplate on these things is very important, and as I have said before we should regard all beings as our kind mother, and treat them as the kindest and most precious beings in this life. This kind of training has to be done gradually. It is very difficult to achieve and will not happen suddenly.

In general all living beings, - in particular all human beings, have the desire to be happy and not to experience suffering, so we should apply whatever methods we can to increase happiness and reduce suffering.

All beings have the right to promote their own happiness, but, if in seeking our own happiness we impinge on the rights of others or cause them suffering, this is the wrong way of going about it and is negative.

In general there is a lot of suffering in Samsara. There are three main types:

1. The Suffering of Suffering,
2. The Suffering of Change,
3. The All Pervasive Suffering.

When generating the causes of happiness for ourselves we have to think carefully so as not to exploit or harm other living beings when doing this.

There are two types of happiness; short term and long term, and it's crucial that we should distinguish between them. Long term happiness is much more important and sometimes it is necessary to give up short term happiness in order to achieve it. We need to develop discriminating awareness or wisdom in order to generate the real cause of happiness for the long term.

According to the Buddhist view everything is interdependent, and depends on cause and effect. Everything is heavily interlinked. Conventionally we talk about "good" and "bad", but it's important to fully understand what is "good" and "bad". Our experiences and feeling usually relate to our body and mind, so when we talk about happiness and suffering, these relate to our body and mind. We can understand this clearly because sometimes we feel happy but we may be sick and suffering, and sometimes when we are healthy we experience some anxiety or mental problems and so suffer.

Regarding the body and mind, mental happiness is much more important than physical comfort or happiness. For example, if there are two people facing the same adverse circumstances and one of them is able to look at it rationally and correctly, that person can deal with it much more easily than the other one who has had no mental training. Real long term happiness depends on inner qualities and mental attitudes, so we can see how important it is to subdue and discipline our minds.

Today there's a lot of material progresses which can help solve certain problems, but it is mistaken to rely on these to solve all our problems, they cannot do this. We know this because in some areas that are well developed externally or materially there are people who are suffering more than those in undeveloped areas with little material benefits. For example, in India there are a lot of classes and some of the rich have more stress and problems than those who have hardly anything. They live under plastic shelters and play old radios, but mentally they seem much happier than wealthy people.

Our body is not mechanical, or produced by machines, so it's important to make an effort to produce inner good qualities like kind-heartedness, honesty and so forth.

As human beings we need to put effort into balancing the internal and external good qualities, and then we can experience happiness.

Without this, everything becomes unbalanced. So, guided by good motivation, we can become compassionate towards each other, be contented, honest and law abiding. To find happiness by exploiting others is not honest and it will not bring us long term happiness.

What I have said today is to help us subdue and pacify our minds. To have a subdued and pacified mental attitude is crucial for one's happiness and with this positive mental attitude we can create a positive and warm atmosphere, through which we can impact on other beings in a positive way. The long term consequence of this attitude is to create more happiness in future lives. It's essential for happiness in this life and future lives, and will

create imprints which will bring us closer to enlightenment. On the contrary, if we have anger, hatred and selfish attitudes we will experience more stress and find it difficult to relate to other people. We will create a lot of difficulties; make a lot of enemies in the community and will become a very unhappy person. Then, in future lives, we will experience the consequences of these negative attitudes. We will go down to the lower realms and will go from bad to worse.

Tsong Khapa (a great Tibetan scholar) says that: "everything depends on our own mind."

If we have good minds and a positive attitude, then all paths, stages and levels become smooth and appealing, or fortunate. With a bad mental attitude, all paths, stages and levels will become uncomfortable and difficult. If we examine and analyse, we will see that the outcome of everything we do depends on our mental attitude. So how we think and perceive things is very important. For example, if there are three people and one of them says something, it may make one of the others angry while the other thinks it is quite good. They have different perceptions. Everything depends on how we perceive and look at things.

Another example could be with a group of workers. Some may say that it would be easy to finish a task in this amount of time and others may think that it is too much and they will find it a burden. The workers, although in the same group, have different perceptions.

The mind is like a creator - it creates all our attitudes about happiness, unhappiness and so on. That's why Buddhism emphasises the importance of pacifying and training our mind; it is a crucial part of our life. We all have the same responsibility to develop good inner qualities and subdue our minds. If we are able to do that we will experience short-term and long-term happiness, and will be able to benefit other beings.

(Translated by Tsering Samdup: Transcribed by Ven. Ani Jampa Tsekyi: Typed out by Yvette Phillips: Lightly edited for Dharma News by Ven. Ani Jampa Tsekyi.)