

MENTAL HEALTH

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This evening I would like to talk about mental health. In our lives, it is important for us to create home and work situations in which there is harmony with our personal being. This is a natural, ordinary consideration, isn't it? In this sense, mental health simply means to live in a way in which we do not cause pain to ourselves, or give ourselves personal problems.

How do people develop personal problems? Some seem to be born with them. Once we enter this world, we enter it with the basic potential for illness; we are beings in samsaric existence, and samsara includes illness as a basic potentiality. In this sense, nobody is really healthy. We find ourselves in samsara because we have a basic level of ignorance; we become split off from our real condition. Out of this ignorance, we express negative emotions, and in doing so, this split becomes more deeply ingrained. The structure of mind which develops is twofold: there is primary mind, as a basic level of being, simple duality, and secondary mind, which includes dualistic perceptions and emotions, a more complex duality.

Home Life

For any person in this world it is important that his or her own personal and psychological health be taken care of right

from the earliest years. It is the responsibility of parents to consider the psychological health of their children. To understand how to do this, one must understand the relationship between parents and children. Children do not necessarily appreciate or understand what parents communicate to them, or at least what parents *wish* to communicate to them.

With regard to the atmosphere at home, it is important that children experience disagreements between parents, or among the family in general as little as possible. There are several reasons for this. First, such disharmony is not so easily borne by children, who are much more sensitive than adults. An ordinary level of disagreement for an adult can be terrifying and shocking for the child, especially if it is a strong disagreement. Second, the imprint of such discord is more lasting and penetrating to a child; it can become a frame of reference for years to come.

Education

As for formal education, study programs are also very important. It is important for children to pursue study programs provided by their schools. This is not only a process of learning information, but also helps the child build a sense of self-reliance. It provides a basis upon which the child can rely in later years.

If a child is not encouraged to persevere with his studies in school, and is left too much to his own devices, the long-term effects may not be positive. He may seem to be in balance when very young, but as he grows up and compares himself with his peers, he will find that fellow students have gone beyond him in learning and employment, and soon, he will feel left behind. So it is important for the child to persevere with a serious direction from his early years in life. Once again, it is

a question of the child building a sense of self-reliance rather than just learning information or studying.

Work

The first contact with the work world is an important moment in life. A person is prepared intellectually by his or her education for a particular occupation. However, a young person especially may not be completely prepared emotionally for that occupation. A person may be given responsibilities or tasks for which he or she is intellectually prepared, but the actual responsibility may be more than the person can bear. Some people even have a breakdown at this stage of life.

For example, some young people join the military and are sent into difficult situations. Some may be capable of handling this, but other more sensitive types are not. The first experiences of the horrors of war can be completely repugnant and may signal a crisis in a person's life. Analogous crises may develop in other work situations as well.

This is why I think that individuals ought to move gradually out of student life into their work situation. A gradual transition is much more harmonious for most people, much more conducive to mental health. Whether one goes into a military occupation, business, or some other ordinary peaceful occupation in the world, the move from the student world into the world of work ought to be done very gradually.

THE ELEMENTS OF WIND

In Tibetan medicine, "wind" refers to the internal, vital humor of wind. It is the active, moving energy of the organism. This doesn't necessarily correspond to the qualities of the wind outside, the "air." This subtle level of wind, which is

part of a living organism, is an energy which provides the main support for movements of mind.

This notion of wind is a very precise and important principle in Tibetan medicine, and is seen as that principle which brings beings into this human existence as opposed to an animal existence, or some other existence. In the disembodied state, an individual is basically the movement of his karma, the wind of his karma, and the movement of his consciousness. When a fetus is forming, it consists of the vital energies of the elements, the most subtle of which is wind. At the time of conception, the wind of karma and the wind which holds the vital force of the fetus blend together and become practically inseparable. This is how the body comes into being in this lifetime, as well as the linking of wind, body, and mind. Thus, we experience ourselves as physical beings, rather than just as psychological beings.

An ordinary human organism is animated by five primary wind energies. These wind energies function through the five primary chakras, which are located in relation to five centers in the physical organism, one above the other. These energies are also commonly related to the five types of bile, which have to do with the workings of the circulatory system.

The first of the primary winds is called "the wind which holds the vital force." It is centered in the crown of the head and radiates through the head, the passages of the brain, and downward. It is related very closely to the cerebral nerve functions and the cerebral circulation.

The wind of wind is related to desire. Dysfunctions of the wind of wind are related to the experience of being frustrated, irritated, and unsettled. This could arise, for example, in connection with not getting what one wants in life, or being prevented from attaining one's aims or goals.

The wind of fire, or hot wind, is closely related to the heart chakra. The experience of aggression corresponds to the dysfunction of this wind. In terms of the "biles," this energy is

related to the liver function, and is usually the first to become disturbed in situations of psychological dysfunction. From there, the disturbance may radiate to other functions.

A third kind of wind, the wind of earth and water, is referred to as the "heavy" wind. This heavy wind can also be related to mind. Although there are fewer psychological problems associated with this heavy wind, it is related to dullness and incomprehension, and progressive stupidity.

In general, in Tibetan medicine, negative emotional states are seen in terms of disturbance of the elements. Disturbance here refers to dysfunction in thought and psychological processes on the one hand, and physical dysfunction of the organism on the other. These in turn become the basis for treatment, which can include directives for diet and behavior, as well as medicines and other approaches.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCEPTING LIFE AS IT IS

Given this way of looking at things, what does Tibetan medicine have to say about working with psychological and physical disturbances? Let us return to the example of the experience of frustration, irritation, and unsettledness, which is a dysfunction of the wind of wind. What can we do about this situation? In order to deal with this we need to develop an attitude of *chokshi*, or a minimal acceptance of life as it is. This means to appreciate and accept our basic situation with respect to wealth, well-being, and needs in this life. It is important to realize and feel that a certain minimal level of life is acceptable and can be lived with. If one does not have an attitude of acceptance of life, then life becomes unbearable, no matter what one's circumstances are.

Even a king will find his life unbearable if he cannot find this attitude of basic acceptance of life. He may be very wealthy, have a great entourage, and a huge amount of what one could desire in life. But if he does not find his situation acceptable, if

he finds that there is another kingdom—over there somewhere—which is also very desirable, and which he absolutely needs in order to feel really happy, he will raise armies and start wars. He will disturb his own situation, accumulate a lot of unvirtuous action, and create a lot of harm in the process. Because he doesn't have a psychological attitude of accepting his life situation, he feels disturbed and unsatisfied even though he is a king. Even a king can sleep uneasily if he doesn't have the right attitude. I'm sure you have heard stories like this before.

On the other hand, an impoverished person, a beggar, might be happy if he has an attitude which includes a minimal acceptance of life. Suppose that our beggar wakes up in the morning and his goal for the day is merely to eat. If he successfully finds not only food, but beer as well, he will feel good, full, and satisfied, for with the beer, he has not only fulfilled but surpassed his basic aim for the day. So he will feel very happy about life, wonderfully happy!

In the old days in Tibet, there were a good number of beggars. These people would usually get drunk in the late afternoon. In Tibet, we have a particular kind of singing called *namthar*, which demands the holding of certain notes for quite a long time, and the warbling of the voice. These beggars would commonly stagger about the streets of Lhasa in the late afternoon and early evening, and launch into a song of this very strange type. These are only examples, of course; not all kings are depressed and not all beggars are happy.

In India, China, and Tibet, there have been spiritual people who became rulers and ruled from their spiritual viewpoint. They had a realistic appreciation of their lives and weren't overwhelmed by or dissatisfied with their circumstances. They radiated benefit for many people inside and outside their kingdoms, and developed both themselves and their people through their spiritual attitude. The point here is that if one's life is even minimally passable, it is important to be able to recognize

and accept that. There is something that is more important than being dissatisfied with our actual life situation.

There are many places in the world that are terribly impoverished, desperately poor. Compared to that, we have a lot of freedom; this country is rich and there is an easy availability of the necessities of life. This is actually an extremely comfortable, wonderful place, but very few people seem to realize that. Perhaps if we don't see much suffering it's difficult to appreciate what happiness is. Experience is important in life; one has to experience suffering and feel suffering, experience happiness and feel happiness.

PAIN AND THE NATURE OF MIND

If one does not examine one's own mind, it becomes easily influenced. Then mind becomes what in literary Tibetan is called *dho-chun*, or *jhap-chol* in the common language. These terms refer to a mind that is completely prey to circumstances and has no independent strength. With a mind like that, one is easily made happy, or is easily depressed. We ought to have more stability than that.

If a person has a very painful experience, how can he or she work with his or her mind in that situation? To work with mind, it is necessary to look at and feel the depth of mind. If one were to do that, in the midst of the painful situation, what would be discovered about mind and the nature of experience?

If one examines mind and experience, the fundamental nature of mind is discovered to be unchanging, beyond any duality of happiness or unhappiness. It is like bright, fresh, unwilted flowers. It never changes in its character, no matter what the circumstances. Within that unchanging nature, there is a very great richness of phenomenal appearances which occur and disappear. Such appearances are like dreams; there is nothing deep or lasting in them. Phenomenal appearances appear precisely, sharply, but they are just ephemeral illusions.

Isn't the world, then, like a small child running to catch a rainbow? If you understand that, you understand that life is like a dream, a child's game. That understanding can help one in achieving a minimal acceptance of life, and in overcoming the tendency to be so easily influenced by changing circumstances.

Sometimes we are faced with great personal difficulties or disasters, situations that are utterly hopeless. At these times it is important not to become despondent. What good will our despondency do in a hopeless situation? Shantideva, the great Tibetan teacher, said that if any situation is workable, there is no cause for despondency. Workable situations can be changed.

It is important to approach any circumstance in such a way that afterwards, there should be no regrets, whatever the outcome. How one makes that approach is crucial. First, one should consider how one should do this. If one doesn't really understand the situation, one should ask advice from someone who is more experienced and does understand the situation. Then, one should enter the situation with the best of one's capacities, knowing that if failure results, there is no cause for regret.

People in the West all say that life is much more stressful here than in the East, so it must be so. I don't really understand this, and I don't really know how to get stressed out in that way, so I've been thinking that I'm going to invite someone to teach me how to do that!

I visited England for the first time in 1983. One evening, while I was watching television, an older gentleman who was an Australian aborigine was talking about how he saw life. He said that the difference he saw between the white man and the aborigine was that the aborigine had something the white man didn't—a mind. This wasn't obvious at first, he continued, because the white man gets up and moves around and does many things that would indicate the presence of a mind. But,

he explained, if you watch closely, you see that there is no mind there. The white man gets up at the same time every morning, goes to the same office, comes home at the same time, and basically he's going around and around. He said, "You don't say a wheel has a mind because it goes around and around, but you say a human-looking thing does." Referring to himself, on the other hand, he said: "I, being a real human being, have a mind. Since I am a person, and I have a mind, when I wake up in the morning, I think, 'Do I want to get up?' Then, if I decide that I want to get up, I do, and if I decide I don't, I don't."

This was very interesting, because from this aborigine gentleman's reflection, I began to see the difference between East and West. There is a tendency to live by a clock in the West, isn't there? It is a kind of social norm. In the West, work is time, and one is meant to be at appointments and work at certain times, and do certain things at certain times. Nearly everyone lives that way in the West, so it is difficult to live in any other way.

PRACTICE CONSIDERATIONS

The problem of stress is a very personal one; one experiences the disquiet and anxiety of stress very personally. But even in this case, what is the nature of this mind of stress like, really? If you look into it, you will find that this mind is a kind of fascination, without any real awareness. By this I mean that although one isn't really aware of it, mind is receiving impressions all the time, and so is continuously being hit and influenced by these various impressions.

Given this, how are we going to grow personally? How can we develop ourselves? Whether one is meditating, or whether one is active in the world, it is very important to find a kind of inner relaxation. The following instructions are ways to cultivate this inner relaxation.

Upon awakening in the morning, one shouldn't just spring out of bed instantly the moment one realizes that one is awake, but rather, sit up cross-legged on one's bed and look about. Be sure that there is air circulation in the room. Put your hands on your knees, exhale as well as you can, and sit calmly, breathing naturally. If there is a viewing space that opens out towards the blue sky, sit in that direction for a couple of minutes before you do anything else. One should be looking west if possible, away from the direct sunlight, into the clear openness of blue sky.

When sitting in the late afternoon, one should be looking east, with the sun behind you and the clear openness in front of you. At midday, face north, gazing into the openness of the north sky. If there is a stream nearby, sit by the stream, or perhaps on a bridge, facing downstream and let your eyes rest on the water which flows away from you towards the sea. On a hill, do not rest facing the hill, but turn and rest facing the open space. In a park or field, when one pauses, pause in an elevated place facing in such a way that the land is sloping away from you: face west in the morning, east in the afternoon.

With regard to these exercises, some people have asked me an interesting question, which is, "What can we do if we can't see very much from our windows, or the sky is not clear?" In that case, just sit and feel the presence of the deep blue sky far off even if you can't actually see it. This is actually quite possible. But don't set a time in the day for this sitting; then, one would be behaving like a machine again.

Some hermitages in Tibet have a single opening for light that is rather narrow, and they are built in such a fashion that one can see out but not in. These windows are on the north side of a retreat house, and hence never receive direct sunlight, even at midday. Thus, a practitioner can practice in isolation and gaze into the clear openness of sky at all times.

If one is not a dharma practitioner, one can still do these exercises. One should simply sit in a relaxed fashion, without being particularly preoccupied by anything. If one is a practitioner, one can sit in the meditation which one has learned. The attitude I have described will enrich your meditation and help you to grow. Everything can be learned, including openness and relaxation. Meditation is a kind of learning process, and it frees one from the instinctive feeling of stress.

CLOSING REMARKS

The essence of mind is always fresh, like a fresh, bright flower. This is what one gradually discovers. Even when one discovers this, it is important not to muddle and disturb one's mind artificially, but to be calm and simple. There are many religions in the world, and all of them understand the importance of being calm. In the Hinayana, Mahayana, and Vajrayana Buddhist teachings, there are many special ways and methods which are taught to help students deal with personal reality, and to reach a deeper level of understanding and calm.

This Institute has a Buddhist name: The Naropa Institute, so I would like, in closing, to offer a few more words from the buddhadharma. Shantideva said that what must be overcome, what must be controlled, is one's own mind; what else could there be that one could ever overcome? And Chandrakirti said that he who stops the mind, recognizes reality. By this, he was referring to the mind which is unexamined and in fascination, and thus influenced by momentary phenomena. Saraha, the great tantric master, said that by controlling one's mind, one controls one's energies, and thus controls the whole of one's organism. Naropa, coming from the other way around, taught that by controlling the passage of energies, one could control the mind.

Although one may not understand these things now, these are quite understandable with a little study. The point is that

mind and body are inextricably woven together and are constantly influencing each other.

QUESTIONS

Thank you all very much. In the West, I have noticed that if one doesn't let people ask one questions, then nobody's happy! So I will answer, perhaps, a few vitally important questions.

Question: Could you say more about strong anger?

Dr. Trogawa, Rinpoche: Anger and aggression are supported in the organism by the hot wind, the energy of fire. This energy moves the blood, and is constantly in relationship to the blood. Aggression overheats the blood and thus influences the whole of the organism. Simply stated, an excess of aggression produces anger.

The heavy winds are related to earth and water. Imbalance in the heavy winds is initiated by not using one's faculties, not thinking. When one becomes torporous and isn't really communicating with one's life, then there begins to become an excess of heavy wind, and one becomes dull.

When the energy of wind causes an illness, it causes a wind illness. In our tradition, when the energy of the hot wind causes an illness, it has its effect through the organism's bile, blood, and heat. When the energy of the heavy wind causes an illness, it causes excess of earth and water, and phlegmatic diseases.

Q: Can you say something about the problems of raising sensitive children?

DTR: First of all, not all children are the same, and thus you cannot take the same approach with every child. Some children are very sensitive and are easily influenced, while others are more resilient, and resistant to influences. They don't listen to people so much.

The situation with Western children is basically different than with Eastern children. You can relate to them on a logi-

cal level more than we do in the East; you can instruct them and they can think about that and appreciate it more. In the East, we say, "Drums and children improve the more you beat them." This does seem to be the case in the East in general, and certainly in Tibet.

Q: We have a two-year-old daughter who gets very frustrated when she doesn't always get her way. How can we work with her frustration?

DTR: Is this your only child?

Q: Yes.

DTR: Yes. Since this is your first child, you have probably been very loving and protective to this child. This frustration is often the case with first children, and only children. It improves with age; you don't have to do much about it. But you can talk, not directly to the child but between yourselves in her presence, about other children in a way that the child will understand. You can say, for instance, that there is this particular child who is quite resilient and doesn't cry when she doesn't get her way, and so on. She could pick that up.

Q: How could one be helpful to someone who is very despondent, to the point of not wanting to live?

DTR: I'd like to refer to something that I've already said. A person could begin to appreciate that life is like a dream or an illusion, and that although many things happen, life is basically illusory. A person in that situation has become too attached, and is grasping too much; the feeling of despondency is a reflection of his own grasping at qualities and conditions. Is this person a dharma practitioner?

Q: No.

DTR: Tilopa said to his disciple Naropa, "Phenomena do not imprison you; grasping imprisons you. If you free yourself from your grasping, the world will no longer be a prison." If the person in question is not a dharma practitioner, they could appreciate that there is no point in being depressed about the past, because it has already disappeared. Then encourage

them to have some courage with respect to their life. We are all responsible for ourselves; we must be our own teachers and find our own sense of being.

Q: Saturday night we spoke of lungta, and I'm wondering about the qualities of lungta itself, its relation to the winds, and its relation to mental health.

DTR: Lungta is not something which is visible. It is primarily dependent upon the wind of karma. Ordinary individuals have two types of winds that are intertwined: the wind of karma and the wind of wisdom. The wind of karma is the usual manifestation, however, while the wind of wisdom only manifests occasionally. The Buddhas and great bodhisattvas, on the other hand, have the wind of wisdom in dominance or in complete expression. The wind of wisdom of an ordinary being is of the same nature as the wind of wisdom of an enlightened being, but it isn't expressed very much. Lungta refers to the degree to which an individual expresses the wind of wisdom.

Negative activity, whether physical, relational, or mental, builds karma, and in building karma, increases the wind of karma. As the wind of karma becomes stronger, the wind of wisdom is suppressed, and thus lungta is also suppressed. Ordinary types of negative activities create negative karma, and create a certain degree of obscuration in the individual, with the decline of lungta. For dharma practitioners, the abandonment of precepts creates a much stronger level of obscuration and destruction of lungta.

In general, purity of mind builds lungta. Negative types of activity create a pollution in wind, and positive types of activities create clarity in wind.

Q: If I could address another aspect of that, you said something about the relationship of lungta to relationships themselves, that certain activities within relationships would decrease lungta and that others would increase lungta.

DTR: Yes, this is true. First, because you are personally involved in the situation, there is an emotional impulse one way or another. Second, this is true because a precept is involved. Precepts exist in tantra, of course, but they also exist in the ordinary world, in the way one enters relationships or situations, and through your commitment to those relationships. There is a lot of tantra in that.

All of the questions have been quite good tonight. Thank you very much. When you study here at The Naropa Institute, try to maintain purity of mind, without negative impulses. Learning in such a personal framework builds positive energy. A clean mirror reflects all the colors; that is the way a mirror should work. Thank you all very much.