



SHIWA LHA CENTER

In 1991, some Lama Zopa Rinpoche students opened at Rio de Janeiro the Dorje Jig Je Center, that had Geshe Lobsang Tempa as resident-master and Venerable Gloria Mallol giving teachings. In 1996, our Spiritual Director – Lama Zopa Rinpoche – blessed the center with a new name: **Shiwa Lha**.

Shiwa Lha means *Shantideva*, in Sanskrit. *Shantideva* was an Indian scholar that wrote the *Bodhisattva Path*, an essential text from Buddhist philosophy that teaches to obtain the illumination mind -- the *Bodhicitta* – through the Six Perfections practice.

Over these years, the center received Lama Zopa Rinpoche twice (1992 and 2015) and masters such as Kirti Tsenshab Rinpoche (who conceded several initiations, including Kalachakra, in 2001), Geshe Jamphel, Ven. Paloma Alba, Ven. Robina Courtin, Ven. Sarah Thresher, Ven. Lobsang Chogni, Ven. Amy Miller, Ven. Irene Turner, Ven. Lobsang Zopa, among others.

Today the center is known as **Center Shiwa Lha of Tibetan Buddhism Studies** and is fully functioning, offering meditation, Buddhist teachings, retreats, practices, lectures and personal refinement courses for lay and practitioners. It has the support of masters and teachers, facilitators, volunteers, translators and collaborators.

The Center is vinculated to the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition (FPMT).

Centro Shiwa Lha de Estudos do Budismo Tibetano

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Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition FPMT

The FPMT organization was founded in 1975 by Lama Thubten Yeshe (1935-84) and Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche, both Tibetan Buddhist monks. The Foundation is devoted to preserving and spreading Mahayana Buddhism worldwide by creating opportunities to listen, reflect, meditate, practice, and actualize the unmistakable teachings of the Buddha and based on that experience spreading the Dharma to sentient beings.

We provide integrated education through which people's minds and hearts can be transformed into their highest potential for the benefit of others, inspired by an attitude of universal responsibility and service. We are committed to creating harmonious environments and helping all beings develop their full potential of infinite wisdom and compassion.

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Texts for the Teachings with Venerable Robina Courtin for Brazil participants

What a joy to receive Dharma teachings from Venerable Robina!

We prepared a collection of her texts related to each theme that is going to be addressed in these teachings.

TAKE THE DIRECTION OF YOUR LIFE (JUNE 20th and 21st)

Become our own therapist – Ven. Robina Courtin

Why meditate? – Ven. Robina Courtin

Karma: we are the creators of our own reality – Ven. Robina Courtin

How karma works – Ven. Robina Courtin

We're insane not to do purification every day – especially now – Ven. Robina Courtin

Regret or guilt? – Ven. Robina Courtin

WHEN CHOCOLATE RUNS OUT (June 23rd)

Change is natural – Ven. Robina Courtin

What is love? – Ven. Robina Courtin

THE PATH OF COMPASSION (June 25th)

Friends, enemies and strangers – Ven. Robina Courtin

EMPTINESS AND MAHAMUDRA (June 27th and June 28th)

Everything is interdependent – Ven. Robina Courtin

TAKE THE DIRECTION OF YOUR LIFE

BECOME OUR OWN THERAPIST

Ven. Robina Courtin

The Buddhist model of the mind is deceptively simple, yet it's a profound method for helping us delve deep into our thoughts and feelings in order to understand and, crucially, change them. "We can mould our mind into any shape we like," as one contemporary Tibetan master Lama Zopa Rinpoche puts it.

Discovered and articulated by the great thinkers and yogis of India in their meditation 3,000 years ago, and still intact today as a living system for inner transformation, this model divides the contents of the human mind into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral; there's no fourth. And these are technical terms, not moralistic.

For this discussion let's forget the neutral. (This term doesn't imply that they're not important; it's referring to the various states of mind such as concentration, vigilance, memory and the many, many others that enable us to function as human beings, but that have neither the characteristics of being virtuous nor non-virtuous.)

So, positive and negative: how do we understand this? These refer to all our day-to-day thoughts, feelings, emotions. The positive ones: so obvious: love, compassion, kindness, generosity, forgiveness, patience. We instantly recognize these words because we can recognize these qualities within us. And we *know* they're the good ones: whether they're prevalent within ourselves and we're on the receiving end of them, we just know they're the source of happiness.

Then we have the others, the so-called negative ones: again, so obvious: anger, neurotic neediness or attachment, jealousy, depression, low self-esteem, arrogance. We just know that the extent to which they're prevalent is the extent to which we're miserable. They are *awful*; so painful.

We all recognize these states of mind. We've had them since we're tiny, and we totally take them for granted, the assumption being, of course, that we're stuck with them: "This is me. This is who I am." That's marvellous if we're the kind of person who can easily access our kindness or stay calm in the face of dramas – how fortunate! – but what if we can more easily access our anger, our hurt, our fears instead, what to do then?

These unhappy emotions, when they're running the show, feel so utterly overwhelming, so absolute, as if they're at the core of our being. And in our culture we don't seem to learn methods for changing them; we just assume we can't.

But we can. This is the fundamental finding of the Buddha: that the neuroses, the painful unhappy states of mind that we all recognize in ourselves and in others, are in fact *not* at the core of our being and thus can be removed. And that the positive states are at the core of our being, indestructibly so, and can be perfected.

This is literally the meaning of nirvana. You've achieved your own nirvana, your own liberation, when you've utterly removed from your mind, your very being, these neuroses and have fully developed the goodness.

It's almost shocking to hear this. If I were to ask my therapist for methods to get rid of all ego, all fears, all anger, etc., etc., and to develop infinite love and compassion for all beings, she'd think I'm crazy! None of our contemporary models of the mind suggest anything remotely like this.

But this job of moulding my mind, of being my own therapist, takes work, of course: much effort, discipline, clarity, perseverance, and accurate instructions from those who've accomplished this goal or who are at least on the path.

First, we need to cultivate the ability to focus the mind, to concentrate, and this is the goal of the meditation technique known these days as mindfulness. It's actually a very sophisticated psychological technique that enables one, in the longterm, to go to extremely subtle levels of one's mind, levels of cognition that are not even posited as existing in contemporary views of the mind.

But we don't need to wait until then. In the short-term this skill enables us to step out of the dramas, to observe the thoughts, the stories, and to become our own therapist. With whatever level of focus we've accomplished, we learn to listen to the elaborate conceptual stories our neurotic states of mind are telling, to distinguish them from the positive parts of us; then to unpack and unravel them, to deconstruct them, to argue with them, and to gradually reconstruct the stories to be in sync instead with wisdom, with kindness, patience, self-worth, and the rest of the marvellous qualities within all of us.

Source: Ven. Robina Courtin's blog in www.robinacourtin.com – June 26th 2019.

WHY MEDITATE?

Ven. Robina Courtin

There are so many ideas in the world about what meditation is and why we would want to do it. And, I'd suggest, there are many misconceptions about it, too. The clichéd image of a person “meditating” has them sitting in full-lotus position, the incense wafting and the lights low while they go to some mystical place where all the thoughts stop. And often “meditating” is seen as a selfish activity.

But when we hear the Tibetan word for “to meditate” – *gom* – it translates as “to familiarize”, it really throws us. So, what *is* meditation? What do we need to familiarize ourselves with? The Buddha's answer is twofold: we need to utterly familiarize our minds with, bring our minds into sync with, virtue and reality.

And why would we need to do that? Because right now, according to the Buddhist take on the world, our minds are more familiar with the opposite: attachment, anger, jealousy and the other neuroses – just look at the suffering all around us: in our own selves, in our relationships, in the world. It is these unhappy states of mind that cause us to be out of sync with reality and goodness, which, in turn, cause us to harm others.

Classically there are two main kinds of meditation used to accomplish freedom from these neuroses – Buddha calls this “nirvana” – this amazing state of being, the potential for which is natural within all of us. These two, both labelled according to the result, are called “calm abiding” and “insight”.

A simpler term for “calm abiding” or in Sanskrit, “*samatha*”, and more direct in conveying its meaning, is “single-pointed concentration”: a state of mind so subtle and refined that the constant stream of conceptual thoughts and emotions, as well as the sensory consciousness, have ceased. That sounds what we might call sleep! But in fact it's a state of super-clear awareness. There is no such state of mind posited in modern psychology and therefore certainly no methods to accomplish it.

Why would we want to accomplish this state of *samadhi*, as the Hindus would call it? In the long term, for the Buddha, in order to eradicate from our minds all the voices of ego, which we consider normal but which he discovered from his own experience are not intrinsic, we need to access this subtle state, this microscope of our mind.

So extraordinary is this state of *samadhi* – absolute clarity, bliss, clairvoyance, and effortless control over thoughts and emotions – that it can easily be mistaken as the end result in itself. But for the Buddha it's just the beginning, it's merely a tool that is then used to develop insight, or in Sanskrit, *vipassana*, the goal of the second mode of meditation.

Insight into what? Reality, how things actually exist. This sounds pretty abstract but what's implied is that the more we're caught up in the self-centred fear-based self, the more we see everything through the filter of the voices of this unreal self, attachment, anger, depression and the rest, and the more out of touch with reality everything appears to us.

The development of insight into reality is no easy job, but it's attainable, just naturally.

Most of us won't get very far in this life with even the first mode of meditation, concentration – forget about the second, the development of insight. But we need to start somewhere. Even five minutes a day of determined, clear focus on something as simple as the breath going in and out of our nostrils can help us step out of our heads and strengthen our clarity, our focus, our thus our ability to see more clearly what's going on inside ourselves.

Then we can apply the second mode of meditation and do some internal analysis, be our own therapist: recognize the fears and unhappy attitudes and use our wisdom and intelligence and kindness etc. to argue with them and gradually lessen them. We can mould our mind, as Lama Zopa Rinpoche says, into any shape we like.

Then, out of our meditation, we can make more sense of what's going on around us, seeing things more objectively, and seeing others through the filter not of our fears and neuroses but our empathy and kindness.

This is the perfect application in daily life of the modes of meditation.

Eventually, perfection will come. One step at a time.

Source: Ven Robina Courtin's blog in www.robinacourtin.com – July 5th 2019.

KARMA: WE ARE THE CREATORS OF OUR OWN REALITY

Ven. Robina Courtin

There seem to be two generally accepted ways of thinking about how or why we get born: if we have a theistic religion, we believe that God created us; if we're materialists we believe that our parents made us.

Well, Buddha's got a different view: effectively, he says *we* created ourselves. Of course, he doesn't actually put it in those words, but it's a very tasty way to say it.

What a surprise! But how can this be so?

Obviously, "create" here doesn't mean that we waved a magic wand and poof! here we are. It's an evolutionary thing for the Buddha. He says that our mind, our consciousness, the essence of who we are, is not physical (he doesn't use the word "soul" or "spirit"), does not come from a creator, and isn't made by our parents. It's a beginningless continuity of mental moments that goes back and back before this birth and on and on after we die.

And, crucially, every micro-second of what we think, feel, do, and say leaves imprints or tendencies or seeds in this consciousness that necessarily ripen in the future as our own experiences. And whatever we experience now is necessarily the fruit of what we put planted in the past.

This is actually the meaning of the law of "karma". It's not punishment or reward because there's no one up there pulling the strings. We are the boss, in other words: we set ourselves up in the past for our own present reality: all the happiness and all the suffering.

This life of ours is our garden: all the flowers and all the weeds right in front of us now are the fruits of the seeds we planted in the past. Every negative karma necessarily ripens as suffering and every good karma necessarily ripens as happiness. Again, remember, this is not punishment or reward, which implies someone judging: there is no concept like that in Buddhism.

Karma "ripens" in four ways: the realm of existence we get born into (human, animal, etc.), our tendencies, our experiences in relation to others, and even our environment.

It's not a complicated concept, it's just that we so utterly believe that we're the product of someone's handiwork or that we come into this world programmed with our parents' tendencies – "I didn't ask to get born, did I?" or "It's not my fault!" – that it takes time to process.

For the Buddha, this approach of karma and reincarnation is a natural law, like gravity or botany or any of the other natural laws that we take for granted. It's just how it is. He didn't make it up, he's not speculating, and he's certainly not asking us to believe it.

Buddha – who was a regular guy who through his own hard inner work became an enlightened being – saw this to be so from his own direct experience. He has laid out the steps that he followed for anyone who wants the same result: we take it as our working hypothesis and slowly, with practice, get to experience and verify it for ourselves.

The consequences of this? The eradication from our being of our fears, limitations, low-self esteem and the rest of our neuroses – which, thank goodness, are not at the core of our being – and the development to perfection of our own natural goodness. This is the meaning of “buddha”.

When used to interpret our lives, the experiential implications of this view are profound: accountability, fearlessness, no victim mentality, no blame, and the courage to change, one step at a time.

And not only that: when we know this for ourselves it brings incredible compassion for others. We’re all suffering, and causing suffering for ourselves and others, for the same reasons.

As I’ve mentioned before, there’s this nice analogy in Buddhism: “A bird needs two wings: wisdom and compassion”. When we’ve put ourselves together – the wisdom wing – then we can truly help others.

We’re all in the same boat, and if I don’t help, who will?

Source: Ven. Robina Courtin’s blog in www.robinacourtin.com - February 5th 2020.

HOW KARMA WORKS

Ven. Robina Courtin

Everywhere people talk about “karma” as a vague notion that what goes around comes around. It’s not a bad way of putting it! And lots of people say they “believe in it.”

Well, if we have decided to take on board Buddha’s view of the world as our working hypothesis, merely believing in it is pretty useless. You don’t say “I believe in botany.” I mean, you could, and you’d get away with it because you can rely on the people who actually know botany: they’ve learned the laws, have proved them to be true, and incorporate them into their lives. But when it comes to growing a garden, merely believing in botany gets you nowhere.

Same with karma, this natural law of cause and effect that Buddha – and everyone else since he was around who’s used the methodology that he laid out – has observed and articulated and proved to be true.

Effectively our life is our garden: what’s in it is what we put in it. We don’t say “Who put weeds in my garden! I don’t deserve weeds!” because we know it’s our garden, we created it. And, for sure, same with the flowers.

But look at us when it comes to suffering and happiness, the weeds and flowers of life! We have no sense at all that what occurs in our life, even in our mind, has anything to do with us. We and our experiences are somehow the handiwork of someone else.

What an awful way to live life! No wonder we have so much fear! The view of a creator – at least someone has a plan! – is definitely a better world view than the nihilistic notion that no one knows why things happen, that it’s just good luck and bad luck – that’s just plain stupid.

Buddha’s not a creator, and he doesn’t assert one. We don’t need creating, he’s basically saying. Our consciousness goes back and back before birth and continues on and on after death – yes, he has proved this; all his methodology is there for us to follow if we want to experience the truth of it for ourselves, just like the natural law of botany. We don’t merely believe this, we take it as our hypothesis and work with it, step by step, proving things as we go (or proving that he’s wrong, in which case, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama says, you’d reject the Buddha; perfectly reasonable).

His Holiness sometimes refers to the law of the karma as “self-creation.” Everything we think and do and say just naturally programs us, sows seeds in our mind that will just naturally ripen in the future as our suffering and happiness. That’s it. Not complicated.

How do we apply this law? We observe the garden of life and learn from it.

One way that our past seeds ripen in the present is environmentally. There are many workers in the hospitals full of Covid 19 patients who will not get sick or die. Why?

They've had the same contact with the suffering human beings they're taking care of as the workers who do get sick and die, but they are experiencing the result right now of their past non-killing. That environment, if you like, of sick people is not harming them. The learning? Reinforce our decision not to kill.

How food impacts upon us: same: environmental karma. Some people die from eating a peanut: that's the result of killing in the past. Some people can eat anything and have no health problems. The learning? Reinforce our decision not to kill.

Another way karma ripens is as our experiences in relation to others. I tell the truth, but people don't believe me: that's the experience similar to the cause of past lying. Equally, I could be lying, and someone will believe me: the experience similar to the cause of past telling the truth. The learning? Reinforce our decision not to lie.

Because we're totally attached to the good things, we just assume that we deserve them so never ask the question, "Why do good things happen?" Just give me more please! And because we can't stand the bad things, we agonize about why they happen and believe totally that we don't deserve them.

We're obsessed with the bad things, they loom so large in our lives, but we never think about the good things. We just take them for granted. But we know when it comes to our garden that the laws of botany apply to both the weeds and the flowers. We planted the lot! It's our garden!

Every second of our experiences and every second of what arises in our mind: it's all the fruits of our past seeds. It's not a complicated idea – just a shocking one because we think the exact opposite.

What's the experiential implication of this law? Same as with botany. Having learned the laws – not just believing in them! – we assess what's in the garden, our garden. We recognize clearly the seeds we must have planted. Then we pull out the weeds and make sure we don't plant more, and we delight in the flowers and make sure we keep planting them.

Living according to this view hugely changes the way we experience our life. It lessens attachment – the assumption that I deserve only the flowers – and lessens anger – the assumption that I don't deserve the weeds. We become more stable, less fearful, less depressed, more content, more in charge of our life. What a relief! We're the boss!

And then we realize that we're all in the same boat. We will have such compassion! Because everyone is suffering unbearably, driven by attachment and anger and zero understanding of cause and effect.

Source: Ven. Robina Courtin's blog in www.robinacourtin.com – May, 22nd 2020.

WE'RE INSANE NOT TO DO PURIFICATION EVERY DAY ESPECIALLY NOW

Ven. Robina Courtin

The purification of karma is a powerful practice that Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommends we do daily – as he bluntly puts it: we're insane not to do so. Why? Because the very nature of the law of karma, of cause and effect, is such that every millisecond of what we think and do and say just naturally programs our mind, sows seeds in our mind that will ripen in the future as our experiences.

Logically, then, our experiences now are the fruit of past seeds. Given that our minds are beginningless, we're carrying around in our mental bank vaults countless seeds – plenty of positive ones, but many negative ones too.

The negative ones, of course, ripen as suffering. So, right now, look at the suffering we're collectively experiencing around the globe.

Karma ripens in four ways.

1. Our actual **rebirth**; this is called the **fully ripened result**. Having a human body, we can deduce that that's the fruit of our past non-killing.

2. The second way it ripens is as our **mental tendencies**; we can call this **actions, or tendencies, similar to the cause** – that is, our having done them before. The last two are what we're experiencing now.

3. **Experiences similar to the cause** – that is, from the habit of past killing some of us are dying young – look at all the people dying from COVID-19 ("Corona Virus Disease 2019).

4. And the fourth is called **environmental karma** – the very way that the external world impacts upon us. In this case contact with things and people in the world are causing us to get sick; this, too, is the result of killing, and of harming others. The environmental result also includes being surrounded by sick and dying people.

However, as we can see, not everyone will get sick or die during the time of the coronavirus. It seems the main suffering for millions of people is economic: losing jobs, becoming homeless, unable to pay bills. That's the **experience similar to the cause**, the third way karma ripens, of **past stealing and miserliness**.

So, what has purification got to do with all this? Well, each of the four steps in the purification process, known as the **Four Opponent Powers**, purifies each of the four ways that karma ripens. Remember, this is a psychological process, not a moralistic one.

The law of karma plays out in the minds of all sentient beings; it's what our mind actually does every second.

1. REGRET. By regretting the actions we've done in the past of harming sentient beings, we just naturally purify the karmic result, the third one, called **experiences similar to the cause**. We need to strongly regret the actions of the past because we are sick of suffering – we know we don't want suffering!

How does that work? Well, strongly **regretting our past killing** will particularly purify dying before our time. Usually the result will come in the next life, but if our purification is heartfelt, don't be surprised if some change can be seen right now: perhaps we'll get sick, but recover, for example.

2. RELIANCE. By **taking refuge** in the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha, relying upon them; and, crucially, by **having compassion** for sentient beings, we will purify the **environmental result**: the physical world won't harm us; we won't get sick; our immediate environment will remain pleasant.

3. THE REMEDY. By applying the remedy, that is, by doing the actual practice of reciting Vajrasattva's mantra, etc. – according to all the lamas one of the most potent remedies – we will purify the **fully ripened result**, in this case, rebirth in the lower realms.

4. RESOLVE. With the resolve, the determination, not to kill again, clearly we purify the **intention, or action, similar to the cause**, the habit to kill.

There is no karma that can't be purified! Phew!

And, of course, never forget to hugely rejoice in all the virtuous karma we must have created that is ripening as all the good things that are happening for us now. Perhaps we're not getting sick and we're not running out of money. Rejoice hugely and know it's the direct result of your own virtue – not just "good luck." And then, of course, resolve to keep practicing virtue – not killing, not stealing, not being miserly, etc. etc. – so that the good results continue to manifest.

Source: Ven. Robina Courtin's blog in www.robinacourtin.com – March 31st, 2020

REGRET OR GUILT?

Ven. Robina Courtin

There's a practice we Tibetan Buddhists do that I like to call "the four Rs": regret, reliance, the remedy and resolve. It's a really practical, optimistic meditation to finish the day with.

Regret. Throughout the day it's inevitable that we've thought and said and done things that drag us down or harm others, which feel like such a burden. Sit down for a few moments, steady the mind, then recall what they are. Be clear and focused; don't get lost in the memories. Acknowledge them, and then regret them.

But what's regret? The Dalai Lama's answer to the question "What's the difference between regret and guilt?" is so helpful: "With guilt," he said, "we look into the past and go, 'I did that and I did this, and I'm a *bad* person.' With regret, however, the first point is the same – we look into the past and acknowledge what we did – but then we think, 'What can I do about it?'"

Guilt seems to be our default mode. We just assume my having done something wrong means I'm a bad person, and we rarely question this assumption. It's terrible! And it's simply not true; it's an exaggeration.

But regret is a healthy, self-respectful attitude. If I've eaten poison, the second I realize it I'd regret it because I don't want suffering, and immediately I'd think "what can I do about it?"

The key to this attitude is the recognition that everything I think and do and say has consequences for me: this is the law of karma, cause and effect; that with every thought and action I'm producing myself. This first step of regret, then, is for our own sake. Compassion for others comes next.

In other words, of course I'd regret being angry, lying, being jealous, killing the ants, downloading the movie that doesn't belong to me, first because I do not want to deepen those habits and second I do not want these things to happen to me – two of the consequences of actions. For this reason I regret these actions from the depths of my heart.

Reliance. This has two parts. The first, for Buddhists, is to remember the Buddha, whom we think of as our doctor, our mentor, whose medicine and advice we rely upon to purify ourselves. Because Buddha doesn't assert a creator, there's no discussion about requesting forgiveness. He would happily give it, but it's not the point. I have to do the work of changing myself, in reliance upon his methods.

The second part is where we now have compassion for those we have harmed. I regret my actions for their sake: I know what it's like to be lied to, harmed, stolen from, and I certainly wouldn't like to be killed! Others are the same, so I have empathy for them. And, if I can, we can try to have compassion for those who have harmed us. Why? Because they will suffer as a result of their actions.

The Remedy. Sometimes this is called the antidote, and the most practical application of it is to consciously attempt to do the opposite: tell the truth, be kind to someone, give something to someone, save a life (of an ant, a mouse), help the sick, etc.

But in meditation at the end of the day we would visualize the Buddha above our heads and imagine him compassionately sending powerful nectar that fills us, utterly purifying every atom of our negative actions, which we visualize leaving through the lower parts of our body like filthy liquid, disappearing into space, not one atom left. Really concentrate on this, imagine it, and be delighted.

Resolve. This last step is crucial. We make a firm decision to change. Until we do this, nothing *will* change. Merely asking someone to forgive us is not enough; it just gets us off the hook. But with the determination to change, we take responsibility for our actions, for our own sake and the sake of others.

So, give ourselves a timeline, be realistic, don't lie to ourselves. If anger is an old habit, perhaps we can vow to not be angry for a few hours; really mean it. The fact is, we'll be asleep and will certainly keep it! Gradually, we can lengthen the time.

We all know that firmly deciding to do something is the main cause for doing it. We will only engage in this step if we we're not overwhelmed by guilt. This determination to change is so powerful! It's the attitude of self-respect and self-confidence.

As one lama said, "We create negativity with our mind, and we can purify it by creating positivity with our mind."

Source: Ven. Robina Courtin's blog in www.robina-courtin.com – September 20th, 2019.

WHEN CHOCOLATE RUNS OUT

CHANGE IS NATURAL

Ven. Robina Courtin

Everything changes, we know that. There's nothing that begins that doesn't end. But why is change often so painful? According to the Buddha it's because we have so much attachment for things to be the way we want them, we can't stand it when things turn out differently.

Look at how we are with relationships. We fall in love and believe with absolute certainty that it's forever. "We will be together until we eighty!"

Of course, there's nothing wrong with aiming to be together until we die, of thinking long-term: that's good, that's commitment.

But we make the mistake of thinking that because we want something to last, it will last. It even appears that way to us. Because everything is good today, we just assume that it'll be that way tomorrow. We totally take it for granted.

And then what happens when the bubble bursts and our partner leaves us? We're shattered. We live in denial. We can't believe it.

And now we think *this* will be forever, this pain will never end. We can't see the light at the end of the tunnel and we fall into despair.

Both these views are not reality. So what's an appropriate way to see things? How to factor in the logic of impermanence, that everything changes moment by moment, that things aren't set in stone?

We might go to the other extreme and then think, "Oh well, if things are impermanent and he could leave me any day, why bother committing to a relationship? What's the point? This is also inappropriate.

When we go on a holiday for two weeks to some lovely place, let's say, the fact is we *know* it's impermanent. But we don't say, "Oh well, if it's impermanent and it'll only last for two weeks, why bother going!" No!

In fact, *because* it's impermanent, *because* it's only for two weeks, we'll enjoy it all the more, we won't waste a moment, we'll appreciate it, we won't take it for granted. And then at the end of the holiday, we'll let it go with a happy mind.

That's the way to live life. It is impermanent, changing every moment. Being awake to this fact, we won't waste our life, we'll make the most of it, we'll move with the changes, welcoming them, not being afraid of them.

Change is a fact. It's not wrong. It's just how things are. Buddha's key point about happiness and suffering is that they're dependent mainly on our mind, our attitude, our being sync with reality, with how things are.

It cuts fear, we become courageous, we welcome change and can use to grow ourselves, to make the most of our lives.

Source: Ven. Robina Courtin's blog in www.robinacourtin.com – October 11th, 2019.

WHAT IS LOVE?

Ven. Robina Courtin

The English word “love” is used to convey so many different emotions that it’s amazing that we can communicate with each other! We can love chocolate cake, our dog, our mother, our new shoes, God, or our boyfriend. So, what’s the difference?

According to the Buddhist model of the mind there are three main categories of states of mind: positive, negative, and neutral – these are technical terms, not moralistic ones. By definition, the positive ones, the virtues, are altruistic; they’re necessarily related to others. “Love” in this context is defined as “the wish that another be happy”; it’s a delight in someone’s happiness.

So, right there, we can see that “love” of chocolate cake or shoes is hardly the right word. Nor is it accurate for someone who has a relationship with a creator. We need different words for both of these.

This definition of love is best used in relation to our mother, our sister, our friends. But what about our boyfriend? Yes, we want him to be happy, but what else is going on?

Being “in love” with our boyfriend, we have “attachment”, “desire”, “craving,” or in its strongest expressions, “lust” for him. And this is when it gets tricky. Our wish for him to be happy, our genuine love, in other words, gets completely confused when it’s mixed with attachment: we can’t tell one from another.

The Buddhist take on this simple word attachment goes pretty deep. It’s multi-faceted. Its energy is dissatisfaction and it’s simply there all the time, driving us to find things or events or people to fulfill our needs.

First, it’s an assumption that I must get what I want every second. Then, when this attachment finds what it wants – the boy, for example – it causes him to look way more delicious than he really is, which, in turn, triggers lots of excitement and extremely good feelings in the body. Then we manipulate to get him, possess him as our own, and have massive expectations that he will fulfill my every need. By now, attachment has built up this huge fantasy. We’ve practically written a novel in our head about him and our next fifty years together!

And all of this happens spontaneously. Buddhism says we come fully programmed with this from the first second of conception in our mother’s womb, simply because we’ve practiced it to perfection in countless past lives and brought it with us.

So, what’s the problem with this attachment? The key point about it and all the other negative states of mind that stem from it – anger, which is the response when attachment doesn’t get what it wants; jealousy, low self-esteem, arrogance, etc., etc. – is that it’s delusional; its not an accurate assessment of reality; it distorts things. Therefore it causes suffering. It’s a perilous state of mind.

This is difficult to see, especially because attachment triggers such good feelings. In fact, it seems cruel to even call it “negative”, which in Buddhism is merely referring to a state of mind that isn’t realistic and therefore causes pain and, in turn, causes us to harm others.

We need to analyze this, and then we can begin to distinguish between the altruistic state of mind called love and the delusion called attachment.

Initially it’s impossible to see how attachment causes suffering. But we can see it nakedly when it doesn’t get what it wants; when the bubble bursts; when the fighting starts, the jealousy, the pain, the loss. Attachment is at the root of them all.

In fact, if we didn’t have attachment, we couldn’t possibly have anger or depression or low self-esteem or jealousy: this is very sobering to contemplate.

Of course, we don’t need to give up our beloveds. When we’ve really worked deeply on our minds and can distinguish between attachment and love, even a little, then we can begin to get the best of both worlds, have our cake and eat it too!

So, we do our best. Never give up wanting someone to be happy, loving them in other words, even when they don’t do what my attachment wants. That’s the key to success of a good, healthy relationship.

Source: Ven. Robina Courtin’s blog in www.robinacourtin.com – May 31st, 2019.

COMPASSION PATH

FRIENDS, ENEMIES, AND STRANGERS

Ven. Robina Courtin

We could divide all beings on this planet into three categories: friends, enemies and strangers; there's no fourth category. A friend is the object of my attachment; an enemy is the object of my aversion; and a stranger is the object of my indifference.

And how do we feel about these three? We love and have compassion our friends, don't love our enemies, and couldn't care less about the strangers. This is the way the world is, even the animals, and we rarely question the logic of it.

There's a powerful meditation Tibetan Buddhists do called Equanimity, the goal of which is the heartfelt recognition that friends, enemies and strangers – in other words, all living beings – are the same as each other from one point of view: they all equally wish to be happy and don't want to suffer.

When we analyze our usual view, it's clear that the basis of loving someone – that is, delighting in their happiness, wanting them to be happy – is mainly attachment. When you do what I want, when you fulfill my needs, of *course* I want you to be happy! And it goes without saying that when you don't fulfill my attachment's needs, when you leave me for someone else, let's say, of *course* I don't want you to be happy! As for strangers, which is the vast majority of beings on this planet, we simply couldn't care less about them; they hardly even register in our minds. Why? Because they neither harm nor help us.

Seeing the truth of this, it's clear that the basis of loving or not loving someone is utterly self-centred. Eventually, from the Buddhist perspective, we can learn to love all beings equally – and this equanimity becomes the foundation. In other words, the logical reason to want someone to be happy is because *they* want to be happy, not because they make me happy.

This is huge! It's basically love with no strings attached. The mother, for example, who selflessly wants her child to be happy – “Whatever makes you happy!” – we know how marvellous it is to be on the receiving end of such love.

Right now we do, of course, have love for others, but it's usually only for the objects of our attachment – and when it comes to compassion it's either for the objects of our attachment or for innocent victims.

We have huge compassion for our cat, for example, but cannot stand the rat. But they are identical to each other in equally wanting happiness and not wanting suffering. We can't argue with the logic of this, but we are compelled to find all sorts of reasons for why the rat is harmful so we can justify harming it.

In fact, we can see that the usual view of compassion for the victim – the cat – goes hand in hand with anger towards the harmer – the rat. This is totally normal behaviour, so it seems almost outrageous to attempt to have compassion for all beings and try not to harm any of them.

But this is the starting point for the Buddha: to live life with the sincere wish to not harm any living being. And given that “everything exists on the tip of the wish,” as one Tibetan saying goes, it becomes like a beacon that guides us through life. It sounds sweet, but its implications are profound.

Source: Ven. Robina Courtin’s blog in www.robinacourtin.com – August, 2nd, 2019.

EMPTINESS AND MAHAMUDRA

EVERYTHING IS INTERDEPENDENT

Ven. Robina Courtin

We don't need to be great philosophers to see that everything around us functions in dependence upon everything else. If we start to think more deeply it's evident that we can't isolate anything; there's nothing that doesn't rely upon something else for its existence. The implications of this are vast, but as long as this totally natural law keeps working, as long as everything is going smoothly, we simply take it all for granted; in fact, we probably don't even think about it.

It's only when things *don't* work that we start to wonder what went wrong – in the world at large, in our own relationships, and, crucially, in our own very self.

In the Buddhist literature there are masses of teachings and instructions on this point; it's not just some vague mystical notion. It's all used as the basis of the logical analysis that the great yogis – present and past – involve themselves in to gain a coherent understanding of it, which serves, in turn as the basis of their ability to go deep into their minds at the subtlest level, in the disciplined practice of meditation, to gain experiential knowledge of it. And why? Because the experience of interdependence finally cuts the roots of ego and brings liberation. Literally. These are not clichés; these are the experiences of all those who've accomplished it.

And what is the result of this "liberation"? The recognition of our natural state of perfection, of goodness, of utter connectedness with others, which brings, just naturally, spontaneous love and compassion and the effortless ability to help others.

Not being in touch with this natural state causes us to cling primordially to a very solid, concrete sense of a self that has zero to do with interdependence, with reality. Just look at how we feel when the voices of ego – the depression, the jealousy, the low-self esteem, the anger – predominate! This is the proof that we think we're separate little beings, not interdependent at all: bereft, lonely, small, unseen.

And look how things become all around us, at work, at home, in our relationships when these neuroses are dominant: a mess! All these separate, lonely, fractured selves fighting for space! So sad.

But look at how we feel when love, contentment, compassion, and generosity, for example, predominate. There's a profound sense of connectedness, isn't there? Our sense of self has expanded, even a little, even for a moment, to encompass others.

And look how things around us appear now: harmonious, peaceful, joyful. This should encourage us to find methods to sustain this experience of natural interdependence.

We know these experiences intimately, but we take it all for granted. We utterly believe that the neuroses are at the core of our being, and when they're really

strong we truly believe that they actually define us. And, of course, we believe that it's everyone else's fault; it's not my fault: that's the biggest belief of ego!

And it's because these assumptions are deep in the bones of our being that we need to work hard at unpacking them, deconstructing them, and gradually connecting with our true self: spacious, interconnected, forgiving, fearless.

The fact is, the natural state of things *is* interdependence. No one made it that way. "Thusness", as the Buddhists would say: the way things are

It is the way it is, but we have to know it, experience it. We have to practise, of course, using the tried-and-tested methods; it's not some hit-and-miss affair. The methods are all there, at least in the Buddhist tradition. And we can see that so much of this wisdom has filtered down to us in many guises, including into our modern psychology.

Buddha would be delighted: he's happy to share!

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