

Unravelling Our Negative Emotions

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The first stage of practice is to abide by the laws of karma: control our body, speech, and mind and stop harming others, thus stopping harming ourselves.

Now we can go to a more advanced level and, as Lama Yeshe puts it, become our own therapists. We need to get to the root of the problems, the causes of why we harm others and ourselves: the deluded states of mind.

According to the Buddha's model of the mind, psychological states fall into three categories: positive, negative, and neutral. Leaving aside the neutral, the positive states, which are at the core of our being, are necessarily the cause of our wellbeing and happiness and the basis of our capacity to benefit others. The negative, which are not at the core of our being and thus can be removed, are necessarily the cause of our unhappiness and the basis of our harming others.

The key job, then, is to develop the skill to look inside, to be introspective, in a clear and disciplined way, so that we're qualified to do the actual job of changing our emotions, of distinguishing between the positive and negative. To become our own therapist, in other words, as Lama Yeshe puts it.

Not an easy job. First of all, we're not educated to look into our minds. Second, we only notice we're angry, for example, when the words vomit out of the mouth; or that we're depressed when we can't get out of bed one morning. Third, even if we do look at our feelings, often we can't tell the difference between the positive and the negative: they're mixed together in a big soup of emotions – and a puréed soup at.

And one of the biggest obstacles is that we don't think we can change them: they're so concrete, so real: "I'm born this way, what can I do about it?" We so fiercely identify with the neuroses, believing that they're the real me. We even think they're physical. And

anyway, who *wants* to look into their mind? "It's not my fault, is it? I didn't ask to get born! This is how we all are! What am I supposed to do about it?"

Everything conspires against our doing this job.

NEGATIVITY IS NOT INNATE

To give ourselves the confidence to even start, we need to think about how the negative states of mind are not at the core of our being, they do not define us, they are not innate, and thus can be removed. This flies in the face of our deeply held assumption – one that's reinforced by all contemporary models of the mind – that the positive and negative have equal status; that they're natural; they just are who we are. If you ask your therapist for methods to get rid of all anger, jealousy, attachment and the rest, they'll think you're insane!

We can be forgiven for thinking the negative, neurotic, unhappy emotions are at the core of our being: they certainly feel like it! We identify totally with them, follow them perfectly, truly believing this is who I really am. This is the irony of ego.

NEGATIVE STATES OF MIND ARE DISTURBING AND DELUSIONAL

So, if the negative, neurotic emotions are the source of our pain and the positive ones the cause of our happiness, then we'd better learn to distinguish them. This is the very essence of the job of being our own therapist.

What are negative states of mind? They have two main characteristics (which the positive ones necessarily lack) and these are indicated by two commonly used synonyms: "disturbing emotions" and "delusions."

Disturbing Even though we can see that anger is disturbing to oneself – just look at an angry person: they're out of their mind! – we fiercely live in denial of it; or we deflect it, so determined are we to believe that the external catalyst is the main problem. My friends on death row in Kentucky told me that they receive visits from an old Catholic man who, after thirty years of grief and rage after his daughter was murdered, finally realized that the *main* reason for his suffering

wasn't his daughter's murder but his rage, his anger.

Delusional The other characteristic that these unhappy states of mind possess is that they're delusional. We'd be offended if someone accused of that, but that's exactly what Buddha is saying. The extent to which our minds are caught up in attachment, anger and the rest is the extent to which we are not in touch with reality. He's saying that we're all delusional, it's just a question of degree.

In other words, anger, attachment and the rest are concepts, *wrong* concepts. It seems like a joke to say that these powerful emotions are based in thoughts, but that's because we only notice them when they roar up to the surface as emotion.

Perhaps we can see the disturbing aspect of them, but rarely the delusional.

They are distorted assessments of the person or the event that we are attached to or angry with; they're elaborations, exaggerated stories, lies, misconceptions, fantasies, conceptual constructions, superstitions. As Rinpoche puts it, they decorate on top of what is already there layers upon layers of characteristics that are simply not there. Bad enough that we see things this way; the worst part is that we *believe* that these stories are true. This is what keeps us locked inside our own personal insane asylum.

Understanding this is the key to understanding our negative states of mind and, therefore, how to get rid of them.

EGO-GRASPING: THE ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

At the root of this, as Buddha calls it, is ignorance: *marigpa* in Tibetan: unawareness: a fundamental unawareness of how we actually exist. The function of this "ego-grasping," as it's appropriately called, is to isolate and concretize this universe-big sense of self, a deluded sense of I, a totally fabricated sense of I, whose nature is fear: paranoid, dark, cut off, separate, alienated, and overwhelming.

This instinctive, pervasive sense of an independent, self-existent, real, solid, definite me-ness, totally pervades everything – there

is not an instant when it is not there. It's at the deepest level of assumption, beneath everything. It is always there, informing everything we think and feel and say and do and experience – and the root even of existing in samsara in the first place.

THE MAIN VOICE OF THE I IS ATTACHMENT

Ego-grasping is the root but the delusion that runs our lives is attachment. The irony of ego is we actually feel empty, bereft, and that neediness, that bottomless pit of yearning, that hunger: that's attachment. And it's the main voice of ego. From eons of practice we come into this life with a profound sense of dissatisfaction, neediness; a primordial sense that something is missing, of being bereft, lonely, cut off. It's just there, *all the time*, in the bones of our being.

This attachment, this desire, being a misconception, makes the mistake of believing, a million percent, that that delicious person, that gorgeous taste, that lovely smell, that nice feeling, that idea – that when I get *that*, when I have it inside me, then I'll feel full, then I'll be content. That is what desire thinks.

This is so hard to see how desire is deluded. And it is not meant to be a moralistic issue. As soon as we hear these words we feel a bit resentful, "What do you mean – I'm not allowed to have pleasure?" That's how we feel. But as Lama Yeshe has pointed out: we're either completely hedonistic, and grasping and shoving everything in, or we're completely puritanical. And the irony is that they are both coming from a misunderstanding of desire; they both come from ego-grasping.

Buddha is not being moralistic. He is not saying we should not have pleasure – the reality is he is saying we *should* have masses of pleasure, joy, happiness, but naturally and appropriately, and, incredibly, without relying upon anything external. This is our natural state when we've depolluted our minds of the neuroses, in fact.

Right now, because of the misconception that desire has, and because of the ignorance that drives it, we have got the wrong end of

the stick. They think that the delicious chocolate cake, that gorgeous thing is *out there*, vibrating deliciousness, demanding that I eat it – nothing coming from my side at all. As Lama Zopa Rinpoche points out, we don't think our mind plays any role at all. We think that it's all happening from the cake's side, all the energy is coming from the cake.

OUR MIND MAKES IT UP

And the thing is that we don't see this process! The fact is we are making up the cake – attachment has written a huge story about cake and what it will do for us. It is a complex conceptual construction, an invention, an elaborate view, an interpretation, an opinion.

We're like a child, as one lama said, who draws a lion – and then becomes afraid of it. We invent everything in our reality, and then we have all the fears and the paranoia and the depression and the grasping. We're too much!

But we make up that cake, we make up the enemy – we made them up ourselves. This sounds pretty cosmic, but it is literally true. This doesn't mean there is no cake there – there is. And it doesn't mean that Fred didn't punch you – he did. We need to distinguish between the facts and the fiction: that's the tricky part.

It is hard to see this, but this is the way delusions function. And basically they are liars. What attachment and ignorance are seeing is simply not true. What they're seeing simply does not exist.

There *is* a cake there, but what we think is cake and what cake actually is are hugely different. This is interesting. And because this is hard to understand indicates how ancient it is within us.

What we're seeing or experiencing, what we are grasping at – delicious cake from its own side that will make me happy – is a total lie. It doesn't exist like that at all. There *is* a cake there, it *is* brown, it *is* square: that's valid. And this is what's hard to distinguish – the facts and the fiction. What is actually there and what is not there. That is the job we need to do in knowing the way delusions

work and therefore how to get rid of them and, finally, to see emptiness.

ATTACHMENT IS THE VOICE OF THE VICTIM

Another characteristic of attachment is that it is the voice of the victim. We truly feel we have no control – cake is this incredible powerful thing, and I just have to have it. What choice do I have? That is attachment talking. Attachment gives all the power to the outside object. Which is why we feel like a baby. That's the victim mentality. And victim mentality, the one of hopelessness, the one of no control, that's the voice of attachment. Literally. That's exactly how attachment functions. Attachment is giving all the power to that object. It sees this truly delicious divine thing, which in reality our mind has made up, and then we believe it and then blame it.

ATTACHMENT IS NOT A FUNCTION OF THE SENSES

"We make the body the boss," as Lama Yeshe would tell us. We totally follow what the senses feel. We assume the delicious cake is an object of the senses – of course, it is; but what we think we see isn't what's there. What appears to the sense of sight, for example, is not a delicious cake but simply the shape and colour of the thing. "Delicious cake" is a story made up by the mental consciousness, specifically attachment. This is a crucial point.

Let's analyze. What is being experienced in relation to that cake? What are the states of mind? One of them is the senses indeed – we smell it in the kitchen, so there's our nose sense. Then there's the touch, the sight, we see the shape and color when it comes to the table; then we touch it, the hand feels it, then there's the taste consciousness, the one we're wanting the most. So four of the five senses are involved in the experience of that cake.

The senses are like dumb animals. Our tongue doesn't experience the hunger for the cake, it doesn't leap out of our face and grab the cake desperately; even our hand doesn't, although it looks like it. The hand goes out to the cake, but not from its own side. So what

does? It's propelled by the neurotic need to get the cake in the mouth. The mental consciousness, in other words. The thought. It is the story about what is chocolate cake, and I need chocolate cake, all the stuff about chocolate cake that is chattering away in the mind. That is where the delusions exist. Attachment is not a function of the taste. It is simply not possible. How can it be? Our tongue doesn't feel neurotic. Our tongue doesn't feel grasping, our tongue doesn't feel, "I want to have more cake," and our tongue doesn't stop functioning when we give up attachment. It is just a doorway through which this bunch of thoughts, these concepts, this ego-grasping grasps at the experience, isn't it? That is all. So the senses do not experience attachment. It is a logical fact.

WE ARE ALL JUNKIES

So of course for eons we have had the mistaken assumption that satisfying the senses is the way to get happiness. So right now, we are totally dependent on sensory objects. We are all junkies, it's just a question of degree. We can't imagine having pleasure unless we get that fix. That fix is any one of the objects of the five senses. Which makes it sound quite brutal.

But unless we can start to look into this and cut through this whole way of working, we will never break free of suffering, we'll never become content, satisfied, fulfilled. Ever. Which is why, the basis of practice, the foundation of all realizations, is morality. Discipline. It means literally practicing control over the senses. And it is not a moralistic issue; It's a practical one. The aim is to get as happy as possible. This is the aim.

This happiness, this pleasure, is not deluded. If pleasure were deluded, we might as well give up now. Pleasure, happiness, joy are totally appropriate.

So where's the problem? Why do we suffer? Why are we frantic and anxious and desperate, fantasizing about the cake before it's even there, then shoving two pieces in when it comes, and then being depressed when we eat too much? Why all this rubbish? Because we have these delusions. Suffering doesn't come from pleasure, it doesn't come from the

senses. It comes from neuroses in the mental consciousness. But right now it's virtually impossible for us to have pleasure without attachment.

ATTACHMENT TO A PERSON

It's the same with people. Let's look at the person we are attached to, the person we are in love with – even more dramatic. Again, this soup of emotions, which we never analyze, never deconstruct.

I can say, "I love you." That means I wish you to be happy. Totally appropriate. Unbelievable, virtuous. The more of this the better. We will only get happiness if we keep thinking that. "I want you not to suffer," that's called compassion. Generosity, maybe you'd like to give the person something. Generosity, in its nature is a virtue, necessarily the cause of happiness.

So, love doesn't cause suffering, compassion doesn't cause suffering, the senses don't directly cause suffering, happiness can't possibly cause suffering – so what does? The cause of suffering is the attachment, first of all, the neurotic sense of an "I," a hungry "I" that sees this person, grossly exaggerates their value to me, gives too much power, puts the power "out there" in that person, just like the cake, which implies that we are devaluing the power of ourself. We're giving all the power to this person, like it's all out there, this person, vibrating, so delicious, so gorgeous, this is exactly how it feels. So attachment is hungry and empty and bereft and lonely. And is completely convinced that having that person is going to make me happy.

What attachment does is exaggerate the beautiful qualities of the person, it is exaggerating our sense of an "I" that needs that person, because attachment thinks that if I don't get that person then I am not happy; because we don't believe we can be happy inside, we have to have an object. Attachment then starts to manipulate this person, expects massively that this person will give me happiness.

It's the same with the person we loathe. We really believe that that person, from out there, from their own side, independently,

definitely, is an awful person, as if ugliness is coursing in their veins along with their blood. We hear their name, it appears awful, we see their face, it appears awful. The discomfort in our mind is huge. We think the discomfort, the unhappiness, the hurt, the anger, the pain, we actually think and believe they are doing it to us.

But it's a lie. It's our own anger that causes the person to look awful, the anger that makes us so miserable.

GOING BEYOND ENEMY, FRIEND, STRANGER

Usually the only person we wish to be happy – that's the meaning of love – is the person we are attached to. And the only person we are attached to is the person we love. So we assume because they come together, they're the same thing. It is just not accurate. We need to start going beyond those limits, which is so scary. When we start practicing equanimity, we analyze: enemy, friend, and stranger – we try to cut through this narrow self-centred view of attachment, ignorance and aversion.

Right now we assume it is normal that when a person is mean to me, I don't like them. So we call them enemies. And we assume it is normal that when a person is nice to me, we call them friend. And when a person is doing neither, they are called stranger. That's the reality of the entire universe, isn't it? We need to go beyond this one.

WHAT IS ANGER AND WHAT IS ANGER NOT?

A perfect question. And the perfect answer, which I heard from a lama, is: "Anger is the response when attachment doesn't get what it wants." Attachment and aversion are utterly linked. Being a fantasy, attachment is not sustainable; the bubble has to burst, and it has nowhere to go but aversion (or ignorance, which manifests as boredom, indifference, uncaring).

In our never-ending efforts to keep the panic at bay, we hungrily seek the right sounds, smells, tastes, feelings, thoughts, words, but the split second we don't get

them, aversion arises, exploding outwards as anger or imploding inwards as depression, guilt, hopelessness, self-hate.

We have a lot of misunderstanding about what anger is. So, what is it not?

Anger is not physical. Anger is part of our mind, and our mind is not physical. It exists in dependence upon the brain, the genes, the chemical reactions, but is not these things.

When anger's strong, it triggers huge physical symptoms: the blood boils, the heart beats fast, the spit comes out the mouth, the eyes open wide in panic, the voice shouts. Or if we experience aversion as depression, the body feels like a lead weight; there's no energy, a terrible inertia. And then, when we boost our serotonin, the body feels good again.

But these are just gross expressions of what, finally, is purely thought: a story made up by our conceptual mind that exaggerates the ugly aspects of the person or event or oneself.

Recent findings prove what is explained in Tibetan Medicine: that what goes on in the mind affects the body.

Anger is not someone else's fault. This doesn't mean that the person didn't punch me; sure they did. And it doesn't mean that punching me is not bad; sure it is. But the person didn't make me angry. The punch is merely the catalyst for my anger, a tendency in my mind. If there were no anger, all I'd get is a broken nose.

Anger does not come from our parents. We love to blame our parents! Actually, if Buddha is wrong in his assertion that our mind comes from previous lives and is propelled by the force of our own past actions into our mother's womb; and if the materialists are right in asserting that our parents created us, then we *should* blame them. How dare they create me, like Frankenstein and his monster, giving me anger and jealousy and the rest! But they didn't, Buddha says. (Nor did a superior being – but we dare not blame him!). They gave us a body; the rest is ours (including our good qualities).

Anger is not only the shouting. Just because a person doesn't shout and yell

doesn't mean they're not angry. When we understand that anger is based on the thought called aversion, then we can see we are all angry. Of course, if we never look inside, we won't notice the aversion; that's why people who don't express anger experience it as depression or guilt.

Anger is not necessary for compassionate action. His Holiness the Dalai Lama responded to an interviewer who suggested that anger seems to act as a motivator for action, "I know what you mean. But with anger, your wish to help doesn't last. With compassion, you never give up."

We need to discriminate between good and bad, but Buddha says that we should criticize the action, not the person. As Martin Luther King said, it's okay to find fault – but then we should think, "What can I do about it?"

It's exactly the same with seeing our own faults, but instead of feeling guilty we should think, "What can I do about it?" Then we can change. Anger and guilt are paralyzed, impotent, useless.

Anger is not natural. Often we think we need anger in order to be a reasonable human being; that it's unnatural not to have it; that it gives perspective to life. It's a bit like thinking that in order to appreciate pleasure we need to know pain. But that's obviously ridiculous: for me to appreciate your kindness, you first need to punch me in the nose?

Anger is not at the core of our being. Being a delusional state of mind, a lie, a misconception, it's logical that anger can be eliminated. If I think there are two cups on my table, whereas there is only one, that's a misconception. What to do with the thought "there are two cups on my table"? Remove it from my mind! Recognize that there is one cup and stop believing the lie. Simple.

Of course, the lies that believe that I'm self-existent, that delicious objects make me happy, that ugly ones make me suffer, that my mind is my brain, that someone else created me – *these* lies have been in my mind since beginningless time. But the method for getting rid of them is the same.

What's left when we've removed the lies, the delusions, is the truth of our own innate goodness, fully perfected. That is what's natural.

PRACTICE IS PAINFUL

Real practice is painful – real practice. Until it is painful, it is not practice, we're just playing safe. We're just keeping our nice comfort zone. Practice has to threaten something – it has to feel painful. Just like when we are overweight, we decide we are going to get thin and beautiful, and we start doing push-ups. It has to be painful at first. We know that if the second we start feeling pain from doing pushups we stop, we will never benefit from doing them. We can always pretend "Oh I did my pushups this morning," but if the second they started being painful, we stopped, we know that if our muscles don't hurt, they will never get strong – it is logic. Giving up attachment is like that – it has to be painful.

Until then, we are just being in our comfort zone – we're playing safe, thinking that being spiritual means smiling and being holy and having a pleasant manner. It is just not so. Until we stretch, until we go beyond our limits, we won't get better at doing anything. We really get our body strong when we go beyond our limits every day. How do we become an accomplished pianist or anything? We have to go beyond our limits. That's what spiritual practice is – we have to stretch our limits.

This means we have to be facing our attachment every day, feeling the pain of it, seeing it. And then, the second we start to do that, somehow we become fulfilled, satisfied. That is what is interesting. When we start to give up being a junkie, we start to become happy. We begin to taste our own potential. As long as we continue to follow attachment, which is so deep, we will never be happy.

MIND IS INNATELY PURE

Buddha says that our mind is innately pure. There's some real logic to this, you know. But one has to think about all this. The fundamental nature of our mind is pure. Which doesn't mean we were pure once and

lost the plot, like Adam and Eve. Not like that. I like to put it this way: that what we think of when we say “water,” we know we mean by “water” this pure, clear stuff, isn’t it – two bits of H and one bit of O. It’s just naturally pure, isn’t it? But we know it can be polluted. Right?

Well, our mind, if you like, you could say actually that the H₂O of our mind is simply goodness – compassion, wisdom, joy, love, generosity, and the rest: they are the substance of our mind, you could say. And the delusions, which are the voices of ego, are the pollution. And that’s what causes all the pain, all the suffering, all the dramas, all these separate me’s all fighting for our spaces, right? Do you understand?

The word “Buddha” or the word in Tibetan “*sang-gye*” for “Bud-dha,” the first syllable, “*sang*” implies the complete removal of all the pollution, you know – all the nonsense, all the delusions and all the causes of suffering, all the ego-rubbish. And the syllable “*gye*” – for “dha,” the second syllable – implies the complete development of all the goodness. And that goodness is the H₂O that’s at the core of our being. That’s who we really are, Buddha says. And so our goal is to finally rid the mind of the pollution so what’s left is all the goodness. That’s it. That’s Buddhahood. That’s enlightenment. And it’s a psychological thing, not some mystical thing in the sky.

And it’s linked to reality. This is the point. The wisdom and compassion completely have to come together. Because when you’ve fully accomplished the compassion wing, you have to have accomplished the wisdom wing, which eradicated all the misconceptions, all the voices of ego, all the ignorance, all the anger, all the jealousy, all the pride. All the pollution is gone completely so your mind is in sync with the universe, quite literally.

They also say there’s no sense of a separate self – His Holiness mentioned this. There’s no sense of subject/object. Right now, we have a universe full of a trillion separate selves don’t we? And occasionally we come together and are nice to each other. But that only goes so far, you know? You

understand my point. So when you realize emptiness, when you’ve eradicated the lie of ignorance, and perfected that realization of emptiness, and cultivated the compassion wing, it’s as if your sense of “I” is as big as the universe. You identify with every other living being. You do not have a sense of being separate. I know it sounds kind of cosmic, but it’s the literal truth, they say.

BE AWARE OF YOUR MIND TO PREVENT CAUSING YOURSELF FUTURE PROBLEMS

But first we have to control our body and speech. If you’ve got strong attachment to alcohol, we all know perfectly well you can’t possibly give up attachment while you keep drinking alcohol. So you want to back away from the object.

So we can see, the very first level is you control the physical. You keep yourself out of the way of people who make you very angry. You keep out of the way of things that make your attachment berserk. I mean we don’t even understand this in our culture. You know, look at ordinary relationships. I just think our romantic notions are so ridiculous. You assume you’re supposed to marry somebody, go live in the same bed in the same house for the rest of your life with this person. The biggest number of murders are domestic. I mean I’m not surprised.

It’s too much to expect of ordinary people with anger and attachment and jealousy to live in the same bed and the same room in the same small house and not expect problems! I mean, we just think, “Oh, I’m a bad person, I fight with my husband, I’m supposed to love him.” It’s too much to expect of ordinary people. I think it’s insane!

If ordinary people realized: I’ve got attachment, I’m angry, I’m going to get married, yes, but let’s have two separate rooms. Who would think that? You’d get divorced straight away because, “You don’t love me, dear!”

But it’s common sense that you’d be more aware of your mind in that situation; you’d have more space. You’d be aware of your danger areas, and you’d protect yourself from problems.

At the first level of practice you learn to be aware, and you control the physical environment. This is already so mature. It's unbelievable. Most of the problems on earth would not exist if we could all do this. Do you hear my point? Then, once you've harnessed your body and speech – and that's where all the vows are at the very first level – you take vows not to lie, steal, bad-mouth, run around with somebody else's partner, and vows are very powerful – this helps you enormously. Just control your body and speech. And the reason – in the very first level of Buddhist practice – the reason to control your body and speech is not because "Buddha says so." It's not because you're supposed to be a good person. It's because killing and lying and sexual misconduct harm *you*.

So, it's like you see this is the first level of controlling yourself. Control your body and speech. Then you're so together and now you can go to high school, now you can be your own therapist; you can learn concentration meditation and you can begin to develop this *amazing* skill to see this insane asylum in your own head that's usually controlling your body and speech.

And that's where you really become a Buddhist. You become your own therapist. You get some concentration, you step back from the chaos. You're seeing the thoughts and feelings and emotions. You're identifying what they are. It's a super-sophisticated job to do, you know? I mean, even Western psychology says there's a thousand thoughts a second. That's what Buddha's saying... We don't notice our thoughts now until they're completely screaming out loud. Do you understand my point?

But to be able to step back and develop this introspective technique, and step back from your mind so you can begin to *hear* the chaos, and slowly start to unravel it, and begin to put words to the voices, and then, *then* – the skill to actually argue with ego's crazy voices – and your wisdom will argue with them – this is where you do the reconstructing. So, it's a really full-on job, you know. This is the day-to-day job.

The wisdom in you and the skill in you and the kindness and the patience and the intelligence and the compassion and the love voices are arguing with the attachment and the anger and the depression and the jealousy, the low self-esteem voices, which at the moment run the show. So you're having this internal argument with yourself; you're being your own therapist, quite literally. It's a struggle, of course it is. My habit in my life was to say whatever I felt the moment I felt it. Even the first years of being a Buddhist, I didn't believe it was possible to change anger. It just takes time, you know.

LEARN TO LIVE WITH THE CRAZY ROOMMATES IN OUR HEAD

So you've got to be really courageous, because one of the first consequences of beginning to practice, to look at our minds, is you think you're getting worse. But you're not getting worse; you're just seeing the chaos for the first time. And this is a good sign. And we can't even cope with this; we can't cope with seeing any negativity – we want to go kill ourselves, you know.

So part of this process – a crucial part – is that we've got to learn to live with this. We've got all these crazy roommates, you know; one's called anger, one's jealousy, one's depression, one's low self-esteem, and there are about a thousand variations of each one. Up until now we've identified with these crazy roommates; we've believed that this is who I really am.

We've got to start identifying with love and wisdom and kindness, and we've got to learn to live with the crazy ones, not wish they'd go away, not hate them, not want to kill ourselves because of it; but learn to know they're not permanent – they are *there* because we've practiced them in the past, but they're not permanent and we can change. Then you're more brave; you learn to deal with all the rubbish and live with it every day knowing you can control it and change it.

Because our attachment just wants it all to be nice; you think, "Oh, I'm a spiritual practitioner, I should be good now." We've got to be courageous, you know, and see

them all, as one of my friends, a therapist, says, "It's having your hands in your own shit." I prefer to call it "tasting your own vomit." It is that. It is that, actually. So you've got to really be courageous.

PRACTICE STARTS WITH MOTIVATION

So how to begin? It all comes from motivation. We can start the day by deciding we will begin, be very courageous. It starts from the thought. We tend in the West to dismiss thoughts. We say, "It's only in the mind," we give no value to the mind, even though we are caught in it. We give no value to just thought.

The point is, that if we really understand this fundamental, and easily provable, truth that every thought programs us into what we will become, we would be so happy to have positive thoughts, and be content with them. Because of two things; first, everything that we do comes from the thought that we think. If I am going to get up and walk out the door, what is the first thing that has to happen? My legs don't just jump up and walk out, my mind has to say "I want to walk out that door." So what does that mean? How do we walk out a door? The first thing is to think "I want to walk out that door."

So every day, you're saying "I want to be compassionate, I want to be beneficial." You're aspiring, and then you'll act. It is no mystery. That's how we become pianists, footballers, a cook – or a happy, beneficial person. It starts with the thought, the motivation, the aspiration.

So we just start our practice with powerful sincere motivations. We are sincere, after all; we do want to be these things, loving, compassionate, etc. Genuinely wanting, seeing the reasonableness of having a compassionate thought, seeing the reasonableness of turning around a negative thought. Not thinking that thought doesn't matter. What we are is the product of our thoughts. It is simply a fact. This is what karma is saying. No one else made us into anything, we made yourself. As Lama Zopa says, we can mould our mind into any shape we wish.

Practice is, in the beginning, every day, is motivation, motivation, motivation. I want to do this, I am aspiring to that. When we start every day, we wish "May I be useful, may I not shoot my mouth off to too many people," etc. Even this is so profound. We have to value the thought, value the mind, it is so powerful. Like the Dalai Lama says, we are then on the right track for the rest of the day. Don't underestimate that. If we really got that, we would be so content, knowing we were sowing the seeds for future crops of happiness. It is like we had a big open field, and we are sowing seeds for the future. That's practice. That's how we start.

We shouldn't fret, "I'm hopeless, I'm useless." We are too concrete in our thinking. So we start with the motivation, start with the thoughts, and we go into the day, and bring that awareness with us. Watch our mind, be careful of the rubbish, try not to shoot our mouth off too much, try to be a bit useful, rejoice in the good stuff.

At the end of the day, we look back, we regret our mistakes and rejoice in our efforts, and then go to bed with a happy mind. That's one day of practice. One day at a time. It is organic, and it's humble. We start one day at a time, and slowly, something develops.