

USING SICKNESS FOR THE PATH

Advice Given By Venerable Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche To A Student With Cancer

Generate love and compassion, either using the seven techniques of cause and effect, or thinking:

Love: All sentient beings are deprived of happiness. They do not know the causes of happiness and, although some of them may know, they are too lazy to create them. How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings had happiness and its causes! I am going to cause that to happen.

Compassion: How much are all sentient beings suffering. They are ignorant of the causes and even if they may know them, they are too lazy to abandon them. How wonderful if all sentient beings were free from suffering and its causes. I am going to cause that to happen.

I am only one person, just one. Even if I am in the hells there is no reason to get depressed. Even if I am free from all sufferings there is no reason to get excited.

All others are numberless and, like me, they want to be happy and they do not want suffering. How wonderful if I alone experience the sufferings of all infinite other sentient beings!

With compassion you take all the sufferings from human beings and gods and also from all beings in the lower realms. Breathing in, take the sufferings through the nose like a polluted smoke and this destroys the self-cherishing thought.

When the self-cherishing is destroyed, the real 'I', the independent, unlabelled, existing-from-its-own-side 'I', this 'I', which does not exist in reality is seen to be empty. The 'I' is merely imputed on the aggregates. The appearing 'I' is false, but one believes that it is true and grasps at that. Then one thinks that oneself is more important than anybody else. So, when the self-cherishing thought is destroyed, the 'I' that appears, unlabelled, concrete and independent, is also destroyed. This leaves some empty space in the mind that can be filled with true happiness and can remove all fears and delusions.

The problem comes when one grasps at that 'I' which is false. When grasping at that 'I', you say, "I want to be happy" and then you forget others and you do not feel that others also want to be happy. You do not want suffering and you stop feeling for all others who have heavier sufferings.

For example, when you imagine one million dollars in your hand, you cherish it so much. Then when you discover that it is just a hallucination, you see that there is nothing to cherish in your hand. The same happens with the 'I', which we grasp as so precious but does not exist and is a hallucination.

So the 'I' is empty, it does not exist. It is empty of existence from its own side; like a bubble that bursts or like a piece of wood which you see in the darkness and you think it is a person. When you switch on the light the person disappears. They do not go anywhere, it is simply empty of person. The same happens with the 'I'.

With love - give to others. You give to others your body transformed into a wish-fulfilling jewel. You also give your possessions, friends and relatives to all sentient beings, the hell beings, hungry ghosts and animals. You also give all the enjoyments. All places become a Pure Land: there are beautiful ponds, flowers, parks, lakes, streams of pure clean water, trees full of fruits, flowers and leaves, perfumes, scents, beautiful birds making dharma sounds, jewels and treasures everywhere under the ground and so forth. All becomes Amitabha Pure Land. All these enjoyments cause the path to be generated in the mind of all beings and they become Amitabha Buddha.

Each sentient being receives what he or she wants. For example: you give thousands of different types of delicious foods, especially to the hungry ghosts. For the hell beings all weapons become flowers, the human beings receive money, doctors, medicines and Gurus. These enjoyments cause them to generate the path in their minds and they become Amitabha Buddha.

Then generate the Special Attitude:

In reality, they have not become enlightened. Now I have all the opportunities. I have received a perfect human rebirth. I have found a virtuous guide who can lead me to enlightenment. I have the dharma wisdom eye to know what to practice and what to abandon. I am responsible for freeing them from their suffering and leading them to enlightenment.

But now I cannot do anything. I do not know the minds of sentient beings. I do not know the methods to lead them to enlightenment. So I have to become enlightened in order to lead all sentient beings to enlightenment.

Do this meditation morning, afternoon and night.

Then train the mind in the following ways:

* *I am experiencing this problem, this sickness, on behalf of others.*
(To think in this way is very important.)

* *I am experiencing this problem because I have created the cause. I am finishing the karma that I have created so I will not experience suffering in the future.*

* *This experience is helping me to practice Dharma.*

* *These are the blessings of the Guru helping me to purify.*

* *I am purifying. This is like doing Vajrasattva retreat or hundreds of thousands of prostrations. Besides that, this is helping me to meditate on bodhicitta and emptiness. It is like doing the preliminary practices.*

* *This practice is done for others, so I accumulate numberless merits because others are*

numberless.

** With emptiness and bodhicitta the practice is very powerful. I accumulate even more merits than doing the preliminary practices because the practice is done for others.*

Remember the stories of the past lives of Shakyamuni Buddha. For example, when he killed a man who was going to kill five hundred people, with great compassion he accepted all the suffering that he may have to experience in the hells. The result was that he shortened his time in samsara by a hundred thousand aeons. Also, in another life, when he was pulling a chariot of fire he had the wish to experience that suffering for all others. He sacrificed himself for others and as a result he took birth in a pure realm.

Also think: *This problem is the best medicine. This problem, which is used to develop bodhicitta (by thinking that it is being experienced for others) and emptiness, is the best medicine.* This is because you finish with the sickness and also with its causes, which are karma and delusions.

The antidote to the self-cherishing thought and the delusions is the Dharma, because the Dharma is the opposite to them. Similarly, the problems are the opposite of the self-cherishing mind so are like the Dharma. The problem has the same function as the Dharma, it destroys the self-cherishing and the delusions which are the source of all our problems and sufferings.

So, instead of taking the sickness, the cancer, on yourself, you give it to the self-cherishing thought. This is very important. Doing it like that, you stop the depression arising, you don't allow unhappiness into the mind and instead you have calm and peace in the mind. The empty space that is left as the depression disappears starts to be filled with happiness.

Also: This problem is making me develop compassion; thus I can achieve enlightenment very quickly because I am accumulating infinite merits.

Today many people are dying, even people without cancer, without AIDS, many very healthy people. So even without cancer the time of death can come at any moment. So it is necessary to purify and accumulate merits.

Colophon: This advice was given by the Venerable Lama Thubten Zopa Rinpoche in October 1989 to Pilar, a Spanish student in Madrid with cancer. It is based on notes taken by Spanish monk, Juan Manzanera, as it could not be taped. Slightly edited by Ven Carolyn Lawler at FPMT Central Office, August 1990.

Due to this merit may all beings meet a perfect spiritual guide and be able to fulfill his wishes and in this way accumulate extensive merit and purify all the negativities and causes of sicknesses without delay.