

Lama Michel Rinpoche

Anger and Patience

teaching transcript

These short but powerful teachings explain not only the causes of suffering and the negative side-effects of anger, but also offer a practical method to eliminate such destructive emotions and develop a more peaceful mind and heart.

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Uni Mail Université de Genève

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Preliminary prayers

***lo chok sangpoi pel gyur trashi pa
thub chen ten pe trinle yar ngo da
phel gye dro lor tsam pe dze pa chen
pal den lame shab la sol wa deb***

Glorious auspiciousness of the supreme virtuous mind, divine action of the Buddha's teaching beneficial like a waxing moon, acting exactly in accordance with the mental capacity of living beings for their development and maturation, at the feet of this glorious guru, I request:

OM AH GURU VAJRADHARA SUMATI MUNI SHASANE KARMA
UHTA VARDANAYE SHRI BADHRA VAR SAMANIYA SARWA
SIDDHI HUNG HUNG

May You grant us the mundane and extraordinary siddhis of Lama Vajradhara, the noble mind of the Buddha's doctrine, which increases the activity of the noble glorious ones.

***sang gye choe dang tsog kyi chog nam la
jang chub bar du dag ni kyab su chi
dag ghi jin sog gyi pai so nam kyi
dro la pen chir sang gye drub par shog***

In the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha I take refuge until enlightenment. Through the practice of generosity and the other perfections, may I become a Buddha for the benefit of all sentient beings.

Bonjour.

First of all, I would like to say that I am very happy to be here today. The last time we were together we spoke about *lojong*, mind training, and today we are going to talk about a subject I like very much: anger and patience .

You know, we are all the same; we are all very similar. It doesn't matter where we come from, what our cultural background is, what our social status is, what work we do, what religion we follow, there is something that makes us all equal. We all suffer, we all want to be happy, and we all do everything we do thinking it's the best for our own happiness, guided however, by our own ignorance.

I am not attached to a view of what is right or what is wrong. I don't want to make any type of moralization by saying, "Oh you should do this, you should not do that." Everything is fine as long as it works, OK? But what is our goal? What do we want? We want to be happy, we want to feel in harmony with ourselves and the world around us, we want to be satisfied, right?

And in order to reach such a state, which we can call inner peace, we do everything we do in life. So all the times we fight, all the times we run after someone - everything we do, we do basically because we want to be happy, don't we?

Suffering and its causes

Generally speaking, we have two main types of suffering. We have physical suffering, which is like the suffering of a headache or kidney stones, of heat, cold or hunger. For example, when it's too hot, when we have any type of sickness or any other suffering that originates from the body, this is physical suffering; we know it well. Then we have what is called mental

suffering. Mental suffering is all the suffering that is created by the mind. So what do we have there? Worries, anxiety, sadness, jealousy and many others that we all also know very well. Dissatisfaction.

So suffering can be defined as all the sensations that we have which we want to stop as soon as possible and not come back again. As a result, we try to create situations in in our daily lives in which we are protected, protected from suffering. We try to have the right job, we want to have pleasant people around us, we want to have a nice body, we want people to love us, we want to have money, etc. So we want to create a situation around us that keeps us safe from suffering. It's as if we try to protect ourselves from suffering, creating a, let's say, perfect world. But we are never able to get there; we are merely trying constantly to create such a situation. At the same time, we grab what we think makes us happy. If there is anything that makes us happy, we grab it and we don't want to let it go. And likewise, if there is anything that makes us suffer, we try to get rid of it. So, this is our normal way of dealing with life, and we could say that there's nothing wrong with it. The problem is that often we don't look for the solution in the right place.

Once a rabbi told me this story, which I like very much, saying it was a Jewish story, and then an imam told me the same story saying it was a Muslim story. I don't know if it's a Jewish story or a Muslim story but it could also be a Buddhist story because it fits very well with Buddhist thought:

We are walking around in a small town on a small road going downhill. It's a dark night, and we find ourselves near a street lamp. Under the light, one man is looking for something on the ground. He's looking and looking; he's desperate. So we approach the man and ask, "Can we help you?" and he says,

“Oh yes, please. I’ve lost my house key.” So, we start looking for it, too. After a long time looking but not finding any key, we ask the man, “Where did you lose your key?” and he answers, “Oh, I lost my key at the bottom of the hill, down over there.” And we ask, “Why then are you looking for your key here?” “Oh, because it’s too dark down there. I have more light here!” he answers. *[laughter]*

We can put a lot of effort into looking for a solution but if we are looking in the wrong place, we will get no result. This is clear, isn’t it?

So, for physical suffering, what type of solution do we need? A physical one, right? If we get a headache, we can get some fresh air, sleep more, change our diet or even take a pain reliever, go to the doctor, etc. Of course, meditation can help, but it’s not the only solution. If you have a physical problem, your doctor can resolve your physical suffering (as long as you choose a good doctor). So, physical suffering requires a physical solution.

What about mental suffering? Where do we need to look for a solution to mental suffering? Can we find it in material things? No, mental suffering requires a mental solution, OK? If we look for ourselves, each one of us, and we put our two sufferings on a scale, physical and mental, which one do we have more of? You know the answer for yourself but normally it’s mental suffering. Why? Because we live in a rich part of the world. Song Rinpoche, a great master, used to say:

“Poor people suffer mostly from physical suffering. Rich people suffer mostly from mental suffering. At the end of the day, they both suffer equally.”

It’s not because we are materially rich that we have found the solution, have we?

Deviating just a minute from our main topic, let me share my own personal definition of rich and poor with you. The poor are those who are not satisfied with what they have. The rich are those who are satisfied with what they have. To be poor means that you don't have enough to meet your needs. So if you are always dissatisfied, it means you never have enough. So you're poor. To be rich means to have more than what you need. So if you are satisfied, it means that you have more than what you need. We cannot define rich and poor by how much money we have in the bank, can we?

As we said, mental suffering requires a mental solution. Normally, where do we look for solutions? We want to have people around us who love us. "I am sad, why? Because you are not caring for me in the right way," one could say. So what is the solution? "You need to love me more." Or one might say, "I am suffering because I cannot get the latest model of the car that I want." What's the solution? Get that new car, OK? Basically, that's what we do. We project the causes of our suffering on external situations, and we look for the solutions outside of ourselves. So normally when we are suffering, do we have a cause for our suffering, an object to blame? Or are we just suffering and saying to ourselves, "Oh, I'm suffering because I am ignorant"? We have a cause, right? We are ready to point the finger and say, "it's because of this, it's because of that."

So if this glass *[showing the glass of water on the desk in front of him]* is the cause of my suffering, I want to get rid of it, and I will use any means I have to do so, won't I? That's anger basically. It's the wish to destroy, to get rid of the cause of my suffering. OK? We are constantly projecting the causes of our suffering onto situations around us and then what happens? We want to get rid of these so-called causes of suffering, and as a result we generate anger.

Respecting the interdependence of phenomena

Anger at the same time, for me, is a way of showing arrogance. For example, when I hear angry people say, “This cannot be like this!” or “You cannot do this!” I answer, “If it is, it’s because it can be.” If a person is doing so, it’s because he can. Sure, maybe it would be better not to do so but when something happens, it’s because the causes and conditions were there for it to happen, weren’t they?

Now, for example, this moment that we are living here, how many causes and conditions were necessary for us to be here today? How many things happened in the past that created this moment here today? Ten, twenty, one thousand, one hundred thousand, one million? So many, infinite, we could say. If we started looking, everything that happened that was necessary for this moment to exist as it is – even just in the life of each one of us – it is endless. Maybe if just one small thing hadn’t happened, we would not be here today. In 1986, my mother decided to give a party for her 30th birthday. One of the friends she invited also invited a couple of friends. This couple of friends had met my Guru, my master Lama Gangchen, in India and they wanted to invite him to Brazil. They asked my mother to help and she accepted. So most probably, if that party had never happened, I would not be here today because I would not have met my Guru, I would not have gone to the monastery and most probably I would not be here today. So one small thing that happened a long time ago makes a big difference in what happens today. If we look at the life of each one of us, there are thousands if not millions of experiences like that.

So, how many causes are necessary for one moment to exist? Infinite, right? And who am I to say that this needs to be this way and that must be that way? No one; I don’t have the ability to do so. So when I get angry, I am actually saying, “My way of seeing

reality is the only way; all the rest is wrong.” I am saying, “This cannot be this way.” You know, anger is strange because it’s as if we see something and we still say to ourselves, “It cannot be what I am seeing.” Because at the foundation of anger there is the non-acceptance of reality; there is the non-acceptance that someone else sees reality differently from how I see it.

Why we get angry

Basically, we can get angry for two different types of things: because of our sensations, which means we want something to give us pleasure or to eliminate our suffering. I like water [*showing the glass of water*] for example, and let’s say that this is the only water here. What would happen if someone came in who was thirsty? What if this person came near me, looked at the water and took my glass? What would my reaction be? Attraction, aversion or indifference to that person? Aversion. And then if the person said, “Oh no, this is my water.” Then what would happen? My aversion would become anger: “No, it’s my water! What you are saying is not true!” So because of attraction, I generate aversion. Do you see? The stronger our attraction is, the stronger our aversion will be. It always works like this. We have some pleasure and someone is taking our pleasure away from us. This is the first case. Then there can be someone who comes and harms us directly. In this case, someone can come and perhaps speak to us in a way we don’t like, creating a sensation of suffering in us. We want that person far from us and so we generate anger, aversion. This is the first type of anger, which is based on sensation.

The second type of anger is based on discrimination, on ideas: I am right and you are wrong. “How can you say this?” “How can you think like this?” How many conflicts exist in this world

because of our attachment to our own points of view? Too many. So at the basis of anger lies our attachment to our own way of seeing reality. But reality is subjective. Is there anything in the world that everyone sees in the same way? I have never found anything but if you have, please tell me, OK?

There is nothing that is objective. The only objective thing is that nothing is objective. Everything that we perceive is a reflection of our own mind. When I look at the glass, it's a reflection of the education I have received, it's a reflection of the experiences I have had, of the places I have been, of the people I have met, of my childhood, of my entire past. Our experience of the present is a reflection of ourselves. We are not able to perceive anything independently of ourselves. When we get angry, we are saying, "My subjective reality is objective." We are saying, "This is the truth. You are wrong, my way of seeing is the right way to see," aren't we? That's why I think that when we see someone really angry or when we get angry ourselves, it's as if we are taking a big sign that says: "Look how ignorant I am!" For two reasons: firstly, on a deeper level, anger is a manifestation of our attachment to reality as being objective. So, never talk about anger to someone who is angry. Why? Because we are always right when we are angry, aren't we? I've already tried and it doesn't work. When you talk about anger to someone who is angry, you too become an object of anger. So there's no need to do that. *[laughter]*

On a more gross level, why do we get angry? Because we don't want to suffer, because we want to be happy. Does anybody here like being angry? Does anybody like the feeling of anger? No. And so why do we get angry? "Because that person said this to me," "Because that person did that," "Because I cannot get what I want" and so on.

Negative side-effects of anger

So, we get angry because we want to be happy, because we don't want to suffer. But in the end, what does anger do? Does it bring us happiness or does it bring us more suffering? More suffering. Even physical problems. I remember a friend of mine, for example. I was talking to this friend, actually I was translating while she was talking to Lama Gangchen, my Guru. And this person had a serious problem with her liver. And then when Lama Gangchen asked her, "Do you get angry very often?" my friend answered, "No." I know her very well, and normally she's a very calm person whom I have never seen really angry. Then Lama Gangchen said, "Hmm, there is some long time anger there," and then this friend said, "Oh, actually yes, for 25 years I have been accumulating anger towards my husband but I don't show it. Whenever I get angry, I leave, I smoke something, I drink something, I try to change my mood, but I keep accumulating this anger." So what happens? One day the liver just gives up, you know.

When we feel angry, how do we feel physically? We feel tense. This tension accumulates over the time, then it eventually manifests as sickness. So anger is not good for our health on many levels. Do we like to be beautiful? Yes or no? What is more important? If we see someone who physically is very beautiful but has a very difficult personality, a very bad temper, what do we say? "Oh, what a beautiful person, but given their character, it's better to keep our distance!" True or not true? *[laughter]* Do our friends like to be near us if we get angry very often? No. So with anger we destroy our health, we destroy our beauty. We put effort into having a beautiful body because we want others to love us, we want people to tell us how nice we are, how beautiful we are. We like people to like us, don't we? But if we

are angry, people don't like to be near us. In this way we can say that we destroy our beauty. It's better to have an unattractive but calm person by our side rather than a beautiful and angry one. Inner beauty is better than outer beauty, isn't it?

So with anger we destroy our health, we destroy our beauty, we destroy our friendships and our family. It happens like this: I get angry at work but I cannot express my anger there because I would get fired. So where do I express my anger? I express my anger towards those who are near me: my husband, wife, daughter, son, parents, friends. I get angry, I answer rudely and so on, and after some time you come to me and say, "Oh, I am tired of you because you are always angry." To which I answer, "But I am not angry with you!" and then you ask, "Then why do you throw your anger on me?" When we speak or act unkindly, when we get angry, we harm the people near us, even if we are not angry with them. It's not nice to be nearby a person who is angry.

When we get angry, we familiarize ourselves with anger, we get used to getting angry, we familiarize ourselves with speaking violently. Once, I was talking to a good friend who was very angry and was shouting. I said, "Stop it. There's no problem here; why do you need to be shouting like that?" "I am not shouting!" he yelled. I said, "Yes, you are. You've gotten so used to getting nervous, to being angry, that you don't see the violence in the way you talk anymore." So the angrier we get, the angrier we will get. We get used to it very quickly, so we need to be careful. OK?

Anger destroys our jobs. Do we prefer to have someone working for us that is nice, calm, peaceful but perhaps doesn't understand the job perfectly, or do we prefer to have someone that understands the job very well but is always nervous and angry? I prefer someone that is less angry and that takes a little bit more time to do the job.

Then we say, “I get angry because I don’t like this person.” If we don’t like the person, why do we take the person home? We take the person to dinner, we take the person to sleep. How? We are always talking about the person, we are thinking about the person: “Look how he did this, how could he do that?” We keep our anger. So anger is even destroying the good things in life because if I am angry, I’m not able to enjoy my water. I can have the best water, I can have the best company, I can be in the most beautiful place but if I am angry, everything becomes like hell. So, the first thing we need to understand is that there is no benefit in becoming angry. It needs to be clear, which means that there are no excuses whatsoever for getting angry! Anger doesn’t solve the problem; it makes us fixated on the problem where we don’t have space for the solution, OK?

Not to be angry doesn’t mean that we don’t do anything to solve the problem. It means we put our energy into the solution and not into the problem. It means we accept the causes and conditions that have appeared, and we choose to create new causes and conditions to go in the direction we want.

If there is a situation we don’t like, we have basically three possibilities. Normally, we choose the first one. I will make it into a metaphor. We eat something with a taste we don’t like. We can keep it in our mouth and say, “Oh, what a bad taste!” bringing it to the other side of the mouth from time to time, “Oh, what a terrible taste!” OK? *[laughter]* Or we can swallow it or we can spit it out. When there is a situation we don’t like, we can accept it or we can go beyond it instead of complaining about the situation: “Oh, this is not good! Oh, it’s so bad for me! Why is it like this? What have I done to be here?” Well, something for sure! *[laughter]* You have surely done something to be in this situation, haven’t you? If I am experiencing a situation, it’s because I have created

the causes. It's clear up until now, isn't it? So the first thing is that there is no reason to become angry. This needs to be clear, OK?

Our values through cultural paradigms

Let's move on to another point: the importance we give to things makes a big difference to us. There are basically two ways of seeing life. The first way is our modern Western way (not modern but Western way - it's actually not even modern, because it's inherited from the Greeks), which is linear. We see life in a linear way, which is from point A to point B. What is point A? Birth. Point B? Death. There can be a point C: Heaven, Hell, OK but we generally don't care much about point C; normally we think only about point A or point B. So our life is linear. What is really important in a linear belief system? It's the sum of our realizations, it's what we do between point A and point B, it's what I build, it's what I conquer. What are some examples of this? The priority in life is to make money, to have a good career, to create things that have not been thought of before, to build, to invent, and so on.

The other system is a belief system that is circular, cyclical. In a cyclical system there is no fixed point A and no fixed point B because we are always meeting these points again and again. What is important in a cyclical system is not what we do but what we are. So in the first system the importance is given to what we do in a linear way. In a cyclical system, what we are is most important. The ancient Indian cultural paradigm of which Buddhism is part, is a cyclical one. Before Buddhism there was already a cyclical system in India. Because life is not one, but there are infinite lives. We die, we're reborn, then we die again, then we're reborn and like this we go on and on and on... So what is important? What we are, not what we do.

There is a short story I heard some time ago and I'd like to share it; it's quite nice. It's a story told by Alexander the Great from Macedonia. He was in the north of India, in present-day Pakistan, where he met a man meditating on a rock. This man was naked, so he called him Gymnosoft, which means the "wise naked man." He looked at this man, he was curious about him and so Alexander asked him, "What are you doing?" to which he answered, "I am contemplating nothing." And then the meditator looked at Alexander and asked, "And you, what are you doing?" to which Alexander replied, "I am conquering the world." And then both started laughing. The meditator said, "How useless to conquer the world; what's the point of conquering the world?" What's the point, I don't know! It's just more work actually, it's just more headaches, isn't it? You conquer the world and then, so what? *[laughter]* And then Alexander looked at the meditator and said, "What a waste of a life, contemplating nothing! You are not doing anything!" Alexander believed in one life, so what he did was what was important. The meditator believed in many lives, and what he became was important.

How many times have we gotten angry? Think for yourselves. How many times have you gotten angry about something that had nothing to do with this life? Never, most probably. If we think about what continues from life to life, and if we give priority to what continues after we die, there is no longer any reason to become angry because everything is momentary, and by becoming angry we are just harming ourselves.

We need to understand what we want and what we are doing to get what we want. I want to be happy and anger is not helping me to be happy. It's just making me suffer more, it's just making me more alone, isn't it? And even when I change my attitude,

my friends don't want to be friends with me anymore because they are too fed up. Perhaps my body is also too tired and the sickness is manifesting itself.

When problems arise, put energy into the solution

Then someone can ask me, “Oh, but do I need to accept everything that happens?” Yes. What do we mean by accept? It means... let's use a metaphor again to make it simple: I am in the middle of the road. A car is coming to hit me, OK? What do I do? Do I start questioning, “Why is that car coming in this direction? Why is this driver not respecting the red light?” Do I take down the license plate number of the car and just keep looking it? No. What I do is I say, “OK, the car is coming and I need to get out of the way!” So, accepting means putting energy in the solution and not in the problem. When we get angry, we put energy in the problem, don't we? Every problem has a solution. If there is no solution, it's not a problem anymore. *[laughter]* Is it a problem that the sun will set? I don't like the sunset, so it's a problem. It's not a problem because there is no solution. Like Shantideva, a great Indian master, said in *The Guide to a Bodhisattva's Way of Life*¹:

*“You have a problem and you have a solution, why get angry?
You have a solution. Why suffer? You have a solution.*

*You have a problem, and you don't have a solution, why suffer?
You don't have a solution.”*

¹ Chapter 6, v. 10 (Patience) “Why be unhappy about something if it can be remedied? And what is the use of being unhappy about something if it cannot be remedied?” (translated into English by Stephan Bachelor for the Library of Tibetan Works & Archives Dharamsala, India)

This means that sometimes we just need to have a simpler attitude in life. Respect reality. Respect interdependence. Respect causes and conditions and their results.

The four steps to eliminate anger

Now we've reached an important point: someone can say, "Yes, I understand that it is not good to become angry, but how do I manage to not get angry? I don't *want* to become angry, but I *do* get angry." Am I angry now? No. Does this mean I don't have anger? No. Bring me an object of anger, and we will see if I get angry or not. How can we train ourselves not to be angry anymore? How can we eliminate anger? I will give you four steps, alright? It works very well if you follow them. Just knowing them is of no use. It's like going to the doctor, only reading the prescription won't cure the sickness. We need to take the medicine, we need to do the exercises, we need to follow the recommended diet, don't we? So if we want to eliminate anger, we need to follow these four steps. There are other methods, too but these steps work well.

First step: Understand how harmful anger is to us

So, the first step: understand. Understand how harmful anger is to us. We need to repeat this again and again until we have no doubts, until it's clear that there is no reason in the world for us to get angry. In order to understand it, we need to analyze it, we need to talk to people. We can do this while sitting down in meditation or we can be running, walking, swimming... We imagine a person to whom we need to explain why it's not good to be angry. Let's imagine that this person doesn't want to understand so we need to find every possible reason why it's

not good to get angry. In doing so, we analyze exactly why it's not beneficial to become angry from all different perspectives. Once this is clear to us, we go to the second step.

Second step: Remember the reasons why we should not become angry, familiarize ourselves with patience and apply the antidote to anger

The second step calls for sitting down to meditate (we can also do this while walking, swimming or doing other activities, even lying down but the best is sitting in meditation). So we sit down, we observe our breath, we relax the mind, we follow the breath with our mind for a few minutes until we see that the mind is present in the present, until we are present in the present moment. Then we recall the reasons why we shouldn't get angry. We remember how harmful anger is, how infantile it is to become angry, how ignorant it is to be angry. Then we take the mind that understands this and we hide it in a corner, in one place. It's as if the mind that understands why we should not be angry is hiding behind a curtain, just a little bit to the side. Then we imagine a situation that makes us angry, OK? But we really imagine it well - imagining the person talking and everything about the moment until slowly we see our anger start to come out. When our anger starts to appear, we come out of our hiding and say, "What are you doing? This is not the right way to act! You are just creating more suffering for yourself." Then you recall all the reasons we saw before about not getting angry. So while we have the object of anger in front of us, we start to calm down and then we generate an opposite attitude, which is one of acceptance, compassion, love, generosity, humbleness, depending on the situation. We are alone; there's no one else. We are only within our visualization, imagining this situation

which is not really happening; we are just imagining. But in our imagination, we transform and create a different attitude, thereby finishing step number two.

Third step: Cut anger by calming down in the presence of anger or by trying to avoid anger when it's coming

When we see that anger is coming – because anger has a smell, we can feel it coming slowly, slowly, it's like a far-away sound approaching; it doesn't appear from one instant to the other. So when we see that it is starting to appear, we cut it. How? By remembering why anger is not good for us, all the harm anger brings, recalling everything we discussed before. In the beginning anger will come. Once anger is there, there's nothing to do about it. The only thing you can do is try to breathe; you can take an object like a mala, a rosary, or you can use your fingers to count. Inhale... exhale... and you count 108 times. And you can say, "Before I get really angry, I need to count," and you'll stop being angry before you finish counting. Or you can say, "Now I'll count until 21." So *[breathing in, breathing out]* one, *[breathing in, breathing out]* two, *[breathing in, breathing out]* three, *[breathing in, breathing out]* four, five... then you'll feel better.

People say, for example, that when you are nervous it helps to drink a glass of water, don't they? How do we drink water when we are nervous? We drink it all at once, and then after we say, "Aaah!" *[sigh]* It's not the benefit of water, it's the benefit of breathing because we are not able to drink a whole glass without breathing. When we are angry the breath is always here, in the chest *[pointing to his chest]*. So we need to try to breathe a little bit more deeply, down in the belly. If we know how, we can apply this type of deeper breathing. It is possible that even though we know that breathing would calm us down, we still don't want to do it.

I remember telling a very angry friend, “OK, breathe, breathe in, look at your breath, breathe in, breathe out,” but he answered, “Why do I need to breathe? Look at what has happened!” We can’t meditate on anger when we are angry. Why? Because we are always right!

Fourth step: Never justify anger

When anger comes, sooner or later it passes. Never justify anger. “Oh, I got angry; I know that it’s bad but If that person hadn’t said this, I would not have gotten angry. If things were not like that, I would not be angry. So, it’s not my fault, I am just a victim!” Imagine anger. I like to imagine it in this way: anger is like a little monster that is inside of us, sleeping. When an unpleasant situation presents itself, someone speaks in a certain way or something disagreeable happens, it’s like someone coming with a stick to start poking that monster. Then the monster wants to get out. If we are able to keep the monster in, as long as we are able to keep him, we can still bring him back inside. Once the monster has gone out, once he has gotten loose, then we cannot do anything anymore; we just need to wait for the monster to come back. We need to wait for him to come back because he has no other place to go. But when the monster does come back, what do we say to the monster? “Oh, why did you harm that person? It was not your fault, they poked you with the stick. OK, come back, monster, poor monster...” Am I right? And then the next time, he comes back with more strength.

So never justify anger, and don’t feel guilty. I think this is more difficult because of our Western mentality. We have this very strong, deep sense of guilt. In Tibetan, there is not even the word to say “guilt.” I need to say, “I got angry,” and then I say, “OK, I was wrong. I should be more careful, I should not react like this.”

Let's summarize the four steps:

The first step: understand. The second step: familiarize yourself with patience by applying the antidote where the poison is. We cannot meditate on patience and love just by thinking, "Oh, anger is not good" in an abstract way, alright? We need to look at our anger, we need to look our anger in the eyes and that is where we need to apply the antidote. This is the second step. The third step: try to calm down when you do get angry! Try to eliminate anger when it starts to manifest itself. The fourth step - this is very important: never justify anger. The most important of all: do it!

I'd like to conclude with one phrase taught by a great master. First I will say it in Tibetan [*speaking Tibetan*], which means something like this:

"Thinking about doing it, thinking about doing it," 20 years went by.

"I couldn't do it, I couldn't do it," 20 years went by.

"Oh, why I didn't do it? Oh, why I didn't do it?" 20 years went by.

In such a way, 60 years went by.

This is the biography of an empty life.

Which means, if we want to do something, it must be today. Today is the future of yesterday, and the past of tomorrow. Take care of today. So, please don't say, "I don't want to be angry," meaning, "At some point, one day in my life, I won't be angry." You can say, "I am going to do something now in order not to be angry." In every word we say, every choice we make, every thought we have, we are taking a direction. We want to be happy, we don't want to suffer; let's do it in a wise way, in an intelligent way. And one of the best ways is by not getting angry.

Let's take a 5-minute-break. [*short dedication prayers*]

Understanding through meditation

[Preliminary prayers]

We have many positive conditions to practice Buddhism in the West: we have time, we are intelligent, we have access to books and teachers but there is an important point which is very often a big interference blocking us. Let's try to understand. The first thing is that understanding something is not enough. Our mentality leads us to often think that we have understood something fully but it's not enough. You know, there is a wide gap between the head and the heart. And we need to understand with the heart to realize something. And that's why we need to meditate, that's why things take time. It's not because I say, "Oh, it's not good to be angry," that from tomorrow on I won't ever get angry. I remember, I was a small child and my father came home one day - he was so happy, he said, "Now I have understood the causes of my suffering! It's my ignorance, my anger, my attachment. Now everything will be fine." It took about 5 minutes for something to happen to make him start shouting around the house. So, understanding is not enough; it's good, it's necessary but it's not enough.

Our mind has a very special quality: what we teach it, it follows. What we teach the mind, the mind follows. It's like learning how to play an instrument. Let's say I'd like to learn how to play the violin. Is it enough just to learn the theory? I can read many books on how to play the violin; I can watch many videos. Will I know how to play the violin? No. What I need to do is to take the violin, put it in my hands and play. How many hours will it take until a pleasant sound comes out? One hundred hours, five hundred hours? Many hours, right? And the more I play, the easier it will become, until the moment that the instrument becomes an extension of my body and I won't need to think

about what movement to make because it has become natural, spontaneous. Why? Because I've repeated it so many times that it has become natural.

The same master Shantideva said: [*speaking Tibetan*] "There is nothing that is difficult once you get used to it," which means, by repeating something, we can make things easy. So in order to stop becoming angry, we need to repeat the process many times. For example, it's not enough to do the four steps I gave before just once; we need to do them hundreds, if not thousands of times. But you will see benefits already from the beginning. At the beginning - as a minimum - try to do it for two weeks every day for ten minutes, then you'll be able to see if it is of benefit or not. If you see a benefit, then continue. If you don't see any benefit, then stop, OK? It's important for us to have consistency in doing things again and again because we need to familiarize ourselves, we need to train our mind. One of the main, let's say, interferences we can have is that we do not believe in ourselves. "I cannot eliminate my anger." "I am not able to do it." "It's stronger than me." "I cannot do anything." These are examples of laziness.

Laziness and self-esteem

There are four types of laziness. The first type of laziness: "Oh, how I need to meditate to eliminate anger. But I am too tired; I don't want to do it today. I am lazy." The second type: "Oh, how I need to meditate on patience to eliminate my anger. I'll do it later; now I am busy." We just postpone, justifying that we will do it "later." But what we do "later," we never do. The third type of laziness: "Oh, it's important. I need to meditate, I need to eliminate my anger but I have too many things to do now. I need to go to work, then I need to eat, then I need to watch

TV, then I am tired and I have so many things in my head so then I need to go to sleep...” I have something to do, so I cannot meditate. This is the laziness where I find something useless to do in order not to do something useful. The fourth type of laziness: “I want to eliminate anger but I am not able. I am not good enough. I would love it, but I cannot do it.” Do you see? We put ourselves down in order not to do something.

If we want to do something, we should start from the beginning. There is always something we can do to make it possible, to make it happen. It’s never too late. So we need to believe in our capability, believe in ourselves. Buddha gave many, many teachings, and all these teachings were given for only one reason: because we *can* put them into practice. We *can* realize them. He would not have taught us something that is beyond our reach. Is it possible to eliminate anger? Yes! Is it easy? No. Is it easy to remain living with anger? No. So it’s better to put effort into eliminating anger, isn’t it? Therefore, there are no excuses.

A well-known master named Geshe Ben Gungyal, was the head of a gang in the south-eastern region of Tibet before becoming a monk. He was a very direct person. It is said in this region, “A man that cannot kill another man is not a man,” to give you an idea about what type of region of Tibet it was. After many years, he regretted his lifestyle and went to a monastery. Sometimes he would be sitting alone in the room and he would take a stick that he had used for fighting and he would raise the stick and start shouting, “Don’t come to me! I am stronger than you, I am going to break your head into pieces!” What was he doing? When he saw anger surfacing, he would say, “Anger, I am stronger than you. Don’t show your face, I’m going to destroy you!” When he saw jealousy coming, he would say, “I am stronger than you.” He had strong self-esteem.

Like Geshe Ben Gungyal, we cannot let even a shadow of anger arise. When we start to see anger manifest, we need to strike it down. But there are two ways of doing so. One is where we are hard on ourselves, where we criticize by saying, “This is not the way to do it!” The second way is gentler: we hug ourselves, we have compassion for ourselves. Like when a small child does something wrong, we can tell the child, “You are wrong,” or we can take the child and hug the child. We can say, “Yes, this is wrong but you can do better.” OK? What we shouldn’t do is justify. If we start observing our daily thoughts, observing our daily words, then we can really make a difference, we can make a change in our lives.

Normally when we ask someone, “What do you do in life?” they answer, “Oh, I am a doctor, I am a lawyer, I clean the streets,” right? I would prefer a different answer: “What I do in my life is I develop love, I eliminate anger, I develop wisdom, I learn to love myself more, I learn to love others more; these are my priorities in life. Sure, I need to pay my bills, I need to eat, I need to have clothes on my back, so I have a job and to pay my expenses I do this or that, but that’s not the main focus in my life.” If becoming more peaceful and serene were a main objective in our daily lives, then we’d put effort into making it happen, wouldn’t we?

There is something important we need to remember: we should not try to escape from unpleasant situations but learn to think differently. Let me give you an example. In Tibet, there was a great Indian master, named Atisha who lived at the beginning of the 11th century. He was one of the most important masters who came to Tibet. When he came to Tibet, he brought his cook with him. Maybe he had some idea of the food in Tibet, so he brought his cook from India. *[laughter]*

But the cook had a very difficult character: anxious, aggressive and very unpleasant. So after some years, some of Atisha's disciples came to him and said, "Oh great master, why don't we send your cook on vacation to India?" At that time, vacation in India meant three years: one year to go, one year to stay, and one year to come back! Atisha didn't answer. Then they said, "Maybe he has been working too hard. Perhaps he should go on a retreat, a solitary three-year retreat? Atisha looked at them and asked, "Who are you talking about? Are you talking about my master of patience?" *[laughter]*

Without an object of anger, you cannot practice patience, can you? There was once a monk doing a meditation retreat. A master came to meet him and he asked him, "What are you meditating on?" and the monk replied *[in a calm voice]*, "I am meditating on patience." "Very good," said the master as he spit in his face, hit him and then stepped backwards, knowing the monk would try to hit him back. He approached the monk again and said, "Remember, without an object of anger, you cannot practice patience!"

Creating space when necessary

We have masters of patience in our daily life but they don't harm us, they show us the anger that we have inside which we don't see on our own. If I don't have anger, nothing will make me angry. The object of anger is actually a mirror showing myself. So, in order to be peaceful, we don't need to escape from the object of anger, to get away from the object of anger. We need to act differently. When we are not ready, we can create some distance but we should never run away, OK?

Sometimes people say, "Ah, but how do I deal with people who get angry with me?" One time a man came to Buddha. He was

very angry. And he started shouting at Buddha, “Who do you think you are to go around teaching people?” He was very angry at Buddha. Buddha listened, then he asked him a question, “If you give someone a present, and this person doesn’t want your present, who does it belong to?” and the man said, “To the person who gave the present.” If you give me a present and I don’t want it, to whom does the present belong? It belongs to you, right? A present needs acceptance to become mine. So in the same way, Buddha said to him, “You are giving me your anger; I don’t want it, keep it for yourself.” I don’t need to take it upon myself, I don’t need to fight against it, I don’t need to play your game. So I choose to stay in my own space. I can act with compassion; I am sorry that you have this attitude, and I wish you could find a way to go beyond it. But when we see that there is a situation of violence that repeats itself again and again, verbal or even physical, then we need to create distance. Because we are not a Buddha yet, we need to create some distance in order not to generate anger ourselves as well. If we are in a situation and then we see that it is too difficult to deal with, we can create a safe distance. We don’t need to run away, but we create some distance. If it’s too difficult to overcome it at the moment, then we create some distance.

Lama Gangchen gave me a very simple teaching once called the “space box.” Let’s say I experience an unpleasant situation, for example, I talk to someone and I don’t like the way he speaks to me. Once the moment is finished, I take the experience and put it in a box in space, I close it, and I move on to the next situation, free from it. When and if I need to, I can go back, open it and I can solve it. When it’s done, I close it again and I go to the next situation. We have one saying in Brazil: “Uma coisa é uma coisa e outra coisa é outra coisa.” It means, “One thing is

one thing, another thing is another thing.” Do you get it? I have a problem with you, I don’t necessarily have a problem with him. This situation is finished, close it up in the box and move on to the next one. You can have two, three, four, five boxes but don’t put the problems in the same box because then they get mixed up together and afterwards we don’t know how to find a solution.

So we have many boxes where we can put the problem, close it up and after some time we forget about it. When we come back and we open it, it’s gone. Instead, if we had stayed looking at it every day, it would have become bigger. So have your own space boxes. When we are unable to avoid getting angry, we take that feeling, that problem and put it in a box. After some time we come back to it. Remember not to mix things up because then one problem creates another one. One short example also of this: I have one friend who taught me many good things but then he also put me in very difficult situations. He did things that were not good for me; he harmed me. So what feeling should I have towards him: is he a friend or an enemy? I am grateful for the good things he did, and I create distance because of the negative ones, even though I still feel grateful. They are separate. One thing is one thing, another thing is another thing. We cannot put everything in the same pot, can we? And then we come back in the future to deal with it. Remember one thing: everything is impermanent, even our problems. Our problems will end, they will change, we just need to wait. Since we will continue, we cannot be destroyed, we cannot be harmed because things are not the way we want them to be. We should put great energy into solving the problem, but when it’s not possible, just relax. We say OK, we put it in a box and life continues.

Developing long-lasting qualities

I believe that we can follow many methods to eliminate anger (which is very good) but as long as we are attached to our own way of seeing reality and we say that others are wrong, we are not going to be able to go beyond it. So we need to observe our own attraction and we need to observe how we grasp at reality as being objective. Reality is subjective, but we believe it is objective. This is an important point.

Another important point has to do with something we all know but we don't like to remember, something very simple, which is that we are going to die. When? I don't know. Is there any other choice? No. At the moment of death, what can help us? Money? No. People? Not really. Just before death, yes, but when we are dying, it's just us and no one else. The only thing that can help us at that moment is our own inner stability. In this life, we can have a long life (and I wish a long and healthy life for everyone) but no one can assure us that we will actually have a long and healthy life, can they? Let's say that I will have a very long life; I'll live until 100 years old. Can anyone assure me that I will be in good health? No. Can anyone assure me that I will have a good and stable economic situation? No. And what about my friends, can anyone assure me that I will have many friends? No. Even friends change. So, where can I put my energy today that will surely help me in the future? The body? No. Material things? No. People around me? No. My image? What people think about me? No. Where?

If we learn to eliminate our anger, if we develop more patience, it doesn't matter if I am healthy or sick, if I am rich or poor, if I am alone or with many people, friends or enemies, patience will help me. It will be helpful to me. Having love will help me. Being humble will help me. Generosity will help me.

Inner stability will help me. OK? Satisfaction will help me. Joy will help me. If we put energy into these qualities today, we will surely benefit from them in the future. It doesn't matter what happens, no one can take it away, no one can steal it from us, no economic crisis can take it away. I am the only one who can choose to throw it away or keep it. So that's where we need to concentrate our energy: in things that truly bring us long-term benefits.

Today we talked about anger. The same thing applies to jealousy, envy, attachment, miserliness. Anger has many faces as well, such as aversion. For example, I see someone who I think is physically attractive. I don't know him; I've never seen him before. What do I feel towards that person: attraction, aversion or indifference? Attraction - because I like the form. Then I see someone I think is ugly. How do I see this person? What do I feel, attraction, aversion or indifference? I'm sorry to say, aversion. Aversion grows into anger. So perhaps we are not the kind of person who gets angry easily but we have aversion that accumulates inside. So we need to eliminate that as well. Another face of anger is resentment that we keep deep inside. Let it go! What is gone is gone.

Being present

We need to live in the present. What do we have of the past today? The memory. Why keep a bad memory? Let's not be attached to the past. OK? With love and compassion towards ourselves, we need to accept what has gone, what is past. When we get angry about something that happened in the past, it's like suffering once again for something we already suffered for. It's like we re-suffer. Then we also have pre-suffer... *[laughter]* We have three types: there is suffering, re-suffering (you suffer again),

and then there is pre-suffering (nothing has happened yet but we are already worried about the possibilities of something happening). “Maybe this thing will happen... and then today when I go there, that will happen... and this person will say this and that...” Nothing has happened; everything is just in our head. So we need to live in the present. If we are able to bring ourselves to the present, a great part of our anger is gone because anger is most often related to the past or to the future.

Being in the present is very useful but how can we become present? Observe the breath, feel the body. OK? Can you feel the weight of your body on your chair? You can feel the clothes on your skin. You can feel the temperature of the air. You can feel the movement of the body when you breathe, can't you? By observing the body, you bring yourself to the present. Doing this three times a day helps us a lot to be more objective so we don't lose ourselves in the future or get lost in the past.

Once a man approached Buddha and asked him, “Oh, Buddha, what do you do?” and Buddha answered, “My disciples and I, we walk, we sit and we eat.” Then the man looked at him and said, “I also walk, I also sit, I also eat. What's so special about that?” Then Buddha replied, “When I walk, I am walking; when I sit, I am sitting; when I eat, I am eating. That's the difference.” Normally whatever we do, we are doing something else – the mind is going around and around. When we sit, our mind is not there, it is around and about somewhere else. Instead, we need to be present in the present. OK?

Thanks

I would like to thank everyone very much. *Merci beaucoup pour la traduction.* I am very grateful to everyone for coming and for listening. I am thankful that you were here, present with your

mind and your heart. I would also like to thank Arlette who always takes care of organizing these teachings throughout the year.

We'll make one final dedication now and tomorrow I will be explaining the fundamental principles of Buddhism, of the Buddhist philosophy and how we can put them into practice in our daily life.

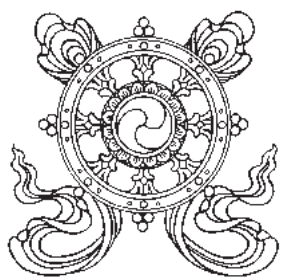
Dedication prayers

*jetsun lame ku tse rabten chin
namkar trinle chog chur kye pa dan
lobsang tenpe dro me sa sum gyi
dro we mun sel tac tu ne gyur chik*

May the holy teacher have a long life. May the enlightened activities be fully displayed in the ten directions and may the brightness of the teachings of Lama Tsong Khapa continuously dissipate the veil of darkness covering the beings of the three realms.

*nyimo delek tsen delek
nyime gung yang delek shin
nyitsen taktu delek pe
kon chok sum gyi jin gyi lob
kon chok sum gyi ngoe drup tsol
kon chok sum gyi tra shi shok*

At dawn or dusk, at night or midday, may the Three Jewels grant us their blessings, may they help us to achieve all realizations and sprinkle the path of our lives with various signs of auspiciousness.



About Lama Michel Rinpoche

Lama Michel Rinpoche is a Buddhist master following the Ngagso Ganden Nyengyu tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, under the spiritual guidance of Lama Gangchen Tulku Rinpoche.

Born in São Paulo, Brazil in 1981, Lama Michel was recognized as a Tulku (the reincarnation of a Buddhist master) at the age of 8 and ordained as a monk at 12. He received a formal education of Buddhist practice and philosophy for 12 years at the Monastic University of Sera Me in the south of India. He continues his studies with annual visits to the Monastery of Tashi Lhumpo in Shigatse, Tibet-China.

Since 2004 he has been residing in Italy, dedicating his life to serving his Guru, Lama Gangchen Rinpoche, and generously sharing his experience and wisdom in many formal and informal situations, such as conferences, teachings, retreats and school visits.

Under the guidance of Lama Gangchen Rinpoche, he oversees several Buddhist centers such as the Kunpen Lama Gangchen in Milan, Italy, Albagnano Healing Meditation Centre in Albagnano on Lake Maggiore, Italy and the Centro de Dharma da Paz in São Paulo, Brazil.

For more information and Ngagso Livestream video teachings, visit: www.ahmc.ngalso.net; www.kunpen.ngalso.net; www.centrodedharma.com.br; www.ngalso.org or soundcloud.com/dharma-sound-archive/sets for audio files.

Lama Gangchen



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