

# Instructions On Turning Happiness And Suffering Into The Path Of Enlightenment

by the Third Dodrup Chen, Jigmed Tenpa'i Nyima

INTRODUCTION BY DR. JONATHAN MILLER

*Instructions on Turning Happiness and Suffering into the Path of Enlightenment* is a precious distilled elixir of essential practical advice. It was written by the third Dodrup Chen Rinpoche, Jigmed Tenpa'i Nyima (1865-1926), a renowned spiritual master and scholar of the Nyingma lineage of Tibetan Buddhism, and the incarnation predecessor of my master, the fourth Dodrup Chen Rinpoche. Although it addresses the practice of our tradition, its wisdom is universally applicable to not only any spiritual practice, but is equally indispensable for simply living a happy life whether a person is a practitioner or not. Since it is impossible to have a healthy body without a happy mind, I feel obligated to make this available to anyone who comes to Lapis Light Natural Health.

This text was translated from the Tibetan by the Buddhist master and scholar Tulku Thondup Rinpoche (author of numerous scholarly and popular texts including *The Healing Power of Mind*, *Boundless Healing*, and *Peaceful Death, Joyful Rebirth*). It was published as part of his collection of teachings of Tibetan Buddhist masters entitled *Enlightened Living* (Shambhala, 1990). He has very kindly allowed me to make some minor modifications for presentation purposes and to make it available here. I am extremely grateful for all of his wonderful work and many years of kindness, generosity, counsel and advice. It is like having a wiser loving older brother who patiently and quietly looks after his stumbling sibling.

Readers can replace terms in the text that apply specifically to Buddhist practice with what works best for them. Thus, “a spiritual life” can be “a happy life”. “Dharma” (teachings of the Buddha) or “path of enlightenment” can be any positive spiritual tradition, “a wholesome life” or “the 'way' according to the universal laws of nature”. “Refuge” in the “Three Jewels” (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha—community of noble practitioners) can refer to relying on one's own tradition, or however one identifies what is true, wholesome, wise and compassionate. Those who prefer not to think in terms of enlightenment as liberation from the succession of lives driven by the cause and effects of actions (*karma*) through cyclic existence (*samsāra*) can instead refer to simply living a happy life.

## Instructions On Turning Happiness And Suffering Into The Path Of Enlightenment

Homage to Ārya-avalokiteśvara through the recollection of his virtues, which are celebrated thus:

He who is always happy because of the happiness of others,  
And extremely distressed by the sufferings of others,  
Who has achieved the quality of great compassion—  
He renounces caring about his own happiness and suffering.

I am going to write a brief instruction on accepting happiness and suffering as the path of enlightenment. It is the most priceless teaching in the world and a useful tool for a spiritual life.

## The Way Of Accepting Suffering As The Path To Enlightenment

### BY MEANS OF FICTIONAL TRUTH<sup>1</sup>

Whenever harm comes to you from beings or inanimate objects, if your mind gets used to perceiving only the suffering or the negative aspects, then from even a small negative incident great mental pain will ensue. For it is the nature of indulging in any concept, whether suffering or happiness, that it will be intensified by habituation. As this (negative) experience gradually becomes stronger, a time will come when most of what appears will become the cause of bringing you unhappiness, and happiness will never have a chance to arise.

If you do not realize that the fault lies with your own mind's way of experiencing, and if you blame external conditions alone, then the ceaseless flame of negative actions involving hatred and suffering will increase. That is called “all appearances arising in the form of enemies”.

You should thoroughly understand that the reason living beings of the age of dregs (our present era) are afflicted by suffering is fundamentally related to the weakness of their discernment.

Thus, being invincible against obstacles such as enemies, illnesses, and harmful spirits does not mean that you can drive them away so that they will not recur. Rather, it means that they will not be able to arise as obstacles to the pursuit of the path of enlightenment. In order to succeed in using suffering as the support of the path, you should train yourself in the following two ways:

### **Reject The State Of Mind Of Exclusively Desiring Not To Have Suffering**

Develop again and again the certainty that it is useless and harmful to feel anxiety and to dislike suffering by regarding it as totally unfavorable. Then again and again, with strong determination, think: “From now on, whatever suffering comes, I shall not be anxious,” and gain experience of that.

#### 1. THE USELESSNESS OF CONSIDERING SUFFERING AS SOMETHING UNFAVORABLE

If you can remedy the suffering, then you don't need to be unhappy. If you cannot remedy it, then

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<sup>1</sup> The relative truth of illusory, interdependent phenomena that appear to ordinary mundane perception.

there is no benefit to being unhappy.

## 2. THE GREAT HARM OF CONSIDERING SUFFERING AS SOMETHING UNFAVORABLE

If you do not feel anxious, your strength of mind can help you to bear even great sufferings easily. They will feel light and insubstantial, like cotton. But anxiety will make even small sufferings intolerable.

For example, while you are thinking of an attractive woman or man, even if you try to get rid of desire you will only get burnt out. Similarly, if you concentrate on the painful characteristics of suffering you will not be able to develop tolerance for it. So as it is said in the *Instructions on Sealing the Doors of the Sense Faculties*, your mind should not fasten onto the negative characteristics of suffering. Instead, you should gain experience in keeping your mind in its more settled, realistic condition, simply remaining in its own state.

### **Develop the Attitude of Being Glad That Suffering Arises**

This is the practice of cultivating joy when suffering arises by regarding it as a support to the path of enlightenment. To apply this practice to your life whenever suffering arises, you must have experiential training in a spiritual practice according to the ability of your mind. Otherwise if you have merely a theoretical understanding and think, “If I have certain clever techniques to apply, the sufferings could bring this or that benefit,” it will be difficult for you to get a good result. For as it is said, “The goal is farther than the sky from the earth.”

#### 1. SUFFERING AS THE SUPPORT OF TRAINING IN THE DETERMINATION TO BE FREE FROM CYCLIC EXISTENCE

Think “As long as I am wandering powerlessly in *saṃsāra* (cyclic existence), the arising of suffering is not an injustice, but is the nature of my being in *saṃsāra*.” Develop disenchantment toward cyclic existence by thinking, “If it is difficult for me to bear even the little sufferings of the happy realms, then how can I bear the sufferings of the lower realms? Alas, cyclic existence is an endless and bottomless ocean of suffering.” With these thoughts, turn your mind to freedom.

#### 2. SUFFERING AS THE SUPPORT OF TRAINING IN GOING FOR REFUGE

Train in taking refuge by developing a strong belief and thinking, “The Three Jewels are the only unbetraying refuges for those endangered by these kinds of fears throughout their succession of lives. From now on I will always depend on the refuges and will never relinquish them under any circumstance!”

#### 3. SUFFERING AS THE SUPPORT OF TRAINING IN OVERCOMING ARROGANCE

Eliminate your pride and contempt for others which are inimical to gaining any kind of merit by realizing, as discussed earlier, that you don't have any control over your own destiny and that you have not transcended the enslavement of suffering.

#### 4. SUFFERING AS THE SUPPORT FOR PURIFICATION OF NEGATIVE ACTIONS

Think carefully, “The sufferings I have experienced and other sufferings that are more unimaginably numerous and severe than those I have experienced are all solely the results of unvirtuous deeds.” Think carefully about this with regard to the four following aspects:

The certainty of the process of *karma* [cause and effect of actions].

The tendency of karma to increase greatly.

That you will not encounter the result of what you have not done.

That the effects of what you have done will not be wasted.

You should also think, “If I do not want suffering I should renounce the cause of suffering, which is negative actions.” In this way purify your previously accumulated unvirtuous deeds by means of the *four forces*<sup>2</sup> and try to restrain yourself from committing them again in the future.

#### 5. SUFFERING AS THE SUPPORT FOR TAKING JOY IN VIRTUE

Think long and carefully, “If I desire happiness, the opposite of suffering, I should try to practice its cause, which is virtue”; and practice virtuous deeds through various means.

#### 6. SUFFERING AS THE SUPPORT FOR TRAINING IN COMPASSION

Think about other living beings, who are also tortured by as much if not more pain as you are, and train yourself by thinking, “How good it would be if they too became free from all the sufferings!”

By this method of thinking, you will also understand the way of practicing loving-kindness, which is the intention to help those who are bereft of happiness.

#### 7. TAKING SUFFERING AS THE SUPPORT OF THE MEDITATION THAT OTHERS ARE DEARER THAN ONESELF

Think, “The reason I am not free from suffering is that I have been caring only about myself from beginningless time. Now I should practice caring only about others, the source of virtue and happiness.”

### CONCLUSION

It is very difficult to practice “Taking Suffering as the Path of Enlightenment” when you actually come face to face with difficult situations. So it is important to become familiar in advance with the trainings of virtue that are to be applied when unfavorable circumstances arise. Also, it makes

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<sup>2</sup> (1) to rely on a blessed support, (2) to generate sincere regret for evil deeds previously committed, (3) to pledge to refrain from committing evil deeds again, and (4) to apply antidotes that are the means of purification through spiritual training.

a great difference if you apply a training in which you have clear experience.

Furthermore, it is not enough merely for suffering to become the support of virtuous training itself. You have to recognize that the suffering has actually become the support of the path, and then you must feel a strong and stable stream of joy which is brought about by that realization.

For any of the foregoing categories of training you should think, “Just as the suffering I have undergone in the past has greatly helped achieve happiness in many significant forms, the joy of high realms, and liberation from saṃsāra, which are all difficult to obtain, so too the suffering I am now undergoing will also continue to help me to attain these same results. So even if my suffering is severe it is supremely agreeable. It is like *ladu* of molasses mixed with cardamom and pepper (a delicious sweet).” Think about this again and again and cultivate the experience of bliss of the mind.

By training in this way, the overwhelming nature or superabundance of mental bliss makes the sufferings of the sense faculties as if they were imperceptible. Thus having a mind which cannot be hurt by suffering is the standard of those who overcome illness by tolerance. It should be noted that according to this reasoning this would also be the measure of those who overcome other obstacles as well, such as antagonists and evil spirits.

As mentioned above, the “Reversing of the Thought of Dislike for Suffering” is the foundation for “Turning Suffering into the Path of Enlightenment” because, while your mind is disturbed and your cheerfulness is extinguished by anxiety, you will not be able to turn suffering into the path.

Also, by training in the actual “Taking Suffering as the Path of Enlightenment” you will improve the previous training of the “Reversing of the Thought of Dislike for Suffering” because as you actually experience an increase in virtues through suffering, you will grow increasingly courageous and joyful. It is said:

If you gradually train yourself through small sufferings “by easy, gradual stages” as the saying goes, you will ultimately be able to train yourself in great sufferings also.

So according to this instruction, you should train gradually because it will be difficult for you to gain experience beyond the scope of your present mental capacity.

In the times between meditation periods you should pray to the unexcelled Three Jewels so that you will be able to turn suffering into the path. Then when your mental strength has grown a little, make offerings to the Three Jewels and elemental spirits and commission them to assist you, saying: “In order that I may gain strength in the practice of virtuous trainings, please send me unfavorable circumstances.” You should maintain the confidence of joy and enthusiasm on all occasions.

When you are first learning this training it is important to keep frivolous diversions at a distance.

For in the midst of such diversions you may become susceptible to the many negative influences of your companions asking you, “How can you bear suffering and contempt?” The flurry of worries caused by adversaries, relatives and wealth could defile and disturb your mind beyond control and cause bad habits. And there are also various other distracting circumstances that could overpower your mind. In isolated places where these distractions are not present the mind will be very clear, so it will be easy to concentrate on virtuous trainings.

For this reason even the Chöd<sup>3</sup> practitioners when meditating on Stamping Out Suffering, first avoid practicing near the harmful actions of men or amid worldly diversions. Instead they train mainly with the apparitions of positive and negative spirits in solitary cemeteries and rugged power spots.

In brief, you should prevent attitudes of dislike toward internal illness, external antagonists, evil spirits, and unharmonious speech from arising, not only in order to make your mind impervious to misfortune and suffering, but also to bring bliss to your mind from the vicissitudes themselves. You should accustom yourself to generating only the feeling of liking them. To do this, you must cease to view harmful circumstances as negative and make every effort to train yourself to view them as valuable, because *whether things are pleasing or not depends on how your mind perceives them*. For example, if a person is continuously aware of the faults in worldly pursuits, then if his retinue and wealth increase, he will feel all the more revulsion toward them. On the other hand, if he perceives mundane pursuits as beneficial, he will further wish to increase his grandiosity.

By practicing this kind of training your mind will become gentle. Your attitude will become broad. You will become easy to be with. You will have a courageous mind. Your spiritual training will become free of obstacles. All bad circumstances will arise as glorious and auspicious. Your mind will always be satisfied by the comfort of peace.

To practice the path of enlightenment in this age of dregs you must never be without the armor of this kind of training. When you are not affected by the suffering of anxiety, not only will other sufferings disappear like weapons dropping from the hands of soldiers, but in most cases even the real negative forces such as illnesses themselves will automatically disappear. The Holy Ones of the past said:

By not feeling any dislike toward or discontent about anything, your mind will remain undisturbed. When your mind is not disturbed, your energy will not be disturbed, and thereby other elements of the body will also not be disturbed. Because of this, your mind will not be disturbed, and so the wheel of joy will keep revolving.

They also said:

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<sup>3</sup> The yogic practice of “cutting” off ego by offering one’s body as charity to harmful spirits in power places.

As birds find it easy to injure horses and donkeys with sores on their backs, evil spirits or negative forces will easily find the opportunity to harm those whose nature is fearful. But it will be difficult to harm those whose nature is stable or strong.

Learned people realize that all happiness and suffering depend upon the mind and therefore seek happiness from the mind itself. They know that the causes of happiness are complete within us so they are not dependent on external sources. With this realization no matter what the afflictions, whether from beings or physical matter, they will not be able to hurt us. This same strength of mind shall also be with us at the time of death. We will always be free from the control of external afflictions.

The meditative absorption of Bodhisattvas known as “Overpowering of All Phenomena by Happiness” is also accomplished by this means.

Instead of seeking happiness within their minds, foolish people chase after external objects hoping thereby to find happiness. But the pursuit of any worldly happiness whether great or small presents those people seeking it with many failures, such as their not being able to attain it, to associate with it, or to keep it in balance. For such foolish people as a proverb says, “[Freedom is lost to externals as if] their hair is tangled in a tree.”

Enemies and robbers will find it easy to harm these foolish people. Even a little criticism will drive happiness from their minds. Their happiness will never be reliable but will be as when a crow nurses a baby cuckoo: however much the crow nurses the baby, it will be impossible for the baby cuckoo to become a baby crow. When such is the case, there will be nothing that is not tiresome for the gods [beings with extensive positive karma], miserable for demons [negative forces], and suffering for them [the foolish people].

This heart-advice is the condensation of a hundred different crucial points in one. There are many other instructions such as how to accept the hardship of austerity for practicing the path, and how to turn illness and harmful effects into the path as taught in the Pacification (of Suffering) teachings and so on. But here I have just written an easily understandable outline on accepting suffering as the support based on the teachings of Śāntideva and his learned followers.

#### BY MEANS OF THE HOLY TRUTH OF REALITY AS IT IS

This is how to draw your mind to dwell contemplatively in supreme peace, the natural state of emptiness in which unfavorable circumstances or even their names cannot be found, and how it is realized by means of reasoning knowledge such as the “Refutation of the Arising of Phenomena from Any of the Four Extremes”.

Even when you are out of that contemplative state you should overcome unfavorable

circumstances by seeing them as being hollow, mere names, and as not arising in the manner that feelings of suffering arose in your mind when fear and intimidation occurred in the past.

## The Way Of Taking Happiness As The Path To Enlightenment

### BY MEANS OF FICTIONAL TRUTH

If you slip under the control of happy circumstances or things that cause happiness, you will become proud, arrogant, and complacent, and this will obstruct your path toward enlightenment. But it is difficult not to fall under the sway of happiness, for as Phadampa says, “Men can bear great suffering, but only a little happiness.”

Therefore consider how all the various phenomena of happiness and their sources are impermanent and full of suffering. Make efforts to develop utter disenchantment toward them and turn your mind away from careless behavior.

Again, you ought to think that “all the wealth and happiness of the world are insignificant and are linked with much harm”. Nevertheless, some of it has value as the Buddha says:

For a person whose freedom is impaired by suffering, it is very difficult to achieve enlightenment; but it will be easy for a person to achieve enlightenment if he is in comfort.

“It is my great good fortune to have the opportunity to practice Dharma in happiness. Now I must buy Dharma with this happiness, and from the Dharma happiness will arise continuously. So I should train in making Dharma and happiness each other's support. Otherwise, like boiling water in a wooden pot, the final outcome will be the very same as what it was at the beginning [back at 'square one' with both exhausted].” Thus you should achieve the essential goal of life by uniting whatever happiness and joy arise with Dharma. This is the view of the *Garland of Jewels*.

If you are happy but do not recognize it, your happiness will not become the instrument of Dharma training and you will be wasting your life with the hope of a separate happiness. Therefore, as the antidote to the hopes for having a separate happiness, you should apply appropriate methods among the trainings given above and should possess the ambrosia of contentment.

There are other ways to take happiness as the path, such as those based on the “Instructions on Training in Bodhicitta” and on “Remembering the Kindness of the Three Jewels”. For the time being, however, this much is sufficient.

Further, in order to accept happiness as the path, as explained in the case of suffering, you should



alternate the trainings of purification with the accumulation of merit in a solitary place.

### BY MEANS OF THE HOLY TRUTH OF REALITY AS IT IS

You should understand it by the training given earlier (for suffering by means of the holy truth of reality as it is).

### CONCLUSION

If you cannot practice Dharma because of sorrow when you are suffering, and if you cannot practice Dharma because of your attachment to happiness when you are happy, then it will be impossible for you to have a chance to practice Dharma. So if you practice Dharma, there is nothing more essential than this training.

If you have this training, whatever kind of place you stay in, whether in a solitary place or a city; whatever the friends you associate with, good or bad; in whatever situation you find yourself, whether riches or poverty, happiness or sorrow; whatever conversations you hear, whether praise or condemnation, good or bad, you will never be apprehensive or afraid that it might diminish you. Thus this is called “the lion-like training”.

Then no matter what you do your mind will be at ease and relaxed. Your attitude will be pure. Your final accomplishments will be excellent. Even though you are physically living in this impure land, your mind will be enjoying the glory of inconceivable bliss like the Bodhisattvas of the pure lands. As the Kadampa Lamas say:

By means of such training happiness will be brought under control  
and suffering will be ended. If you are alone it will be the  
companion of sadness. If you are sick it will nurse you.

Goldsmiths purify gold by melting it and make it flexible by rinsing it in water again and again. It is likewise with the mind: if by taking happiness as the path you develop ardent desire for the practice of the Dharma, and if by taking suffering as the path you cleanse your mind, then you shall easily attain the extraordinary meditative absorption that makes your mind and body capable of accomplishing what you wish.

I can see that this training is the most profound method for perfecting moral discipline, the root of virtues. Because it generates nonattachment to happiness, the foundation of the extraordinary moral discipline of renunciation [of mundane life] is established. Because it generates freedom from the fear of suffering, it makes the discipline [conduct in alignment with the way of reality] pure. As it is said:

Giving is the basis of moral discipline. Patience is the cleanser of moral discipline.

By training this way now, when you reach the higher stages of the path your attainments will come about as it is said:

Bodhisattvas realize that all phenomena are like Māyā (illusion),  
And they see that their births in saṃsāra are like entering a joyful  
garden.  
Therefore, either at the time of prosperity or decline--  
They will not experience the danger of either emotional  
defilements or suffering.

Here are some illustrations from the life of the Buddha:

Before attaining enlightenment, he renounced the position of 'universal monarch' as though it were straw and sat by the Nairanjana River with no concern for the harshness of the austerities that he was practicing. This indicates that the development of the 'equal taste of happiness and suffering' was necessary for him to achieve the 'ambrosia' [of full enlightenment].

After the Buddha attained enlightenment, on the one hand, the chiefs of human beings and gods up to the highest realms placed his feet on the crowns of their heads and offered him respect and service for all his needs and comfort. On the other hand, the Brahman Bharadvaja abused him with a hundred allegations, a Brahmin's daughter slandered him with accusations of sexual misconduct, he lived on rotten horse fodder for three months in the country of King Agnidatta, and so forth. Yet throughout all these the Buddha remained without any alterations of mind, excitement or depression, just like Mount Sumeru which cannot be moved by the wind. This indicates that it is necessary to develop the equal taste of happiness and suffering in order to act for the benefit of living beings.

### **COLOPHON**

It is appropriate for this teaching to be taught by those who are like the Lord Kadampas who have a history of “not crying when there is suffering” and of having “great revulsion toward saṃsāra when there is happiness”. If a man like me teaches it, I am afraid that my own tongue will have contempt for me. But with my goal of achieving the habit of “equal taste” of the eight worldly affairs [gain and loss, pleasure and pain, praise and blame, fame and infamy], I, the poor old man Tenpa'i Nyima, have written this in the Forest of Many Birds.