

Live Teaching by Khen Rinpoche Kalsang Nyima

'How to face suffering from the pandemic'

7:30 p.m., 18 August 2020

English transcript

Dear Dharma brothers and sisters,

Our Venerable Khen Rinpoche Kalsang Nyima gave a live teaching on 'How to face suffering from the pandemic' at 'Wake Up with Dharma', a Facebook page, at 7.30 p.m. on 18 August 2020. The Tibetan teaching was translated into Cantonese by Professor Lozang Hau. The English translation of the Chinese transcript of this online teaching is now available for your reading and sharing. Thank you.

How to face suffering from the pandemic

In response to the student's requests, Khen Rinpoche would like to speak to us through the webcast.

What will Khen Rinpoche teach? It will be about how to dispel difficulties and suffering. This is particularly essential as the existing COVID-19 pandemic has given rise to a lot of difficulties and suffering to everyone. So Khen Rinpoche is going to explain how to face them.

While our world has not become larger, its population is growing to become over-populated. When we have more people, more suffering is created.

Therefore, people need to acquire a lot of skills, such as different languages, in order to survive in this age. If one acquires insufficient skills or knowledge, his or her living in this world can become very difficult.

Owing to the growing population, our land, houses, and necessities have become increasingly expensive. Our daily expenses have also increased several folds.

At this age, one will need to work hard for many years in order to buy a quality house. In order to be able to pay for the daily necessities that are increasingly expensive, we need to work hard every day. Otherwise, we will not be able to sustain the living. We are now living in such an era.

In short, we have been learning different subjects and many different skills since we were small until 20 something years old. This has become a burden. When we need to learn so much, we need to spend a lot on education. We plan so hard in raising the

school fees. Upon completion of the learning, we also need to look for a job. When we work, we have a lot of troubles and pain and may have discord with others. Competitions at work and among businesses are so intense that the entire society is facing great pressure. Furthermore, our food contains chemicals, which give us suffering. As such, our bodies are no longer as healthy as they used to be in the past.

So, our world is facing more different kinds of difficulties as compared with the past. This year is particularly hard. Many people died, become sick, and lose their jobs because of the pandemic this year. So, they are unhappy and cannot accept the situation. As they are undergoing these difficulties and suffering, they have a stronger temper and can get angry and lose their temper all the time. After that, they would argue and fight with their family members.

So how should we face so many difficulties and pain?

Each of us does not wish to have difficulties and suffering. If there was a place that is free of difficulties and pain, I believe everyone would like to go there. However, having such a place in the human community is rare. If there was no such a place that is free of suffering for us to go, then how can we face these problems and difficulties? This has become a big question in our life.

In fact, one of the situations is that these problems and suffering would expand or become lessen according to our way of thinking.

Someone would think their situation is very terrible and they cannot tolerate, bear, and accept that at all when they face their difficulties. There are people reacting in this manner. If one thinks in this way, he or she would give up his or her job by resigning once he or she cannot get along with his or her supervisor or colleague even though he or she has a job.

Some people got married or have a lover without getting married. But once a bad situation arises, they may not be able to accept the situation. So, for those who have got married, they may become divorced. For those who have yet got married, they may break up with their lovers.

For those who do business or other work, they can have a grand plan at the beginning. But they would give up the work or shut down their business after feeling disturbed and worried when some situations or troubles arise. They would lose their motivation and think of themselves as being incapable. So, their plans fail to realize at last.

As these people would lose their interest, effort, and motivation in their work quickly, they can never initiate any large project or undertake any important matter.

As a result, others may look down or criticized them. Therefore, they can never achieve anything beneficial or meaningful in their life.

Some people, however, are being able to turn problems, difficulties, and pain into something positive. They can accumulate experience through something bad and find the opportunities to turnaround a negative issue into a positive matter. We, therefore, need to have a good thinking approach and positive thoughts to change our difficulties. If not, we will need to forebear the pain and continue to work hard to attain the original goal.

If we take a look at the sublime beings and great men in the past, their open mind has helped them overcome a lot of difficulties. Compared with these sublime beings, the difficulties that we are experiencing are negligible. If we can think in this way, our mind will not be twisted by [defeated by] difficulties easily. On the contrary, our efforts, perseverance and motivation will grow instead of falling.

If we can think deeper, we would understand that all difficulties and suffering have their own positive aspects. Suffering can give us a lot of merits. The biggest mistake in our life is pride and hatred. But when we face our suffering, it is a great opportunity to tame our pride and hatred.

Similarly, the biggest merit in our life is to be able to generate loving and kindness. When we face difficulties and suffering, it is a great opportunity for us to generate compassion. It is because we can understand others' suffering the best when we are in difficulties and suffering.

For example, there was a driver in the Nangqian county (Nangchen) of the Kham region in Tibet. At that time, there were only large trucks running on the road without any smaller vehicles or buses. When the drivers drove their trucks, sometimes they would meet people who asked for a ride on their way. But this driver declined all these requests. At that time, many people liked to make pilgrimage to Lhasa. Later one day, this driver carried his baggage for a pilgrimage. When he started his journey, he walked at first and tried to stop some trucks in the middle of his way in a hope for a free ride. He felt so sad when some drivers refused. But if some drivers were willing to give him a ride, he would feel so happy for many days. He finally managed to arrive at the Jokhang Monastery in Lhasa. He swore in front of the Jowo Shakyamuni statue in the temple and said, 'If there are people stopping my truck to ask for a free ride, unless the truck is full, I would do so as long as there is some space left in the truck.'

This driver used to reject the free ride requests from others. But after experiencing so many difficulties in his own pilgrimage, he experienced how it felt when others were willing to help and how it could be when others refused to help. He has

changed to become a good driver, a driver that is willing to give others a free ride after experiencing these difficulties of his own.

Each of us understands and feels how it is during our own suffering in our life. In this way, we will be able to understand how others' suffering is and be able to generate compassion towards others. This compassion can only be arisen when we face pains.

At the same time, we will be able to nurture unsurpassable capabilities, greater merit and higher qualities when we face our difficulties and pain. If we cannot address suffering, we can only be an average person. If we are being able to think about how these difficulties and suffering can provide opportunities for us to become an important person, then we will be able to forebear these pains.

Similarly, many pains and suffering in our life has become greater and harder because of our wrong way of thinking. Why? It is because when we face difficulties and suffering, we would think it was due to other's mistakes. We thought we have not done anything wrong. This way of thinking has led to greater suffering for us. This thinking approach has made us to arise hatred, anger and dislike towards others. Because we do not like and hate others and are in anger, we even experience greater pain.

For example, someone made a mistake for about an hour. But we may get very angry and dislike that person so much which make us carry this hatred in our mind throughout our whole life. When we have this anger and hatred in our mind, our body is like being burnt by fire and our face looks terribly like a ghost which others do not wish to take a look at it. Then whatever we say would become bad words harming others' peace and happiness as if bombs that would destroy others' houses. When we are angry, our body energy would be worn away slowly triggering many illnesses. If you always get angry easily and carry the hatred, you may find yourselves having cancer, high blood pressure or other diseases anytime.

Some people would say this person is bad, that person is dirty, and how inferior and vulgar another person is etc. whenever and wherever they meet another person. They would become even angrier with stronger hatred as they talk making themselves very uncomfortable too. These people are living in this manner throughout their whole life. For those people who are dissatisfied with others, they often would think of themselves as very good, very smart and with so much wisdom etc. But these people, in fact, are very stupid, unreasonable making themselves so difficult.

It is because as long as a person continues to get angry, hate or blame others all the time, he or she would not have any peace, happiness and healthiness in his or her

own mind. If this situation continues for a long time, he or she would suffer a lot triggering many diseases.

We can never find a person who is free of defects in this world. When we are living in this world, sometimes we are happy. Sometimes it is good. But there are poor situations and sometimes it can be painful. Sometimes we meet good people and good friends. Sometimes we come across with bad people and bad friends. Sometimes we can work things out smoothly or with very good results. Sometimes we cannot accomplish a work no matter how hard we have tried. Why do we have all these good, bad, pain and happiness? That is not without any cause and reason.

For example, if we need to plant, we need to gather various conditions such as seeds, water, soil and sunlight together. The plant itself cannot be grown suddenly.

Similarly, all phenomena of pain, happiness, good and bad in our life depend upon the combination of many causes and conditions instead of a single cause or a single condition. It is like when we clap our hands, we need two hands to do so. If we move only one hand, there will not be any clapping sound. In our life, many phenomena are originated from the combination of many causes and conditions. If we recognize Buddhadharma, we believe happiness comes from the good karma we did in the past lives. Suffering comes from the bad karma we did in the past.

However, many people would think it is because of their own personal capabilities, qualities, and knowledge that have resulted in something good in their life. They think the good things are entirely driven by themselves. So, when something bad or problems emerge, we would say that is because of others' mistakes or something that he or she has not done for us. But all these kinds of thinking are wrong.

If we open and expand our mind to understand and think about how pain and happiness arise from many causes and conditions, in particular on how our pain and happiness come from our own good and bad karma, then we would not merely blame others when we encounter difficulties. Our anger and dissatisfaction towards others would be reduced. Then we will not let anger stay in our mind for a long time and will not carry hatred with us for a long time even though we can become angry about something suddenly.

If our mind does not have any anger and hatred, then it can become calm, peaceful, happy, and spacious. We can, therefore, have an open mind to think about the combination of different causes and conditions especially on how true and unfailing the law of karma is. This will enable us to dispel different pains. It is particularly important to us to recognize that our pain and suffering are due to the ripening of our past bad karma. If we can think it is time for us to bear the results of these bad karma, then we will be able to generate compassion towards others. We will hope to

share and take up the suffering of others when our own bad karma has become mature. This is another good opportunity for us to cleanse bad karma that may lead to our downfall to the lower realms.

In one of the Buddhadharma teachings, it was taught that anger and hatred are the greatest bad karma while forbearance is the greatest good karma. If we wish to practice forbearance and in order to be able to do so, we need someone to harm us, and someone to create obstacles. So, when others are creating difficulties and giving us suffering, we need to think that is a good opportunity to cut through our anger and hatred, and practice forbearance. If we can arise our confidence towards Buddhadharma in this manner, our suffering can be reduced, our karma and obstacles can be cleansed and purified, and we can accumulate merits. If we can practice in this way, we will be able to think people who make us angry or people who we dislike are very kind to us. It is because they provide us with good opportunities to train our mind, and practice patience and compassion.

Similarly, if we can visualize the tong len”(give and take) practice that we just talked about, and practice exchanging ourselves and others while we are sick, our suffering in the sickness can be transformed into an opportunity for accumulating merits and cleansing and purifying karma and obstacles.

Since our births till now, many years have passed. We have been growing up slowly from small to older. All the things that we did in the past are gone and have disappeared. Only their memory is left with us. It is like different dreams we had in our sleep last night. After we wake up, only the memory of the dream is left. The rest are all disappeared. Similarly, all the things we did for so many years are the same as the dreams, which are all gone now. What we did in the morning has become a dream and all have passed.

We started the teaching at 7:30 p.m. this evening. Now it is 8:30 p.m. What we talked about has disappeared leaving traces of memory behind. Why? It is because everything fades moment by moment. Nothing can last for long. Similarly, we need to think about the impermanence nature of everything in this world and how they are changing moment by moment like dreams. If we can think like this way, we no longer need to feel surprised, react strongly towards it, and lose our motivation in our difficult times. If we can think that all phenomena are like dreams and illusions, then this can greatly reduce our pain and suffering.

For example, if we get 10 men to take a look at a woman. Some may find this lady beautiful. Some may think she looks average. Some may think she does not look that nice. Some may think she does not look good. Some may even find her ugly. Different men can feel differently towards the same lady.

For example, those who were born in India may find rice grown in India and their dishes very delicious. For Mainlanders or Hongkongers who take these dishes in India, they may find the food unpalatable and cannot eat them at all. Europeans have food like salad. For Tibetans who use to eat horses, cows, and yaks, they would find salad looks bad for eating. Tibetans started to eat tsampa since they were small. They would find it difficult to survive without tsampa. But Hongkongers would find tsampa difficult to be eaten.

So, the habit and viewpoints in our mind affect whether something is beautiful or ugly or not. However, genuinely there is nothing so-called beautiful or ugly by the nature of a face itself. Similarly, the habits that we formed since we were small help determine whether a piece of food is delicious or not. If we have been used to it, then it becomes delicious. However, we can never find a kind of food that everyone in this world thinks as the most delicious.

Some people like gambling. When they talk about gambling with other gamblers, they would feel very happy. Some soldiers like war. So, when they gather to talk about how to beat and kill people, they would become very happy. Some businessmen like to make business and money. When they meet and talk, that can be very delightful. When practitioners meet, they would talk happily about how to learn and practice Buddhadharma too.

So, for those with similar habits, familiar with and get used to most similar things, they would become friends when they meet. If they have different views and habits, they can never get along together for a long time when they meet and will separate quickly.

So, what we called good and bad actually means whether that matches with our own feeling or not. It does not mean that the nature of that matter itself is good or bad. Similarly, if we contemplate the so-called pain and happiness further, we understand those are concepts imputed by our mind. There is no absolute meaning of pain and suffering in truth. If we understand any good or bad phenomenon is a concept created by our mind, that it is a kind of confused appearance, and there is nothing as good or as bad as what we think and perceive truly exist, then our mind can become more opened, broader, and be in greater peace and happiness.

Each of us has different habits, karma, perspectives, and habits. It is impossible for a person to completely change others. In the sutra, there is teaching saying that it is impossible to find enough carpets to cover the entire surface of the earth if one wishes not to step into any spikes or sand and rocks when they go out and walk.

Similarly, it is impossible for us to remove all our enemies and kill everyone who we find bad to make ourselves free of enemies. I quit working in this place because I

meet some bad guys here today. When I change to work in another place, I still meet some bad people. So, I switch to third place to work. If I continue in this manner, I would still not be able to find a place where is completely free of bad people.

Therefore, the sutra taught us that we should never think of finding carpets that can cover the whole piece of earth. We should wear a pair of good shoes instead so that our feet will not be hurt by spikes, sand, or rocks wherever we go. This is the same as covering the entire piece of ground.

Therefore, we should stop thinking about changing everyone. We should stop thinking about how unbearable another person is. We need to let our mind free of anger and hatred to become more compassionate and open. Then the result would be the same as changing everyone in this world.

There is no way for us to be completely renounced from this world. We can never find a place that is free of difficulties and suffering. Then where should we go? We need to turn into our mind and focus on relaxing in our own nature.

Why? It is because the nature of the mind is luminous and is Buddha Nature (or called 'tathagatagarbha'). Buddha Nature is free of defilements and is endowed with all the supreme qualities. It is the same as the wisdom of Buddha. The nature of the mind of all living beings is just like this. However, because we do not understand the nature of the mind and can never abide in it, we suffer. If we wish to have happiness and peace, we should work hard in understanding and recognizing the nature of our mind.

Our world is getting hotter with melting snow mountains. Lakes and sea are full of rubbish. The air is polluted. Everyone is selfish with a strong pride. If we wish to be able to protect the environment, we need to work on protecting our mind [instead]. This is especially relevant to the practice of the Vajrayana of secret mantra. We would visualize the entire external world as the pure land and everyone we see as Buddha or Bodhisattva, or as the male or female yidam deity. We visualize all sounds as mantras and all our thoughts as the displays of the primordial wisdom of the nature of our mind. We should practice in this way to maintain a pure perception. We can use this pure perception to protect our mind.

Some of the friends in the last year have become enemies this year. Some of the lovers have separated. In this time when the mind is unstable and ever-changing, bodhicitta is the best companion of our mind.

Our food has a lot of chemical and unhealthy substances leading to obesity and other health problems. Our best food at this time is meditation. This is the most important.

Relatively speaking, all phenomena in this world arise from different causes and conditions. The law of karma is true. But ultimately speaking, everything is in emptiness. So, we need to focus on nurturing our eyes of wisdom which can see both the relative truth and ultimate truth.

Similarly, we need to wear our shoes of forbearance.

The nature of our mind is also the home of our mind. Our mind lives in tathagatagarbha. We have Buddha Nature which does not need to be created or established.

The [practice of] generation stage is the best protection for our mind. We do not need to buy or build it. When practicing the generation stage, thinking will do.

Every living being has compassion in his or her own mind. So, when each of us can be diligent, we can grow this compassion to become bodhicitta, which will become the best companion of our mind.

If we can think of the merits of patience and defects of anger and hatred, then we will be able to wear the shoes of forbearance without having the need of searching or buying them from a remote place.

All living beings have all the wisdom. If we are willing to learn and practice, we all can open our eyes of wisdom.

Similarly, if we can think about the merits and benefits of meditation and defects of not doing the practice, then we will be able to enjoy meditation as our food naturally.

When the supreme qualities and virtues such as loving, kindness, wisdom, openness of our mind can become increasingly powerful, then anger, hatred, dissatisfaction, worries, and fear can become increasingly less.

Why? It is because compassion and wisdom are the right views of seeing all phenomena in this world. This is backed by evidence and statements and is in line with the nature of Dharma (i.e. dharmata). It can benefit yourself and others.

As for five-poison or three-poison kleshas like attachments, anger, ignorance, jealousy, and pride, they do not match with the nature of Dharma, they are not dharmic, and they are unsuitable for the real situation. They can only give us suffering and unhappiness in this life and pain in the next lives. If we can think in this manner, it is easier to cut off our defilements.

In short, if we can change our mind towards the virtues and manage our mind, no matter how difficult the external phenomena have become, the peace and calmness in our mind can never be obscured. This can create such a powerful effect.

Otherwise, if one never thinks of changing his or her own mind, but focuses on changing the external phenomena, then his or her own mind would experience great pain and suffering even though there are some minor difficulties in the external world.

Now we have many wealthy and well-known people in this world. Many of them can never eat and sleep happily and peacefully.

But there are poor families living in small houses with food and clothes that are not so good. However, they can always be very happy and sing and laugh out loud together.

Why is it so? It is because happiness comes from the way of our thinking, not from external objects and matters.

In short, our mind is like a king, and body and speech are like servants. If a king or ruler of a place is good, then this place can become peaceful and happy. But if the king is bad, the country cannot have peace and happiness even though its ministers are good. It can have a lot of troubles and difficulties. Our mind is like a king. If our mind can become vast, open, and feel content with compassion, we can still have peace and happiness even though we may not have any money and name and own little materially. That is why we say our mind has a lot of good qualities and virtues.

Some people may own a lot of things, having a lot of money and food. But often they live in great pain, problems, and sadness. Why? It is because their mind never feels satisfied and is not open enough, lacks compassion, and does not have the wisdom to know the truth. Their mind is like a poor king. The wealth, friends, and food that they have cannot help them. They feel painful and sad whenever and wherever they go.

If we can turn our mind towards virtues and correct our mind, our mind will have great power to dispel or reduce our suffering.

This is the end of Khen Rinpoche's teaching for this evening. Thank you!

- End -