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Understanding Karma

Exploring the law of karma helps us understand why suffering and problems arise in our life, we can learn how to protect our self from future pain and build the foundation for a life of pure happiness.

This course is a preparation for Vajrasattva purification weekend retreat.

- October 14th - Introduction to Karma and purification
- October 21st - The powers of regret and promise
- October 28th - The powers of reliance and opponent force
- November 4th - Introduction to Vajrasattva practice

Introduction to Karma and purification

Below are some key points that will go with you throughout the whole course. Feel free to return to the points you are making in this class in your other classes because it will create repetition

You don't need to talk about all these points (you can if you wish...)

Introduction - basic Buddhist view: Purification is done in order to liberate the self from the experiences that are the results of previous activities.

So we need to know something about

1. The self
2. About Karma
3. About purification

1. Who we are

- what is the self?
 - contaminated basis of imputation
 - uncontaminated basis of imputation
- our basic aspiration
- what are our real problems
 - what is suffering
 - what is happiness
- where do they come from
 - mind is the creator of everything

2. What is karma?

- what is the purpose of Buddha's teaching about karma?
- what is karma
 - what are the four characteristics of karma
- what misconception might people have with regards to karma

3. What is purification.

- What do we purify
 - negativities in our mind
 - where do these negativities come from?
- Why do we purify
- how do we purify
 - the four powers (you can introduce them briefly and in the next two classes we shall explore them in more depth)
 - reliance
 - regret
 - opponent force
 - promise

The powers of regret and promise

Briefly

- what is karma
- what are the four results of one actions
- what do we purify

How do we purify

The four powers

The two powers - regret and promise, as explained in the book *The Bodhisattva Vow*:

“ The first opponent power, the power of reliance, purifies the potential for the environmental effect, and also functions to subdue negative karma in general.

“ The fourth opponent power, the power of promise, purifies the potential for the effect that is a tendency similar to the cause, and also prevents us from repeating the action.

- The power of regret
 - Clarifying the difference between guilt and regret.
 - In *Joyful Path* (power of regret) Venerable Geshe-la says:

◦ “ We develop regret by remembering all the dangers of our negativity.

this is practical but hard so need to approach this gently

◦ “ The stronger our regret, the stronger our restraint.

This is an insight for the importance of regret

- The power of promise
 - exploring the act of promising - what helps us keep a promise, what may be the reasons we break promises

From the dictionary

guilt (gɪlt) n

1. the fact or state of having done wrong or committed an offence
2. (Law) responsibility for a criminal or moral offence deserving punishment or a penalty
3. remorse or self-reproach caused by feeling that one is responsible for a wrong or offence
4. archaic sin or crime

From chatGPT

Regret is about wishing something had been different — an event, a choice, or an outcome.

Guilt is about feeling responsible for harm — it carries a moral or ethical weight.

For example:

- You might **regret** missing an opportunity to visit a friend before they moved away.
- You might feel **guilty** if you promised to visit but didn't, and your absence caused them pain.

Re-stated

- Guilt is the emotional weight of feeling responsible for a moral wrong — “I have done harm.”
- Regret is the emotional reflection of wishing one had acted differently — “I wish I had not done that.”

So guilt carries moral judgment — the sense of having violated a value or duty. Regret carries emotional sadness — a yearning for what might have been.

These kind of insights can help us understand why people do not like guilt. But if we think about it guilt is not necessarily as "negative" as most people feel it to be.

It might be that our capacity for taking responsibility for incorrect moral behaviors is manipulated by others to make us behave in a particular way. This is of course problematic and make cause a lot of resentment.

Practice take away

Explore how can these two forces be practiced:

- In meditation
- During our daily activities

Understanding Karma

The powers of reliance and the opponent force

Briefly

- what is karma
- what are the four results of one actions
- what do we purify - the four results

How do we purify

The four powers

- The power of reliance
- The power of opponent force

Understanding Karma

Introduction to Vajrasattva practice

The Power of Love

A course to introduce the Kind Heart Meditation audio tracks.

The course has two aims:

- The guided audio tracks can help people overcome the difficulties they may have starting a home meditation practice.
- At the end of the course we have a retreat - so the course is a type of preparation

1st Class - Introduction to our love

The classes in this course are based on the booklet Meditations for a Kind Heart.

The introduction section can feed all your three classes.

While the meditations are around cherishing others - they also are indicating the loving kindness. So please explain the two. We touch on wishing love in the third meditation.

We need to re-explain what are problems and why Buddhist say that cherishing others solves problems.

Emphasise the difference between theoretical understanding and experiential understanding. And how we need to experience the real meaning of love - experience of cherishing others -as opposite to desiring to possess them for our own selfish needs(read attachment).

In the first class, please cover the quote:

“ The meditations on this CD will help us to develop greater peace of mind, happiness, and to improve our relationships through learning to cherish others. A kind heart is a special mental attitude that cherishes other people at least as much as we cherish ourselves. It is grounded in the following commonsense thinking: ***'Just as I wish to be happy, so does everyone else; and just as I do not wish for the slightest suffering, nor does anyone else. From this point of view we are all the same. Therefore there is no reason to consider my own happiness or my own suffering to be more important than anyone else's.'***

Discuss the objections or the difficulties in accepting the above quote.

Why does Venerable Geshe-la states it is common sense??

There are many other topics you can dig out from the introduction.

2nd class - Compassion and the practice of Taking

In this class we build on the common sense we've been introduced too -

“Just as I wish to be happy and free from suffering so does everyone else. In this respect we are all the same.

We discuss how compassion is a natural outcome of cherishing the other person - people, and how without being careful our compassion can cause us a burn out because currently we are a limited person; meaning our ability to know what the other person needs is limited by our ignorance and our ability to work for the benefit of many people is limited by our self-cherishing and physical body.

Then we explain that the solution to the above obstacles is to use our imagination.

This imagination is the nature of an action which has as its main purpose the function of eliminating our self-cherishing.

Then explain the meditation and do it.

:)

End of Year De-Stress

End of Year De-Stressing

During the festive season people experience various kinds of mental/emotional hardships which can be described as stress, anxiety, depression, melancholy etc

When we teach, we try to think about the topic from our own experiences. This grounds your teachings in a shared reality with the listeners.

I prepared a short lists of things which may contribute to people's stressed, anxious, etc experiences:

- Financial pressure
- Family and social relationships
- Loneliness and isolation
- Overcommitment and time pressure
- Lack of privacy
- Heightened expectations
- Seasonal and environmental factors

We help people De-Stress through discussing these points (and or any other points that you wish to talk about from your experience) and showing how we can use aspects of dharma to de-stress our self.

There can be two approaches of how dharma help to de-stress: a general and a specific approach.

General:

- **Grasping:** This is about the truth of the situation - usually it is because we do not understand the reality of the situation we're in that we develop stress etc:
 - permanence
 - samsara
 - external to the mind
 - Truly existent
- **Perspective:** this is when we do not have the correct perspective on the situation
 - Samsaric beings (body and mind) and situations will always be lacking satisfaction
 - Self-chirishing - by centring our self we skew perspective on the situation, causing problems

Specific

We need to be careful about how we address these specific causes of stress. This is because we do not know the actual situation people in the audience are in.

Pick any one of the specific causes I listed or any other causes/factors you can think about and show how we can prepare and use dharma to mitigate the strength of that particular factor.

Few examples:

- Overcommitment - we can look at why we overcommit; inability to say no? Wanting to keep some reputation? Etc - in which case we can use various kinds of dharma training
- Financial pressures - This is assuming people are not so poor they basically can't find money for food (which in some cases may be an issue) - change the meaning of festivity from just presents to preparing small but thoughtful expression of appreciation to the people we're spending time with
- Etc...

Addressing the specific and general causes of stress etc, you should now have more than enough to teach the following two classes

How to Stop Overthinking

Do you have a tendency to overthink things and find it hard to switch off?

Learn invaluable ways to clear the mind of negative mental habits and remain balanced, calm and clear as you navigate the busyness of daily life.

The mental activity of overthinking is painful and can in its extreme be detrimental to the well being of the person.

We as Buddhist offer working with the mind as the only reliable method to be able to stop overthinking.

Overthinking always happens in the context of uncontrolled mind - suffering from either unawareness of doing it or being aware of doing it but not having the power to stop it.

We are helping people to become aware

We are helping people to develop the power to move the mind towards virtue

We need to explain how this method is reliable but it is slower - it takes time, and the person should not have unrealistic expectations. But that in time we can really gain control over our mind and that will allow us to recognize (become aware) the start of our overthinking and beginning to reduce it.

1st Class

In the first class we establish

- What is overthinking
- How does it affect us
- What ways do people have to overcome their overthinking - do they work
- Since overthinking is a mental problem we will need to work with our mind to overcome it
 - This is going to take time - long time, which means people should not expect quick results

The practical aspect

- Developing clarity about the situation => leading us to a sincere heartfelt wish to end our overthinking
- Understanding the three difficulties -
 - Recognizing the times we are overthinking
 - Reducing
 - Abandoning This is of course to do with the topic from training the mind called the three difficulties.

For the time being we only think about the first two. And specifically we explain the importance of recognizing when we start our overthinking process.

As a takeaway from the class - during the coming week just recalling the wish and training in alertness to catch our self starting the overthinking process.

Why is this important or how do these two work?

- Without sincere wish we will not put the effort needed - and we will need a lot of effort to undermine the real causes of overthinking (which we explore in the next class(s))
- The wish will help us to be alert to what's going on in our mind. Without knowing what's going on in our mind how can we ever stop overthinking before it grows and we can't do much about it other than

2nd Class

Starting with a recap

Roughly speaking we can divide the causes of overthinking into two:

1. external
2. internal

Changing externals such as environment, lifestyle, may offer some help but really we need to change the mind. If you wish it may be helpful to explain a little about the mind vs brain and how with this Buddhist explanation of mind we have a chance to understand the situation in a simpler and clearer way that allows us to understand the mechanism of overthinking.

With a basic understanding of the mind we can introduce delusions and how delusions are exaggerated imaginations.

With this we can show how at the bottom of much of our overthinking done through mental exaggeration I am suggesting few aspects as main factors in overthinking:

1. Inability to deal with uncertainty
2. Attachment to the fulfilment of our own wishes
3. Self-cherishing
4. Self-grasping

You can choose to talk about any or all of these three

There is also a need to touch on the nature of samsara which is the real context for everything. But this is difficult for people to fully get to grips with.

The next class is about proactively preempting overthinking (which we understand as negative mental activity that repeats itself and causes us to spiral to an unpleasant mental space) and moving the mind

How to Stop Overthinking

3rd Class

In this class we are thinking of counter acting against our normal mental habits.

So we begin to develop ideas in our mind such as I am not the centre of the world My wishes do not and cannot realistically always be fulfilled

How to Stop Overthinking

4th Class

in this class we may consider two things that can help dealing with overthinking

1. karma
2. emptiness these two topics help with overthinking because overthinking is scrade from the uncertainty of life and overthinking creates in ourmind an appearance of the world which does not exist but we relate to it as if it does. becasue we relate to this inner appearance as if it is the reality we then experience all the painful issues associated with overthinking