

~ How to Process and Befriend Your Feelings ~

Mingyur Rinpoche

How to work with the feeling level? Normally we have three things: the thinking mind, the cognitive or reasoning mind; then the feeling mind, or emotional mind, or sensing mind, the intuition mind; then another layer, the imprint mind, the habitual mind, the unconscious level of mind. Three layers.

So, what is feeling? Feeling comes with a lot of sensation. Of course it comes in the body, and especially through the senses — whatever you see, whatever you hear, you feel something. Normally the feeling might be pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. But normally we are not aware of that neutral feeling.

The neutral feeling is present even when we go to sleep and are almost unconscious. Of course, when we go to sleep we think it is unconscious. But that neutral feeling is still present. That is why when you feel cold, you still experience it. When a mosquito bites you, you will automatically scratch.

That neutral feeling is always there with us. It is like when you hit a drum and there is a vibration — like that. That feeling is throughout the body and throughout the mind. And based on that neutral, subtle feeling, then the gross feeling comes.

What is a gross feeling? Pleasant feeling — ice cream, I love it. Or somebody says, “You are perfect! You did a good job.” A wave of pleasant sensation comes in the body, and the mind is very happy, joyful. Or somebody says you are stupid — now there is an uncomfortable, unpleasant feeling.

This feeling arises in our life — if you lose your job, encounter obstacles, a relationship does not go well, your stock market goes down — and nowadays there is a lot of turbulence happening around the world, like conflicts and environmental problems. When we hear this, when we engage with this, we have unpleasant feelings.

But if you find what looks like the perfect match, or you found your dream job, or you went to a wonderful place and ate food that you love, and somebody says, “You are perfect. Good job. You are looking nice,” pleasant feeling comes and goes throughout the body and the mind.

Then there is another thing. That neutral feeling I mentioned is always present, open, and like the basis for all feelings, and you feel that at almost an unconscious level. Normally that feeling is related with intuition. Many people say, “The moment I saw something, I felt something was not right,” or “was right.” Through the intellectual mind, you do not even know if it is good or not good, but you feel it is not really right or not really nice. Or you felt a connection. That is related with the neutral feeling.

The neutral feeling is huge, and it manifests through the senses. The moment you encounter something, the unconscious level processes so many things. And of course, that is also based on your past experiences and past memories.

Many people think intuition is wisdom, or genuine, or that intuition is very important. That is true — intuition has the capacity to process so many things at an unconscious level. But that intuition is also related with past experiences, what we call “imprints,” past memories. So do not totally rely on intuition, either.

You can take a lot from intuition, but also use your own wisdom through reasoning. Try to combine them, and then rest with the present moment, in a little bit of a meditative state. All of this combined is really beneficial.

Now, the problem is that sometimes these feelings and emotions are very strong. Especially when the neutral feeling is very, very active, we become very sensitive. We feel others’ emotions. We feel others’ energy. We feel something, and we cannot say no. And based on that, we develop stress. Maybe we burn out, or maybe become impatient, and it can also create panic attacks.

For me it really became very difficult when I was young, because I was very sensitive. The feeling was connected with my environment — strong thunderstorms, snowstorms, strangers. There were so many

things that were processing through feeling, and I did not know how to work with that.

So how to work with that through the ancient practice? Three things. We have to work with the view, working at the cognitive level; meditation, working with the emotion directly; and then application, working with the imprints, the unconscious mind, repeating positive imprints.

From the cognitive level, it is very important to let go. But letting go is not giving up. So how to let go? We need to learn impermanence. Life is up and down. It changes. In one way, that might look depressing — impermanence, changing. But in another way, that is possibility, that is potential, and that is freedom. Nothing is fixed. That is opportunity.

In fact, if you accept impermanence, then there is no really big obstacle, because you can learn from obstacles. You can learn from up and down. Up is good, and you feel happy. But with downs, you learn more, you transform more. For me, the panic attacks were a down moment in my life, but I learned the most from my panic attacks. So I say that panic was my teacher, my best friend. I mean it. I am teaching this meditation now because of my panic attacks.

Accepting ups and downs as potential opportunities for the learning process — that is learning to let go, but not giving up. You are learning by accepting that. You are not fixed, not holding. You are letting go. That is the view. It applies to your relationship, your work, your life, your professional job, your business, your studies, everything. Accept from the beginning that there are ups and downs, but through the ups and downs, “I want to learn and grow and transform.” That is the view from the cognitive level. Keep that in the background of your mind.

Second, how to work with emotion directly is through meditation. The first step is learning how to be with one object. That is not the thinking mind, but what we call the “being mind.” Normally I give some choices. One is breathing. I think all of you might know this one. Be with the breath. Just feel the breathing. Be present with the breathing. You do not have to ask any question. You do not have to analyze anything. You do not have to do anything. Just be with the breathing with your mind. And you cannot do that for too long — only a few seconds. Then in between, millions of thoughts (“blah, blah,

blah, yada, yada, yada”) about the past and future will come. The past, future, present — all this will come. Let them come, let them go.

And maybe sometimes practice with sound. Just listen to any sound — birds, music, traffic jams. Just be with the sound.

Then slowly, slowly come back to the body. Be with the body. Feel the gravity. You can even do this. [Mingyur Rinpoche holds up one arm in front of himself and allows his hand to hang down.] Feel the gravity. Feel the warm or cold temperature. Feel pleasant and neutral sensation first, and then eventually unpleasant. Then, at the third level, feel the feeling itself — feel the emotion itself.

I felt my panic attacks. Of course, at the beginning they were very strong and felt overwhelming. But when you see the mountain, you are off of the mountain. When you see the river, you are out the river. So if you can feel the emotion, then the awareness, the mind, becomes bigger than the emotion. And you do not need to stop the emotion, block it, or control it. Like when you see the river, you do not have to stop the river, but you are out of the river, watching the river. In the same way, if you can look at the emotion and the emotion is still there, that means you are out of the emotion. You are not totally controlled by the emotion.

That is the first benefit. There is space between you and the emotion, but the emotion is still there. You do not have to block it. That is the first benefit. Second, now emotion becomes your friend, becomes a support for your meditation. Just like breathing. Your breath comes and goes, comes and goes, right? By watching that breath, by being with the breathing, that breathing becomes support for your meditation. Now, panic becomes support for your meditation.

Of course, it is not so easy. And if you feel overwhelmed, if you feel like you cannot really watch it, then do not watch it. Go back to sound. Listen to sound. Or watch the breathing.

That way, eventually, you can have emotion, but the emotion does not get out of control. The emotion becomes your friend, and maybe the emotion disappears for some people. There is a gap. That is also good — what we call a “nonconceptual state.” If emotions disappear, let them disappear. If emotions are there, just watch them. Let them be

there. You do not need to do anything. Do not choose: “Through meditation, I have to get rid of the emotions. I need that gap.” If you do, the emotion becomes stronger. Like when you say, “Do not think about oranges,” what happens? You think about oranges. So do not try to stop the emotion. But you do not have to look for emotion or create emotion, either. Non-judgment. Just witness.

Third, application. You can now bring this practice into your life, in relationships, for example. A lot of people come to me and always complain about their relationship: “How can I deal with this? They do not understand me. They are not there for me, and they confuse me. Then in the end, they turned out to be a jerk.” Such a long list.

Now you feel all this. What do you have to do? The first thing is to remember that it is impermanent, that everything is changing. Relationships go up and down. There is no such thing as Mr. Perfect or Ms. Perfect. Normally I say that. You might have Ms. Okay or Mr. Okay. That is possible. But perfectness is difficult. So accept that and let go. It is impermanent and might change. Then, you do not give up. When you accept impermanence, you see how things flow. The relationship becomes more healthy and longer, and your mind is less sensitive.

But when you face a lot of emotion, maybe the first step is to change focus. If you are angry, listen to sound. If you feel hatred, watch the breathing. For me, with panic, I go back to the breath. That is the first step. If you get some experience with that, get some taste of it — normally we practice for about one month — then feel the body. When you feel panic attacks, you can feel the body. Then, third, you can watch it; you can feel the panic directly, feel the hatred directly.

When you do not look at the panic, it is so solid and strong. When you look at it, it becomes pieces — sensation, image, voices, belief — and they are changing. It is like shaving foam: it looks like a piece of rock, but inside it is full of bubbles. Try that in everyday life, short times, many times.

And the most important is the first step: catch it. “Oh, I am angry again.” At the workplace, when you feel stressed, “Oh, I feel stressed.” A lot of things are at an unconscious level, like a machine. At a certain level, we become like a machine. So if you do not feel that, if you do not catch it, even though you tell yourself, “I want to be nice, and

tomorrow, I will go to my office with a full smile,” then something happens and the hatred blows up like a volcano eruption. Ten minutes later, “Ooh.”

So with the training of this awareness, just catch it. “I am just feeling hatred.” “I am stressed.” “I am angry.” And feel the body sensation. No need to say, “I should not be angry.” Sometimes even when you tell yourself not to be angry, it does not help — it becomes worse. So you do not have to do anything. Just catch that moment. By catching that moment, you already feel relief, actually. There is a lot of power in that. Just by being aware, a lot of positive work is done, automatically and spontaneously.

When the sunlight appears, the frost on the grass automatically melts. The sunlight does not think, “I should melt the frost.” The frost does not say, “Do not melt me.” It comes spontaneously. In the same way, the mental frost and ice at the emotional level — just by being present with it, at a certain level, it melts.

So the view is accepting impermanence; meditation, learning the being mind — not the thinking mind, not the doing mind — being with reality as it is, beginning with breathing and sound, then the body, then the emotion; and then application, applying that in everyday life. When you do these three things, emotion can become your teacher. Emotion becomes your friend.