





Embracing Negative Energies

Sometimes we are overwhelmed by the energy of hate, of anger, of despair. We forget that in us there are other kinds of energy that can manifest also. If we know how to practice, we can bring back the energy of insight, of love, and of hope in order to embrace the energy of fear, of despair, and of anger. Our ancestors are capable of negating the unwholesome energies, or what Christians might call the evil spirit within us, by bringing back the Holy Spirit in order for us to heal and to be healthy and joyful and alive again.

In Buddhism, we also talk about these kinds of energies, the negative energies and the positive energies. There is a little difference though. In the case of Buddhism, we don't have to chase the evil spirit away; in fact we embrace the evil spirit, the energy of anger, the energy of despair, the energy of hate, the negative energies. Embraced by the energy of mindfulness, they are transformed. They don't need to be chased away.

What do you do in order to embrace and transform them? You have to call in to yourself, you have to help manifest the energy of love, of understanding, and of peace in order to embrace these kinds of negative energies. Listening to the bell, for instance, is one of the wonderful ways to generate the energy of peace, to generate the energy of mindfulness. These energies will help to take care of the negative energies. For instance, when you are angry you can always practice like this:

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Breathing in, I know the energy of anger is in me.

Breathing out, I embrace my anger.

It is a wonderful practice. You just practice breathing in and out to be aware that anger is in you. You know that when you are angry it is not good to say anything. It is not good to react or do anything. "Breathing in, breathing out, I recognize there is anger in me" is the best thing to do. If you know how to do it, the energy of anger will not be able to harm you or the people around you.

During this practice, the energy of mindfulness is in you, alive, because you continue the practice of mindful breathing in and mindful breathing out. Mindful breathing helps the energy of mindfulness to be alive, and this enables you to embrace the energy of anger, to recognize it as existing. You are put in a very safe situation. You don't

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have to chase anger out of you. You allow it to be in you, you embrace it tenderly, and then anger will subside, and the danger is overcome. During the practice you have helped anger, and it will be transformed slowly. This practice enables you to acknowledge your anger with a smile. While you practice breathing in and out, acknowledging your anger and smiling toward it, the energy of the Buddha is in you. The Buddha is in you, the Buddha as an ancestor is protecting you. You know that the Buddha is not an idea. The Buddha is true energy. The energy of the Buddha is the energy of mindfulness, the energy of peace, the energy of concentration and wisdom.

If you are a Christian, your practice should be similar. When the evil spirit is within you, the spirit of despair, anger, violence, and hatred, you have to be aware that it is in you. You ask Jesus to come and be manifest within you in order for you to be able to recognize the negative in yourself and to embrace it. With prayer and contemplation, with the reading of the Bible, you put yourself in a safe situation. You are able to contain, to control, to transform the negative energy in you. For those of us who practice mindfulness, we believe that the energy of mindfulness (which is the energy of the Buddha) is the equivalent of what our friends call the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is the kind of energy that is capable of being there, of understanding, of accepting, of loving, and of healing. If you agree that the Holy Spirit has the power to be present, to understand, to heal, to love, if you agree about this, then you have to say it is the same thing as the energy of mindfulness. Where mindfulness is, there is true presence. Where mindfulness is, there is the capacity to understand. You have the capacity to accept, to become compassion-

ate, to love, and therefore to touch the energy of mindfulness so that it may become manifest in you. The Buddha as a spiritual ancestor is manifest in you. You are able to allow the Holy Spirit to be in you, to guide you, to shine on you like a lamp. Jesus is then alive in you that very moment.

It is possible to know the Buddha and at the same time know Jesus. There are people who have roots within both the Buddhist tradition and the Christian tradition. In my hermitage, I put a lot of Buddha statues on my altar, about ten or fifteen very small Buddhas one centimeter high and larger ones too. I also have a statue of Jesus as my ancestor. I have adopted Jesus Christ as one of my spiritual ancestors.

During the Vietnam War I worked very hard in order to stop the killing. When I was in Europe and in North America I met with a number of Christians who really embodied the spirit of love, of understanding, of peace, of Jesus. Thanks to these people I have touched deeply Jesus as a spiritual teacher, a spiritual ancestor.

Just imagine a kingdom where there is no suffering at all; it is very distressing. The joy to be alive can be there only when you know what dying is. The joy of being healthy, of being able to walk and run and breathe, will not be possible without your experience of death and sickness. Our hope, our desire, and our aspiration for a kingdom or a place where suffering does not exist should be re-examined.

The people who live in that Kingdom are not supposed to suffer at all. It seems that they should experience only happiness in their daily life. This

is something absurd and impossible. A pure land, a Buddhaland, or paradise, is not a place where suffering doesn't exist. My definition of paradise is the place where love exists, where compassion exists. When the Bodhisattva of Compassion comes down to hell, hell stops being hell because the Bodhisattva brings love to it.

Yet, love cannot exist without suffering. In fact, suffering is the ground on which love is born. If you have not suffered, if you don't see the suffering of people or other living beings, you would not have love in you nor would you understand what it is to love. Without suffering, compassion, loving-kindness, tolerance, and understanding would not arise. Do you want to live in a place where there is no suffering? If you live in such a place, you will not be able to know what is love. Love is born from suffering.

You know what suffering is. You don't want to suffer, you don't want to make other people suffer, and therefore you love is born. You

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want to be happy and you want to bring happiness to others. That is love. When suffering is there, it helps give birth to compassion. We need to touch suffering in order for our compassion to be born and to be nourished. That is why suffering plays such an important role even down here in paradise. We are already here in some sort of paradise surrounded by love, but there is still jealousy, hatred, anger, and suffering around us and inside of us.

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It is because we are struggling to free ourselves from the grip of suffering and affliction that we learn how to love and how to take care of ourselves and of others, not to inflict on others more suffering and misunderstanding. Love is a practice and unless you know what suffering is, you are not motivated to practice compassion, love, and understanding.

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I would not be willing to go to a place where there is no suffering because I know that living in such a place I would not experience love. Because I suffer, I need love. Because you suffer, you need love. Because we suffer, we know that we have to offer each other love and love becomes a practice.

The Buddha of love, Maitreya, will never be born in a world where there is no suffering. This is the right place for the Buddha of love to be born, because suffering is the element from which we can create love. Let us not be naïve and abandon this world of suffering, and hope for a place—whether we call it nirvana or the Kingdom of God or the Pure Land. You know that the element with which you can create love is our own suffering, and the suffering we experience every day around us.