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Namo Tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammasambuddhasa

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May You Be Well and Happy

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Summary

This teaching provides a detailed analysis of the unwholesome nature of the minds of worry and regret; the influence of kamma and the root of their origination. The teaching also explains the significant limitations of these negative mental states, particularly when it comes to problem-solving.

There are many practices and strategies to help us to overcome the arising of the 'worrying mind', including by Buddhist masters and a TED talk by Shreyans Jain.

Letting Go of Worry and Regret

Mark Twain said in 1911 – "I've worried about many things in my life. Some of them actually happened".

A study was done some years ago that recorded what people worried about, for how long, and what percentage of their worries did eventuate. It turned out that 85% of the things people in the study worried about didn't happen. Of the 15% that did happen 79% of respondents said the problem wasn't as bad as they had thought and things turned out OK, or they had learned from the experience. What was left was 3% of the things people worried about did happen.

If our Teacher saw one of his students was worrying, he would sometimes say "How much are you being paid to do that worrying?" No one ever replied they were being paid to do it. It's the sort of job you wouldn't want, especially if you wish to be happy.

As Buddhists we need to be generating positive mental energies every day and reducing and eliminating our negative mental energy. If we consider all the negative mental states, or hindrances as we call them, as negative energy, our job is to maintain positive mental states. It's not particularly difficult. It means we stop being a passive onlooker upon our life and start being pro-active.

If it's not happening yet, one day this will happen for each of us. That day will come when we decide we have had enough suffering, enough defilements, enough laziness, enough complacency and it's just easier and better to make our own positive energy. It's a small shift really – we smile a lot, we send ourselves metta a lot wishing ourselves to be well and happy, we offer beautiful things we see to Buddha, we keep the positive intention clicking over. It doesn't require a lot of energy to do this. Be gentle, soft, relaxed. Easy. Happy.

Maybe it sounds too easy? It is easy so long as we don't get caught by our kamma. Being caught by our kamma means we believe it. Something that arises in our mind, without us inviting it to arise, something that wasn't there a little while ago appears, and at that same instant we take it to be "me".

Something merely has to appear in our minds for us to believe it is me. This is how we get caught by our kamma. Whatever characteristics the thing that arose in our mind has; we can't recognize as we have already taken it to be ourself.

The thing that arose could be a positive thing or it could be a negative thing. Our perception that it is "me" means we can't differentiate between positive or negative. Positive or negative, wholesome or unwholesome can't be distinguished at this point. It is only later when we analyze what is happening, we start to reflect that this thing that has arisen seems to be a negative, for example. But really, it's too late, because that moment of arising is now past.

There is an alternative, however. There is the possibility of seeing things differently, better. The Buddha taught that the nature of the phenomena that arises, in this case the mental objects that arise, is that in reality they are not self. They are not really me, not what I am. Also, the Buddha taught that each mental event that appears is impermanent. It wasn't there a little while ago, and it won't be there in a short while. It will have vanished. What "me" do we think we are that can vanish?

The Buddha points out to us that if something will vanish it is unreliable.

When we apply the Buddha's description of the nature of these things that appear in our mind it becomes obvious, intellectually at least, that these things cannot be me or mine.

As Buddhists we are taught that the reason our minds have this confusion is due to ignorance. We have ignorance about the nature of what we contact. It doesn't matter whether the things we contact are internal such as ideas, views, beliefs, feelings, and so on, or external things, what we see, hear, taste, etc. The Buddhist Path is for the removal of ignorance.

Ignorance is a compound thing made out of many "bits". These bits can be expressed as five and are referred to as the Five Hindrances. If we didn't have these five hindrances, we could easily develop Right Concentration leading to wisdom that knows our mind as it really is – impermanent, unreliable and not self.

We need to find out how to be free from the Five Hindrances and then by doing that over time our mental clarity and peace and understanding will surely increase. We can do it the hard way, or we can do it the easy way. What we are saying is that the easy way is to decide enough is enough! Just maintain positive energy as we go along.

When we wake up, smile. Send ourselves metta and be happy to walk out for breakfast. There's something yummy to eat. A warm house, a lovely shower in warm water, a healthy body. For goodness sake smile! Be generous to yourself. Once you kick-start the positive energy it can keep going all by itself.

The Five Hindrances are:

1. Doubt – vicikicchā in Pali
2. Sensual desire – kamma chanda
3. Ill will – dosa
4. Sloth and Torpor – thina and middha
5. Restlessness and regret – uddhacca and kukkuccha

Generally, in Buddhism we regard these as negative mental states or unwholesome mental states. This means they are unprofitable; their use will cause our mind to be dull, confused, unclear, not knowing what needs to be done for our own growth and benefit.

If you scan through the reading material on the Five Hindrances, you will find there is a common theme about the way to become free of these hindrances. The common theme is to learn how to not use them or, choose not to use them. (Hint: smile).

Let us use the topic of worry and regret to look at this. Once you start to worry or regret about something does the worry or regret go away? What usually happens?

The attention we give worry and regret minds is the fuel that makes them grow. Then the mind becomes inclined to worry. When the mind is inclined to worry, we may think we want to stop being worried however the mind just keeps worrying along. The worry seems important, it seems like in some way we are actively dealing with the problem. However, how often have you found the worrying mind does solve the problem and just stops worrying?

Another way to state this is in the Buddha's words:

'Whatever you frequently think and ponder upon, that will become the inclination of your mind.'

Also, from the Bojjhāṅgasamyutta (SN Chapter II 46) – Connected Discourses on the Factors of Enlightenment.

“And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen restlessness and remorse and for the increase and expansion of arisen restlessness and remorse? There is, bhikkhus, unsettledness of mind; frequently giving careless attention to it is the nutriment for the arising of unarisen restlessness and remorse and for the increase and expansion of arisen restlessness and remorse.”

“The Sāmaññaphala Sutta, on the other hand, uses a human imagery to demonstrate the effect that restlessness and worry can have on our mental freedom: one under the sway of restlessness and worry is like a slave, one is unable to go where one wishes.

In a similar way, says the (Nivaraṇa) Saṅgārava Sutta (S 46.55), due to the influence of restlessness and worry, the mind becomes unready and disinclined to effort and energy. When restlessness and worry are present in the mind, we are unable to recognize what is good for us or

what is good for others, nor are we able to remember even what has been memorized over a long time”.

“Worry is the result of our wrong conduct or omission in what we have said or done or in what we thought we have said or done. When this negative feeling is directed to someone who is an authority-figure—especially that of a God-idea or guru-figure—or for whom we have high regard, then, it easily becomes guilt-feeling. (Regret - kukkuccha)”
1.

Worrying minds can't solve problems. They are convinced they can solve problems, but worry is a cloud of turbulence that reduces our ability to resolve any problem. The mind that we are using to solve a problem becomes a major obstacle to finding any solution. However, we trustingly believe what our worry mind is saying to us, so we get into this bizarre loop. In psychological terms we are experiencing a kind of compulsive repetition disorder.

In *The Art of Reflection*, Ratnaguna writes: “Most of the time we're at the mercy of whatever subject happens to present itself to us: we're not so much thinking as being thought. We have to learn to make choices.”

Dale Carnegie wrote his book on this topic in 1948 called *How to stop Worrying and Start Living*: “Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance, but to do what lies clearly at hand.”

He offers many suggestions to yank us “down out of the great grey clouds in which we fumble around when we are blinded by worry”.

So here we are. Caught by believing whatever arises in our mind without recognizing their most basic characteristic - whether they are wholesome or unwholesome.

The Buddhist Master Ajahn Chah said:

“Whatever the mind tells you, don't fall for it. It's only a deception. Whatever negative comments and views it offers, you can just say ‘That's not my business,’ every time, and let it go.” You can say, “Thank you for trying to protect me. I'm OK for now.”

Australian Buddhist Monk Ajahn Brahm gave a talk in 2015 at Google's US offices called “Don't Worry Be Grumpy”. In the talk he mentioned that a guy came up to him after a Dhamma talk he had given in Singapore. Ajahn Brahm said the man was a Doctor and he was working with patients who had schizophrenia. Ajahn Brahm inquired of the Doctor “How do you treat schizophrenia?” The Doctor said “I don't treat schizophrenia. I treat the other part of the patient. The part that doesn't have schizophrenia”.

Ajahn Brahm commented that this Doctor had figured out a key aspect of how to deal with the mind. That is that negative mental states cannot be cured. When Buddha teaches, for example, that hate is a defilement what that means is we can't work on it and fix it up. We can't somehow transform hate into something better. It has the nature of being unwholesome so what

needs to be done is to never use that mental state. The cure to all defilements is to not use them.

Defilements will never tell you this, however. They make a lot of noise, get our attention, disturb us, demand us to take action, to follow them in their direction. It's the worst thing we can do.

One thing worry minds are good at is finding problems. They can find them everywhere, even if there are none to be found. Worry minds will invent problems, they depend on having problems, that is their core business. If there is nothing for them to worry about those worry minds will become unemployed, useless, silent. Alas, it will never happen.

If we are lost in a worry mind that mind has very low intelligence. When we think of our own intelligence we may think, "Well I'm quite intelligent", or "I'm an intelligent person", or whatever we think. Actually, it's not like that. Our intelligence depends on what mind we have at the time. It has been described elsewhere that worry minds have the intelligence of a three-year-old. How good is a three-year-old at solving problems we may ask?

Now, let's revisit our problem with a wholesome mind. When our mind perceives a problem to exist, we should check are we in the present. Regret depends on memory about things done or not done in the past. Worry is usually future orientated, some event or situation that is not happening now, but may happen in the future.

A lot of so called "problems" are future imaginings that come into our mind because of how we perceive a future situation to be. We may perceive some situation will be fearful, we may think we could lose something important to us, and so on. We need to get into the present and just cut off the worry mind.

However, if the mind still maintains the belief of a problem being real, if we are fortunate, we may not need to deal with it immediately. We may have some time to analyze the situation deliberately with our full attention. If this is the case, when we first perceive a problem, we need to make an appointment with ourselves so we can deal with it with a clear mind. We should avoid dealing with it now, simply because our mind thinks there is a problem, unless, of course, there is an obvious solution. We should avoid creating the opportunity for the worry mind to take over and add confusion and myopia to the problem. No, wrong way, go back!

Happily, walk past any worry mind that pops up. "Stand back so I can get on with my life!" or as we say in Australia "No worries!" or in Disneyland, "Hakuna Matata!" Be confident. Send some metta to yourself and smile. If you have been looking after your positive energy this shouldn't be too difficult.

Write your appointment time on your daily planner, or weekly planner. Set aside a specific time to analyze the issues and come up with solutions by using a systematic problem-solving method.

Traditionally there are four or five steps to problem solving. It's a fairly straight forward process. However, there are different types of problems we deal with in our life and sorting them out may need different approaches. If the problem is something that we wouldn't normally find worrisome then let's stay with a conventional approach.

However, if we have arrived at our problem because we are worried and fretting when we start our problem-solving session there's a good chance, we may get bogged down all over again by some pretty stressed out minds. In this case we need a different approach to solving our problem.

An excellent approach is provided by Shreyans Jain in a TED talk called *Figure It Out – The Art of Problem Solving. 2*.

In summary Shreyans key ideas are:

1. We start by stating what the problem is. We acknowledge the problem.
2. We don't automatically go to the worst-case consequences flowing on from the stated problem, which is what usually happens. We go to the best-case consequence which is "It's OK, I am going to figure this out".

We should visualize what our life will be like with the problem solved, our best outcome. If we hold the problem in our mind manifesting as worst-case consequences, we are using the visualization power of our mind to make the problem last. We visualize our life with it solved.

3. How can I turn it around?

We start with the facts. Maybe we need to do some research to ensure we have all the needed information.

We look at possible solutions.

Analyze what needs to happen. Figure it Out

Look for opportunities for a better outcome than what we had before.

Don't settle for one way of fixing it

Be creative – allow for the possibilities of the unexpected.

Look at the situation from different viewpoints.

What is the kammic solution?

4. Ask for help.
5. Inspire hope. I got this!

“Think and act cheerfully, and you will feel cheerful. Let’s fill our minds with thoughts of peace, courage, health and hope for our life is what our thoughts make of it”. – Dale Carnegie.

6. Arrive at a decision – and then act on that decision.

Remember we are living in samsara. The ultimate cause of the problem is kamma.

Not everything can be fixed exactly how we want. We are reluctant to accept a perceived loss, we don’t like being blamed, we wish to avoid experiencing failure, we don’t like things not working out as we had hoped. Yet impermanence and unreliability are natural conditions.

Maybe there’s nothing to be fixed?

” Don’t we manage somehow to survive the rare storms and avalanches and lightning blasts of life, only to let our hearts be eaten out by little beetles of worry” – Carnegie

“Count your blessings, not your troubles”

At the Buddhist Discussion Centre we do this by smiling.

Addendum

“There is a form of restlessness which can have a wholesome effect, so to speak. This is known as “Dharma restlessness” (dhamm’uddhacca), a kind of spiritual angst arising from an eagerness to realize the Dhamma. If the conditions are right, this kind of angst can actually bring about awakening.

A noteworthy usage of uddhacca occurs in the (Yuganaddha) Paṭipadā Sutta (A 4.170), which refers to restlessness in its description of one of the ways to attain final liberation. According to this discourse, we can reach the path to final liberation when the mind is under the influence of dhamm’uddhacca, that is, restlessness related to the Dharma.

This “restlessness” or angst is a sort of existential “cry” out of a powerful desire to break free from suffering or out of compassion for the suffering world, or both. Once the mind settles down and becomes focused, the path is attained.”

1. www.themindingcentre.org/dharmafarer/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/32.7-Uddhaccakukkucca-piya.pdf
2. (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_LX9mo0Thu)