

Voice of Clear Light

Volume 14, Number 5 / October 2014



Shifting Your Pain Identity

An Excerpt from an Edited Transcript of a Recorded Live Webcast by Geshe Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche, June 8, 2014



Does the role you play in life bring you more pain than peace and happiness? In this teaching from a June 8, 2014, live webcast, Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche explains how you can move beyond an identification with pain and come closer to your true self. Rinpoche begins with [short meditation and mantra recitation](#) to connect with Sherap Chamma, a female tantric deity of the Bon tradition who is the embodiment of love and wisdom.

We can observe that the pain we experience in our life—whether we experienced it in the past or will experience it in the future—is related to one single cause. This cause is the same for everyone, and is called *dak dzin* [Tib: *bdag 'dzin*], which is the self-grasping mind, ego. You can also refer to it as “pain identity,” because you identify with the pain. So as I’m speaking, I want all of you to not just listen intellectually or try to analyze what I’m saying or, even worse, judge what I’m saying. Instead, focus within yourself to see what this means to you. What is your pain identity? What was your pain identity? Whatever your pain identity was, how much suffering has it caused within you? Whatever your pain identity is in this moment, recognize that it is causing pain within you.

The pain identity is basically a very simple sense of self, the way you feel yourself to be in this moment. How is that arising in you in this moment? Simply by looking at your pain, you come to experience this sense of self. Look very closely at the pain that you are experiencing now or that you have experienced in the past. Deep inside that pain, there is a sense of “I” waiting to be seen, waiting to be awakened, waiting to be illuminated, waiting to be guided, a sense of “I” that feels the need to be totally free from its own prison of pain.

Can you be aware of this at this moment? Can you feel your pain identity at this moment? Whether it is individual or collective—I feel pain, the two of us feel pain, we all feel pain—look at that pain. Deep inside there is a sense of “I.” There is an “I” which is very strongly identified with a specific role. It is very specifically identified with what you do or wish to do, or with a sense of who you want to be—an ideal, a sense of self. Who is that?

For example, when a mother or a father suffers, it’s a very specific kind of suffering that only parents know. Monks do not know this kind of suffering. Nuns do not know this. Singles who are childless will not know. If you are suffering as a parent, then I am talking to you. If you are experiencing pain, you look at your sense of self; deep inside you feel *I am a mother; I am a father; I love my children; I wish my children would do this, and not do that; I wish they lived this kind of life, and not that kind of life.*

It’s the parent in you, the mother or father in you, who suffering. Why are you suffering in that way? It’s because you overly identify with the role of the mother or father. That’s why you’re suffering. That’s why you feel conflict with your children. That’s why you’re not able to give the warmth, love and peace you want to give them. That’s why you’re not able to give clear guidance to them. That’s why you don’t even feel close to them. That’s why you feel they are avoiding you. That’s why you feel that there is a disconnect between you and your children.

It all goes back to one single thing: identifying too much with the role of father or mother. My definition of “too much” is the level where it creates pain, conflict, disconnectedness. So if you are that person, I’m talking to you. I just want you to recognize that you are overly identifying with your role. You are not only a father or mother; you are more than that. I want you to just have a sense of that, a feeling of that. *Yes, I am more than that.*

Maybe some of you are trying to protect something. You’re trying to take care of somebody, to love somebody, or you’re trying to give something to somebody. But you are also overly identifying with the role of protector, or with the role of being in control. Just be aware that you cannot control it forever, or that you are not the only one who should control it or who is responsible for it. Perhaps where you are taking charge or controlling, you are overcontrolling it. There is no space for movement, freedom, flow, flexibility, creativity, because that control is occupying a space in which you are suffocating and you are suffocating other people as well.

Simply recognize this pain identity that needs to control. It has nothing to do with doing something better or perfectly or ethically or with generosity. It’s more that there is a need to control, and that need has something to do with the inner pain that you are identifying with. Simply recognize that. *Yes, it’s true—it’s not about what I’m trying to do out there. I can feel it—it’s my own need; it’s my pain identity, and I need to shift it.*

How do you shift it? One might try to control that feeling, try to be in charge of it, and make the same mistake again. Don’t do that. Don’t try to control your feelings or thoughts. Simply be aware of them. Be aware of your need to control, a need that is producing the pain, conflict and

blockages in the flow of creative action. And if you are not a parent, but you are someone who is trying to control in this way, I want you to simply be aware of your need to control. That need is your pain identity.

I'll use three categories regarding this sense of identity: The first category is identifying too much with a role; second is a medium level of identifying with a role; third is less identification with a given role. At the first extreme, a person identifies so much with their pain that very often they destroy themselves and others. It is both collective as well as self-destructive. It happens because they can never figure out how to come out of their overidentification, and things go too far. Of course, it is always possible to come out of it, but in some cases the person loses the opportunity, and the result is collective destruction.

The middling level is where a person identifies strongly with a role. If this is the case for you, you may feel a lot of conflict within yourself, your situation in life or with the people you are participating with, in whatever role you are participating with them. You feel a lot of conflict within and around you, because once again you are identifying quite a lot with your role. Every time we identify with our role we feel the pain of whatever part is not being fulfilled and the pain of wishful thinking.

The third category is having less identity with a given role. Of course being in samsara, being in this world, there is no way to not identify with pain. The definition of samsara is the one who possesses discomfort or pain as a result of a grasping mind. As possessors of this grasping mind, we are samsaric beings. All suffering is the outcome or fruition of the grasping mind.

As I said earlier, there is no way not to have a grasping mind. But when you have a minimum of it, you feel less pain and conflict and more space, more flow, more awareness within yourself. You feel less pain with your work, who you are working with and who you are in a relationship with. You feel less pain with your family members. This is because you are not identifying too much with your pain or with that role.

So the big question is, why do we identify with our role, with our pain and with someone who we are not? The answer is very simple. We don't perceive another option. Because if we are not able to be aware of who we are, then the only option is to identify with who we are not. We don't perceive another choice. We are not even conscious that we are doing it. Every second, every moment, every situation, every relationship—even our relationship to God, to the deities, to teachers, to spiritual guides—we identify with our own pain and needs, and mess up some of

those very special relationships. Even our sacred relationships are mixed with our own pain.

So how do we overcome this? When we are able to be conscious of who we are—even being closer to that experience for just a moment—something inside us begins to shift. How do you do that? How can it happen? Of course it's not that easy; then again, it is not very difficult either. It is always a question of being ready, mature and ripened. When you are ready, mature and ripened, nothing can stop you. But when you are not, it's very hard. The sun is shining unbiased in every direction, but the cave that is facing north does not receive the sunlight. This is not because the sun is biased or chooses not to shine, but because the cave is facing in the wrong direction.

What will make it easier to shift that pain identity? Again, it's very simple. Whenever you feel your pain body is active, whenever you are feeling a sense of that pain identity—a deep, deep, deep pain that is clearly connected with a sense of specific identity, like, *I'm a father, therefore I'm feeling the pain of my father role*

—simply recognize that. Recognize when pain speech is active. Recognize when you are complaining about your loved ones. Realize it has nothing to do with them or the situation; it's just the uncontrolled expression of you own awakened pain that is being expressed unconsciously in that moment through your speech. It is coming out.

When my pain identity is active, I did not plan it. I did not choose that vocabulary or that tone of voice. I did not choose to speak that loud or shakily, or to speak in that ungrounded way. I did it because my pain speech was awakened. When my pain mind is awakened, I am not choosing to have these crazy, crazy thoughts. I am glad no one is watching my thoughts. I'm glad most people don't know what I'm thinking. I'm glad my famous people don't know what I'm thinking. I'm glad to know this person who hates me does not know what I'm thinking at that moment. But even I don't know why I'm thinking what I'm thinking; I'm just thinking.

The imagination of pain mind is active and uncontrolled. What do you do at this time? Just be conscious. Be conscious that these thoughts are crazy. *These thoughts are not really my thoughts; they are coming from my inner pain mind. These voices are coming from my pain speech; these aches are coming from my pain body.*

Just be conscious of that. And try to rest. At this moment, if any of you are feeling active pain body, speech or mind, realize that it has nothing to do with a given situation; it's just active.

Be still. Be silent. Be spacious. And allow what you are experiencing. Allow as Sherap Chamma would allow, like a mother who is open, wise, kind and compassionate. When a child is expressing pain by jumping around or screaming, and their imagination is going crazy, what

does the mother do? The mother does not go crazy like the child but, rather, hosts the child, gives the child space. Gives protection to the child and gives acknowledgment, a sense of sacred presence. Those crazy manifestations feel that space, that sacred presence, that kindness, that awareness, and gradually these crazy manifestations exhaust themselves in that pure space, in that absolute silence, in that pure spaciousness of the heart. They dissolve. In the end, there is a very genuine, natural sense of stillness and silence that is experienced. At that moment you have shifted your pain identity or pain body into stillness, your pain speech into silence, your pain mind or imagination into spaciousness. It is free, calm, connected and feeling peace, feeling restful. It's feeling a deep inner healing.

So, be aware. Every moment when you encounter your own inner pain, your pain identity, just be conscious. Be directly aware. Recognize it has nothing to do with the other person or the situation. It is simply activated by your own pain.

In the Tibetan traditions we often talk about practitioners of superior, middling and inferior capacities. This translation doesn't seem very popular in the West, but that's what it is. So if you don't like to be called an inferior practitioner, I'll suggest something you can do. Whenever you are in conflict with someone, whenever you feel deep pain within yourself, immediately ask yourself, "Where is this coming from?" Very often you immediately think, "Of course it's not me, it's the other person. It's my famous person, my father, my mother, my husband, my ex, my wife, my child, my boss, the situation—it's not me." Automatically we think that. So whenever you think your problem has 100 percent to do with someone else, recognize that you are an inferior practitioner. I'll repeat this again, for fun. Some of you might not like it. But it's still for fun. Whenever you think that your own pain or conflict has 100 percent to do with someone outside you or with another person, you can think, "Oh, as I am doing what I'm doing at this moment, I must be an inferior practitioner."

Or, you might think to yourself, "I'm experiencing this pain, this conflict with this person, but it's us. It's both him and me; it's her and me; it's them and me; it's the situation and me; it's a collective thing. Together we have to figure out a solution." If you approach your problem or pain in that way, you can consider yourself a middling practitioner. You can think, "I'm doing this, I'm trying to make the situation 50-50, so I must be a middling practitioner. Not the best, not the worst, but the middling one."

But if you think your pain has nothing to do with anybody else—because everything that you see or feel you have created and you realize that it is only a projection of your mind—you can say, "Well, wonderful, I am a superior practitioner." Try not to sit too long with that thought; otherwise, you will immediately become a middling or inferior practitioner! But at least you can

recognize that you are projecting something from the inside out rather than blaming someone else for your pain.

We create every single pain. Every moment that you recognize you are the creator of your pain, you have an opportunity to not create further pain for yourself or for others.

Listen to the entire recorded webcast [here](#) .