

Train in the Three Difficulties

When neurosis arises, you first have to recognize it as neurosis. Then you have to apply a technique or antidote to overcome it. Since neurosis basically comes from selfishness, from placing too much importance on yourself, the antidote is that you have to cut through the ego. Finally, you have to have the determination not to follow the neurosis or continue to be attracted to it. There is a sense of abruptly overcoming neurosis.

From Training the Mind & Cultivating Loving-Kindness by Chogyam Trungpa

Train in the Three Difficulties

"Train in the three difficulties" is my favorite slogan because it acknowledges that this path is difficult, all right, but it's a good way to spend our time. There are three difficulties. The first is seeing neurosis as neurosis, and the second is being willing to do something different. The third difficulty is the aspiration to make this a way of life.

From Start Where You Are : A Guide to Compassionate Living by Pema Chodron

Learn the Three Difficult Points

At first, it is difficult to recognize disturbing emotions. Then, it is difficult to overcome them. In the end, it is difficult to cut their continuity. Therefore, you should train in these three points. First, recognize disturbing emotions for what they are as soon as they arise. Then, stop them by taking corrective measures. Finally, be decisive in your attitude that such disturbances will never arise again.

From The Great Path of Awakening

Practice the Three Austerities

Austerity refers to something difficult and arduous. What are these three things that are so difficult to do? The first is bearing in mind the antidotes to mental distortions; the second is turning away from the mental distortions; the third is cutting their continuum.

The first austerity is simply to be aware from hour to hour, from moment to moment, of the quality of thoughts that arise in our mind. It is pleasant to savor a mind that is relatively undistorted, with a sense of balance that does not hinge upon external stimuli or even on sucking the conceptual thumb of a pleasant thought. As you become aware, you can ascertain these wholesome states of mind, despite the subtle currents of self-grasping that remain. Then, when this wholesome state becomes distorted, try to remain aware. This takes some practice. The mental distortions that arise may shape themselves as anger or resentment dwelling on some abuse or thoughtlessness received, or as anxiety focused on attachment. Whatever form they take, they disrupt the internal harmony of the mind, its poise and clarity. Recognizing these mental distortions as they arise, recollect their antidotes. Shantideva, especially in the sixth chapter of his Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, offers a whole repertoire of very accessible practices. We need not be saints or profound contemplatives to practice these effective antidotes for specific mental distortions, although they can be difficult.

The easiest thing to do when a mental distortion arises is to ride with it like a hitchhiker. We are sticking our thumb out in a neutral or wholesome state of mind, and then some guy comes along in a black vehicle of mental distortions, picks us up and carries us away. When a mental distortion arises, we naturally identify with it and go with it. The mind is not aware of the mental distortion but is focused instead on the subject of the distortion: the enemy or the thing we are grasping after. This is the conditioning we have to overcome.

The second austerity, after awareness of the antidotes, is to turn away from the mental distortion. Point a finger and say, "Alright anger, resentment, attachment, jealousy, I see you. I know what you are doing to me and I am not going along for the ride. Your time is up." It may be a crude response, but it is better than riding with it as a passive victim. Recognize the distortion, recall the specific antidote, apply the antidote, and pull out. Like a jet going into a nose dive, it may be hard to pull against the momentum, but with effort it can be done.

The third austerity is cutting the continuum of the mental distortions. This is the hardest of all, but we can start by cultivating a resolve, once we have recognized the mental distortion and turned away from it, not to succumb to this kind of distortion in the future. The final antidote, of course, is direct realization of the nature of ultimate truth. From a Buddhist perspective this is the only effective means for ultimately cutting the mental distortions forever, so that they can never afflict us again. The misconstruing of reality through confusion and ignorance lies at the very root of all other mental distortions. To cut that root we need to saturate the mind with the experience, and not simply the concept, of the nature of ultimate reality.

Excerpted from: The Seven-Point Mind Training by B. Alan Wallace

Train in Three Hard Disciplines

These are the difficult practices of mindfulness, of expulsion and of 'interrupting the flow.'

As for the first of these, the difficult practice of mindfulness, it is necessary to recognize afflictive emotions as soon as they arise and it is hard, at first, to remain sufficiently aware to be able to do this. However, when negative emotions arise, we should identify them as anger, desire or stupidity. Even when emotions have been recognized, it is not easy to drive them out with the antidote. If, for instance, an uncontrollably strong emotion comes over us, so that we feel helplessly in its power, we should nevertheless confront it and question it. Where are its weapons? Where are its muscles? Where is its great army and its political strength? We will see that emotions are just insubstantial thoughts, by nature empty: they come from nowhere, they go nowhere, they remain nowhere. When we are able to repel our defiled emotions, there comes the difficult practice of 'interrupting the flow,' This means that, on the basis of the antidote described, defiled emotions are eliminated just like a bird flying through the air: no trace is left behind. These are practices in which we should really strive.

From Enlightened Courage, by Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche.