

Six Factors that Stimulate Disturbing Emotions

The Substantial Cause



Seed - karmic imprints from past actions (done in ignorance and under control of afflictive emotions) that exist in our minds as a potentiality or predisposition. (This is the substantial cause)

- Always there but not always manifest, continuously abiding at an unconscious level as a subtle predisposition. A readiness for a particular affliction to arise.
- If we can remove the seed, then no matter what the circumstances, we can keep a contented mind and disturbing emotions will not arise.
- Can be purified - renders the seeds impotent (like diffusing a bomb). Can only be completely eradicated by the wisdom realising emptiness. "Foe destroyer" of the real foes (disturbing emotions, mistaken views) will never again experience suffering.

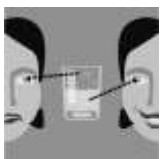
The Trigger



Object - Delusions cannot arise without meeting an object. When we encounter a related object, the mind of incorrect assumption superimposes qualities that are not there, and we generate attachment, aversion etc. (The co-operative cause)

- The more objects we encounter, the more delusions have a chance to arise. Get some breathing space! Abandon attachment to worldly activities, be content with less.
- As beginners, physically removing ourselves from these objects lessens the likelihood of our delusions manifesting. This is a simple method that can be very helpful. If we are an alcoholic - avoid pubs. If a gambler - don't go to casinos.

Distorted Attention is the Lynchpin



Inappropriate attention - Incorrect thinking. A mind that dwells on a contaminated object and exaggerates its apparent qualities. As a result, the qualities that we ascribe to it begin to appear very solid and permanent.

- Grasping at objects to be inherently existent (we assume that how they appear is how they are); grasping at the impermanent as permanent, exaggerating or imputing qualities that are not there, resulting in aversion or attachment.
- We overestimate, superimpose, or see only good or bad characteristics. Reflected in our speech patterns: "You always do that", "You are a complete beast".
- The afflictions will increase and strengthen to the extent that you indulge in this kind of deluded attention, or incorrect thinking. We must free ourselves from the illusion that external objects are the true source of happiness, and break our addiction to the world of ephemeral pleasures.

Internal Conditions that Propel Us



Habits - familiarity with negative thoughts or unconstructive behaviour causes strong delusions to arise in our mind. The more familiar we are with them, the more likely they will arise again.

- Why do we develop delusions without even trying? Why do we have to put such effort into developing virtuous minds? Because we are very familiar with delusions.
- Our minds have been acquainted with delusions since beginningless time. Owing to this familiarity we effortlessly develop attachment or hostility, even when distracted.
- A habit does not go away by itself, in fact it grows. The only way we can reverse this is by training in the opposites, and becoming familiar with virtue instead. Eventually we can reach a point where it is easier to develop virtuous minds than negative ones.

External Conditions that Compound the Problem



Society - detrimental influences, misleading company, mental distraction. We naturally imitate those we associate with. It is difficult to maintain control in opposition to people distracted by drinking, wasting time.

- Everyone in daily life has the potential to be bad company! Distinguish between those we can affect, and those who affect us. Keep bad friends close to your heart, but physically distant. We can't blame friends for our own delusions or weaknesses. They can influence us, but they are not cause of our disturbing emotions.
- Good friends bring out the best in us, so cultivate them! They are even more important than a teacher because they are there all the time!



Media - following false teachings, explanations or impure advice, either consciously or unconsciously. Media that encourages you to commit harmful actions or that stimulates desire will obviously lead you away from the goal of pacifying and eliminating afflictive emotional states.

- We like interesting things, we are curious, but an uncritical attitude is dangerous. This causes us to develop conflicting or confusing views. Rely on authentic teachings. Ask - where is it taking us? The objects of knowledge are infinite, but will lead me out of suffering?
- Don't stuff your head with useless information. Check your motivation for watching TV. Apply the Dharma to each segment. Put in place constructive media, such as signs around house encouraging you to be patient. Read inspiring biographies.

The Three Higher Trainings

They are called 'higher' because they aim higher than just having a pleasant life. They come from an altruistic attitude of universal responsibility. The goal is not merely a worldly one, but of either complete personal liberation, or full enlightenment for the sake of all.

With all three higher trainings of ethics, concentration and wisdom, we can cut the root of suffering forever.

- Higher training in ethics is focussed on the body
- Concentration is like two strong arms
- Wisdom is like a very sharp axe
- Our delusions and their seeds are the tree



Ethics

Ethics is the very foundation of all the qualities that we develop within ourselves. Nagarjuna says, if a container is broken how can it hold anything? If our ethics are broken, how can we develop any positive qualities? Ethics is a quality of mind that wishes to abstain from non-virtue and negativity. We don't do it for sake of reputation, through bargaining, or through fear. The practice of ethics is not about fear or guilt, but creating circumstances for joy.

At the moment we are bound to cyclic existence because we are under the control of our minds, and our minds are under the control of our delusions. As a result we are in a state of constant distraction, unable to apply ourselves to what matters to us. Practicing ethical behaviour helps us, like wearing the superpower cloak of our vows as protection.

Concentration

Our minds are like cities of distractions, so we need to create some physical and mental space from the objects of delusion. Calming our mind and focussing on virtuous objects is the basis for cultivating realisations on the path. When we free our minds from distractions, we will find it much easier to discriminate between what to practice and what to abandon.

Without single pointed concentration we are unable to stabilise our realisations or focus on virtue. If we can focus our mind on our chosen topic, without distraction, we will be able to cease the gross delusions entirely. By abandoning the objects of our delusions, we decrease the afflictions. By abandoning mental wandering, we increase the practice of virtue.

Wisdom

To free our minds completely from the control of delusions and their seeds, we need wisdom. Not just any wisdom, but the realisation of the nature of reality. The result of this wisdom is the complete cessation of suffering, of delusions and their seeds. If our studies are based in ethics, our wisdom will not degenerate or become unhinged. Our studies will become like medicine to cure the disease of the disturbing emotions and their results.

Misconceptions About the Nature of Things



Four main assumptions from the first Noble Truth. While we function under these, we will only experience dissatisfaction and pain.

1. Seeking the permanent in the impermanent. We are aging, things naturally break, relationships cannot last forever. Everything is in a state of change. Denying this brings great suffering. We know we are not immortal, yet we are shocked when someone dies, we "weren't expecting it". Why are things like this? Because they are produced.
2. Seeking happiness in the miserable. Craving perfection, but looking for it in the imperfect. What appears beautiful has a flipside, fresh flowers rot. We expect fallible things to be perfect. We expect human beings to never make mistakes. We expect politics to work. Why? Because we are under control of karma and delusion.
3. Seeking an independence in the dependent. We forget we are interdependent. What we do affects others, what others do affects us. We feel separate but we are intricately bound. Why? No-one is self-sufficient/powerful.
4. Seeking an essence in the empty. We feel like we are unchanging, that there is an essence of me. Yet if we were, we would be doomed to unhappiness forever. Why? We do not inherently exist, we exist in dependence on many changeable factors. We are a product of our era (politics, religion, education).

Media and the Two Truths



Long before Donald Rumsfeld categorised military intelligence into "*known knows, unknown knows, known unknowns and unknown unknowns*", the Buddha described reality in the much sought after 'theory of everything' known as the Two Truths.

This explanation shows how relative truth and ultimate truth are distinct, yet exist simultaneously. They are two sides of the same coin. Mixing them up is what causes our suffering and compounds our confusion. We grasp at relative phenomena as if they were ultimate (fixed, permanent, unchanging), and we cannot appreciate the vastness or subtlety of an ultimate perspective.

CONVENTIONAL Truth

Correct conventional truths

- Human induced climate change
- A person dependently exists

Wrong conventional truths

- A mirage
- Reflection of a face in the mirror
- Alternative facts

ULTIMATE Truth

All ultimate truths are emptinesses

- The ultimate truth of all phenomena is that they are empty

All conventional truths are false

- Conventional truths are incorrect from an ultimate point of view, as they see the world through the lens of self-grasping.

The Power of Habit

The Nature of our Mind

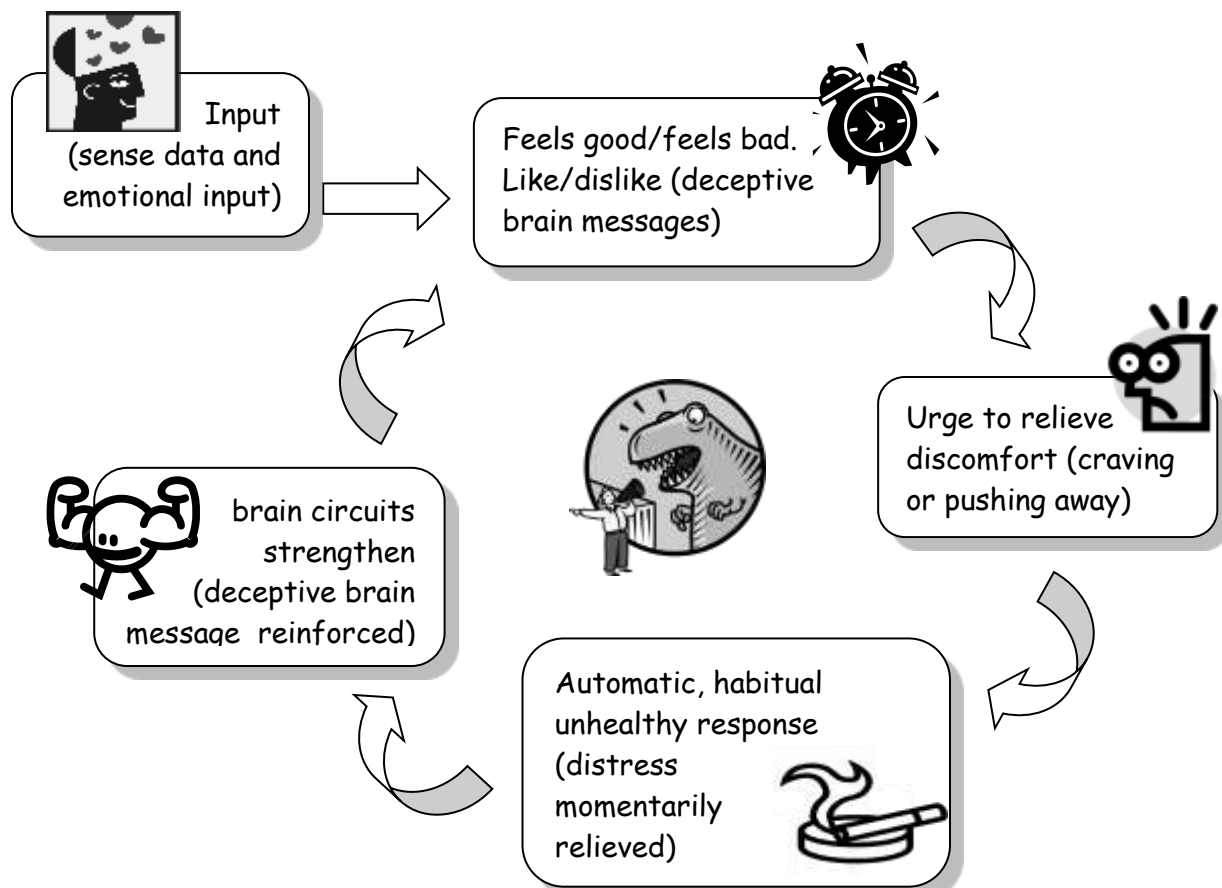
Our mind is by nature pure, but at present it is polluted with confusion and toxic emotions. When we act negatively, it's not because we are a bad or a worthless person. It's because we are operating under the influence of the disturbing emotions.

The Buddha found a way to remove all the pollution from his mind, and became enlightened. Enlightenment is a state beyond the uncontrolled, agitated dissatisfied state of mind. It is a state of perfect freedom, everlasting enjoyment and complete understanding of the nature of the mind. As the nature of our mind is no different from the Buddha's, we too have the potential to become enlightened, just as the Buddha did!

What is a Habit?

- An acquired behaviour pattern, regularly followed, until it becomes almost involuntary. Anything that we do repeatedly becomes a habit. It can be a habit of body (physical activity or addiction), speech (how we communicate) or mind (what we dwell upon, the stories we tell ourselves).
- A *negative* habit is anything you do repeatedly that takes you away from focussing on something beneficial. Happiness is also habit. It's not something that we wait around for hoping it will happen to us, we have to practice it!

Neurology of Habit – Feeding the Monster



Why are Bad Habits so Hard to Break?

Whether we approach something to fulfil a desire or remove a horrible feeling, the process is neurologically the same. The craving is painful, momentary distress is relieved, you get the rush of pleasure, but an unhealthy brain circuit is strengthened. We may not recognise craving as an uncomfortable state to be relieved, but that's how addictions spiral out of control.

Whenever you repeatedly respond the same way to a deceptive brain message, by focussing on and engaging in an unhealthy behaviour, you teach the brain to always respond the same way, with the same unhealthy behaviour, whenever a similar situation, thought or impulse arises. You start by drinking to relieve stress, and end up craving a drink even when you feel good, and even more stressed without a drink.

"Feeding the monster" brings short term reward, but long term dissatisfaction. It leads to more frequent urges, the discomfort is more intense, and the habits become harder to resist. We can stop feeding the monster and start cultivating a cycle of human flourishing!

Deconstructing the Toxic Habit Cycle



Input → Conscious motivation We waste most of our effort trying to change others and control the world. We cannot control what happens to us but we can control how we respond. We cannot stop our thoughts, but can be pro-active and direct them positively.

Feels good/feels bad → Mindfulness a window of opportunity before the urge completely overwhelms us. Normally we focus on the content of the deceptive brain message, rather than just being aware that it has arisen. Create space before reacting. Just because it feels bad doesn't mean it is bad!



Grasp/push away → Discipline. Acknowledge the feelings without engaging in them. Cannot control what arises in the mind, but we can decide what attention to give it. Don't try to block the negative thoughts or to not feel them. Indulging in them or fighting them wires them more strongly into your brain. Stretch the space between the urge and acting upon it (15 minute rule of thumb). When you do act, do it mindfully, with your full attention, don't do anything else at same time. Will feel discomfort, but that is evidence the brain is being re-wired, like sore muscles at the gym are evidence you are building them up.

Automatic reaction → Change channel. Once the negative cycle is running, don't try to talk or ruminate on it. Instead, replace the experience altogether by doing something (a) enjoyable and (b) long term beneficial (not vodka!).



Circuits strengthened → Constructive habit. With training, it will become more likely that in a challenging situation you will respond with calm and confidence. It won't happen by itself because our biological bias is hard-wired to notice threats (this keeps us alive) so we have to make initial effort to direct our thoughts. Also, research and employ the specific antidotes to the afflictive emotions.



If we do this.... Input → Framing changes. What we notice of the input is pre-cognitive (unconscious). Our perception bias determined by our past experience, culture, instinct, world view. As we change, the world changes.

Two Breathing Meditations

Nine-round Breathing

Bring your awareness inwards, by focussing your attention on the physical sensation of your breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils. Simply breath in and breath out, allowing no thoughts to distract you. Whenever you notice your attention has wandered, bring your focus back to the breath, again and again. Do this for a few minutes.

Now, imagine that you are breathing out through left nostril and in through right (no need to physically block your nostrils, this is done in imagination).

As you breath out through left nostril, imagine you breath out, in the form of black smoke all your negativities, disturbing emotions, obsessive thoughts, anger, hatred, aversion, dissatisfaction, craving, stupidity, dullness, ignorance, pride, doubt, confusion. It leaves your body like pollution leaves a chimney, disappearing into space.

As you breath in through the right nostril, imagine breathing in golden light, the manifestation of loving-kindness, patience, warmth, compassion, caring, joyousness, generosity, light, wisdom, skilfulness, clarity, energy.

Do this three times.

Then swap the nostrils over. This time imagine breathing out through right nostril and in through left, three times. Repeat the visualisation.

Finally, imagine breathing out through both nostrils and in through both nostrils, repeating the visualisation, three times.

When you complete this cycle, continue breathing in and breathing out radiant, clear light. Feel the very fine membrane between the outside and the inside, with clear radiance permeating all.

Breathing Out the Three Poisons

Bring your awareness inwards, focussing your attention on your breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils. Simply breath in and breath out, allowing no thoughts to distract you. Whenever you notice your attention has wandered, bring your focus back to the breath, again and again. Do this for a few minutes.

Now imagine breathing out all your anger, hatred, urge to retaliate, vengeance and aversion in the form of thick black smoke, like pollution leaving a chimney. As you do so, feel your body gradually becoming clearer and lighter. As you breath in, inhale loving-kindness, patience and warmth in the form of golden light.

Next, imagine breathing out all your dissatisfaction, craving, lust, greed and hunger in the form of red light. Breathe in the golden light of compassion, joy and generosity.

Finally, breathe out all your stupidity, dullness, ignorance, pride, doubt and confusion in the form of light grey smoke or clouds, and breathe in clear light- wisdom, skilfulness, clarity, and effortless ability.

Then, continue breathing in and breathing out clear light for a few minutes.

World of Support Meditation

Imagine you are sitting on a gently sloping hillside. It's a beautiful day. Calm and clear.

On either side of you the two people who have supported and looked after you the most (usually mother and father), and without them you would not have survived....

Feel how good it is to be with them, and how you sincerely want the best for them. Feel this as a physical warmth at your heart, that flows through your body as warm, blissful light. Feel this warmth of kindness radiate out to them.

Behind you all the people who supported you - a close brother or sister, best friend, a really good doctor, a kind teacher at primary school, the person who got you out of a fix, or who wrote a book that changed your life. Feel their support, how they've "got your back"....

Feel the warmth in your heart growing stronger. Light beams radiate out to each of them, and as the kindness hits them they become happy and free of problems.

In front of you are all the people who challenged you to grow and develop. The rude boss who you practiced patience with, the unethical business that clarified your own stance, the betraying partner that showed you how *not* to behave, the social injustice that you stood up to even though you were scared, the person who hurt you that you first got an opportunity to practice forgiveness....

The warmth flowing from your heart frees them from negativity. They transform before your eyes. Their destructive behaviour falls from them like a crusty shell.

On either side of you are all the people throughout history that have indirectly contributed to your well-being. If you wear glasses - the person who invented the optical lens and spent their life refining it. If you wear a wristwatch, the people who contributed to the 200 year search for measuring longitude. All the researchers in medicine, many who were social pariahs and ostracised for their ideas. The patients who lived through medical trials - especially for cancer - so that better treatments could be developed. An incalculable amount of benefit from total strangers...

Feel how now, the entire world is permeated with the warmth of your kindness. How it flows from your heart as easily as breathing.

Thinking of these three groups of people: the friends who have kept your head above water, the challengers without which you would have no character or moral strength, and the strangers who you experience indirect benefit from continuously. Feel the whole world of support....

Wish them all to live harmoniously, free from bias or prejudice, to be free of suffering, and to attain a lasting, stable happiness. Make a resolution to contribute to that in your own way, no matter how small!

The light and warmth of kindness flows back to you in great waves, and absorbs into your heart.

Breathe in this warmth and strength, and breathe out warmth and kindness. Feel the ebb and flow of the whole world of support....