

1. Forgiveness and Anger

Transcript

Paul Ekman (introduction): Two important concepts are clarified: forgiveness and anger. We start with the question of how we can forgive and still hold people responsible for their actions, for they could have chosen not to do that. The Dalai Lama makes clear how we can maintain forgiveness and yet believe in free will in the choice that we all have not to do harm but to do good. Then I take some of his previous writings to justify how anger can be nonafflictive, but constructive, and he agrees. This was the last few minutes of our second session.

Dalai Lama: Yes.

Ekman: Now, if I have choice, then if I act in a way that harms others, why do you forgive me for doing so? I could have chosen not to.

Dalai Lama: Hm. I will answer, If you keep that sort of grudge...

Ekman: Yes.

Dalai Lama: If you keep grudge, then you'll get more suffering.

Ekman: Yes.

Dalai Lama: If you give forgiveness, then you feel more... more relieved.

Ekman: Oh. So, it's good for *you*.

Dalai Lama: Yes!

Ekman: It is good for the person who forgives, but does it not remove responsibility...?

Dalai Lama: No, no, for example—I'll give an example. Now we mentally give forgiveness to the Chinese. That means we try to... not to keep negative feeling towards them, because of their wrong deeds, but that does not mean we accept it, what they've done. So, this spirit of forgiveness against them, as far as their action is concerned.

Ekman: Explain a little more. I am just on the edge of understanding.

Dalai Lama: Oh. Forgiveness, I feel, means not to forget what they have done. But forgiveness means do not keep your negative feeling towards them. So, as far as their action is concerned, sometimes you should use your intelligence. You deliberately have to take countermeasure, but without negative feeling.

Ekman: Can you take it away from the Chinese for a moment?

Dalai Lama: *Laughs.*

Ekman: Because, whoever it is, if they act in a harmful fashion, and they had free choice and they chose to act in that way, you forgive them, but do you also condemn their actions?

Dalai Lama: Oh, yes.

Ekman: Yes?

Dalai Lama: Yes!

Ekman: It's a wrong action.

Dalai Lama: Yes!

Ekman: An unethical, immoral action.

Dalai Lama: Yes—if your side is honest! Then, must criticize.

Ekman: This, I think, is what is in the West misunderstood about the Buddhist view. They believe that the forgiving means you don't hold them responsible for having acted wrongly. If you don't hold them responsible, how will they learn and change?

Dalai Lama: That's right. Oh, that's right. Usually, you see, I make the distinction, "after an action."

Ekman: Yes.

Dalai Lama: Where action is concerned, you have to oppose. You have to stop; you have to try to stop. Even use a bit harsh method. You know? But, as far as actor is concerned, you should not develop negative feeling and should keep a more compassionate attitude. Now, that, we ourselves, you see, we often do that. When I make something, a mistake, to you, then later, I have to, later I will say...

JINPA: Confess.

Dalai Lama: ...some kind of confess Oh, confession, right.

Ekman: Yes.

Dalai Lama: "Sorry." I apologize. So at that time, I make distinction. I myself now feel that's wrong, wrong action. But wrong action, you never... *Still*, you believe wrong action is wrong, that action is wrong.

Ekman: Okay. Very important.

Dalai Lama: So I recognize that action is wrong, but that does not mean I'm still doing that. So I apologize. This moment, I make a distinction between my previous action and myself.

Ekman: If I accept your apology, then I am recognizing that you and your action are not identical.

Dalai Lama: Yes, that's right.

Ekman: And so this leads us right into the heart of anger. Because when you wrote about this—when I first read it, I think in *Ethics for a New Millennium*—you said that you use force to stop the action and compassion for the actor.

Dalai Lama: Yes.

Ekman: That, I believe, is a description of constructive anger. Which means that if we accept your view of that, we then have to say anger *can* be constructive.

Dalai Lama: Yes.

Ekman: Yes. You agree?

Dalai Lama: Now, hear, you see, that anger towards that action. Not the person.

Ekman: It does not try to hurt the person.

Dalai Lama: Yes, yes, that is right.

Ekman: But stops the action.

Dalai Lama: Towards person, towards actor: compassion. Towards action: anger.

Ekman: Even from a practical viewpoint, leave aside everything else, they'll never change if you try to hurt them. Only if you have compassion for them, will they stop acting...

Dalai Lama: Oh, yes, that's right!

Ekman: ...in a harmful way.

Dalai Lama: That's right!

Ekman: So, just if you did not have any concern for ethics, just for practical consequences, this is the right tack.

Dalai Lama: Yes. Very good. Very nice words—useful meaning.

Both: *Laughter.*