



The Shenpa Syndrome, by Pema Chodron

Someone criticizes you. They criticize your work or your appearance or your child. At moments like that, what is it you feel? It has a familiar taste in your mouth, it has a familiar smell. Once you begin to notice it, you feel like this experience has been happening forever. The Tibetan word for this is Shenpa. It is usually translated as "attachment," but a more descriptive translation might be "hooked." When shenpa hooks us, we're likely to get stuck. We could call shenpa "that sticky feeling." It's an everyday experience. Even a spot on your new sweater can take you there. At the subtlest level, we feel a tightening, a tensing, a sense of closing down. Then we feel a sense of withdrawing, not wanting to be where we are. That's the hooked quality. That tight feeling has the power to hook us into self denigration, blame, anger, jealousy, and other emotions which lead to words and actions that end up poisoning us. [...] Shenpa thrives on the underlying insecurity of living in a world that is always changing. We experience this insecurity as a background of slight unease or restlessness. We all want some kind of relief from that unease, so we turn to what we enjoy--food, alcohol, drugs, sex, work or shopping. In moderation what we enjoy might be very delightful. We can appreciate its taste and its presence in our life. But when we empower it with the idea that it will bring us comfort, that it will remove our unease, we get hooked. In practicing with shenpa, first we try to recognize it. The best place to do this is on the meditation cushion. Sitting practice teaches us how to open and relax whatever arises, without picking and choosing. It teaches us to experience the uneasiness and the urge fully, and to interrupt the momentum that usually follows. We do this by not following after the thoughts and learning to come back to the present moment. We learn to stay with the uneasiness, the tightening, the itch of shenpa. We train in sitting still with our desire to scratch. This is how we learn to stop the chain reaction of habitual patterns that otherwise will rule our lives. This is how we weaken the patterns that keep us hooked into discomfort that we mistake as comfort. We label the spinoff "thinking" and return to the present moment. What we really need to do is address things just as they are. Learning to recognize shenpa teaches us the meaning of not being attached to this world. Not being attached has nothing to do with this world. It has to do with shenpa - being hooked by what we associate with comfort. All we're trying to do is not to feel our uneasiness. But when we do this we never get to the root of practice. The root is experiencing the itch as well as the urge to scratch, and then not acting it out. --Pema Chodron

[share/read comments

[<http://nipun.charityfocus.org/blog/ar/wednesdays/000549.html>]]

