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## Heart Advice

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

6 February 2019

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I am delighted to meet you all again after a long break. If we say goodbye with a sense of love and friendship then when we meet again later, the same positive feeling will arise.

To love and be loved brings happiness in our lives. Therefore, it is important that we foster good relationships. Our relationship and intimacy with others should serve as a basis for finding happiness and meaning in our lives and support when we need it.

We know from our own experience that when there is a joyful, loving and meaningful relationship with people to whom we are closely connected, it makes a huge difference to our lives. If we don't have that, we are more vulnerable to problems and suffering. Even good conditions, such as delicious food, won't give us much satisfaction. We therefore need to recognise the benefits of maintaining healthy relationships with others. The most important cause for this is cultivating a loving mental attitude towards other people and not losing it.

I believe our happiness and wellbeing is dependent upon good health of mind and body; not on whether or not we are a believer or the kind of job we do.

We must take responsibility for our own mental and physical health. We cannot expect a healthy mind and body while our daily actions are damaging to our health. There is no doubt we all wish for happiness and a healthy mind and body, but what we do seems to be at odds with our wishes. Therefore, we need to modify our actions, and reflect on where happiness and suffering truly come from. Then we can notice that we create the causes for unhappiness.

We all have the capacity to achieve good health. When we talk about the health of our body, we talk about good hygiene. If we focus on the health of our mind, we are talking about our thoughts and emotions. If we observe our thoughts we will recognise that if we develop a more positive mental attitude, it will enhance the health of our mind.

It is important that we try to utilise our intelligence and check that whatever we are undertaking, there is always a purpose or an aim. We also have to ask whether or not this aim is realistic. Our intelligence should be our main tool for direction in life.

When we say, 'I am unhappy,' the reason is mostly related to the state of our physical and mental wellbeing or health. If we have pain or sickness, we say, 'I don't feel right', or 'I feel bad.'

Sometimes it is not physical, but related to our mental or emotional health. If we enjoy good physical and mental health we will say, 'I feel great or I am very happy'. The

cause of our happiness and suffering is closely associated with our mental and physical health.

As far as maintaining good physical health goes, we are quite well educated. We know we can seek help from health specialists. We can learn more through the internet or even some TV programs. There are a lot of supports and resources to help us with improving our physical health.

As far as improving the health of the mind goes, the most important thing is observing our own thoughts and state of mind. If we observe our mind, we will notice that it is always wandering after external objects. Sometimes it has a reason and purpose, but mostly, the mind has no purpose. It aimlessly and unceasingly ponders over one object after another. This uncontrolled mind is a primary cause of increased mental and emotional stress, tension, anxiety, fears, depression and sense of isolation.

I advise people that if they want to find true peace and relaxation, they must reduce distracting thoughts. By preventing distracting thoughts, we are ridding ourselves of mental and emotional problems. We will free ourselves of the percentage of mental problems that is equal to the percentage of distracting thoughts we remove from our mind.

Distracting thoughts bring problems because they distance us from our mind and body, creating a gap that causes imbalance between us and our minds. As a result, the possessor of such a mind becomes a victim. If our mind is taken over by mental distraction, we lose control of it and we suffer when our mind is disturbed. For example, you are sitting on a chair or cushion, but your mind may not be here. It may be far away with distracting thoughts running after various objects. As a result, not only will you not be able to focus on your present action, but you also won't be able to rest.

People who undergo mental problems such as depression, suffer a lot. Their perception of things and other people is affected in a very negative way. They become angry for no apparent reason. Losing control of their mind to a distracting thought is what triggered their problem. As a part of maintaining good mental health, therefore, it is important to rest our mind by calming distracting thoughts and keeping our mind in the present moment, so that our mind and body remain together.

These points throw some light onto the purpose and benefits of meditation practice. However, we must try meditation in order to gain these benefits. If we practise meditation we can see that it results in reduced mental distraction. This, in turn, will pave the way for more peace, clarity and happiness.

Meditation practice enables us to prevent our mind from wandering after distracting thoughts. The moment we stop distracting thoughts, we immediately find more peace, rest and stillness from busy, uncontrolled thoughts. Meditation practice is a form of discipline for an unruly mind that wanders off to external objects.

With meditation practice, we don't allow the mind to function in its usual neurotic way. We discipline it when we focus on the meditation object single-pointedly. The more we meditate, the more we will notice fewer

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distracting thoughts arising within us. Even if a distracting thought arises, it is less overwhelming and forceful. This enables us to have more control over our mind, rather than the mind being fully ruled by disturbing thoughts.

We will do a short breathing meditation now. This breathing meditation is particularly recommended for beginners, as it is a simple technique that does not require much to learn; yet it is greatly effective in overcoming immediate mental disturbances or emotional crises.

Take someone who is disturbed and restless because of strong hatred, obsessive desire or jealousy towards others. If you were to advise them to meditate, you need to ensure that the meditation you recommend is applicable and will work immediately for that person. For a person experiencing an intense emotional crisis, recommending a meditation that requires detailed thought won't work.

However, if you recommend breathing meditation, even though under the influence of strong mental affliction the person can practise because they don't need to think to make sense of it. They can overcome all mental agitation or outgoing thoughts by simply directing the mind to the incoming and outgoing breath.

You will notice that doing a breathing meditation, even for a short period such as a minute or two, is profoundly effective in overcoming an immediate mental crisis and also for eventually developing single-pointed concentration.

Meditation practice is also about bringing happiness from within. We all know that this is more important for us than finding happiness on a material or physical level in the external world. By mental happiness we are talking about a deeper form of happiness lying within us. So essentially it does not depend on any external causes and conditions. The primary cause for achieving it is using our own intelligence and wisdom and developing inner qualities, such as concentration.

The benefits of meditation practice are guaranteed. Even if the duration is short, we gain the benefits of finding peace and happiness. It doesn't cost us anything. Happiness is easily accessible through meditation rather than trying to find it by gathering the right material conditions. We cannot all possess wonderful material objects, but we can all learn to meditate.

When we engage in meditation, it is important to ensure that every part of our body is relaxed and, as we pay attention to our minds, prevent all outgoing thoughts. That means we have to disengage the mind from external objects, distracting thoughts and events. In this meditation, we want to rest and focus the mind on the inhaling and exhaling of the breath. As an object, the breath is neutral. That makes it easy and natural for the mind to focus on breathing. We need to bring the mind inward by getting rid of all thought until we have 100% of our mind within.

If you want 100% of the mind to be within, you need to fix it 100% on the breathing. If you use an object which is not neutral, such as one that can induce afflicted

emotions, like desire, it is impossible to fix the mind there single-pointedly.

Now begin the breathing meditation and try to apply mindfulness, or memory, to retain the object, and alertness to correct the meditation if any faults arise.

*(Pause for meditation).*

As we chant the Buddha's mantra, shift the mental focus to the sound of the mantra. Keep the mind inward while chanting and also when we stop chanting. Continue the meditation in silence to maintain that mental stillness within us.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

We will finish for tonight. Thank you all for coming to the teachings, and please drive home safely.

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Edited Version  
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