
Heart Advice

༄༅། །གདམས་ངག་གི་སྣང་པོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

13 February 2019

Please relax. We are here to meditate.

The purpose of meditation is to bring, calmness, peace and joy to our mind.

We know that achieving it on a material level is not sufficient. We need to experience peace and happiness more on the mental than the physical level. If we investigate how peace, happiness and joy arise, we notice that they come when our mind is calm and quiet. If our mind is agitated and disturbed, we cannot achieve peace and happiness. The positive experience that we find in meditation is very inspirational. It is awakening, because it gives us an alternative for finding the peace and happiness that we seek, by simply working on our own mind.

We can all understand how beneficial it is for us to have a state of mind that is steady, peaceful and happy. But the mind is abstract, so it is not as easy to modify it as we would like. We face great challenges in understanding the cause and effect of mental happiness and sufferings. Because of these challenges, we don't like to think too much about the dynamic of our own thoughts and emotions. Our habitual outlook is very much driven by external values and attractions, based on our preconception of external things and events as the sole source of our happiness and our dissatisfaction.

To a great extent, we have managed to meet our needs and fix our external problems. We have a sophisticated knowledge of the material world. For example, we have air conditioning to combat heat, heaters to combat cold, a good chain of food and drink supplies to combat hunger and thirst. As far as external development goes, we have developed a good knowledge of what we want and what we do not want. In a similar fashion, we need to analyse what we should do to bring about the happiness that we want, and to eliminate the suffering that we do not want.

Based on our innate wish to find happiness and avoid suffering, we crave for things that we perceive as beneficial, and dislike things that we perceive as harmful. However, if desire and aversion are not brought under control, there will be more things to crave for and to loathe. In another words, desire and aversion are the main source of our anxiety and frustration, which in turn bring suffering and emotional turmoil.

We need to be aware how desire will make us frustrated and suffer, even if the desired object is not realistically achievable. This is something we can quite easily understand by observing our thoughts and actions. The question is whether continually increasing desire increases satisfaction and happiness, mentally and physically. It doesn't matter whether we do spiritual practice or something mundane, as long as we gain

happiness and satisfaction. Likewise, it doesn't matter whether we become rich and educated if we are happy. What we are concerned about is to ensure that whatever we do brings joy and happiness and is good for our well-being.

If we achieve material happiness it makes our time and effort worthwhile. But we also need to ask ourselves if we are gaining happiness from what we do and achieve? If material wealth and success give happiness and joy, it's good because that's the reason we have wealth. If we have a nice house, we should appreciate and enjoy it.

If we observe our life, we will notice that we live quite a hectic life. From the time we wake in the morning to when we go to bed at night we are preoccupied with racing after things. If the end result of this racing brings joy and happiness it is wonderful. However, if the end result of living a very busy and hard life, is somehow feeling empty, with more frustration and suffering and even leading into the state of depression, then it is very sad and sometimes tragic.

We cannot blame or point to the external world as a source of our problem, because externally we are in good position. I therefore advise people to direct their attention to their own mind to find out what they need to keep or to throw away to live a healthy and happy life. Externally we try hard to find the things we want or those we do not want. Inwardly, what we do not want is any mental agitation, suffering and misery.

These unwanted states of mind and emotions do not arise from outside, but from within us. Mental afflictions arise in the forms of desire, hatred, jealousy, pride, competitiveness etc. Each affliction can be overcome by cultivating a state of mind that opposes the way we perceive its object. We need to recognise the disadvantages of mental afflictions and understand their causes and conditions as part of applying antidotes. We can overcome hatred by cultivating loving kindness and patience because they oppose hatred. Hatred is a mental attitude that perceives its object as being undesirable and unpleasant, whereas loving-kindness perceives its object as being desirable and pleasant. Likewise, patience shows tolerance to a situation, but hatred doesn't. So, we can't have both hatred and loving kindness at the same time.

If we want to overcome hatred, we need to apply an antidote. This enables us to change our perception of the object or situation that arouses hatred within us. For example, if we are able to perceive the object of hatred as being loving or to generate empathy, then automatically the hatred will go away. In the case of desire or attachment for an object, we perceive its object as being overly attractive and pleasant. Desire can inflict a great deal of suffering and it is harder to tackle than hatred. However, if we look into how and when it arises, we can notice that it arises because we perceive the object as being attractive in a very exaggerated way. The more intense our perception of attraction, the stronger will be our desire for it.

We need to change our perception of the desired object by removing the veil of fantasy. As we do that, we will notice that our perception changes; as does our desire and craving for the object. Sometimes jealousy can be a

big issue for us. We feel jealous about other peoples' external wealth, beautiful looks, prestige or internal knowledge and skills. We feel that it's unbearable to see them having, those desirable things. Those people do not have to be our enemies. They can be our relatives and friends and also strangers. We can overcome jealousy by changing our negative attitude into one of rejoicing in other peoples' good qualities. Just as a poor person will be overjoyed if they find a treasure, we can have the same feeling of joy if we replace jealousy with rejoicing. If we are able to mentally take delight in the wealth, success and good qualities of other beings, there is no room for any jealousy to arise within us.

The effective means to achieve peace and happiness is to engage in meditation practice. The focus and purpose of meditation is transforming our mental attitude and our way of thinking. We know from our experience how we are victimised by the unruly, negative states of mind like attachment, hatred, jealousy, pride etc. With the presence of these negative states of mind, we can't have peace and happiness. They are the main enemies of our peace and happiness. On the other hand, we are saying here that spiritual practice and meditation is the most effective means to defeat these enemies. By understanding this, it should occur to us that whenever any afflictive emotions arise that destroy our inner peace and happiness and bring miseries, that we don't have to simply put up with it; rather we should understand that there is a way to overcome it. That way is to follow spiritual practice and engage in meditation. However, we have to be patient. Because we may be new to the practice and not familiar with it, our progress can be very slow.

The important thing is that we apply this practice when confronting mentally or emotionally unwanted experiences. If we meditate on day-to-day basis, it develops to a year-to-year basis. Don't worry about the length of time. Just meditate continuously and eventually we see a concrete result. When this happens, it gives us more inspiration, motivation and faith in our practice. The purpose of meditation is to counteract unwanted states of mind and develop joy and peace.

Essentially, our perception of things and events is the primary factor in pre-determining the states of mind and emotions that we generate and experience. Therefore, we need to manipulate our way of thinking to bring about changes on a mental level. If we want to get rid of desire for an object, we need to cultivate the mental perspective of viewing it as undesirable. To get rid of hatred we need to view the object from the angle of love by cultivating love and patience. To overcome jealousy, we need to cultivate a mental perspective whereby we genuinely admire others and rejoice in their success.

Meditation will help to change and transform our mind and change our personality traits. In the beginning it is not possible for us to tackle the root cause of mental afflictions such as attachment, hatred, pride, jealousy etc., but we can have a break from them by preventing them from arising during our meditation. This still is very beneficial as it allows peace and stability to find a space within us. Meditation also weakens the intensity of mental afflictions.

Mental afflictions are the cause for losing peace in the present, but the root cause of all these mental afflictions is the self-cherishing mind and a wrong sense of selfhood. It is unrealistic to expect we can immediately uproot mental afflictions. However, we can see it is within our reach to be able to prevent or stop these mental afflictions from arising at the present moment. This is because the arising of mental afflictions is contingent upon their respective objects. When we divert our mind to a different object, for example placing our mind on the breath in breathing meditation, we can prevent and override any mental afflictions or disturbing thoughts. This brings immediate peace and happiness. Breathing meditation is not a direct remedy for specific mental afflictions, but it is very effective in temporarily preventing them from arising. Having a bit of space and peace created through such preventative measures allows us space to then to work on applying more permanent remedies for our mental afflictions.

We now begin a short breathing meditation together. Make sure you relax your body and try to as much as possible to get rid of all the distracting thoughts. Let the mind completely rest within yourself in peace and tranquillity. And then direct the mind fully onto the incoming and outgoing breath and try as much as possible to keep your mental attention on the breath, thus not giving room for any thoughts to arise.

(Pause for meditation)

So, as we continue with the chanting of Buddha's mantra ensure that you retain the peaceful mind gained during breathing meditation. As we begin the chanting, place the mental focus on the sound of the mantra, as well as after the chanting where we continue with silent meditation. Again, make sure that you keep your mind within yourself.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA

Thank you for coming to the teaching and for your good attention.

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi
Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering
Edit 2 by Cynthia Karena
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*