
Heart Advice

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As much as possible try to fully relax your body, and then try to make the best use of your time here to bring about some sense of peace and happiness within yourself.

Whatever activity we undertake in our life, it is important to understand why we are doing the activity. When we actually begin that activity, we should not lose sight of our aim. Generally speaking, we are all seeking peace and happiness within our mind, or our mental level. So how can we actualise that peace and happiness? In spiritual terms, we talk about removing the mental afflictions or delusions. But in simple terms, it is getting rid of unpeaceful, unhappy states of mind. And so it is important that whatever activity we undertake, we direct that activity to achieve our aim, and achieve it faster.

We have a deeper level of peace and happiness within us, and it is not something that is going to arise automatically. Typically, this is something that we personally don't think about much, but we have to be very serious about this. First of all, recognise that happiness is what you want, and then think about how to achieve that; or conversely, what are the obstacles or hindrances that will prevent us achieving that happiness.

So when we talk about a deeper peace and happiness, what does that mean exactly? Well, we are talking about a certain moment when we feel so fully happy and peaceful from within ourselves, and some sense of total happiness that overwhelms us from within ourselves. We need to look into the situations where we experience that deeper sense of happiness, as well as when we don't. Typically, we notice we don't experience deeper happiness when our mind is agitated or disturbed. This agitation, including sudden uncontrolled external distractions, or reactions to certain external things or events, will impede us from experiencing any happiness, let alone any deeper happiness, even if we are surrounded by good external conditions. And of course, sometimes the reason why we do not feel a deeper peace and happiness could also be due to what we call mental afflictions, which are certain kinds of destructive emotions. When we experience them, then we have no chance of experiencing any deeper peace and happiness.

But when we have the ability to experience that peace and happiness, we can appreciate how wonderful that is; we can feel peaceful, calm and happy, regardless of whatever is going wrong externally. So, if we think about this, then really the primary cause of bringing about or enhancing a deeper peace and happiness doesn't depend so much on changing the external conditions in our life. Of course, this is not to say that external conditions are not relevant; of course, they are relevant. However, the primary cause of happiness is within us and it depends on our own mental outlook. Whether we are happy or not

depends on our own state of mind. It is a question of either our mind is happy or not happy, or something is joyful or not; you can't have both at the same time. Happy and unhappy cannot co-exist. Likewise, we can't have both attachment and aversion to an object at the same time. They are mutually exclusive, so you can't have both existing together. So if you create the cause for mental peace and happiness, then it will arise within us. Likewise, if we do not do anything to get rid of something that is making our mind unhappy or lacking peace, then of course we cannot get rid of that unhappy state of mind in want of peace.

So we need to think about the causes and the conditions that are responsible for giving us mental peace and happiness, as well as the causes and conditions that give us the opposite, which is the unhappiness within us. We all have this gift of human intelligence, this discriminating wisdom. Using our intelligence, we can clearly see the causes and conditions for happiness or unhappiness. We can work out the causal link between happiness and its causes and suffering and its causes. If we develop our intelligence and this discriminating wisdom, then things become very clear to us.

When we develop this discriminating wisdom within us it serves as a true guide for us in our life. It becomes very clear to us what kind of steps we need to take in life.

Quite often Buddhism or Buddhist philosophy is also considered as science; some people have even called me a scientist! Through cultivating discriminating wisdom, we can gain an understanding of the truth of cause and effect, and that is what we call the true science. And Buddhist science is based on facts.

In the Lord Buddha's teachings, he gives each person the liberty to find out what is most beneficial for them. Buddha never imposed on his followers that they should believe in what he says out of respect or faith towards him, but rather puts the emphasis on the individual to use the power of their own intelligence. By using this intelligent power, we will be able to really dispel the ignorance, the darkness within our mind, and at the same time, we will be able to illuminate the light of knowledge to see things clearly by ourselves.

The great Lama Tsongkhapa said that whether or not our actions are beneficial or harmful depends upon whether our mental attitude is white or black. So if our mental attitude is white, meaning positive, then whatever the action that follows will also be positive. If our mental attitude is all wrong or destructive, then what follows after that will also be negative and destructive. In summary, everything depends on our own mind.

So in essence, this passage by Lama Tsongkhapa is saying that whatever actions or activities we undertake are always be preceded by a thought, which serves as a driving force for that activity. Without the preceding thought we cannot undertake any actions. The key advice here is that if we want our actions to be beneficial and meaningful, or something that would make us proud later on, then before we engage in any action, we need to have a good look at our thoughts, which serve as a motivation or impulse that drives us to do an action. We should have a very good look at that thought. And then

we can be assured that if that thought is positive and wholesome, such as showing some sense of loving and caring towards others, then we can be sure that whatever physical or verbal action that follows will be pleasant and beneficial.

When we take all this into account, we get a sense of direction, and how things can unfold depending upon what we are thinking. We have to look at our motivation and our frame of our mind, and if they're positive, then whatever actions we do will be worthwhile. On the other hand, if the thoughts within us are negative, then we have to understand that our actions will be negative and could even be harmful to others. Therefore, it is important that we stop these kinds of negative thoughts. If we don't, then they will result in us undertaking harmful verbal or physical actions. So we need to take responsibility for our own mind, our own thoughts.

One of the tools we can use to do that is mindfulness, which is a very important tool. If we look at a thought and it is something positive, then the message for us is that we should follow that thought, that mental attitude. This is where we have to apply that mindfulness, that memory, in order to ensure that whatever actions we are creating are led by that positive thought. On the other hand, if the thought that leads our action is negative, then we should try to not put it into action. So in this way we can be a bit more reassured that at the end there is one less thing for us to feel guilty, negative or regretful about. Rather, we can look back and feel proud of the good we have done; we can feel positive and even start to feel admiration for ourselves.

We have been discussing how our own positive state of mind can be a source of happiness, and a source of bringing joy to our minds and even for others. Likewise, our own negative state of mind can be a cause of unhappiness for us and for others. In the end, we experience happiness and we feel joy due to our own state of mind. Our own positive state of mind can make us feel good, feel positive, and feel happy, and this will have a similar effect on other people as well, including those living with you, those close to you, and those around you. We can see the impact of a positive state of mind on other people by bringing them joy and happiness in their own mind.

We also need to look more specifically into what are the positive states of mind and what are the negative states of mind we are talking about here. For example, when we are holding any ill thoughts such as animosity towards others, we feel unhappy and that can cause the same kind of unhappiness and negative feeling in other people as well. So our practice should be to work on cultivating our positive states of mind, and then try to prevent their disintegration, and if possible even to try to further increase these positive states of mind.

To summarise, our main practice is cultivating and increasing a positive state of mind. Cultivating a positive state of mind is key to finding happiness in our life. I have personally given a lot of thought as to whether this is really true or not. Of course there is no doubt that when a person has positive states of mind, then that person can be happy and joyful. Otherwise, as we were saying

before, if the state of mind we have within us, within our continuum, is not positive but rather it is something negative, then there is no hope for the person to find peace within their own minds.

When we think of how to cultivate a positive state of mind, this is where the practice of meditation becomes relevant; and important to integrate into our life. Meditation practice enables us to familiarise or habituate our mind with a positive mental attitude, which brings peace and happiness within us. Of course, we need to understand how to meditate, and what we need to do in a meditation practice. In essence, it is familiarising ourselves, training ourselves to properly apply mindfulness. Through alertness we train our mind to become habituated with positive ways of thinking.

So now it's time for us to try to engage in the meditation practice. So as usual we will do a very short breathing meditation. In this meditation, our breathing in and out becomes the main object for our mind, for our mental attention. Make sure as you begin with a meditation practice to fully relax your body, and then try to let go of all the distracting thoughts. Let the mind fully rest, and fully subside within you. And then try to have a bit of a think about the purpose of meditation practice, which is to overcome a wild state of mind, which is neither peaceful nor happy.

As you focus on this very rough and unsubdued mind, think, 'This unsubdued mind is the source of all my troubles, all my unhappiness.' You say to this unsubdued mind, 'I blame you for all my unwanted experiences because if you were not there, everything in my life would be so wonderful.' There is no reason for us to be unhappy, especially taking into account our beautiful conditions, such as where we live.

The idea is to blame this negative state of mind. Sometimes it could be, for example, a jealous state of mind that could be disturbing you. So we point to this jealous state of mind within ourselves. This is causing us unhappiness, rather than the person you are jealous of. The jealous mind is the problem, not the person you're jealous of. You can't blame that person for all your suffering. So try to cultivate this strong thought, this strong motivation that you will not fall under the influence or under the power of this negative state of mind. Let go of all the distracting thoughts, and then place your full attention of the mind, one hundred percent attention, on the incoming and outgoing breath, and sit in there for a little while.

(Pause for meditation).

There is room for maybe one or two questions. Does anyone have a question?

If there are no questions, then it looks like it's time to thank you for paying really great attention to my teachings.

Question: What is the difference between worldly happiness and real happiness?

Response: In Buddhism, we call worldly happiness *samsaric* happiness. Worldly happiness primarily depends on material causes, for example, enjoying a good meal, or having special clothes to wear etc.

Another explanation where we talk about worldly or samsaric happiness is when happiness is more on the level of sensual experience, in terms of the five senses - visual form, sound, smell, taste, and touch. On that level, whatever kind of pleasure we experience with our five senses can be called worldly pleasure, worldly happiness.

There is also the term 'uncontaminated happiness', but we won't go into it tonight. Generally, true happiness is the kind of happiness that arises within yourself, which is not so contingent upon external causes and conditions. Rather it arises, for example, through developing your discriminating wisdom, finding some sort of meaning, satisfaction and happiness. This uncontaminated happiness arises within you, primarily from your own mind.

Asanga said that sensual happiness or worldly happiness is unreliable. Whereas the happiness that arises from within is more reliable and more sustainable.

Normally the happiness we seek very much depends on the sensual level. For example, if we see something attractive, then it gives us some sort of pleasure, therefore we crave for that object. Whereas if the object is something unattractive or ugly, or the sound you hear is not pleasing, then aversion arises within us. When we experience this attachment or aversion then there is no end to our suffering; our experience is completely and perpetually unpleasant. As we were saying before, normally in a worldly life we talk about our measurement of happiness on the basis of how successful we are in acquiring worldly objects, in terms of those five sensual objects.

But in our own experience, we know this is not necessarily true; we don't become happier the more we acquire things. So it is important to transcend that kind of sensual happiness to find happiness within ourselves. This deeper happiness is less dependent on external conditions.

Our desire for happiness is there as long as we have a deep sense of 'I' within ourselves. The problem is when we rely on this kind of happiness. It is unstable; it relies too much on outside factors. It is not fully in our hands, or in our control. However, this deeper happiness within us is always accessible within us. Whenever we want happiness, it is always there and it is always within our reach and within our control, whereas the other happiness, worldly happiness, depends on the outside world.

When we experience desire, we perceive the desired object as being something very beautiful, something very attractive, something very pleasing, and we think it is the source of our happiness. From that perspective, even though the object of our desire is not a true source of happiness, it seems like it is, because of the way the object appears to us as being very attractive. So, it is very difficult to recognise the flaws or the shortcomings of the object of our desire. This makes it difficult for us to overcome desire. In comparison, it is easier to see the shortcomings of an object that we have animosity or hatred towards. It is easier for us to recognise the shortcomings and the flaws of that state of mind, so on one hand it is easier to overcome it.

Lama Tsongkhapa used the analogy of desire as being like 'a drop of oil on a piece of paper' that is easily absorbed or dissolved into the paper. Once it is absorbed into the paper it is very hard to separate it from the paper. Likewise, it is difficult to remove or overcome desire. This is particularly true if you become more habituated with desire, which then becomes harder for us to get rid of.

It is very difficult to separate desire when it takes a strong hold or grip on our mind. Once someone asked me to advise on overcoming desire; I simply said that it is okay to have a small amount of desire. Actually, I was asked by one young girl who said that she had thoughts about the shortcomings of the various other delusions or mental afflictions; she could recognise the shortcomings and so she could motivate herself to overcoming that. However, she said she found it very difficult to overcome the desire for her partner. And so this is where I advised her, 'if you have a small amount of desire, there is nothing wrong with that'. The girl appreciated that advice and applied the teaching in her practice. I too appreciated her question because it truly showed that she tried hard to put the teaching into practice and her question testified to her practice.

Whatever mental afflictions we want to overcome we must first recognise it, see its faults and how it arises. For example, in order to overcome anger, we have to recognise anger. Where is the anger? When we try to overcome the anger, do not focus on the object of our anger. That is very wrong. If we want to overcome anger, we should focus the mind inward, because the anger is within ourselves, within our own mind. Anger is not that object or person. We need to try to recognise the anger within our mind and then to really point the finger at that. It is said that when we are able to recognise anger to the point that we can point the finger at it, then it may simply destroy itself. If we focus our mind on the anger itself, then by nature it disappears by itself.

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