
Heart Advice

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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As usual, we will begin by relaxing our body.

As we find a relaxed state of body, we could also find a relaxed, peaceful and joyful state of mind so that we can truly find peace and happiness and have a really wonderful experience. Usually we only think of peace and happiness in terms of physical or outer conditions but not in terms of mental or inner conditions. A peaceful inner condition within our mind is in fact essential, therefore, we need to find a correct means to create it.

We all like to find happiness and pleasure on a physical level, such as when we enjoy a healthy body not afflicted with sickness. However, to actually enjoy the happiness and joy of having a healthy body we need to mentally recognise, appreciate and have a sense of contentment. So, we can see how it is necessary to complement our physical happiness with mental happiness in order to enjoy a healthy body. Mental happiness is contingent upon a sense of contentment within us.

If we observe our experience, we note that sometimes we carry a mind filled with unhappiness and misery. Due to this, we feel down all the time. Sometimes people continue to suffer mental problems for a long time because they pre-occupy their mind with some sort of unfulfilled, unsettled and troubled thoughts. As the days and months go by like this, they find it mentally, physically and emotionally impossible to cope. They find themselves in a situation where nothing can cheer them up or bring joy to their mind.

For example, they can't enjoy the taste of food even if it is very delicious, and they can't enjoy the companionship of good friends, nor can their friends do anything to change their situation. These situations reveal the gravity of the suffering people go through when they are afflicted with mental problems and a lack peace and happiness within themselves.

Under such circumstances, no matter what good things they find or surround themselves with, somehow it fails to serve as a cause to alleviate their problems and make them feel better. Therefore, we need to be more patient and empathetic, rather than angry, with people who are suffering, and not label them as very moody and unhappy. We should mentally feel closer to rather than distant from them. Usually, they are our partners, relatives, friends and work colleagues etc., who have a special relationship with us and with whom we share our lives and do things together.

Furthermore, when people are afflicted with mental unhappiness, sometimes they think (and I have come across some people saying) 'nobody likes me.' Mental unhappiness can affect our perception of people and the world. When we confront very unhappy, tense and volatile people, we can adopt a more holistic approach in

dealing with them if we have a clearer and better understanding of their true situation. We can be more positive towards them if our thoughts and deeds show understanding, respect, love and compassion. We can also acknowledge and accept the situation as it is and show more resilience and tolerance in the face of adversaries.

Regardless of being rich or poor, famous or not, every now and then we all experience mental unhappiness which destroys our peace, joy, space and stability. The question is how well we handle it. Have we found an effective remedy for it? Do we know the main cause of it? If we do not ask these questions, then we won't be able to counteract the cause of the problem.

Instead of dealing with the actual cause, we normally regard diverting our attention to something else as a means of getting over the problem. However, this is not effective. It may act as temporary relief, but the same problem and unhappy mind associated with it will keep coming back. Therefore, reflecting upon the above questions is very useful.

We will not find that the main cause is external things and events but related to our own mind and lack of control over it. The main reason we lack peace and happiness within our mind is because our mind is overpowered by disturbing thoughts and afflictive emotions which easily arise within our continuum. These thoughts and emotions destroy our peace and happiness and bring unhappiness in our lives. These also make us harm other beings.

Therefore, the purpose of meditation is to subdue our mind. How does the meditation work? In meditation practice we train our mind to remain on the object of meditation and in this way, we are conditioning our mind to let go of disturbing thoughts and afflictive emotions. The result is bringing inner peace, stability and happiness. I emphasise that the meditation practice is not simply a matter of assuming a cross-legged sitting posture. Rather, it is designed to direct mental attention to a given object. If the meditation is done effectively and diligently, then we will find it a healing medicine, curing all the mental illnesses and restoring the peace, happiness and health of our mind.

As ordinary beings, we experience hardship or suffering in life. Exceptions to this are those who have gained higher realisations and are free from suffering. I am certain that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is one of the highly realised noble beings totally free of the suffering all ordinary beings experience. Catholics would regard the Pope as an example of such a noble being.

As to all ordinary beings that are subject to the suffering nature of life, it is true to say that the extent to which individual beings experience hardship and suffering depends on their level of mental spirit, determination and tolerance. Therefore, it is very beneficial to develop a higher level of mental spirit, courage and determination in order to diminish hardship in the face of adversaries.

We are not necessarily talking here about hardship in our meditation and spiritual practice but also in our mundane activities. To reach our goals we have to overcome

obstacles and create the right conditions which requires spirit and determination. We need to maintain a positive mental attitude under all circumstances, ensure we are always on top of things and never let ourselves fall under the pressure of difficult situations.

We have to remind ourselves that our main goal or wish is to achieve happiness and eliminate suffering. This is the same for all beings. Everyone who experiences a sense of 'I' deep down and identifies with the 'I', innately or instinctively wishes for happiness and to avoid suffering. This is our natural tendency.

However, the problem is our attachment to happiness and hatred towards unhappiness which brings much stress, tension, dissatisfaction and suffering in our lives. So, we need to do something to eliminate or reduce attachment and aversion in order to find more peace and happiness.

The most important thing is for each individual to take responsibility for their own life. We must be clear about what we want, our priorities and how to realise our goals.

As mentioned earlier, our fundamental wish is to find happiness and eliminate suffering. Life is not just about accomplishing and being successful in certain goals, such as accumulating a certain amount of wealth. We need to ensure that our success brings happiness, satisfaction and rest for us. Otherwise, we are defeating the main purpose for which we work hard and set our goals.

That's why we are saying that it is very important, for whatever goals we set to achieve, to also keep our focus inward and keep check on our own thoughts and states of mind which shape our experiences and feelings.

As we know, achieving external goals doesn't guarantee happiness, satisfaction or rest for us. As soon as we realise or complete one thing, we will embark on the next thing because the first thing that we have achieved is not good enough, so we are not satisfied with it. We then set ourselves to accomplish something that is bigger and higher. This means that we have to work even more and prepare to face more difficulties. Again, at the end of realising our set goal, we find no satisfaction because we are not able to appreciate and content our mind with our success.

If we don't subdue our mind, we will never find true peace and happiness. In fact, if you observe the life of a very competitive businessman, you will note that he is living a very stressful life. He compares his accomplishment of wealth against other people's. As he always finds someone wealthier, he is forced to work harder and faster. I do not see him finding time to fully relax and enjoy life. As the great Buddhist poet and master Ashvagoshā said, there is no greater misery or suffering than the suffering of a discontented mind.

Essentially, I am trying to direct the point of our discussion to the benefits of meditation practice. We understand here that really, the primary source of our unending suffering is a strong wave of attachment or aversion that we have within us. Hence, the cause of the problem is related to our mind, such as our inability to control strong and forceful attachment or hatred. Therefore, if we aim our meditation practice at

counteracting negative states of mind, such as strong attachment or aversion, then it will directly benefit us.

The bottom line is that the cause of suffering lies within us; so too the remedy lies within us. Meditation practice helps us to develop discriminating wisdom, an intelligence within us, which in turn is our best guide and protection. The wisdom shows us what is right and what is wrong, or what is beneficial and what is harmful and it is fully reliable, trustworthy and unailing.

Through our wisdom we can understand that there is a remedy to suffering, that we can extinguish or minimise suffering. We do not have to simply put up with suffering or live our lives in suffering. Of course, if we do not know the shortcomings of attachment and hatred that incur suffering, then when we suffer because of these, all we can do is sit and cry. However, if we know that there is a remedy to attachment and anger that incurs suffering, then it should occur to us to apply it in practice.

The practice in which we recognise attachment arising recognises that our mind falsely projects an object as being beautiful, pleasant and attractive. Hence, as a remedy to overcoming attachment, we train our mind by meditating on the unattractiveness or unpleasantness of the object. Likewise, hatred arises primarily because our mind perceives the object as being undesirable or unpleasant.

Hence, the remedy is cultivating love and endearment which causes our mind to view the object as being desirable and pleasant and is in direct opposition with the attitude of hatred.

If a person truly loves others or has a good heart towards them, even if they do something wrong or something provocative, he or she will not lose their temper or retaliate. They will instead still try to be helpful and show care for them. In general, in our society, if there is harmony, trust and good friendship among people, then to a large extent people will be supporting each other. With such a helpful, supportive and caring mental attitude towards each other, I think a great deal of human problems can be prevented and eliminated and true peace and happiness will prevail.

When people share genuine care and love, even if they receive some harm or discomfort from others, they can tolerate it and do not get angry. I have shared this with you in the past, that I saw on TV – a man changing the nappy of presumably his son, who shot pee straight up on his face. However, the man just had a big laugh because of his love towards his child.

Then, on another show, a dog was helping a crippled goat who had a wheel to help him walk. This is also quite an amazing thing to watch. It was an amazing act between two completely unrelated animals that have formed a good friendship and support each other to overcome difficulty. In a different instance, there were two llamas living among a herd of sheep. Apparently, the llamas were there to take care of the sheep.

These examples show that if animals can form a good friendship and take good care of other animals from a different species, why can't people develop a closer and caring relationship. The basis of forming such intimate,

mutually beneficial and trustworthy relationships is cultivating love and a good heart in our relationships. Therefore, we should focus on developing love and compassion within us.

In this talk, I have shared with you some important points to think over as I believe these have the potential to benefit you and others.

That's all for this talk. Now we will do the usual short breathing meditation. So, to begin with, try to relax your body and let go of all the distracting thoughts. As your mind settles within you, begin the meditation by simply directing the mental focus on the incoming and outgoing breath. Try to place the mind on the breath fully, place one hundred percent of your mental attention on it.

[Meditation]

So, let's continue with the chanting of the mantra. Make sure you don't let the mind wander but keep it focused on the mantra or within yourself.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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