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## Heart Advice

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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As usual, we come here to find a moment of peace and relaxation and also to discuss and educate ourselves about the Dharma. Educating ourselves about the Dharma is something that relates to our mind; to our inner selves. We learn about the Dharma because it is an effective means to solve our problems in life, particularly those problems caused by our mind or relating to our mental wellbeing.

Overcoming these mentally-related problems also helps us to overcome physical and externally-related problems. To begin with, we need to be aware that both happiness and suffering arise due to causes and conditions. The fact that we have a good human life with comfortable and conducive living conditions at the moment, such as a nice house, food and drink etc., is the result of the good karma we created in our past lives. Even if we put aside the concept of past and future lives, we can understand the causal link between our actions and what we experience in this present lifetime. For example, there is a causal link between what we did in the early stages of our life and what we find in the later stages of our life. So, everything we want or do not want depends on causes and conditions.

Personally, I feel that the good living conditions I enjoy now is because of studying hard from the age of twenty-one or twenty-two onwards. The fact is, whether or not we believe in the law of karma, if we think about it, we can understand for ourselves that positive actions produce positive results and negative actions produce negative results.

We can observe how people who work hard and acquire a good education can secure a better job and livelihood. Education is very important for living a good life. However, I notice here that there seems to be some social pressure and expectation for children when they turn fifteen or sixteen years of age, that is that they should be able to stand on their own feet. So, at this age, children go through a difficult stage in life and it becomes a critical period. Those children who somehow manage to cope well under the pressure and are able to pursue their education, end up achieving good results. As a result, they are able to find good jobs and live a good life. So, in terms of the acquisition of good material conditions, we know that if you work hard and are patient with whatever hardship you face, you can be successful. In a similar way, especially for those of you who have been following the Dharma for a while, you must understand that, if you work hard and maintain your enthusiasm in Dharma practice, you will achieve your desired goal, despite difficulties or obstacles.

In order to achieve what we want to achieve and to eliminate what we want to eliminate we must tackle the

challenge. We must not lose courage. Obviously, if we lose courage or lack the spirit to face hardship, we will simply give up and not achieve our goal. However, if we don't run away in the face of challenges and are courageous and diligent in doing what we have to do, we can find a solution and a way to tackle the situation. In this way, we can reach our goal. There is no doubt that we are always trying to find more happiness and reduce unhappiness. But we have to understand that everything occurs because of causes and conditions. We have to meet the right causes to achieve the happiness we want and avoid unwanted unhappiness. Therefore, we must create the causes and make an effort, be willing and joyfully prepare to accept whatever hardship we face in achieving our goal.

Here, we are mainly talking about bringing happiness and removing the suffering of the problems related to our mind. In this regard, we can see that spiritual practice is the most effective means, whereas external or material means are not effective and reliable.

Hence, whenever we face any situation that causes mental happiness, we must look for the cause within our mind rather than always relating the cause to external things and events. In fact, the direct cause of mental unhappiness lies within our mind in the form of various delusions arising from negative energy. Our mind is usually preoccupied by wandering thoughts concerning external things and events and, as we are controlled by our mind, we do not pay any attention to what lies within it. Therefore, whenever something goes wrong or we don't feel right, we always tend to point the finger at external things as the cause.

For example, anger is not a pleasant feeling and we want to get rid of it because whenever it arises we lose our peace of mind. However, we only identify the cause of anger and unhappiness with external factors. As mentioned earlier, we never consider that the main cause of anger is, in fact, lying within us. Hence, we blame the other person or an external circumstance for our anger and misery. To overcome our problems, we resent that person and retaliate. Instead of overcoming the problem, this only aggravates it.

Therefore, we need to fine-tune our understanding of the situation. When we are faced with a situation in which we feel mentally unhappy, we need to train our mind to settle down; to stay inward and alert, rather than allowing it to fill with a rush of thoughts and emotions concerning external people, events or things. By training our mind to remain calm and inwardly focussed, we will be able to pin-point the true cause of the unhappiness, restlessness, stress etc. within us and see that it is because of the anger we generate within ourselves. Now, since the anger is within us, if we think about the antidote for it, we need to recognise that the remedy to counteract the anger is also within us.

We are using anger as an example but there are many other mental afflictions. As we noted above, the primary cause of anger is not an external object or another person. We need to recognise that the primary cause is the kind of mental attitude we hold with respect to people and the

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situations we face. If we recognise that the true cause lies within us, then we will be able to effectively apply the remedy. If we don't recognise that, then we won't be able to remedy the problem and we will simply blame the outside world.

Generally, we find it easy to recognise when other people get angry and lose their temper. Once, someone said to me, 'Geshe-la, I find it too hard to live with my partner because they get angry so easily and this makes my life very miserable.' I replied, 'Do you realise that you also have a lot of anger within yourself?' The person was quite shocked to hear me say that and they became very quiet. If we look at the cause of our anger, the obvious cause is some dissatisfaction and unhappiness within us. In the case of anger, an immediate cause of such mental unhappiness can be the object of our mind, such as a person we find very irritating. As long as we think of that person in our mind, we will feel unhappy. Therefore, to redress that unhappiness, we need to stop thinking of that person by diverting our mind to a different object.

It is recommended that, instead of thinking about the object or the situation that caused the anger to arise, we should direct and focus our mind on the anger within us – observing its nature, seeing how it arises and noticing how strong it is and so forth. As we do this, we will notice our mind calming down and our anger reducing, as if it is dissolving into itself. We will find this very effective in enhancing inner peace and reducing the unhappiness within us. When this unhappy mind subsides, anger is pacified as well. Therefore, we need to break down the mental habit of always blaming external things for the cause of our mental unhappiness, as well as all the unwanted thoughts and emotions we generate within ourselves.

So, the purpose of meditation practice is to subdue our mind and enhance our discriminating wisdom, as well as ensuring that we are not overpowered by mental afflictions and delusions. Through meditation practice, we can discipline our mind and enhance peace and tranquillity within ourselves. This is because meditation helps us to gain control over our mind, rather than our mind being overpowered by mental delusion.

As we counteract the dominant influence of mental delusions over our mind through the consistent application of mindfulness and introspection, we can derive the benefits of meditation practice, such as gaining control over our mind and finding stable mental peace. When we have brought the mind under control, we have automatically brought our body and speech under control too.

We must always ensure that the meditation practice we do is aimed at bringing our mind under control by preventing it from being overpowered by mental delusions. Once our mind is subdued and the overwhelming force of mental delusions reduced, then, as mentioned before, we can naturally prevent non-virtuous actions of our body and speech. For example, we can prevent the three bodily non-virtues of killing, stealing and sexual misconduct and the four verbal non-virtues of lying, slandering, harsh speech and gossiping. By

controlling our mind, not only do we find more peace and tranquillity within ourselves, but we are also transforming all our outer actions into wholesome ones.

Nevertheless, if our meditation practice is not done properly by targeting it to overcome the mental delusions within us, then, no matter how long we sit in meditation, it will not have an effect on our life or our personality. As soon as the meditation practice is over, we are back to our normal, neurotic self. If we normally tell a lot of lies, we will continue to lie to others. Or if we normally live our life by killing other beings, we will simply carry on with the same action of killing and so forth. We understand that the Dharma literally means to hold us up from falling and that the Dharma is the true refuge and protection. From the perspective of the concept of life after death, we need to understand and have a certain conviction that our Dharma and meditation practice, such as living a good ethical life, will result in finding a higher rebirth, thereby holding us up from falling into lower rebirths. Hence, meditation practice yields concrete benefits and brings positive changes to how we live our life. It makes our life truly meaningful.

We can also say that our Dharma practice serves as a cause to benefit other beings. Benefitting others means helping them to eliminate problems and find happiness. Just like us, other beings also wish for happiness and want to avoid suffering. So, in order to benefit others, we need to practice Dharma because we need to rid ourselves of mental delusions. If our mind is totally overpowered with various mental delusions, then it is impossible to benefit others.

When we can overcome and free our mind from mental delusions and confusion through meditation practice, then we are naturally in a good position to spread peace and happiness to the outside world. In fact, our Dharma practice will have immediate positive benefits, especially for those we live and interact with in our daily life. Our practice will have a very positive impact on our life and on others. In this way, for ourselves and for the benefit of all others, the practice of overcoming the afflictions is crucial.

It is human nature that, when someone brings us joy, we will naturally feel good about that person and we will respond to them in a positive way. Conversely, if someone causes us problems, our response to that person will be negative too. So, if we expect others to be polite and friendly to us, then we need to be considerate of their needs – to show them good gestures, give them joy and happiness and help them overcome their problems. In this way, we will build good relationships with others.

Just as we feel close to others when they are good to us, in the same way, others will become close to us when we are good to them. On the other hand, if we cause harm to others and do something contrary to their wishes, then they will want to avoid us. In practical terms, when we say here that we should be more considerate of the needs of other beings, we are really talking about improving our interaction with all the people in our everyday life. These other people are none other than our own family members, friends and work colleagues. From this angle,

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we can see the obvious benefits of our Dharma practice in terms of securing more happiness and reducing problems in our own life because a good relationship with these people is indispensable for us. When we reflect on these things, we will also begin to appreciate and recognise the kindness of those like our parents. We will also know how to repay their kindness and show them our gratitude by giving them joy, appeasing them and helping them with whatever they need.

We will now do a short breathing meditation. This meditation is especially effective in overcoming intense mental distractions and disturbing thoughts.

The benefit of this breathing meditation is to immediately get rid of all disturbing thoughts. One of the causes for disturbing thoughts is the movement of wind energy. When we fix our mental attention on the breath, this helps to stabilise the wind energy, which in turn helps to stabilise the mind. So, this indicates the benefit of using the breath as an object of meditation. Besides that, the breath is not a visual object with colours and shapes which usually cause mental distraction. Therefore, it is said that using breathing as an object to focus our mind is suitable for calming mental agitation. When we engage in meditation practice, it is important to have single-pointed concentration and to get rid of all the distracting thoughts in our mind. Having brought the mind inward, we will focus just on the breath and maintain our focus there. We will do this meditation now.

*Pause for meditation*

Thank you for your attention.

In this talk, we focused on two important things concerning the purpose of meditation or why we meditate. Firstly, it is to bring our mind under control, so it is not overpowered by mental delusion. Secondly, we habituate our mind and ourselves to a positive state of mind.

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor  
Edit 1 by Katherine Boland  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
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