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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

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As usual we can spend some time on meditation and for that purpose we sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. As instructed in the teachings, it is essential to have a good motivation when commencing any practice. Therefore let us develop such for the purpose of this meditation. If we are to consider, 'why am I meditating, why do I need to meditate?' that will sort of initiate the purpose of the meditation. Of course, there might be different reasons or purposes for why we meditate. Ensuring that one has a proper motivation secures the purpose of whatever activity we are engaging in to follow through. For example, in terms of work, our normal mundane work, the primary motivation would be to gain an earning and that is the purpose of why we go to work. Likewise in any activity we engage in, that activity would be preceded with an intention of why we are doing that activity.

In our practice of meditation, having a proper motivation is said to be a means to secure that purpose behind why we meditate. Another example is students who go to school to study; their intention is to learn by studying. When they go to school they take an initiative. When we consider the long term purpose of study at school we can see the goal is to acquire knowledge from the study that enables us to secure a good job in the future. Furthermore, by securing a good job we seek to gain a good income which in turn leads to the goal of sustaining oneself, sustaining a healthy body in particular as well as sustaining the needs of others and various positive conditions for one's life.

Just as we can see the long term purpose behind engaging in study and so forth, we can also see the purpose of a practice such as meditation as a means to secure genuine kindness, love and compassion within oneself. These qualities are what will contribute to sustaining ourselves, sustaining a good mind, increased happiness and joy. Just as we secure wholesome external conditions in our life we need to likewise cultivate internal qualities of the mind. When we have a combination of both good external and internal conditions, i.e. the qualities of love and compassion, then our life will be truly meaningful and worthwhile. We might also notice that acquiring the external conditions is relatively easier somehow whereas to secure the inner qualities for one's well-being is a little bit harder.

We need to pay a bit more importance to securing our inner qualities. As it is harder, we need to pay more attention. That is something that I remind people often. External conditions I would consider as being easy to acquire. I can relate a story to illustrate this. Before we left Tibet and escaped into India, His Holiness the Dalai Lama had conferred the Kalachakra initiation at the summer palace called Norbulingka. Many people came to receive the teachings and initiation from His Holiness; I recall that at that time I was as a young teenager and was I there with other monk friends. It was a very destitute time, we didn't have much food, so during a break, we had to consider how

to get some food; particularly tsampa, which is roasted barley. My friends and I thought of a scheme of how to get some food for the day. As I mentioned earlier, there were so many people coming with their families and they would bring a picnic with them. So my monk friends and I would go out to different groups and collect a bit of this or that, a bit of tea, some bread and slowly accrue enough food for the day like that. This was done by going off to different groups of people and asking for something. We all got different things from different groups. So this is an illustration of how actually it is relatively easy to get external means. What I am intending to point out here with this illustration is that in relation to external conditions, the material things are something that can be divided and shared with others, as mentioned earlier. However in terms of inner conditions, particularly in relation to some hardships or difficulties in one's life, those are something that cannot be shared, cannot be lightened by sharing with others.

Difficulties as well as happiness cannot be shared. They are something that has to be experienced by oneself. When it comes to any type of suffering, that is something to be experienced by one self alone, cannot be shared with others. Likewise with happiness, it is something that one has to experience alone. Even if one would want, one cannot give it to others and share it. The point to be considered here is whether it is a happy state of mind or an unhappy state of mind that is something one has to experience for oneself.

In relation to the two states of mind, we naturally have the wish to experience a happy state of mind. Whereas suffering is something that we naturally we do not wish for. We don't voluntarily wish to experience any kind of suffering. Thus whatever we do is in relation to gaining a certain amount of happiness for oneself and avoiding suffering. The great master Shantideva has mentioned in his work, that though beings do not wish to experience suffering, they willingly engage in the causes of suffering; and while beings wish to experience happiness they avoid the causes of happiness as if they were one's own enemies. Essentially what is being pointed to by this great master is whether we experience a state of happiness or suffering is entirely dependent on our state of mind.

To explain in simpler terms, if we wish to experience the positive result of happiness then we have to take the initiative and take the responsibility for creating the appropriate causes for happiness. Likewise if we do not wish to experience any kind of misery or suffering, then we need to take responsibility to avoid creating the causes of suffering for oneself. This is something we need to really take into consideration. Since we have the inclination of wishing to experience happiness and to avoid suffering, we need to take that responsibility ourselves. Of course it is different in relation to children who lack the distinction between the causes of happiness and the causes of suffering. We, who consider ourselves mature people, would definitely know certain things that cause us misery and those conditions which cause us happiness. On a more obscure level there are certain aspects which we may not be fully aware of, such as the conditions that place our mind in turmoil. Most of the unwanted unhappy states of mind that we have are said to be related to a distracted mind.

Now again, that connection may not be obvious to us immediately, but if we really sincerely look within ourselves we will begin to slowly notice that indeed the distracted mind is the cause for the troubles of one's mind. When our mind is distracted with so many different objects of

distraction there is no end to it. It is like vicious cycle; going round in circles with so many different thoughts. That then becomes the cause of an unsettled mind and causes the troubled mind. This needs to be detected within oneself.

The consequences of allowing our mind to follow distractions, constantly allowing our mind to be completely focused outwards, immersed in worldly distractions is the cause of turmoil in one's mind. Regardless of our status, regardless of our wealth, regardless of our external conditions, whether someone is poor or rich, the condition of the distracted mind is shared by all—all are affected. For those ordinary beings who are affected by the distracted mind, the natural consequence is to experience troubles in their life. As the great master Aryadeva has mentioned in one of his works, the poor and destitute experience more physical suffering whereas the suffering of the influential and wealthy is more mental or psychological. These are really good points that we need to consider.

Physical suffering is experienced when deprived of food or drink or clothing and shelter, and those are the immediate sufferings experienced by the poor. However with the wealthy, influential or rich, they may have adequate means to sustain themselves physically but are more prone to experiencing psychological or mental suffering. Thus, despite the conditions, whether poor or rich, all equally have their share of suffering. And so this point is good for us to really consider, so that we don't feel that the suffering we experience is something uncommon or is experienced just by oneself. We hear some asking, 'why do I have to suffer in this way?' In fact if we consider the reality of each and every ordinary being, all have their own share of suffering.

So the various types of suffering, especially in relation to psychological suffering, are related to our distracted mind. The more we allow ourselves to be completely influenced by distractions, the more we are prone to turmoil and psychological disturbance within oneself. Having pointed that out, now the next point is to present a means of how to overcome that. And this is where the technique of meditation becomes relevant. So the technique of meditation is no other than the means to settle down that very busy or distracted mind, to actually completely withdraw from all forms of distraction.

Thus when we engage in the practice of meditation, it allows our mind to be centred and focused, and that becomes a way to bring about a genuine clarity in one's mind. Then, as we are protected from the distractions, our mind becomes naturally clear and more focused and thus the qualities of kindness naturally increase within oneself. That is how one restores a sense of joy and happiness within oneself. This is how we need to relate to the practical benefit of the practice of meditation. The practice of meditation becomes the ultimate means to really restore one's sense of wellbeing within oneself, a sense of joy and genuine sense of happiness within oneself. This is the real remedy rather than having to rely on external remedies such as medication and so forth.

Now there are many, even quite influential and wealthy people who are, I have heard, dependent on antidepressants and so forth. So that is when we can clearly see how the real source of happiness is lacking within them and thus they are dependent on external conditions to bring down their depression and so forth. It may work temporary but does not seem to bring a real solution for their well-being in life. So lest we fall victim to such conditions and our mind becomes completely overwhelmed with depression, we need

to take an initiative to really protect our mind from falling into that state of being completely overwhelmed with problems, anxiety, fears and paranoia and so forth. We can do that by taking the initiative to really apply the meditation technique in our daily life.

We are all prone to experiencing certain difficulties in one's life—that is part of our nature. We are not immune to experiencing difficulties in life. However the very acceptance of difficulties and enduring the hardship, in itself, becomes a means to lighten whatever difficulties and problems one may experience. His Holiness the Dalai Lama attests to saying that willingly accepting one's hardships becomes the best way to actually lighten the difficulty for oneself. If, rather than being completely overwhelmed by the problems we have a certain amount of endurance and acceptance, then that actually becomes a great means for one to cope with it. So the main point is that the ultimate protection comes through the application of the technique of meditation in one's life.

Enduring hardships is a form of patience. The definition of patience is not allowing the mind to be disturbed in an event of suffering or hardship. When one willingly endures hardship then that is applying the antidote, a form of patience. Therefore, if we can understand the virtue of patience, then that actual practice of patience is something which will be really useful for oneself, particular in times of difficulties and hardship. Again as Dalai Lama mentions, the various hardships he faced in his life have become the best way for him to develop endurance and patience within himself. And so he has been able to cope with many hardships in his life. He is actually talking from his own experience as a way to really to give us advice, to point to us that we can also adopt that mentality to cope with our difficulties and problems.

There are many who have confided in me that when they adopt the practice of meditation it brings happiness to their mind. If they neglect the practice of meditation then they seem to lose joy and a sense of happiness. So they are relating something from their own experience and this is very true. If we really want to have the causes of happiness within oneself, the practice of meditation is one of the utmost ways to gain that. These are individuals who would have had various great problems particularly in the earlier part of their life then, having come into contact with the technique of meditation and adopting it, they have seen that a transformation has taken place in their life.

Having explained quite extensively the practice of meditation, I need to keep my word and leave some time for us to do some actual meditation. Remembering that when it comes sincerely, and with one's full attention and heart, then it actually becomes a technique or method to bring about a calm mind. So, as mentioned previously we need to first of all be aware of how our mind is very distracted. We may not normally pay attention to the fact, but when we really consider how our mind works, we come to notice that there are so many forms of distractions that our mind is constantly preoccupied with; constantly going from one thought to the other, from one subject to another, like a vicious circle, going round and round.

Now, if those distractions were to bring some kind of genuine happiness and peace in one's mind, then by all means there would be nothing wrong in being distracted. However it is our experience that allowing the mind to be distracted in that way is what causes disturbances in the

mind. In order to engage in the proper practice of meditation, we need to make the sincere commitment to completely withdraw from all forms of distraction, of thoughts and any kind of object that we have in mind. Then bring our focus inwards, to where we are sitting here, right within ourselves. Then place that focus upon the object of our meditation for our session now, which is our own breath. Then we bring our attention and focus to the breath, maintaining the focus there on the breath itself for the next few minutes and remain 100% focused on the breath itself. So in this way we will spend the next few minutes in meditation. *[Pause for meditation]*

Question: As Geshe-la mentioned that we cannot share our happiness or suffering with others, so how do we really help someone who is suffering?

Answer: Of course it depends on the situation and kind of difficulty or suffering the other is going through. In terms of psychological difficulties or problems like, for example, feeling discouraged or losing a sense of direction in life, losing hope, low self-esteem, then one can, through one's words help them to feel more encouraged. With words of encouragement and inspiration, one can definitely help the other in such way.

As His Holiness Dalai Lama mentions, helping others does not necessarily have to be dependent on having to share wealth or give money and so forth. Even if one is not able to do that one can still help others by befriending them, sharing words of encouragement and so forth. So that is one level. Then of course, one may befriend them, take them out for maybe a meal sometime or give them a nice cup of tea.

Particularly for those who suffer from anxiety or having issues of temperament, anger and so forth, it is advised to give them good, sustaining, nourishing food and that will help them to calm down. Any good gesture like that for someone who is feeling weighed down and troubled, whatever psychological difficulties they may be experiencing, lend them your ear, and take them out if possible. Going to the park or going out for a small walk—those kinds of measures can really help.

Then, of course, if it is a situation where the other is suffering from illness then of course we all know that there are many different ways to help. So depending on the situation there are various ways and methods to help them feel lighter. We may not be able to completely remove their suffering but it definitely will help make a huge difference in them. I think we can sum it up as a real moral support for the other.

Of course, particularly if we have a wish to help the other, the first thing that we need to do is to understand the problem of the other. If you don't have a really good understanding of what kind of problem they are having then there is really no way for us to assume that we can help the other. And also that sense of willingness to help others will not come about naturally if we don't understand their problem. So understanding and relating to that problem and difficulty will give us the initiative to do something which will be worthwhile, and helpful. That sort of wisdom, the compassion and love, concern for them can come from that wisdom of understanding their problem.

Question: If we are subject to our previous karma, then to what extent can we ensure that we will be happy?

Answer: Well, the understanding of karma is not separate the means of how we deliver and accumulate ways to be happy

and to remove suffering. Even though they may not use the word 'karma', every tradition does have a sense of 'if you do certain things that will make you happy, that becomes a cause of happiness'. If you have done certain negative things, then you need to purify that. For example in the Christian tradition you need to do confession. There is such a thing as 'confession' and they consider that confession, which is equivalent to what we call in Buddhism 'purification' will relieve them from that misdeed. For example, when this was a Catholic chapel, that room in the corner, was apparently the confession room. So therefore every tradition has their fundamental belief or the fundamental mechanism of karma: basically adopting good for one's own happiness and discarding evil or negativity which harms oneself, causes of suffering.

Now again with an understanding of karma we can use whatever we experience as a way to actually purify negative karma and so forth. To illustrate, when one has developed the strong conviction and understanding of karma then when difficult circumstances occur, then rather than feeling unhappy about it, one can generate a state of mind with the understanding that 'this suffering that I experience, the discomfort that I am experiencing now does not come about without causes and conditions.. They are actually based on causes and conditions that I have created in the past. Thus it is fitting that I experience this now. In fact experiencing these problems and difficulties now may be a way for me to completely exhaust the results of my negative karma and purify it.

So when one actually willingly takes difficulties upon oneself, one's problems actually become lighter. It does not become such an unwanted thing, and one begins to feel joyful and happy in experiencing problems because of that attitude. Likewise when things go very well then one can also develop the awareness 'it is not such a good thing that I am experiencing all these good things now because my good karma is being used up'. So actually this form of practice in relation to one's attitude is a very profound practice.

In summary, the practice that is presented in the teachings on how to incorporate the understanding of karma in one's life is to change one's attitude from feeling miserable when one is experiencing suffering to feeling a sense of joy; and instead of feeling elated and very excited when things go well, feel a little bit wary and being cautious.

Now the point of the practice is that, if one does not change one's attitude from feeling miserable to feeling a sense of joy when one experiences difficulties and problems in life, then what can easily happen is that anger can arise when one has difficulties. If one has an unwanted experience and really wants to avoid it, then when one experiences the hardship, anger can arise and that is the way for one to create negativity.

Whereas when things go well in one's life, if one becomes overly excited and elated, that then can be a cause for attachment to rise for those conditions that bring about that sense of happiness. Thus to protect oneself from the vices of anger and attachment, if we adopt this attitude then that will protect us. Regardless of what kind of situation we experience, we will be able to protect ourselves from the negativity of anger and attachment. So that is the point of the practice.

To give an illustration, the moment one dislikes a person, anger and aversion towards the person. Whereas the moment one has appreciation, liking that person, one would

notice if one checks that attachment starts to rise for that person. So that is how it actually works.

The unique benefit from the genuine practice of applying the understanding of karma is that it is really a very profound method to protect one from feelings of being either completely overwhelmed by problems and despondent, and also protecting one from the very elated, excited feeling, which is also a way for one to develop attachment. So the point of the practice is to have a total conviction in karma, so as to incorporate whatever experience one has with that understanding of karma. Think that whatever befalls me, whether it is good times or bad times, is entirely in relation to the karma that I have created; it is none else but the karma that determines that experience. So with that understanding, with that conviction in karma then it is said that it will protect one from feeling completely down when difficulties arise, and feeling overly excited and elated when things go relatively well.

As His Holiness Dalai Lama emphasises, again and again emphasises many times, a Christian has a total faith and conviction in God. By entrusting themselves to God, then whatever one experiences is the will of God. If one has happiness that is again the will of God, if one has difficulties and problems, that also is a lesson to be learnt and God is presenting it to oneself. We should therefore not be disheartened or discouraged by that difficulty or hardship. Rather, we should willingly accept it because it is a test from God, a lesson to be learnt. So His Holiness has emphasised again and again that there is a real great benefit to be derived from that wholehearted conviction in God. I really feel that this is really true, a sincere Christian follower having a total conviction in God would definitely have that benefit, which will be a very powerful way for them to deal with situations in life. Likewise from our side, from the Buddhist point of view, having that conviction of karma works in the same way.

Question: How can we distinguish the difference between love and attachment?

Answer: To explain briefly, in the Buddhist context, genuine love and compassion, genuine concern, what we call 'love' is said to be a state of mind or attitude, or emotion that arises in relation to the welfare of others rather than oneself. Basically, a genuine love rises in relation to the needs of the other rather than the needs of oneself. Thus it is based on the wish to benefit the other. When we think of people, such as one's mother, one's parents, one's children so forth, then instinctively there is that notion of 'my mother' or 'my sister' or 'my brother' and 'my children'. Attachment arises mainly because of that self-interest, because it is my brother, sister or mother. If one can develop a sense of love for the other, not because of any self-interest, but rather out of a greater concern for the others' needs beyond one's self then that is love. With our own experience we might relate to how we love something or someone with self-interest, the main focus is not related to oneself but with the focus on the other it becomes a more genuine love.

I agree with you that it is difficult to really distinguish between the two, because we are still very inclined to feel love for one's parents or children and don't question that. So then it is difficult for us to really detect that there is attachment involved in there as well.

So the main point is that if one is extending one's love to the other because there is a self-interest then that love is said to be mixed with self-cherishing mind, cherishing oneself in

disguise of love for the other. If you consider those who are really destitute, who otherwise have no immediate connection to oneself, if one feels that one wants to help them or give them food, shelter and drink, a genuine concern for the other has arisen, and we can see there is a qualitative difference in that love relative to self-cherishing love. So if one investigates it becomes a little clearer in one's mind.

However, that is not to underestimate the benefit that one can bring to the other. Even with some attachment one can still help others. Even love mixed with attachment need not be underestimated, it does have some value. As also prescribed in the teachings, out of attachment one can benefit others even with some attachment, whereas there are no redeeming qualities of anger and no benefit for the other in any way. So when we act with anger there will be no benefit for the other, whereas with attachment there is some benefit. Of course, normally from a worldly perspective when others may give us gifts and nice things and so forth out of attachment, then we claim that as being a sign of love.

So before we conclude for the evening we can take a few moments to again contemplate in the form of meditation, this time the object that we will focus shall be the sound of the mantra to be recited, Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the sound, try to maintain full attention and focus on the sound that we hear, and then maintain that focus for a while even when the sound has stopped.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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