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approach life and our situations. When we have a more positive outlook, a positive way of thinking, it helps us to solve lot of problems that otherwise may seem unsolvable. When we realise that most of the problems we experience are related to our state of mind, then changing our state of mind and attitude helps to release our difficulties and problems.

The one essential point that we need to begin to understand is that the mental distress that we experience is in relation to our mind focusing on a particular object that causes us distress. These distracting objects influence us to have afflictions, or negative states of mind that arise in our mind. We need to grasp that the mind is very much influenced by the object that it is focusing on. It is natural for our mind to focus on an object, because that is the function of the mind. The function of the mind is to cognise, to interact with an object.

This understanding is essential because while the mind's function is to interact and perceive an object, we have a choice as to what objects we want the mind to focus on. The very fact that we are an individual person means that we have a mind; it is not as if we can leave our mind somewhere else. We will always have a mind; it always comes along with us. And the objects our mind focuses on is what leads to our mind being either in a happy, or a distressed state. We need to understand that in meditation we are intentionally choosing an object to focus on that will not cause distress to our mind. By the very virtue of focusing on that object, it helps to soothe and calm down our mind.

Initially we choose an object that helps to calm us down, to settle down our mind. In this case, for our regular meditation practice here, we choose the breath as an object to focus on. The breath is a neutral object, and it is not a distracting object. When we place our focus on our breath, keeping our full attention on the breath, then during that time there is no opportunity for the afflictions, the negative states of mind, to arise within us. To apply this technique to its full extent, we keep our entire focus on it during the meditation, and not allow our mind to focus on any other object during that time. We place it entirely on the chosen object, which for our purpose now is the breath. This is the way that we apply the meditation technique properly, and then we can get the benefit from that.

For the next few minutes let us apply the discipline of this commitment to first of all withdraw our attention from all other objects that we may be preoccupied with, then bring our mind inwards. This inward focus helps to settle us down a bit, then we intentionally place the focus of our mind on the breath itself, based on the natural inflow and outflow of our breathing. So in this way for the next minutes we will do this technique.

*[meditation]*

Question: Geshe-la, you have been teaching the importance of having a clear and positive mind, I have understood from the Christian teachings that one should develop the heart. So, which is more important?

Answer: You'd have to check with them what they mean by heart. In Buddhism, the mind and heart can be used

synonymously; it can mean the same thing. Sometimes even the expression, 'it is deep in one's heart' refers to being deep in thought as well. So it could mean the same thing.

There is an expression in Tibetan that I believe is also in English when talking about loving someone or having affection for someone that is deep from the heart. So that also means 'deep from our mind'—it is same thing.

Question: I have two questions; can our prayers help someone who has passed away and is now in the intermediate state, and is it possible that they go the pure lands for a short period of time to deepen their understanding of the Dharma, and then come back to this world?

Answer: As I have explained in the teachings, our prayers and dedications can definitely have a positive effect for someone who we particularly have a strong connection with. As explained in the teachings, the life span of the intermediate-state beings (*bardo* in Tibetan) is seven days. So every seven days they have a small death and are reborn again in that state if they haven't found a place to be reborn yet. In the first stage of the seven days, our good actions, prayers and dedications can help them if they have not found a good rebirth yet. When they come back again from the small death in their intermediate state, they will again have an opportunity to have a virtuous mind to choose a better rebirth. It is explained that at the most they will have up to seven such lives and deaths; that is 49 days in total. After 49 days they would have definitely found a place to be reborn. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, it is during that 49 days period after someone dies, that many prayers and positive actions are done specifically dedicated for the deceased person, that is because it has a positive effect.

Relating to your next question—if they were to be born in the pure land, whether they may come back again for a period of time, yes that is definitely possible. Particularly for those who have gained some realisations. When they are born in the pure land then they will intentionally come back to the human realm as a way to benefit human beings again.

I have related this story in the past about an American scholar, Glenn Mullen, who studied the Buddhist teachings extensively and translated them. He told me that the first time he did a summer course at one of the Kagyu centres he tried to come to see me but I wasn't around, so he saw me the next time. The reason why he came to visit me, he said, is that I am a student of the late Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey as was he. He said that since we are both disciples of Geshe Ngawang Dhargyey if he didn't take the initiative to come and visit me, then when he died and met Geshe Dhargyey in the pure realms, he would scold him for not visiting me when he had the opportunity. It sounded like he is certain that he will be going to pure land!

I heard that when he first went to India he was a hippie! Apparently being a hippie in those days meant using drugs and having good time and having carefree lifestyle. So when he first arrived in Dharamsala, that was the sort of a lifestyle he was adopting. However, being interested in Buddhism he started going to some classes on

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Buddhism taught by our late teacher Geshe Ngawang Dhargye in the Tibetan library.

Geshe Ngawang Dhargye told me this about Glenn Mullen, that when he first came he seemed spaced out, however after having received some Buddhist lessons he started coming back and started to show some interest then he started to gradually become more and more diligent and became a good student and started giving up all his bad habits. Geshe Dhargye encouraged him to learn, not only the Buddhist philosophies but also Tibetan language and start doing some translation work. He did indeed take up translation work and has since translated a few books, one of them is the Life Story of all the previous Dalai Lamas, which he was working on at the time he met me. He even gave me one or two books that he had already completed.

Geshe Dhargye advised him that translating would give him a good understanding of the teachings. It would be good for him to have a good understanding of the dialectics of the Buddhist philosophy, so he was advised to go the dialectic school in Dharamsala. That's where he went to study. For three years he studied there. He did learn the Tibetan style of debates as well. When Glenn Mullen referred to Geshe Ngawang Dhargye and other great beings, great practitioners passed away and are automatically reborn into the pure land due to their positive virtues, he was making the point that they make a conscious decision to come back to our world, to human existence as a way to further help other beings. The only intention of these great beings, who are endowed with great love and compassion, is to help others, so therefore they would consciously choose to go wherever the help is needed, wherever they can benefit and do the most benefit for others.

A more contemporary recent example of someone who takes the initiative to go to places that are impoverished is the example of Dalai Lama visiting Uluru, and meeting with the local aboriginal community and encouraging and supporting them. He even gave a generous donation to them as well. His very presence there seemed to be very encouraging for them. They were happy and appreciated his visit there. Having gone with altruism, and great love and compassion, and concern for the people there, his presence definitely had a positive effect.

I emphasise regularly that the qualities that contribute to making others happy and joyful are the qualities of love and compassion. So taking the initiative to develop love and compassion becomes the best way to befriend others and to help them.

During one of his talks there, the Dalai Lama also made a comment in relation to beauty, that there is external beauty and internal beauty, but what is most important is the internal beauty. The inner beauty he was referring to is love and compassion. Inner beauty is much more important than just the fleeting beauty of external appearances. He was giving very profound advice, applicable also to the younger generation, to pay heed to developing love and compassion and not just to run after the physical appearances of others. Make sure you are befriend someone who has love and compassion in their heart as well. At the end of the day, what helps us at

a time of distress and difficulty is someone who has love and compassion in their heart. Their beauty and their nice appearances will not help anyone at any time, but the love and compassion within their mind can help others. This is the most important thing. The advice the Dalai Lama was giving is profound, not something to be taken lightly.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, let us just take the opportunity to again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object that you can focus on is the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. So as we hear the chant, we try to keep our entire focus on the sound itself and then when the recitation subsides, just maintain that awareness of vacuity of that sound and any blissful feeling we have. Just to focus on that for a few moments.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo  
Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
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