



DHARMA FOR DAILY LIFE

BY VENERABLE GESHE DOGA



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Foreword

One feature that distinguishes Ven Geshe Doga's Wednesday night teachings is his wonderful advice regarding spiritual development, meditation and different areas of daily life, which everybody finds infinitely useful, and I thought it would be nice to compile some of it into a booklet.

Of course the material in the different chapters is by no means a comprehensive teaching on the respective subjects, but is a compilation of some of the points Geshe-la frequently stresses, or occasional points that came up during teaching and question and answer time.

I take of course full responsibility for the choice of the material and for any grammatical or spelling errors that might still be present.

Meditation

Buddha Nature

It is important to think about whether we have the potential to attain enlightenment or not. When we contemplate this, we should arrive at the conclusion that we are definitely able to attain enlightenment, for the reason that we have buddha nature.

Our mind has the potential to be fully purified of all mental stains. Without going into a great philosophical explanation we can say that this potential for complete purification is our buddha nature, and because of it we can generate bodhicitta and become enlightened. Our mind has the potential to be purified of all mental stains because the basic nature of the mind is unstained and clear.

Firstly, what is mind? Mind is non-physical. It does not have colour, shape, taste, smell, sound, or a tactile quality. Its basic nature is clear. Because of this basic clear nature, it has the potential to reflect objects, or arise in the aspect of objects.

If we investigate, we can experience this for ourselves. If, while the mind is in a calm, non-conceptual state in which we are not thinking about anything, a single mental image appears to the mind, at this moment, the mind has reflected the object or has arisen in the aspect of that particular object. This is what the mind does – it reflects objects, and it can do this because its basic nature is clear, like glass.

From our own experience, we can sometimes feel

the mind abiding in its basic nature. Then, while we are viewing our environment through this basic mind, it seems as if some other type of adventitious, disturbing mental attitude will come between our basic mind and our environment.

The basic, clear mind is what we refer to as the fundamental mind. It has a natural purity that it is free from any type of stain. Everyone's mind has this natural purity, but adventitiously this purity is obscured by the various disturbing emotions and disturbing thoughts. It is like with clouds in the sky, or dirt in water. Clouds temporarily obscure the sky, but they are not of one nature with the sky. While the clouds temporarily obscure the sky, they are not solidly established as being one with it. They come and go.

In the same way, disturbing thoughts and the harmful emotions such as attachment, anger, pride, jealousy, or competitiveness temporarily obscure the natural purity of the basic mind, but they are not of one nature with this basic mind. This means that we do not exist as one with the afflictions.

It is the same with dirt in water. Initially, the water is clean-clear, but if dirt falls into it, the clarity of the water is temporarily obscured. The dirt is not of one nature with the water, but is a separate object from the water, and only temporarily obscures its clarity. Once the dirt has separated from the water, the water returns to being clean-clear. These examples shows how our disturbing thoughts and emotions are not of one nature with our basic buddha nature, but only

temporarily obscure it. The mental stains only temporarily obscure our buddha nature, and are not a fixed feature in our mind.

Why Meditate?

The Union of Inner and Outer Happiness

Everybody wants to have happiness, and happiness is twofold. There is outer happiness, and there is inner happiness. To have outer happiness it is important to look well after one's body, and to have inner happiness it is important to look well after one's mind.

Out of the two, inner happiness is the predominant factor that decides whether one has a happy life experience or not. We all know from experience that one can have tons of outer happiness without actually being happy, while one can have a total lack of outer happiness and yet still be happy as long as one has inner happiness.

Therefore it is important that we treat our mind well. Of course, external conditions are also needed for happiness, but the primary cause for happiness is the mind. To protect the mind, we need to meditate. Without meditation, it is not possible to protect the mind. Meditation means training the mind well in virtue, so that we are able to refrain from doing actions that we know will harm the mind. We should be able to act in accordance with our wisdom. First we must develop the wisdom that understands what is harmful to the mind and what is beneficial, by focusing the mind inwards and analysing which mental

states give happiness, and which mental states give suffering, and then we have to put that wisdom to use and refrain from actions that we recognise as harmful.

Changing the Mind

The purpose of meditation is to prevent harmful actions of body, speech and mind so that we can achieve peace and happiness. The happiness we are talking about here is not some transitory type of happiness, but the peace and happiness that is the truth of cessation – the total pacification of the mental afflictions, including their seeds.

To achieve that, we have to purify the mind of the mental states that make it heavy, unwieldy and unworkable. Through this process of purification the mind becomes flexible and serviceable. We then also gain control over our body and speech, because it is our mind that determines our actions of body and speech.

If we have many mental afflictions, we need to gradually reduce them to just a few. If we have strong afflictions we need to gradually make them weaker. In this way, our mind will naturally abide internally, enabling us to progress along the path and eventually eradicate completely the mental afflictions and their seeds.

Normally the underlying motivation for all our actions is to attain every possible happiness and eliminate any type of suffering. Since all our actions of this life

have been carried out with this motivation of self-interest, we should by now have some mental satisfaction and happiness to show for our efforts.

For example, many people work throughout their lives with the idea that, when they retire, they will have enough money to relax. However, while they have accumulated the external conditions to physically relax, they may find that they have neglected the internal conditions that facilitate a happy, peaceful mind and inner mental satisfaction. If they were to examine their situation closely, they would conclude that they are in this position due to an unsubdued mind.

What happens in our mind is much more important than what happens externally. It is important to withdraw the mind from the 'busy-ness' and stress of life and focus it internally, making it happy and pliable.

The significance of our internal mental state becomes obvious if we live alone. There is no-one to cause us problems, yet we find we are unhappy. This proves that we are missing a positive internal influence to facilitate our happiness.

The basis of our actions should be the motivation to benefit others. With this motivation, even if we engage in worldly actions, those actions become beneficial for others. If we then feel that our Dharma practice has been of benefit, this will in turn inspire us to practise more Dharma. In this way, we can carry the Dharma into worldly life. It is good to think about the connection between these two sides of our lives.

Many thoughts populate our mind, causing it to become restless and agitated. We tend to believe these thoughts, whether they are true or not. Such thoughts make us susceptible to anger. They also cause other confused mental states that lead us to lose our faith in the Dharma, or our aspiration to practise the Dharma, or our self-confidence.

One train of thought we might set in motion contains countless associated thoughts, each accompanied by ignorance, which makes the mind darker. Our mind becomes filled with more and more conceptual thoughts until we feel overwhelmed and completely unhappy.

Therefore, we first need to identify the most prevalent affliction in our mind, and meditate on its specific antidote. In this way, we can progressively counteract all the mental afflictions.

Effort is required in overcoming mental afflictions. Although the Buddha has all the realisations, and all the bodhisattvas have high realisations, those realisations cannot be transferred to our mental continuum.

The buddhas and bodhisattvas teach us the Dharma, but it is up to us to put that Dharma into practice, as it has been explained to us. Because the mind is a creature of habit, it will adapt to whatever it is trained in.

Making the Mind Stable and Clear

We all hold onto certain thoughts that make the mind

unhappy. If our being unhappy were to make others happy, it might be beneficial. However, there is no benefit to ourselves or others. Rather, our mind becomes depressed, and we feel powerless, weak, and unable to act.

Therefore, we need to subdue unsuitable thoughts and bring the mind to a more peaceful state. To do this, we focus the mind single-pointedly on one virtuous object and make the determination not to let the mind fall under the control of negative states, recalling the disadvantages of these negative mental states and how they cause us suffering and problems.

If a person sincerely practises overcoming the mental afflictions by analysing whether the way they apprehend reality is concordant with reality, or whether there is a discrepancy between what actually exists and what an affliction will try to make them believe exists, that person will be able to take away the power of the afflictions and subdue the mind.

Certain conditions are required to make the mind stable and clear. A multitude of mental images can generate attachment to objects that appear pleasant and desirable, and anger towards objects that appear undesirable. Often, external objects will appear to promise happiness. We feel that if we have these objects, we will be happy. However, this type of happiness depends on the condition of the external object, and so is beyond our control. It is unreliable and unstable.

The other type of happiness where, instead of engag-

ing external objects with the mind we focus the mind inward and pacify conceptual thoughts, is true inner happiness that does not depend on contact with the external object. Therefore, it is happiness that is under our control.

Revitalising the Body

Making the mind clear will also have a positive effect on the body, energising and refreshing it.

When the mind is not relaxed and clear, it makes us feel physically tired and we have less aspiration to do things. There are many physical diseases and sicknesses that occur because of a restless, unhealthy mind. When the mind is clear, it energises us physically and we can do more.

How to Meditate

The Seven-point Posture

To meditate, you should sit in a relaxed manner in the seven-point Vairocana posture.

The Dhyani Buddha Vairocana is the embodiment of the purified, enlightened aggregate of form. Sitting in the Vairocana posture leaves an imprint on your mind to attain the enlightened body of a buddha in the future. It also greatly facilitates the generation of single-pointed concentration, and becomes particularly important in tantra.

However, since it is also important that we are comfortable when we meditate, it is not necessary to sit strictly in the seven-point Vairocana posture.

The seven points of the posture are as follows:

First, sit in the full lotus posture. If you cannot do this because it is too difficult, you can sit in the half-lotus posture. There are many reasons why it is beneficial to sit in this vajra position. First, the bliss of mental and physical pliancy arises more easily. Also, if we are meditating for long periods, we will not tire as easily, and we will be able to sit for longer. Further, if others see us meditating in the vajra position, our body will look beautiful and settled, leaving a good impression in their minds.

Another reason is that all the arhats and buddhas sit in the full vajra position when they meditate.

Second, your hands should be placed at your navel in the mudra of meditative equipoise, with the right hand on top of the left, and the two thumbs touching each other. This mudra becomes important when practising the completion state of highest yoga tantra. The triangle formed by the two hands symbolises the three doors to liberation, with the space between symbolising the truth body of the Buddha.

Third, you need to sit straight, because if the body is upright the psychic energy channels within it will also be straight. This facilitates the coming and going of the psychic energies in these channels, which in turn facilitates having a clear and stable meditation. Holding a straight posture also helps your mind stay clear and helps you avoid drowsiness and sleep.

Your body should not be tense. Sometimes, we tend to sit with a tense body as if we were pressing inwards.

That is not conducive to meditation. We should sit upright but relaxed, without tensing the body. At the same time, we should not be so relaxed that the body becomes sluggish, because this is also not conducive.

The elbows should not be pressed against the body, but held loosely to allow air to flow between them and the body.

Fourth, your mouth should be closed comfortably, not clenched shut or open. This facilitates a natural flow of breath. The tip of your tongue is placed on the upper palate behind the upper front teeth. This prevents the mouth from drying out – or when you are in deep equipoise, from saliva collecting and dribbling out your mouth!

Fifth, your head should be inclined slightly forward. This has a calming influence on the subtle energies in the head and helps prevent mental excitement and distraction.

Sixth, your eyes should be open and your gaze directed at the tip of your nose. It is recommended to have the eyes partly open, not wide open and staring at some object, but rather half-closed with the head tilted forward a little.

Staring at an object is not going to generate concentration, because we generate concentration on the basis of mental consciousness, and not on the basis of the sense consciousnesses. We meditate with our mental consciousness, and when our mental consciousness becomes engaged in meditation, our sense consciousnesses are disengaged.

Having the eyes fully open can cause mental excitement. If having the eyes open does not cause mental excitement, then there is no fault, but generally the advice is not to have them fully open. Likewise, the reason for not closing the eyes completely is to avoid generating mental sinking. When we close our eyes, a certain darkness is naturally generated within the mind.

For those two reasons it is said to have the eyes half-open. But if it does not harm your meditation to have them closed, you can, or you can slowly try to half-open your eyes as your meditation develops over time. Seventh, you should have shoulders level, and not have one higher than the other.

Taming the Mind

A crazed elephant can be tamed with a rope, hook and pillar. It is tied to the pillar with the rope, and directed with the hook.

Similarly, our crazed mind is subdued with the rope of mindfulness, the hook or introspection, and the pillar of the virtuous meditation object. First the mind needs to be tied to the pillar of the meditation object with the rope of mindfulness, and then we use the hook of mental introspection to direct the mind back to the virtuous object if it has strayed, or adjust our focus when we find the mind has become unclear.

Through this approach, we will not experience mental wandering and distraction, and all other virtuous practices will arise naturally.

The Meditation Object

In general anything can be an object of meditation, but it should not be something that generates afflictions in the mind, but a virtuous object.

One can select particular objects to counteract particular afflictions, such as meditating on love and compassion to counteract anger, on impurity to counteract attachment, on the twelve links of dependent origination to counteract ignorance, on the different categories of knowledge to counteract pride, and on the coming and going of the breath to counteract the over conceptualising mind.

When placing the mind on the object you do not place it on the actual external object, but on the reflection of that object in the mind.

Not Too Tight, Not Too Relaxed

To meditate successfully, ensure that your mind is neither too tight nor too relaxed, because both create problems.

If the mind is too tight, it will cause mental and physical problems. The energies within the body will become blocked. Some people start hearing voices during meditation, or feel they are being prodded. These problems occur not because of the meditation, but because of not meditating properly. The mind has not been trained in the correct meditation method from the beginning.

A mind that is too relaxed will cause other problems, such as mental sinking, lack of clarity, or darkness.

When we say that the mind should be relaxed during meditation, we do not mean too relaxed. We have to tune the mind correctly so that we will have fewer obstacles.

This fine-tuning can only be achieved through experience. Finding the middle ground between being too relaxed and too tight is the secret instruction for avoiding mental and physical difficulties during our meditation.

If we follow this instruction, we will have fewer obstacles and our mind will be lighter. Problems occur when the mind is inflexible, too heavy, and so forth.

We should not let the mind wander off to external objects, whether they be pleasant or unpleasant. Normally, when we encounter pleasant objects, they generate attachment and when we encounter unpleasant objects, they generate aversion and anger.

For example, it can easily happen while we are meditating that we will hear certain sounds we may be attached to, such as music. As soon as we hear the music, the mind becomes distracted because it immediately starts engaging with the music. In no time, the mind has wandered off to an external object. We should try to avoid this.

Some people say it is impossible to stop the mind wandering off to attractive objects, because they feel it is in the nature of their mind to act in such a way. However, setting an artificial boundary by saying: “I can’t stop it because it is the nature of my mind to act in such a way” prevents the generation of pure,

wholesome thoughts. We should not set such an artificial boundary but be aware that the mind is a creature of habit that can be conditioned.

Mental Excitement and Mental Sinking

The two main obstructions to the attainment of calm abiding are mental excitement and mental sinking. Calm abiding must be endowed with both single-pointed abiding of the mind which is disrupted by mental excitement, and clarity which is prevented by mental sinking. First, we overcome mental excitement then mental sinking because they are overcome sequentially.

Mental excitement are thoughts belonging to the family of 'attachment'. Initially one has to overcome coarse mental excitement which happens when the mind actually strays away from the object. After we have overcome coarse mental excitement and have reached the point where the mind can abide single-pointedly internally, subtle excitement can still disrupt the meditation without taking the mind completely away from the object.

After having overcome subtle mental excitement we have to deal with mental sinking – first coarse, then subtle. We need to have clarity with intensity, and this will not come about if we do not overcome mental sinking. But this only happens in the more advanced stages of meditation.

Mindfulness and Introspection

To overcome the faults of mental sinking and mental excitement we need to rely on the two conducive conditions for calm-abiding – mindfulness and introspection.

Mindfulness is the mental factor that does not forget the meditation object. It continually keeps the object in mind. Introspection is the mental factor that checks up on the rest of the mind – how it is meditating, whether it is still holding onto the object correctly or not, and so forth.

When you meditate, you should maintain awareness of mental excitement and mental sinking as the two adverse conditions that obstruct the attainment of calm abiding, and of mindfulness and introspection as the two conducive conditions that facilitate the generation of calm abiding.

Antidotes to Mental Excitement and Sinking

To overcome mental sinking while meditating on the visualisation of a Buddha statue, for example, we should visualise the object as having a certain brightness.

Because mental sinking is a mind that is in some way depressed, we need to build it up again. This is done by thinking about the qualities of the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, buddha-nature, and so forth.

We can counteract feeling down about ourself by thinking about our good qualities and the qualities of our mind. In such a way we apply the principle that is

taught for overcoming mental sinking to other areas of our life.

Mental excitement is in the nature of attachment, and therefore is generated by exaggerating the desirable qualities of an object, thinking of it as pure, happiness, permanent, and having a self. Therefore, to counteract mental excitement, we should analyse the undesirable qualities of the object such as its impure and suffering nature, and meditate on its impermanence. A strong awareness of these topics helps to cut off mental excitement. Training in contentment also counteracts mental excitement.

We need to initially introduce the mind to the meditation object. When we have visualised the object in the prescribed way, we use mindfulness to keep our mental focus on the object. At the same time, while we keep the object stably in mind with mindfulness, another part of the mind investigates whether our mindfulness is holding onto the object properly, or whether there is some disturbance or mental wandering. If we find that there is some mental wandering we have to again focus the mind completely on the focal object.

Engaging in mental introspection while keeping the mind on the object with mindfulness is a good method for beginners because it strengthens their mindfulness. While the mind is placed on the object with mindfulness, we simultaneously investigate our meditation with another part of the mind which ascertains how mindfulness is holding on to the object –

whether there is mental distraction, whether the mind has already partially wandered from the object, or whether the mind is about to wander away from the object.

Doing such mental introspection when we meditate single-pointedly on the object with mindfulness greatly facilitates our single-pointed focus. It also helps prevent the mind from wandering away from the object. If we do not perform this mental introspection the mind usually wanders away from the object and we will not be aware of it until after it has happened. But then it is too late.

Focusing on the Breath

The Breath and the Mind

The mind and the breath have a close mutual relationship. The mind is like a person with eyes but without legs: it can see an object but it cannot go to the object by itself. The breath is like a blind person with legs. By themselves they are constrained, but if they work together as a team, they complement each other.

If we are feeling so uptight that there is no proper flow of the breath and we cannot breathe properly, then this can cause strong mental disturbances that may lead to chronic mental imbalance.

When we meditate properly on the coming and going of the breath, the erratic breathing that increases the conceptualising mind becomes pacified, and with it the conceptualising mind itself. Our consciousness

can then abide calmly in an internal state.

The placement of the mind on the coming and going of the breath should be done in a gentle yet single-pointed manner. The breathing should not be forced, but should flow naturally as we place the mind vividly yet lightly on the natural flow, letting the mind become one with the breath.

When we meditate, we should not block the breath or hold it, because obstructing the breathing obstructs the psychic nervous system and this can cause pain. To counteract this it is sometimes good to do deep exhalations that start deep in the abdomen and imagine that we are exhaling out all of our tensions and obstructions.

Generally, we have many types of conceptual thoughts, both harmful and positive. Subduing the conceptualising mind means subduing the harmful conceptual thoughts.

Each mental affliction has its own particular antidote and meditating on the coming and going of the breath is the best antidote to the over-conceptualising mind. It is an easy meditation in which we do not need to think too much. We can just sit down and place the mind on the coming and going of the breath. Also, because the breath does not have any specific colour or shape, placing the mind on it brings the mind into a state of equanimity.

Subduing the over-conceptualising mind implicitly pacifies anger and attachment as well, so the meditation on the coming and going of the breath has a

broad effect. You can achieve single-pointed concentration with this meditation, and when you have become proficient in it, you can move on to meditations that involve greater mental activity.

Laying the Proper Foundation

It is important to train the mind correctly in single-pointedness from the outset. This means it is better to have many short sessions of good quality, where the mind abides single-pointedly on the object, rather than to have one long session where we are engaged in a constant struggle to bring the mind back to the object after it has wandered off.

The short session can just be a few minutes because for beginners it is difficult to keep the mind on the object for long. Sitting for a long time while constantly retrieving the wandering mind does not lay a good foundation for meditation practice because the mind gets accustomed to the process of wandering off and having to be recalled. Later on, after you have meditated for some years, this is how the mind will function.

Rather than setting up this type of mental habit, it is much better to set up a mental habit in which the mind abides clearly and vividly on the object. Even if it is just for a short time, at least it sets up the correct mental habit. Then, slowly, through practice, the length of time we are able to concentrate clearly will naturally increase.

Thus, the importance lies in having a meditation of good quality and not in the length of time.

How to Focus on the Breath

It is a common experience that during the course of a day, many different mental states arise that disturb the mind. Different objects randomly appearing to the mind have the effect of disturbing it.

To stop these mental images, first sit in a relaxed and comfortable posture – preferably the seven-point meditation posture with which you are all familiar. On the basis of sitting properly, adjust your mind as it is important to have a relaxed and clear mind but without letting it be sluggish. Then turn the mind inwards and place it in an empty state of no-thought. To achieve this, turn the mind very gently inward and do not let it engage external objects.

After having fully collected the mind internally, stay relaxed in that internal state of no-thought, not letting the mind be occupied by any particular object. Then place the mind gently, yet vividly and single-pointedly, on the coming and going of the breath, letting it become one with the breath.

The placement of the mind on the breath should not be done in a dualistic manner, as if you are looking at a separate object. Rather, you place the mind single-pointedly within the breathing, letting it merge with the breathing. This is done gently, yet with a vivid focus. If you are able to hold this focus single-pointedly for a few minutes, you will gain mental and physical respite.

This single-pointed placement of the mind is concentration. Initially it might last only a short time, perhaps a couple of minutes, and then the mind will again dis-

tracted by disturbing thoughts. But, by practising steadily and continuously, over time this period will extend further and further.

However, it is also important that we practise this meditation gently, and not be grasping and greedy.

We should tune the mind correctly – not too tight, but also not too relaxed. When placing the mind on the coming and going of the breath, find a balance between not holding on too tightly and not being too relaxed. Find the correct middle way where you hold onto the object in just the right way.

By doing this meditation, we can experience a specific type of happiness that only arises from meditation. We can observe the difference it makes to our body if we relax mentally. As long as the mind is uptight, the psychic channels within the body will be tight, and the gross physical body will also be hard and tense. But by loosening the mind, the psychic channels also become more loose and relaxed, and the coarse physical body becomes less tense.

This is one benefit we get from meditating on the coming and going of the breath – the mind becomes more relaxed which in turn relaxes the psychic channels, which in turn relaxes the coarse physical body. Then, for example, there is less danger that we will become physically sick.

Otherwise, if the body is tense and uptight, we will feel physically unwell and will become sick more easily. If the mind is tied up in knots and too tense that will also express itself physically.

By meditating on the coming and going of the breath we can relax the mind. We can train the mind so that, slowly, over time, we will gain an experience of mental relaxation. We can all experience this mental feeling of wellness that arises from mental relaxation.

Becoming familiar with this meditation helps us to not be easily agitated by petty external problems. Sometimes small external conditions can induce a multitude of thought sequences that disturb the mind. But by practising this meditation, we can learn not to be disturbed by such conditions.

Combining Breathing Meditation with Visualisation

Visualise as you breathe out that all your mental afflictions, ignorance, attachment, anger, all non-virtuous karmas, obscurations, sicknesses and so forth are expelled in the form of black light.

Then, as you breathe in, visualise that you are breathing in the blessings of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas in the form of white light, which completely fills your body-mind continuum.

If you combine these visualisations with the coming and going of the breath, your meditation becomes a unique Buddhist breathing meditation. Otherwise, meditating on the mere coming and going of the breath is not a specific a Buddhist meditation, but one that we can also find in other traditions.

Importance of Daily Meditation

Joyous Effort

You should have at least one short meditation session every day. As with all activities the success of mediation practice is directly related to enthusiastic effort.

Sometimes we tend to throw in the towel if something does not work instantly, and meditation is like any other activity. Initially it will be difficult. However, by starting with small steps, trying to meditate regularly for short periods of time, it will become easier, and our focus will become clearer and more stable.

The great Lama Tsong Khapa said, “A sour piece of fruit will not become edible by sprinkling a little bit of sugar here and there. We need to slowly cover all the fruit by sprinkling sugar over it until the whole surface is covered. Then we can eat it.”

The point is that we need to practise meditation regularly over a long period of time. As with any activity, success is directly related to persistence, endurance and enthusiasm.

Reducing Harmful Thoughts

Because it has been under the control of mental afflictions for such a long time, our mental continuum is filled with many different types of afflictions. That is why purifying those afflictions and removing them from the continuum takes a long time.

We need to persist and investigate the causes of our

unhappiness, and then gently counteract them. Often the mind is overcome by disturbing thoughts and ideas that make us unhappy and cause us to frown and be angry all day long. First the mind makes up these fantasies, and then it believes in the truth of its own projections. These projections, even though they are fictitious, nonetheless, do actually disturb the mind.

Reducing disturbing conceptual processes through daily meditation practice has a beneficial effect.

Is it better to experience mental happiness or mental unhappiness? If we prefer to be happy, we must engage in a method that will bring that about, which is where meditation is so important. By focusing the mind single-pointedly on a meditation object other thoughts subside.

Of course this process does not bring overnight results. If someone has led a wild life they will not change immediately. However, through consistent effort, they can become more subdued and well-behaved. It is the same with the mind. If the mind has been ruled by disturbing thoughts for a long time, it will be very difficult to free it immediately from the dominance of those thoughts. That only happens through continual practice, slowly, over time.

Creating Balance

If you practise meditation daily, over time the mind will become calm. It will learn to rest in a state of equipoise. This will have a balancing effect on the

physical elements that make up your body. A disturbed mind disturbs the particles that make up the elements in the body, bringing them into imbalance and disarray and causing physical discomfort. Meditating not only calms the mind, but it also balances the physical elements.

We can also adjust our meditation according to the specific affliction we wish to counteract. By analysing our mind we can recognise the disturbing mental state that is causing our unhappiness. Then we can choose the appropriate meditation that is the antidote. By practising like this we can counteract our disturbing mental states and generate faith and conviction in meditation.

It will be difficult to see the qualities of meditation if we do not practise meditation properly.

Benefiting Self and Others

A calm, peaceful and happy mind obviously benefits each of us personally. But it also benefits others if, instead of being agitated and disturbed, we treat those around us in a happy, kind manner. By meditating and making the mind calmer, happier and more peaceful, you can avoid agitation and treat those around us in a cheerful, kind manner. That benefit will also be recognised by your partner and friends.

If, however, you just sit there cross-legged with your eyes downcast for some time, and then get up and start bickering with others, they will not see that meditation practice as having been particularly useful.

Developing Wisdom

The mind is so accustomed to following the objects of the mental afflictions that when we place the mind on a virtuous object it finds it difficult to abide upon it.

For our meditation practice to be successful, it is important to see which objects make the mind happier. Is the mind happier when it abides on a virtuous object, or is it happier when it is preoccupied with the objects of the afflictions? Then we need to train the mind slowly, focusing and abiding on virtuous objects.

Initially, this has to be done in a leisurely manner. We need to take it easy, but by doing this process repeatedly, the mind becomes accustomed to this habit of abiding on a virtuous object.

In this way, we develop the wisdom that can distinguish between right and wrong, between beneficial and harmful. If we investigate deeply, we will recognise that certain experiences, while providing some superficial happiness, deep down may cause us further suffering. In such situations we have to look deeply and closely at what is happening in the mind.

It's important to meditate regularly, because in the same way that a person needs boundaries for what to do and what not to do, the mind also needs boundaries. If we do not give the mind boundaries it will go wild.

Getting Our Priorities Straight

For a mind that lacks happiness, training the mind will enable it to begin experiencing happiness. Think

carefully about the way we are eager to repeat an action that we perceive as giving us some kind of happiness. A mind that was unclear can become clearer and more mindful.

We also need to be mindful. As we said earlier, our practice has to be continual. Rarely do we lack the time or energy to go out and have fun. Even if we have been working all day, we still easily find the energy in the evening to go to a movie, or do other activities that waste our time and money. But when it comes to meditating, we easily feel too tired or too busy, and have more important things that need to be done first. This is not very skilful.

We do not need to stop going to work. Because we need money to live going to work is indispensable. Similarly, to attain happiness, we need to work with the mind, which we do with meditation. Meditation is indispensable. We should consider this very carefully and make time for meditation.

Despite having good external conditions we are always complaining about being unhappy. What is missing in our life? Where is our effort lacking? This is something we should consider carefully. Although your lives are very busy, it is essential to make some time for meditation every day. Set aside at least five minutes every day for meditation. Do not let that time slip by but make use of it.

Some people may be in a situation where, initially, when they were not practising the Dharma, they were unhappy. Then, when they started to practise the

Dharma, their mind improved and they became happier. However, they may have subsequently become distracted by other types of happiness and let their Dharma practice and meditation slip with the consequence that their mind again degenerated. Therefore it is important to continue to meditate regularly, even when our meditation bears some fruit.

By meditating regularly, you will not only attain a more single-pointed mind, but you will also be able to protect the qualities you have already developed. This is very important, because the more qualities you have, the fewer the mental afflictions! It is important to analyse and identify which parts of the mind give us happiness and which parts of the mind disturb us. When we do that, we will find that our good mental qualities have a beneficial influence – they facilitate a tranquil and calm mind. On the other hand, the more faults we have, the more disturbed will be our mind. It is important that we protect our good qualities from degenerating.

If we take it slowly, step-by-step, according to our present ability, and then increase the action according to our increasing ability, it will become a natural process where the mind is also happy with what we are doing, and is peaceful, spacious and relaxed. To benefit from meditation practice, we need to practise regularly over a long period of time. We will not gain any benefit by meditating only for a few times, or even just for a few years.

Mantras

Mantra is a Sanskrit word made up of two syllables, *man* and *tra*. *Man* comes from *mana*, which means 'mind' and *tra* means to 'liberate or protect'. So a mantra protects and rescues the mind from suffering and ordinary appearance.

It is called secret mantra because for our practice to be successful, we must keep it to ourself.

There are two types of mantra – the definitive mantra and the interpretive mantra.

The interpretive mantra is what is commonly referred to as the actual words of the mantra. The definitive Perfection of Wisdom mantra is the wisdom directly realising emptiness. That is why it is referred to as the highest mantra.

This does not mean that we do not recite the other mantras as well. For example, the definitive mantra of Om mani padme hum is the omniscient wisdom knowledge of Chenresig. In order to attain the omniscient wisdom knowledge of Chenresig (the definitive mantra) one recites the interpretive mantra of Om mani padme hum. If we recite it with that in mind it becomes very effective. It is the same for other mantras.

Mantra and Faith

The sutras explain that even if we recite a mantra incorrectly, if we do this with strong faith in our teacher we can attain what are called common realisations.

There is a story of a bikkhu and his mother. It is the tradition that every year the ordained community observes the rains retreat. This lasts one-and-a-half or three months and during which the monks and nuns cannot go into the towns and villages.

One year during a famine, this monk did not see his mother for a long time and started to worry, “Maybe she has already died”. But when he went to look for her, he found her looking more vibrant and bright than before the famine. The reason was that she had received the lineage of a mantra that could turn stones into food. Although she was reciting the mantra wrongly, saying “bahli bahli” instead of “tsali tsali”, because of her strong faith she could still transform stones into food. However, when she tried the correct version after being told by her son that she had been reciting the mantra wrongly, she could not do it.

There is another story of someone who, upon requesting a teaching, was told by the teacher to go away. But the student thought that he had received a special mantra, and repeated the words over and over again! Because of his pure faith, he attained some common realisations, such as being able to pacify certain harms and so forth, with the mantra.

So, even if the teacher is not a fully qualified teacher, if you have fully qualified faith, there will be some benefit from the recitation of the mantra.

Different Mantras

There are different types of mantras, for example, to increase wealth, to pacify anger and to increase wisdom. Because the following mantras are quite short, one can recite them purely.

Chenresig

Chenresig Mantra: Om Mani Padme Hum

Chenresig is the embodiment of the compassion of all the buddhas, and to recite his mantra has innumerable benefits.

Om is made out of the three letters ‘ah’, ‘oh’ and ‘ma’, which together become ‘om’, and symbolise the enlightened body, speech and mind of Chenresig.

Mani is Sanskrit and means jewel. Between his two upper hands, Four-Armed Chenresig holds a jewel that symbolises the unification of method and wisdom. His lower right hand holds a crystal mala and the lower left hand a flower. The mala symbolises method and the flower symbolises wisdom.

Padme means lotus, here meaning “that which has a lotus”, which is a reference to Chenresig.

Hum symbolises the enlightened mind of Chenresig.

If we recite this mantra while meditating on the lama as Chenresig or that our mind is one with the mind of Chenresig, it has incredible benefit and will calm the mind. It is also beneficial for those with eye problems.

Manjushri

Manjushri Mantra: Om Ah Ra Pa Tsa Na Dhi

Making requests to Manjushri and reciting his mantra greatly increases one's wisdom.

This should be done on the basis of viewing one's teacher as Manjushri. It is usually recommended to the young monks in the monasteries to recite Manjushri's mantra in the morning, hanging on for as long as possible in one breath to a repetition of dhi dhi dhi at the end. This greatly purifies one's speech and increases wisdom.

Tara

Tara Mantra: Om Tare Tuttare Ture Svaha

There are eight dangers over which the Tara mantra provides protection, such as the dangers of water, fire and weapons. There is a story regarding each of these fears. In each, Tara was requested to liberate some person or other.

If you are experiencing the danger of fire, this danger will be subdued by single-pointedly requesting Tara's protection. Likewise, if you are in danger from wild animals, such as snakes, by single-pointedly making a request to Tara, the danger from that animal will be pacified.

The eight dangers can also be related to the different afflictive delusions – the dangers of attachment, anger, jealousy, greed, ignorance, wrong doubt and so forth.

Shakymuni Buddha

Shakyamuni Buddha Mantra: Tayatha Om Muni Muni
Maha Munaye Svaha

After having collected the mind internally, those who have faith in Shakyamuni Buddha can visualise the Buddha above their crown, and at his heart the seed syllable hum surrounded by the syllables of the mantra. Then while reciting the mantra you visualise white light rays and nectar flowing down from the seed syllables, entering your continuum, purifying your obscurations and blessing you.

This meditation is very useful when the mind is disturbed. It is like a refreshing shower that cools down the agitated mind. It makes the mind happy and relaxed again.

The Perfection of Wisdom Mantra: Tayatha Gate
Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha

The Perfection of Wisdom mantra is regarded as the supreme mantra, because there is nothing better than the wisdom realising emptiness to liberate oneself from suffering.

Medicine Buddha

Medicine Buddha short mantra: Tayatha Om
Bekanze Bekanze Maha Bekanze (Bekanze) Radza
Samugate Svaha

Medicine Buddha long mantra: Om Namō Bagawate
Bekanze Guru Bendurya Braba Razaya Tatagataya
Arhate Samyaksam Buddhaya Tayata Om Bekanze
Bekanze Maha Bekanze (Bekanze) Radza Samu-
gate Svaha

The Importance of the Motivation

We may become too concerned about the number of mantras we recite rather than about the quality of the actual recitation.

There was once a group of four people doing a refuge retreat together and three of them quickly accumulated the required one hundred thousand refuge practices. When they asked the fourth person why he did not accumulate the necessary number of refuge practices, he said: “Because I am doing a retreat on refuge and the three of you did a retreat on accumulating the numbers.”

So, the significance of the motivation cannot be explained often enough. Even if we engage in an unsuitable action, if it is done with a virtuous motivation, it will be less harmful.

During and Between Meditation Sessions

Our actions during the post-meditation period should accord with the meditation in which we engaged during the meditation sessions, and should facilitate that meditation.

We can do practices to accumulate merit and purify non-virtue, such as prostrations, circumambulations, and daily prayers. The accumulation of merit supports our practice, while non-virtue obstructs it. We can also read Dharma texts, specifically commentaries and teachings that relate to our current practice.

Most importantly, we must not forget the meditation object and the meditation in which we have been engaging in. Also in the post-meditation period we should rely on mindfulness and introspection regarding the meditation and meditation object. Otherwise our actions between sessions will counteract our efforts during the meditation sessions. Thus, not only do we train in mindfulness during the meditation session but also in the post-meditation period.

We should also practise morality, the mind of restraint, and self-discipline which is the basis of all qualities. Further, we should train in accumulating the fourfold causes that facilitate generating the path of calm abiding and special insight:

1. Restraining the doors of the six senses
2. Acting with mental introspection
3. Eating a measured intake of food
4. Striving in the yoga of sleeping appropriately.

Restraining the Doors of the Six Senses

The earlier we overcome attachment, the easier it is to give it up, but if we allow our mind to indulge in attachment and then act upon it, we increase its potency, making it difficult to stop the action. It is therefore vital that we prevent attachment from being generated in the first place.

The first step to prevent the generation of either attachment or anger is to restrain the doors of the six senses from the objects of the six senses – visual forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile sensations, and what we refer to as phenomena. We do this through mindfulness and introspection.

For an affliction to be generated through any of the six doors there has to be first a meeting between object, sense power, and primary consciousness. For example, if we look at a clock, there is a meeting between the visible object of the clock, the primary eye-consciousness and the eye sense power. Then, upon perceiving the clock, we think, “That’s a nice clock”, and generate attachment for it. This model also applies to the other senses.

If we think of an object as unpleasant, instead of attachment, anger is generated.

Restraining the doors of the six senses means taking care that no attachment is generated in the first place. Controlling the six doors means exerting control over the six senses after attachment has already been generated and not acting upon desire.

The attachment generated immediately upon the

meeting of object, primary consciousness and sense power is referred to as “attachment in relation to the apprehension of the characteristic”. There is also the attachment that occurs later when we remember the object. This is referred to as “attachment that is generated through fact”. It means that attachment does not have to be generated immediately upon perception of the object.

What is most pleasurable for the eyes of a man to behold is the form of a woman, and what is most pleasurable for the eyes of a woman is the form of a man. Apart from that, we have sounds, smells, and so forth.

Normally, upon perceiving such objects, we may feel that the immediate generation of attachment is natural; however, this is not quite accurate. Although it might be difficult initially, it is important to exert restraint and control to stop the generation of attachment or aversion. This way you can decrease your mental afflictions.

Acting with Introspection

Mindfulness keeps our actions of body, speech and mind virtuous by taking virtuous action as its focal object. Introspection is a discriminating awareness that checks up whether our actions of body, speech and mind are still focused on a virtuous object or whether they have become non-virtuous.

The great bodhisattva Shantideva says in his *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* that during

our actions of body, speech and mind, we should investigate our mind repeatedly. To act with mental introspection means to check up whether the actions of body, speech and mind in which we are engaging or about to engage are appropriate or not. If the action is appropriate, we engage in the action, but if it is inappropriate, we do not start it. If we have already started it, we stop it. We reverse from a non-virtuous path using conscientiousness.

Shantideva said: “I prostrate to anybody who controls their actions with mindfulness and introspection” because mindfulness and introspection are the only tools with which we are able to control our actions of body, speech and mind effectively.

The great Atisha advised us to control the doors of the sense powers with mindfulness, introspection and conscientiousness, three times during the day and three times during the night.

For example, in the morning, we should first investigate whether our mental state is positive and conducive, or whether it is negative and harmful. If it is the latter, we should rectify the situation. But the power of that change may have already dissipated by lunchtime. So again, at lunchtime, we investigate the mind with introspection, and again correct any possible disturbances that might have arisen. It is the same in the evening.

Atisha said that watching the mind is the best method, and having concern for the welfare of others is the best quality. Through watching the mind, we

become aware of what is going on within it. This observation is the basis for improving the mind. In order to improve it we need first to recognise what harms it, and then change what needs to be changed.

Skilful Eating

The Right Amount

We need to be aware and eat appropriate quantities of food, following a middle way. We should not eat too much nor too little. This will help us protect our virtuous practice. We should eat enough to alleviate hunger pains and maintain a strong body, but avoid eating too much, as this will make our body feel heavy, our mind unclear, our breathing heavy, and cause us to fall asleep easily. Eating too much facilitates the generation of mental afflictions with the result that we can find ourselves not wanting to engage in any virtuous practice after a sumptuous meal.

Lama Tsong Khapa mentions in the *Great Lam Rim* that we should eat food that agrees with us and can be digested well. If the food we eat does not agree with us, then we will not receive the benefit of eating the food: we will feel neither happy nor that our suffering of hunger has been alleviated.

The food we eat should also not be obtained by any of the five wrong livelihoods. If the food is contaminated by the five wrong livelihoods it will increase our afflictions and separate us from happiness.

Some people believe that garlic, onion and radish can harm our meditation practice, but this is incorrect.

Only while doing certain tantric practices such as action tantra, which place great emphasis on external purity, should those foods be avoided because they are regarded as possessing certain impurities, such as a strong odour.

There is more advice from the Buddha on how to eat food, such as eating quietly, not munching loudly on our food, and making sure our mouth is closed while we eat. This is similar to what would be regarded as good behaviour or politeness in worldly life.

Making Eating Virtuous

Depending on the motivation, eating food can be virtuous or non-virtuous. If, for example, we eat food to gain a handsome and beautiful body, that food is being eaten with the motivation of attachment. Some people eat food to gain a strong body so that they can intimidate others. That food is being eaten on the basis of pride.

But we can also eat food with the motivation of having a healthy body and long life so that we can have more time to transform our mind and practise the Dharma to benefit sentient beings. It is good to eat with the thought: “I am eating this food so that I can benefit others”. If you eat food with such a motivation, it will not lose its taste.

When we eat food that is offered to us, we should think: “I will use the strength gained from the food to practise the Dharma well so that I can benefit the benefactor in the future.”

While eating, practise generosity by visualising offering the food to the hundreds of millions of small micro-organisms present within your body, and think: “May this material offering that I now make to all these beings create the dependent arising for me to be able to give them the Dharma in the future”.

These are some meditations that can make eating a virtuous action. To sum it up, as Nagarjuna said in his *Letter to a King*: “One should recognise the right way of eating and eat untainted by mental afflictions”.

Counteracting Craving for Food

One antidote to craving for food is to reflect on the faults of the food one is eating. Lama Tsong Khapa, in his *Great Lam Rim*, suggests meditating on what the food will look like after it has been in the mouth. Even though the food in front of us has a nice colour, taste, smell and so forth, as soon as it is chewed, it will not look so appealing. In fact, it will have become an object of repulsion that is more likely to generate nausea than the wish to eat it! Lama Tsong Khapa says that as soon as saliva touches food, it actually becomes nauseating and not attractive any more.

Food still has certain benefits, such as facilitating a long life. But from a Dharma point of view, merely having a long life is not significant. What is important about having a long life is that we have more time to work with and transform our mind.

If we have still strong attachment to food we can also visualise that the plate is filled with blood and pus.

Blessing the Food

Recite the mantra Om ah hum three times over the food. With the first recitation meditate that all the impurities of the food relating to taste, smell, colour and so forth are purified. With the second recitation the food is transformed into uncontaminated nectar that has the power to induce great bliss in our mind. With the third recitation the potency of that uncontaminated nectar is made inexhaustible.

Then offer it to the merit field, meditating that you generate uncontaminated bliss in the minds of the buddhas and bodhisattvas. This is the essence of the offering, to generate bliss in the mind of the merit field. By doing this brief meditation for just a few minutes before we eat or drink, we plant the seeds of liberation and enlightenment and of all goodness and happiness in our mind. And as we have to eat and drink several times a day there is plenty of opportunity to accumulate limitless merits in such a way.

Sleep and Dreams

When to Sleep

As Nagarjuna says in his *Letter to a Friend*, during the day and during the earlier and later part of the night we should engage in virtuous practices and sleep in the middle part of the night.

By engaging in virtuous practices in the earlier and later part of the night and sleeping in the middle part of the night, the elements of the body rejuvenate and regenerate, supporting our Dharma practice. This

makes the mind fresher and enhances its flexibility. During the day while in the post-meditation period, we should not go to sleep.

Going to sleep before 12pm, let us say around 11pm, is very conducive, because the sleep we get around this time is rejuvenating. It is also good to look at when we need to get up. If we want to get up at 3am to practise, like His Holiness the Dalai Lama, we definitely need to go to bed around 9pm. Otherwise we will not be able to get up early.

How to Sleep

To make the act of sleeping a virtuous activity, we should remain mindful of our object of meditation. If mental afflictions arise, we can recognise them with mental introspection and reverse the mind from those mental afflictions.

Ideally we should try to go to sleep with the motivation of bodhicitta, thinking we will rise early, and dedicating the next day to achieving the welfare of all sentient beings. If that is not possible, we should go to sleep with some other positive and wholesome motivation.

Sleeping positions are also relevant to our Dharma practice. We should try to lie on our right side with our head resting in the palm of the right hand and the left leg resting on the right leg. This is called the lion pose.

Sleeping in this position has many advantages for our Dharma practice. For example, our body does not become too relaxed in this position, preventing

us from falling too deeply into sleep and from being disturbed by heavy dreams during which we could create non-virtuous karma. This position also facilitates mindfulness and introspection.

If you are disturbed by bad dreams, you can sleep in the lion pose and visualise Shakyamuni Buddha over your crown. Then visualise that light rays emanate from Shakyamuni Buddha's heart into the ten directions, invoking the blessings of the buddhas and bodhisattvas of the ten directions, which come back in the form of light that absorbs into the heart of Shakyamuni Buddha. These blessings then come down from Shakyamuni Buddha's heart in the form of light, entering and purifying you.

The light rays form a tent over you and you sleep within this tent of light rays. At the edge of the tent, there is a wall of transcendental wisdom fire surrounding you, protecting you from the different types of harm. In this way you will sleep very well and have good dreams.

Dreams

The karma that we create during dreams is referred to as "karma that is created but not accumulated". If, for example, we kill somebody during our dream, we have created the karma of killing, but because some of the conditions required for a complete karmic action are not present – such as the object – the karma is not accumulated.

There are many types of dreams that indicate purifi-

cation of non-virtuous karma through your Dharma practice. These can be dreams of eating curd or drinking milk, meeting monks and nuns, being on top of a mountain with the sun and moon shining, crossing water and swimming across an ocean.

You may also have dreams of overcoming evil dream beings, or of other dream figures fleeing from you and so on. All these types of dreams indicate purification. However, it is best to keep external signs received through meditation practice to yourself and not to publicise them.

There are also situations where you purify negative karma by experiencing suffering in dreams.

It is possible to create virtuous karma during a dream, for example, by meditating on concentration during sleep and not losing mindfulness and introspection. This transforms the whole process of sleep into virtue. Also, if we are mindful, when we create non-virtue during a dream, a mind of regret arises and we immediately think: "That is not an appropriate action."

Buddhas pass away in all kinds of positions. Some pass away in the sleeping lion position, others pass away in the vajra position. The significant thing is to die with a virtuous state of mind.

There are many benefits to sleeping in the lion position such as not being harmed by adverse conditions, just as the lion is not harmed by other animals. For sleeping and dreaming, the most skilful thing to do is go to sleep with a virtuous motivation in the lion po-

sition, making sleep a virtuous activity.

There are three positions that are referred to as the sleeping positions of lazy people: lying on the back, which is called the sleeping position of the gods; lying on the left side, which is called the sleeping position of attachment; and lying on the stomach, which is called the sleeping position of animals.

The Four Ways of Practising During Sessions

If we look at these four practices, we can see they are not exclusive to the post-meditation period but that most of them have to be practised during the meditation session as well.

There is no way we can meditate if we do not control the door of the senses and there is no way we can meditate without introspection. Also, there is no way we can meditate if we do not engage in the yoga of not sleeping.

Eating and sleeping correctly are practices that are exclusive to the post-meditation period. It is not proper to have a cup of tea during one's meditation session! Spending our meditation session meditating a little bit, having a cup of tea, then again meditating a little bit and sipping tea – this is not recommended.

In fact, in the commentaries on how to do retreats, it is explicitly recommended not to eat or drink during the meditation session. Although we might feel hungry or thirsty during our meditation session, we just have to wait until the session is finished.

Eating, drinking and sleeping take up a great part of

our life, so it is important that we do not transform them into non-virtue. Half of our life is passed in sleep, and eating and drinking also take up a great part of our life. If we can spend these times without creating non-virtue, we will profit greatly.

Importance of Mindfulness

Lama Tsong Khapa said there is nothing surprising about having to be mindful while we meditate. What is infinitely more important is that we stay mindful after we have stopped meditating.

When we meditate with mindfulness, the coarse disturbing thoughts subside because we are able to keep the virtuous object in mind. The danger lies when we arise from our meditation and become careless, allowing the coarse mental afflictions to arise again and disturb the mind.

So, this advice from Lama Tsong Khapa is very profound, and applies not only to ordained practitioners, but to anyone who has taken vows or precepts. While we sit in meditation, there is no danger. The danger arises when we stop meditating and engage in other activities. If we are not mindful at such a time we are in danger of breaking our vows. Therefore it is infinitely important that we practise mindfulness between meditation sessions so as not to break our vows and precepts.

This advice is also important for those who do not have vows or precepts. We have to remain mindful even when we are not sitting in meditation, so that,

for example, we do not retaliate in response to harm from others. If we are not mindful of our actions, sometimes we will react negatively, although the other person may have treated us well. Or, vice versa, if we treat another person well and they react negatively, if we are not mindful, we will react negatively in return.

Human beings are capable of good, positive, wholesome and beneficial actions. But that capacity needs to be harnessed with mindfulness.

In a less specific Dharma context, it is good to exert mindfulness and introspection when drinking alcohol. If we know that our limit is four drinks then it would be good to stop ourselves at the third drink through mindfulness and introspection. This will prevent problems that otherwise would arise if we had had that fourth drink.

Through mindfulness and introspection we practise restraint and avoid sufferings. For example, we should be mindful not to drive after drinking alcohol. If you practise in such a way, trying to be a good person with mindfulness and introspection, it will have a good result.

We need to keep the actions of our body, speech and mind virtuous with mindfulness, and we need to repeatedly analyse with introspection whether they are still virtuous or not. If we find that they are not virtuous, we should correct them and put them again on a virtuous path.

As the great bodhisattva Shantideva said, with mindfulness we are aware of the virtuous object – our

ethics, vows, and so forth. With mental introspection we should analyse whether what we are doing has become non-virtuous or not, and then rectify our actions accordingly. We should protect our vows and pledges in this way, even at the cost of our life. Shantideva said: “I prostrate to whoever is able to practise in this manner”.

Daily Life Dharma

Choosing Friends Wisely

Good Or Bad Influence?

It is important for us to rely on a qualified spiritual friend, because to generate even one quality or eliminate just one fault, we need to rely on the root of all happiness and goodness, which is the holy spiritual friend.

The company we keep is important because it has a great influence on us, both in the Dharma and in daily life. Good friends can inspire us to practise meditation and the Dharma, while bad friends can inspire us to give up our meditation and Dharma practice.

If our friends have many faults, we are likely to adopt their faults. This will manifest as an increase in the negative tendencies we already have, or the emergence of new ones. It is as if we had an arrow that was originally not poisoned at the tip but which became poisoned because we put it into a quiver lined with poison.

Although we might not have certain negative tendencies, by associating with the wrong company, we can acquire their negative tendencies. If we rely on misleading friends, they will bring us obstacles, obstructive conditions, and so forth.

If, on the other hand, our friends have many good qualities, we are likely to adopt those qualities. Good company will ripen our positive qualities, and help us generate new ones. Since the aim of our practice is

to be free of all faults and generate all the good qualities, we should try to keep company with those who will help us achieve that.

There is a story of two friends who lived in the same village. One of them drank lots of alcohol and gambled, while the other lived a pure lifestyle practising the Dharma. The one who drank and gambled went to stay with a geshe in a monastery, while the other friend went to Lhasa, where he fell in with people who drank and gambled.

Later, when they met again, the roles were totally reversed. Because he had been living with a geshe, the friend who used to drink and gamble had adopted a pure Dharma lifestyle. The other friend however, by falling in with the wrong crowd in Lhasa, had adopted their habits and had started to drink and gamble.

Similarly, if someone who is normally not an angry person starts living with someone who is habitually angry, it is quite possible that that person will start getting angrier more often. Of course, it could also be the other way around!

This demonstrates how the company we keep influences us. For example, people who do not drink alcohol may begin drinking when they start going to parties, because being non-alcoholic at parties can be difficult. If everyone else is drinking, it may be difficult to stick to our own habit of drinking non-alcoholic drinks.

One piece of advice I give to people when they go to parties where everyone else is drinking is to have a

glass of fruit juice or something non-alcoholic and leave the glass full. Since it is full, nobody can pour you an alcoholic drink. You just hold onto that full glass.

Because I do not drink alcohol and do not smoke, many of my students who previously used to drink and smoke have stopped. If it were the other way around and I drank and smoked, most likely many students who did not drink or smoke before would have started by now!

Protecting Yourself

If your friends have bad habits that you do not have, you need to be careful because they may try to influence you, offering you drinks or cigarettes and saying: “Do not worry, this one is on me.”

But once you have the habit, nobody will offer to pay for your drinks or cigarettes, and your habit will have become a burden on your hip-pocket.

Therefore you have to take great care to control the influences in your life. If you allow yourself to be influenced the wrong way, your qualities will diminish and you will receive a great loss.

We should always rely on our own wisdom, first developing the wisdom that understands what is beneficial and what is not, then following that wisdom and rejecting harmful and destructive ways.

Relating to Misleading Friends

Misleading friends are those whose company causes the three mental afflictions of ignorance, anger and attachment to increase in your mind, leading you to engage in negative actions such as killing. It also refers to friends whose company will harm your practice of listening, contemplation and meditation; those who will lessen your love and compassion; and those who criticise and disrespect the Three Jewels. They can plant doubt in your mind which works away at your inner faith until you give up taking refuge. You should definitely not conform to the behaviour and expectations of such friends.

The internal misleading friends are one's mental afflictions, to which one also should never conform.

We might think: "If the text says I have to abandon misleading and bad company, does that mean I have to harm them?" That is not what we are saying. The Buddha said that we have to practise affection and love towards all sentient beings, whether they are enemies or friends. When the text talks about abandoning misleading friends, it means that we have to abandon bad behaviour, and not our affection for other people.

Whether our friends are good or bad company, it is important to know how to relate to different people. It will be difficult to find someone who is one-hundred-percent good, pure and positive. Everyone has a good and bad side. Everyone has certain harmful, negative behaviour, and certain positive qualities and

good behaviour, just like us.

If we analyse our own mind, we will find many different mental afflictions, such as ignorance, anger, desire, jealousy, and pride. If we can find all these mental afflictions in our own mind, they will also be present in the minds of others. It is very difficult to find friends who are completely free of mental afflictions – who do not have any pride, anger, or attachment.

The skilful way of relating to others is to conform to and adopt their positive qualities, but reject their faults. We should take the good qualities of others as an example and try to act accordingly, and avoid imitating their negative qualities and actions. If we act in such a discerning way, we will benefit, and our own qualities will increase.

Even if you have lived with someone for some time and later separate, if you adopt this way of relating to them, you will have received much benefit and will have increased your good qualities.

On the other hand, if you only take the negative actions of others as an example, not only will you lose the qualities you already have, you will also develop more harmful states of mind, and engage in more harmful actions.

If we can take care of our mind and be careful, even though the company we keep may have certain faults, they will not rub off on us. Also, if we take care that we do not adopt those negative tendencies, we may even cause the other person to give up those bad habits.

For example, oneself not drinking alcohol can have a good influence on others, causing them to give up drinking. If we do not smoke, it can cause others to give up smoking. In some relationships, one partner might make it clear that if the other does not stop smoking they will break off the relationship. Or they may say to the other person: “I don’t want to share the bed with you after you’ve had a cigarette because it smells so bad!”

Skilful Human Relations

It is important to be discerning and skilful in the way we relate to others, because there is no limit to how far we can degenerate. Falling into bad habits is easy, and there is no limit to where this can lead us. On the other hand, developing good qualities is difficult and takes much effort. Therefore, if we see certain faults in the people around us, we should definitely not adopt these faults, or take them as an example.

For example, attachment can easily be increased to such a level that people quite often kill because of it. On the other hand, everyone wants friendship from others. Everyone likes to be treated as a friend. It is important to always be friendly and polite in whatever we do or say – to speak politely and smile. Even if we do not know someone, we can act as if we know them well, and not just ignore them. When we feel a bit down, rather than letting it show, we can still smile on the outside.

This is accepted as good behaviour. If we see people who behave otherwise, we should not adopt their negative ways.

It is important to be mentally self-sufficient. First, we should not focus on the faults of others, but on their good qualities. By focusing only on the qualities of others, we receive those qualities ourselves. Otherwise, if we are constantly looking at others' faults, we end up with lots of faults ourselves. Secondly, it is much better to be self-sufficient in one's knowledge of what is right and what is wrong and not to be always influenced by what people around us are doing.

Even if one goes to a restaurant with friends and where everybody else drinks, one should be self-sufficient enough to be able to say: "I'm sorry, I don't drink". We should not just start drinking alcohol because the others are drinking. Instead we should have the inner strength and stability of mind to say: "That is something I do not want to do."

The essence of abandoning misleading friends is not to abandon our relationships with others, but to protect our mind from falling under the negative influence of others. If our friend gets angry at us, we should not get angry back just because our friend is angry. This is like pouring oil on a flame and escalates the situation. Rather, if our friend gets angry, we should meditate on patience. In this way, we do not fall under the negative influence of that person.

If a friend engages in behaviour that increases attach-

ment, it might be more difficult to prevent attachment arising from our side. But it is possible to prevent anger arising. If the other person is angry, we can definitely meditate on patience. When anger arises in our mind, it reduces our good qualities and increases our faults. The same occurs to the other person when anger arises in their mind. So, if we let anger arise from our side, that will exaggerate and escalate the situation, making it worse.

Similarly, we should not conform to the behaviour of people who lie, or are greedy, angry or divisive. Some people always engage in divisive speech, saying things that will generate dislike between friends and split them up.

Developing the Internal Friend

Positive, pure mental states are our internal friend. It is important to have this happy, peaceful mind as an internal friend. Even though you might lose your external friends, as long as you do not lose your internal friend you will not be alone and you will not suffer. But if you lose such an internal friend and, on top of that, lose your external friends, you will feel very lonely and sad indeed.

An example of a pure mental state is the wisdom arising from listening. The understanding we generate from listening dispels the darkness of ignorance. Because we do not know a subject, we have to make an effort to understand it. Some people keep saying, “I don’t know anything”, without doing anything about

it, thus remaining ignorant. The reason we have to practise listening to teachings is so that we can generate new understanding and insight to dispel ignorance. The wisdom we generate through listening is something nobody can take from us – no thief can steal it from us.

The wisdom we generate through listening is our best friend, our best support. It is a friend that will never desert us. With it we are able to discern between beneficial, suitable actions and non-beneficial, unsuitable ones, and judge which course of action is the proper one.

Outer friends, as we know from experience, will be our friends for as long as the going is good. But once we experience difficulties – if we get sick, for example – some of those friends will disappear. But the inner friend of wisdom will never desert us.

There was a practitioner called Yeshe Gyatso who was very poor at the outset of his practice. He had an uncle, who was a businessman, who completely ignored his nephew on the street because he was poor. But later on, Yeshe Gyatso became widely renowned for his realisation and understanding, and he even became one of the tutors of the Dalai Lama.

The uncle came to visit him after he had achieved this high position. Of course, Yeshe Gyatso understood that the uncle did not really like him – he was obviously coming in the hope of getting some money or some business. So he invited the uncle for lunch, completely understanding the uncle's dislike.

Then he placed some money he had to one side and, when the uncle sat down for lunch, announced: “The uncle who is not an uncle, because he really did not want to be my uncle, has just come in the form of an uncle because he wanted some money. So I prostrate to all the money that gave me the uncle!”

Outer friends are unreliable. But the inner friend of wisdom and understanding will never desert us. It will always help us in any situation; nobody can take it away.

Advice for Young People

The Search for Happiness

Everybody searches for human happiness. Ordinarily you think that external happiness is the happiness that you need. To get it you let your mind fall completely under the control of your mental afflictions, follow your afflicted thoughts, and focus completely on the external world. But sometimes, when you get tired of this, you turn to the more internal way where you try to attain happiness through subduing the mental afflictions.

I think it is a good thing to compare these two types of happiness, and recognise that the true happiness is inner happiness. Of course, external objects provide a certain type of transitory happiness, but is it true happiness? I think inner happiness is more stable, of better quality, and probably a stronger experience of happiness.

The purpose of meditation is to make the mind a

good, softer and happier mind. By generating a good mind you will become a good person who is liked by others. A good-natured person will always be well-liked by others and enjoy their company and affection. A person who is the opposite – harmful, unhappy and with a vicious selfish mind – will generally be disliked by others, even to the point of becoming their enemy. It is important to know the significance of generating a good mind and the effect of your state of mind on others.

Through meditation you can utilise the power of the mind. If you are not aware of the power of the mind then it will be completely fixated on external objects in its search for happiness: you will place all your hopes for happiness in external living conditions, wealth and friends. But if we are honest with ourselves, these three external causes for happiness are not without their difficulties. Everybody encounters difficulties in earning wealth. There is no one amongst you who does not experience difficulties with friends and there are always difficulties associated with getting and maintaining a nice living place. If you are not aware of the power of the mind, it will become obsessed with external objects, which are not really able to provide proper happiness. This then makes your situation very difficult. Therefore it is important to be aware of the shortcomings of these external objects at an early age, and to practise meditation in order to utilise the potential of the mind. In this way you can attain true inner happiness, which can then be complemented by external factors.

Develop Qualities

Whether you have success or happiness in life lies within your own hands. You have to take responsibility for your life, take your life in your own hands and do something positive.

For example, a sapling is nursed until it has grown into a tall tree yielding many fruits, from which many people benefit. Likewise you have to take care of yourself from a young age and then, when you have grown up, many people can benefit from the fruits of your qualities.

To this end it is important that your mind becomes acquainted with positive mental states. You should treat yourself in a wholesome manner, having a wholesome attitude to yourself as well as to others. Study hard, work well and do not associate with bad company.

Even though we quite often talk about Dharma aims that are still seem very far off, we nevertheless have to apply the Dharma to our day-to-day life. We do that by keeping a wholesome mind and not associating with the wrong types of friends - those who are wild and have destructive behaviour - by having a good job, by working well and by studying hard.

What is most important of all for young people is to study hard and develop good qualities and knowledge. If you are a good person with good qualities, others will naturally be attracted to you and you have no worries about finding friends. If you study hard and acquire good qualities while young, you will not

have any problems with making lots of money later on - you will be able to buy a good car and house. If you focus now on what is important now such as studying hard and developing qualities, then friends, a car and so forth will all come naturally later on. If you do not study now and if do not develop any qualities or knowledge, then you will not be able to get good work, you will not have any money and you will not have any friends – it is that simple.

Saving Money

I once gave similar advice to a little girl when she was six years old. I told her to always put away part of her pocket money into a savings account. I told her that by doing that she would accumulate money and later be able to buy whatever she wanted. These days she is in her twenties and she has already bought her own house! Her parents told me that they were very pleased that I had given her this advice. They said, 'If we would have advised her, she would not have listened, but because you said it, she listened'. Now, not only does she have her own house but she also practises meditation in the morning regularly. One can say her life worked out well.

Relationships

I am not saying that you should not have friends and relationships. What I do advise is to be discerning and not to go after other people like a hungry dog finding food on the street.

If you are not discerning then one problem is that you will go back and forth between intense attachment and aversion, not being able to experience a stable relationship. First you generate strong craving for the other person because your mind is blinded by desire and the other person is perceived as wholly attractive and wonderful. At this stage you want to be together with the other person all the time. But sooner or later, when you start to perceive the faults of the other person, your mind switches from attachment to anger, and then you cannot wait to be rid of them.

In this way it becomes very difficult to have stable and enduring friendships. That is why I advise young students to be more discerning and to try to have a stable and good relationship that you can also enjoy.

It is good to check up whether your perception of the other person is accurate, and not to be blinded by a pretty face and a charming manner. Is the other person really the wonderful, faultless person that you perceive or is there a discrepancy between what appears to you and what really is? Look behind the pretty face and see what is really in the other person's mind. What you should analyse is whether or not the other person is someone that you can spend the rest of your life with. Are they really suitable to become your life partner?

Attachment

When the mind is under the control of attachment you become involuntarily and also quite unreasonably attracted to another person. Quite often the attachment is primarily to their body. Whilst the mind is completely under the control of attachment it is very difficult to be objective. You become totally attracted to the other person and perceive them as wholly attractive. This is unreasonable because the body is not completely attractive at all. In fact there are parts of the body that are quite repulsive. But you cannot see this as long as you are blinded by desire.

Try to recognise that desire is an irrational state of mind that is not conducive to your happiness. It is best to take care of that problem at a young age, by being discerning and not making a habit of letting the mind be controlled by desire. If you get into the habit of constantly generating attachment from a young age then, as you grow up, it will become increasingly difficult to stop later on in life. The habit of generating attachment will only be the cause for lots of suffering and problems.

For those who are more advanced in years, the uselessness of playing around with attachment should be pretty obvious. Young people can be forgiven for not seeing the disadvantages and trickery of attachment. They are like somebody who is presented with food when they have not eaten for a long time! That is how I like to think of it.

Education

I think it is very important, especially for younger students, that you do not neglect your studies. Sometimes younger students become so enthusiastic about the Dharma that they want to be ordained. I tell them that it is better to finish school and university before seeking ordination. Then, if life as an ordained person does not work out, they have a university education to fall back on. Otherwise, they have to go back to lay life without any qualifications.

Sometimes there is a bit of a dilemma for young students when their study classes fall on Wednesday or Tuesday night. I always say, “Oh, don’t worry about the Dharma class. It is much more important for you to concentrate on your school studies or your university studies at the moment. The Dharma will work out over time”. It is very important to have a good education as a sound basis for worldly life. Both the Dharma side and the worldly side need to be developed.

Relying on Your Parents

If you have any doubts it is good for you to rely on your parents. If other people give you strange advice that raises questions and doubts in your mind, tell your parents about what that person said, and then listen to your parents. At a young age, you are not really empowered to fully decide what you should do and it is good to rely on your parents. Even people who have reached the age of sixty need someone to rely upon for advice. So when you are young, there is no doubt that you need guidance.

Your Life and Dharma

Here I have a very significant piece of advice for you. Strictly speaking, as a Dharma practitioner, between worldly actions and Dharma actions you should always give priority to Dharma actions, and between life and the next, you should always regard the next life as more important.

However, this can be difficult to do, and as a beginner it can even be counter-productive to try and give up all worldly activities all at once. Life is long and it is very difficult to keep up a pure Dharma practice throughout one's whole life.

Time and again, I have seen students quickly become very enthusiastic about the Dharma and decide to devote their life wholly to Dharma practice. After a few years, they notice that they have not gone as far as they imagined in their Dharma practice and, because they neglected their worldly education and their worldly life, they arrive at a point where they become immensely dissatisfied. They find themselves in a difficult position, and quite often they actually generate wrong views about the Dharma. They become completely discouraged and turn away from the Dharma completely, giving up all Dharma practice. For such a person it was completely counter-productive to devote their whole life to the Dharma. It would have been much better to take it more slowly.

That is why I always tell you to not give up your worldly activities all at once. Even if you are not able to practise in a pure manner and your life still mainly

revolves around your worldly activities, you should still keep your Dharma practice and not forget it altogether.

Strictly speaking, most lamas will say you have to give up the worldly life and practice the Dharma. I am not saying that you should not do that. However, in the case where you are not able to practice in such a pure fashion you should not feel that there is no other possibility. You can live your life focused on worldly activities with Dharma practice on the side. In this way you have the benefit of not abandoning your Dharma practice altogether.

There is a very significant point to my advice. I always tell you to go slowly in your Dharma practice. Life is long and it is very difficult to keep up pure Dharma practice throughout one's whole life. Just generate a good mental state, a good mind, try to be a good human being and carry that attitude into your daily life. These white worldly actions will bring great benefit to yourself and others. In this way you gain the benefit of Dharma practice.

Take Good Care of Your Mind and Body

When you are young it is particularly important that you take great care of your mind because that will have an enormous effect on how the rest of our life turns out. If you just let your mind run wild and acquire all kinds of harmful habits, then these can have a detrimental effect on the rest of your life, and prove difficult, or even impossible, to get rid of.

Towards this end it is important that you develop a well-regulated and wholesome lifestyle. By trying to follow some rules in your life you will be able to regulate your days better and soon they will become second nature. Otherwise you will just hang around, not knowing what to do, and your days will probably seem very long. But if you know what you are about, have plans and schedules, then your days will seem very short. In fact they will seem too short to accomplish everything you want to do.

It is important that you look after your body and your mind in an appropriate fashion, recognising the things that benefit your mind and then being enthusiastic about those things by striving to develop them. Reject activities that harm your mental or physical health. To experience happiness in this life you need a mind free from afflictions such as grasping, desire, anger, pride, and jealousy and so forth. If you do not have such a mind then it is unlikely that you will experience happiness. Instead you will be distracted, dissatisfied, and unhappy and will experience a lot of suffering.

Of course it is difficult to avoid attraction towards external objects altogether, but it is important that you take care that you do not engage in activities that are completely pointless such as those that have neither a worldly purpose nor a Dharma purpose.

Similarly, you should recognise what is good and what is harmful for the body and then adopt the first and reject the later. You need to have a healthy body and a healthy mind in order to be successful in life.

Relationships

True Love versus Attachment

Love is the thought wishing the other person to have happiness. It arises from recognising the other person's kindness to us and how they lack happiness. As such, it is rooted in reality.

Attachment on the other hand is a thought desiring the object for our own happiness, and arises from the misleading perception of the object as pure and perfect. As such, it is based on an illusion, and is not based in reality.

Relationships based on true love are stable and harmonious, while relationships based on attachment are unstable and discordant. That is because love is a concern for the welfare of the other person. It recognises the other person's true state of being, whereas attachment is based on the perception of the other person's pureness and perfection. As a perception it is unrealistic, and sooner or later wanes. Mutual love fosters mutual trust and confidence which makes for a harmonious relationship.

While it is extremely difficult to have a relationship without attachment we should take care that true love is the prevailing attitude in our relationships.

Quite often, while the other person is well and healthy, we profess to have great love and affection for them. But when they start to get sick, suffer, and become miserable and sad, we are not there to care for that person. This is a sign that we did not have real love and compassion for that person in the first

place. Unfortunately the situation where somebody will leave a friend in hospital without caring for them is quite common.

We should have true love and compassion for the other person and look after them, without being concerned about whether we receive something in return or not. If our concern for the other person is based on what we may get back in return, it is not a good foundation for a stable relationship. We need to have true love and compassion, and look after the other person without being concerned about what we get back in return.

We should recognise that, like us, those close to us do not like to hear harsh words. If, for example, someone says something harsh or unfriendly to us, it is good to keep in mind that if we were to reply in kind, we would just inflict the same suffering on them because no-one likes to be treated in this way. By practising compassion for them in such a moment and treating them kindly and compassionately, we can diffuse the situation and also generate some trust and affection in them. But we need to be aware that it can take time to be able to practise in this way.

Having a harmonious and friendly relationship – for example, having a cup of coffee or tea or a meal with those close to us, or sharing some other activity – generates a very special type of happiness. One of the conducive conditions for going into retreat is to have a friendly helper, a harmonious friend, someone who is agreeable and who supports us during our re-

treat. In this way, the retreat also becomes a happy experience.

Likewise, in our day-to-day life, having a good friend with whom we have a harmonious relationship provides the opportunity for us to experience this special type of happiness.

Engaging in actions that benefit our partner or friend and not harming them is the practice of the Dharma in relationships. For a happy and stable relationship, we need to engage in actions that benefit others, making our relationships stable, confident and comfortable. By being loving and compassionate our mind also becomes wholesome and good, and we can have a happy life.

Human beings have a particular power that other sentient beings do not possess. By using that power effectively, we can bring about greater happiness for others. However, this will not come about without love and compassion. Whether or not we lead a good human life is determined by our actions and not by our external situation, such as whether we are enjoying food and drink and so on.

Generosity in the Relationship

There are many other ways to be generous to others without having great material resources.

For example, we can cheer up those who are sad and depressed, talking to them in a way that revives their self-confidence and strength of mind. In the case of depression, we can take the person for a

walk and talk pleasantly with them, tell them a story, try to distract them from their problem. In this way, we can ease their depression, build their mind up again, and make them more relaxed and happy. We can look after them when they are sick.

We can be compassionate and loving to those who are desperate and suffering. Anyone can do these things. And we must value the abilities and potential of the other person. Without love and compassion, we will not really value them.

At such a time, in the future when we are in a similar suffering situation, not only will we need someone to help and support us but we will also really come to understand the suffering our friend had earlier experienced.

Taking care of one another is very beneficial. Some people are always close and friendly when their friend has a happy mind. But when the friend's mind is unhappy, those people start to distance themselves. This is not appropriate or acceptable behaviour. When a friend has a distressed and unhappy mind, we should feel a responsibility to take care of them, We might take them out for lunch or to a movie. Taking care of the other person in this way will help greatly.

The Importance of Our Perception

Our partner can be both the object of happiness and the object of suffering.

For example, if we look at our partner with anger, we

will experience suffering and feel distant from them. That is because at that time we mentally imagine them as undesirable, threatening and harmful.

But if we look at them with attachment, because we have generated a mental image of them as attractive and beautiful, it will generate some happiness in our mind and we will want to be closer to them.

The point here is that we constantly go back and forth between happiness and suffering depending on whether or not we are angry or attached to them and all this without there being any great change in the other person. What really changes is our perception of them.

It is not conducive to focus on the faults of our partner, but it is realistic to be aware of their faults, because, inevitably, they will have faults. Each person brings their own faults to a relationship, but it is more beneficial to focus on our partner's qualities rather than their faults.

Patience in the Relationship

If we do not have patience with our partner, the relationship will definitely not work. Also, we could be in a situation where our happiness depends on our partner's actions. For example, if they laugh and are friendly to us, we feel happy, but if they do not laugh or are unfriendly immediately we start to suffer.

This is why I always advise students that when they see their partner coming home from work stressed, upset or angry – which you can often recognise by

their facial expression – it is a wise course of action to put them at ease, letting them settle down, making them comfortable, cooking something for them, or offering them tea or coffee. When they have a chance settle down, their anger will go away.

Students who have followed this advice say they have found it very beneficial.

Promiscuity

If you have a habit of switching partners when problems arise in a relationship, it is wise to understand that it does not really matter whether you get a new partner or not, because a new partner will also have a mind full of delusions. From this point of view, there is no difference between the present partner and the possible future partner, and therefore there is really no benefit in switching.

Even though you might feel that the grass is greener on the other side, what really needs changing is your mind.

Constantly switching partners brings difficulties and confusion into your life and into the lives of others. In a way, constantly switching partners is inconsiderate because we do it out of an egotistical attitude, and thus bring much worry and suffering to parents, friends, children, and so forth.

The suffering brought about by separation is widespread. Further, when couples separate, their wealth is dispersed and one of them may be financially disadvantaged.

If somebody breaks your trust by lying and deceiving you, normally what happens is that you lose your trust in that person. If you share the responsibility of children, you cannot immediately separate from them. It is therefore good if you engage in efforts to mend the relationship and renew the trust.

Approach the other person and explain why you feel deceived. Explain that you are experiencing a loss of trust. Communicate in a reasonable manner what they are doing, and the harm their actions are bringing to your relationship and to your children.

Hopefully, the other person will see their faults and promise not to act like that in future and not deceive you again. Do not get angry, but talk with the other person in a reasonable manner.

Discussion versus Arguing

There is a difference between a discussion about different points of view, and criticism arising out of strong anger.

Sometimes, someone will establish a pattern of criticising their partner. This habit is difficult to break. When I lived in Buxa, there was an Indian man who used to do the sweeping. While he had money he was alright. But once his money ran out, he was always angry and criticising everyone. This was just a habit he had developed.

We find the same situation within families, where it has become a habit to always fight about this or that. We should be aware that fighting and having a dis-

cussion are two different things. If two people each have strong points of view with neither being prepared to give any quarter, many problems will arise. In such a situation it would be good to analyse the point of view of the other person, and to have some discussion about the difference in viewpoints.

Sometimes we have the situation where the male and the female sides of the family each stick together, causing disharmony and division within the family. There is the female point of view and the male point of view with both parties having a right to their perspective. However, to have a situation where each side stubbornly holds onto their view can cause great disharmony.

It is much better to have a wholesome discussion in which we try to look at the situation from the other person's side instead of allowing constant accusations and criticism to come out of anger with the intention to inflict harm on the other person.

Criticism within a family and within a circle of friends and acquaintances has no benefit whatsoever. Criticism within a family destroys the harmony in the family, while criticism within friendships and relationships destroys our relations with other people.

For example, we may look forward to seeing someone within the family or our circle of friends. We wish to have a good relationship with that person. However, whenever we meet the other person, old issues keep surfacing and we start to bicker and argue about things that happened in the past. Then the re-

lationship is no longer harmonious. Finally, we actually avoid that person altogether. Even though we would like to talk with them and do things with them, we are reticent, because we feel that criticism and anger will start again immediately.

Love and Compassion

The root of Dharma practice consists of the two thoughts: “I will benefit others as much as I can” and “I will abstain from harming others”. Together they form the basis of our Dharma practice.

While it may be easy to generate these thoughts when we are alone, if the mind is untrained and we meet adverse conditions, it will be difficult to hold them and translate them into practice. So we need to train the mind repeatedly in these two thoughts through meditation by sitting down in a relaxed manner, without grasping, and developing and fostering these thoughts so that they become stronger and stronger.

This is the root of all of our Dharma practice. It is also the root of purifying all of our actions of body, speech and mind.

There is a great difference between a person who values the happiness of others and a selfish person who values only their own happiness. The more self-cherishing a person has, the more difficult their life becomes. Even small things that frustrate their self-cherishing set them off and make them unhappy.

Usually a selfish person is unpleasant which causes

others to distance themselves from them. But if we have a more open mind that cherishes the happiness of others, we will be more balanced and happy, and we will be automatically liked by others.

We need to ask: what is the best method for looking after ourselves? Is it having a state of mind where we are constantly unhappy, or is it having a state of mind where we are happy?

The Root of All Happiness

Love is the thought wishing another to have happiness and compassion is the thought wishing another to be free from suffering. Love is generated by reflecting on another's lack of happiness. This is because when we become aware of how the other person lacks happiness, we automatically wish that person to have happiness.

Compassion is generated by reflecting on the other person's suffering because understanding this naturally brings about the wish for them to be free from that suffering.

Having love and compassion in our mind will stop harmful intent, and consequently stop us from harming ourselves and others. Instead, it will generate happiness for ourselves and those around us.

That is why it is said that love and compassion are the root of all happiness.

Everyone – our girlfriend or boyfriend, our parents, and so forth – need happiness, and this happiness comes about through love and compassion. If we

have love and compassion in our mind, we will be happy, affectionate and loving toward others. We will automatically like those around us and they in turn will like us back.

Anyone who acts in a warm, loving and affectionate manner will always be liked. Wherever such a person goes, they will be happy and the friends they meet will also be happy. On the other hand, if we act in the opposite way, in a selfish and angry manner, wherever we go we will experience unhappiness and the people around us will not like us. We will not like them nor will they like us.

A person who is warm, loving and compassionate will have many friends because everybody is attracted to those qualities. Even if such a person loses a friend to whom they were attached, they will not be completely alone because they will still have many other friends.

Who creates our friends and enemies? Our friends are created through our love and compassion, and our enemies through our anger. If we practise love and compassion, it will attract people who want to be friends. It will also transform people who may have at first disliked us – who might have been an enemy – into becoming our friend.

Our anger is what creates our enemies. Anger creates dislike for us in other people. Anger that is focused on others will create dislike in their mind towards us. In this way our anger creates our enemies and transforms even our friends into enemies.

It pushes our friends further far away from us whereas love and compassion pull people more closely to us.

Whether it is two or more people living together, or a large group of people such as a nation, the practice of love and compassion is needed for them to experience happiness and peace.

Sometimes it appears as if happiness and peace can be brought about through external means. We have to analyse this. For example, how does a small group of people feel when everything is harmonious? Do they experience happiness and peace? The answer is, yes. But what will happen within that group of people if anger arises? The peace and happiness they experienced previously will be completely destroyed.

Thus, in order to be able to experience happiness and peace in our life, love and compassion are essential. This applies among groups of people at all levels.

If we act with love and compassion, other people will trust us, and they also will start acting in a loving and compassionate manner and therefore will gain our trust in return. Having trust in each other is the basis of good human relationships. If your actions are based on love and compassion, trust will arise and the relationship will become stable, but if the relationship is based on attachment, it will not be stable.

Also, we will have a good reputation among our family, friends and society. They will say, "This is a good person. They are always kind, respectful and caring".

If you think about it, what do the people around you – your girlfriend or boyfriend, for example – really need? They need your affection and care. Once we show affection and care for our partner and friends they will see us as a good person who has benefited them. Therefore they will be kind to us in return.

Non-harmfulness

The buddha dharma is called the “peaceful dharma”, the dharma of non-harmfulness.

We have to relate the practice non-harmfulness to ourselves. By increasing our love and compassion we will be practising the Dharma of non-harmfulness. In the sutras it states that, “Harming others is not Dharma practice”. Harming others is never virtuous.

Having love and compassion within our mind is important because it brings about concern for others, the attitude of wanting to benefit others. If we have love and compassion for others – for example, our father, mother, or other members of our family – automatically we will have concern for them and we will want to benefit them. If we have some success in our life, for example material success, we will immediately want to share it with the rest of our family.

If we lack love and compassion, we will also lack concern for others and our attitude of wanting to benefit others will be more from the point of view of self interest. Although we might talk a lot about how concerned we are about the rest of our family and how much we want to benefit them, when we actually

have some material success and come into the position where we could benefit our family, we will not do so because we have fallen under the control of the self-cherishing thought.

Living in Harmony

If we live together for a long time with another person, it is important that we treat them with love and compassion. Through this we can experience the happiness of living in harmony. Harmony is one of the most important forms of happiness that we can experience.

Though we can also derive some happiness from having material comfort, the happiness of being able to live harmoniously with others is very important. Such happiness comes about through the practice of love and compassion.

If we do not practise love and compassion we will lose the happiness of harmonious living. Then, regardless of what we do – whether we are eating, drinking, sleeping, sitting, lying down, standing up or walking – we will not experience happiness and peace within our mind.

If we lose the happiness of harmonious living, we can even lose our own unhappiness to the point where we cannot sleep, even when we may be tired, and cannot eat, even though we may be hungry and food is placed in front of us. There is the danger that we will wet our pillow from crying the whole night!

By practising love and compassion, we will be able

to live harmoniously with others. But we have to really practise it. It is not just a question of understanding the importance of love and compassion. This is something everyone can understand. But we must also have to put it into practice, not just think, “That’s a nice idea.”

Of course, to be able to live harmoniously with another person, both parties need to practise love and compassion. Sometimes, we cannot control the actions of the other person, but from our own side, we should at least put it into practice as best we can, without putting the responsibility for harmony on the other person.

Recognising clearly the danger that losing our love and compassion will bring for us, we should become aware whenever we are about to engage in an action that is not in the spirit of love and compassion. If we recognise a state of mind arising that is not in this spirit we should be apprehensive and not follow that action, be it mentally, physically or verbally.

It is good to reflect on the qualities and benefits of practising love and compassion and then actually put them into practice. We have to analyse the state of our mind at those times when we are loving and compassionate and then when our mind is under the control of anger. A mind under the control of anger will not experience inner happiness, whereas a mind under the control of love and compassion, will.

By clearly seeing the benefits of love and compassion and the disadvantages of anger, we should

adopt one and reject the other.

We always talk about making other sentient beings happy. Making other sentient beings really happy comes about by practising love and compassion. Happiness in the other person's mind is not generated by giving them presents or material things, but by practising love and compassion toward them. Then they will be happy.

Patience

It is a common misunderstanding that meditation on patience means not expressing our anger but keeping it inside. This may lead us to think that it would be better not to practise patience, but instead, to express our anger.

However, meditation on patience does not mean that we do not express our anger. Rather, it means we do not generate anger in the first place.

Patience is a mind that remains peaceful and happy in the face of suffering and harm. Ordinarily, when we encounter suffering or other harmful conditions, our mind becomes agitated. To avoid this, we have to train the mind in patience.

For example, a mother accused of something by her small child would not get angry due to her patience with the child. But if the accusation came from her husband, her mind might become agitated. That is the difference.

We should not confuse the practice of patience with the suppression of anger. While it is good to restrain

ourselves from physically hurting someone despite being angry, this is not patience. You have to deal with that anger, because if you harbour anger in your mind, it turns into resentment.

We overcome anger by practising patience and keeping our mind peaceful and undisturbed in the face of adversity and suffering. This is because patience harms and eliminates the anger. When this happens, we will not have to experience the mental problems, suffering and anguish that anger brings. Thus, our practice of patience will rescue us from the problems of anger and become a refuge from anger.

The Disadvantages of Anger

Without patience, we get angry easily. Anger has many disadvantages. Unlike the disadvantages of desire, the disadvantages of anger are not subtle and can be observed directly. Basically, anger harms ourselves and others, destroying our happiness and the happiness of those around us.

Therefore it is important that we do not behave like a small child and immediately retaliate in response to harm. Rather we should show maturity and wisdom and try to work with the other person, being friendly to them, putting them at ease, and so forth. We need to look at our situation and our mind. Patience is a practice that happens in the mind.

Sometimes, when we get angry with someone, the harmful intent might start out weak, but then we start thinking about the ways the other person has mis-

treated us, or the times they looked at us in the wrong way or spoke to us in the wrong way, and so forth. We get ourselves worked up and the anger becomes stronger. Reminding ourselves of the disadvantages of anger can stop this process.

When we practise patience, we are practising the Dharma, because patience harms the delusions. A person who does not have an angry mind is a happy person, while a person whose mind is disturbed and agitated by anger will be unhappy.

One way of dealing with anger is to focus the mind inwards and investigate the anger – the reasons for our anger, its disadvantages, and so forth. Do not let the mind be distracted outside, but focus it inside and investigate the anger. Through this process alone, the anger will abate. It is in the nature of the mind to calm down if it is focused inwards.

We can also contemplate the situation of the other person who is the object of our anger. We can think about the reasons why that person is angry, and how they are under the control of their own negative mind. We can think that, at that moment, because they are experiencing anger, they are not happy because we all know about the unhappiness that anger generates within the mind. We realise the other person is experiencing that very unhappiness. By thinking about the unhappiness of the other person, we generate compassion and love for them, and so overcome our own anger.

Whether we generate anger towards the other per-

son or not has a lot to do with how the person appears to our mind. Does the person appear pleasant to our mind? Does the person appear undesirable to our mind?

We can reflect on how we generate anger towards the other person when we think they are in a good situation but how our attitude changes quickly when we find out that the other person has a serious disease. The anger we previously had for the person goes away, and we think: "My God, that poor person, how much suffering are they experiencing. What can I do to help?" When we see someone suffering from a serious disease, we generate compassion for them.

Anger: The Real Culprit

One way of meditating on patience is to understand how the other person is compelled by their anger to hurt us without having any freedom in the matter.

Here it is important to first understand our own mind. By observing how easy it is for our mind to fall under the control of anger, and how we are then compelled to harm the other person, we can understand how the other person is likewise compelled to act in the way they do. Hence the real culprit is not the other person, but the other person's anger, which robs them of their reason and freedom of choice.

So, if we were to get angry at all, we should direct our anger at the other person's anger, not towards the other person.

If there is a three-car pile-up, with the third car push-

ing the middle car into the first, the driver of the first car should not be angry with the driver of the middle car as it was not that driver's fault. It was the driver in the car behind who caused the accident. The driver of the first car should be most upset with the driver in the last car. Similarly, someone being pushed by their anger does not really have much freedom or choice in the matter.

As the great Bodhisattva Shantideva said, a person under the influence of the mental afflictions will even hurt themselves. Their mind can become so disturbed that they even hurt themselves physically. So, even if we do not generate compassion for that person, at the very least we can see that they are really not the object of our anger.

Also, from our own experience, we know that an angry person is a suffering person. If that person were happy, they would not frown and say unpleasant things. Understanding that anger is making the other person suffer helps us to generate compassion for them.

Being Patient in an Impatient World

When two parties are warring with each other, will anybody come out the winner? Is it not more the case that if both parties are angry, they both end up with wounds on their heads because they start hitting each other?! When their anger dies down, they may put bandaids on each other's wounds. But they will not really have received any benefit.

There is no benefit to be gained from two parties having a go at each other in anger. We know where that will end. For example, when larger countries give smaller countries a hard time, neither really wins.

The worldly view is that if we are verbally abused and do not retaliate, we will receive a loss. This is the general worldly perception – we will receive loss if we do not retaliate in kind. We learn this view from a young age.

However, the Dharma point of view is different. We have to consider that if we were to retaliate in kind we would lose our inner peace and happiness.

For example, when we are verbally abused by someone, if we let our mind be affected by what that person says, we would lose our inner peace and happiness. So we have the choice – do we want to preserve our inner peace and happiness, or do we want to retaliate in kind?

If we go on to retaliate in kind, it is likely that our mind will be overrun by anger. This will automatically cause us to lose our inner calmness, peace and happiness.

Although from a worldly perspective we may say that someone who does not retaliate is stupid, in fact the person who practises patience when verbally abused, and so on, is truly courageous, unlike the person who retaliates in kind.

Patience and Suffering

There is no need to feel depressed when we are sick. By reflecting upon the law of cause and effect –

that the sickness is the result of non-virtuous karma – you will realise that the sickness is a good thing because it is purifying non-virtuous karma.

Real practitioners and bodhisattvas have great courage, and pray for more problems so that they can purify more negative karma and have more ammunition against self-cherishing.

It is also good to pray: “By my experiencing this sickness, may all others that experience the same sickness be freed from their sicknesses, and may that their sicknesses be placed upon myself.” By doing this practice, there is a danger that we will be cured of our sickness!

The more problems and sickness we face, the greater should be our courage and strength of mind. Usually, it is the other way around – the greater the problem, the less confident we become. But when we experience great problems, we should actually increase our strength of mind and courage, willingly taking on those problems and practising forbearance. In this way, we will arrive at a result. If we are not willing to take on any problems, we will not get any result.

Practising Patience Close to Home

We need to take care that our mind remains undisturbed. Initially we start the practice of patience with those who are close to us – our nearest and dearest, our family and friends – then slowly we extend it further.

As beginners, we will find it difficult; we are not yet at

the level of a practitioner who can have patience with everybody. We need to start out small with our immediate environment, and then slowly extend our practice. The reason why we practise patience with those close to us is that we have more interaction with them, and therefore more opportunities to be disturbed and angry.

How not to Hold a Grudge

Recognising Resentment

You can recognise whether or not you are holding a grudge against someone by checking whether you have lingering harmful intent in your mind toward them. If you do this then you have resentment toward the other person and thus no forgiveness.

Holding a grudge means harbouring resentment toward the other person, and waiting for the right time to pay them back. The way this works is that initially you had anger, but you did not deal with that anger because it transformed into a more subtle and lingering resentment against the other person with the result that now you are just waiting for the right opportunity to harm them.

We engage in revenge due to the mental factor of resentment. First, we get angry at the other person. Then we store away that anger until a time when we can repay the person in kind. Finally the anger becomes lingering resentment that acts as the cause for engaging in some action of revenge.

Counteracting Resentment

Meditating on love for the other person counteracts resentment toward them because resentment (or holding a grudge) has as its nature ill-will towards another.

The initial anger is also in the nature of ill-will, but it is slightly different. Anger wants to harm the object straight away. Resentment is anger turned into a subtler type of ill-will that waits until the right opportunity arrives to pay the person back. In other words it waits until we can say or do just the right thing to make the other person suffer.

Since resentment is in the nature of ill-will, it is counteracted by love, wanting the other person to be happy.

Reflect on how the other person was pushed into their action by their mental afflictions, how they had no freedom in their actions but were under the control of their afflictions. That will help you keep a positive mind. Then think that they probably engaged in that harmful action because of some problem or suffering of their own.

By reflecting that the other person did not have much freedom in the matter but was pushed into the action by their mental afflictions and that therefore the fault does not lie with them but with their afflictions, helps us to let the anger go.

And by reflecting on your own life you will see that there were situations where your mental afflictions also pushed you uncontrollably into a harmful action. This also helps dissolve anger.

Developing Courage

Buddha is referred to as the lord of the fearless realm. Fearless, in this sense, means the absence of anger, attachment and ignorance which are minds that can be eliminated through the teachings of the Buddha. We can abide free from fear of these if we practise the Dharma.

Great courage has to be acquired and be made your friend. You have to build up the mind and train the mind in courage. Like anything else, it has to be learned. Otherwise your mind will be small and weak.

Some people have a small fearful mind, almost like an inferiority complex, where they think of themselves as not quite capable of doing something, even though they actually have potential to do it. Such people are self-sabotaging because of internal doubt and fear. They have to train themselves to overcome that fear.

We develop the courage to practise Dharma by contemplating how previous practitioners practised – how they were courageous, overcame great difficulties, and devoted their life to Dharma practice without being concerned with food, drink, and so forth. Reflecting on this, and that they were ordinary human beings just like us will inspire us to practise similarly.

The same principle applies if we want to inspire ourselves to have greater courage in worldly activities. There are enough examples of people who have had great worldly success. We can contemplate their actions and life stories – how they were successful in

the face of adversity, overcame adversity, and so forth. In this way, we remind ourselves that they were human beings just like us.

For example, some students have difficulty giving a Dharma talk to others, to the extent that they may shake out of fear and nervousness when sitting in front of the group. The problem is not that they do not have the knowledge. They have the knowledge, but they have a fear of sitting in front of a group of people talking about the Dharma. But, because it was something I asked them to do, they were unable to say no and so did it. Through thus doing, they were able to gradually become more confident and less fearful. Through training, they gradually became more confident and brave.

Similarly, there are people who are shy to an extreme, having great fear of expressing themselves. They find great difficulty just having a normal conversation, and find it difficult to properly interact with others.

That can again be overcome. Slowly, by training with friends and relatives and people with whom they feel comfortable they can overcome their shyness and fear of expressing themselves and conversing. They can actually become very articulate.

It is important to develop great strength of mind, the willingness to put up with difficulties and problems. Your mind should not be like cotton. If you have a weak mind, like cotton, it will be blown here and there as soon as a breeze comes up! But if you have great

strength of mind, your practice will be successful.

For example, it is important that we have enough strength of mind to withstand external pressures that pressure us to believe we are unhappy because we lack different types of objects. If we do not have that internal strength of mind we will start to believe: “I’m unhappy because I do not have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, or because I do not have a house, or not a nice enough house, or because I do not have money, or not enough money”. By starting to think in this way, we will become unhappy.

If we do not generate courage and determination we will be easily discouraged by small problems. There is a type of soldier who, when their companion is shot, will lose courage and strength of mind upon seeing the other’s blood. They just curl up somewhere, waiting for everything to be over.

I have heard that someone got so frightened that he actually put his head into a hole in the ground with the rest of the body still sticking out, just like a small child who thinks it is invisible because it has closed its eyes.

In one sutra, the Buddha taught a woman that to overcome all types of suffering and problems, she should generate strength of mind, thinking: “I am willing to put up with any type of problem in order to overcome the immeasurable great problem of the delusions.” This is the type of courage in which we need to train.

We need to have strong and solid mental determina-

tion because, with a weak and thin mind, our practice will not progress. If, from the start, we have generated strong determination, we will even be able to transform great problems into the path, and turn them into conditions for our spiritual growth.

The example given is that of a brave soldier when he is shot or wounded. Instead of discouraging him, the sight of his own blood will cause him to become fiercer and will give him greater strength.

We can observe this when football players are wounded during a game. They will proudly smear the blood over their head, maybe put on a bandage, and will be inspired to play even more roughly!

If we do not have that strong determination from the beginning, and rather have a small mind lacking self-confidence, even small problems will pose great obstacles to our progress. We will throw in the towel easily, and readily give up our practice because of even small difficulties and problems.

Depression

Just as we experience many problems, we should also be aware that others experience similar problems. Thus, without feeling discouraged or depressed, but instead meeting problems with great courage and strength of mind, a bodhisattva takes on the sufferings of others.

There will be times when we experience different types of destitution, such as lack of money or friends. We may encounter financial problems because of a

decline in our business or losing our job. We can also be separated from someone dear or be unable to find new friends. We can experience lack in any area of our life.

However, at these difficult times, we must not get depressed and lose our strength of heart. Rather, we should keep up our inner strength and optimism. Then we will be able to get on with our life and improve our situation, changing it if we are able to change it.

As a famous Tibetan Lama once asked: “Does depression free us from being destitute?” Whether we are experiencing material destitution or lack of human warmth and friends, we should analyse whether being depressed will help the situation.

The fact is that being depressed does not liberate us from problems and destitution. Therefore, we should not let our mind be overcome by sadness and suffering but should work out what we want to achieve. Then we should rely on skilful means or ask someone skilful to show us the way to achieve it.

By applying method and effort we will be able to overcome our problem. If we remain depressed, not doing anything and not seeking help, we will not overcome our problem. In short, it is up to us whether we deal with our situation or not.

Everyone shares the experience of destitution and loss. We Tibetans have experienced great loss. Many Tibetans have lost family, friends and children to the Chinese. When they arrived in India, some Tibetans

could not bear it and committed suicide, while others did not let their minds be overcome by depression but remained optimistic. Eventually, although they had lost everything, they were able to start new businesses, find new friends and start a new life.

Some Tibetans lost their girlfriends or boyfriends in Tibet, but as soon as they came over the border, they found new girlfriends or boyfriends. It was almost instantaneous – one moment there was loss, then immediately afterwards they gained!

So, it is important not to let our mind be overcome by depression, but to keep an optimistic attitude.

As Buddhist practitioners, at times of depression when the mind is down, we can reflect on the positive and uplifting aspects of the Lam Rim – for example, reflecting on the qualities of the Three Jewels, or reflecting on karma. In this way, we can uplift our mind.

If we are depressed and sit down and read a Dharma book, automatically our mind will be uplifted and happy. But when the mind becomes too uplifted, it is important to think about those aspects of the path that subdue the mind a little. This prevents us from becoming too excited and over-confident. In this manner we keep our mind in a stable and optimistic state.

Otherwise, if we let the mind be overcome by depression, it creates an obstacle to our Dharma practice. Some people do not practise any Dharma at all, but just wallow in their depression. This is a great danger.

There is no need to let our mind fall into depression.

Even if we get physically sick, if our mind is happy, we will be happy. For example, when I was in hospital some years ago, although I was physically so sick that I could not even go to the toilet, mentally I was able to remain happy. The doctors were surprised by this. I was too sick to get up, but my mind was happy. My mind was fully functional and I had the opportunity to do my prayers, so I was happy. The doctors found that quite surprising!

If we are sick, we are already experiencing physical suffering so there is no need to add mental suffering to it. If we are mentally happy while experiencing physical suffering this will make the physical suffering bearable. Otherwise, if we let the mind become too fixated on our problem, whether it be physical suffering or some kind of loss, it will be difficult to get out of the situation.

For example, if we have experienced the loss of a friend, there is no point in letting the mind get too fixated on this loss by constantly thinking about it and becoming obsessed by it. If we do this, we will rob ourselves of the possibility of again experiencing happiness as we will be unable to apply any method with which to deal with it.

In the case of losing a friendship, the other person is already estranged from us. There is nothing we can do about that – it has already happened. However, instead of letting the mind be overcome by depression, we should focus on our other close friends and keep the mind optimistic and upbeat. By applying

skilful methods, we can slowly work our way upward and change our situation.

We usually talk about “transforming problems into the path”. This is actually quite difficult to do. We need to have a very pure and good Dharma mind to do that.

But even now, we can reflect on how other people experience the problems we experience. By meditating on exchanging self and others – taking on the problems of others and imagining that we have freed all other sentient beings from suffering by taking on their problems – our mind will definitely be benefited.

The Psychology of the Afflictions

The arising of afflictions within the mind stream depends on three conditions: proximity to the object, mistaken conception, and the presence of the seeds of the afflictions.

For someone who has not abandoned the afflictions, and therefore has the seeds in their continuum, if the other two conditions come together, afflictions will arise in the mind without choice. Of the three, we can say the main condition is mistaken conception.

It is important for us to understand the psychological development of the afflictions together with the role that mistaken conception or mistaken thinking plays in this.

Throughout our lives, we swing from attachment, to anger, to attachment, to anger. If we perceive somebody as pleasant because they make us happy and we think of them as near and dear to us, we will generate attachment towards them. But then something

real or imaginary happens, our conception of that person changes and we perceive them as harmful and unpleasant, which causes us to generate anger. In this manner, our mind swings back and forth like a pendulum, holding a person as near and dear one moment, and then generating aversion to that person the next.

When we meet an object of anger or attachment, mistaken conception gives us a wrong impression of it. In the case of an object of attachment, mistaken conception greatly exaggerates the attractive aspects of the object up to the point where we feel we are unable to live without it. This exaggerated perception is what causes us to generate desire for the object.

Conversely, if we meet an object of anger, our misleading conception greatly exaggerates the negative aspects of that object in our mind and we generate anger toward it.

If these perceptions are carefully analysed we will find that they exist only in our mind, and not on or in the object. When we go to bed, we may feel we cannot bear to be separated from the other person for even a moment. But when we wake up the following morning, we may feel we cannot stand to be with the other person for even one more moment! Obviously, what has changed is our perception of the other person, not the other person.

If we can free ourselves from the control of misleading conception, then neither attachment nor anger will arise in relation to an object. Therefore, identify-

ing this misleading conception and reducing its power becomes very important.

When we find that our mistaken conception starts to think about the faults of the object, exaggerating them and concentrating only on them, we have to put a stop to that way of thinking. Through putting a stop to that negative train of thought, we also put a stop to anger.

Otherwise, as we all know, the more we get mentally involved in this thought-process, and the more we exaggerate the faults and negative qualities of the other person in our mind, the more our anger will increase.

The same goes for attachment. If we find that our mind starts to fantasise about the qualities of the object we have to put a stop to that line of thinking. If we do not, our mind will become overwhelmed with desire for it. The more our mistaken conception exaggerates the attractive aspects of the object, the more attachment will be generated for that object until, in the end, it will appear to us as if we cannot live without that object.

It is crucial to understand that our mind becomes completely overwhelmed by attachment or anger on the basis of exaggerating either the attractive qualities or faults of the object.

When we understand the role that mistaken conception plays in the development of our afflictions we will better understand the purpose and importance of meditation. This is because the purpose of meditation is to not let the mind fall under the control of the mistaken and deluded thoughts.

Detaching from Criticism and Praise

There is no way in which others' angry words toward us can decrease our qualities and increase our faults. Nor that praise can increase our qualities and decrease our faults.

In this manner we can see the words of others are empty, a mere echo. The Bodhisattva Shantideva said: "Our mind should not be like the mind of a small child who builds a sand castle on the beach and then gets very upset when the tide comes and sweeps the sand castle away." Our mind should not be like a child's mind, getting upset by words that cannot affect us one way or the other.

Gain and fame are objects of attachment and completely unworthy of our attention. There are certain types of people who will give up everything, their wealth and even their life, in the name of fame.

But if we think about it, the word fame is just a word. There is not the slightest benefit coming from the word. You will not be healthier from fame, and neither will you be any happier. Nor can it be taken to the next life. Things such as fame and material possessions have to be left behind when you go to the next life.

So, although some people put great effort into trying to become famous, it is an empty objective. By reflecting in this way on the uselessness of attachment to praise, we should become unattached to receiving, or not receiving, praise or criticism and keep a happy mind.

The mind can go up and down with praise and criticism like a yo-yo, which is not useful. If someone criticises us, it goes down. If someone praises us, we become proud and our mind goes up. Then, someone else comes along and criticises us, and our mind goes down again. We should try to have a more stable mind.

If we are criticised it will neither decrease our qualities nor give us more faults. Similarly, if we are praised it will neither increase our qualities nor make us a better person. Likewise, if somebody compliments us on our appearance, it will not make us more handsome or beautiful. And, if someone criticises our appearance, it will not make us uglier than we are already are!

If somebody says: “You are really a nice person with such a good mind,” what is the benefit? It does not change anything. We know our own mind, and because we know our own mind, we do not need to get excited if we are praised, or get depressed if somebody criticises us. If we know our own mind, we can mentally remain happy even in the face of criticism.

It is said in the texts that “our mind is our witness.” Our mind is the judge of what type of a person we are. We do not need to rely on the praise and criticism of others and we do not need to identify with what other people say but should rely instead on how our inner situation really is. That is important.

By contemplating this again and again, slowly we will

become independent of others' views. Slowly through our practice, we will be able to improve our inner situation – increasing our qualities and reducing our faults – and there will be no need to be attached to or to identify with others' opinions.

Overcoming Jealousy

Rejoicing in the other person's fortune generates happiness, while being jealous produces suffering. Therefore, our happiness and suffering depend on our point of view. Looking at the other person's fortune from the point of view of rejoicing in their fortune generates happiness for us. It actually brings us good fortune. However, regarding the other person's fortune with jealousy only causes us to be unhappy.

We can rejoice in our own fortune, and the fortune of others. When we rejoice in our own fortune it counteracts pride. When we rejoice in the fortune of others it counteracts jealousy.

To rejoice in your own fortune you contemplate all the good, virtuous things that you have done. Rejoicing in the fortune of others is like the situation of a beggar finding a piece of gold – that beggar will be incredibly happy. When we rejoice, we should feel the same kind of joy for the fortune of others. To rejoice in the good fortune of others we have to remember that the other person is exactly the same as each of us in wanting happiness, yet lacking happiness. So if something good happens to them, we can rejoice in their happiness.

If you are jealous of another person's wealth, meditate on how nice it is for the other person to have that wealth. If you are jealous of the other person's wealth, since wealth is something that everybody needs and desires, think how nice it is that that person actually has some wealth. If you are jealous of their qualities, rejoice that they have those qualities, and if you are jealous of their circle of friends, rejoice in them having those friends.

If you can rejoice in other people's good fortune, you can sleep well at night. But if your mind is racked by jealousy you are the one who will receive the loss and will lose sleep.

If we do not rejoice in other's good fortune it will generate jealousy in our mind. So rejoicing is the antidote to jealousy.

Rejoicing also generates virtue, because when we rejoice in the good fortune of others, we generate virtuous karma. In this way there is a double benefit. We generate happiness in our mind and we generate virtue.

Lama Tsong Khapa describes the practice of rejoicing as a virtuous practice that requires little effort, but accumulates great waves of merit.

Work

Harmony in the Workplace

As I always advise, it is important to meditate daily. Of course, you can only meditate relative to how much time you have. But even when you are busy with work and other things, it is still important to practise mindfulness throughout the day – for example, being mindful about what you say. Take a short mental pause before saying something and reflect upon whether what you are about to say is harmful or beneficial.

By stopping to reflect in this way you can avoid much unpleasantness in the workplace. Quite often the friction generated in the workplace happens because of unpleasant things said without thinking, or because someone frowned at another person.

Practise mindfulness by taking the time to reflect upon what you are going to say and if you find that what you are about to say is hurtful to the other person, change your attitude and say instead something friendly and beneficial! By smiling and being pleasant with the other person much friction is avoided in the workplace.

We should always base our actions on love, compassion and a concern for the welfare of others, whether we are walking, lying down, sitting or talking.

Job Security

Some people worry about losing their job if their employer becomes bankrupt. I cannot give you a method for not losing your job. But does worrying prevent you from losing your job? Is worrying in any way beneficial? Will worrying make it more unlikely that you will lose the job?

Since there is no benefit, your worrying is just a source of suffering. It will not help you to keep your job and will only cause you more suffering. Instead of worrying about losing your job, it is better to have a calm, relaxed and happy mind, and look for a new job.

As Shantideva says, worrying is never useful. If the problem is beyond your control there is no benefit in worrying, and if you can change the problem, then there is also no benefit in worrying.

Many times previously, I have told the story of two geshe, Geshe Kalchen and Geshe Penba, who were in a group that escaped from Tibet to India over the mountains. Geshe Kalchen was a senior geshe who had several students to look after, and he worried about their provisions. He worried that their tsampa¹ would run out. He was also constantly worrying about what would happen when they came to India – not having anything to eat, and so on. But Geshe Penba, who was junior to Geshe Kalchen, said: “Geshe-la, do not worry. Where we are going, to India, there is food. Since there is food, we will be able to get some of it. Therefore do not worry.” That helped Geshe Kalchen.

¹ Roasted barley flour, a Tibetan staple food

The Right Motivation

If you do your job, whatever it is, not just with the motivation of making money, but also with the motivation of benefiting others, it will become more worthwhile. In this way, we can combine our ordinary work with the accumulation of merit.

Professions such as medicine or nursing are very meritorious. When someone is so sick that they have to be hospitalised they can feel very distressed. They have no choice but to be in hospital. However, being looked after kindly by the doctor, the nurses, friends and relatives will make a great difference to them. If you are a nurse, you can accumulate much merit through your work. If you have been in hospital yourself, you can really appreciate the difference it makes when you are looked after nicely by a nurse.

In short, positive actions accumulate merit, while harming others creates non-virtuous karma.

If you are employed, you should work honestly and effectively for your employer. By working hard for your employer, you will be able to save them money, benefiting the company as a whole and making your employer happy with you. Therefore, there is benefit all around.

It is important that both the employee and the employer can depend on each other. If you are employed somewhere, you should try to work as well as you can for the employer. You will then receive benefit. If you do not work well, despite getting paid, then it becomes like stealing from your employer.

Dealing with Difficult People

Often, we may find ourselves in a work situation where we have to work with someone whose manner may disturb us. In such situations, we should ignore the other person and focus on our own work.

All we really have to do is say: “Good morning” when we arrive at work, and when we leave say: “Good evening, see you tomorrow.” Then, during the day, we just concentrate on our work, because the purpose of going to work is to earn money. This is the whole point of going to work! So, we should not let our purpose be obstructed by another’s disruptive behaviour.

By doing this over a few months, the other person may feel a bit embarrassed, and may realise that from their own side, they have not really behaved properly. Apart from that, our mind is our own responsibility.

If we return their scowls with a happy face, it might also transform their expression into a happier one. If we think: “Why is that person looking a bit grim today? There is probably a reason as to why they look so grim. Maybe I should try to make them a little happier.” Then if we smile at the other person, it might help change the situation.

Generally, if someone is frowning and being a bit aggressive, smiling at that person and talking to them nicely can have a transformative, beneficial effect.

Dealing Skilfully with Wealth

Attachment Is Bad, Wealth Is Good

There is a misunderstanding regarding the Buddhist practices of renunciation, contentment and less desire, whereby students think it means to get rid of all their material possessions, not realising that the practices refers to a state of mind.

To practise renunciation it is not external wealth that needs to be given away, but rather, the grasping at that wealth as it is this grasping that produces suffering. External wealth is necessary to practise the Dharma, and it is good to have good quality possessions. Also as Buddhists we need money, because we need to purchase things!

Practising more contentment and less desire does not mean to give away all our possessions. Rather it means that we try to be content with what we have, at the same time reducing our attachment to possessions. To practise this is not only important for ordained practitioners but for everyone, because if our mind falls under the control of attachment, it causes much suffering.

Being separated from something we are attached to causes great anguish and mental suffering. But if we are separated from something to which we are not attached it will not cause us any mental suffering and anguish. A Dharma practitioner who does not have attachment can, when the time of death comes, die comfortably. This because they will not suffer when separated from friends and relatives, possessions

and their body. But if a person has attachment for these three they will suffer greatly when they die.

Similarly, during one's life, if we have attachment to our wealth, it will cause us suffering. Thus, instead of the wealth being a conducive condition for happiness, it will leave a conducive condition for suffering. Normally we regard wealth as a conducive condition for happiness, but if we have attachment to that wealth, it will become the exact opposite. What is supposed to be a condition for happiness will obstruct our happiness.

It is good to be wealthy, because if we are wealthy, it benefits society. If we become wealthy, we can benefit those who are less wealthy by employing them. In this way, we can generate more wealth. People who have less wealth depend on the wealthy for employment, while the wealthy depend on the workers for their happiness. It is good to keep that dependent origination in mind.

It is also important not to be controlled by our wealth because, after all, external wealth is supposed to be a conducive condition for happiness. If we are controlled by our wealth, it will become counterproductive. If we have a mind that is overcome by delusions, we will have strong grasping towards our worldly achievements. We might have accumulated a certain number of possessions, or a certain amount of money, but this accumulation of possessions of worldly happiness will not actually cause happiness within the mind and later it will just cause more suf-

fering. This is a peculiar effect that has been reported by many famous and rich people who have said, “All the possessions I have accumulated have not given me mental happiness. In fact they have caused me more suffering.”

Because we have strong grasping for possessions, we cannot let them go. On the one hand, we cannot let the possessions go and give them to others because we feel we have worked hard to get them. On the other hand, we constantly worry about what to do with them and how not to lose them.

It is the nature of impermanence that all the worldly happiness, to which we grasp is constantly moving away from us. Trying to hold on to such happiness is destined to failure and will only cause suffering. We do not say that the fault lies within the possessions. There is nothing wrong with having possessions, money, and so forth. In fact, as we have said, it is beneficial to have possessions and money. The fault lies in our mental attitude. Regardless of whether or not we have many possessions, it is important to recognise the correct mental attitudes that will cause happiness, and the mistaken mental attitudes that will cause only suffering.

When our mind is unified with the Dharma, it will experience mental happiness, and furthermore, can retain that mental happiness. If we engage in various worldly activities, the mental happiness we gain disperses in various directions.

Two Attitudes

There are two attitudes to possessions – a worldly attitude and a Dharma attitude. The latter would be the attitude of using our possessions to benefit all sentient beings.

It is also in accordance with the Dharma if someone who has spent most of their life accumulating possessions, money, wealth and so forth uses that money to provide for their children. Instead of thinking, “This is what I have worked for all my life” and keeping it for themselves, they might buy a house for each of the children, and set each of them up very well. That is also a Dharma attitude as it is practising Dharma in the context of the family. While not benefiting all sentient beings, it is practising the Dharma, by unifying the mind with the Dharma in the context of a family situation.

We can often observe that people who have worked for the greater part of their life to accumulate wealth like to hold onto it. Then something will happen in the family – for example, a husband will separate from his first wife and children, take a new wife and go a different way with his money. This causes a great deal of suffering and problems. The fault is that of having a worldly attitude. We do not say that the person is bad. What we say is that the person’s worldly attitude is bad, and that is where the fault lies.

There are many good reasons from a Dharma point of view for becoming famous or renowned, but we should see all these worldly accomplishments as

having no essence, like a dewdrop on a blade of grass that does not remain there for very long. We should see our worldly accomplishments as lacking essence, and be humble and not conceited, this is the practice of a bodhisattva.

There is a lot to say about the disadvantages of pride. First, if someone is proud and conceited, that person will not have many friends as they cannot interact harmoniously with others. Also, a conceited and proud person will not learn anything new. They will not generate any new qualities or insights. Additionally, the qualities and insights they have already generated will decline.

When we have any type of success – wealth, a beautiful appearance, a highly respected family, power, inner and outer qualities, and so forth – it can act as a cause of pride. Pride or conceit is generated in the mind. Once generated it can destroy that person.

There is nothing wrong with these qualities, but once we generate pride in them, it will turn around and destroy us. We will become conceited and generate a discriminating attitude, looking down on those with lesser qualities, viewing them as being inferior and treating them badly. Such considerations is one of pride's dangers.

Generally, if a person is without pride and conceit, that person's mind will be quite happy and at ease.

When Your Possessions Are Stolen

When someone has stolen something from you, it is

good to apply an antidote to greed and to think that your wealth is deceptive and illusory.

When we initially try to accumulate wealth we are unable to do so. Later, when we are able to accumulate wealth, we find it difficult to hold onto it. Eventually, the wealth disintegrates anyway. So, outer wealth does not hold any essence.

It is more constructive to think that our wealth of inner qualities constitutes the real wealth and it is for this that we should strive. You can also reflect on the transient nature of wealth and of your body. There is really no way of holding onto them – you will definitely lose them sooner or later. You might even speculate that from one point of view it is even better that your wealth is stolen now, because at the time of death, you will not have anything to cling to!

And if we take the thief into account, you can pray that whatever they stole may be of benefit to them. If you can completely let go of what was stolen from you, your mind will be happy.

Whether you can be happy or not all depends on your way of thinking.

Raising Children

Explaining the Dharma to Children

When we explain the Dharma to our children, it is not in the context of a Dharma teacher talking to a disciple. The child is not yet developed and cannot take the role of a disciple. You have to teach small children the Dharma in a very gentle and skilful way.

If you tried to force a child to sit in the seven-point meditation posture and meditate, success will not arise. I think it would even generate in the child some nausea about meditation practice as children like to move around and play.

Teaching the child about Dharma should be in the context of a playful environment for it is here that they are quite happy to learn new things. But if you take away the playful environment, they will not be so keen.

For example, it is useful to teach small children by doing drawings. You could draw two areas on a piece of paper, which you could say are two countries on either side of an ocean, one the good country, and one the bad one. In the good country you can draw all the nice things children might want later in life. You can be quite creative in this and make it elaborate, drawing nice houses, nice cars, pets and so forth. In the bad country you draw the opposite, poor houses etc.

You also draw children on the good side and other children on the bad side, and then explain the relationship between being a good child and having all these nice things later in life. You show their respective development, pointing out that the children on the good side end up with a good life. They have good food to eat, many friends, living in comfort and harmony, and they got there by listening well to their parents, not harming others, being good children, helpful, studying well and so forth.

The children who went down the harmful direction ended up with insufficient or drink, no friends, bad circumstances, and so on, and they arrived there by acting in a harmful and destructive manner, not listening to their parents, not studying well and so forth. You could add that the children who went in a harmful direction did not have a good relationship with their parents and did not listen. For this reason the parents were unable to teach them properly. The children on the good side, on the other hand, had a good relationship with their parents and were taught well by the parents and listened well to them.

This sort of visual aid makes it easy for the children to generate a mental image of what you are describing and discussing. I think also that using this technique has also proved useful during the Sunday Dharma Club children's group. You can also combine this with handing out treats to the children.

It is important for children to have aims and to understand the benefits of being good, studying well etc. All this can all be conveyed in this exercise. Once they understand the benefit of studying well at school, they want to do it. This can be a very skilled way of getting children to study. Parents should not push the child to study, but try to make the child understand the future benefits of studying well now. If explained in such a manner children become very keen to study. But it is important to be always gentle and understanding in our efforts to educate the child.

It can also be good to teach a child some simple Dharma practices, such as how to do circumambulations, offerings and prostrations, because then the child will become acquainted with these actions. They might not yet comprehend the meaning of the actions, but as they grow up and their mind becomes a little bit subdued, they can receive further teachings and then realise: “That is why I have been doing that.”

Teaching meditation to a child may be very difficult – their minds are very restless and distracted. But to teach those other things is very useful because if the child becomes familiar with pure thoughts and ways of acting, it can prove beneficial for the child later in life.

One can explain simple Buddhist principles in simple terms to a child. For example, if one harms an insect, that it hurts the insect in the same way as oneself. This can be illustrated by pinching the child slightly, explaining that is the pain the insect feels when one squeezes it. This can be elaborated on by explaining: “You don’t like to be harassed or abused by others, so you should not do those things to others. You don’t like to be harmed, so you shouldn’t harm others.”

Skilful Answers

There was a grandmother who did things like recite Tara praises, make offerings and prostrate to Tara. One day, one of her grandchildren asked: “You do all those things like prostrations and offering to Tara, but

what is Tara doing, what is the Buddha doing?” In such a situation, if you explain to the child that he or she will receive blessings in the mind that will benefit them later in life – improve their mind, help them in their study at school, etc. – the child will be happy.

The Importance of Taming the Mind

There is a story about being able to use external force to subdue the body but not the mind. Elephants are tamed by the use of force. They are beaten with a stick to be forced into submission and follow the instructions given to them with the stick and hook.

One day, a king went to a famous elephant tamer and asked for the tamest elephant, then took a ride on it. However, the elephant smelled a female elephant that was in heat, so it started to run like crazy with the king still on its back, chasing her. The king thought he would die because the elephant was so crazed.

When the king finally managed to get the elephant back, he complained to the elephant tamer: “I asked you to give me a really, really tame elephant, but you gave me one that was completely untamed.” The elephant tamer replied: “I’m really sorry, but all I can do is exert some physical control over the elephant’s body. I cannot subdue its mind. But look, the elephant’s desire and attachment have subsided, and he’s completely tame again.”

He then showed the king all the things the elephant was trained to do and how tame it was now that its

mind of desire had subsided. Then the king asked the elephant tamer: “Where can one find a person who is proficient in subduing sentient beings’ minds?” The elephant tamer said: “There is this person called Shakyamuni Buddha who is very skilful at doing that.”

This is a good story for parents with teenage sons. When the son’s mind becomes stirred up by desire and he starts chasing girls, the parents know that he is really a little bit crazy in his mind at that time! We have to always relate the moral of those stories to our own mind and situation. We know there are situations when our mind or another person’s mind is completely overwhelmed by disturbing thoughts and there is nothing that person can do at that moment. They cannot help themselves and just have to act in that disturbed manner. Understanding the other person’s situation at that time can be very helpful.

This story also shows that we cannot subdue the mind by subduing the body. For example, parents might ground their teenage son, but this would only physically restrain the boy. It would not help him with his mental state.

Being an Example

The first thing a child needs is an example. It is more important for the child to be able to observe the parents practising the Dharma than the parents trying to teach their child.

For example, if the parents are Christian, rather than them trying to teach their child about different Chris-

tian beliefs and practices, it is more beneficial for the child to be able to observe them participating in the different Christian practices – going to Church, giving charity, and the like. The child should be able to take the parents as an example so that later, when the practices are formally explained, that explanation will fall on fruitful ground.

For the same reason it is important for the parents to live together harmoniously by practising true love and compassion with each other. Children are usually imprinted by the behaviour of their parents. If the parents live together harmoniously then that leaves imprints on the child's mind to be able to do so likewise, and pass it on to their own children.

If the parents treat each other well – if the husband treats the wife in a gentle manner, and the wife treats the husband likewise, and they talk to each other kindly, respectfully and honestly, this will educate the child to behave likewise.

Otherwise, if the mother always fights with the father, or the father always fights with the mother, you can see how that makes an imprint on the child to act similarly when he or she grows up. When the girl becomes a woman perhaps she will have a tendency to always fight with her husband, or, if it is a boy, as a man he might have a tendency to always fight with his wife and mistreat her.

Early and Skilful

It is important to start educating the child early on re-

garding the different things to do and not to do. Otherwise, if you let children do whatever they want from a young age, once they are 11 or 12, they will feel they have already attained a lot of freedom and independence, and it will be difficult control such a child. But if you apply the right amount of discipline and relaxation from an early age, then when the child has grown up their mind will be happier and stable, and they will be more receptive to your advice.

Of course this has to be done in a gentle manner and according to the child's disposition and inclinations. Often the parents force their expectations and wishes on the child without taking into consideration the aspirations of the child. This can create a gulf between the child and the parents because the child feels that it is not understood by the parents and is being forced into a life it does not wish to have. This gulf can then lead to total estrangement once the child has grown up and is ready to marry and start his or her own family.

That children reject their parents once they have grown up is a phenomenon often observed, and I think often the cause may be that the parents created this gulf due to not being sensitive to the child's wishes.

For example, once the child has reached the age where they want a boy or girl friend, then it is important to allow them to bring the boy or girl friend home. Offer them something to eat and drink, allow them to spend their time at home, but ask them not to drink or smoke. In such a way the child does not have the

feeling that he or she has to take its life outside, seeking refuge in cliques which can prove very dangerous, because they can easily lead to drugs, alcohol, and other destructive lifestyles.

Being Vigilant

It is also important for parents to always be vigilant and never leave their child out of sight. Many accidents happen because the child is not properly supervised or looked after by the parent. For example, once an infant was killed in the arms of its mother by a ball. The mother was standing at the sidelines of a cricket game, watching with her infant child in her arms, when a rogue ball came along and hit the infant in her arms.

Complementing Advice

Alcohol and Drinking

We should not drink alcohol, because it is important not to drink anything that makes the mind disturbed and uncontrolled. When we drink, it is easy to get into a situation where we act in a way that we later regret.

We should not sacrifice long-term happiness for the short-term happiness offered by alcohol and food. It seems a nice idea to sit down with others for two hours to eat, drink and talk, but the more we drink, the more we talk about all kinds of useless things and it can easily get out of hand.

I had first-hand experience of this during a social event some time ago. I was not aware that the person was drunk at the time. This man was there with his girlfriend, but because he was drunk, he flirted with other women present. Right there, he laid the foundation for an argument with his girlfriend after they returned home.

He probably did not mean anything by his actions. He was out of control because he was drunk, but that is what happens when you drink. You lay the foundation for later arguments and regret. Try to be aware of this and try to behave well.

Benefiting Pets

Pets and Meditation

It is perfectly alright for your dogs to come to your meditation. Some people say they find it comforting when they have their pet close by during meditation – for example, having their cat snuggling up to them.

If you recite some mantras such as Om mani padme hum or Tayatha Om Muni Muni Maha Munaye Svaha into your pet's ears before and after your meditation, that would also be very beneficial.

You can also tell them you are praying that, through those imprints, in the next life or in some future life, they may also be able to practise the Dharma, as you are doing now.

Helping Sick Pets

Reciting the Medicine Buddha mantra or the Tara mantra is very useful. To recite the 'Prayer to the Twenty-One Taras' or the 'Heart Sutra' before a pet's operation the operation will go well. You have to take strong refuge in Tara, thinking, "Tara, you are going to take care of it."

Benefiting a Pet that Has Died

You can recite the Chenresig mantra, the Shakyamuni Buddha mantra, or the Medicine Buddha mantra over the body of the pet. Although it has already died, it will still benefit by that recitation.

If possible, say the 'Prayer for Rebirth in the Pure

Realm of Great Bliss' by Lama Tsong Khapa. Also, you can do your own prayers, praying that the pet will have a higher rebirth, as a human or god, will meet all the internal and external conditions for Dharma practice – meeting the Dharma and a virtuous teacher, being free from all obscurations to Dharma practice, and so forth – and will quickly become enlightened.

Maybe your pet has already been reborn in the pure realm of great bliss and is now looking down at you thinking: “There’s my previous owner!”

Merits from Looking after a Pet

There are many benefits from making offerings, and it would take too much time to go through all of them. Briefly, it is said that the final result of throwing just one flower as an offering to a buddha will be that you will attain Nirvana.

You can see that from accumulating even a small amount of virtue, a very great effect will ultimately arise. There are many stories of how the causes for great positive effects were created by some simple or small offering. Understanding this should inspire you to engage in even small acts of virtue, knowing that because of the dynamics of karma, ultimately they all will have a great effect.

Even offering a tiny morsel of food to an animal based on the motivation of wanting to make it happy, content, or suffer less, is a powerful virtue that will have a great outcome. Through the karmic ripple ef-

fect a great happy result will reverberate in the future. So, even the tiny act of feeding your pets, such as fish or cats, becomes very powerful karma if done with the motivation of making the animal happy and content, and to reduce its suffering.

In this way, people who have pets accumulate greater amounts of merit than those without pets. There might be some expense involved, but the merits are very good!

Benefiting others is a universally recognised quality and is regarded as positive by those who do not practise the Dharma, as well as by those who practise the Dharma.

Circumambulation

There are many benefits to circumambulating a stupa, because a stupa is the representation of the Buddha's mind. We circumambulate to accumulate merit, and there are many stories about the benefits of circumambulation, and how practitioners accumulated merits and furthered their progress along the path by circumambulation.

For example, to circumambulate a stupa while contemplating the qualities of the Buddha's body, speech and mind, will accumulate boundless merits.

If you have a stupa at home and you are short of time, you can do circumambulations at home, but when you have a bit more time, you can come here to Tara Institute, because there are many holy objects here.

To circumambulate Tara Institute, it is good to go around the block, and while doing so, you can visualise that there are countless buddhas and bodhisattvas at the centre. Because you have to walk further and it is physically more demanding than circumambulating one object, you are also purifying more physical negative karma.

When you do a circumambulation, you should not just think that you are circumambulating a solid structure, but you should think that the Buddha is actually present. Visualise light rays emanating from the heart of the Buddha into the ten directions, invoking the blessings of all the buddhas and bodhisattvas. These come back in the form of a rain of white light that absorbs into the Buddha and then, from the Buddha's heart, light rays emanate towards you and purify you while you are circumambulating. Visualise these light rays entering through your crown and purifying you.

Performing circumambulations in this way will give you a good feeling for what circumambulating involves. You can then understand the benefits a little without me going into great detail.

If you circumambulate a stupa containing relics of the Buddha, you will accumulate great merit even if you circumambulate without any particular motivation.

There is nothing funny or strange about this because a relic of an enlightened being is something special. These days, people they will a hundred thousand dollars to buy a hat that belonged to someone famous. There is really no practical purpose in this because

they cannot use that hat but just to have it. And for that they will spend that much money. So there is no need to think it strange that the relics of an enlightened being are special.

Does the Direction Matter?

Regarding the direction, it does not matter whether you circumambulate clockwise or anti-clockwise. If you practise the Chakrasamvara system, you do anticlockwise circumambulation. When you are doing six-session guru yoga and reciting the 'Sixteen-Line Praise', you visualise yourself circumambulating the refuge field anticlockwise.

In Tibet above Ganden monastery, there was a particular stupa that I visited that was always circumambulated anticlockwise. It was said if you circumambulated it a certain number of times, it would help cure leprosy. That stupa was said to be very powerful. Many people afflicted by leprosy went there to do circumambulations.

In the Theravadan tradition practised in countries such as Burma, practitioners will do the anticlockwise version, because they think that they will meet the Buddha who is circumambulating clockwise!

Giving up Smoking

The first step in giving up smoking is to gather your mental strength. You need to generate great mental strength, self-confidence and courage and, on the basis of that, you must make a promise.

To gain such strong determination and mental strength, it is beneficial to reflect on the disadvantages of smoking, which I think you know. Reflect on all the detrimental effects that smoking has on your health. To understand them, look at the body of somebody who has smoked a lot. That will be enough to give you an idea!

By reflecting on the disadvantages of smoking, you arrive at the inescapable conclusion that there is absolutely no benefit in smoking.

The great bodhisattva Shantideva said if you want to overcome attachment to a human body that might appear attractive to you, all you have to do to overcome that misperception is to look at what is inside the body. Look at a cut-up body and see whether you still find it attractive. In this way you realise that the appearance of attractiveness is a misperception. We can apply the same principle to other things. If you want to understand the disadvantages of smoking, and generate dislike for smoking, look at the body of someone who has smoked. This will help you a lot to really understand the damage done by smoking.

Quitting may give you some physical discomfort for the first two weeks or so. After that, you will still have to overcome the mental habit, because mentally you

will still generate the craving for a cigarette. When that craving occurs, it can help to have something hard to chew on.

One way of dealing with the craving is to view it as the mere appearance to the mind that it is and therefore not take it too seriously. Although the mind tries to make smoking appear attractive, that attractiveness is really only an appearance to the mind, and does not exist on the object.

You can meditate in this way when the cravings arise, and if during those times you also have something to chew on, that might also help. The main thing is to deal with the craving, which is just an appearance to the mind.

After you have stopped smoking, it will purify your appearance. You will notice the difference when somebody stops smoking. Their appearance becomes clearer and purer. You can recognise smokers by their somewhat yellow appearance. If you want to have a yellow face and an unattractive appearance, it is probably advisable to smoke! But if you want to have a clearer appearance, it is better not to smoke. The point is that it is beneficial to make yourself afraid of smoking.

Once I asked a little boy whether he liked chocolate and he said, "Yes, of course I like chocolate". Then I said to him, "Have a look at my teeth", and asked whether he would like to have teeth like mine and he said, "No." I replied, "They are the teeth you will get if you eat lots of chocolate! So, do you still want to have some chocolate?" He said, "No".

Helping the Sick

Nursing and healing those who are sick, giving food and drink to those who are hungry, helping to those who need help and are destitute – these are very powerful, meritorious actions and among the highest activities in Buddhism. They bring many benefits to ourselves and to others. They accumulate vast merits, which benefit us because merits are the cause for achieving our aims.

Also, if we treat a person nicely with compassion and love, our love, compassion and patience increase. This makes us a better person, which in turn makes it easier for us to make others happy.

If we treat a person nicely with compassion and love, the sick person will feel that they are being looked after, which will put them at ease and alleviate their mental suffering. Otherwise, if they feel that they are not being looked after, it adds to their unhappiness.

I have personal experience of that. I once helped a person in India when I was 23. The person told me that initially when he was in hospital, he felt he would rather die than be in hospital, because he had been completely abandoned by his family but that through my help he felt that he could go on living. He had five relatives, but none of them had helped him properly.

Sometimes one may inherit money from the person we are looking after. There is a story of a person who inherited money after helping a sick person, and was very surprised because he did not have any intention of inheriting.

The Buddha himself looked after sick monks. It is one of the responsibilities of an abbot to look after his monks.

To meditate and improve your mind, you do not have to go away to some remote place. If your lifestyle increases your love and compassion, and you practise love and compassion, you are doing what is right even though you do not sit in the seven-point posture.

Generally, the best thing to do is to first generate a good motivation, train the mind in meditation, and then go and help others. Hence, our meditation is not only for our own purpose, but also to help others. Therefore, if you live a life where you help others, your lifestyle conforms to that principle.

On Birth, Dying, and Death

Birth

Reciting prayers and mantras such as the Tara mantra or Shakyamuni Buddha's mantra will protect a mother and child from complications during birth.

When the mother is going through her labour pains, somebody can sit by her side and recite mantras and meditate. I know of one mother who was present when her daughter gave birth. When the child was delivered, it was not breathing, so the grandmother immediately recited some Tara mantras, upon which the child started to breathe. The grandmother was a practitioner of Tara, and had recited many Tara praises and mantras in her life. She accredited Tara with the child's being able to start breathing.

Helping Loved Ones During and After Death

When someone is dying, it is said to be beneficial to recite the mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha, Chenresig, Medicine Buddha, or the Tara Praises so that the patient can hear the actual words.

The recitation of mantras should be done with a good motivation such as that of bodhicitta or the wish for the sick person to always encounter the buddha dharma and buddhas in all future lifetimes, and to be reborn in the pure land of Amitabha, the pure realm of great bliss.

When you recite the mantras to the patient with that type of motivation it will definitely be beneficial. You can also recite the tenth chapter of the *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* by the great bodhisattva Shantideva. When you read the tenth chapter, in your mind pray that whatever is mentioned in that prayer may come about exactly as Shantideva intended. This is also beneficial.

There are many things you can do to repay the kindness of a deceased person. If there was a strong bond between you and the deceased, they will particularly benefit from the prayers and mantras you recite for them. You can also make offerings and prayers on behalf of the deceased to the Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha.

If you make an offering to the Three Jewels with money that belonged to the deceased person, it is especially helpful for the person. In Tibet, it was common to use the possessions left behind by the de-

ceased to make offerings on his or her behalf.

For example, when Dr Adrian's father passed away and he came into a small inheritance he used it to offer a Tara statue to Tara Institute and he also made offerings to Chenresig Institute and Vajrayogini Institute. He did not keep much of the money for himself.

To pray on behalf of the deceased is powerful. There are many things you can pray for, such as the person being reborn in the pure realms, or that by all their merit that they may attain enlightenment. Doing these prayers also creates a karmic connection to meet that person again in the future. The karmic interdependence or dependent-arising between human beings is subtle and profound. It is much more subtle and profound than we can understand and that is why these prayers work.

Misconception with Regards to Self-improvement

Because we are in the situation we are in, it is important for us to follow a valid path of self-improvement.

Just letting the mind abide calmly and peacefully will not bring about a process of improvement. Rather, on the basis of having a calm mind, we improve ourselves by increasing and generating good mental states such as love and compassion, and getting rid of disturbing and unnecessary mental states such as anger and attachment. We decide not to generate any new disturbing mental states and to lessen and purify those we already have. We also decide to increase the virtuous mental states we already have

and generate new ones that we did not have before. If we practise in this way, the process of self-improvement can happen, and our meditation will bear some proper fruit.

If we understand this model of self-improvement, there is no need to ask the question: “Geshe-la, why does my mind not improve, even though I have been meditating for a number of years?” The answer is that you have only meditated for the purpose of calming your mind; you have not really meditated for the purpose of increasing the good mental states and decreasing the bad mental states.

This is where the problem lies – with our lack of understanding of how self-improvement works. It is not a fault that lies with the Dharma. Quite often, there is the danger that a practitioner will generate a misconception about the Dharma, thinking that is where the mistake lies, but actually the mistake lies with the meditator not having a proper understanding of how to meditate properly.

If we understand these important points, we will receive benefit from our practice. However, if we do not understand these significant points, although we may be a meditator, there is a danger that our ignorance or anger will increase, and that we will end up as an angry meditator!

Sharing the Dharma

The Generosity of Giving Dharma

Receiving the benefits arising from teaching the Dharma is relative to the good motivation with which it is taught.

Relating this to our personal practice, when we recite our prayers, we can visualise being surrounded by all sentient beings in the aspect of humans. As we recite the prayers, we can imagine that we are teaching them the Dharma. Then, when we conclude our prayers, we can make some sort of dedication to that effect. This is why we recite prayers aloud – so that we can imagine ourselves teaching all sentient beings, who surround us and are in the aspect of humans.

Also, teaching the Dharma is not confined to sitting on a throne. We can teach the Dharma in everyday conversations as well. For example, if we are chatting with acquaintances and friends, we can weave some Dharma into the conversation, regarding what must be practised and what must be stopped. If this is done with a good motivation, it is like teaching the Dharma. It becomes the generosity of giving the Dharma.

Of the two – material generosity and the generosity of giving the Dharma – giving the Dharma is much more meritorious. If we give Dharma advice to a friend to help them overcome some difficulty or deal with a problem it becomes the generosity of the Dharma regardless of whether it benefits the other person's mind or not.

Just by saying the right things, we can make another person happy. We can give that other person ten minutes or one hour of happiness. This is a type of generosity.

Being Skilful

When we teach the Dharma to others, we need to talk pleasantly, and offer them tea and biscuits or food. In this way, we can convey some Dharma to others and slowly they can be led to a state where they can understand more difficult things.

Generosity and talking pleasantly are two skilful means employed by bodhisattvas to subdue the minds of others.

Even animals can recognise when they are being shown kindness. When we give food to an animal and talk pleasantly to it, the animal will recognise our kindness and good intentions. They might not understand the actual words we are saying, but they will recognise that we are being pleasant and kind, and the love being shown to them. If we give them food, they will lose their fear of us and begin to trust us and come closer to us.

However, if we give food to the animal and talk harshly at the same time, the animal will be afraid. It will not trust us. Even animals can recognise when they are being treated well, with kindness and generosity.

Of course, humans can also recognise this and react in a similar way.

Even if you are not confident about knowing the Dharma well, you can explain the things that you know. You can say: “That is according to my understanding. That is what I think it means.” And then you can add: “And most likely I’m right!” (laughter)

The idea is that, even if you do not say it explicitly, you can convey the idea that you have some conviction in what you have said. Also, if you are unable to give an answer immediately to a question, you can say: “I’ll get back to you later. I will have to research it and think about it and get back to you.” Then you give them the answer later.

You can say: “I’m a bit busy right now, so I’ll have to get back to you.” But you have to make it sound believable, as if you are really pressed for time and as if that were really the only reason you cannot give them the answer right now! (laughter)

Ven Geshe Doga's teachings are distinguished by many features, and two main ones are his clear instructions regarding meditation and his wonderful advice on how to practice dharma in the many different areas of daily life. Following his instructions on how to focus the mind single-pointedly on the internal object with mindfulness and introspection one can develop a strong and balancing meditation practice that will prove to be beneficial for the mind as well as healthy for the body.



If you have ever wished for practical advice on how to apply the dharma in-between the meditation sessions in areas such as relationships, work or health, and how to deal with the myriads of problems arising there, then this is also the book for you.