
Good advice, straight from the heart

The following extracts are from the edited transcript of Ven. Geshe Doga's final teaching for 2001, the annual 'Heart Advice', which was translated by Ven. Tenzin Dongak.

"The root of the mind cherishing others, bodhicitta, is love and compassion. The main point of love and compassion is non-harmfulness and non-cruelty. If we train in non-harmfulness, we train in the essence of the Buddha's teachings. Non-harmfulness is needed both at the beginning of the path, and at the time of the result of the path.

Everybody has a certain measure of love and compassion or non-harmfulness within their mental continuum. There might be some difference with regard to the strength of it, but everybody definitely possesses a certain measure of non-harmfulness, love and compassion...

...How do we start to meditate on love and compassion? Love is the mental attitude that wishes other sentient beings to have happiness. If we see that that another being is lacking happiness, and we generate the wish for that being to have happiness, then that is love. If we see that another being is suffering and we generate the mental attitude wishing them to be free from their suffering, then that is a compassionate attitude.

If we have true love and compassion in our mind, then we can also engage in actions that benefit others. Then we can really help others. The actions we engage in for the purpose of others will then become really beneficial and powerful. If we don't have love and compassion within our mind, then it will not be possible for us to benefit others.

It is good to differentiate between love and compassion, and attachment. Love and attachment are two very different mental states. Attachment is the mental state where an object appears to our mind as being pleasing, beautiful and desirable, and one wants to have that object. When we have love and compassion then the object of our love and compassion doesn't necessarily appear to our mind as pleasing or beautiful or attractive. So we can see that those two mental attitudes are quite different. Attachment is the state of mind where one wants to have for one's own enjoyment the object that appears so beautiful and desirable. That's what attachment comes down to. Whereas love and compassion are mental attitudes of wishing the other being to be happy, or to be free from their problems...

...Love and compassion are the root of harmony and of living harmoniously together, be it in relation to a whole country, within the family, or within one's circle of friends and acquaintances. Regardless of the context, love and compassion are the root of harmony within those relationships.

If some of our acquaintances or friends are lacking happiness, and if we have a love and affection for them, then we will think of various ways of making them happy. That is regarded as very good. From our own point of view, if we are unhappy, or if we experience various problems, and another person helps us by making us happy, or alleviating our problems, then we really feel very grateful towards that very kind person...

So, if our acquaintances are unhappy, or if we meet somebody who is unhappy, then we try to make that person happy. If they are sad, then we should try to lighten them up and make them happier. If they have financial problems, then we should try them to help them financially and materially. In whatever way people need help, we should try to help them. If we have this attitude of love and compassion, then wherever we go, we will have a very easy-going relationship with everybody...

...The development of a loving attitude is very important. We have grown up because of the love and affection of our parents. We grew up because they took care of us. At the beginning of our life we were very much dependent of the love and affection of our parents. At the end of our life we will again be very much dependent on the love, affection and consideration of others. If we say, "Oh in my middle years love and affection is not important" then that may be rather inconsiderate. If we depended on the love and affection of others at the beginning of our life, and will again depend on that love and consideration at the end of our life, then saying in the middle of our life, "Oh it's not important to show love and compassion to others" may be a bit rich!...

...The happiness that we enjoy these days, and any success that we enjoy, all came about through the kindness of our parents. They gave us drink, they gave us food, they fed us, they clothed us, they gave us love and affection. Because of their care, and because of what they gave us, we can now enjoy success. Whatever we enjoy all came about through the kindness of our parents.

So from our side when our parents are old and in need of care, and love, and compassion, then definitely one should give them that affection and love and compassion. This might be doing such simple things as giving one's parents flowers, or giving them a present like something nice to eat, or something that makes their minds happy. If we generate happiness in the minds of others then that becomes Dharma. If we give nice presents like flowers etc. to our parents, and that makes them happy then that is Dharma practice. This is something I always encourage, and I always say that one should definitely take care of one's parents, and make them happy.

If we don't practise love and compassion with our parents, and don't show them a loving compassionate attitude, then there is a great danger that anger and ill-will will arise. That will destroy the harmony between the parents and the children, and it will foster ill-will, distrust, and disharmony. It will also cause suffering, as it is very disruptive to one's happiness if one is constantly experiencing disputes and disharmony. Therefore it is very important to practise love and compassion with regard to one's parents.

The relationship between parents and children is not like another ordinary relationship. Regardless of whether we are very close to our parents, or to our children, or to other relatives, in our mind there will always be the recognition of that person as, for example, being one's mother, or one's father, or one's child, or one's sister or brother. Regardless of whether one has a close relationship, or a good relationship, or a bad relationship there will always be this recognition in our mental continuum. It is not something we can avoid, as it will be with us all of the time.

If we divorce our wife or our husband, or we separate from our partner, after a few years we sooner or later don't think of that person as our partner, husband or wife any more. So that relationship doesn't cut so deep. The relationship between relatives, however, goes much deeper. One cannot just say, "Oh, that person is not my relative any more." Therefore practising love and compassion with regard to one's parents, etc. is very, very important. That's my opinion.

Everybody wants kindness and warmth and so forth, and everybody wants to have a good and positive mind, and wants the actions of one's body, speech and mind to be good and positive. So the practice of love and compassion is not something that is necessarily religious. The practice of love and compassion, together with the benefits of the practice of love and compassion, is something that everybody recognises. If we practise it, then it becomes Dharma practice anyway.

Whether or not our actions of our body, speech and mind become pure and good depends upon ourselves. Whether our actions go in a good direction, or whether our actions go in a negative direction, is completely up to us. Our mind determines the direction. If we engage in harmful actions, it is our mind pushing us towards harmful actions. If we engage in positive actions, it is our mind encouraging and inducing us to practise virtuous, positive actions. So taking care of one's own mind therefore becomes very important, because it is like the engine which is directing us.

The practice of love and compassion is very important. If you practise love and compassion then one's life will take a good turn. One will be able to live easily within the society, and live easily within one's family. Practising love and compassion is good for society, and good for the country. In our mind, we should have the idea that the practice of love and compassion is very important. We should give it great weight and consideration, thinking that practising love and compassion has a very great impact."