Advice from the Heart

"The spiritual teacher is concerned that you die happily and have achieved something and that you have not wasted your precious human life."

Since I am a father, I think about the closeness between a father and a son and the advice that a father gives to his son, or the advice a mother gives to her children. The advice that fathers give their children may be deep from their heart. This differs from country to country where fathers and mothers have different beliefs, but what they really all want is for their children to be successful. This advice often comes down to wishing that your children will be able to achieve the things that you were unable to achieve in your own life.

Fathers give advice from their hearts, mothers give advice from their hearts, friends give advice from their hearts and teachers give advice for their students. There may be different ways of giving advice but perhaps the main difference is one of presentation. For example, perhaps a father's advice has a worldly nature, wishing for his children to succeed in worldly life and in business and be able to carry responsibility and have a good, enjoyable family life. A father does not like to see his children failing to get an education. Fathers do not want to see their child suffering or becoming dependent on someone else. A father says, "I want my son to be a success, to be the boss".

A mother's advice is slightly different. A mother is very much concerned with warmth, with a good family and happy children without sickness, and plenty of healthy, happy grandchildren. So it seems to me that the mother's wishes have everything to do with success in family and home life.

When a friend gives you advice, it is all about overcoming difficulties and being independent. It is about how to achieve success relative to others. Their advice is maybe not that much concerned with family life. Friends tend to look at worldly success.

On the other hand, when spiritual people give advice, whether it is given to friends or students, they look at how to be successful in terms of spiritual development. They are not much concerned with material happiness. They are concerned with the happiness which comes through understanding and practice. This happiness is not based on competitiveness but rather on the development of loving kindness and tolerance. The fundamental thing is that this happiness does not have much to do with this life, but rather with the next life, or with future lives that you are going to lead. Progress and constant improvement in life after life is the important thing.

If it seems that you are not going to have much worldly success in this life, the spiritual

teacher is not overly concerned. However, the spiritual teacher is greatly concerned with future lives and with preparation for death and dying. He or she is concerned that you die happily and have achieved something; he is concerned that you have not wasted your precious human body, and that you have fully achieved the purpose of a human life. That seems to be the advice of spiritual people. You can see that advice is something that comes deep from the heart.

Different people's advice has a different scope. A mother's advice is very much to do with love, gentleness, taking care of families. A father's advice is about how to achieve the things that he has not been able to achieve in his lifetime - it is like achieving the dreams of the father. A friend's advice is about winning life's competitions and less to do with family life or spiritual life. The teacher's advice is that the father's advice, the mother's advice and the friend's advice only has impermanent benefit. The teacher is looking for long term benefit for his students and how to improve their future lives. He is not concerned with material success.

When you look at all these people together, they are all giving advice in different degrees, but it all comes down to the same thing: it is about how to make positive change, how to be good humans, how to become better practitioners. My advice, which is something that comes from my heart, is based on a spiritual perspective. You have enough of the other advice, those of you who have a father and a mother, those of you who have friends giving you advice all the time. They do that much better than me, so I do not need to repeat the advice they give you.

My own failure is a lack of constant practice. I see so many people in monasteries: monks, nuns, lay sangha. They go for many years' retreat - four years, eight years, twelve years. I always think of myself as a Buddhist, but I have never been able to go to retreat for more than three months in my whole life. So I think that in terms of practice I am a failure. When people ask, "Can you please teach me how to do sadhanas and how to meditate?" I do not know how to answer, because I do not know how to teach these things. I am not enlightened. I do not even know what it means to be enlightened. I have morals, I know right from wrong; I believe in being honest and good, but apart from that I do not have much experience.

I think it is very excellent to go into retreat, but sometimes people say things like, "I've done ten years of practice," or "I've done twenty years of meditation practice, but I have not achieved anything." And when you ask how many hours of practice they do, they say, "I do one whole hour every day." There are twenty four hours in a day so what do you expect? You are so proud of doing one hour of meditation each day and some of you say, "I have achieved something." I do not think that is possible.

Also, when you sit for one hour, how much time do you really spend meditating? Like most people, you get up in the morning, get breakfast, get your children dressed and to school, then you have to think about your business or your office and during the day you sit on a cushion for an hour. Even then you spend that time thinking about your business or the person you had a fight with yesterday. You think about what you are going to say to that

person today, how you are going to deal with them; then about what you are going to fix for your children to eat when they come home from school. You are always thinking about your life: which route will I take, What food will I cook, are the children safe? So that is your meditation.

Sometimes you may say of your meditation, "I had a very good experience." What do you mean by that? Perhaps you were in a kind of sleep state, but sleep is not meditation. Going into a trance is not meditation. You have spent one hour on the cushion, but as for meditation you have not done more than two or three minutes. What benefit do you expect from two or three minutes a day for thirty years?

Maybe you do much better than me and maybe you are able to spend your whole hour doing actual meditation, whatever that means to you. I am not so sure what it means. Most people seem to think that meditation is something where you do not move and you lose track of time. People say, "I had such a good meditation that I completely lost track of time. When I looked at my watch, the time was already up." That is like a kind of sleep or like being drunk. Do you consider being half-drunk as meditation? You say, "I had a good meditation and I meditated together with the teacher. I lost track of time and lost all my sensations," but do you consider paralysis as meditation? I do not think the teachings ever said that you need to become paralysed.

Maybe I have not achieved much, but I have read many meditation texts and nowhere does it say that meditation means you forget everything, become paralysed or lose track of time. My advice is to try to understand what meditation is and to find a good teacher. Meditation cannot be learnt from books. Meditation is not something a friend can help you with.
For meditation you need a spiritual teacher, but you should not choose a teacher based on literature or advertisements. Nowadays there are lots of advertisements on the internet and people say things like, "I can tell your fortune, I can see your future lives, I am enlightened." A person once came to see me and told me he was enlightened, so I do not know why he came to see me. Maybe he wanted to teach me!

Nowadays the internet promises so much happiness and also can be the cause of so much suffering, with people searching not just for teachers but also husbands and wives. You can look for all sorts of treatment on the internet. You look for happiness, but how many children are damaged looking for boyfriends or girlfriends through the internet? I am sure you will have similar problems if you believe what you find on the internet. When you are looking for a spiritual teacher, do not look at advertisements.

When looking for a teacher, it is important to do so in person and not to make a quick decision. You can wait to see if you have found a good or bad teacher. You should be together with that person for nine years. For three years you investigate the teacher, and the teacher spends three years seeing if you are honest and worth teaching. Then you work together for a further three years. If you do things that way you will make fewer mistakes.

It is the same thing when you are looking for a wife or a husband. I would recommend taking a longer time doing this. Sometimes you will stay as girlfriend or boyfriend for nine years and

then think it is safe to get married and within a week you are looking for a divorce. Perhaps you need to be together for more than nine years to find out if you can spend your whole life together.

In the case of looking for a teacher, sometimes it happens that you have been working together for many years and you are thinking, "This is a good teacher," and you commit to this person. Then another teacher pops up, perhaps from India. This teacher seems much nicer, gentler, wiser, so you give up your previous teacher saying, "Goodbye! I thought you were good, but now I've found a better teacher." You keep changing throughout your life. It is not worth doing that because you will have wasted your time totally. My heart advice to you is to do things slowly and to look at things carefully. Do not just look at what is written on the noticeboard but feel the heart of the person. It is not like choosing a husband or wife. One teacher may be good with some particular advice, but you can still look for advice from other teachers. You may find that one teacher is good for some things, while another teacher is good for a different type of teaching. You can learn from them all and appreciate them all without being "married, divorced, married, divorced." A spiritual teacher is different from a husband or wife.

When you become a Buddhist you always think you must have a guru. You do not know who that should be, but maybe you find somebody who seems quite special and you ask, "Will you be my guru?" and they may say, "I don't know what that means but yes, okay, if that is what you want." And a few months later you say, "Sorry I have found another teacher. Can you please not be my guru any more!" And in time you change that teacher too; every few years you change. It is more like getting into a wrong marriage each time.

Perhaps you are not really ready to find a guru. The guru always takes the form of a deity like Dorje Chang or Chenrezig or the Medicine Buddha - you do not visualise a human being above your head. You can visualise the essence of those you think of as gurus in the form of the deity. If you are a Kagyupa, you can think of the Karmapa in the form of Dorje Chang. When you do the foundations, you visualise Dorje Chang, but within the form of Dorje Chang you imagine the essence of the guru and all the lineage masters.

You do not think of a human being above your head because, if your faith and devotion are not strong, your feelings will change and you will feel guilty. You may feel that when that person was having good times you received a blessing and when he or she was having bad times, you received negative energy. That is too confusing and is really not necessary. All the positive energy and all the good root guru's blessings are in the form of Dorje Chang and you do not need to keep changing to different faces. If your practice is very strong and your devotion is unchangeable, then if you wish, you can think of your human root guru above your head. If you have that kind of strength then it is okay, but not until then.

My heart experience, having been here in Europe for over forty years, is that there are many unnecessary mistakes and misunderstandings between teachers and students. Teachers claim, "These are my students." Students claim, "This is not my teacher." There are constant problems. You do not have to have these problems, they are merely human errors and it is not necessary to make them. If you consider someone to be your teacher then my advice is

that you let that teacher teach only what he or she knows. When students reach the teacher's limit, the teacher has to pass them to a new teacher. The teacher must pass them to the right new teacher so that they can keep learning and developing.

There are two problems which I often see. Sometimes a teacher reaches the limit of his or her knowledge but considers the students to be "his" and does not want student numbers to decline. The teachers are frightened to lose students because they have been very useful to them, and they think they need them to maintain the level of business in their life. They want to keep the students whether they are doing good or harm; they do not consider a person's development. It is all about their own comfort. I think this sort of teacher is making a big mistake.

As for the student, if a good teacher passes the student to another teacher having developed the student as far as he can, the student may not have appreciation for that first teacher he or she was studying with before. He or she says, "Okay, now I see his limitation and I am free from that person." That is a big mistake too. It is a good teacher who is passing you to a great teacher. The teacher is really thinking of your development and you should have appreciation and respect. Your respect for the teacher should not change because, if you had never made that first step, you would not have reached the second step. Therefore it is very important to have respect.

Many people do not have that feeling of respect or sense of responsibility for their centre. They do not think, "I have been in this organisation for so many years, I am part of the organisation." Sometimes when not-so-good teachers visit a successful centre, they look to see who is working to create this success. Then maybe that teacher does a good presentation with lots of smiles, and says, "T have a project you can do for me." So that teacher gives people jobs and takes them away from their successful centre. think that is a mistake. There is nothing to take from an unsuccessful centre, but a success is always a target.

Many teachers look for people who have a kind of magnetism or glow. They think, "This one is rich, this one is very well-educated, this one is young, this one is intelligent." People do not realise this is happening and think, "This is a very good teacher. We have never had such a good presentation. I even get a cup of tea and a chance to have my picture taken with him. This is excellent. I'd like to join with this person." You forget your responsibilities and that is a mistake. I try not to do that, but I am sure those mental images still arise. I am a human being, but I hope that success does not mean I want all successful people to join with me.

Therefore you should not mix spiritual life too much with material life. Buddha had to give up worldly life in order to be a spiritual person. Perhaps it is possible to be a king and an enlightened being at the same time, but Buddha told his disciples that it may not be wise to mix spiritual and material things. On the other hand, if you are an experienced practitioner then it does not matter what conditions you have: rich, poor, king, queen, bhikkhu, bhikkhuni. The external form is not important. What is important is how you deal with your emotions, how you deal with your mind.

It is possible to achieve enlightenment through normal life. People have achieved enlightenment whether they were ordained or non-ordained, living a very simple life or a normal human life. Sometimes they may have been military people or warriors, kings or queens. If you are dealing with your mind the whole time, then your external form is not important. If you are unable to deal with your mind, then a particular external form will give strength to your mind. So for those who have a very weak mind, making physical changes will support your mind and give it strength.

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