

H.E. Garchen Rinpoche's Heart Advice: How to Deal with Obstacles Including Demons

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Oral Translation by Dieter Schindler

Transcribed by Ratnashri Meditation Center, Sweden



When we talk about obstacles, no matter how they arise - outer or inner, big or small, we have to see that in order for obstacles to arise, causes and conditions (contributing factors) have to come together. If it lacks certain cause or certain condition, obstacles would not arise whether inwardly or outwardly. Say for example if we have a bile disease like gallbladder and if we eat very oily food, it will hurt us and we will get some symptoms on the physical level. Similarly, we have to consider causes and conditions. We have to look into the cause, the root cause and find out what the root cause is, not just on a superficial level. Based on the root cause, when it meets up with conditions in the outer world, it stirs the situation up. We have to look at it from the inner perspective, from the perspective of the fundamental cause. Of course, it also comes together with personal obscurations as a result of the karma that has been accumulated in the past from the activities of our body, speech and mind. Then they meet outer circumstances and in Tibetan traditional terminology, they talk about all different kinds of spirits, maras and demons. They have many names. But we have to see that the root cause in the inner level is really the grasping to one's own self. All disturbing emotions arise from that. These afflictive emotions or kleshas stir up our mind. This then meets with outer circumstances, outer elemental energies or elemental spirits, this can really manifest into very big problems for us. For example, if we have predominately disturbing emotions of aversion in our mind, that anger or hatred connect to something called "gyalpo" which is one of the most powerful spirits in the Tibetan tradition. They mainly appear in the night as terrifying demons which really torture us, torturing us in the way how they appear. They appear in the dreams and we are subjected to go through very difficult experiences. So they go predominately together with the disturbing emotions of aversion - anger

and hatred. Each disturbing emotion has an energetic link and if it comes together with certain outer circumstances, it will manifest obstacles or even like a demonic force create very difficult life situations. But again we have to address it on an inner level. It is very hard to change the outer situations. We have to really go to the root. The root is the grasping to self. Disturbing emotions arise from it.

Then what can we actually do and how can we deal with obstacles when they do arise for some people on different levels in different intensities? Obviously, it is to take refuge to a yidam, to really look for shelter and protection from, for example, Tara. We have to see how it also connects to our past accumulation of good karma, some past accumulation of positivity, good deeds that we performed through our body, speech and mind. If we make this link, then it is quite easy for us to use this antidote, to overcome obstacles which arise in our lives.

Another important thing is to confess our negativities. If there were really some negative actions that we conducted by our body, speech and mind, we really become aware of it, regret it and confess it. For example, if you had quarrels or fights with your parents or children or anybody, and now you recognize that that is something that you really do not want since it is not beneficial and it is really harmful. You really want to confess it in your mind stream - it is not about outer confession. Still there are some karmic traces that are left behind from the actions conducted, for example, the fighting or the quarreling, but they are actually quite soft and the obstacles that will arise from that will be quite easy to handle. On the other hand, if we conducted negative deeds with body, speech and mind, but we are unaware of it and do not confess them in our mind, they become very strong and powerful karmic traces which also can manifest as difficult life situations later.

We need to be able to deal with situations, with general difficult life situations, for example a disease. If we have a severe sickness, how are we able to deal with it? First of course, we try to work with it, we try to heal it and we try to apply methods. Sometimes, it is not working and people do not get healed. So, it is important to work deeper on a karmic level to recognize that this is really karma which is ripening right now. The accumulation of that karma was in the past, that I cannot do a lot about except for confessing it in my mind stream, to regret whatever were the causes for this circumstance. For this, we do it again and again. Not only will it hopefully do something positive for the actual symptom, but it will also bring peace in our mind.

If we can really accept it as my karma that I have accumulated, it will actually pacify a lot of suffering in our mind. For example, we lent somebody a big sum of money but we do not get it back. It creates lots of suffering in people's mind. Of course, first we try with good motivation to get the money back, to negotiate and try in different ways; but if nothing seems to work and we do not get the money back, we have to accept that there is some karma behind it, probably some karmic root that I have planted some seed in the past that causes the situation to ripen now in this difficult situation. If we first try the outer methods and it does not work, we have to take refuge to the inner method and realize that, "Oh it is really something to do with me, it is my karma." And in the end, in a positive way we can let it drop and we can accept the situation. Even though it did not turn out and we do not get the money back but at least we are in peace, instead of all worked up in resentment, anger, hatred and so forth.

In general, we can look at obstacles on outer, inner and secret level. We can see that an obstacle on the outer level is very much connected to a collective human level. It has also a lot to do with the correspondence – always with our inner state. This can be outer catastrophe like earthquakes, floods etc. It is a collective link related to the accumulation of karma from a large group of people. But then we also see that individuals are quite different. At the occurrence of a big earthquake, everybody was there and there were a few who could survive. For them if they do not have the karma, they are not going to die. It is quite amazing. If one does not have the karmic link to the obstacle which is arising, it will not manifest for one outwardly. That is on the outer level. On the inner level, it has to do with our energetic pattern in our body – with the nadis/the subtle channels and with prajna/the subtle winds. What is happening is that they get stirred up through our inner behavior and through our mentality and so forth which will manifest as disease in our body. Then on a secret level, it is connected to our own thinking or discursive thoughts – our dualistic thinking, the grasping of subject and object. It is really on the secret level that we create all the obstacles. It creates our disease inwardly and it also creates outer obstacles which manifest in our outer physical environment. Even if we go to the hospital, and we keep complaining that we are sick and we are so desperate. We push and push and suddenly there is a big diagnosis there. Some of these diseases are just labels, being superimposed actually. If we take it back to the root, it may actually be created through very strong clinging to the mind through discursive thoughts. It is important to bring it back to the root which is always the inside of all the obstacles, whether they are outer, inner or secret. The way how it works is to make the mind compliant, to make our mind soft through training on the quality of loving kindness and compassion. If the mind is really directed towards the benefit of others, may I be of benefit for others, may I be of positive effect to my environment. So, whenever obstacle arises, we have

to bring it back to the root – to the essence. The important point on a secret level is the grasping to self and all obstacles manifest. We have to be able to deal from that level to really work to overcome the grasping to self.

On an inner level, for example, disease according to the Tibetan medicine: cold disease connects very much to emotions of hatred and aversion; disease of heat connects very much to the emotions of attachment; and disease belongs to prana, bile and phlegm, phlegm connects very much to ignorance. But the root of all these diseases is always disturbing emotions which are stirred up by the grasping to self. So we have to address it directly at the root which is the root cause. How is karma accumulated? It accumulates through mental continuum. We accumulate karma exactly through grasping to self which cause disturbing emotions to arise and through the activities that we engage in based on the disturbing emotions. Once the karma is accumulated, we cannot stop it. Karma accumulated will ripen. We may be able to deal with the situation a little bit and be skillful with the ripening but it will ripen. So the goal is to apply a soft mind which is endowed with love and loving kindness so that we do not accumulate any more of this negative karma. This is on the inner level, but then also on the outer level since it reflects from inner to the outer world. A couple years ago in eastern Tibet, Kham, there was a very big devastating earthquake. I knew a few people and I observed their situation. There was a monk from the monastery who normally stays in Lhasa. Somehow he had to go to Kham. Right when the earthquake occurred, he was right there and he passed away. While somebody else who was living there all the time but had right before the earthquake made the decision to travel to India or had to move somewhere, of course no idea about the earthquake. He just left the night before the devastating earthquake happened. That is the outer situation that the earthquake happened, but it has to come together with your personal karma. If you do not have the personal karma to be there, you are not there or maybe you are there, you are not hurt. So we see how it interlinks all from the secret, inner and outer level - how it actually starts from grasping to self on the secret level and disturbing emotions arise on the inner level and then the event occurs on the outer level.

We look at all kinds of sufferings that we experience. A very skillful way according to the Buddhist teaching is to deal with it and to bring it onto the path and to accept it. Really in the context that we know, it is the karma that is accumulated in the past and it is ripening now. Whatever we experience now is the fruition of the past accumulation and our ability to accept it and to bring it on the path. Also, use the right skillful way to purify it with purifying method, to confess it and resolve not to commit such negative deeds again and so forth. Even to the extent that you almost rejoice it: "How wonderful that I now have the chance to purify it so that it will not be a cause of further

suffering or even more severe suffering like the three lower realms.” In addition, based on what is happening now think: “I do not want to accumulate such seeds anymore in my continuum. I want to practice love and loving kindness so that in the future, I will have a happier state of mind.” If we look in the outer world, for example, wars in particular, the root is always disturbing emotions. The root of disturbing emotion is grasping to self. In terms of wars, obviously the energy of aversion, anger, hatred really manifests. If we look into our mind, we all have these qualities. We all somehow have some aversion, anger or maybe even hatred sometimes. We have this root in our mind. So reflect by thinking: “Oh, I have this root in my mind too. Maybe at this moment, it is arising. I want to skillfully deal with it in the sense that I become aware of it and generate love and loving kindness.” So in this way we actively prevent that in the future we have to experience the result of seeds that we generate now in a negative sense.

As the well-known Buddhist prayer says: “May all mother sentient beings boundless as the sky... be free from suffering and the causes of suffering.....” We not only wish all mother sentient beings be free from suffering, but free from the causes of suffering. When we recognize the cause, we will be able to eradicate the cause. When we recognize that the cause of suffering is the disturbing emotions and the root of disturbing emotion is the grasping to self, we really work on freeing ourselves from the grasping to self. That is the essential message of the Buddhadharma. Since freeing from grasping to self itself cannot be seen outwardly no matter how scientifically we try to analyze it, there is nothing that we can substantially find there. So we have to practice it in our own mind to generate love and loving kindness and to become aware of it and to diminish more and more grasping to self which is the actual root cause of suffering. For this we really perform, so to say, peace work for ourselves and for the whole environment, that is, to create harmony in the nearby environment with friends through love and loving kindness. At that moment, this hard block of grasping to self is softened. In essence, the root of all suffering is the attachment and grasping to self. If we are able to lose that right at the moment, we do not accumulate further causes and thus further suffering.

How to deal with physical and mental exhaustion in our daily life?

When we are facing low energy level physically and especially mentally, feeling like “I can’t, I want but I can’t,” it is actually a sign of grasping and attachment to self. The antidote is a mind directed towards the benefit of others. May I be of benefit to others. May I be able to open up my mind with love and loving kindness towards others. Through this skillful mean, wisdom comes into being and we will be more energized, open outwardly,

instead of collapsing inwardly, feeling I do not have energy.

If I have only little time, what should be my main practice and main focus?

The essence of all the practices, no matter how little time we have, is to capture our own mind. All practices including yidam deity practices, all boil down to our own mind. The mind manifestation of yidam is nothing else than the manifestation of loving kindness and compassion. That is what we have to practice. Whether we visualize ourselves as a deity, do mantra accumulations or other practices, it all has to come down to the essence of our mind which is loving kindness and compassion. It is true when we do our sitting practice session but also in all our daily activities. As shown in the essence of the Bodhisattva Way of Life that the practices of the generation of bodhicitta (loving kindness and compassion) are methods to increase loving kindness and compassion where it is not yet arisen and where it has arisen, to protect it so that it will not decline, but to strengthen it further and further. That is the essence of all the practices. If we have this motivation, we also get the energy to practice, be it on the cushion, be it in formal meditation and also in all our daily activities; if our mind is penetrated with this quality of loving kindness and compassion, our energy will increase and spread. We can also do the vajra recitation of OM AH HUNG or other mantra recitations. The importance is the continuity of the practice. The base of this continuous practice is love and loving kindness. It is not enough to do it sporadically, sometimes and sometimes not. We need the continuous flow of our practice.

How to deal with distraction when I practice?

For example, to do the yidam practice is to continuously merge your mind with mindfulness with the yidam. For instance to bring the outer physical presence in the self-generation of yidam constantly in a stable focus of mindfulness or to focus on the seed syllable, be it a HUNG or other seed syllable of a yidam; this is actually a method to hold the mind, to bring your mind in stable focus of mindfulness. To continuously see yourself in the form of the yidam and to bring forth the qualities of the yidam, for example Chenrezig which in essence is loving kindness and compassion, to bring forth this quality, to stably abide with the mind, in the physical appearance as well as in the inner qualities etc.; all these are methods which directly counteract distraction.

How can I go beyond the normal state of compassion, the normal state of subject-object duality? How can I attain one-mind non-dual state?

It is not easy actually. We cannot jump easily there. We have to practice continuously for example in the context of yidam practice, as mentioned before, with mindfulness merge the mind with the yidam and to generate yourself

as the meditative deity, to abide there stably and in particular, to bring forth the qualities of the yidam which is nothing else than love and loving kindness and to actively integrate that in our day-to-day activities and in our daily behavior. This is actually the method through the relative bodhicitta. And then slowly, slowly through the yidam practice it will decrease the grasping of self which is nothing else than dualistic notion. Then gradually reaches a state of non-duality. But we cannot jump in there. Mere understanding or grasping the idea of non-conceptual, non-dual state does not help if it is not nurtured with loving kindness, it will be of no benefit. The root of duality is a notion of self and other. Through grasping of self, there appear others – other human beings, objects and so forth. For this, the whole samsara, the duality of samsara and nirvana everything manifested through this root of self-grasping – the notion of self and other. It is good to contemplate that, for example when we see a friend, we see that our bodies are distinctly different, but the base of our mind is the same. We are of same essence. Very much the same when we look at light as a metaphor, electric light is of one essence, we may have different lamps in different forms, but the electric light is the same and in the whole world electric light is of the same fundamental quality, the same essence. The nature of the mind and on the fundamental level there is no duality no distinction between me and other.

How to benefit sentient beings – I want to benefit, and have ideas and visions to do activities, but do not know how to go about doing it? How to decide what is best? How to empower myself to make important decision?

The most important and fundamental is the motivation, to give rise to motivation to really benefit beings, to really bring this forth in our minds, this is the root of all. If you really strengthen this, you do not need to worry about the outer thing, it will come naturally. Actually, the stronger the motivation is, it will find its natural expression in the world. But we do not need to compare with others because it has also to do with our past accumulation of merits. We see some people who have big and amazing activities outwardly and they do a lot of outer benefits while others maybe not so much on an outer level. Our previous accumulation of aspiration prayers and our merits will determine how active we can be in the outer world. However what we can do is to really strengthen our motivation, to bring forth a strong motivation in our mind, to develop this motivation just like the quality of Tara or Chenrezig so that naturally in the future, it will become stronger and stronger and also in outer manifestations.

The motivation is most important, the compassion motivation to benefit other and then action-wise sometimes it can be quite remarkable. Buddha in his previous life when he was on board with many people on a boat and among them, many were bodhisattvas, but there was an evil person who wanted to kill all and Buddha killed this person and this was deeply motivated

through loving kindness and compassion to protect the other. The fundamental motivation is the most important. For example, this prayer wheel with millions of mantra in it, the essence of all these mantras is just to benefit all, to get the benefit out for all sentient beings. Whatever activities I do, even while I am eating, the benefit goes out for all sentient beings.

How to raise children so that they can be on the Path naturally, not forcing them?

Definitely do not bring any force as it will not do any good. The thing is that you practice yourself as parents. See yourself and also the child in divine pure form as yidam as Tara or Chenrezig. I always tell parents even during pregnancy not to attach too much to the child as the child grows; instead see the girl as Tara or the boy as Chenrezig. This would be a direct mean to work with your mind. Some unfortunately lose the child during pregnancy and they suffer a lot from that. Let go of it, do not hold it tight and accept the situation and see things as pure. This is the most important. So with good motivation and with this pure visualization of yourself as parents and the child as the deity, the natural wisdom will arise. This will help them to find their path. I meet so many thousands of people all over the world, I want to benefit all of them, those whom I meet directly and also all the others. I do not know them personally and it is hard to relate to them on a personal level. The relation is through Tara. That is what my relation to them is also. My motivation and wish is to benefit all sentient beings through the enlightened activities of Tara. When people have faith and trust in that, there is a strong link. If there is no trust or faith, it is not so easy to make a strong connection.

How to deal with strong jealousy?

Obviously jealousy is a disturbing emotion, one of the disturbing emotions. The root of it is also grasping to self. In fact jealousy is the biggest enemy to all our accumulated merits. What jealousy does is that if somebody is really doing well, we do not rejoice in it, rather it is the opposite, we do not like it. It can even be among sibling, maybe two brothers and one is doing exceedingly well and the other not, so there is jealousy. In fact, happiness comes from rejoicing other's happiness and jealousy is the opposite, rejoicing in suffering. You do not want that they thrive, they are doing well. This is the root of jealousy. Jealousy really creates pain and suffering for ourselves, and separates people no matter siblings or friends, and it is a strong disturbing emotion that really destroys our merits. We have to be really aware of it and then directly deal with it, with a mind with loving kindness, to recollect, to see yourself as Tara or Chenrezig for example, and really bring forth this motivation that we directly address it and ultimately transform it into actually rejoicing, which is the direct antidote to jealousy. With all our disturbing emotions, be it jealousy, pride, hatred or attachment,

the fundamental problem is ignorance. So we have to first recognize it, become aware of it since ignorance is the head of all disturbing emotions. Once we are aware of it, we can work directly with it. All the fighting in the outer world comes from our disturbing emotions, so as soon as they arise in our mind, we have to recognize it and be aware of it so that we can then directly work with it.

How can my mind be one (non-dual) with the Guru's mind?

The notion or the idea that the lama and the students are different is exactly what we call duality, that is, the grasping of duality. On the other hand, if we recognize the view of mahamudra, we recognize that all sentient beings and all Buddhas are of the same essence. If the lama's compassion meets with the loving kindness and devotion in particular of the student, then mahamudra (non-duality) can be attained. It is not the outer form of the lama; the outer appearance of the lama is not of great benefit to us. We need to capture the mind, the essence of the lama. We have to analyze what is the essence of the lama's mind. It is loving kindness, bodhicitta. In fact the beautiful unconditional loving kindness and compassion that a mother has to her child is of the same essence as that of the lama. The essence of the mind of the lama is loving kindness and compassion and the blessing of the lama is also loving kindness and compassion. We have to bring this forth in our own mind, as mentioned before. Then we recognize that the loving kindness of the Buddhas and the loving kindness of the lama and in fact, the loving kindness of us, they are not different. It is not possible to separate them. If you realize that, you are inseparable from the lama.

Regarding separation and duality, let say, if we choose to become a Buddhist, are we not in duality, that is, separating from other religions?

In the context of the Buddhadharma, we have to understand the meaning of it. The meaning, the goal and the final result of the practice is to generate loving kindness and compassion – to really realize it. And then, what is the benefit of it? The benefit is to loosen up our tight self-grasping so that our hard mind opens up, softens and becomes the water of the ocean, actually unifies with the big body of the water of the ocean of all the Buddhas. We have to know that this separateness in us is due to the grasping to self, that it has the quality of ice, and that it can melt into the big body of water in the ocean. Again the method is through the practice and development of loving kindness and compassion. This actually opens up and widens our mind. Through this, we are able to let go of grasping to self and ultimately we arrive at the view of non-duality. In the mind, non-duality means that there are no two things, just like the sky, we cannot say that this is the center, this is the boundary. There are no two things. This is true for all religions.

Even though outwardly there are different religions, this is this and this is that. That is a relative view which is a partial view, a view that we have to be very careful of. If we say this is this, this is that and we describe qualities, we are quickly heading into the dynamics of attraction and aversion, namely, I like this and I do not like that. In fact, if we see two religions or all different religions in an authentic way of practice, actually they all serve the same purpose to bring forth loving kindness and compassion, to release the mind from this tight grip and to open up and widen it in the relative perspective. But from the absolute point of view, there is no duality, no distinction of one and the other. It is beyond duality.