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### Verse 3: Avert Afflictions as soon as They Arise

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*In my every action, I will watch my mind,  
And the moment destructive emotions arise,  
I will confront them strongly and avert them,  
Since they will hurt both me and others.*

In every action and deed, every speech and behavior, of my everyday life, I will examine my mind, and as soon as mental and emotional afflictions arise, because they endanger myself and others, I will discover and confront them rapidly, and firmly avert them without delay.

a. The root causes of afflictions

As an ordinary being, everyone has mental and emotional afflictions. With respect to the root causes of these afflictions or defilements, both Sutrayana and Tantrayana have their own explanations. In Sutrayana teachings, the roots of emotional afflictions are unwholesome mental factors and ignorance. In Tantric teachings, the root cause of afflictions is dualistic clinging, which is further caused by the subtle karmic winds, or the three appearances of subtle semen, blood, and wind energy, upon which the habitual tendencies ride. As a result, Sutrayana tradition and Tantrayana tradition have different ways in counteracting mental and emotional afflictions: the Sutrayana way turns causes into Dharma practices, and the Tantrayana way turns results onto the path.

Lord Atisha inherited the intentions of Asanga, and Langri Tangpa carried forward the style of Lord Atisha. Lord Atisha used to point out that: “If someone seeks the Dharma but does not apply it in counteracting emotional afflictions, his practice will be in vain.” Our purpose of learning the Dharma and doing spiritual practices should be towards eliminating mental and emotional afflictions, so what kind of antidote shall we use for this purpose? Here, Geshe Langri Tangpa’s pith instruction is to observe and examine our mind in all kinds of activities, such as sitting, walking, lying down, and standing, for the purpose of seeing whether it is in a positive state, a negative state, or a neutral state.

If it is in a negative state, which one of the five poisonous afflictions has it given rise to? Does it have any coming and going? Does it have a shape, color or inherent nature? By repeatedly and carefully examining one’s own mind stream in this way, a wise person will be able to counteract mental and emotional afflictions with mindfulness and alertness. When destructive emotions or bad thoughts arise, he will abandon them immediately, and confess to them with deep regret. But a person lacking in wisdom does the opposite: he is unable to tell what is right or what is wrong, and may even mistake one for the other. As a result, he will be unable to remedy the mental afflictions on his own.

Our mental and emotional afflictions arise within the mind. If the mind does not give rise to these afflictions, even if we encounter unfavorable conditions, such as illness or other physical disability, we will not be endangered by any affliction. Modern medical science and physiology also share the belief that suffering and happiness are determined mainly by one’s

mental state. If one is happy, the physical pain is lessened. . On the other hand, if one is caught up in mental suffering, the physical pain is felt even stronger. .

b. Destroy afflictions as soon as they arise

We should know that afflictions are manifestations of the habitual tendencies in our mind, and can be eliminated completely through certain remedies. For example, among the Han students of the fourfold assembly, some had an obstinate character with strong mental and emotional afflictions, when they first came to Larung Gar. After a certain period of time, by listening to the Dharma, reflecting and meditating upon it, they became more kind-hearted, had better personalities, and their wisdom increased gradually. Along with that, their mental and emotional afflictions decreased. However, once they paid less attention to the counteracting remedies, the old afflictions and habitual tendencies gradually rose up again. If they were able to keep practicing with diligence and perseverance, over the course of time, their minds would progressively become tamed, and the strong afflictions themselves would be brought onto the path. This was something that was experienced by every practitioner over the course of his or her spiritual practice.

Here, *“the moment destructive emotions arise, I will confront them strongly and avert them”* means that, as soon as a disturbing emotion, such as anger, arises in our mind, we must extinguish it immediately and avert it without delay. As is recounted in *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*:

*When emotions become habitual, they are hard to get rid of with antidotes.  
Therefore, with mindfulness and vigilance, to seize the weapon of the antidote  
And crush attachment and other negative emotions  
The moment they arise is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

If the disturbing emotions are not severed as soon as they arise, they will endanger ourselves and others. For instance, when we meet a bad person, we should, at the very beginning, contemplate that this person, like all sentient beings, has Buddha nature; therefore, he or she should be treated as our equal. If we did not give rise to this thought or visualization, from the very beginning, by the time we have begun to quarrel and have reached the height of our anger, it would then be virtually impossible for us to counteract the disturbing emotions through mindfulness and alertness. His Holiness Jigme Phuntsok Rinpoche has also said that: “If a disturbing emotion is not counteracted as soon as it arises, by the time it grows to any extent whatsoever, it will be very difficult for it to be subdued.”

Although it is mentioned in the unsurpassable Great Perfection (Dzogchen) that: “Carry afflictions onto the path, the inherent nature of afflictions is Bodhi itself, and all phenomena are pure and equal”, as ordinary beings, our perception of things is nevertheless defiled. The only thing we can do, perhaps, is to make an aspiration in our heart, and pray that we will reach the spiritual state in which afflictions can be taken onto the path, and all phenomena turn out to be pure and equal, as quickly as possible. At the same time, in our conduct, we should act based upon the Sutrayana perspective of the causal stage, and destroy the five poisons, which are attachment, anger, ignorance, arrogance, and jealousy. Otherwise, merely an instant of anger is enough to destroy the merits that we have accumulated and to endanger both ourselves and others; an instant of strong attachment is enough to ruin our vowed discipline, as well as

that of other people.

Therefore, we should examine our mind, from time to time, and periodically avert our own negative thoughts. In earlier times, whenever the great Kadampa masters gave rise to bad thoughts, they would stop eating and drinking, and would scold themselves, or even beat themselves, in order to subdue mental afflictions. This pith instruction may sound easy, but it is extremely profound. Every Mahayana practitioner should rely on this pith instruction, and constantly and diligently observe their three doors of body, speech and mind.

c. Pay more attention to our speech

Here, what should be particularly emphasized is that we need to pay attention to our own speech, and refrain from talking about the faults of other people. In *The Thirty-Seven Practices of a Bodhisattva*, it is stated that:

*If, impelled by negative emotions, I relate the faults  
Of other bodhisattvas, I will myself degenerate.  
Therefore, to not talk about the faults of anyone  
Who has entered the Mahayana is the practice of a bodhisattva.*

If we talk about other people's faults, we have transgressed the vows of the Bodhisattva. Most of the people here have taken the vows of the Bodhisattva, and are practitioners who have generated the Mahayana Bodhicitta, so it is very likely that what they do, and how they behave, are in keeping with the skillful methods of Bodhisattvas intended to help sentient beings. Therefore, we should not make comments carelessly, nor mention the faults of others. The Buddha articulated that: "Very few people can understand the predispositions and capacities of sentient beings, other than Buddhas." If we were Buddhas, we could point out the faults of others directly, but everyone may observe yourself: "Have I attained Buddhahood, yet?"

Perhaps, someone would ask in return: "Khenpola, you asked us not to mention the faults of others, but why, in class, do you mention our faults every day?" The answer is that "It is permitted in specific situations. However, every time I mention your faults, I'm very concerned that you would suffer from disturbing emotions on hearing this, so I speak as little about them as possible, or try to remind you in relatively mild ways. Meanwhile, however, I'm afraid that you would not recognize your own faults, and so I feel that I have to talk about them. This is different from simply pointing out the faults of others. For so many years, I have never aroused a conflict with a disciple, by mentioning one's faults in class. On the contrary, many people are able to see more clearly what their own faults are, and put an end to these faults in their mind stream".

However, when ordinary people speak about the faults of others, they are not doing so out of altruistic compassion but are rather merely being driven by their own disturbing emotions. This both destroys the source of their own merits and deepens their prejudice towards other people. It is like a frost of obstacles laying on the crops of their own practice, and also sows discord preventing harmonious union within the Sangha. Such behavior brings no benefit whatsoever, neither to themselves nor to any others. Therefore, when doing the mind-training, we must, from time to time, examine every part of our speech and conduct, what we do and how we behave, and gradually learn to subdue our obstinate characters, so that our mind

continuum will grow ever gentler.