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these qualities and makes the object look more beautiful than it actually is, which causes the longing and desire for the object. In the meditation of focusing on the imperfections of the object, one is focusing on and analysing the natural imperfections. By focusing on the natural imperfections, the earlier mind of seeing the object as completely appealing and beautiful is nullified, as we are now focusing on the aspects of the object that are not so attractive or appealing. So it directly counteracts the mind of seeing the object as completely appealing and beautiful. This is how the earlier mind of attachment is overpowered by the meditation on imperfections. If we gradually adopt this meditation, we will slowly notice that our attachments become less and less.

A particular example of objects of attachment, more commonly to those affected by desire and longing, is the body; attachment either to our own body or the beautiful bodies of others.

Whether it is in relation to our own body (assuming that one has a beautiful physique) or being overly obsessed and attached with the bodies of others, the attachment arises by perceiving the body as being really beautiful and appealing. If it appears as beautiful, then the mind exaggerates the qualities of that body. This is how the mind of attachment perceives the body. Here, meditating on the imperfections of the body means using logic, not just blindly, but through logic investigating the actual object, which in this case is the body, and asking and investigating, 'where is the beauty?' 'Which part of it is really beautiful?'

First of all, we investigate the skin and then go beyond the skin. If it's just the exterior part, which may seem appealing right away, but the skin is only so deep. Peel away the skin and beyond the skin we come to the flesh and the muscles and beyond, that is, the skeletal and internal organs. So it is in this way, when we investigate thoroughly from the bottom of the feet all the way to the top of our head and scrutinise how the body is, what is it made up of, then the natural imperfections will become very apparent to our mind. This is one way to counteract the earlier faulty perceptions of seeing a body as completely appealing and beautiful. There are other forms of this meditation as well, but this is one easy way that we can relate to using our logical investigation.

When we check the nature of the body, it brings to mind the natural imperfections of the body; then we will realise that it is not as appealing and beautiful in the way that we perceived earlier. When we initially perceive the body to be beautiful, it comes with an underlying notion that the beautiful and appealing body exists independently out there, and is an intrinsically never changing beautiful object. We have this concrete perception of the beautiful body, but through this investigation, we will come to realise for ourselves that the perception held by the mind of attachment is an incorrect perception. This comes to light when we start to peel away and look beyond that exterior appearance.

As mentioned earlier, there are other forms of meditation to see the imperfections of the body, which are presented in the Buddhist text known as *Abhidharma*. It is a graphic meditation and some may find it confronting, but this meditation is an effective way to overcome attachment to the body. There is a particular meditation where we perceive half of the body to be skeletal and the other half to be open flesh with blood oozing out. If we bring that vision to mind and overlay it upon the image of the earlier object of

attachment, this will immediately nullify the attachment to that body.

Likewise, there is a meditation to overcome the predominant affliction that most of us suffer from – anger. Anger is a readily known affliction that causes distress to our mind. Anyone who has experienced intense anger knows from experience that the mind is not in a happy and calm state when we are angry. Just as exaggerates the qualities and seeing the object as appealing, anger perceives the object as one hundred percent unappealing, and only focuses on the faults and the imperfections of the object. By focusing merely on the faults and exaggerating them, we feel anger and hostility towards the object. As a remedy, there are particular meditations that serve as an antidote to overcome the faulty state of mind and as a way to reduce anger. It is advised that we meditate on love for the object, particularly if it is an animate object. Love has an element of seeing the object as endearing and appealing in a more positive way. As we start to generate love towards the object, the mind of anger and hostility towards the object will be reduced. In such ways meditation offers many practical ways of dealing with afflictions in the mind that cause us so much distress.

There are other similar meditations to overcome specific afflictions in our mind. While these may seem a bit more elaborate and advanced to begin with, and we find them a bit hard right away, another method that we can use is focusing on our breath. This simple meditation technique is very effective for settling down the mind, particularly for a mind that is highly agitated and disturbed and has a lot of discursive thoughts. For such a busy state of mind, initially the practice of just focusing on our breath is very effective and is more appropriate for someone who is struggling with wandering thoughts and not being able to keep their attention and focus well. If, when someone is angry, you present a meditation technique by saying, 'you should meditate on love or meditate on patience; and meditate on the imperfections of an object' will be too much for them at that moment. But giving them a simple technique to just focus on the breath is something manageable, and easy to do and yet effective for settling down the mind.

In the last session, we covered some of the specifics of the ideal posture that we can adopt for the meditation practice. The specifics on what we are attempting to achieve in our meditation on the mental level is what we call 'mental stabilisation'. In order to develop mental stabilisation, first of all, we have to recognise obstructions, the states of mind that oppose mental stabilisation, namely excitement and laxity. There are specific methods and techniques of identifying what laxity and mindfulness are. The antidotes to overcoming excitement and laxity are mindfulness and introspection respectively. I can go into more detail in future sessions.

Mental stabilisation is achieved when we are able to single-pointedly focus on an inner object for as long as we wish. That is the definition of mental stabilisation. We have developed mental stabilisation when we are able to single-pointedly focus on an inner object as opposed to an external object for as long as we wish. In order to achieve that, we start from the beginning the practice of understanding of what we want to achieve. Initially we need to understand and identify what the conditions and obstructing conditions are to be able to achieve mental stabilisation. We all have the conducive conditions we need to achieve and remove the obstructing conditions. Thus, with meditation particularly,

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with developing mental stabilisation we need to understand the conducive and obstructing conditions.

All that we choose for our meditation regularly here is our own breath. There is significance of using the breath as an object. In order to apply this meditation technique properly, we need to be committed not to allow our mind to be distracted by normal distracting thoughts in relation to external objects. In other words, we withdraw our attention from all external objects and bring our full attention and focus on the breath itself. Here we are focusing on the image of the breath; imagine the breath coming in and going out. There are also specific instructions on how we should be breathing during that time. The breath itself should be free from sound when breathing. The breath coming in and out through our nostrils should be free from a laboured breath, such as breathing in and out loudly and deeply, and also be free from taking in small breaths and exhaling out long breaths. Thus, we focus on our natural breath maintaining a natural breathing rhythm; that is, basically how we normally breathe. We don't make any sounds when breathing in and out normally, and we don't breathe in deeply or shallowly but naturally. So we use our natural rhythm and then bring our full attention and focus just on the breath itself, and being aware when breathing in, 'now I am breathing in' and when breathing out, 'now the breath is leaving'. This is advised for beginners. When the mind is able to maintain the focus for a while, we will start to experience a joyous state of mind. Within that joyous state of mind, it is good to then come out of the meditation temporarily and not go on for too long, because as beginners we have not yet mastered focus for too long. If we attempt to focus for too long, then our mind will start getting distracted while not noticing that the mind has become distracted. If distraction becomes a habit of a mind seemingly focused but not entirely focused, then that itself can become a bad habit in our meditation. In brief, the quantity is not important but rather the quality - a short time but with a good focus. So for the next few minutes, we will adopt the meditation.

*(meditation)*

In this relatively focused state of mind, we can now just change the object of our focus to the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's name. As we hear this sound of the mantra, we maintain our focus on that sound and when the recitation subsides, we try to maintain the inner awareness.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

That will be sufficient for tonight unless someone has a good question. Geshe-la says we can address one question.

*Question:* What is the best way to keep a focused mind in a very noisy environment? As I'm currently staying in a rehabilitation centre, it can be a very busy and noisy place!

*Answer:* Of course the technique that was presented earlier, to focus on our breath, is a meditation technique that can help the situation. But for beginners, it is advised to find an environment little bit more conducive such as a quiet place because if there's a lot of distractions and noise near you, then it is hard for beginners to just focus on their breath adequately. Ideally it is good to find a quiet place.

One of the conditions and causes for internal busyness and turmoil in the mind seems to be very much related to

bringing up past memories. So if we can find a quiet place we can start to acknowledge our past memories, whether they are good or uncomfortable memories, and then to temporarily leave them aside. If we can train ourselves to not to dwell too much on those memories, then it will help to quieten down the mind. In fact, when we engage in this meditation by just focusing on the breath, it is best done by not bringing up any memories of the past or speculations of the future, but just being fully aware of the breath itself. The reason we feel settled and in a calm state of mind, even during a short period of being able to focus or attempting to focus on the breath, is because temporarily we are not dwelling on past memories, and just by the virtue of doing that we feel relieved. That shows if we normally dwell too much with past memories, it can cause turmoil in the mind.

If we can begin to lessen our obsession with past memories, and if we don't make an attempt to remember them, our mind will just go on its natural way. Otherwise it might be that the mind has become habituated and fixated on certain past memories that cause us turmoil and make us feel uncomfortable. It may seem that our mind just naturally goes back again and again to certain memories. However, that is because of the habituation we have formed in our mind and the pattern and way of thinking. In order to break that cycle, we need to make a specific attempt. It is not easy and it does not come about right away but gradually over time we can be free of that pattern of thinking. We may start thinking about a certain thing and it brings us a feeling of agony, feelings of guilt and uncomfortable feelings, and the more we dwell on that, the more the mind becomes more disturbed and agitated. So, when we can recognise that, we try to think of another object. Focusing on the breath is an example of focusing on another object that does not cause distress and disturbance to the mind. We can all identify that when certain memories and thoughts occur they disturb us. And if they don't occur in our mind, we feel relaxed. Therefore, those particular thoughts and memories that cause distress and agitation in the mind are the ones we try not to focus on, and we try to divert our attention from them, slowly through our meditation practice. This is for beginners. When we have gained control of our mind, then there are certain memories that may be useful when we bring them up. It can be useful as a cautionary method and to learn something from, as a way to prevent future mishaps. That is something that comes later, when we have further control of our mind. But in the beginning for beginners, it is best not to focus on those things.

Thank you for that good question. Your question would have been something that many others could have related to as well so you have asked on behalf of many others.

Thank you very much for paying such good attention and listening very well.

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