
When we apply the technique of focusing on an inner object, what is known as the meditation object, then by the virtue of focusing on the inner object, and by not allowing the mind to follow after the distractions the mind feels much more tranquil and relaxed. During that time when the mind is focused on the inner object, so there is no immediate cause for the afflictions to arise.

When the afflictions are not manifested, and they subside, we experience natural tranquillity, natural calmness in the mind. So we apply this method of focusing on an inner object, initially for the duration of one minute, and then gradually increase it to two minutes. Initially it is better not to have a long session, just one or two minutes at a time. Then that one or two minutes of actual focus on the inner object can be applied more frequently during the day, up to one hundred times during the day, and if you can keep your mind focused on the inner object, then by the virtue of doing that, the mind will naturally experience much more tranquillity. This will definitely counteract the natural tendency or habit of the mind wandering off and following the distractions.

As mentioned earlier, when the mind is distracted, that causes agitation in the mind which leads to an unhappy state of mind. When we intentionally apply methods to reverse that, then the mind experiences more tranquillity and more happiness.

Through familiarity with focusing on an inner object it becomes more of a habit. Then even when we are out and engaged in our normal everyday life activities, that familiarity of focusing on an inner object from our earlier meditation session, will serve as an aid to enable us to become a bit more aware of what is going on in our mind, and whether our mind is becoming distracted and influenced by afflictions and so forth.

That awareness itself can be really very helpful to prevent distractions or afflictions from further escalating. For example when the mind of anger arises, it is normally in relation to an object. If it is in regard to an external object that we develop anger, then due to our earlier familiarity of the practice of meditation, we can come to a point where we take notice of anger as soon as it arises, and investigate anger itself, rather than focusing on the external object that served as a condition for anger to arise.

There is not much we can do to change the external object, as that is not within our control, but the mind of anger itself is something that we have more control of. Look at the mind of anger itself, investigate it and check its nature and the consequences of allowing anger to manifest within oneself. What would the consequences be? So this sort of investigation would really help to reduce the intensity of that anger.

Likewise, when attachment arises, rather than focusing on the object of the attachment, and trying to do something to change the object itself, looking at the attachment itself within our own mind is something more manageable; we can look at and investigate attachment itself.

Although we may not be able to completely avoid anger or attachment from arising in our mind, through this

process we can definitely help to reduce the intensity of anger and attachment. That particular intensity causes deep agitation and anguish within one's mind, and that can definitely be reduced, and this would be really, really helpful.

To use a more specific example, in an event where one gets angry or upset with one's partner or companion, if we can immediately just take notice of the anger that arises within oneself, and just spend some time looking at one's anger rather than focusing on one's partner or companion. If we first look at our own anger and take notice of it and acknowledge it, then when we look again at our partner or companion we would see them in different light. It will be different to how we initially perceived them in the moment of anger; there is definitely a change.

In talking about anger, we might all be agreeing and thinking that sounds reasonable. If one can have a better perspective of one's partner or companion without the mind of anger, then that will be a good thing and you probably all agree with that. But with attachment we might start thinking, 'oh but I don't know if I can do without having a mind of attachment to my partner or companion' because one immediately thinks that if one doesn't have attachment then one may feel that one will miss out on something in that relationship. But that is really a false way of thinking.

What I am suggesting here is to just look at your own state of mind and notice when there is intense attachment towards your partner, then compare that to the mind that has a bit less intense attachment. If that intense attachment towards your partner can be relieved or reduced a bit, a little bit more relaxed, I think that would be healthier and much better for your and your partner.

So the point here is that rather than intentionally enhancing your attachment to your partner or companion, it would be better to reduce the intensity of that attachment. The way to reflect on this point is that if the object of one's attachment is beyond change, i.e. that they will never change, then perhaps one could say there is nothing wrong with having attachment. But since the object will definitely go through changes, then for as long as the strong mind of attachment is present it is not possible to accept the changes because it is holding onto a particular projection of the object as being extremely beautiful. So when the object's appealing features start to fade away, it will cause so much agony in the mind.

Now of course, I personally don't have experience of that, but when I look at situations, and when people relate their troubles to me, it seems that a lot of pain and agony is experienced when changes take place. That is something that you can relate to.

Furthermore, when there is very strong attachment towards the partner, then this also seems to cause a very strong sense of possessiveness towards the other person. A very strong sense of possessiveness, actually causes a very tight hold on the other person which can be an uncomfortable experience. There are those who have mentioned to me that their partner is always checking on their every move and scrutinising whatever they do; it

seems to be uncomfortable for the other person when there is too much possessiveness.

Therefore, when the mind of attachment is reduced, it can actually help the other person to feel more relaxed as well. So within that atmosphere of a more relaxed state, and a more relaxed relationship, then I feel there will be room for the genuine positive states of mind of love and compassion to be generated for each other. And when the relationship is based on true love and compassion, then that is a much healthier relationship. And when there is a mutual care for each other based on love and compassion, then that will definitely foster a genuine trust towards each other as well.

Now referring back to the main point, the practice of meditation is one where we train our mind to focus on objects which do not cause afflictions to arise. By familiarising our mind with those objects, we can then reduce the intensity of the afflictions in the mind, and consequently cause more tranquillity and calmness to arise in the mind.

As mentioned earlier, we think about the negative consequences of anger. We really use our own experience to investigate what are the consequences of anger, and contrast that to when one's mind is devoid of anger, when there is a mind of no anger. Likewise, when one has intense attachment, what kind of consequences does one experience with intense attachment? And in contrast to that, when one has non-attachment in one's mind, what does one experience? Likewise, with the mind of jealousy, what kind of agony does it bring to the mind? And then likewise if one is free from jealousy, focusing on an object of non-jealousy, then what are the positive consequences that one experiences?

So what I am presenting to you here, in very practical and simple terms, is really a means for checking on and investigating one's own state of mind, the emotions and feelings that one goes through, one can just check-up for oneself.

Now we will apply the meditation technique for a few minutes, and we remind ourselves that with meditation we need to have an object to focus on, a meditation object, and for our purpose here, as we regularly do, we use our own breath to focus on.

In order to apply this technique fully and properly, we need to make the commitment to not allow our mind to be disturbed in every direction, following various different distractions, but rather bring our focus inwards, and having brought our focus inwards then placing it on the meditation object.

The consequences of a completely dispersed and distracted mind is, that our mind loses its full potential, one lacks the potency of the mind when it is completely dispersed in every direction. Whereas when we bring our focus inwards and place it on one object, then the potency of the mind becomes much more effective. We can then utilise the potential or potency of the mind to a greater extent. So that is the virtue of bringing our focus inwards and placing it upon one object, as through that one gains a greater ability in one's mind, and the opportunity to use it in a proper way.

Further, as a way to maintain our focus on the object, one needs to apply mindfulness, and to be really mindful of the object, which is the breath itself. Constantly remember it, and while focusing on it, we also need to find the right measure, where our focus is not too intense or too tight but also not too loose.

The analogy mentioned in the teachings is that it is like holding a stick; if you hold it too tight that can be stressful and painful, whereas if it is too loose, then you will lose the stick - it will fall out of your hands. Similarly, if you are holding onto your fingers, when squeezing too tight, that is not comfortable, whereas you can hold your fingers and just squeeze to a certain degree so that you have a grip. It is something similar to that.

Of course, the right method will eventually come through experience, but this is what we try to bear in mind initially, not to be too tense and at the same time not to be too loose.

So now by maintaining a one hundred percent focus on the breath, we will spend a few minutes in meditation.

Meditation

We now change the object of our focus to the sound of the mantra to be recited, and maintain the focus inwards.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

That will be sufficient for now.

Does anyone have a question?

Question: Geshe-la, you mentioned earlier that we need to prepare for our old age, by taking care of our health and wellbeing now; however when we are young we don't normally think much about old age. Are there any methods to help us reflect on it more readily?

Answer: Of course, thoughts about one's old age and so forth may not come naturally if one doesn't consciously think about it. There is a saying by one of the earlier masters that; 'not thinking about the need to practice Dharma twenty years went by, then contemplating and thinking that perhaps I need to practice the Dharma, another twenty years had gone by. Yet another twenty years went by not finding the time to practice the Dharma, this then is the story of an empty life'. So it is similar to that.

Actually, the point that you raise is exactly what is coming later on in the text. The text itself will be giving actually points to think about.

Taking it on a personal level, when you were five years old for example, it would never have occurred to you that one day you would be twenty-five, but now you are twenty-five.

So the reality is, that whether we think about it or not, it actually does occur, our old age will come. It is not dependent on whether we think about it or not, it actually does come.

I guess the point really is that there is no specific strategy other than actually thinking about the reality of one's life, but that doesn't mean that one needs to become obsessed with thinking about one's old age. However it is practical to think about your life. For example, in a few years' time

where you will be, what you will do and so forth. So these kinds of thoughts would be useful.

To give a little bit more explanation regarding the occurrences in our lives, for example when one reaches the age of seventy, then that is usually an age that you would call 'retirement'.

Having reached the age of seventy then suddenly one will be without a job, which means that there is no regular income. I have heard that then some people start thinking about their savings, like maybe one or two hundred thousand dollars, and how long that would that last, will it be enough up to their eighties or nineties? And then apparently some people at that stage start to worry again, and start to think, where will I get income from? How can I survive?

So it seems that if we have made plans when we were younger, like long-term investment for our old age, then perhaps you would not have to worry at that time. But also with health, in terms of one's health, if one doesn't take care of one's health, one can experience some consequences of that as well, that is something that we can all recognise.

Now leaving aside the consequences that one may have to face in our old age, some more immediate examples come to mind, such as when young people abuse their body through substances, injecting or consuming all sorts of substances, and then they reach the point where they become completely addicted, and this causes a lot of anger and conflict in the family. There are fights within the family, or with one's partner, and there is so much destruction and so much unhappiness that comes about because of that situation, that is something very obvious.

You do not have to wait until sometime in the future for those consequences, they are right there in one's youth, one experiences these consequences immediately.

So when we see examples of that, we need to protect ourselves by reminding ourselves to avoid going down that path. That is something we can learn.

And then there are those who in their later years, such as in their sixties, who confess that they didn't take care, and they neglected their bodies when they were young, and now they are experiencing a lot of complications with their health. A person who I knew passed away when he was barely sixty-eight but he looked much older.

From what I understand, although I am not one hundred percent sure if I understood everything correctly, he was saying that he neglected his health and his body when he was younger. He didn't seem to be too anxious however, he seemed to be in quite good spirits, but he was confessing that he may have had substance abuse issues and so forth when he was young, and that caused him ill-health.

I've also got some associates in their late sixties and they have mentioned to me that through having smoked a lot when they were young, they now have problems with their lungs, difficulty with breathing and so forth.

Apparently, the doctors can clearly see the effects with the body at that age, around sixty, with the effects of early substance abuse and so forth, and the difference

between someone who hasn't taken substances can be quite clearly seen, there can be significant differences.

I used to think that I was quite old when I was about twenty-five, and then when I first came to Australia I was about forty-eight and I thought I was quite old then, so I used to think; 'since I am forty-eight and quite old there is no point thinking of much more advancement, it's better to just focus on my practice and try to meditate. That will be the best thing to do'. So that is how I used to think, and I guess that might have helped a bit with my practice.

In terms of one's material achievements and conditions, it is perhaps good to have the thought of contentment and not to be too ambitious. That sort of mind can be helpful for practice.

Thanks very much for listening well.

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