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then if we don't really manage it well, we can feel disturbed. So really the best way to prepare oneself, and to protect oneself, is through the familiarisation of the meditation practice. That is something we need to bear in mind.

When we engage in this practice we can also really cultivate a discriminative wisdom, which is a deep inner intelligence that recognises what is pleasurable for oneself and what is harmful.

Now we will spend some time in the actual practice of formal meditation, and for that purpose we will adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture.

In order to engage in meditation practice it is important that we first identify and choose an appropriate object to focus on, and this is an object that does not cause afflictions to arise in our mind. We focus on an object in order to anchor our mind so that it does not get dispersed in all directions. Some people may prefer a particular object to focus on; while there are many appropriate objects to focus on, certain objects may be more suitable for one's mind and so for that reason one may choose to focus on a particular object.

However, the object that we regularly choose here as a common object to focus on is our own breath.

Choosing the breath is very significant for us beginners because, as the great master Lama Tsongkhapa has mentioned, for someone who is affected by a lot of discursive thoughts, focusing on the breath is the most appropriate and the most suitable object to focus on as a way to settle the mind

The reason why we need to apply an appropriate method to settle down the discursive thoughts is because the discursive thoughts are one of the main causes of interference whenever we wish do something. It is the discursive thoughts that affect the thinking in our mind and cause hindrance and interference. So that is why we need to settle that down.

So for an individual who is affected by a lot of discursive thoughts, or put simply, excessive thinking, engaging in a meditation technique that involves further analysis or thinking will not work. It will not be suitable, because their mind is already affected by excessive thinking.

For example, when someone is really affected by intense anger, if you ask them to meditate on love as a way to overcome anger, in that very moment when they are experiencing intense anger they will not consider that as being suitable for them. They will not take that on board, as meditating on love is not something that they can relate to right then.

However, a simple meditation of just focusing on the breath is something much more manageable because it involves a less strenuous state of mind. In fact, when one focusses on the breath properly and attentively, is said to enable the mind to settle down. The discursive thoughts and the very hyperactive state of mind will naturally settle down. Consequently, the mind becomes clearer and brighter and when the mind experiences this very clear and bright state, it actually also experiences a sense of deep relaxation, deep relief and a genuine sense of relaxation.

In regard to the specific instruction of how to focus on the breath, is said that the breath itself needs to be in a natural state. That means it has to be free from a deep inhalation and exhalation that is audible, and also be free from forceful inhalation and exhalation, such as a long in-breath or a long out-breath in a forceful manner. So in brief, the instruction is to maintain one's breath in its natural rhythm, just in the way that one would normally breathe, calmly and naturally.

Also, when one actually begins to focus on the breath, one of course applies mindfulness, an awareness that the breath is coming in and the breath is going out. Just maintaining that awareness, even just focusing on the breath itself coming in and going out is actually a very effective means to maintain one's focus.

So we adopt our appropriate physical posture, such as being relaxed but upright and straight. Then, most importantly, we need to have the right state of mind, which, for the meditation purpose, is to withdraw our attention from all forms of distractions whether internal or external. This includes not only the distractions which we would call negative distractions, but also the positive thoughts and so forth; temporarily we need to withdraw from those as well. The main point is to try to disengage from all mental activities, thoughts, mental processes and so forth, and just bring our full focus and attention onto the meditation object which is our own breath, completely focus on our own breath.

Initially, as beginners, we may find it hard to maintain a focus on the breath for a long duration, and actually the advice is that one should not attempt to focus on the object for a long time when the object may not be clear and steady. It is far better to have a good focus for a minute or two initially, and then take a small break, and then readjust the focus again, and in this way really focus single-pointedly for a minute or two. Then we can gradually increase the span of our focus, and our attention on the object, and it will actually become stronger, and steadier for a longer duration.

Otherwise if we begin our meditation by allowing our mind to be seemingly focused but actually distracted, like that, then that in itself can become a bad habit. Although we seem to be in a meditative state, the mind is actually always half distracted and half wandering, and that will be very difficult habit to change later.

If we can make sure that we are adopting a proper technique, from the very outset, in that we really focus on the object itself even for a short period, and we experience the positive effect of a focused mind, we will naturally be keen to continue to practise meditation.

Otherwise, as just mentioned, if we make an attempt to meditate but allow the mind to be completely distracted, then after a certain time we will become weary of that. Meditation will start becoming difficult. And because it seems that you are not making any progress, you may think that there is no point in meditating and that you may as well give up. That is the fault of not having utilised the technique properly. So it is important to have this clear understanding right at the start of our meditation.

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So now by setting our mind to the purpose of our meditation, we will try to maintain a one hundred percent focus on the breath itself and engage in this meditation for the next few minutes.

*(Pause for Meditation)*

Now while maintaining our posture and focused state of mind, we can change the object of our focus to the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. After the recitation finishes, we can just maintain that focus and awareness.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

So that is sufficient for now. If there is a question I can maybe address one question, and it is fine if there is no questions.

Again, just to reiterate, it is important to find ways and means to associate with positive states of mind. If we can associate with positiveness every single day, and not allow our minds to be separated from that, then that will be the best assistant in whatever we do.

Within the positive states of mind, the most essential is the mind of love and compassion. This is the most positive state of mind that one can cultivate. A true sense of love and compassion is really essential for one's wellbeing and for the wellbeing for others. So if, in our daily life, we can really familiarise our mind with the values of love and compassion, and try to really integrate love and compassion into our normal way of thinking, then that will be most effective.

One aspect of the incredible effectiveness of love and compassion on a personal level is that if one extends true love and compassion towards others, it actually helps to overcome a lot of negative states of mind within oneself. So the afflictive states of mind that cause us distress and unhappiness, can mostly be overcome by love and compassion. It would be wonderful if one did not have to experience the ill effects of the negative states of mind; how wonderful it would be if these states of mind can be overcome by love and compassion.

So the more we familiarise ourselves with love and compassion, the more we will naturally be imbued with a sense of love and compassion towards others. And further, the more we familiarise ourselves with love and compassion, the more our mind naturally becomes more and more relaxed, and more joyful and happy.

These positive effects are something that we all can experience. When we have a true sense of love and compassion towards someone, we don't in that moment experience anger towards them, and we don't experience jealousy towards them, or a sense of competitiveness or pride.

Therefore, it is very clear, that when one's mind is dominated with love and compassion these negative states of mind that causes distress do not arise.

The main consideration for parents who have a true sense of love and compassion towards their children, will be the wellbeing of their children, and from the parent's side, they will only be thinking of how to benefit their children, and how to contribute towards the betterment

of their children, rather than having a sense of anger or pride or jealousy towards them.

Likewise, when there is a mutual sense of love and compassion in a relationship with partners or companions, there is a true bond, and a real sense of harmony between those two people.

So in this way we can see that love and compassion is really the main cause for a sense of genuine happiness for wellbeing. This is something that I don't say lightly. I have spent a lot of time, in fact most of my life, really just investigating and thinking about this point. And having some level of experience myself, I can definitely assert that love and compassion is the most valuable state of mind. And furthermore, it is not something which is completely alien to us, we all have the seed or the basis of love and compassion within ourselves. It is just a matter of further developing it and perfecting it, and that is what we need to do.

If we investigate about it further, we will come to acknowledge that whenever we face some sort of problem or difficulty in life, particularly one that it is hard to deal with by ourselves, then it becomes apparent that we have to rely on help from someone else. So we would naturally seek help from someone who has a true sense of love and compassion for us. That would be the person who would come to our aid, not just anyone.

So this is how we can again validate that the value of love and compassion. As I stress regularly, in any relationship the most important element is a true sense of love and compassion towards each other. Of course, that is not to say that a relationship may not initially be based on attachment, as it is hard to be completely free from attachment in a committed relationship. However, if both sides can work towards going further than just feeling attachment towards each other and go beyond that to developing a true sense of love and compassion, then that will really establish a genuine bond between two people.

Otherwise, if it is just based on a sort of fleeting attraction and attachment, (and I couldn't say that there is no enjoyment and happiness at all in that kind of relationship) it is definitely not be durable. When the attraction starts to wane, then the relationship will also fall apart, That is quite obvious.

However, those relationships that continue on are those which are based on a true sense of mutual love and compassion. Love is the sentiment of wishing others to be happy.

When we see they are lacking happiness, we are not able to bear that, and we wish them to be happy, that is the sentiment of love. Whereas compassion is the sentiment of not wanting others to experience any kind of suffering. When one sees others experiencing misery or suffering or pain, one is not being able to bear that, and wishes them to be free from that, and does whatever possible to help them to be free from the misery or pain. That is the element of compassion.

These are important elements that we needs to further develop and cultivate as a means to maintain that true sense of wellbeing within ourselves and for others.