

Begin by fully relaxing your body.

It is wonderful if your mind is also relaxed and peaceful. When both mind and body are peaceful and rested, the possessor of the mind and body, who is identified as the 'I,' also finds peace and relaxation.

Notice how, even when we are physically at rest, if our mind is not peaceful we won't be able to relax. If our mind is calm and peaceful it doesn't matter whether we are sitting, walking or otherwise busy, we will be happy and peaceful as well. There is a unique relationship between mind, body and self.

If we observe our daily experiences, we can notice that when we are happy on the mental level, we are truly happy. Happiness will beam from our smile. When a person is happy or unhappy inside it is noticeable externally. Happiness has more to do with the person's mental attitude or way of thinking than with external wealth and success.

We can understand this by observing our own experiences and looking at the causes of the happiness and suffering we go through. The main cause of each person's experience and state of emotions is not necessarily their material conditions. An unhappy person can sometimes be much wealthier than a happy person. We sometimes assume that wealthy people live a happy life and wish for our lives to be like theirs. In reality they are not necessarily happier than their poorer counterparts.

It is not that favourable external conditions will not bring us any happiness. We know from experience that sometimes we are happy because of good external conditions; for example, when we are in the company of a person we love.

However, we need to examine the overall cause of happiness at that moment. If the cause is entirely related to external conditions, we don't have any control over how long we can remain in that situation. Given the transient nature of events, we can easily lose that kind of happiness and are vulnerable to changing conditions. A couple may enjoy time together in the morning, but be nasty to each other at night.

If our happiness is too dependent on outer conditions, we face a tragic situation whenever we lose the things that we like, for example, when people we love begin to hate us. There is, however, a kind of joy that can be experienced from within and which is not dependent on external conditions. This kind of happiness is more reliable and sustainable. We have more control over this happiness than happiness that relies on external factors. Regardless of changing external conditions, we can be as happy at night as we were in the morning.

That true happiness lies within us. Someone close to me said to me that he found this advice very helpful when he went through a difficult time after being separated from his partner. Understanding that the purpose of meditation is to recognise our inner happiness and tap into that helps us to comprehend its relevance in our life.

People's experience of unhappiness is primarily related to their psychological condition. Our attitude is the primary source of our life experiences. If we check we can understand that a certain way of thinking brings suffering, gives us a negative picture and destroys our peace and happiness. A different way of thinking brings happiness and enables us to eliminate suffering.

This is not because we have some kind of mental disorder. Rather, it is how we cope emotionally with problems that we face in our everyday situation. If we develop more understanding of our mind, we can reduce problems related to our mind, and live life more wisely and happily. We need mental control, otherwise our mind will be easily filled with disturbing thoughts.

Understanding that the purpose of meditation is overcoming the inner causes of everyday life problems will inspire us to practice. It's focus is not on making change in the outer world, but on bringing change from within. Most problems and suffering that we undergo are related directly to our mental attitude. If we have a very strong self-cherishing mind and think only about our own interests, but not those of other beings, all sorts of mental afflictions will arise.

These mental afflictions will then serve as the direct source of suffering for ourselves, and also the suffering that we cause to other beings. Mental afflictions such as desire, hatred, jealousy, pride, competitiveness etc, are all rooted in the self-cherishing and self-centred mind. Whenever we perceive any pleasant object we generate attachment for it. If we perceive unpleasant objects we generate hatred or aversion. When we see the wealth and the admirable qualities of other beings we generate jealousy. For our own achievements and qualities, we generate pride.

The point is to recognise the effect of these mental afflictions upon us and upon our experiences. The moment any of these afflictions arise within us, we are very disturbed. To remedy these afflictions, we need to recognise their harmfulness to others and to ourselves. That is also the purpose of engaging in meditation.

If our mind is filled with mental afflictions we have no way to achieve happiness and joy. If our mind is filled with mental afflictions we will be subject to suffering and misery, even if externally we enjoy very favourable living conditions. We need to understand that it is the mental affliction that makes us suffer, not the external object. Mental afflictions can be dependent upon external objects without which they cannot arise. This is to say, when we think of certain external object the afflicted state of mind arises, and as we stop thinking of that object, the afflicted mind ceases. Having said that, it is not the external object itself, rather the way our mind perceives that object that gives rise to the afflicted mind.

The purpose of meditation is to discipline our mind. It is important in meditation to maintain the focus on the object and not lose it to distracting objects. We tie our mind to the meditation object. By keeping the mind there, we are habituating or familiarising it with the meditation object and through this we are changing the habitual patterns of the mind and breaking its tie with mental afflictions. As we place our mind on the object, we will notice that disturbing thoughts and mental agitations, both good and bad, cease as the mind rests in peace and tranquillity.

What we learn and achieve through meditation will be very enlightening and enable us to live our everyday life more happily and meaningfully. Understanding that the primary source of all our suffering is negative states of mind is something we need to be aware of at all times. We need to recognise that mental afflictions are the driving force behind unskilful actions and unhappy thoughts. Normally we blame ourselves or something external for our suffering.

This insight completely revolutionises our thoughts and deeds. From the point of view of Dharma, suffering results from wrongdoing but wrongdoing is the result of the afflicted mind. The person should not be blamed for their wrongdoings; it is the afflicted mind within them. This understanding will help to prevent self-blame and blaming other people.

This understanding inspires us to avoid negativities and adopt positivity, rather than being discouraged and feeling depressed. The more understanding we have about our own situation, the better our understanding of other people. With this understanding, we are well equipped to practice patience and compassion, particularly for those who commit harmful actions out of hostility and hatred. Not blaming the person means we are able to maintain compassion and tolerance towards them.

It is important that we are aware of our thoughts and actions all the time. If we feel emotionally disturbed and unhappy, we may easily do things which are harmful to others and even to ourselves. We need to recognise that the main cause is the afflicted state of mind, and try to utilise this situation to develop more understanding of the shortcomings and destructiveness of mental afflictions. Thinking in this way gives you motivation to counteract these mental afflictions.

Now we will begin our breathing meditation. It is important that we always begin the meditation with a comfortable, fully-relaxed body. The next thing is to empty your mind of all thoughts. Regardless of whether it is good or bad, try to get rid of every thought. Give yourself a break from your usual mind which is unruly and wanders from one object to the next. If we do not stop these thoughts, we cannot stop the worries and problems that we experience. It is important that we put those things away, at least during meditation, and allow ourselves true rest and peace.

Sometimes the cause of our worries, stress and tensions concerns things such as sad things that happened in the past. We are better off if we forget about the past.

Likewise, if we are not careful our mind can be filled with unnecessary problems worrying about the future.

We want our mind to stand still within us with no object or thought. At that moment, we can feel a sense of peace, stillness and relaxation. Try to remain in that state for a little while. Direct all your mental attention to the incoming and outgoing breath. It is not important how long you can stay on the object. Even a minute or two is very beneficial. If the mind wanders off, simply bring it back to the object.

Meditation is a form of training through which we modify our mind so that eventually we gain more control, instead of being overpowered by the influence of external distractions.

[Meditation]

Continue the meditation with the chanting of Buddha's mantra. Switch the focus of the mind to the sound of the mantra. As we begin chanting, make sure the mind focuses on the sound of the mantra, rather than wandering off after outside objects. After a few rounds of the mantra stop chanting, but continue the meditation silently to ensure that the mind remains within yourself as much as possible.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

There is time for one question.

Question: How can we help those who have a problem, but don't admit to or recognise their problems?

There are some people who may be undergoing even some serious problem, such as depression, but they don't want to admit or let other people know. They choose to appear to others as if they are happy and free of problems, when they are not. It's not easy to help them. Often, we also have to pretend not to know their real situation. If they say, 'things are good', we have to reply, 'that's wonderful'. It's a bit complicated and awkward to help them with their problem because we want to respect their privacy and individual choices.

In certain situations, people can't talk about their issues because of legal consequences or individual rights. Sometime the situation can be very complex because, if certain information goes to the wrong person, they can be prosecuted and end up in prison. We hear from the news of cases where some old people get charged for long-past misdeeds. We also need to take into account confidentiality and privacy legislation. This means that we have to be careful about who we share the information with and why.

Despite not knowing the cause of their problem, we can help support other people. If they are close to you or you interact with them regularly, it is good enough if you help them in whatever way you can, or whenever you see they need help.

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