
For example, if you advise your children not to engage in quarrels, fights and arguments with others, but then you constantly have arguments with your partner, then that is something that will not go down well with the children.

We say that the effects we feel from external objects are dependent on our attitude and how we view the objects. This doesn't mean that external objects don't have an influence on our mind, or that external objects don't contribute to the effects that we feel in our mind - they do. External objects do serve as a condition for us to experience either happiness or unhappiness in our mind. However, what is being emphasised here is that while external objects have some contribution towards our wellbeing, the primary cause for us to feel either happy or unhappy is in our mind, in how we interpret the objects. For example, there are times when other people may affect us because of what they say or how they appear to us, even the way they look at us. Sometimes, just the way someone looks at us can really affect our mind to a great degree. If it was just the bad look on their face that really affects us, then we would have to assume that everyone's bad look should affect us, but that is not the case. We know through our experience that not everyone's bad look effect us, such as that of strangers. But if someone that we have a close relationship with, such as our partner or friend gives us a bad look, then that affects our mind. What happens is that we interpret their bad look in a completely disproportional exaggerated way. This completely blows it out of proportion and our mind starts to interpret things using assumptions and doubts within our own mind. So, on top of that one bad look, negative states of mind kick in and start to exaggerate it. The mind feeds itself with these negative thoughts, and this contributes to our mind feeling hurt or unhappy. If our mind didn't exaggerate and impose the outlook of the object, then it would not affect us to that degree. That is why the appearance of the object is dependent on how the mind views it.

When we begin to really understand how the mind functions, we will see that it is really the mind that completely exaggerates and distorts reality. When the mind sees things in disproportion, that in turn causes the mind to feel unrestful. In meditation we are trying to reduce that conceptual mind, and eventually try to overcome it. As the mind settles down to focus on a neutral object, and then eventually on virtuous objects, then the conceptual mind subsides, and the mind becomes calmer and more peaceful. When we notice and experience that for ourselves, then we start to really realise for ourselves that there is definitely value in meditation, and that's what we call developing faith in the meditation, faith in the practice of the teaching.

Religion does emphasise that one should have faith in what is being preached, but the real faith is generated within one's own mind, with one's own experience. This is called convinced faith and it becomes an indestructible faith because it comes from one's own experience and thus is very stable. As we gain experience from the meditation and our mind becomes calmer and more peaceful, we can start to develop real faith in the larger picture.

As we gain experience from meditation, we come to realise that the effort we put into gaining a result from meditation means that the actual protector or refuge is developed within us. When our mind goes into our natural habit of exaggerating the faults of an object, this results in attachment and anger arising. This causes the mind to be unrestful and constantly agitated and disturbed, and contributes to the rest of the problems in the mind such as frustration and depression and so forth. This is very difficult to overcome right away. It takes a long time, but even in a short meditation, by disciplining ourselves for a few minutes and using our full attention to focus on the object, we can come to experience the mind settling down. From an earlier state where the mind is very agitated and very distracted, as soon as we apply meditation sincerely, then we experience the mind becoming calm and restful; our mind is protected immediately. We give the mind that protection ourselves. Our own decision in focussing on a virtuous object and keeping the mind focussed brings the mind into a calm state. When one's mind is disturbed and agitated and in a very unrestful state, no one else can really protect us. Our best friends around us and our family, the ones who really love us, can't really help us at a time when our mind is in a very disturbed state. We have to help ourselves; this is why it is mentioned in the teachings that the real refuge and protector is within ourselves.

Having described the process of how we protect ourselves from our disturbed, confused and agitated mind, now it is good to try to apply the actual technique of meditation. The purpose is to bring the mind to a more subdued state, more relaxed, calm and peaceful. If letting our mind to be in a distracted state were to bring us a some good result, then there would be some point in leaving it as it is. But as we all notice, there is no real constructive benefit from just letting the mind follow it's whims. The only result we gain is a mind that is more confused, agitated and more disturbed. If we want to have a more calm and peaceful mind, which contributes to our wellbeing and others wellbeing, then it is appropriate that we apply the technique of meditation. It is good to be sincere and use whatever short time we have to apply the meditation technique and apply it one hundred per cent. This means we have to withdraw our mind from all thoughts for the time being, and focus it on the constant inflow and outflow of our breath. Try to get into a rhythm of breathing where there is a natural inflow and outflow of our breath. Don't try to labour the breathing where the out breath is long and the in breath is short or vice versa. When we find a good physical posture and sit in a relaxed way, then the breath should also naturally subside and flow into a natural rhythm. Breathing through our nostrils preferably, allow the breath to settle down to a natural rhythm, then focus on the natural in flow and out flow of our breath. Just maintain your focus, leaving aside whatever other thoughts and ideas that you may have. If the mind gets distracted, just bring it back onto the breath again and try to remain focussed on that.

Question: I find it hard when my boss is being nice to me at work. Rather than appreciating him for being nice to me, it

makes me feel insecure and uncomfortable. How best can I deal with this feeling?

Generally speaking, if someone appreciates us and likes us, isn't that something we would like?

If it is done with the proper attitude, then there are those who are of a good nature who would try to be friendly with others, specifically with co-workers, so that things go well in the company or the work situation. Because you have to relate with others on a daily basis, there are certain good natured people who do want to try to communicate and be nice to others regardless of who they are. If you are working with them, then in order to get the good rapport with others, make an attempt to have a good relationship. There are those of a good nature who, even if others don't appreciate them, they still make an attempt to be nice and friendly. It could be a situation like that, if it is genuine.

When others relate of a difficulty where their bosses are not being nice to them and are criticising them and so forth, that usually seems to be more of a practical problem to me. It seems in a job situation if the bosses are not really paying attention or not really commenting or showing any appreciation of your work, then all sort of doubts arise in the mind - 'maybe the boss doesn't like me or doesn't like what I do, maybe I will lose my job' - and there can be paranoia or fear that arises from that. But I haven't really heard others saying the opposite. It seems rare to find someone saying that their boss being nice to them actually annoys them.

There have been others that have related their difficulty in a job situation where their boss is not being nice to them, and have asked me if is there some kind of mantra that they can recite so that others will start liking them. Maybe you have recited the Tara mantra well, so now the bosses really like you. (*Laughter*)

Question: I seem to lose interest and initiative in doing things. Could it be a form of laziness? What can I do to overcome such a state of mind?

If it's in relation to the job where you have to do something which is unpleasant, then in order to motivate oneself to do it, one would have to start to think about the financial benefit it could bring. If one is not inclined and doesn't have a strong financial inclination, then maybe one may not find the motivation to the job or the work.

Then again, of course there are the problems of people who don't have a job, or who have difficulty finding a job. Having a job with some difficulties, I think is a lesser problem than those who don't have a job at all or have difficulty finding a job.

Seeing the greater purpose of doing the activity, for example apologising for a mistake, will come slowly with practice and familiarity. Initially the main difficulty that arises in apologising is a little bit of a pride. If one can actually start to reason with oneself and see how it is much nobler and much more worthwhile to apologise for something that one knows definitely one has done wrong, and if one can actually encourage oneself to do that, then one actually feels much better afterwards. With any activity, if one can see the greater purpose and the greater benefit, then even though there is some initial

discomfort and hesitation, it can be overcome when one starts to really reason it out in one's mind. This all comes with familiarity.

For the short time we gather here, for just over one hour, my main intention is to bring a few minutes of real calmness and happiness within ourselves. If we can have some real mutual understanding and good feeling within ourselves, then that is something that will definitely contribute to the well being of your whole life. This is something that I really take with utmost concern. In our gathering here, if we can have a little bit of a good time and share something worthwhile, then I feel that it has served its purpose and there has been some benefit.

Before we conclude for the evening, it would be good to spend some time in meditation again. As we bring our focus inward, leaving the distractions aside, we keep our mind focused inward, focusing on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed from tape by Vanessa Walsh
Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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