
Attachment is difficult to identify as a negative state of mind because of the very nature or aspect of how attachment is experienced or felt within oneself. When an attachment arises within one's mind it arises in relation to an object. The object appears, from its own side, to be attractive. One sees and only focuses on the attractive features of an object. One is focusing on the attractive features with what is said to be an exaggerated view of the qualities. By thinking that those attractive features arise from the object's side and really believing in those attractive features, one then develops a sense of longing to possess or to come into contact with the object.

The mind projects extra qualities upon the object. The combination of the object itself appearing attractive and the mind projecting extra qualities of attractiveness on the object, produces a state of mind that is attachment, and then one longs to possess the object. Thus one does not see the longing desire towards the object, as a fault. With anger it is the opposite. What appears to the mind from the very object's side are the negative attributes or features of the object. The mind then projects extra negative qualities upon the object and generates a feeling of repulsion, thus wishing to avoid the object, and agitation and anger arise in the mind.

One of the reasons why attachment is difficult to identify as a harmful state of mind, is because the very expression or experience of attachment comes with an initial pleasurable feeling or sensation in the mind. Whereas in the very expression or experience of anger, there is an unpleasant feeling. When anger initially arises one can immediately feel the unpleasant feeling and the disturbance in the mind. That is an experience which is felt quite readily. Thus it is easier to identify anger as being a harmful state of mind. Whereas, it is more difficult to recognise attachment as a harmful state of mind.

Furthermore, when attachment arises and the object that you are attached to is a person, the other person will respond to your attachment by liking you as well, and they may actually benefit you to a certain degree. They may go out of their way to make you feel happy and help you. From your side, as long as attachment is there, you have no reservations about helping them as well. There is a mutual wish to benefit to each other. Thus attachment is seen as an aid to support and help each other.

This makes it very difficult to recognise the initial attachment as being a harmful state of mind. But if one were to analyse further and go into a deeper and a more subtle level of attachment, one will be able to see how attachment harms the mind. Someone who is engaged in real practice will begin to notice that the very arising of attachment within one's mind begins to unsettle the mind. This would be particularly true for someone who wants to do serious meditation. When there is strong attachment in the mind, it is impossible to have a good meditation.

For someone who has a very strong attachment and is constantly obsessed with the object of desire, it is as if his or her mind is possessed with the object of desire and a focused meditation is impossible. It simply cannot come about. When one really begins to go to a deeper level and

analysis how attachment effects us, we can begin to notice and see that even though there are some initial pleasurable feelings and satisfaction from the mind of attachment, deep down inside it actually harms us in a very subtle way. Again those who are more in tune to a subtle level of trying to focus the mind will notice that as soon as attachment arises, it disturbs the mind.

Attachment harms us in a very slow and gradual way. Unlike anger, which harms us immediately, and we can recognise the harm right away, the way attachment harms us is very subtle and gradual. It is said that strong attachment develops gradually. The analogy given in the teaching is like oil dripping onto a piece of paper. When oil drips onto paper, it starts to permeate and is slowly absorbed into the paper. Once it is absorbed into the paper you cannot remove it. It is almost impossible to remove the oil stain from the paper. Similarly, when one is really obsessed with the object of attachment it is said to be very difficult to remove ourselves from the object of attachment. It is then very difficult for us to have a stable mind because we will be completely obsessed with the object of desire.

Again, while it is hard to identify or recognise attachment as a harmful state of mind because of the initial pleasant feeling associated with attachment, it serves as a basis for other consequences to arise, which we can recognise as unpleasant. A lot of other circumstances which we can identify as being painful and harmful actually come initially from the basis of desire. To give some examples, we can identify with the suffering of dissatisfaction, not being able to be satisfied, constantly longing for something but not being able to be satisfied by that. The suffering of dissatisfaction is something we can identify. Where does the suffering of dissatisfaction come from? It comes from none other than desire or attachment. Furthermore we can experience the sufferings of separation from someone that we like and feel close to. When a separation takes place there are inevitably many sufferings that one experiences. Where does that suffering come from? It comes from none other than the desire that we have. Furthermore, there are sufferings of not getting what we want. Suffering is experienced by not getting objects that we desire. This suffering again comes from the desires we have towards objects. These are just some examples of the many, many circumstances where suffering arises as consequences of having desires.

The main point that I was making earlier is that if one does not protect one's mind from losing happiness then all of these consequences will befall us and our mind will be in the constant state of unhappiness. In summary, the main point being emphasised is that the purpose of meditation is as a means of protecting the happiness of one's mind. If we don't protect the mind, which means not allowing the mind to be influenced by negative states of mind, such as anger and desire then, for as long as the mind is influenced by these negative states of mind, the mind will be in turmoil, constantly agitated and in a frustrated state. Conversely, if we are able to withdraw our mind from the delusions, distance our mind from anger and attachment etc, and train our mind to be focussed on a neutral object such as the breath, the mind can settle down.

We can actually feel the immediate effect of our mind being calm and relatively peaceful, even during the short duration that we spend in focussing on the breath. If we do it in a sincere way we will notice that our mind becomes calmer and relatively more peaceful. This happens because we are withdrawing our minds from the objects of the delusions, thus not allowing our mind to be influenced by delusions during that time. As explained in the teachings, during that time we are protecting our mind from the manifest delusions. Manifest means the active state of delusions in our mind, such as anger and desire. We are not allowing our mind to be influenced, by withdrawing from it. This gives some relief and has a positive effect on the mind.

If temporarily withdrawing our mind from the manifest levels of delusion, can bring some level of calmness and peace to the mind, then there is no need to mention how much more peace and calmness one would experience if we were to completely remove the delusions from the mind. When the delusions are removed from its very foundation or root, the result is said to be a continuously tranquil mind; an everlasting peaceful mind. If we understand it in this way, we can begin to understand what is being meant when the teachings say that an arhat, which is translated in English as a foe destroyer, remains in a constant peaceful state of nirvana or liberation. They are in a state of liberation and that state of liberation is a constant state of peace. We can begin to understand and relate to what is meant by that.

If we can practise at our own level now, and continue with our practise and try to maintain a focussed mind and so forth then gradually, through our applied, constant effort and practice we will also definitely reach that state of liberation. The Buddha was an enlightened being who is said to have become an enlightened being by having engaged in practices. He was once an ordinary person like us. He practised by eliminating one fault at a time and acquiring one level of wisdom at a time. The process that he went through was not a rapid, instantaneous process of becoming a buddha or enlightened being. Instead it was a gradual process over years and years of practice, taking one step at a time until he reached that state of enlightenment. As the teachings explain, we all have the potential to become a buddha and that particular potential is called buddha-nature. It is within ourselves, within our minds, and we can rest assured that if we exert some effort and perseverance we will definitely be able to achieve the state of enlightenment ourselves as well.

We will now spend a few minutes in meditation. This is done by distancing our mind from distractions which basically means making the decision, 'During the next few minutes I will not allow my mind to be influenced by any distractions'. Therefore, bring the mind inward and focus it on the breath. In order to get some benefit from this meditation we must be one hundred percent determined to focus on our breath and not allow the mind to wander off. In that way, we can get some benefit from meditation. So, for the next few minutes we will engage in this meditation. *(Pause for meditation)*.

That should be sufficient for now. Thank you. Does anyone have a particular question they would like to ask? Please raise your hand if you do.

Question: Geshe-la, I would like to ask about the attachment a parent has towards a child, where that child appears to a parent to be more valuable than other children. Would that be regarded as a negative thing?

This is unlike other instances of attachment. I think that the feeling that a parent has for their child, even though there is some attachment, is more genuine unconditional love than attachment. The degree of attachment would be less. It is unlike other objects of attachment because of the higher level of unconditional love which is combined with the attachment and that seems to be more beneficial. One could say that the kind of attachment a parent has for a child is much more worthwhile, much more beneficial.

We can say that there is more unconditional love involved rather than attachment. This can be seen in the attitude that a parent has towards their child. One could say that it is a natural attitude or feeling for a parent to have great love and concern for their child and that a parent would want everything possible for their child to be happy. If there is the slightest discomfort or unease or suffering a parent will feel uncomfortable with that. It is clear that what makes a parent most joyful is to see their child happy. That indicates there is a real and unconditional love. One could say that maybe there is some attachment involved as well, but in terms of degrees, love and concern is much higher.

Conversely, as a means to see that why it couldn't be attachment that is stronger in a parent's relations with their child we have the example of nappy changes and so forth. Even though it is a substance which is not so clean the parent has no hesitation in wanting to clean that. In fact, even though initially there is some difficulty involved, like waking up in the middle of the night to clean or change nappies and so forth, it is done with joy. I have been told by parents that even though there are some difficulties, they do it with joy. They are happy to do that and they don't see it as a chore but they do it with great happiness. If it was attachment, there would be a notion of disgust. It would be seen as dirty job. But it is not seen as a dirty job and it is done joyfully. It is because of the joy and lack of reservation that a parent has in caring for their child, that it is considered as unconditional love.

It is really quite incredible when we see the extent a parent will go to in taking care of their children. To give another example, it is like sacrificing oneself. Consider a woman who would normally do everything to keep herself clean and beautiful and who is seen as being attractive. Once she has a child she would have no hesitation, even though she normally dressed very beautifully, very clean and so forth, there is no hesitation, in caring for her child, even if that means dirtying herself. She will put her child first before her beauty and attraction. That goes to show the level of sacrifice a mother would go through.

We can clearly see that it is through the love and concern that a parent has for their child that the child survives

when they are young and as the child grows up, that continued support and love and concern helps the child to get nourishment and become mature. Of course, even in the later stages children continuously need their parent's love and support to be able to become healthy young people.

That is the basis for our survival. Furthermore, as the teachings describe, it is very true that a parent's love and concern increases when their child is in a difficult situation, such as having some sort of illness or disability. The parent's concern for the child increases and thus the care and nurture the parent gives to such a child increases to a great extent. That shows that love and concern is much higher than any level of attachment they would have for the children.

We all know that generally with attraction pertaining to people, there may be initial attraction, a sort of fondness for each other, but when things get difficult, rather than trying to help, people may start thinking of separating from each other. If the attachment is strong that would be the result. Rather than caring for the other, you want to back away. That would be a case of a strong attachment rather than love and concern.

Question: Geshe-la, can you explain the difference between passion and desire?

In Tibetan, depending on how you use it, there is one word that we normally translate as attachment, which has the connotation of desiring something for your own self-interest. Something you want just for one's own self-interest. Selfishly motivated desire is what we call attachment. Whereas desire, which could also be called 'longing' in English, can be a positive thing if your focus is for the benefit of others or a higher purpose even it's for oneself. If it's not just a selfish motive but for a higher purpose then that sort of desire is a positive desire or longing.

When the teaching talks about the attachment that should be overcome it is talking about negative desire which is just selfishly motivated desire for immediate, short term, self interest. Because of the ambiguousness of the word desire and not being able to distinguish between a desire that is based on attachment for selfish reasons and a noble desire, many people misinterpret the teachings to mean one must give up all desire and then are confused about how they could achieve anything. How could one achieve any goal if one doesn't have desire? This problem arises where one is not able to distinguish between positive desire and negative desire. Being unable to distinguish between these two leaves someone with the doubt or question of how could one ever survive without desire. How could one achieve any happiness without desire? How could one achieve anything or any happiness without desire? Some monks feel if one doesn't have desire how one could ever be happy.

From the worldly, conventional level we can give an example of the breadwinner such as the husband or father in the family who has the desire to go to work to make money. Now the desire to earn money by going to work could either be a positive state of mind or a negative state of mind. How we distinguish this is that if the father goes to work wanting to earn lots of money so

that he can just buy better things for himself, better cars and so forth, that would be a negative desire. Whereas if he is going to earn money so that he can feed the family and support the family and so forth, that would be a positive desire. With the first desire, the negative desire, when the father earns lots of money his attitude may be 'I've earned lots of money and I'm going to go out by myself and might even find someone else to live with. That negative desire can lead to other kinds of negative consequences. It is important to distinguish between the two.

Question: I've been thinking about the difference between passion and desire, and that passion is really the same thing. When you are passionate about something then there's an extreme or overwhelming desire that completely takes over your life. You can be passionate about football, or passionate about a person or idea, you cannot think of anything else.

Try to contemplate on this yourself. Sometimes there are different ways of expressing things that may come to the same thing anyway. Because of the different way of expressing an opinion it is good to just contemplate. If it is in relation to different ways of looking at something or different ways of expressing something, it is good to look into what makes more sense, what seems more logical, and settle with what seems to be most logical. The one who has reasons that are more logical will win in a debate. The one who doesn't have very sound reasoning and logical basis will be the one who has to give in.

Passion could also be similar to what is called *dun-pa* in Tibetan. This word is normally translated in English as aspiration. If you really want to do something, depending on what you want to do, being really zealous and putting a lot of effort into it, could be something like a passion. In the Buddhist terminology you would say it is having a strong aspiration to do something and thus you put in a lot of effort. On a positive side, that is what is needed when you are doing a practice, or studying and so forth, in Buddhism. The stronger the aspiration one has towards doing something, the stronger the interest would grow in doing it. One loses one's aspiration when the mind becomes complacent. The mind can become complacent and lose enthusiasm then one can lose the aspiration to do something too. That is true for any practice such as meditation or whatever.

Before we end the session for the evening we can take a few minutes to focus our mind again by withdrawing, distancing our mind from all distractions. We keep the mind focussed and just trying focussing it on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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