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resume their normal life they felt a sense of loneliness. The sense of joy and happiness did not seem to be there anymore. The particular person confiding in me was asking, 'Why is that so? What could it be?' My response was, 'I guess you would know the answer yourself'.

That sense of joy and happiness was not so much related to a real inner sense of joy and happiness but was actually related to external conditions, being in an enjoyable place with a particular person whom you enjoy being with. When those conditions are not present anymore, and because one's sense of joy and happiness was related and dependent on those conditions, they are replaced with a sense of loneliness and a lack of joy or happy mind. These are clear examples of a sense of joy and happiness that is fleeting and temporary and dependent on external conditions rather than inner qualities.

So this is why I started becoming wary about my own sense of joy and happiness and a little cautious about that feeling. I examined whether my sense of joy and happiness was dependent on distractions and the temporary good conditions that I am in and if it were, then I had better not give in or trust that, because it is not going to be very stable. So in my investigation and self-analysis I found that the sense of joy and happiness that I experience seems to really come from a source deep within myself and seems to increase rather than decrease. Regardless of the situation and where I am, I seem to have that within me and this is why I feel quite confident that it is the result of my practices.

The main point with the example that was used earlier about the person who confided in me the sense of joy and happiness they experienced on the short 'week or two' vacation, was that it was with someone that they had a fleeting infatuation with. So, it was not with someone who was a long-term partner but someone that they had an immediate attraction towards. Thus, when they came back and went their separate ways, real pain and suffering was experienced. The suffering of loneliness and feeling empty was experienced because, as that particular person later came to his own understanding and knowledge, it was an impulsive decision of going out and having a good time without taking into consideration the consequences that would be experienced later. This also points out that often we may give in to immediate pleasures and good times at the cost of bringing about more suffering later on.

So in our life it is really important that we try to make good judgements in the decisions we make. If we give in to impulsive decisions based on just immediate infatuations it can bring about more suffering and unhappiness afterwards and a sense of unfulfilment and discontent; a sense of loss rather than fulfilment and contentment. When we consider this reality and pay attention to this it will help us to make right choices.

If a situation presents itself as a tempting opportunity of temporarily having a good time we can stand back and see it through and ask, 'Will this last? Will it bring me real satisfaction and contentment in the future?' or 'Will this bring about more difficulties and problems for me?' If one finds that it will bring more complications afterwards then it is best that we don't engage in that and try to be a little bit patient even though there is the temptation. We should try not to give in to the temptation because of the consequences. This is another useful point to remember in our life. This sort of investigation and analysis is using our intelligence in a very positive way for our overall and long-term well-being, rather than giving in to temporary pleasures.

In relation to the points that I have been making earlier I might as well share again the advice and suggestions that I particularly give to youngsters. I have imparted my suggestions to some young ones who have less experience about relationships. I have cautioned them in relation to their experiences that some of them have related to me. I have also warned them that it is really important to be wary of relationships when you are still immature in that field, particularly when you are still studying and trying to develop a career in life. It is really important that one tries to be mindful of engaging in serious relationships. Of course we all need companions and friends, but the proper way would be, as I have seen from others' experiences, not to be too hasty and jump into relationships.

Others have related to me that when they are guided by immediate infatuation and attraction and get into a relationship and become involved in another's life, they seem to lose their own direction and the other's confusion adds on to one's own confusion. Furthermore, they seem to lose the time and energy for their own studies and so forth. As others have related to me, when you get seriously involved in a relationship with someone before getting to know that person, falling for their looks or attraction, things don't work out well. Anger starts to develop in one's mind and a feeling of angst developing within oneself. In an angry state of mind, nothing can be really accomplished well in one's life.

So my practical suggestion, particularly to youngsters because they are lacking experience in life, is to take it easy and don't make quick decisions. When it comes to relationships, companions or friends make sure that one first gets to know them well. As one gets to know them more deeply and thoroughly, if a relationship were to develop later on it will be based on a good understanding of each other. Of course it is not my place to be mentioning this because it's others' lives, particularly in relationships. I don't have that experience either so it is not really my domain. Nevertheless, I have shared this advice with those that I feel a close connection with and it seemed to have been useful and helpful; that's why I thought of mentioning it again.

I have advised young, growing teenagers to be wary and not to treat relationships as you would food when you are very hungry. When someone is very hungry one will not think about what one is eating. One just gulps it down. That's not the kind of approach you should have.

What I emphasised to youngsters that I have a close relationship with is that the priority in their life must always be their studies. As that is the main thing they need to accomplish they should always put their time and energy in to it. Having maintained that attitude will help carry them through their studies.

The main point being emphasised is the significance and importance of meditation in one's life. What was discussed earlier is specifically related to why meditation is important in one's life. Meditation is a technique that helps to promote a sense of genuine well-being, calmness and a happy, joyous kind mind, within oneself. These are the qualities that meditation promotes and establishes. These are positive qualities that we would naturally strive for. What we wouldn't want to experience is an unhappy state of mind with turmoil and a disturbed and chaotic state of mind. An unhappy, disturbed and chaotic mind is definitely an unpleasant state to be in.

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We can emphasise the importance of meditation from another point of view. When we investigate and check the main causes for the mind to be unhappy, disturbed, chaotic or troubled, we would come to notice for ourselves that in every instance of an unhappy, troubled or problematic state of mind, it is related to a distracted mind. The more our mind is prone to being distracted the more likely it will be in an unhappy and troubled state. So there's definitely a relationship between a completely distracted mind and a troubled, unhappy mind. This can be understood and can become clearer and clearer as we do an internal analysis and look within one's own mind, when we try to detect the causes for one's troubles.

One would, of course, naturally be inclined to think that external conditions contribute to one's unhappiness. Now this is not to rule out completely that external factors could be a condition for one being unhappy or troubled. They serve as a catalyst, a condition. But if we were to check, pinpoint, what is the main cause for one's troubles one would come to notice that it is the distracted mind. When one clearly understands and notices this for oneself, then the relevance of meditation becomes even more established and clear for one. Meditation is a technique for settling down the mind, making the mind focussed and not allowing one's mind to be distracted by external conditions. Therefore meditation is a technique to establish a focussed and clear mind. This is another way we can see the real importance and benefit of meditation.

When we have the experience of external conditions becoming a cause or condition for one to feel troubled or unhappy, the specific investigation we need to do is what, along with that seemingly uncomfortable external condition, adds to that situation. Do we contribute anything from our own mind? We would come to notice that when external conditions may be uncomfortable or unsettled, we add on an extra state of mind and attitude that seemingly makes that condition even worse for one. It is our own mind that makes the situation become really uncomfortable. That is how one would notice that it is a state of mind.

We can use an illustration of how the contributing factor for our feeling troubled or unhappy is coming from our mind. We can take the example of two people who love each other but come to the point where they have to separate. Separation would conventionally be understood as one of the conditions for feeling unhappy or troubled. That is a known condition for feeling unhappy, troubled, and so forth. When a separation takes place between two people the suffering and trouble that is experienced is dependent on how strong the attachment is between them. If there's a strong attachment when separation takes place, the suffering that's experienced will be much greater. If there's less attachment, when separation takes place there will be less trouble and less suffering experienced. If there's no attachment but a real sense of concern and compassion for each other then, if a separation were to take place whilst physically they may be apart, because of the genuine concern for each other, there would be no angst and bitterness, but rather a continued sense of wanting to help and care for each other. So without attachment no suffering will be experienced. This is something that clearly shows that in exactly the same instance of separation, the suffering that is experienced is dependent on the level of attachment in the mind.

People have confided in me that when separation takes place that sometimes there's so much angst and suffering

experienced. That clearly shows that there is a very strong attachment involved. As I regularly emphasise, everyone in worldly life needs companions and friends. For those who have partners, by all means have a good relationship with your partner. Of course you need to be with someone that you want to spend your life with. That may be a choice but do so with a genuine sense of concern for the other and try to cultivate compassion.

In a worldly context, to have a relationship without any attachment can, to say the least, be quite difficult. So while attachment may be involved try to complement this with a genuine sense of caring and compassion for the other, then the relationship becomes a really good, genuine relationship. That would be a healthy approach. While there may be some difficulties experienced with attachment involved, the overall relationship would be a healthy and good one with genuine concern and compassion for the other, mutually experienced. So this is what I emphasise to people in relationships.

Having talked about the benefits of meditation we can now spend some time in meditation. We need to first adopt a relaxed posture. Having found a relaxed and an appropriate posture for meditation, the object to focus on for the meditation that we do here is our own breath. We use the breath as our focal object. However whilst we use the actual inhalation and exhalation as a medium for our focus we try not to be obsessed with the breath itself. When we breathe we try to have a relaxed breath and not force our breath in or out but use instead a natural relaxed breathing pattern. The breath should be natural, effortless and soundless, so that you breathe in and out in a very calm and gentle manner.

Based on such a regulated, gentle pattern of the breath, we keep our full attention and focus on the breath itself. This involves a commitment that for the next few minutes we will not allow our mind to be influenced by other external distractions and thoughts. For the sake of our meditation practice now, try not to be influenced by either good or bad thoughts. Even if it is good thoughts just temporarily leave them aside and constantly bring your focus and awareness just to the breath itself. In order for this practice to be an authentic good practice one needs to be fully committed to just focus on the breath itself. So, for the next few minutes we will engage in that and then we will experience a settled mind. (*Pause for meditation*)

That would be sufficient for now. We can spend the next few minutes for questions and answers. Do you have any questions? Please raise your hand if you do. We seem to be experiencing heat and humidity in Melbourne at this time. It is a bit uncomfortable.

*Question: What do we have to do to overcome sleepiness when we meditate?*

If one gets one's posture right and one actually straightens up a bit then that appropriate posture itself will help to prevent sleepiness and drowsiness.

There are also other techniques. Various techniques to overcome drowsiness or sleepiness are explained in the teachings. One way is to temporarily just imagine a luminous object like the sky. That luminosity can help to brighten up one's mind.

Those who engage in serious meditation particularly when developing a meditation called achieving the state of 'calm abiding', which is a single-pointed concentration focused on any object, one needs to engage in long meditation sessions. For those who are committed to engage in such meditation

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practice it is sometimes advised that you tie a string on your head, which has a small container of water at the end at the level of one's cheek, so if you were to fall asleep a bit of water comes out and that will wake you up.

Another practical technique, as I advised in some teachings, is that if one is struggling with sleep it is better to come out of one's session and stand up and walk around a bit but remain focussed on whatever one wants to do, and then sit back down again for one's meditation session.

Another piece practical advice would be not to meditate right after a meal. If one has a very long day or is feeling tired from work, then it is better not to meditate right after coming back from work either. You would fall into relaxation rather than meditation and could just fall asleep.

Then again some serious meditators put a rope across their meditation rooms or huts with something to hold on to and if, after prolonged meditation, they are trying to fight fatigue or sleep they will stand up and just walk slowly back and forth across the room holding the strap on the rope but still maintaining their focus. After that they will sit down again and meditate in their sitting posture.

Some advice is to come out of one's meditation session or even go out a bit to get some fresh air. That can also help.

If sleep were actually a living being with a consciousness, it can be considered quite virtuous because it always goes to where someone is trying to practice. So sleep says, 'Wherever there is Dharma practice, I am going to go there. But I won't go where there's eating taking place'. These were anecdotes that were given to us when we were kids trying to study. The teachers would relate them to us.

*Question: Some days we are so busy that we can't meditate but we really want to. Is it worthwhile doing it in a busy street during lunchtime on a bench, or in a packed train commuting to the city?*

With the wider implication of what meditation stands for or means, one can definitely take every opportunity for the practice of meditation. What meditation really means is to have a virtuous and clear mind. To maintain a virtuous mind is one of the highest forms of meditation. Therefore, as I regularly emphasise in my teachings, it is good for us to be mindful of maintaining a virtuous mind at every instance, whether we are moving, whether we are sitting. Even when we are sitting down formally for meditation we might be in an assumed meditation posture with all the right conditions but if one's mind is not virtuous it doesn't serve the purpose. In a true sense it's not a meditation practice. When one is sitting, whether doing a formal meditation or at work, wherever one is, it is helpful to sometimes find a quiet time for one to recollect one's thoughts and mind to be in a virtuous state of mind. As you said, to go to a quiet isolated place at breaks to have some time for yourself for about five minutes would be good.

As a general rule it would be useful if one can incorporate about five minutes in one's day every morning before one goes to work. That would be the most appropriate time because one's mind is still fresh. Others have confided in me that they have found it really beneficial to start the day with five minutes of meditation before they go about their day.

On a good note, in this time and age prayer and meditation seems to be quite commonly accepted. One need not feel that one's being weird or awkward or that it's strange to find some quiet time for one to meditate, because others can respect it. One can feel confident that one is doing a good thing. As I have noticed, and others have told me, at airports

they now make small rooms available that are called 'prayer or meditation rooms'. Someone actually said to me 'Geshe-la, if you want to have a quiet time to meditate, you can go to the room'. That is a sign of how it is commonly accepted that prayer and meditation is part of one's life. I have been told that they now also have a room for prayers or meditation at work places.

Whether there is an actual specific allocated room or place to meditate or not one could find a quiet spot, for example in a lounge. Many places have an area that is considered a relaxing area where you just sit down quietly and relax. An area like that would also be appropriate. If you can come out of meditation smiling and joyful that would encourage others. That would be a good sign for others to see that there are positive results from meditation. Without having to say anything you can naturally encourage and inspire others to also try out meditation rather than trying to convince them verbally.

I also notice that at spas and the steam room some people just sit there quietly. They seem to be in meditation and contemplation. Recently I went to the steam room at the St Kilda sea baths. When I go I just spend some time by myself. I normally sit quietly in a composed manner. Another young lady came in and sat beside me and she actually assumed a meditation posture. After a while she was breathing quite heavily and forcibly as a way of regulating her breath. I just noticed that myself. So even though I was not in any particular meditation, I may have inspired her to meditate too.

I also noticed on several occasions that people would come in and quietly sit cross-legged. Ultimately what is clear is that we need to definitely find measures to relax not just the body but mind. A combination of relaxing the body and mind is really essential.

On another occasion at the sea baths I noticed a person who is quite well known in the sports field. He is quite famous and is shown on TV a lot. He is maybe in his later years. After a while he came over and greeted me, shook my hand, and said, 'I noticed you are a very joyful and happy person'. He just wanted to acknowledge that.

Your questions were very good; thank you very much. Whether I have been able to relate something useful or not, I cannot be too sure. However what I can be certain of is that you all listen very attentively and it seems like you take great interest in what I have to say. That, in itself, attests that our time spent together was worthwhile. We have spent a good hour together in a worthwhile way. So we can be joyful about that.

Before we conclude for the evening it would be appropriate to again spend a few moments in meditation. This time after we adopt the appropriate posture and state of mind free from distractions the object of our focus will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. As we hear the sound of the mantra we try to keep a complete focus and attention on the sound itself. As the sound of the mantra subsides, we try to maintain the focus for a while. In this way it will be a genuine meditation practice.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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