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A happy and joyous state of mind is definitely related to our attitude. We must recognise that. If we harbour certain negative attitudes, they hinder our happy and joyous state of mind, but when we cultivate positive attitudes, then that is what helps us. Our analytical wisdom is able to distinguish what is positive and beneficial for us and what is detrimental and harmful. That joyous wisdom is having the intelligence to know how to maintain balance in our life and being able to detect when things are harmful for us. Thus we can avoid harmful things and adopt things that are useful for us. This is our real security in life. When we cultivate that inner wisdom, then we do not need to rely on other sources all the time. Instead, we are able to make decisions based on our own internal intelligence and wisdom; we have that competence to engage in a meaningful life.

As the great Indian master Asanga said, joy and happiness from external sources is rare, whereas joy and happiness that is developed within is plentiful. The great master Asanga is explaining that we normally assume the sources of happiness are external. We would normally rely upon others as a source of happiness, such as friends or wealth. But when we investigate the happiness that comes from friends, we find that even though friends can make us happy and joyful temporarily, they can never provide an ultimate source of happiness within ourselves. When situations change, our friends can even cause us distress. Similarly, with other external things such as wealth, we may think that a nice house or having lots of money would make us really happy, but as we all know those who do have big houses and wealth are not necessarily happy people.

This shows that the happiness external things provide is very limited. Whereas the happiness that can be derived within ourselves, from our own inner wisdom is very stable and can only increase; it becomes more plentiful rather than diminishing. We really need to understand this point well. The great masters advise us to develop inner wisdom, then the happiness and joy that comes along with that wisdom will be inseparable from us. Wherever we go the wisdom that is developed within the mind comes along with that. So, unlike the external resources from friends and so forth, which we may not be able to take everywhere, our inner wisdom is something that we can access no matter where we are in whatever we do. Our inner wisdom becomes our main source of joy and happiness.

Having explained some benefits of meditation, we can now spend some time applying it. To engage in the practice of meditation, we can readjust our physical posture so we are comfortable and relaxed. Most importantly, we need to have the right mindset and the right intention to practise meditation. First of all, we need to develop a commitment to engage fully in the practice of meditation, focusing our mind on the object to be meditated upon, which is the breath. We will use our breath as an object to focus on. In order to gain the full benefit from meditation, we need to be fully committed and pay full attention to the practice. This means we need to temporarily distance ourselves from all forms of distractions, whether they may be thoughts or ideas or plans or any kind. We need to completely withdraw from all forms of discursive thoughts, negative or positive. Even what we would normally consider to be positive thoughts or good thoughts can temporarily become an obstacle for our practice of meditation.

So, we need to be completely focused on nothing else but our own breath. Be fully aware of just our breath. As we breathe in and breathe out naturally, keep our full attention

and awareness just on that breath; be fully aware when the breath comes in and fully aware when the breath leaves our nostril. Just be focused on that, settling ourselves completely on just that. Just be 100 per cent focused just on the breath. When we apply the meditation technique in this way, then it becomes an affective practice. [*meditation*]

Just as we have attempted in our short session now, it would be good to apply regular practice in our life. A happy and joyous state of mind can be obtained from our practice of meditation; which is most essential in our life. On a practical level, a happy and joyous state of mind contributes to our physical well-being. I am convinced myself of that correlation between a happy and joyous state of mind and physical wellbeing. I have experiences of that myself, but I will leave that for another time.

If we can apply a certain meditation technique that can help to promote a happy and joyous state of mind, then what more do we need to ask for? This is all we need. If we can have a happy and joyous state of mind from meditation, then why not apply that? A happy and joyous state of mind overrides even mundane difficulties. If we have a happy and joyous state of mind, we will not be deprived of food and drink. The point is, if we are in a happy and joyous state of mind, then naturally others really appreciate this, and we will be invited to have meals and go out and have coffee with them, and they might even invite you to see a movie.

When you are in a happy and joyous state of mind, people relate to that and want to be around you. Whereas people don't like be around someone who is grumpy and gloomy all the time; people naturally shy away. People don't like to be around gloomy people. So if we have a happy and joyous state of mind, definitely we will get lot of invitations!

We need to understand that we do have this great potential to develop a happy and joyous state of mind, which naturally makes others around us feel at ease. We contribute to others' joyfulness and happiness by merely developing our own happy and joyous state of mind. When we have developed and secured a happy and joyous state of mind, this has a positive effect around us; it contributes to others' well-being and they like to be around us.

In contrast to that situation, even if we have money, money itself cannot buy friends. We may have temporary friends because of our wealth, but the moment our wealth declines, we might lose those friends. Having money doesn't guarantee a happy life.

The importance of developing a genuine positive, compassionate, happy, joyous mind as a means for genuine companionship with others is strongly emphasised by His Holiness the Dalai Lama. He emphasises the point by giving the examples, saying that if someone has friends mainly because of the wealth they have, then once their wealth declines then the friends will say goodbye and leave them. Whereas if we have friends and companions due to the positive qualities we display, then those companions and friends will definitely want to be with us and really come to our aid when we are in need. His Holiness Dalai Lama's advice, as many of you would have recently heard in his teachings here, is practical, meaningful advice for our everyday life. When we think about his advice, it is meaningful and practical when we apply it to our life.

*Question:* Even though I have been meditating for a long time, I feel that there are certain things that are not quite right about my health. Is there such thing as intensifying the meditation, what do you do?

*Answer:* Meditation practice, and particularly having a joyous mind, can definitely have a positive effect on us. But even though meditation has a positive effect on our health, it will not completely sort out all our health problems. First of all, if our mind is disturbed, it affects the elements in our body to become disturbed as well, because our mind is very much related to the elements. When we talk about the four elements, there are different levels. The subtle elements within our body are strongly related to our mind, so when the mind is disturbed, the elements in our body also become disturbed. Because our bodies are basically a combination of the four elements, when the four elements within our body are disturbed or in disharmony, then this causes ill health within our body.

Meditation as a technique to calm down the mind will help the four elements within us, from the grosser to the subtle levels, become harmonious.

We find that there are different meditation techniques as well as different levels of meditation as we progress in meditation practice. However, on a very basic level, even the simple breathing meditation technique described earlier, does help to settle and calm down the mind, bringing harmony within the four elements and positively affecting our physical health. But when our mind is agitated and disturbed, then, as many of us would have experienced, that causes tension within us. First of all we feel tension within our mind, then it manifests within our body as aches and pains. We may have to go and see a massage therapist and sometimes even that doesn't sooth our pains and aches. They may have to use their elbows and really push down hard because their fingers and hands don't have enough strength to help the deep pain within our body, and that comes from disturbances in our mind.

A settled and focused mind helps to also strengthen the immune system within our body. And, as His Holiness Dalai Lama also recently mentioned in the teachings, it is scientifically proven that when the mind is settled, the immune system becomes strong. As His Holiness mentioned, great scientists have investigated and found that there is a strong correlation between a calm mind and a healthy immune system. When we have a settled and calm mind then the ability to ward off diseases becomes stronger, as well as, in western scientific terms, the immune system.

This is not something that is merely hypothesised, but found true through empirical investigations. His Holiness described in detail the scientists' research and experiments. Scientists had two groups of people, one group were given specific techniques to calm down their minds, and another group was not given any specific method. When the immune systems and bodies were tested, the immune systems of the group that were given the specific technique to calm down the mind, was found to be much stronger. Whereas the other group's immune systems were not as good, and this group were much more prone to diseases. These results confirm the Buddhist teachings that meditation definitely has a positive effect on our health.

As His Holiness also mentioned, scientists are taking a great interest in how the mind functions. But even though scientists are greatly skilled and have great understanding through their experiments of the physical world, they are

not that advanced yet in knowing the state of the mind. His Holiness mentions regularly that this is something that we can offer back to the scientists as a way for them to become more interested in investigating the power of the mind and what the mind is. His Holiness says there is a strong interest among scientists now to find out about the mind. From the Buddhist point of view, we can also take an interest in the science and accept the things that they find to be true.

As His Holiness explained, the reason why scientists are taking an interest in the mind is that, contrary to their normal belief that the mind just the function of the brain, they have now come to slowly understand and see aspects beyond the brain that take place that are not directly connected to the brain function but yet affect us. Thus, scientists are becoming more interested in the mind. They have no choice but to start to become truly interested about the mind if there could be something not visible beyond the brain. Scientists are beginning to take an interest particularly in the subtle levels of the workings of the mind, which function beyond the physical.

When the physical function of the brain ceases, particularly at the time of death, there are certain signs that the subtle mind is still in the body. The most recent account of that, which is documented, happened in New Zealand recently. One prominent teacher called Thubten Rinpoche passed away and sixteen days after he passed away the doctors found that his body was still very supple and there was no sign of decay and decomposing of the body. They even noticed that the fingers were stretched out first and starting to withdraw slowly as well. These are signs that normal scientists can't explain, but yet they definitely occur. According to the Buddhist explanation, the functions of the subtle levels of the mind are still working within the body and keep the body fresh, even after death.

There is a particular meditation technique and achievement called 'calm abiding'. When people reach that state of calm abiding, which is a single-pointed meditation focused without any disturbance, a positive effect of that is to gain physical pliancy. Consequently, on the physical level there are no disturbances but rather much bliss and joy is experienced. Of course, on our beginner's level we have not obtained that. But once we do, then we can definitely experience this most positive affect on the physical level as well.

Before we end the session for the evening, we can again spend a few minutes in meditation, and this time focus on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra, and for those who are chanting it, as we chant it and hear the sound, keep complete focus on the sound itself. For this to become an effective meditation technique, we need to withdraw from all forms of distraction and thoughts and place 100 per cent focus on the sound itself. Maintain the awareness of the sound, even when the recitation stops, maintain the awareness for a few minutes. The meditation then becomes a complete practice of meditation.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo*

*Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena*

*Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe*

*Edited Version*

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