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to do it slowly, and take our time. When we focus on an object initially we might find it hard but over time it will become easier. If we find ourselves too stressed focusing on the object and we find it difficult then it is okay to let the mind focus on something else for a bit, not a negative object but something else, to distract the mind a bit again so it does not become too daunted or too rigid. So it is in this way that we start to really train our mind gradually.

In this way we begin to understand the implication of meditation and how it helps to bring about mental calmness. To give an analogy, let's imagine being in the middle of Melbourne city where there is a lot of activity going on; it is quite chaotic, with cars moving in traffic and people rushing about. So much activity is going on that we are naturally carried away by it and become quite busy ourselves. If we remove ourselves physically and go to a remote area where there are meadows, or forests where you can hear birds, then you naturally feel quite relaxed and calm because you are out of that 'busyness'. Likewise, when our mind is filled with so many discursive thoughts, it is a very busy mind and the busier the mind is, the more disturbed and agitated it becomes. So when we apply the meditation technique by focussing on just one particular object, we are removing ourselves from that very busy state of mind.

If, as I said earlier, a subdued mind is a happy mind, then there is really no better technique to subdue the mind than the meditation technique. The actual process of subduing the mind is explained in a text called *Essence of the Middle Way*, which uses the analogy of a wild, untamed elephant to illustrate how the mind can be tamed. The great master Shantideva mentioned that an unsubdued mind is even worse than an untamed elephant, as it is filled with so many discursive and negative attitudes and delusions.

In *Essence of the Middle Way* the elephant is analogous to our mind, and the person skilled in taming the elephant, the mahout, uses a rope to tie the elephant to a substantial pillar. Traditionally in India, the mahout had a hook to poke a very sensitive point on the elephant's head. If they are poked there they immediately listen to, and obey the mahout. In terms of the analogy, we are like the mahout in that we are taming our own mind. When the elephant has been successfully tamed to the point where it will listen to the mahout's commands, he will sit or lie down on command, and becomes very obedient.

Just as a very strong pole is needed so the elephant won't break loose, we need to choose an appropriate object to focus our mind on. Thus the pillar is analogous to an appropriate object of focus. Then, in addition to the firm pole to tie the elephant to, you need to have the rope with which to tie the elephant to the pole. Here the rope is analogous to what is called mindfulness. Just as the elephant is tied to the pillar, our mind needs to engage fully with the object, and it is mindfulness that allows one to do that.

Mindfulness is the state of mind which ensures that our mind is focused on the chosen object. It ensures that our mind does not stray from the object. Along with mindfulness we also need introspection, which is a state of mind that, having initially made an attempt to place our focus on the object, periodically checks whether the mind is still focused on the object. That constant vigilance over our focus is called introspection.

Just as the mahout has the tools and implements to tame the elephant, the essential tools for training the mind are mindfulness and introspection. These two tools are needed

to develop a mind so that it becomes more and more focused on the chosen object, and as a way of developing sound and stable concentration on the object.

When one's concentration reaches that perfected state, one has reached the state called mental stabilisation, or calm abiding. This is a state where, through meditation, one has developed a mind that is able to focus on an object unwaveringly for as long as one wishes. When one reaches that state of mental quiescence or calm abiding, one has achieved the state of being able to focus on the object without any interruption for as long as one wishes.

It is said in the teachings that this is the state of mind where the mind becomes serviceable. It is able to focus on whatever virtuous object one may choose for as long as one wishes, which induces feelings of physical and mental bliss. That is said to be an incredibly beneficial state, where there is no disturbance in the mind at all. Even though one may not have uprooted the delusions completely, when one experiences mental quiescence, or calm abiding, one is not disturbed at all by negativities, such as strong attachment, anger and so forth.

That calm state of mind is a genuinely tamed and subdued state of mind. It is good for us to recognise that this state can be obtained through the practice of meditation. We all have the potential to achieve that. We really need to understand this and incorporate it into our psyche, so that we do not fall victim to the state of mind where we feel that we can't possibly transform our mind. Many people feel that their mind is so distracted and influenced by negativities that it is an impossible task.

It seems that the more we try to understand the mind, the more it seems to be distracted and the more it seems deluded and so forth. So we need to rely upon these teachings as a way to really confirm that taming the mind is possible; that there have been many who have achieved that state of calm abiding; that it is something that can definitely be achieved; and that we all have the potential to do so.

When we think in this way then it really encourages us. Even though we might feel that our mind is quite unsubdued right now, by relying on these teachings and understanding the explanations they contain, we can see that there is some possibility of overcoming that unsubdued mind. This is how the teachings are uplifting and encouraging.

This, then, is the ultimate meaning of having a subdued mind and a happy mind. Thus far I have been giving a commentary on that first statement that I made — a subdued mind is a happy mind — which is what the Buddha actually said. People may have their own interpretation of what it means, but I am sharing with you what the teachings say.

Having given quite a lengthy explanation about the purpose and the benefit of the practice of meditation, let's now actually take the opportunity to spend a few minutes in meditation. Again, we readjust our physical posture, so that it is upright, comfortable and relaxed. In order to adopt the meditation technique properly we need to make the determination that 'For the next few minutes I will not allow my mind to focus on any other distractions, any discursive thoughts, past memories, or speculation about the future and so forth. Rather I will place my full attention and focus on the chosen object, which is my own breath'.

As we naturally breathe in and out, be completely and fully aware of it and pay full attention to it. Just be fully aware of each in-breath and out-breath and keeping our entire focus

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just on that. When we apply the determination to focus on the breath, then it serves as a true meditation technique. So we can spend the next few minutes in this way.

*[meditation]*

That will be sufficient for now. It seems like we have spent most of the session on the earlier discussion. However, with the few minutes we have left, if you have any questions you may raise your hand and we can address that.

*Question:* Whenever I make an attempt to place my attention on the breath, my mind becomes very scattered; so how does one actually overcome a scattered mind? Is it a matter of just keeping on practising?

*Answer:* Of course as you've just mentioned, it comes about through practice, which means thoroughly applying the appropriate technique.

As mentioned earlier, through practice one can obtain a state where one is completely focused, so that the very distracted mind is subdued. A contemporary worldly example is an object that you are very attracted to, where you temporarily forget about everything else, and think only about that object of attraction, and that object of infatuation comes to mind very vividly. You might have more experience with that than I do. Do you find that is true? Do you find that with strong attachment or attraction to an object, one may be so obsessed with it that nothing else comes to mind. That is an example of how the mind focuses on something in a negative way. So it is a matter of changing that object to a virtuous one.

Another example given in the teachings is that it is said that when our mind is focused on something attractive, the level of focus becomes so acute that you don't even hear sounds; the mind is so focussed that it is inattentive to sound. This shows that our mental consciousness predominates over the senses. The mind focusing on an object is actually a mental state that can exclude sensory input.

We can use that contemporary example of a mind that is so excessively attracted to a beautiful object that it does not hear sounds in a positive sense. If one develops one's mind through meditation to a certain point, one will be able to focus on an object of virtue to the point where even external sound will not disturb one's focus on the object.

This practice requires full attention and focus on the object. For a beginner the duration is not as important as the quality of focus. It is much more worthwhile to maintain that focus for even a minute, or just thirty seconds initially, rather than assume that one is meditating for significant amount of time, when in fact there is only partial focus, liable to distraction, which requires bringing the mind back to the object again. That can become a bad habit so that our mind is never able to fully focus on an object. So it is advised that for beginners, maintaining complete focus for even just thirty seconds or a minute is most important. Then you can slowly build on that.

What the meditation technique requires initially, and indeed throughout our meditation practice, is a disciplined mind. As with anything else we want to achieve in life, we have got to have a disciplined mind, and here the discipline is to be really focused on the object. So if one can maintain the focus for one minute then be satisfied and happy with that, because during that one minute of focus one will experience a sense of relief and calm.

Be content with that, and try not to jump ahead to a longer meditation. Otherwise, as mentioned earlier, one can

develop the habit of being only partly focused, becoming distracted again, and then having to bring back our focus again and again. Doing meditation like that for an hour is not an authentic meditation and can in fact produce negative results. It is when the mind is not focused and keeps getting distracted, and then has to be brought back to the task, that people find meditation starts to become taxing.

However if we slowly and gradually build up our meditation from a genuine focus for half minute or minute initially, then we will eventually be able to maintain our focus for an hour. So that is how we need to progressively increase the duration of our focus on an object.

You are not the only one who finds this difficult. Almost every meditator initially finds it very difficult to keep focused. Even those who assume that they are meditators face their own problems with distraction and have a hard time in maintaining their focus. So although you asked your question thinking that you are the only one with that problem, most of us trying to meditate have the same problem. So it was good to be very honest about the difficulty that you face. Indeed, as I periodically think about these points, it also helps me to refresh my mind.

Before we end the session for the evening, let us again take the opportunity to do some meditation practice. This time we will use the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra as our object of focus. Really try to maintain your focus just on the sound itself. So, we will engage in this meditation for the next few minutes.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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