
then that happiness is experienced by them alone, they cannot share it with others. Our own wellbeing and happiness is our responsibility alone. We need to take the right measure of using our wisdom and intelligence to look into and analyse what is useful and what is harmful.

The need for moderation and protection

To summarise, we need to take the initiative and responsibility to look after ourselves, our body and our physical health. Just because we have the conditions and means to buy whatever we want, if we don't use our intelligence and wisdom well, it is very easy for us to spend our money on harmful substances. Just because we can afford it, that doesn't mean we need to consume substances that are harmful to our health. Excessive drinking or smoking will eventually harm us. Even with food we need to be mindful. Just because we can afford to buy and eat something whenever we feel like it, that doesn't mean it will be beneficial for our health. We need to be mindful.

For those who cannot afford to buy drinks and cigarettes, of course there's not much danger of harming themselves through excessive drinking and smoking. But those who can afford to buy things like that are the ones that need to be mindful. When we experience wellbeing, and we protect our health and body, then we are the ones who will experience the positive consequences and good health. If we don't pay attention to our body and are not careful, then we are the ones who will suffer. So we need to take responsibility and look after our physical body.

Even if our mind is strong and we have the will and determination to do something, if our physical body is weak or we have poor health, we cannot achieve what we want to do. We need to have good physical conditions along with mental determination and strong will. And vice versa; even if we are physically well and strong, if our mind lacks clarity and direction, we cannot achieve much. We need to have the combination of both a strong physical body and a clear mind. We need to have a mind that is strong-willed with positive ambitions. It is of course, the mind that is the main thing, because it is the mind that takes the initiative to do things. As a primary condition, we need to have a clear, sound, good and intelligent mind. We are more capable and skilful in looking after our body, but how do we take care of our mind? How do we ensure that we have a bright, clear mind combined with an intelligent mind?

Maintaining and developing whatever level of clarity, wisdom and intelligence we have in our mind is achieved by primarily by protecting the mind from negative influences, further cultivating and developing a positive state of mind. The protection here is ultimately protecting the happy state of mind. We all have the basis of a joyous and happy mind, and that is something that we need to protect. We don't allow the happiness of our mind to decline because it is through a happy mind that we can achieve whatever we have set out to do. If we have an unhappy or depressed state of mind in contrast to a happy mind, then that is where every path to moving forward seems to be blocked. It is as if we cannot go

forward at all, it seems like all 'gloom and doom' when the mind is very depressed.

The benefits of maintaining a happy mind

A happy and joyous mind is the primary condition for further developing our mind. Indeed a happy mind is said to be the primary condition for our wellbeing. As the great scholar and master Sakya Pandita has mentioned, a happy mind is the primary factor for our wellbeing, for us to be happy and to be well. This also applies to our overall general wellbeing. Even if our physical body and health is not too good and we might be experiencing some physical hardship, if we have taken measures to protect our joyous and happy mind, then in spite of physical hardship, we can still maintain a positive attitude and it will not affect us to a great degree. With minor illnesses and difficulties, whether it is financial difficulties or health issues, these can only become a big issue and affect us greatly when the mind itself is unhappy and starts to become overwhelmed and feeling depressed. Then even the slightest hardship can affect us and our happiness. However, if we have maintained a good strong and happy mind, that will definitely contribute to our happiness. Meditation is one of best techniques to maintain a happy, joyous mind and the best way to protect the mind from losing its positive state.

When we experience obstacles that seem to hinder our wellbeing, then immediately it affects our state of mind and we start feeling unhappy. When we experience mental unease, this will cause unhappiness in our mind. The main point is—how do we experience the mental unease? The mental unease or discomfort in our mind is the attitude we carry that causes our mental unease and discomfort. If we don't pay attention, we may not notice it; but if we pay attention, we notice that when we allow our mind to have a negative attitude, then that causes us mental unease and discomfort.

The ill effects of holding on to negative attitudes

Generating and holding onto a negative attitude will cause us mental unease and discomfort, which then contributes to our mental unhappiness. When we are experiencing a general sense of wellbeing, everything seems fine, and we are feeling quite at ease. We immediately feel distress when attitudes such as anger or jealousy arise in our mind, or doubt in our mind. For example, when jealousy arises, it really disturbs our mind. The moment we focus on someone else's wellbeing, and we feel unhappy and jealous about that, it immediately causes us mental distress and unhappiness. Likewise, when intense anger arises, whatever level of calmness and peace we have in our mind is completely distorted and overwhelmed by that anger – our mind becomes disturbed. The doubts we refer to are unnecessary doubts. When they arise in the mind, they also cause unnecessary anxiety and discomfort in our mind. I often joke with some of my friends and students that if you are feeling relatively relaxed at home and if your partner, who usually comes back around 5pm after work, one day comes back later at 6pm or 7pm, that's when you start to having doubts in their mind, 'where could they have gone? Maybe they have gone to visit

someone else.' This is how the mind starts to make up a certain story like, 'what could they be doing; perhaps visiting someone else?' When they do return, because of all these unnecessary doubts they aren't greeted as nicely as normal and this causes them to feel unhappy too. This is an example of how, from an initial unnecessary doubt, people can cause others and themselves to feel distressed and unhappy.

When negative attitudes start to manifest in our mind, one moment we may be happy and joyful and feeling that everything is fine, but the very next moment a negative attitude arises. In that second moment, immediately everything changes and becomes unpleasant. That sense of feeling calm and peaceful is suddenly replaced by feeling anxious, fearful, or angry with doubts. It is because of this disturbance, from the second moment it arises in our mind, that we experience the ill effects of these negative attitudes in our mind. When we fully understand and recognise that, then the next thing we need to question is—is it possible to overcome that and not be influenced by a negative attitude? The answer is that it is possible. Maybe not immediately, but through regular practise of meditation.

How meditation works to overcome negative attitudes

The meditation technique works by overcoming negative attitudes, or temporarily keeping them at bay. Meditation is key to not being influenced by negative attitudes. The meditation practice itself involves choosing an appropriate object, which is an internal virtuous or neutral object, an object that does not cause mental disturbances or negative attitudes to arise when focussing on it. The meditation technique involves keeping our focus on the object. For the duration of our meditation, we try our utmost to maintain our focus on that object. When we adopt this technique and apply it in an appropriate way, because our mind is fully focussed and paying attention on that internal object and nothing else, it does not give an opportunity for negative attitudes to arise. We are temporarily removed from the influences of negative attitudes. Our mind experiences a genuine calmness and the feeling of a settled mind. This is because we are not giving any negative attitudes an opportunity to gain a foothold in our mind. We are intentionally withdrawing our mind from all negative influences and placing it upon an appropriate meditation object.

When we do this practice sincerely with a disciplined mind, we will experience positive effects. However, when we come out of meditation or later on, we may become influenced by negative attitudes again. This is because of our ingrained habits. Our mind is habitually focussing on negative attitudes, and it is easy for us to fall back into that. However, through daily practice we become mindful of our negative tendencies and attitudes. Of course, in meditation practice we make a specific determination not to allow negative tendencies to influence and overpower us. However, in every day life when we are engaged in normal activities, it is also good to maintain mindfulness.

The need for mindfulness which comes from a daily meditation practice

If we do this formal meditation practice daily, then the positive effects of this meditation practice can start to expand and linger more in our daily lives. It starts to become easier for us to be mindful of our thought patterns and to analyse them. Even if we engage in normal activities such as talking to someone else or doing our work, we can periodically check our mind. 'How is my attitude right now? Is a negative tendency starting to manifest or not? How am I conducting myself? How is my mind reacting to things that I hear when I am engaging with others?' In this mindfulness, we will be able to detect when a negative attitude is about to arise. Sometimes it seems to be very intense, and before we know it, a negative attitude has already arisen. But when we notice it, especially when intense negativities are about to arise, even though we may not be able to completely prevent negative attitudes from arising, we can take measures for them not to escalate, and not to let ourselves become overpowered by them. We can analyse, 'if I allow this negative mind or negative attitude to arise, it will harm me and I will experience the ill effects, so I must be careful. I must be very diligent and not to allow these negativities to overpower and influence myself'.

This is what is called 'mindfulness' in our daily lives. Being mindful in this way, we can gradually start to see the positive effects. While I cannot claim that I am doing any high level of practices in my daily life, this is something that I am personally concerned with myself, checking my own state of mind and trying to periodically assess my own state of mind. I check whether it is in a positive or negative state and warn myself whenever negativities arise, and congratulate myself and further develop positive attitudes that arise in myself. This process, I find personally, very, very useful and very effective in my daily life. I can share with you what has been useful in my own life.

Applying mindfulness and understanding our thought patterns and the attitudes that arise in our mind, and adopting a meditation technique in our everyday life is useful, particularly when negativities arise. Be extra diligent and careful, and not allow ourselves to be influenced by them. Why? Because it harms us. We pay so much attention in trying to always avoid anything that harms us, even people; we try to walk away from people who we feel are harming us. Why? Because it makes us feel uncomfortable. We don't like to experience hurt and harm from someone else, whether it is an object or a person, so we will naturally always try to avoid them. So if you want to avoid things that harm you, then avoid the negative attitudes and the negative thought patterns within yourself. Isn't it reasonable to make an attempt to avoid them, trying to overcome them, and not feed on negative attitudes and emotions? Likewise, in our everyday life, we try to adopt and acquire what we consider useful and beneficial for ourselves, whether it is friends or people, objects or food.

In summary

Since we are concerned for our wellbeing, we want to acquire good things for ourselves. So it is worthwhile adopting what is useful, which is our positive attitudes, positive thought patterns, and positive emotions within ourselves. This is worthwhile investing time and energy in adopting. Our mental wellbeing is of primary importance. When our mind is well protected and in a positive frame, then the physical aspect is naturally taken care of. When our mind is genuinely happy and joyful, it really contributes to our physical wellbeing and good health. In contrast to that, if our mind is unhappy and stressful, then that contributes to our ill health.

On a more immediate level, we can see the stress that manifests in our body with neck and shoulder aches. Sometimes we have to see a masseur, and sometimes the stress level and tension is so deep that it is not enough to just rub it, they have to knead it with their elbows to try to get to the deep 'pressure points'. This physical pain is all related to our mind being stressed. The more stressful our life, the more ill effects we experience in our body. It's true, so we need to pay attention to our mental wellbeing. This is where the meditation practice helps.

Meditation

Having explained the benefit of the meditation practice and how it works, let us now take some time to adopt the meditation technique. Find an appropriate physical posture, where we are sitting comfortably and relaxed. Try to have a clear and bright state of mind, not sluggish. Within that clear state of mind, make the determination, for the next few minutes, to keep our full attention and focus on the meditation object. For our meditation purpose now, the object to focus on will be our own breath—the natural rhythm of our breath, which is the inflow and outflow of our breathing. Try to imagine seeing the actual breath going in and out, keeping our full focus and attention on that. The main point is that we are determined to not allow our mind to be distracted with other thoughts or ideas, sounds or smells, but rather keep our full attention and focus just on the breath. We stay a 100% focussed on the breath, and nothing else. With that determination and discipline, let us now apply the meditation technique for the next few minutes (*Pause for meditation*).

We will conclude the evening with another meditation. This time, with the same discipline, in a relaxed physical body and a comfortable state of mind, make the determination to focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the sound of the recitation, we try to maintain our focus just on the sound. As the recitation subsides, try to maintain the sensation that we just experienced—the calmness and joy—and maintain our focus for the next few moments after the recitation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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