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Another way to explain the purpose of meditation is that it is a means to develop concentration. A Buddhist definition of concentration is 'a state of mind where one is able to continuously focus on virtuous objects'. When we develop a certain level of concentration our mind is focused on virtue, as opposed to focusing on non-virtue. It is by focusing on non-virtuous objects that our mind becomes disturbed and chaotic. If we were to develop and train our mind so that it is intentionally focused on virtuous objects then our mind will begin to settle down and experience the reverse of a chaotic state of mind, which is a calm state of mind. This is what meditation entails.

It is important to understand what meditation implies and the method and technique of meditation prior to sitting down and trying to meditate. Meditation is not just sitting in a correct posture; it is a state of mind. Therefore, understanding the state the mind needs to be in is of primary importance for us to apply the proper technique. Meditation is a technique where one develops one's concentration. Concentration also involves developing single-pointed focus on the chosen meditation object.

As described in the Buddhist teachings, there are other mental states that serve as aids to develop single-pointed concentration, namely mindfulness and introspection. Mindfulness is a state of mind that has a function of constantly remembering the focal object of one's meditation. Maintaining that awareness, or constantly remembering the object of meditation is the function of mindfulness. Now mindfulness itself is not concentration, because concentration is a state of mind that is single-pointedly focused on a virtuous object from its own side, by its own power. Mindfulness itself is not a concentration. However mindfulness serves as an aid to develop concentration. Therefore mindfulness is essential in developing concentration.

Introspection is a state of mind that is constantly vigilant of our own state of mind, which checks whether the mind is focused on the meditation object or not. It is an internal investigation of whether one is remembering the object or not. Then, if it's distracted, it brings the mind back again. That is the function of introspection. Thus we need to apply these two aids, mindfulness and introspection, in our meditation, as a way to develop single-pointed concentration.

Mindfulness and introspection are two essential tools that we need in order to develop concentration and engage in meditation. These are states of mind that we all have as a basis for practice and can develop further. We all have the states of mind called mindfulness and introspection. We have mindfulness because we have the capacity to remember an object. Simply put, remembrance of a particular virtuous object is mindfulness. We can all do that. We also have the mental ability to investigate as to whether we are focused on that object or not. We also have that capacity.

So we can, on the one hand, feel encouraged to engage in meditation knowing that we have these conditions. Now, on the other hand of course, there are certain obstructions or obstacles to the practice of meditation. We might also

have those obstacles. That might also be part of the reality. Nevertheless, we do have these good conditions as well. So that is something good for us to acknowledge.

Amongst the various obstacles to meditation, one of the worst ones is laziness. We might all be able to relate to that. (*Laughter*) Laziness is a fault or obstacle to our meditation because, whilst we might initially be inspired to do meditation, laziness obstructs us from maintaining a continuous practice..

So, to summarise the main points that I have been mentioning, whilst we might acknowledge that we have quite a busy and disturbed mind right now, we can take the initiative not to acquaint ourselves with this disturbed mind and not to allow that disturbed mind to escalate further. Instead we can apply measures to try to contain our mind. That can be done through the practice of meditation.

The next essential point was that one can appease a disturbed or chaotic, very busy mind through the practice of meditation. Meditation is to intentionally, single-pointedly, focus on a chosen object. That is what meditation connotes. Mindfulness and introspection are aids to assist us to focus single-pointedly on a chosen object.

Mindfulness is constantly remembering the appropriate object chosen to focus on in the meditation. Rather than focusing on other things during one's meditation practice one constantly remembers the chosen object. To just keep one's mind focused on that chosen object is the function of mindfulness.

Introspection is a state of mind that surveys our mind. Is our mind actually focused on the chosen object or not? If it's focused, then just maintain that focus. If we notice that our focus has shifted a bit and we are beginning to focus on another object rather than the chosen meditation object, we bring our focus back upon the object. That is how introspection functions.

Having given a full description of what meditation practice involves and how to apply it, we can now take the next few minutes to practice. While we readjust our physical posture, the most important thing is to have the right state of mind. We need to develop that determination that, 'For the next few minutes, I will not allow my mind to focus on other things'. Try to avoid being in a state where you are a bit focused, but also a bit distracted. Try to avoid this and be completely focused on the object. The object that we choose for our meditation practice now is our breath, our natural breathing. So we try to be fully aware of our breath coming in and going out. The main point is to have a complete, 100%, focus on that object, the breath itself, and not to allow the mind to be distracted. If we really apply this for the next few minutes, that will suffice for a good meditation practice. [*pause for meditation*]

We can go through the text or leave some time for questions. If there are any questions, you may raise your hand.

*Question:* What does compounded phenomenon mean? Do cause and effect go together with compounded phenomena?

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*Answer:* A compounded phenomenon does have that connotation. That which is produced by causes is a compounded phenomenon. So when you give the connotation compounded phenomena to objects and so forth it connotes that these things don't materialise out of nothing, that they have a cause. Compounded means brought together due to certain causes. Objects that are brought about by causes are compounded phenomena.

*Question:* I didn't quite understand how our mind is like a mirror, can Geshe-la explain that again?

*Answer:* The mirror is used as an illustration of how the mind functions. Just as a mirror reflects things naturally, our minds seem to naturally be in a continuous state of grasping at things that appear to the mind. Things that are constantly appearing to the mind; thoughts constantly seeming to come to the mind. There are thoughts coming into the mind; it is the state of the mind that is like the mirror. Did that help?

The mind works through the facets of our five senses. Because our mind functions through the eye consciousness, the mind starts thinking about the things that appear to the eyes. Judgemental thoughts, whether good or bad and so forth, arise in relation to what has appeared to the eye sense. Similarly there are things that appear to the nose and the other senses as well. All things, whether good or bad, that appear to the mirror are reflected and nothing is discriminated initially in the mirror; it just reflects.

Similarly, first the eye consciousness sees things, then the mental consciousness, the process of thinking, brings up an image, in relation to what the eye consciousness sees, in the mind and then, based on that mental image, we judge whether it is good or bad.

In the Buddhist teachings an object for meditation is very specifically described as not being an external physical object but rather an inner object that relates to a mental image. However, in order to get a good mental image it is suggested that if it's a physical object that you look at it well first with your eyes and develop a clear physical image and then it is easier to bring up a mental image. In meditation one focuses on the mental image. When one is able to focus on the mental image well then, by default, the mind is able to be contained and internalise rather than externalise our thoughts.

The external things that appear to us can cause all sorts of mental projections as well. Some people may see something even though there is not really something out there. Even though one imagines seeing something this can still cause mental projections that can cause a lot of fear. There are some people who have experienced a lot of fear based on something that they thought they saw. An object may not really be there, but a visual image still causes fear in the mind. There can be many situations like that.

It is often in situations when the mental thought process gets involved that we can experience fear and so forth. For example, if we are travelling in an airplane and we do not give it much thought and just relax and sit back then there is nothing to be a real cause of mental anxiety. But, as soon as we start thinking about the prospect of being

up in the sky and nothing holding up the plane in thin air it can cause a lot of fear in the mind.

This reminds me of an occasion several years ago when I went to Canada to receive teachings from the Dalai Lama. At one point during a break the Dalai Lama asked me, 'How long does it take to come from Australia? How long is the flight?' I described the hours that I took to fly there and then the Dalai Lama asked, 'Were you afraid?' My honest response was that when I thought about it that brought some fear but if I didn't think about it, it was OK. (*Laughter.*)

So, when you're in the plane, imagine yourself in a house in a comfortable room, sitting on a chair. There is nothing to be much concerned about. But I have noticed that some people seem to be really anxious and even tremble quite a bit at the prospect of what could happen when you think about the situation.

*Question:* Is the goal to be mindful all the time and do we attempt to stop all thoughts, even out of meditation session?

*Answer:* I don't know if you are aware but the question that you asked seemed a little bit contradictory. On one hand you asked, 'Is the point then to be mindful all the time?' but then you asked, 'Is the goal of meditation not to have any thought at all?'

*Student:* That's right.

*Answer:* The goal of meditation is not to have no thoughts at all, because the very fact of having a mind means that we have thoughts. The very function of the mind is to be conscious. So, to be conscious, mindful, of what we are thinking is most important. Driving a car can be an analogy for mindfulness. When we are driving we have to be mindful and use our mind or we will crash into things. We have to be mindful of the road, of what's going on in the surrounding area, everything. We have to be very mindful when we are driving. It's the natural process of our mind to be mindful in order to accomplish whatever task we are doing.

In meditation, the goal is to be mindful of the right things, of virtuous things, of the right sort of attitudes, of the right sort of thoughts and so forth. So, in summary, the answer to your question is, 'No, the goal is *not* to attempt to have no thoughts at all.' That is not possible because that would be contradictory to having a mind. Rather meditation is a process of training our mind to have correct, positive thoughts and to be mindful of those positive thoughts. Does that make sense?

That was, of course, a very good question. I appreciate your questions, thank you.

*Question:* For the last year and half I have been doing mindfulness meditation, being mindful of my thoughts, and that has helped to overcome some negative thoughts but I am wondering whether I am actually repressing them? Is that a good thing or not?

*Answer:* If we consider our meditation and mindfulness to be at a beginner's level then the best we can expect is to be able to stop the manifest levels of negative states of mind and so forth, whatever they may be. Even not allowing these minds to become manifest is already quite

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good. Now it may be true that we have not worked on the subtler levels. I don't know how you would define 'suppressing', but if it meant not being able to deal with the real issues and not being able to overcome and completely remove negative states from one's mind that might be true.

At a beginner's level we haven't acquainted ourselves with the technique of applying the correct antidote for overcoming a particular negative state of mind. So until we are able to recognise and apply the antidote for overcoming a particular negative state of mind it might be the case that it just temporarily subsides. On another occasion, when something else happens it arises again. That might be the case, but that doesn't mean that it's not worthwhile trying to minimise these negative states of mind from manifesting.

Even if you feel you have put in quite a lot of effort, the happiness or peace that we experience as a consequence of our practice of meditation on a beginner's level is a peace or calmness that is derived not from having completely overcome and abandoned a negative state of mind. Rather it comes from having temporarily not allowed it to manifest in our mind. When the manifest level of the conceptual state of mind, or what we call the discursive mind, is appeased, we experience some level of calmness and happiness in our mind. Our happiness or calmness is not derived from abandoning the negative state of mind completely from our mind. Thus, because we still have the root of the delusion or the negative state of mind, when the conditions arise it may arise again.

We should not understate or devalue the level of calmness that we experience because that will prevent us from having a strong, very intense, negative state of mind. When a negative mind arises and is about to become intense we will be able to notice that for ourselves and know the consequence of that. We will then be able to not escalate that mind too much. So, to that extent, there is definitely a benefit from that.

I feel that the outcome of your experience has been very good. You should be really happy with whatever you experience now. This is good. Based on those experiences from meditation, we just have to slowly go further and practice further. Then, gradually, we will eventually be able to completely overcome the negative states of mind.

That was a very good question, thank you. I think it was a good question because your question indicates the process of how the mind works, exactly how it is explained in the teachings. There is a difference between overcoming the manifest level of the negative states of mind or delusions and overcoming them from the root. Your experience from your meditation relates to that and that is why I commend it as a good question.

The benefit that you experience now from meditation is that it helps to overcome the manifest levels of negative states of mind and you feel like the negative mind is reducing a bit. That, nevertheless, needs to be continued. If one doesn't maintain a continuity of mindfulness and meditation it is very easy to become complacent. 'Oh yes. Ok, I have done that meditation. I know that.' (*Geshe-la chuckles.*) Then we might fall into a state where prior to completely abandoning a negative state of mind we

might fall victim to manifest levels of delusions again. Thanks again.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, let us again take an opportunity to engage in meditation practice. This time, as we sit in an appropriate posture and have the right state of mind, we can focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. We try to maintain our full attention and focus on the sound of the mantra and then maintain that for a few minutes after the recitation finishes.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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