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negative state of mind and negative attitude, then we can apply a technique to come out of that negative state of mind. If we allow ourselves to dwell in a negative state of mind and let the negative mind carry on, then it can only escalate and bring more unhappiness and sadness to our mind. By reminding ourselves in this way, we can take the initiative to come out of that and focus on something positive. When we focus on a positive object, our mind will be uplifted and come out of that depressed and unhappy state of mind. When we recognise any negative tendencies and negative attitudes, we need to take the initiative to overcome that, and not allow ourselves to dwell in it. So in this way the training of the mind is intentionally setting it in the right direction to acquire a happy state of mind.

The main point I am emphasising is that we all naturally wish for a happy and genuinely clear and calm state of mind, a mind of serenity. A happy state of mind comes from a serene state of mind. This requires training, which depends on familiarising ourselves with a positive state of mind, and not allowing ourselves to be accustomed to dwelling in a negative state of mind with negative attitudes. As everything comes with familiarity, we need to familiarise our mind in the right direction, that is, with positive states of mind that focus on objects that help promote a clear and calm state of mind. We need to familiarise ourselves with this.

Particularly for the older generation, it is essential to train ourselves so we can prepare for aging and death. It is essential to be relaxed physically, and to have a clear and calm state of mind. To achieve that, we need to engage in training our mind now. This is particularly important for the older generation, not to mention the younger generation. As we age, physically we may be in a relaxed state where we are not overly energetic. But if our mind is in turmoil and not relaxed and happy, then we are deprived of the essentials for mental well being and happiness. There may be some people who have plenty of resources, even be millionaires, but some of these people have confided in me that they seem to lack real genuine calmness or contentment in their mind. So it is clear that mental tranquillity, calmness and happiness do not depend just on external conditions. Even though there might be enough external conditions for us to be relaxed and comfortable, we may lack the mental conditions for a happy state of mind. The main point is that if we want a happy, clear and relaxed state of mind when we are dying, then we need to adopt the training now.

Training the mind comes down to one word—meditation. Meditation is the technique to train the mind in developing positive qualities. Furthermore, meditation becomes the ultimate protection for our own mind, protecting our good qualities, such as a kind and gentle state of mind. It is the positive qualities that we develop within ourselves, such as genuine consideration for others, kindness, compassion and love, that contribute to our mental well being and happiness. We need to understand how our mental well being is very much related to the way we carry our thoughts. When we adopt negative attitudes and ways of thinking, this can bring great disturbances to our own mind. We become agitated,

restless and upset. This is all related to the way we think, and the attitudes we adopt.

In contrast to that, when we hold positive attitudes with genuine consideration for others, we will be in a more positive, happier and healthier state of mind with less turmoil and agitation. When we investigate our mind and our circumstances in this way, we can clearly identify the causes for our own mental well being and what causes the turmoil, unhappiness and trouble within our own mind. This is very much dependent on our way of thinking and our attitudes.

Meditation is the best way to add clarity to this investigative process. A few weeks ago, two very young girls confirmed that meditation helped with self-analysis. One young girl said she had tried regularly to analyse her state of mind and identify the negative states. She has been doing this for a year and it has helped her to recognise negative states of mind such as anger arising.

She was saying that by recognising and identifying negative states of mind, it helped her reduce the intensity of negative states of mind such as anger or attachment. She confided that it is difficult for negative states of mind not to arise at all, but nevertheless, it helped to reduce their intensity. I felt that she was very honest and it was good of her to share that with us. I praised her for sharing a point that was exactly explained in the teachings. Merely seeing the faults of the negative states of mind as a fault can help appease and overcome that negative state of mind. As she was saying, she had done the practice for a while and found it helpful. The point that she was making is a significant point. Having made the attempts, she had found the benefit herself and she was sharing that.

The reason I praise that is because these are significant results that we could also experience, if we make an attempt. So while this young girl shares her experience of having attempted reducing her negative states of mind in one year of meditation, another reason why that is significant is because there may be others who have meditated for many years but don't have that kind of experience. They may assume that they are good meditators, but however when it comes to relating their experience, I haven't heard them relating such experiences.

For our meditation purpose tonight, we assume a relaxed comfortable posture. It is also good to ensure that we have a positive state of mind. The easiest way to adopt a positive state of mind is making a commitment and resolution, 'I will do whatever possible to help others and I will not intentionally hurt anyone or any being'. That is a basic level that suffices for the most positive intentions. With that intention in our mind, we can engage in the practice of meditation.

With the hands in a meditative posture, our right hand on top of the left palm with the tip of the thumbs touching, and place it under our navel centre. This is also significant. Some may wonder about the significance of placing the palms on top of each other and thumbs touching in the meditative posture, even though this is not an essential requirement. The tip of the thumb has nerve endings, which are like an energy channel for the

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awakening mind. The ends or channels of the awakening mind come to the tip of the thumbs. When they are placed together, it allows the awakening mind, which basically is an extremely profound level of altruistic mind, to generate easily within us, particularly when we place them under the navel where heat is generated. The heat generated from the navel centre induces the altruistic mind to be activated within us. As the heat is generated, it soothes the channels within our body. And when all the channels are soothed and relaxed, then this can cause the mind to be fresh as well. This is a conducive state of mind for the practice of meditation, particularly to develop love and compassion within our mind.

In the practice of meditation, we need to resolve within our mind that for the next few minutes, during our practice of meditation, to not allow our mind to be distracted with any kind of external distractions or, most importantly, internal distractions such as thoughts and memories. If our mind is completely preoccupied with various thoughts, and becomes busy and completely immersed in so many different kinds of thoughts that continually run from one to another, we become completely distracted. In relation to memories, we often bring up memories from so many past years and then we dwell on them. This causes us unnecessary pain, agony, and feelings of unhappiness. We can see that most of our unease is related to these superstitious, discursive thoughts, which make our mind busy and completely distracted, and cause us distress. Understanding that, we resolve to not allow our mind to follow these various different thoughts, but instead place our full attention and focus on the breath, which is our focal object. Based on the natural rhythm of our breathing, we bring our full attention and focus just on the breath, not allowing our mind to wander to any other thoughts. In this way, for the next few minutes, we will focus on the breath. (*meditation*)

*Question:* Is singing a worldly activity to be avoided?

*Answer:* Whether an action harms us or not depends mainly on the intention. So in relation to singing, if we do the singing with the intention of bringing joy and happiness to others, then this is a positive motivation. In that sense, the action of singing may not necessarily be just a worldly activity. With a good intention and motivation, when it becomes an activity to help others, it can bring benefit.

However when singing, it is good to do it in a concentrated way, being physically and mentally calm. When we are physically and mentally calm, then singing can be beautiful. It can be a real contribution for others.

For example, religious singing in churches is sometimes beautiful and moving. When I hear singing in a church, even though I may not fully understand the words, somehow the melody and the way it is chanted with such devotion is very moving. I feel it is soothing. This is an example of how singing can be an uplifting experience.

However, the reason why I emphasise the way and mode of how the singing is done is important because there are of course other kinds of singing that seem to bring a lot of

agitation and brings about a lot of chaos. We need to be mindful of the kind of singing that brings disturbances like more agitation in the mind.

*Question:* Even with a positive motivation and intention, some actions seem to cause agitation. So how can one try to overcome agitation and do the right thing?

*Answer:* Of course with a positive motivation and intention, there can be different levels of motivation. On one hand we may assume we have a good motivation or intention for doing something, whether it is singing or whatever it may be. But we may not be able to recognise on a subtle level that we do have some self interest there too. Thus with an example of doing some good deeds like singing or good deeds for others, we may engage in that deed with the positive intention to benefit others, but after having done the good deed, if we feel that others are not acknowledging or appreciating it, then we begin to start feeling uncomfortable and agitated in the mind.

This agitation is a sign that, on a subtle level, there is some self-interest, some interest in wanting appreciation and being acknowledged and appreciated by others. Even though this may be on a subtle level, it causes the intention to become not completely pure. There's some mixture of self-interest involved. Even a good motivation can be tainted with self-interest. If one has done a deed with a pure intention and motivation, totally for the benefit of others, then even when they do not appreciate it, this will not affect our mind; it won't become agitated and we won't feel upset. Instead, their lack of appreciation will cause us to feel compassion for them. Rather than feeling annoyed and upset, we can feel compassion for them. When we start feeling compassion when others don't appreciate things, then that is a sign that our motivation has been pure. Another important element to assist us in benefiting others is patience. We need to develop patience when we wish to benefit others because when we attempt to help others, even with the best of intentions, there may be cases where rather than showing appreciation, they may start being critical about us and being negative about our help towards them. When that occurs, and if we haven't made an attempt to practice patience, then it is at that point that we can immediately get upset and annoyed ourselves. We can become angry. We need to benefit others in a way that we can protect our own mind from becoming upset and angry. We can protect our own mind with patience. One of the main conditions to benefit others is developing patience.

*Question:* Sometimes, even when I have the best intention to help others, they don't seem to accept it and that can cause agitation; so how do we overcome that?

*Answer:* In order to prevent agitation in our mind, it is good to consider how, even when we want to do good, whether it is benefitting others or our own Dharma practice. In order to be successful in engaging in good deeds, it requires many conditions to take place. When all the conditions for either helping others or to do our own practice are not in place, then it is not possible or obstacles arise. It requires many conditions for us to be able to be successful in doing a good deed or some Dharma. When it doesn't work out, we can just

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acknowledge, 'OK, the conditions may not have been all together, I need to work harder to make those conditions come together and rather than being upset and agitated about it'. If there's no possibility in bringing those conditions now, then becoming upset and agitated about it will not help the situation.

In terms of conditions, they can either be conditions on a personal level, where you may not have all the right conditions to be able to help others. Sometimes, even when we have all the right conditions, and we have a good motivation, but the other person does not have the good conditions to receive our help. When we try to help them, they become agitated or they don't appreciate it or they don't accept it. If they don't accept our help, then even if we have the conditions from our own side, but others are not ready to accept it, again the conditions are lacking from their side, not from our side but their side. Thus in order for help to be provided, the conditions will have to be acquired from all sides.

For example, when we think about others' welfare and the suffering of others, and feeling pity and compassion for them, it may feel a little bit uncomfortable, but that is a virtuous unease. It is virtue. Even though we feel a little bit uncomfortable, it is for a good cause. In other words, do not be afraid or shy away from that.

In fact, it is because of the unease we feel when we see others suffering that prompts us to do something for them. If we don't feel any unease when we see others suffering, either we don't feel anything, or we feel incapacitated and we can't do anything. With the uncomfortable unease we feel with others' suffering, this can inspire us to do something to help alleviate and remove their suffering.

I personally feel that unease is a worthy unease, because it gives us the initiative to do something positive. For example, on a practical level, if someone's companion or partner is unwell and is in hospital, some may not feel any unease about that. They don't feel anything and that may prompt them to go off and have an affair with someone else and enjoy themselves. Whereas those who feel the unease will take the initiative to go to the hospital and visit their companion or partner to see if they are okay and comfortable. Feeling unease at others' suffering, on a beginner's level, gives us a start to initiate a feeling of compassion for them.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation, with a comfortable, relaxed posture, and a clear state of mind. We will focus on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. As the mantra is being recited, we place our full attention and focus on the sound, and as the sound subsides, we just try to meditate on the residue of the sound and focus on that for a few minutes.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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