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settled and unhappy it is most prone to becoming upset. We are a little bit on edge, a bit irritated, such that any small incident may cause the mind to become angry. This does happen—if we are not careful we can develop intense anger.

To prevent the mind from being completely immersed in worldly distractions and becoming disturbed and agitated we adopt the technique of intentionally bringing our focus inward and focusing on an internal object. That allows the mind to withdraw from all forms of distraction and one can experience a settled mind. I am trying to present this technique in a simple way, in simple language that you can relate to.

Now while one may experience the significant benefit of a settled mind for the duration of a focused meditation on an internal object one might have a reasonable doubt and ask, 'I can't remain in that internalised focus all the time. I will eventually have to come out of meditation and interact in the outside world again and I'll still have to come into contact with external objects. So how do I deal with that? If I have to face the outside world again with all of the distractions and objects, how will focused meditation actually help me then?'

The answer is that if we take this practice seriously to heart and give our time to it then as we familiarise ourselves with focusing inward on an internal object when we come out of meditation it will be less likely that we will be completely distracted by external objects. Even though we will have to deal with the external objects, they will not affect us to as great an extent. A particular example would be someone who has meditated on the technique to overcome intensive attachment by focusing on the imperfections of an object. When they come out of that meditation they will, of course, still see the object of attraction but due to the familiarity of having meditated on the imperfections and natural unattractive attributes of that object, they will not be completely swayed by the appearance of the object. It will not cause the mind to have as intense an attachment as previously. So this is a significant benefit. It helps the mind to not be completely influenced by that object.

Another practical approach is to spend more time in really contemplating how our mind works. Analysing one's own state of mind one begins to recognise how the mind gets disturbed and how it actually gets excited and agitated. When we recognise how our mind is easily influenced in that way, we can develop an understanding of the disadvantages of the mind being completely distracted and agitated.

When one begins to notice the disadvantages of that state of mind then, whenever one goes out and interacts in the outside world, although one will still see attractive objects and nice things, there will be a part of our mind that will always be a little bit cautious and will remind us that, 'If I am not careful here and I completely let my mind be influenced by this distraction it'll actually be destructive for me. It will cause me more harm and create more disturbances in my mind.' So that internal sort of reminder, that cautious state of mind, can be there as well.

When we adopt the practice in this practical way and apply this sort of awareness and mindfulness to whatever we are doing then that, in itself, becomes a protection for us. To give another specific example, when we go out somewhere we might come across a person that we dislike a little. Normally seeing that person might immediately cause irritation and might make you upset, agitated and angry. It could lead to you doing harmful things. After learning this mindfulness and self-awareness, when we see that person we can apply this approach and prepare ourselves, 'OK, this person is approaching. I have to be very careful here and apply mindfulness. I shall not let myself get affected by this person's presence or what they say.' When one applies that preparation and caution one will not be affected to the same extent. In this way, with that particular person, we have protected our mind from becoming upset and angry and avoided exchanging unpleasant remarks and so forth.

During meditation practice we all experience a benefit, because we are not immediately confronted with an external, uncomfortable situation. But when we come out of the meditation session it is most important that we maintain that self-analysis and self-awareness. This is really the most important point.

Indeed this self-awareness that we apply, along with the wisdom that is based on logical reasoning, is essential for maintaining one's composure and one's calm state of mind. We can illustrate this further, based on that earlier example of coming into contact with someone who one has had a disagreement with, or who irritates one by what they say, or who is a person that one feels immediately uncomfortable with. We can see the benefit of applying this meditation technique and developing this self-awareness. Previously we would have had no hesitation in going along with our unease and expressing it. We would not have had any means of containing ourself. One would have just felt it was natural and had no way to tackle that.

Now, having meditated and developed self-awareness and maintained some mindfulness, the transformation is that we don't respond as we used to. We don't react immediately as we used to in the past. We hold back and reason with ourselves, 'Now, even though I am about to encounter a person who I feel uncomfortable with, and feel agitated there is no point in getting upset. If I were to get upset and become angry, it does not affect the other person. Me becoming upset and agitated is not going to affect the other person in the slightest way. But, in fact, it will hurt me. My mind will be disturbed. My own peace of mind will be completely disrupted.' Reasoning in this way will help us to maintain our composure, and not be completely overwhelmed with negative emotions and feel agitated and so forth, when we encounter this person. Instead, we might just be able to be at ease ourselves. In that way we might actually have a good encounter with the other person rather than an uncomfortable one.

It is in this way that it stems from our own mind. The negativity, agitation, everything really comes from our own mind and we need to control it ourselves. It is through this reasoning and analysis that we are able to do

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that. This is how we can see the practical benefits of the practice.

So in this way we can see how the statement 'having a positive attitude will help us to overcome many problems and difficulties in life', is very true. Whereas if we maintain a negative attitude then that is actually a cause of many problems and disturbances in one's life. These statements really ring true if we look at how our mind works.

We need not have to feel that we need to resort to complex and complicated texts in order to start transforming our own minds. Just contemplating these practical issues in one's life, the emotions that come up and how to change one's attitudes, are measures that we can immediately adopt in our life. And we will see the benefits right away, too. This is how we can take a practical approach to the practices.

In summary, what I have been attempting to share with you is a technique that brings our focus inward on an appropriate object and intentionally distances us from all external distractions. Even though we only apply the technique for a short time we can familiarise our mind in this way with having a good, calm state of mind. The very attempt we make to familiarise our mind in this way with positive ways of thinking will be a great solace, a great benefit, in our life. If we can recognise and appreciate that then the meditation practice that we do, even for a short while, becomes highly significant because the very process to achieve that is through the meagre attempts that we make now. So we will now adopt the meditation practice.

A quote from the great Indian master Shantideva's works reaffirms what I have been presenting. Shantideva has said that before one engages in any activity you should first check your own mind. If you find that your mind is disturbed, then temporarily don't engage in anything. Don't say anything. Don't do anything. Just remain calm.

This seemingly simple advice is actually very profound, and very meaningful. Shantideva says, 'Before engaging in anything, check your state of mind and if it's disturbed, don't act'. Let us take an example of a mind that is disturbed with anger. If the mind is angry and we say something or do something physically it is bound to bring about consequences that are destructive. Therefore, following Shantideva's advice, if in checking your mind you find that it is in an angry state, it is temporarily best not to say anything or engage in any physical action. Just maintain your composure until you become calm again. This is an instruction that is to be applied in every instance throughout our life. It is something that is to be used in one's whole life. Indeed many people have confided in me that this kind of advice has been very helpful and beneficial in their life. In many circumstances in their life they have found that this advice has been very useful. So, we all have to keep this in mind to maintain our composure.

Now let us readjust our physical posture to be upright but relaxed and comfortable. For the purpose of our meditation we need to develop a state of mind where our intention is to fully engage in the practice. The object of our meditation is our own breath. In order to be able to

really have a 100% focus on the breath we need to distance ourselves from all kind of external or internal distractions such as our thoughts and so forth. This temporarily includes *all* forms of thoughts, whether they are good or bad, whether they are positive or negative. We temporarily leave aside everything and bring our full attention and focus onto the breath itself.

Having brought our full attention and focus onto the breath, we have to constantly be vigilant to maintain our focus on the breath. One of the aspects of our mind constantly checks whether it is focused on the breath or not and just periodically brings to mind the focal object, the breath itself. Try to be fully aware of the breath coming in and going out and just maintain that focus on the breath. It is in this way that we can derive a benefit from the practice of meditation. So, for the next few minutes, we will adopt the meditation practice. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Geshe-la was wondering if there are any questions. You may raise your hand if you have a question.

*Question:* Geshe-la, you were explaining how to overcome attachment by focusing on the imperfections of the object. However I was wondering how one would overcome attachment to our spiritual teacher?

*Answer:* First of all, in relation to meditating on the imperfections of, for example, the body, the main point is to start from one's *own* body. That is the main thing, to meditate on the shortcomings, the unattractive attributes of one's own body. That's how one should start.

In relation to this practice of applying the antidote to attachment, meditating on imperfections, you need to be very clear about what kind of mindset or meditation it actually involves. First of all, there seems to be some sort of misinterpretation of meditating on imperfections. Meditating on imperfections does not mean one is focusing on the person as being imperfect or the person as having faults and so forth. That is not what the meditation involves.

Next, when the antidote to overcome attachment suggests meditating on the imperfections it is not saying to view a beautiful object as ugly. That is not what it is saying. In reality, if there is a beautiful object, then the natural attribute of beauty is there. The object does possess natural beauty. To view it as not being beautiful, or being ugly, would be contrary to the reality in existence. So one needs to understand that point.

The actual meditation on the imperfections, whether it's others' bodies or one's own body and it's most suitable to first start with one's own body, is that when an object appears to be beautiful, the attachment arises from an exaggerated attractiveness or beauty we place upon that object. Attachment arises in relation to the exaggerated beauty that appears to us. Therefore, the way to contemplate the imperfections is to mentally analyse, with logic and reasoning, 'where is the beauty that appears to me?' For example, beginning with one's own body, one analyses the body from one's soles to the top of one's head to progressively look for this beauty. 'Is it on the skin? Is it beyond that? Is it in the flesh, in the muscles? Is the beauty in the bones?' When you analyse

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what is inside the body one would notice that what one finds in there is not really beautiful at all. (*Geshe-la laughs*) It is really quite unattractive! One mentally dissects the body and analyses each part searching for this beauty that appears to us. 'Where is it actually?' Then the conclusion one comes to is that the beauty that we have imagined seeing on this body is not really there. The reality is there is something quite the opposite, quite unattractive, rather than attractive and beautiful. This is the process of meditating on the imperfections.

As Shantideva advises in his works, if having mentally analysed and used logic one can still not come to the conclusion that there is a natural unattractiveness to the body, then go to the cemetery. Traditionally in Tibet and India they would cremate the bodies so the whole body would be visible. In this time and age, we can relate that to anatomy and autopsies. There are even shows on TV where they show the body being cut up and so forth. If we watch that it becomes very evident that what comes out of the body is not that attractive at all. This is the way the Shantideva advises us to think.

Another way to see how the very nature of our body is impure, is that when we eat food that looks very beautiful, very colourful and nice and we chew it for a while then bring it out it is completely unattractive. (*Laughter*) This is something we can relate to on an obvious level.

In the text we have been studying in the Tuesday evening study group, *The Precious Garland*, Nagarjuna very clearly talks about the unattractive or the imperfections of the body. He goes on to say, 'While looking at that in other bodies, look into your own body and it is exactly the same. Just as you see it in others, it is actually the same in your own body.' That is what Nagarjuna exhorts us to look into. It is through this meditation, this analysis, that one can overcome strong attachment.

Some people have confided in me, 'This meditation for overcoming attachment may be effective during the time of meditating on it, but I am not able to really apply it'. They are saying that they are not able to see the person that they are attracted to as unattractive. That is something that they are not able to do. (*Geshe-la laughs*)

The individual who confided this to me was actually being very honest. It is true, as the teachings indicate, that if when one does this meditation one does it on the surface but internally one still grasps onto that beauty then, no matter how much meditation one does, one will not be able to overcome the attachment.

When the mind is not giving up the object of attachment there is no effect. Even if one does the meditation it doesn't overcome the attachment. That is because one has not given up from one's mind the idea of that object as being attractive. One needs to be mindful that if one does not apply the technique properly one cannot accuse the technique of not really working to overcome attachment when one is not really changing one's own attitude internally. That would not be fair, would it?

To summarise our presentation, the main point is to apply the meditation technique in one's life and gradually try to make it part of one's daily routine to

derive its real benefit. That is what I exhort you to do again and again. What I try to remind you of again and again is to have a kind mind. Have a happy mind. Try to have a calm mind, not a disturbed and agitated mind. That is the only thing that concerns me. If you can adopt this technique it can help you to have a calmer, more contained mind and be less agitated and excited and that would be most useful for you. I plead with you to please have a happy mind!

What helps me most in my daily life is when I make the sincere aspiration, 'May I be able to assist bringing happiness to all beings and assist to remove all suffering from all beings. May the gurus and buddhas bless my mind to be able to do so.' Contemplating and thinking about this really brings solace and benefit to my mind. That is what I wanted to share. Thinking about this point again and again throughout the day.

Before we conclude for the evening we can spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object that we will focus on will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. As we hear the sound of the mantra we distance ourselves from all other distractions and place our full and entire focus on the sound of the mantra. Then, as the recitation subsides we maintain that awareness and focus for just a few moments. That, in itself, becomes a complete practice of focused meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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