
over the way we think or what we say. We realise when this happens that even though normally we wouldn't do or say negative things intentionally, at times they seem to come out uncontrollably and impulsively. This is because, when we begin to understand how our mind works, we can see that the negative states of mind are still predominantly established in our mindset, and that's why they influence us to behave and speak in inappropriate ways. When we begin to understand that about ourselves and accept it, we are able to recognise that this situation is exactly the same for any other ordinary person. Other individuals may say and do inappropriate things, but they are not bad or evil. Rather, they are being influenced by the delusion in their mind. The distinction we make between the doer and the deed is extremely important because with understanding aqleads to the acceptance of others. If we start by accepting ourselves, we will begin to accept others. Consequently, we will feel less hostile and negative towards others and start to accept them instead. If we want to relate to others effectively and deal with them in a reasonable manner, this is the way to go about it. Otherwise, if we constantly hold on to negative attitudes about others and have a judgemental mind, then a gathering such as this would be meaningless.

The process of sincerely and honestly investigating your own state of mind, and analysing what kinds of thoughts you are preoccupied with enables you to see whether your thoughts are positive or negative. If they are negative, then you can think about what the results would be if you were to carry out the negative thought. If you reflected seriously about the negative thoughts that arise in your mind and what would happen if you acted on them, you would see that the results would be really shocking and frightening even to yourself. Analysing our states of mind, distinguishing between negative thoughts when they arise, and not engaging with those thoughts because we can see the negative consequences, is all done by an intelligent mind. Buddhism calls this "wisdom" – specifically "analytical wisdom". The analytical part of our mind – our wisdom – investigates and establishes whether thoughts are positive or negative, and what the consequences of those positive and negative thoughts are. Our wisdom is very useful to us because it is the optimum source of wellbeing for ourselves. In this way we can see that adopting an analytical mind is essential to developing our happiness.

One of the great Indian masters has reflected that the Buddha does not judge others by their deeds, but sees them only in their entirety and goodness. The Buddha recognises that when someone engages in a negative deed, the person is influenced by the delusions and is not an evil or negative individual. This reflection would be a positive and virtuous way for us to conduct ourselves on a daily basis.

To summarise so far, we all identify with what we refer to as "I" or "me", and we all follow this up with a sense of identity by referring to "my body" and "my mind". Our minds can have positive and negative states, but we can use our analytical wisdom or intelligence to pay attention and distinguish what kinds of thoughts are arising in our minds and whether they are beneficial.

If we identify a positive state of mind, we need to further develop it so that it increases. If we detect a negative state of mind, we need to do our utmost to overcome it and decrease its intensity. The best way to do this is to acknowledge the thought arising in your mind and have an internal dialogue. You can do this by identifying whether a thought is negative and, if it is, checking and asking yourself if you want to hold on to the negative state of mind. You could ask yourself if the thought has any redeeming values. In the process of investigating and discovering your negative states, you could see the negative consequences of following and acting on those thoughts. When you recognise the disastrous consequences a negative state of mind can cause yourself and others, you begin to really understand that the negative state of mind you are experiencing is causing nothing but turmoil and trouble for yourself.

We may have adequate external conditions for our survival, such as food, drink, housing and friends, and there might not be anyone who intends to really hurt us, however the negative states of mind continue to cause us a real disturbance. Thus, we need to pinpoint the real troublemaker, which is the delusions that are within our own minds. Once we have identified what is agitating us, we must be firm with ourselves and say, "I'm not going to allow the negative states of mind to overpower and control me. They have done enough damage in my life already. They have brought enough destruction for me and my surrounding; they have hurt others as well. But I've identified this negative attitude now, I recognise it and I'm not going to allow it to overpower me." There's a part of ourselves that can summon this determination to combat the negativities within us and courageously face, overcome and destroy our delusions or negative states of mind.

This way of investigating and identifying the negativities within yourself helps you to not be readily controlled by negative mindsets. You will be able to hold yourself back, make the distinction between positive and negative attitudes, and not let yourself be dominated by the negative state of minds. This is beneficial to you and others.

Having made the determination to tackle your negative states of mind by identifying them and understanding their negative consequences, you are in a better position to not be dominated or influenced by them. You will not be completely immersed in the negative state of mind because you will have recognised the delusion, considered its negative consequences, and, through these means, been able to distance and protect yourself from being influenced by the negativity. Further, you can then recognise the positive attitudes that enabled you to do this, such as self-discipline and commitment.

When our negativities begin to reduce, and we are not overtaken or influenced by them, our positive states of mind naturally increase. This works just like a set of weighing scales. Decreased negative states of mind enables our positive qualities to increase and stabilise so that our minds become clearer and more focused. Our memory becomes sharper too, because our mindfulness is enhanced. If the mind is in a clear and bright state, and has a good focus, it naturally becomes calmer, and the

consequences of these positive states of mind are experienced as joy and happiness. In fact, happiness will definitely be experienced when the mind is in a clear and calm state.

Therefore, experiencing joy and happiness is the positive consequence of having taken the initiative to reduce our negativities and increase our positive states of mind. This whole system of identifying negative states, seeing their disadvantages and intentionally focusing on positive qualities is the result of meditation. This is why meditating is essential in our lives. In short, when we begin to see our negativities decreasing and our positive mindsets increasing; that is the beneficial result of our meditation practice taking root. Thus, a happy state of mind is naturally brought about when all the unnecessary, busy and discursive thoughts lessen, and a clearer state of mind arises. This is done through a consistent practice of meditation.

Remember when your mother [referring to the translator - Venerable Michael] came to see me when we were in south India. I suggested to her that the best thing to do in life is to work on having a happy state of mind and to really protect it. Then she asked, "How do I do that? How do I maintain a happy state of mind?" My answer was, "By reducing the busy and discursive thoughts in your mind. If you make your mind more focused and let go of the discursive thoughts, you will naturally bring about a happier state of mind." She immediately related to the simplicity of what I said, put her palms together and, with tears in her eyes, said, "Thank you. Thank you. That is very good. That is really helpful."

Having explained some of the benefits of meditation, we can now engage in the practice itself. In our last session I went over the main points of our physical posture. Whether you are able to fully adopt that posture or not is not a major concern right now; the main prerequisite is to be physically relaxed. However to engage in a meditation practice it is beneficial to maintain an upright and relaxed posture, and bring your focus inward.

The best thing to do before meditating is to adopt a positive intention for doing the practice. This means we think about our motivation for meditating and why we are doing it. Adopting a positive motivation reminds us of the purpose of our practice. So, before we meditate, we try to adopt the noblest intention and then we engage in the practice. We also need to be fully committed during the meditation and not allow our minds to follow discursive thoughts. Discursive thoughts are random meaningless thoughts that we usually get distracted by and get carried away with; this includes irrational fears, anxieties, and unnecessary doubts, worries and so forth. So, for the purpose of our practice now, we need to intentionally commit to distancing ourselves from these thoughts, and not allow ourselves to follow whatever arises in our minds. Instead, we can bring our full attention and focus inwards and place it on the object of meditation. The object of meditation we will focus on now will be our own breath. Thus, we will place our attention fully on the breath and give it our 100 per cent focus. To help us to do this we need to constantly remind ourselves that the breath is the object that we are meant to be focusing on now – there is nothing else but the

breath to give our full attention to. In this way, we will meditate for the next few minutes.

[*Pause for meditation.*]

That should be sufficient for now.

Adopting a practice of meditation in your daily life, like we have just attempted, would be highly beneficial for you. Spending a few moments contemplating the reason to meditate prior to engaging in the practice would be very worthwhile too. You could ask yourself why you are meditating, to establish the reason for doing the practice. You could acknowledge that you definitely have negative states of mind and are influenced by them, and then remind yourself that the consequences of those negativities are unpleasant. You could analyse what the consequences for yourself and others would be if you allowed yourself to be caught up in negative states of mind. You could also identify your positive states of mind and think how you could increase those and make them firm and stable. This would set your motivation and make the purpose of your meditation practice very clear. Thinking about the benefits and advantages of meditating, and what the faults or disadvantages of not practising meditation would be, is very useful. This kind of contemplation in itself will quieten your mind. It is also worthwhile because it will enable you to engage in a focused meditation practice.

In this way, if we adopt a meditation practice for a few minutes each day, we will begin to see the positive results for ourselves. We will notice that our practice relates to our day-to-day happiness and is therefore relevant, useful and beneficial.

We can use the remaining few minutes of our session for questions; we will go through the text gradually in following sessions.

Student: Geshe-la, you talked extensively on doing self-analysis and investigation of our state of mind; so my question is, do we need to rely on a teacher or do we do this investigation on our own?

Geshe-la: Of course, reliable sources are helpful to us and we can rely on them. Reliable sources would be gurus or individuals who assist us in finding the right technique to check our minds and do self-analysis appropriately. Of course, some individuals may be naturally predisposed to be self-analytical on a sound basis. On the whole, however, this kind of investigation without guidance is difficult. We might already be taking some time to discover the answers for ourselves, but relying on a reliable source for guidance on how to do this effectively is probably quicker and more useful. There is a story from the Buddha's time that illustrates this. There was a king who was seeking the best mahout, a person who trains elephants, because he wanted the tamest elephant possible to ride. The best mahout in the country was summoned and the king was presented with the tamest elephant the mahout had trained, which happened to be male. When the king rode the elephant, however, it sensed a female in heat, became excited and went very fast so that the king was thrown about. [*Lots of laughter.*] The king was very upset by this and wanted to punish the mahout for providing him with an elephant that was

not peaceful to ride at all! [Laughter.] To avoid punishment, the mahout told the king that he had fulfilled his duty in giving the king a physically tame elephant, but he was not responsible for taming the elephant's mind too. The king was startled by the mahout's explanation – he was left speechless and could not find fault in the mahout's logic: the elephant had smelt the female in heat and its mind had become wild, which is why the ride was not smooth. The king then asked his ministers where he could find the best person to tame his own mind. They told him that the Buddha was the best person to consult about taming the mind. And that is how the king became a disciple of the Buddha.

Student: how do you protect yourself from a person who is violent or abusive, using the Buddhist practice of not harming others?

Depending on the situation, there are ways and means to protect yourself without hurting the other person. There could be ways. Not retaliating with violence or negativity does not mean we don't stick up for our rights. We have to correct the wrong of the other if that occurs, but we do it with genuine concern for that person, and with love and compassion. We don't need to correct the wrong out of hostility. Standing up for our rights with genuine concern, love and compassion for the other person, and avoiding being hostile or violent is possible. Does that make sense? [*Student nods her head and says yes.*]

[*Geshe-la speaks to an older student, who has her hand up.*] You would have all the answers! You are an old student! [*Everyone laughs.*] I can say "old student" to you because you have been a long-time student and I know you won't be affected by my saying that. [*Laughter.*] If I spoke in this way to a newer student, they might be taken aback. This is because someone who is young and fresh-minded is like a flower bud. They need nourishment and care. Just as we would nurture a sprout so that it grows into a tree, we need to nourish fresh minds. If we care and nurture the sprout by giving it water, fertiliser and so on, it will become a strong tree. Similarly, when young, fresh minds ask questions we have to address them so that they become strong. Of course, nurturing is required from parents and others, and that is not an easy task. Nevertheless, nurturing young minds is a worthwhile investment of your time.

Another question?

Student: I find myself in breathing meditation thinking about how the breath is moving in my body and I wonder if this is the technique or if it is a kind of distraction. Please can you advise me?

Geshe-la: The technique is to focus on the breath. So being mindful of the breath coming in and going out is the technique. How the breath goes in and which channels it goes in is not really mentioned in this technique. If you are diverting your attention from the breath and beginning to visualise or imagine where the breath is going, like into the lungs, then this thinking may be diverting your attention from the actual object of meditation. However, having said that, there are other forms of meditation where you intentionally focus on the different channels in your body and follow where the

breath goes in and out. But that is another form of meditation – a higher form of meditation. That type of meditation might not be suitable for beginners initially.

One more question?

Student: Is it better to take one guru or multiple gurus? People seem to practise this differently. How would you maintain guru yoga if you had multiple gurus? That seems like it would be tricky.

Geshe-la: Whether someone has one guru or many depends on the individual. In our Buddhist tradition, there have been some masters who had over a hundred gurus. While some masters had only four or less. Again, the general advice is that if you are able to maintain a good connection with your gurus, then the more you have might be better for you because you may be able to receive more wisdom or understanding from different sources. If you are unable to maintain guru yoga, or what we call a good connection with the gurus, then having fewer gurus would be better because then you could at least work on having a good connection with a few gurus. So having one guru or many gurus depends on the individual. Of course, on a practical level, if you have a good connection and a good reliance on one teacher, then based on that connection with that teacher, you will be able to relate to other teachers well too.

The questions were all very good. Thank you very much for asking them. That last question was also good. It reminded me of my own practice of relying on the gurus. Tara's question [about focusing on the breath] was good too. In fact, she often comes up with tricky and deep questions! [*Geshe-la laughs.*] Of course, Tara seems to have a natural inclination to study; she has an inquisitive mind for the Dharma and really takes it in too. Perhaps her inquisitive, serious mind brings up these deeper questions about the Dharma. That is something to think about.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time we can focus on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra, we can try to maintain our entire focus and attention on the sound. Then, when the recitation subsides, we can focus on the sense of space left after the mantra is no longer recited; we can maintain our focus on that space and that will be our meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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