

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe 20 March 2013

As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. For that purpose, we sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. It is also important to try to have a clear, bright state of mind and, from within that state, to develop a calm and a peaceful mind.

If we were able to adopt a physical, relaxed posture and have a calm and peaceful mind, we would have already achieved what we came here for! Seriously, when we think about it, that is really what we are seeking, isn't it? Our ultimate goal is to achieve that state. As I mention regularly, if we are able to have this conducive combination of a relaxed body and genuinely relaxed, calm mind, then whatever training we adopt would be fruitful; we would be able to achieve our desired result.

Essentially, we are talking here about training our mind. When we experience the benefit of having a relaxed body and a genuinely calm state of mind, we will be able to relate to how essential it is for our wellbeing. Thus in training our mind, we first need to consider how essential these conducive conditions are, and then, how to protect those conditions from declining and also how to further increase them. Training one's mind involves thinking about the methods of how to bring about a genuinely calm body and mind. So this is what we intend to do.

The analysis requires us to first really think about whether being physically relaxed and having a calm, peaceful state of mind is essential and conducive for one's wellbeing or not? If we find that it is essential, we can ask, is it on the verge of declining, or is it becoming firm and stable within oneself? If we find that the conducive conditions for our wellbeing are declining, we need to ask, how can we restore them and further increase them?

When we have established that these conditions do not deceive us but are truly beneficial for our wellbeing, we will then begin to trust and rely on the technique of bringing this about. That trust will enable us to further take personal responsibility for seeing how we can further increase the conditions for our wellbeing.

Having thought and analysed in this way, we will notice for ourselves that there are certain positive attitudes that are conducive for our wellbeing, that do not cheat or mislead us; whereas there are other negative states of mind that deceive and harm us. Those negative states of mind can lead us down a path that is harmful to us. It is essential that we are able to identify these two states of mind and distinguish between them.

We might have agreed that when we have a relaxed body, that in itself may be a conducive factor for bringing about a genuinely calm, peaceful mind. But then we might think, 'I cannot afford to always be in a relaxed sitting position because I have to go out and work. I have a lot of engagements with a very busy life.' Of course, we all need to work for a living, which means being physically active. So we might think that it is impossible to always be in this relaxed physical position, which is conducive to a peaceful state of mind. This is a significant concern. I am just presenting a scenario as a way for you to think about your situation in a logical way.

So what one needs to understand through analysis and clear thinking is that, even if the body is actively engaged in physical actions, the main conducive factor for having a calm, peaceful mind is that the mind itself remains firm and stable. Regardless of the physical conditions, if the mind is not disturbed, that is the main conducive factor for having a peaceful mind.

Now the relevant question would be how is this possible? How can I maintain my mind in a state that is not troubled, agitated or disturbed? As I mentioned earlier, a disturbed or agitated mind is what causes real turmoil within us. So, is there a method to prevent my mind from becoming troubled and agitated? The answer is yes, that is to familiarise ourselves with a gentle and kind attitude. The more we familiarise our mind with a kind and gentle attitude, the more it becomes part of our nature, part of our being. Having a gentle, kind attitude will prevent our mind from becoming troubled and agitated.

What examples do we have to prove this? The best example we can present from a conventional point of view of the benefits of kindness is the experience of those who have been parents. Even when their children's behaviour is agitated and chaotic, the parent's kindness overrides this, and she or he is able to restrain the children; if a child is having a tantrum, the parent is able to control that situation in a calm manner because of their love and kindness, and the genuine concern for their child. This is true isn't it? Many of you will have found this from your own experience.

For myself, I can relate to television show I saw just a while ago, where a young toddler was peeing on the mother; however the mother just smiled and laughed and didn't care at all and continued to care for the toddler. This is really quite amazing, because normally you would not be able to tolerate someone else peeing on you *(laughter from audience)*; you would consider it as being inappropriate and inconsiderate.

Taking that as an example, if we were to familiarise our mind with such an attitude of kindness and gentleness then even if the external situation were a bit chaotic, we would still be able to maintain a calm demeanour.

Having done our analysis, and having contemplated these points, we come to a point where we can accept that a kind, gentle attitude is something we need to familiarise ourselves with; it is an attitude that is worthwhile for us to adopt. This is the point where meditation becomes relevant. One will be able to see why meditation is important, because meditation practice is none other than a very useful tool or technique that brings about those positive attitudes of kindness, gentleness and so forth within us. Thus we can see the relevance of meditation in one's daily life. If we were to ask ourselves, 'What is my mind already familiar with? What kinds of attitude am I accustomed to?' the honest answer would be that we are mostly familiar with attitudes associated with attachment and anger – they are the attitudes and perceptions one's mind is mostly associated with.

This is because, from a very young age, from as far back as we can remember, we would have continually expressed attachment and anger one way or another. It is because our mind is so familiar with these attitudes that we seldom hold back and express them naturally and spontaneously.

The meditation technique presents a totally different object to familiarise our mind with, namely the positive attitudes of kindness, gentleness and so forth. However we would only be able to see the real result and benefit of meditation after prolonged, consistent practice. It would be totally unrealistic to expect an immediate change, if we had tried meditation only a few times, or sporadically and inconsistently. As an analogy, if we had a huge container of sour water and we put one drop of sweet water into it, would it be realistic to think that the container filled with sour water would suddenly turn sweet? You know that would be impossible, right? But if we were to consistently and continually add a few drops of sweet water into that container of sour water, eventually it would turn sweet; when you drank from that container the water will not taste sour but rather sweet.

Similarly, meditation should be applied day by day and gradually maintained. The main thing is to maintain the practice; then you will begin to see some transformation taking place. Otherwise, there are many who might feel, 'I've tried meditation a few times but I don't see any good results. It must not work for me', and then give up.

The main point here is that, like with anything else we wish to achieve in life, it takes time. Even with worldly work, whatever we want to achieve may be hard and difficult, and we may not be able to achieve quick results. But if we are consistent and don't give up, we will experience good results in whatever we wish to achieve. This is exactly how we need to apply ourselves in meditation, with the difference being we need to be more consistent and invest even more time over a longer duration to experience the results of inner transformation within our mind.

I am not about to boast of any great achievements myself in my life, but I can speak from my own experience of having started my spiritual quest from when I was quite young and having been constantly engaged in it and trying to work on it up until now. As a result, at this time in my life and at my age, I can safely say I have a naturally happy and joyous mind. That is something I can share. Even when I had my recent medical check-up, my doctor acknowledged that and said, 'I know your health is quite good, you actually appear quite joyful and happy'. He congratulated me, shook my hands and put his thumbs up and said, 'That is good'. *(Laughter from audience)* Going back to the main point I wish to emphasise here: we can all acknowledge that what we really want in life is a genuine sense of calmness, peacefulness and happiness within oneself. Since that is something we all wish to achieve, the technique to achieve this is with the practice of meditation. It is a significant and tested technique, and if we are sincere and practise and try our best, we will definitely achieve some results over time.

I cannot emphasise enough how important these qualities are – the positive attitudes of kindness, gentleness, consideration, and a genuine sense of joy and happiness within oneself. These are the most important assets in our life. If we were to consider them as a friend or companion, they are the best friend one could ever have. Thus we need to protect this inner friend and always try to maintain it within us. This inner quality will never betray us. As long we have this inner friend, it will never fail to provide us with a sense of wellbeing. We do not need to place all our time and energy into seeking out external friends, but rather work on developing our inner friend. If we were lose this inner friend, I feel that would be the greatest loss in our life.

Whether or not we possess the positive qualities that I mentioned earlier depends entirely on ourselves. It does not depend on others, or on external factors. This makes it much easier for us to access. If it were dependent on others, we would have to rely on others to achieve it. It would depend on whether we were on good terms with others or not, which might be difficult. But when it depends on our own mind; it is a matter of changing our attitudes and adopting positive ones. We all have the resources within us, but we need to take the initiative to do it.

For the actual practice of meditation, we need to readjust our physical posture. Sit in an upright, relaxed, comfortable posture and try to generate a positive intention or motivation for the practice. The technique itself involves making the commitment that for the next two minutes that one will not allow one's mind to be distracted with various thoughts and ideas, whether they are external or internal distractions. Rather we completely withdraw our attention from all other objects, and bring our entire attention and focus within ourselves. Then we place our attention on the actual object of our meditation, which here is our own breath, the natural inflow and outflow of our breath through our nostrils. We place our full attention, a hundred percent focus, just on the breath itself. For the next few minutes, we will make the genuine attempt to keep our attention there. (Pause for meditation)

That should be fine for now. If there are any questions, good questions like something burning in your mind, we can address them.

Question: Geshe-la, you mentioned earlier that we need a calm and focused mind in order to overcome disturbing thoughts and emotions. But how do we maintain that when we are out in the busy world?

Answer: In a formal meditation setting where we are sitting down and intentionally bringing our focus on a particular object, such as we have done now with the breath, it is of course easier to maintain a clearer and purer mind, a mind that is at least protected from the appearances of so many different things outside. As there are no external, temporary distractions to disturb the mind in such a formal meditation session.

However the reality is that we can't be in a formal meditation setting all the time. As mentioned previously, we need to go out, to interact with the outside world, which is when we will be confronted with different objects; we do actually have to interact with different people, situations and so forth. So the question is how to maintain a more pure and clear state of mind in that situation?

What will help us at such times is constant awareness, combined with the analytical approach that I mentioned earlier – asking ourselves, for example: Where is my mind going now? Where are my thoughts leading? How am I reacting to this particular situation? Is my reaction towards the situation positive or negative? We have the capacity to analyse and think in this way.

If our reaction to a situation is positive, we can rejoice and think, 'Okay, I am managing it well' and pat oneself in the back. But if one finds that one's interaction with others are not so positive, that one is falling victim to our negative emotions - becoming a little upset, agitated and so forth, then even if we are not able to immediately change the situation, at least in hindsight one can think: 'Was that a positive way to handle that situation?' If one's answer is: 'No it wasn't really skilful', this is when we remind ourselves to try to do better the next time.

You can also apply a more practical technique for dealing with a situation such as getting really upset and angry with a person. Before we go out, prior to encountering them, try to meditate on how that person who normally makes us angry is themself a victim of negativities. That person is deprived of genuine happiness - that is why they are intentionally annoying us. Because they lack clarity in their own mind, they are a victim of the delusions that make them act in this way. So rather than getting upset and angry with them, in reality one should see them as an object of one's compassion. We should meditate on compassion for that other being. It is it is possible that slowly, through one's familiarity with meditating on compassion, seeing the plight of the suffering state that person is in, that one can develop genuine compassion for them. Then when we meet them, through the familiarity of our practice, it is possible for us to see them in a good light. At the very least, the intense anger we normally feel would definitely be reduced.

The great master Shantideva mentioned this situation of someone who, the moment you think about them or hear about them causes you distress. He said that if one meditated on them as being a friend or companion then, through one's practice of familiarity, there can be a time when one could be with them without feeling upset and agitated. What Shantideva is pointing out is that through one's familiarity and practice of meditating on someone's positive attributes and on love and compassion, even with someone who makes you feel very agitated and uncomfortable, at some point later on, the very person who earlier caused you unease can turn into a friend; one could feel such strong companionship with them that one would feel uneasy in their absence.

I have some personal experience on this point. I have related the story a few times in the past but for those who have not heard it, when I was guite young, about eleven or twelve, there was another young monk. We were both novices. We were also rivals, and had many fights. Some fights even turned into actual blows, where we were hitting each others' heads with stones and bleeding. However, later on, when we formally entered the monastery, we found that our rooms were quite close to each other. Perhaps we were so worn out by the disputes and fights in the past because, when we saw each other, we acknowledged each other. Then we started to become closer, to the point where we became such good companions, we ended up sharing whatever we had, even though we didn't have much. Whenever we had something like a present or something nice to eat, he would come and share with me; whatever I had, I would share with him. We would save a space for each other in prayer sessions. When he got there first, he would save a space for me, and if I got there first, I would save a space for him. So we became inseparable; our close companionship transformed from our earlier rivalry. This is an example of how it is possible to change, to transform. Going back to the meditation technique, if we really apply it in our daily life, it is possible to change our attitudes and ways of thinking.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time, the object of our meditation can be the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the recitation of the mantra, we try to keep our full attention and focus on the sound. Then, when the mantra recitation subsides, try to maintain that residue of awareness of voidness, for a few moments.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi Edit 1 by Mary-Lou Considine Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe Edited Version

© Tara Institute