
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 joyful 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 to 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 themselves 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 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 quite 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

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