
your benefit than adopting something without due consideration.

The main point I am emphasising is to ensure you understand that the purpose of whatever meditation practice you adopt is to develop your wisdom. If, otherwise, you adopt a meditation technique without this knowledge, you may develop a more single-pointed mind, but its focus will lack intelligence, which is not of much use or benefit for oneself.

We can now engage in a formal meditation practice for a few minutes. To do this, let us readjust ourselves physically, so that we are sitting in an upright meditative posture, which is very important. Even more important though is to have a good motivation and intention, and to remind ourselves that we engage in a meditation practice for the ultimate purpose of benefiting others.

The object in our meditation that we will focus on will be our own breath. Some may be familiar with other objects in their regular meditation practice; whatever that object may be, even if it's tangible, the Buddhist teachings instruct us to first have a visual acquaintance with the object, and observe the object's shape and colour very well, as a way to get a clear, mental image of the object. Ultimately, what one is focusing on is not the actual physical object that one has chosen for one's meditation, but the mental image of the object. Thus, initially, we visually familiarise ourselves with the object and then bring it to mind. The mental image for beginners is not very clear; often the mental picture is fuzzy and faded, but with familiarity, and as we engage in the practice of meditation, the mental image is said to become clearer and more vivid so that it can be focused on during meditation. As with any meditation practice, we need to develop a focused mind through discipline, and commit to not allowing our minds to be distracted by any other objects, including disturbing thoughts and concepts. So, for the next few minutes, instead of being side-tracked by other objects, we can bring our full attention within, place it on the breath and focus on it single-pointedly. [*Pause for meditation.*]

That will be sufficient for now.

As we have just attempted in our short session now, meditating regularly in our daily life would be highly beneficial for us. We can commit to an everyday practice and not use the common excuse that we do not have time. I have heard many, many times people saying, "Oh, I am busy and don't have time to meditate", as a justification not to have a consistent practice. Usually I tease those I am close to and acquainted with by saying, "Well, you say you don't have time for meditation, but you seem to have time to spend over two hours or so at the movies!"

Spending a significant time doing something frivolous that does not provide you with real benefit would be a pity when you could be acquiring something of real personal advantage instead. Indeed, spending your time watching movies or television shows, rather than spending it to pursue more worthwhile activities, like meditating for your wellbeing, is something to consider when trying to find some time for your practice. Of course, some people may be really unhappy at home, and feel completely lost and lonely, so occasionally seeing a movie to be released from those mindsets may be helpful.

The main thing we need to consider when regarding what contributes to our personal wellbeing is to take the initiative to adopt what is beneficial and to discard what is harmful. When this is applied to serving others by always benefiting

and never harming them, it will be the greatest way to conduct our lives. This is the lifestyle or commitment a bodhisattva has.

A bodhisattva is a great noble being because he or she is committed to always helping others and not hurting them in the slightest way. Of course, if we are inspired to live similar lives, we need to begin with ourselves, so if you feel you are not yet ready to benefit others and to not harm them, then, rightly, you first need to care for yourself. You do this by committing to look after your physical and mental wellbeing by avoiding and discarding what is harmful. For your physical wellbeing, you need to consume food that is nourishing and conducive to your body's health, and to avoid food that is tasty but detrimental to it. There is no point being attached to the taste of something that is harmful, so you need to take the initiative to mindfully avoid foods that are not good for you. For your mental wellbeing, you need to adopt constructive attitudes and discard those that are damaging. Through mindfully using your vigilance and awareness to distinguish between positive and negative attitudes, you can adopt what is beneficial and discard what is harmful to your mental health. This mindfulness will increase your wisdom too. This is the practical way to care for yourself, which you can start with and then apply to others.

Using self-discipline is essential in caring for yourself because no one else can enforce your adoption of what is beneficial and your abandonment of what is harmful to your wellbeing. You need to be strict with yourself about what to implement and what to discard so that you are not easily swayed by others. You do not have to smoke or drink because your companion does—that is an excuse and shows you are becoming lax.

Poor self-discipline arises from a lack of wisdom of knowing what is beneficial and what is harmful to you. Without the combination of discipline and wisdom, you can be easily influenced by others and engage in the harmful activities of your companions. Initially, for example, you may smoke or drink to fit in with friends, but sooner or later they will go their own way and all you will be left with is a bad habit. I am telling you this out of genuine concern for you and because I have seen it happen many times; I want to prevent it happening to you too.

So, a practical way of developing our wisdom in order to protect our wellbeing is to check our mental state in whatever situation we may be in and see whether it is useful for us. For example, if you start to feel angry, rather than succumbing to it, you can take a step back and ask yourself if getting annoyed is a helpful mindset for the situation. You could ask yourself if you derive any benefit from the anger; does it contribute to your sense of happiness and joy? When you scrutinise your negative mental states like this, you will find they do not benefit you, but serve only to disturb your mind. In this way, you can acknowledge that being angry is of no help and only destroys your happiness. Since you have resolved to care for yourself, you will then be able to reason with yourself to not remain in that state. This process of taking a step back when a negative attitude arises appeases your mind so that it is not completely under the negative attitude's control; you can use your intelligence to assess a situation and if there is no benefit to engaging in a particular way, you can discard it.

Adopting this practical approach in everything you do is the way to tackle mental difficulties and problems. All

psychological problems are created by the mind, so they can only be solved by the mind. External means, such as wealth and money, cannot solve our psychological problems; only training our minds in adopting positive attitudes and positive ways of thinking solves our mental problems. This is an important point to understand.

As mentioned previously, we need to begin by taking a strong initiative to benefit ourselves by acquiring conditions useful to us and discarding those that are harmful. Seeing what is really valuable for our overall wellbeing and adopting that for ourselves can then slowly be extended to others because our personal experiences will make helping others easier. We are then able to benefit others and avoid harming them through sharing our knowledge and experience. This genuine sense of concern for others begins with those we live with and our companions. It is the ultimate way to care for and have genuine good relationships with others—what better friend and companion can there be than one who wishes to benefit us and not cause us any harm? The best companion is someone who does not cause us any harm and only benefits us.

What I have shared so far are practical ways to benefit you in your life. In the Buddhist context, the next stage is to practise Dharma by ensuring any deeds we do serve to help and benefit others and to avoid harming them.

Before we conclude, are there any questions?

Question: Sometimes we get angry because there is something about a situation which does not sit well with us. Our anger may be signalling to us to address a problem in order to protect ourselves. In this respect, couldn't anger be considered useful?

Geshe-la: Yes, on one level, what you are saying is true: when anger arises, there is the intention to protect yourself. However, what we need to investigate is whether anger brings us peace and calm. The opposite state of mind to anger is patience. Patience is a state of mind undisturbed in the event of harmful conditions. When the mind is not disturbed, its tranquillity remains intact. However, when anger arises, that peaceful state of mind is completely disrupted and lost. That's why the advantages of patience and the disadvantages of anger are presented in Buddhist teachings.

Of course, from a worldly perspective, anger may seem appropriate at times, for example, to vanquish an enemy if you are training in the army. The conventional view is that if someone harms you, you must retaliate so they will not harm you further. This approach is considered appropriate from a worldly point of view, but if we were to really think about this in relation to our own happiness, we would see it is not really true. For example, if a close friend or companion said something inappropriate to you and you were impatient and immediately became upset and retaliated by saying something back, then, your mind would be disturbed and you would not be happy.

When you do not take what is said personally and your mind is not disturbed, you wouldn't even think of retaliating; this is the practice of patience. We might have all experienced that at certain times even inappropriate words do not disturb one and we are able to remain clam and tolerant. For example, a mother may not take much notice of a child calling her stupid, but if her partner said it, she may get really annoyed. The same words are used but the difference in where they come from affects how they are interpreted, and consequently how they affect the one. There

are many different ways to practise patience. One way is to willingly endure inappropriate actions or hardships. However, merely not retaliating physically or verbally does not necessarily mean you are practising patience—you may feel uncomfortable inside and although you have not expressed your anger, you are still feeling it inside. So be mindful that you do not hold on to your anger and bottle it up inside, assuming that you are practising patience. Patience does not mean refraining from reacting but secretly being resentful. Practising genuine patience will not cause psychological disturbances, like resentment. If you find you are holding on to unexpressed anger, you are not in fact not really practising patience.

That was good question, thank you.

Question: Thank you for the teaching, Geshe-la. I found what you said very useful and applicable to me. Your advice is always so practical.

Geshe-la: Thank you, that is good. Being praised makes us happy doesn't it? [*Laughter.*] If you make others happy by offering praise, then that's a good quality. So, thank you for your praise.

The great master Atisha advised us to point out the good qualities of others, but to hide our own. He also advised us to proclaim our faults, but to hide our qualities. These points are very significant when they are considered because they have a lot of substance.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time we can use the sound of the mantra to be recited as an object to focus on. As we hear the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra, we can keep our full attention and focus on it, and when the recitation subsides, we can maintain our focus in its vacuity for a few moments.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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