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To relate to this significant point in normal terms, we can all safely assume that we didn't come to this world in an unhappy state of mind. As far as we can recall, we had a carefree and happy mind, but as we go through life somehow we seem to allow ourselves to be influenced by certain circumstances and situations that actually cause our happy state of mind to be completely distorted and lost. Thus, we need to check what those adverse conditions are that hinder our happy and carefree state of mind.

Those adverse situations that arise, which we call difficulties or problems, hinder or obstruct our happy state of mind only to the extent that we allow them to. When we allow the difficulties and problems to overwhelm us and to become a cause to destroy our happy state of mind, then naturally that is the consequence that we experience. So we need to protect ourselves. Whilst difficulties and problems do arise occasionally, if we don't allow them to disturb our happy state of mind, we are protecting ourselves.

One of the best ways to protect our mind is to willingly accept these difficulties and problems. As explained by the masters, 'Willingly accepting a problem is the best way to deal with a problem'. And that is because when we willingly accept the problem, we are not hiding away from it; because we actually face it, it doesn't overpower us. It is as if we are in control and the problems and difficulties are beneath us, which enables us to deal with them more effectively.

In contrast, if, as soon as problems and difficulties arise we start shying away thinking, 'Oh, I can't tolerate or deal with this', and we allow our minds to become like a victim; then we are actually contributing to the problems and difficulties by allowing them to overpower over us, to the point where we are completely dominated by the problems. Thus we make ourselves smaller and smaller and think, 'Oh I can't do anything' and so the feelings of despondency, low self esteem and helplessness arise.

So courageously facing problems is an optimum technique for dealing with problems and difficulties; to accept them, thinking, 'OK, there is a difficult situation here which I will look at and I will work out how to deal with'. Initially it is good to train in willingly accepting small problems. It is hard for us to accept big problems and issues in life, so we begin with small ones. then as we train our mind in willingly accepting and not allowing ourselves to get upset when something small goes wrong, we can start to become more and more effective in dealing with bigger problems in life.

So it is a matter of developing and maintaining that attitude in our life, and this is an essential attitude that we need, whether it is in a worldly context or spiritual life, because in both cases there are bound to be difficulties. In a worldly context, we all know that there are so many problems that we have at work, living conditions and so forth. However even in a spiritual context, life is not cut out to be easy; there are hardships and difficulties involved. Therefore, in both cases, whatever life one is following at the moment, we need to adopt such an attitude to be able to deal with those problems effectively.

It is indeed worthwhile to consider becoming a little bit more tolerant of situations—the word we use in Buddhism is being patient—when problems arise. Otherwise, if it becomes a habit for us to be intolerant with small problems, then we can fall into the category of people who will become upset even with the smallest insignificant things that go wrong. It is rather difficult to associate with such a person, who is constantly getting annoyed and upset. So if we can see that in others, we need to take the initiative ourselves in making sure that we are not in the same category and that we are able to tolerate small problems when they occur.

I have related this incident in the past where I have witnessed a couple who were enjoying a nice cup of tea while sitting down and relaxing at the airport. At one point the wife spilled some tea, the husband giggled and she got very upset. She stood up and walked away and didn't want to talk with him for a while. Of course when you witness it, all it was, was spilling a bit of tea and the other one giggling and that caused an uproar and it became an uncomfortable situation. So when you witness it from the outside, you would think that it is a very insignificant problem, however for one of them it seemed like a big issue.

In any case, when we look back we can all relate to certain incidences in life where we have allowed ourselves to become upset and annoyed over something small and insignificant. So to protect ourselves, we need to train our mind to willingly endure and accept small difficulties and problems when they arise. Then we become more capable of handling bigger problems and issues in life. This is something that is not too profound, I am sure all of you will be able to relate to that, as you all are very intelligent people.

Another cause of losing happiness is when we allow our minds to become obsessed with many different kinds of unnecessary and discursive thoughts. We allow our minds to be obsessed with these thoughts, most of them being irrational, and some which we hold on to as a sort of ideal which we don't let go of, and we don't want to give up. It might appear to be realistic, however because we grasp on to the ideal, refusing to let go, anything that opposes this ideal causes one to feel angst, discomfort and unhappiness. This is another point that we need to look into.

To give a particular example of how this occurs, if someone suffering from an eye disease where the eyes become sore starts to think, 'Oh, my eyes are feeling sore and uncomfortable, maybe I will go blind'. Then the moment they start getting obsessed with that thought it becomes a significant worry. In reality it is just soreness in the eyes, there's nothing that would affect the sight, and it can be cured, but as soon as they think 'Oh, I may go blind', the worry and speculation starts to kick in. That speculation becomes a much bigger issue than the actual problem and the more one gives in to the paranoia, the more it causes one to become distressed. So, paranoia is not reality, it is none other than a mental agitation created by the mind itself. Using this as an example, it is true for any kind of physical discomfort, when we add our angst, anxiety, speculation and paranoia onto the actual

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physical suffering, then it becomes much more of a problem. So mental suffering is something we create ourselves and it is in this way that it is greater than the physical suffering.

For those who find that they have this mental speculation, paranoia, unnecessary worries and fears as well as all kinds of discursive, irrational ways of thinking, the best technique that helps to appease and settle down one's mind, is presented in our tradition as the meditation technique. Thus, meditation becomes a relevant and optimum way for settling down the unnecessary worries and problems that occur in our mind.

Besides the meditation technique, a more practical approach which is within our reach is to adopt a more positive attitude. We can train ourselves to recognise when we are starting to worry or are being taken over by anxiety, and at that time remind ourselves that the worry is not going to be useful as it will not solve the problem, we can resolve, 'If I give in to worries and anxieties, it will only cause me more distress'. So when one actually recognises that and takes hold or control on one's own state of mind, then it will help us to settle down again. It is a matter of acquainting and familiarising ourselves with thinking in this positive way, and to remind ourselves of this positive attitude again and again.

So as with the example of someone who is diagnosed with a certain disease, rather than giving in to worries and anxieties, one has to take a practical approach, 'How can I best treat it and what are the best measures to take?' When we don't allow our mind to become obsessed with worries and anxieties, then whilst we may be suffering a bit physically, we are in control of our mind and therefore there will be less hindrance to our overall well being. As mentioned previously, it is like the eye disease, in that if one can recognise that, 'OK, I have got sore eyes, I will have a check-up and most likely it can be treated. Just because my eyes are sore doesn't mean I will go blind'.

So when we use our wisdom and intelligence in adopting such a positive way of thinking, then even in the event that we do have some difficulties, problems and physical illness, our mental attitude will enable us to handle it more effectively and it will not cause us so much suffering. It is good for us to take control of our mind, focus inwards and maintain the positive attitude.

To summarise the main point, in our everyday lives we all have to accept the reality that we have both natural faults as well as good qualities. This means we have to recognise that and then identify the kind of faults we have which lead us into making mistakes. But we also have to recognise our qualities, the positive attitudes and ways of thinking that we can adopt, recognising our good potential and further strengthen that. Being able to discriminate between our faults and good qualities is what we call 'wisdom', which is a deeper level of intelligence. The next step is to discard the faults and to adopt and strengthen the qualities, such as the positive attitudes, good ways of thinking, and so forth. Because we have intelligence and wisdom and, because we have an interest in our own well being, upon successfully

identifying the good qualities, it be will natural for us to adopt and further develop them. That is something which we will naturally do.

We need to conclude that when we follow our own discriminative wisdom, meaning the wisdom that can successfully distinguish between what is conducive and what is harmful for ourselves, such as good and bad thoughts and so on, we are capable of making the right choices in life and are more likely to avoid big mistakes. Even if we do make mistakes, we are able to recognise and correct them and that is the advantage of following our deeper wisdom.

Whereas if we allow ourselves to become oblivious, letting the ignorant mind take over, and to act blindly or out of impulse, then we are more prone to making mistakes, sometimes great mistakes. So for the interest of our own well being, we need to be committed to follow our wisdom rather than following ignorance.

We will not be able to master all of this right away, but if we think about it slowly and gradually, we will definitely begin to get more and more skilled in doing this. As mentioned previously meditation is one of the best techniques to further develop that and so we can now spend some time in meditation.

Let us readjust our physical posture to be comfortable and then most importantly adopt the right mind-setting for meditation. What disturb our calm and peaceful state of mind are the irrational and discursive thoughts. We can all identify with these thoughts that cause us to feel angst, discomfort and distress as soon as they arise. So having recognised them, and for the purpose of meditation, we need to temporarily and intentionally withdraw from engaging with them by bringing our focus within.

Having done so we need an object to focus and anchor our mind on. We are naturally not capable of being in a thoughtful state for too long, so therefore as a way to train our mind in being focused on an appropriate object, one that does not cause distress, here, for the purpose of our meditation, we will use our own breath. Based on the natural rhythm of our breathing, we bring our full attention and focus one hundred per cent on the breath itself. This means we pay full attention and focus on nothing other than breath. So in this way, for the next few minutes, we will adopt this meditation technique. (*Meditation*)

I am wondering if there are any questions. Perhaps some good questions that someone may have. If you have any questions, you may raise your hands.

*Question:* In some difficult situations, in order to deal with it, how much do you practice patience and when do you take action?

*Answer:* If the action that you need to take involves having to get angry, then that will never solve the problem. If you take action from within anger, then the problem, whatever it may be, will not be solved effectively.

Alternatively, trying to be patient does not imply that one does not take any action. In fact taking action from within the frame of mind of being patient is the best way to solve

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the problem. What patience really means in its proper context, is the mental state that does not allow hardship, suffering and harm to cause a disturbance to the mind. So when one takes action from an undisturbed state of mind, it naturally becomes more effective. Of course there will be situations where we have to speak up for our rights, but we can do this with a mind free from anger, with a mind of patience, without losing genuine concern for the other. When we take the other's well being into consideration with some sense of love and compassion for them as well, then when we speak up for our rights, it can be done effectively in that way.

Of course in reality many of the problems we are facing are in relation to someone who is close to us, particularly in relation to having been in a committed relationship, sometimes for twenty or thirty years. Having lived and shared a life together for that long, it seems absurd that there are problems arising from what is otherwise a committed relationship. When people get married there is a saying that, 'We are now together for better or for worse'. That means in good times or bad times we are going to stick together, we will always be sharing everything. That's the Tibetan approach and way of looking at marriage.

The reality is that it is not going to be all good and happy times; there are bound to be difficult times as well, but that's not going to daunt your commitment to staying together. That's the idea behind it anyway.

So what this implies is that all is well when things are going well, but when things are difficult in a relationship, then 'for better or worse' means to not give up on each other but to continuously help each other. That should be the real connotation.

All of the problems that come about in a relationship boil down to one point, which is the lack of patience in being able to deal with each other. When there is a lack of patience, then by default it means that there is anger in your relationship. When anger takes over in a relationship and is mutually expressed, then in terms of one's words and gestures, it will all be unpleasant. This is true within any committed relationship, between couples, parents and children, siblings or friends. Thus practising patience would be the basis for a mutually good relationship. When we think about it, often the situation is not bad to begin with, it's not a significant problem that may arise between two people, but that escalates when there is anger. That is how we need to see that an otherwise insignificant situation can lead up to a hostile feeling and environment. Thus, there are people who say, 'I can't tolerate living with them any longer and want us to lead separate lives'.

It is best to try to avoid such situations from the very beginning. If you take heed not to give in to hurtful speech, then there is no basis and nothing to escalate. I have also witnessed occasions where a young child may call their parents 'naughty'. I have asked the parents with whom I have a close association, 'Why is the child saying that?' There is a reason behind a child telling the parents, 'naughty'. It is because the parents have initiated that. If the children are doing something and you immediately start yelling at them, 'You are a naughty child', then,

that's where they got it from. So naturally they will respond back with the same words or gestures. There are measures that one can take to prevent the child from doing something without having to be harsh and calling them 'naughty' or 'bad'. So from the very beginning, it is good to use gentle and pleasant words to educate the child, so they grow up with the environment of using pleasant speech.

Even a young child defends themselves and does not readily accept that they are naughty. I have an example with Tara.

When Tara was about five and Susie about three, we had a meal together, and in order to test out Tara, I was complimenting Susie and saying, 'Oh Susie is a very good girl' (*laughter*). Tara immediately exclaimed that, 'No, Susie is naughty sometimes' (*laughter*). Then I asked her, 'Is your father naughty?' and she said, 'Yes'. 'Is your mother naughty?' 'Yes'. 'So you must be naughty?' She exclaimed, 'No, I am not naughty!' (*Laughter*).

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

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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