
our experiences in this way is good for us to do because then we can clearly see that our interpretation of an object is what causes our experience, rather than the object itself. This in turn shows us that our experiences are caused by our internal conditions and that our level of happiness is created by our own minds.

So, the reason why we feel elated one moment and sad the next is because of our discursive and superstitious thoughts, and this is nothing other than a reflection of our minds being influenced by those thoughts. Our minds will constantly fluctuate between excitement and dejection for as long as we do not realise that our minds are influenced by our internal conditions. We all would have noticed that sometimes we feel jubilant in the morning because everything seems fine, but later in the day we feel gloomy instead because certain situations are not as we want them. However, if we identify that the reason we are swinging between these extreme states is because our discursive thoughts are influencing us, we can prevent ourselves from giving in to having these kinds of distracted states of mind. "Giving in" here means completely allowing ourselves to be influenced by our negative states of mind. If we instead take a grip of our emotions and attitudes by saying, "I am not going to allow my mind to fluctuate between extremes and give these distracting thoughts power", we will have much more control over our states of mind.

I have explained how our experiences of extreme, irrational joy and our experiences of extreme, irrational melancholy are dependent on our contact with an object – how we view that object determines the experiences we have. In Buddhist teachings, we call an object that influences us to feel elated or despondent a "disturbing object". The reason why we use the meditation technique is to temporarily distance ourselves from these kinds of disturbing objects. This is done by choosing an alternative and appropriate inner object to focus on in our meditation. An "appropriate inner object" is an internal object that does not cause the delusions or distractions to arise in our minds. So, for as long as we are able to maintain a single-pointed focus on an inner object, even if it is only for a few minutes, we will have distanced ourselves from the disturbing objects that bother us. Meditating, therefore, enables us to experience a sense of tranquillity and calmness within our minds because we have detached ourselves from the delusions.

Of course, we may initially experience this sense of tranquillity while meditating, but find that we are easily influenced by disturbing objects and have a chaotic mind when we are not meditating. This is because our minds have not yet become acquainted with focusing on an inner object; thus more practice is needed. However, with time and cultivating a gradual and consistent meditation practice, we will become more and more acquainted with maintaining the peaceful effect the focus on the inner object has. We will then be able to maintain our focus on the internal object in our meditation practice, but more importantly, we will be able to maintain our focus outside of our meditation practice so that our minds do not become as disturbed as they did previously. This means that when we go about our daily life and come into contact with a disturbing object which would have

previously agitated us, the contact with that object will not affect us negatively at all. Naturally, we will not experience this effect immediately after just a few attempts at meditation, but if we are persistent and in our meditation practice, gradually we will definitely experience it.

For now, when we do experience a few minutes of stillness while meditating, we can use our intelligence and gain the wisdom that settling the mind is possible. We will be able to see, through the results of our meditation, that calming our minds is possible and that we can unquestionably experience peaceful states. This personal experience of the meditation technique gives us important evidence that we all have the potential to cultivate composed states of mind. If we train our minds further through steady perseverance, our meditation practice will definitely reach a point where our minds maintain tranquillity regardless of the situation we find ourselves in. We can learn all this from just a short meditation and we can use what we learn to develop a deeper understanding to increase our wisdom.

Let us now engage in the meditation technique. As mentioned previously, having a relaxed and comfortable physical posture is important, so we should spend a few moments readjusting our sitting position accordingly.

The inner object that we will choose for our meditation practice is the image of our breath. "Image" here means bringing our mental awareness to and basing it on our breath. We can imagine seeing the breath coming in and going out and maintain our entire focus on that natural process – all our mental awareness can be placed on the natural rhythm of our breathing pattern. Before we begin meditating, and in order to gain its full benefit, we need to be fully committed in doing this practice. This means we commit to focusing 100 per cent on our breath; not allowing our minds to be preoccupied with any other thoughts or ideas. If we allow ourselves to pay part attention to our breath but partly have our attention elsewhere, then we're not really doing the practice properly, because our mind is not fully focused on the inner object. So, to be fully focused, we need to dedicate ourselves to bringing our full attention to the breath itself. We do not need to feel pressure that this concentration will be for a long time. Intending to keep our full focus on the breath for just a few moments is worthwhile. Even short meditations are beneficial because during that time we distance our attention from all other thoughts, sensations, feelings and objects that we are normally preoccupied with. So, for the next few minutes, we will completely distance ourselves from disturbing objects and bring our full attention and focus to the breath itself. We can maintain that single-pointed concentration for as long as we can as our meditation technique. [*Pause for breathing meditation.*]

That should be sufficient for now.

Now that you have attempted to meditate and know what to do, continuing such a practice would be good. It is an excellent way for you to take responsibility for your own mind. I mention regularly that a stable meditation practice is the optimum method of having control over your mind and the best way to care for your personal

wellbeing. Your wellbeing ultimately depends on how you conduct yourself and the responsibility for it definitely rests with you. To be aware of this responsibility and to acknowledge it will help you take the initiative to train your mind by meditating. Unfortunately, you cannot wait around expecting someone else to make you happy or to make all the conditions right for you! Your happiness is your own responsibility and recognising this fact will encourage you to take the initiative now to create your own happiness. To help you to do this, you can recognise that your wellbeing and happiness do not lie solely in external conditions by doing the inner investigation that I outlined earlier. This will show you that the real source of your happiness – particularly in relation to your state of mind – is internal because it depends on your attitude. Therefore, taking the initiative to cultivate your good inner conditions by meditating is in your best interests. The practice of meditation is a tool that you can adopt for your own betterment.

Taking responsibility for your own wellbeing means adopting whatever is beneficial for yourself. We all need to adopt conditions that are favourable to our wellbeing, whether they relate to our daily lives, like our education, or to our spiritual practice, like meditating. We also all need to discard whatever is harmful and detrimental to our wellbeing. Recognising the importance of acquiring good conditions and abandoning what harms us is very useful because it is the ultimate way we can protect ourselves from adversity and negativities. If we can take the initiative to protect ourselves by adopting what is beneficial and discarding what is harmful, then that is a great achievement for our personal wellbeing. To do this requires the intelligence or wisdom of recognising what is worth adopting and what needs discarding. This applies to whatever activity we engage in, whether it is spiritual or mundane.

We can apply this principal to situations that are not immediately to our liking – particularly when we know that accepting a situation will mean a better outcome in the long run. An example of this is the husband of a couple who had recently moved house. He confided to me that he didn't like the style of the kitchen, but because his wife did, he said to himself, "Even though the kitchen doesn't appeal to me, my wife really likes it. I have to live with my wife and I definitely need her. She is much more important to me than how the kitchen looks, so I'll accept the kitchen and live with it. That's fine."

This is an example of replacing your own interest with someone else's. Sometimes we need to let go of our preference because holding too fast to "*my choice*" is how conflicts arise. Disputes arise when we stubbornly argue for what we want – we all can see that many conflicts often start over very insignificant matters. Letting go of our personal wishes, however, can lead to more harmonious relationships. In this case, the husband forwent his dislike of the kitchen's style in favour of his wife's opinion and concern. That is a very good way to think. Further, the husband considered the bigger picture and so was able to agree with his wife and overcome a minor preference in order to achieve something more important for his state of mind. We always gain more

when we take others' wishes into consideration. Initially, we may seem to be losing something, but really we are the one who actually has a gain and there really is no loss.

Another time, this same couple had made lunch for me, and when they were serving, the husband said, "My wife Regina is very good. I'm not very good, but she is because I often complain and nag her, but she just smiles, accepts what I say and doesn't really respond." This is another practical example of being in a committed relationship and taking the initiative to let go of personal interest in favour of the other person. In both examples, the husband and wife each allow the other's interest to take effect, but not from a place of complete surrender.

We can now cover a few lines from the text we are studying.

4.2.2.1.2.3. The way to train the mind in the stages of the path of beings of the great scope

4.2.2.1.2.3.2. The actual paths

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2. How to develop an awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1. The stages of training the awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1. Training the mind in the pith instructions on the six causes and effect, which comes from the lineage traced to the great master Atisha

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2. Extensive explanation

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2. The actual training in the stages

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1. Training the mind to strive for the welfare of others

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.2. The actual development of the mind that strives for others' welfare

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.2.2. Cultivating compassion

The definition of love and how to develop it was described in earlier sessions. In our last session, compassion was defined and the object of compassion was established. Having given a description of the objects of compassion, the text now goes on to explain what kind of appearance compassion takes. In other words, how is compassion formed?

The text describes cultivating compassion as wishing all sentient beings to be free from suffering, and generating that state of mind by contemplating how wonderful their freedom from suffering would be. Compassion is therefore focusing on the suffering of others and generating the following states of mind:

- How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from their suffering;
- May all sentient beings be free from their suffering; and
- I will free all sentient beings from their suffering.

Reflecting on these three specific points is how compassion is generated.

We cultivate compassion by focusing on the object, namely, other sentient beings who are experiencing suffering. By relating to their suffering, we are able to generate the thought, "How wonderful it would be if all sentient beings were free from their suffering." This mindset leads us to wish, "May all sentient beings be free from their suffering", which consequently moves us to

the further aspiration, "I will take responsibility to free all sentient beings from their suffering."

The text will describe how to generate compassion in greater detail later on, however to further explain what is presented here is that one generates compassion by focusing on others' suffering and not being able to tolerate it. Normally we are not able to tolerate our own suffering and want to be free from it, but here we exchange the wish to be relieved from our own suffering to instead relieve the suffering of others. The extent to which we cannot tolerate others' suffering is the extent to which we will be able to generate a strong wish.

We can relate this to our daily lives. If someone's poverty does not affect us, we do not take much initiative in helping to relieve them of their hunger, thirst or impoverished conditions. Whereas, people who take the initiative, do so because they cannot tolerate seeing others in distressing situations. There are many individuals who go to great lengths to help others. Rather than keeping their money in the bank, they use it to alleviate others' suffering. They may not necessarily follow a particular religion, but they are very inclined to help and serve others in order to relieve them from their suffering. These individuals and groups take it upon themselves to build adequate housing for those who have very low living standards, and provide food and drink to those who are hungry and thirsty. In this way we can see how the initiative of freeing others from suffering relates to an intolerance of their suffering – the wish for others not to experience suffering compels one to take responsibility in freeing them from that pain. This is a really important point to consider when developing compassion.

Further, and as I regularly emphasise, we value those who are genuinely concerned about us. If a person has a strong attachment to us, there is not a sound basis for us to consider that person as precious. Similarly, if we lost contact with a person who merely had a fleeting attraction to us, then that would not be a great loss. However, if we lost someone who showed us genuine concern and love that would indeed be a great loss. This is because when we are distressed or in a difficult situation, the person who comes to our aid is the person who is genuinely concerned about us. This person would have a true sense of love and compassion for us, which is incredibly valuable because that person would be the one to help us in our time of need. Likewise, for us to be on the receiving end of genuine love and compassion, we need to cultivate those qualities ourselves, and extend them to others. This is how a mutual benefit can be derived from developing love and compassion. Therefore, there is great value in generating genuine concern and love for others from a sense of true compassion.

Practical examples that we relate to, can help us to recognise the value of love and compassion. Those who devote themselves to caring for and helping others may wonder who will care for them when they get sick, but there are many examples of people naturally coming forward and helping care for those who have been concerned about and helped others. Receiving kindness from other people seems to be a natural and immediate result of having been kind and considerate towards

others. We can reflect on and recognise that a genuine sense of love and compassion naturally brings people together, and does so in a harmonious and joyful way.

Meditating, and cultivating love and compassion are invaluable activities because they change how we relate to others. A result of personally cultivating and developing a real sense of love and compassion is that wherever you go, everyone you come into contact with will be viewed as dear and very close. This overcomes the norms of seeing some people as friends, others as enemies and most as strangers. An unbiased sense of love and compassion does not create categories of "friends", "enemies" and "strangers" because someone who has really cultivated and developed genuine love and compassion finds everyone equally appealing and endearing. Such a person would have an unbiased focus on other people's welfare and wellbeing, and a genuine wish for others to be happy and free from suffering. This is how we can best relate to the great value of love and compassion.

Indeed, how wonderful it would be if we could start to see whoever we relate to as being like a close friend or relative. How truly wonderful that would be. For someone who has developed genuine love and compassion that would be natural.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, we can again take the opportunity to spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object to focus on can be the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the chant, we can try to maintain a full focus on its sound. We need to again withdraw our attention from all other distractions and just place our full focus on the mantra's sound. Then, when the recitation subsides, we can try to maintain our focus for a few moments on the space left when the sound disappears.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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