
the distress in our mind. Then even if we were to notice it, because we have been stuck for so long, it gets worse and worse each year. The more we dwell on it, the more immersed we become; it's like an endless spiral that we get into. That situation can be psychologically very disruptive for oneself and thus we need to be really mindful from the very outset. Particularly for the younger generation, it is important to check your state of mind, and not to allow yourself to go down that path of disruptive mental states, such as depression and so forth. Of course, on one hand we need to protect ourselves from getting into that state of being completely overwhelmed by heavy negative emotions, but on the other hand we also need to acknowledge that everyone has occasions of feeling a little bit down, depressed or sad. For one reason or another everyone will naturally feel a little bit unhappy at times. Regardless of your status, whether you are rich or poor, whether you are healthy or sick, or whether you have a good job or not, whatever kind of situation you may be in, as long as you are an ordinary human being, we will have reasons to be unhappy. It is important to acknowledge that so that we don't feel completely alone in thinking, 'Why is this happening to me? I am the only one who is suffering this way'. And feeling that it is unjust and that there is no help. This is something that we need to be mindful of, because it is not true. Everyone, to a certain degree would have some reason to feel unhappy at times, so we shouldn't feel alone and think that no one could understand or help us.

So the means and ways of how to detect what is going on within one's own mind, what state of mind one is in, what kind of emotions one is experiencing and how to overcome them, is first done by taking the initiative to investigate one's state of mind. Again the main point in relation to the delusions that arise in our mind is that we need to do an honest assessment of ourselves. We need to check on what occasions the delusions arise, what kind of objects we are focused on when they arise, how to overcome and divert our attention, and to not focus on the objects which cause distress and delusions to arise. When we do that investigation, we come to notice that we do have control over our minds. We do have a choice of what to focus on and what not to focus on. Therefore we will be able to notice for ourselves that we are not entirely under the sway of the delusions because we can choose what objects we focus on or not. Therefore the meditation technique is applicable here as a way of choosing an appropriate focal object, to familiarise our mind with and to divert our attention from those objects which cause delusions to arise.

To summarise and categorise all the states of mind there are two main streams: there are the faulty states of mind and the positive states of mind. In relation to the faulty states of mind there may be different levels or degrees. However, for certain faulty states of mind, if we don't take the initiative to overcome them, then they will cause us real distress, mental agony and psychological pain. Therefore the meditation technique is a way for one to begin to overcome these faulty states of mind, in order for the transformation to take place, we need to adopt the meditation technique.

The transformation will definitely take place once we take the initiative to apply the appropriate technique. As mentioned earlier this technique is based on inner investigations, because the transformation or change does not come about from external sources, but rather it has to come from within oneself. So transforming our negative or faulty states of mind into positive states has to occur within oneself and that is how meditation becomes the most essential technique. We can now apply some time for meditation.

We again readjust our physical posture to be comfortable, relaxed and upright. With our mindset we need to bring our full attention and focus on our meditation object, which is our own breath. That means we actually withdraw our attention from all other forms of objects or thoughts and memories—we completely withdraw from all that and bring a hundred percent focus and attention on the breath itself. In this way, for the next few minutes, we will spend our time in meditation. (*Pause for meditation*)

That will be sufficient for now. Just as we have attempted now in our short session, it would be good to regularly adopt the practice of meditation.

The essential point that we need to acknowledge for ourselves is how changing one's attitude and way of thinking can definitely have the effect of lessening any kind of pain or suffering that we may be experiencing. We will find that there are many instances where just changing or shifting our way of thinking and our attitude can lighten whatever experience we are going through. Changing our attitudes in certain ways can make us feel much lighter and more joyful even if initially there is some distress. Likewise changing one's attitude from an otherwise happy and joyful state of mind, by the slight change of one's way of thinking, can also cause one great distress. So it can go either way. But the main thing is that it does have an effect regardless of the external situation. Even if initially an external situation may have caused distress, and the situation may not have changed, but if we look at it a different way and adopt a more positive attitude, our mindset will be different. From an earlier distressed state, we can become much more accepting, calm and relaxed. That is proof that regardless of the external situation, one can change one's experience by changing one's attitude and state of mind.

Transformation of one's state of mind comes through the training in meditation and that is how meditation will assist us. These are important points to know.

Feeling distress is due to focusing on a particular type of object. If we are familiar with meditation we will be able to access the technique or use that familiarity to remind us to change our object and focus, then because one has changed the object from the one which causes distress, one feels relief. So that's how it actually works.

So it is in this way, by adopting the meditation technique, we will find various means and ways of how to deal with different kinds of situations that occur on a psychological level.

Does anyone have any questions?

Question: When I attempt to do an analytical meditation, my mind seems to lose the point and I get distracted again. Can Geshe-la give some advice on how to maintain my focus in an analytical meditation?

Answer: It is because our mind is so easily distracted that I emphasised that in adopting the meditation technique, from the very outset one needs to be mindful of not allowing the mind to waver from the object. In order to have a good quality meditation we must train our mind to maintain its focus on the object for whatever duration it may be, even if initially it is a short time, so that it becomes familiar. Meditation is about focusing on a particular chosen object, whatever the object may be. When we attempt to meditate, if from the very outset we allow our mind to constantly go back and forth, allowing it to waver and don't pay much attention to focusing on the chosen object, then that itself becomes a familiarity, a habit. It becomes such a stubborn habit that whenever we engage in meditation, our mind will be wavering, going back and forth and in every direction. Thus in training our mind to meditate, from the very outset, we need to apply a focused mind on the object. If one is not able to focus on the object at all, then we need to temporarily leave the meditation session and try to find other means and techniques to overcome the excitement in our mind. Because the excitement is causing the distraction in our mind we need to apply a specific antidote to overcome it.

Analytical meditation is very useful and important for us, especially as beginners, to analyse whatever topics we are dealing with. However we need to be mindful that analytical meditation is also based on a focused mind, if we don't have a focused mind whatever we try to analyse will not be carried out fruitfully. That is why it is mentioned in the instructions that we need to alternate between focused and analytical meditation, not to do just one or the other but rather to alternate and combine both.

It is said that through the combination of the focused and analytical meditation, one acquires all the positive qualities in one's mind.

In a focused meditation one chooses a particular object and for the duration of the meditation the emphasis is on maintaining one's focus and attention just on that one object. Whereas in an analytical meditation, while one maintains one's focus and attention on the object, it is a way of analysing the object so as to increase one's understanding and wisdom. It does not mean that one could do an analytical meditation without a focused and attentive mind; rather that the specific emphasis is on analysing and looking into more details of that object as a way to gain further understanding. Both are equally important for us.

Question: What is the deeper significance of a mantra?

Answer: You cannot really give a simple explanation of the meaning of mantra without going into what tantra is all about, because a mantra comes from the tantric explanation of the teachings. However one of the main points is that whatever mantra it may be, such as Shakyamuni's or the mantra of any other enlightened being, the mantra signifies the enlightened mind of that particular being.

The mantra of a particular deity represents and signifies the actual enlightened mind of that deity. Reciting the mantra of the deity has the significance of making us closer to the enlightened mind, binding us closer to the enlightened being. That is the general explanation. Of course you could go into deeper explanations and how it benefits us on a subtler level, but that is hard to describe in a few words.

The main thing is that if one is inclined to recite a mantra it is good to do it with a focused mind, focusing particularly on the deity. If one recites the mantra with a focused mind then the benefit is much greater. It is not to say that there will be no benefit at all when reciting a mantra with a distracted mind, but the real and greater benefit of reciting the mantra comes with a focused and attentive mind.

When mantra recitation is done with a focused and attentive mind, particularly relating to the deity that the mantra is recited for, then one can imagine receiving the blessings from that deity. For example, when reciting the mantra of the enlightened being Tara, at the same time as one is reciting the mantra, one can also develop a strong conviction that one is actually receiving the blessings of Tara's holy and enlightened body, speech and mind. Many have confided in me that they have received immense benefits from doing that sort of practice. On many occasions' people have actually experienced that it really helps the mind, alleviating a lot of distress, agony, worries or fears in their minds. So there's definitely a benefit.

Some have confided in me that in the past when they have had a difficult situation, or were feeling very distressed and there was nothing much they could do except huddle in a corner and just do nothing. Now, they say, 'After having access to reciting mantra and understanding the benefits, I don't have to worry about doing that anymore. Anytime I start feeling uncomfortable, uneasy or distressed, I relate to Tara, recite the mantras and I immediately feel calm and peaceful'.

Likewise in generating positive states of mind I try to encourage others to develop this simple, clear and conscious state of mind which makes the determination that 'I will do everything possible to bring other beings to happiness and I will do everything within my capacity to remove other being's sufferings'. Just by generating that positive thought in one's mind and focusing on that, even for a short while, can really alleviate distress within oneself, open up one's mind and at the same time, allow one to feel more courageous, calm and relaxed.

Generating and familiarising oneself with the thought and attitude that, 'I will do everything possible to bring other beings into happiness and alleviate their sufferings' is a method to actually increase love and compassion within one's own heart. The more that love and compassion expands and increases in one's heart, the more joyful and relaxed one will actually feel. It will naturally release any kind of feelings of distress. That is how we can see the practical benefit for oneself.

Before we end the session for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the focus

will be on the sound of the mantra to be recited. As it has been brought up in the questions, it is indeed true that when one recites the mantra one will feel the benefit of feeling a sense of tranquility, but in fact on a more subtle level, it is said by reciting the mantra or any mantra of an enlightened being, it has a great benefit of purifying a lot of negativities within oneself. Negativities that one has accumulated in many past lives can be purified by reciting the mantra or the name of the enlightened being. So now of course, if one were to further ask, 'how does it occur?' Then that is a more subtle level and hard to describe in a few words. However, that is what is explained in the teachings. So with that understanding and significance in one's mind, one can recite the mantra.

In relation to the mantra that we are about to recite, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra, the Tibetan word for the Buddha is *Shakya Tupa*. The word *tupa* literally means *able* and has the connotation of overcoming all delusions; completely overcoming and eradicating all faults and delusions in the mind. So that is the significance of the word *tupa*.

One of the main qualities of the Buddha is that of 'abandonment', having abandoned all negativities. When that is presented, then the fact that the Buddha is endowed with all good qualities is naturally understood.

So it is in this way that we can relate to the significance of reciting the name of such an enlightened being, one who has overcome all negativities and is endowed with all good qualities. We now have a little understanding of how reciting the name of such a being can have a positive effect upon oneself in eliminating and purifying negativities. So, with this understanding we can recite the mantra and do a short meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor
Edit 1 by Ven. Lozang Lhamo
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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