
When we think about this presentation we can see it is a logical system or technique for developing genuine insight within us. It is a tested and systematic way of gaining insight. If one makes decisions based on what others say we cannot be certain whether we are making the right choices or decisions in life. Whereas if we make decisions based on our own understanding, insight and experiences, then these decisions are much more firm and stable. Therefore I personally feel that the way in which this is presented in a logical, systematic way is an approach one can utilise for one's own well being.

This systematic approach will assist us and prevent us being swayed or fooled by others. Initially we may be a bit gullible and follow whatever others say. If we don't take the time and initiative to really assess and analyse whatever instructions we have been given we often find out later that they were not right and did not work out for us, and in turn we may get upset and angry with them. That is because we have not personally taken the initiative to check it out first.

When we receive the Buddha's instructions presented in the systematic, logical and profound way that he presents his teachings and advice, we can see that he was a indeed a great master and a really wise person. In very simple terms, what the Buddha basically said was, 'here are some suggestions and advice, test it out yourself, and having tested and analysed the advice by using your intelligence if you find it worthy of implementing, then implement it. Don't accept it just because I say it, but instead use your own intelligence and wisdom to analyse it.' This is how he presented his instructions, giving us the ultimate choice and authority to choose whether it is right or wrong.

Buddhists consider the Buddha to be completely free from all faults and endowed with all qualities. What proves that the Buddha is indeed a being who is free from all faults and endowed with all qualities is the way he presents his teachings. When he gives us the full authority and means to investigate and check out what he is saying it means that he has no fear that anyone will find fault with what he is saying, and that there are no flaws he needs to hide.

We can relate this to circumstances where someone has something to hide; they will not let others probe too much into what they are saying because of the fear that others will find out what they are trying to conceal. That is how someone who is sharing something that is not completely based on the truth or honesty behaves. Whereas if there's nothing to hide, then there's no fear on others checking it out, analysing and investigating what one says. So this is how one can relate to the qualities of the Buddha.

Coming back to the meditation that we are attempting to do, I have previously given many instructions on how to meditate and its benefits. Many of you have heard this many times. I have no doubt that you are implementing it in your life. With the assurance that we are all quite familiar with the meditation practice, we can now adopt the meditation technique.

Whilst I would have given instructions on how to meditate and discussed the benefits of the meditation

technique, I have to confess that I dare not ask you to investigate what I say is true or not, because I have to admit that I still have faults. I am not completely faultless; as ordinary beings, we all have mistaken perceptions and views and are all prone to making mistakes.

However, as a reminder, the essential points that we need to be mindful of to assist us in our meditation practice are that there are two main obstacles to our meditation that we have to attempt to overcome. These are on one hand excitement and on the other hand dullness. These are the two extreme faults in meditation. Excitement is a hindrance to focussing our mind, which causes us not to focus on the chosen object. Excitement causes our mind to wander off and that is why it is a fault in meditation. Whereas when dullness arises we may seemingly maintain a focus on the object but then we will notice the clarity of our mind starts to fade away and it is in a foggy state. That is the onset of dullness. Dullness obstructs the clarity of our mind when we are focusing on an object.

We need to maintain a constant state of awareness and mindfulness in order to place our full attention and focus on our chosen object. Having initially placed our attention and focus on the object we periodically check whether that focus and attention is still placed on the object or not. If we find that it has wandered off then we need to bring it back and refocus on the object. If we find that that our mind is still focused and attentive to the object we need not do anything and just maintain our focus on the chosen object. In brief, that is the way we conduct our meditation practice.

Furthermore, having made the decision and commitment to engage in meditation practice, we need to make sure our mind is 100% focused on the object. If we don't apply that 100% focus on the object and allow our mind to be half focussed on the object of meditation, and half wandering off somewhere else, then that itself becomes a habit and our meditation will never succeed and we will never have a genuine and good meditation session. So, in order to protect our mind from forming that habit and going into that state, we need from the very outset to be fully committed to being one hundred percent focused on that object. We need temporarily to completely withdraw our attention and focus from all other forms of distraction, whether they are external objects or thoughts—they are all distractions, and bring our attention and focus to the chosen object for meditation. In this case our chosen object for meditation is our breath. We bring our attention and focus within to be free from all other thoughts and then place our full attention upon the breath and maintain that for the next few minutes. In this way, we will engage in the meditation practice (*Pause for meditation*).

That will be sufficient for now. It would be really worthwhile to try and implement a regular meditation practice in our daily life, just as we have attempted to do so in our short session now. At the least it gives our mind a break, which otherwise is in a very busy state; occupied with so many distractions, confused and muddled. When we adopt this meditation practice we will notice for ourselves that our mind settles down. If we chose the appropriate object to focus on and we do this practice successfully, our mind will naturally come to its natural

calmer and quiet state, and we will experience that to a certain extent. This will then help one to be clearer.

When one does this meditation practice sincerely one will reach the point where one's mind becomes more settled and quiet. That is something we need to attain in meditation practice and slowly and gradually work on improving. When we initially get that experience we may feel our meditation practice is working well. But if we are not careful we can get side-tracked and involved with other things going on in our mind and completely lose that natural state. We may not even recognise that our mind is being distracted and going unattended. That's when we may feel that we are not getting much out of meditation practice.

When we are able through our meditation practice to gain a relatively more relaxed and positive state of mind then even the normal enjoyments that we partake of in our everyday life will be much more appreciated. We will appreciate life much more. I am not implying that these are the great blissful experiences that we can gain from meditation, which are, of course, the ultimate goal that we will reach. We sometimes fail to enjoy even the mundane normal experiences that we have because of our mind is distressed and full of distractions and so forth. Even normal life experiences can be appreciated more when the mind is relaxed and more positive.

It is when we have reached such a more stable state in our everyday life, where our mind is relatively more relaxed, positive and clear, that we can claim, 'I am happy'. There would be no reason for one to say, 'Oh, I am not well. I am not happy', when the mind is relaxed and naturally more positive.

In contrast to that, if the mind is in a perpetual disturbed and troubled state, full of anxieties, worries and fears, one is not able to claim, 'I am happy', because the mind itself is disturbed. It is really important and actually interesting to notice that there is a connection between the self or 'I' and our state of mind. There is definitely a relationship there. When the mind is genuinely calm and positive the 'I' who possesses the mind can claim, 'I am happy'. Whereas if the mind is disturbed and full of worries then the one who possesses the mind, the 'I', cannot say that they are happy.

We can analyse further this relationship between the state of mind and the 'I' or the self. We can analyse how the relationship is formed and how each affects the other. Just contemplating and thinking about this is, in itself, like a meditation. That thinking process or analysis is a way for us to gain some great benefit or well being within us.

I am not in any way saying these things lightly here. What I am trying to share is something for you to look into and find out for yourselves. But I personally feel that there's definitely a relationship between the 'I' and the mind. It is something that is really very pronounced and true. To re-emphasise this point again. When the 'I' is associated with a positive and kind state of mind, the individual person in turn feels genuinely contented and happy and has a genuinely joyful and happy attitude. But when the 'I' or 'self' is associated with negative states of mind, anger for example, then that individual at that

moment is not a happy person and is in a disturbed state. This is something that one will notice for oneself through one's own experiences.

It is worthwhile for one to analyse and identify the positive states of mind that make one feel more relaxed and calmer. How do we develop that gentler and kinder mind? It is worthwhile to do this investigation and find out, simply because we all want to be happy. There's no one who intentionally wants to experience hardship, difficulties and suffering. We all equally want to be happy and don't want to experience any suffering. Therefore it is worthwhile to take the initiative to find the means to achieve that.

Since we don't have much time left, I will not go into explanations of the text. But I will re-emphasise and share with you what works for me. I cannot claim to have any great levels of meditation practice, but I do spend some significant time practising and what I find really helpful for my own mind is to spend a few minutes each day just cultivating the thought and wish that, 'I will do whatever is necessary and possible to help other beings, and I will not intentionally cause any harm and hurt to other living beings'. It really gives me great solace to contemplate this point and make that sort of daily commitment in my mind. For example, I generate the thought, 'On this day I will not intentionally harm any living beings and I will do everything possible to assist and help other beings'. The more I generate and cultivate this thought and wish in my mind, the more it seems to add real, great purpose and meaning to my life.

The more I familiarise myself this attitude in my mind, the more it seems to bring about a natural appreciation of others. Whenever I go out to meet and deal with others, it naturally has a positive effect of being able to joyfully engage and associate with others, and they seem to notice that. From my side, I definitely find that this is due to that familiarisation and commitment that I try to make everyday. It seems to really increase a sense of joy and ease to be with others. I find that that is something great to achieve.

We could use the remaining few minutes for questions. Are there any questions?

Question: Geshe-la you bring great joy to the people who come here. I am wondering if you go to other places like schools or other gatherings?

In the past I went to Monash University a few times. There used to be a Buddhist group there that invited me to visit them. I am not sure if that group continues. But I must confess that I am a little bit timid about going out to address big crowds. I have addressed different kind of groups on several occasions. I once went to Gippsland. It was quite a large gathering.

I also went to the Art Gallery once, where there is a group. It was a big gathering at that time. There were about over a hundred people then. The topic was patience. After addressing the gathering a radio announcer asked me a few questions in an interview.

Apparently it had already been announced on the radio that a Buddhist master was giving teachings and he

asked some questions about the relationship we should have with the Aboriginals; something of that nature.

The first comment that I came up with was that a way to have a good relationship and communication with the Aboriginals was to give them the opportunity to have education, that would be really good. What I mentioned then was that when someone has the qualities of learning and education other people seek you out. They want you to come and they want to have you. Whereas if you don't have education, then people shun you and say, 'Go away!' (*laughter*) Of course, what I said then, was something that we could all relate to. This is a significant point that I am trying to relate to all of you here now.

When I was up in Queensland and posted there to teach in a centre I went to neighbouring areas like Noosa, Cairns etc. The gathering there is at a coffee shop. About thirty people came. I went to Swinburne University once and also to Bendigo College, that was more of a gathering of teachers and educators, and I gave a talk.

So your question brought out as a response a little bit of a story about myself (*laughter*). That was a reminder of what I have done. Your question prompted me to think, 'Oh yes, I have indeed been to several places, and I may have more places that come to mind later'. (*laughter*) I have been to Tasmania, and I visited Wodonga and Albury many times. More recently, I have been visiting Warrnambool annually. I have also been to neighbouring states and cities, Adelaide, many times, and Sydney as well.

There is an opportunity for another question. Any other questions?

Asking personal questions and sharing is another significant purpose of our gathering, because we are a gathering of like-minded people, wanting to share and learn from each other. Anything that helps to bring some joy and light-hearted sharing is good. Why not? We may also learn something from sharing. You may be able to take something away from what's being shared. Often there are occasions where we share and there was not much point—maybe we talk and share a lot but we didn't get much out of it. Then sometimes people may ask questions that seem very complicated and you are not really sure what the question is about. Trying to attempt to answer that question can become even more complicated. (*laughter*) You end up with nothing much. It can end up being like a child asking its mother a question and when the mother answers the child goes, 'Why?' Then the mother gives another answer and the child again asks, 'Why?' Then the mother gets annoyed. (*laughter*).

The reason the child keeps asking, 'Why?' is because its curiosity has not been satisfied. Indeed there are groups and settings like this. There may be some people who ask questions but are not really satisfied with the answers and want to keep probing to check further. Sometimes when you are not satisfied with the answers you have to keep on probing and probing to find something.

Before we end the session for this evening, let us take the opportunity to engage in meditation again. This time the object of our focus can be the sound of the Buddha

Shakyamuni's mantra as it is recited. As we hear the chanting, we again distance ourselves from all other distractions and place our full attention and focus on the sound of the mantra. When the recitation subsides, we may have gained through our focus and attention to the sound of the mantra and a little sense of relaxation and an eased mind. So, after the recitation, we maintain our focus on that sense of ease and release of tension and just focus on that for a few moments. That will suffice for our meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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