



Since I have explained a little about the significance and benefits of meditating, we can now do a formal meditation for a few minutes. First, as mentioned previously, we need to adjust ourselves so that we are relaxed, comfortable and sitting in an appropriate posture. Second, we need to generate a positive intention and motivation for our meditation. And third, we need to identify a suitable object for the focus of our meditation. The object that we can focus on now can be our own personal breathing pattern. We can bring our attention inward and concentrate on the natural rhythm of our breath. To do this well, we need to withdraw our attention from all other objects, concerns and thoughts so that our entire focus is single-pointedly on the breath. This single-pointed concentration is what we are attempting to achieve by meditating and it is what this type of mind training involves. So, for the next few minutes, we will place our full attention and focus on the breath and practise the technique. [*Pause for meditation.*]

That will be sufficient for now. If you meditate in the way we just attempted and start a regular practice in your daily life, the results will be highly meaningful and beneficial. Meditating in the morning is ideal because the mind is fresher then and less hyperactive. However, if your schedule cannot allow for a consistent morning meditation practice, then any time during the day, or whenever you have some spare time, is fine. The main need for your practice is to maintain its consistency and continuity. This is so when negative states of mind, or what in Buddhism we call "delusions", are prevalent and strong, you will be better equipped to notice and step back from them. Noticing your delusions and not letting your mind follow those kinds of attitudes is ideal. If you see a negative attitude arise in your mind and you are able to distance yourself from it because you recognise that the delusion will destroy your happiness, you will be better placed to be able to apply an antidote to overcome it. This approach is much more worthwhile and meaningful than allowing yourself to be influenced and dominated by a negative state of mind. A regular meditation practice will help you to be alert to delusions and counteract them.

#### **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**

In previous sessions, I had extensively explained what the Buddhist definitions of love and compassion are. Briefly, love is defined in Buddhist teachings as the wish for other sentient beings to be happy and compassion is defined as the wish for other sentient beings not to suffer.

We have now come to the part in the text we are studying that explains how to cultivate wholehearted compassion. The text describes compassion as a precious and valuable state of mind that we will definitely reap great benefits from if we take the time and energy to develop and cultivate it.

Developing and cultivating compassion is unquestionably something we are all capable of doing.

We can all apply the levels of love and compassion we have developed in our daily interactions with others. We can do this in practical ways through our recognition that every type of relationship we have can be improved by having a genuine sense of concern for the other person. Genuine concern for another person's welfare and the wish to help that person is the basis of love and compassion. If our help is based on love and compassion and we extend it to others, our relationships will become more stable and secure. We are then able to directly benefit other people because we have a genuine concern for their welfare.

When a relationship is based on mutual love and compassion, it is secure and harmonious. The teachings explain that for us ordinary beings the best kind of happiness we can experience is the happiness of harmonious relationships with others. If this is one of the best forms of happiness we can experience, then wanting to foster harmonious relationships with others is natural. Knowing that developing love and compassion for others derives the ultimate benefit for ourselves is a powerful incentive to take a genuine concern in the welfare of other people.

You may be wondering whether attachment to another person is necessary for a relationship to be harmonious. This is a significant issue to investigate. If you look into attachment, particularly strong attachment, you will see that it does not contribute to a healthy relationship, but only serves to destroy its harmony. On a superficial level, attachment may seem to bring people closer together and anger may seem to be the factor that makes them distant from one another, but if we look more deeply, we will see that attachment never contributes to genuine and harmonious connection with others.

In fact, anger occurs between two people when their feelings of genuine concern for the other weakens; it will seep into a relationship when love and compassion declines and is no longer the basis for their real concern. Anger is what destroys the pleasantness in the bond between two people and can only arise because their genuine sense of concern for each other is weak.

These are significant points to ponder because they relate to improving the quality of our lives. Since we all want a good and meaningful life, thinking about what destroys our happiness is worthwhile.

I regularly stress that we need to recognise the people who have genuine concern for us and consider them to be our most precious companions. The reason why they are so precious is because they are the individuals who have a heartfelt concern for our welfare and will be the ones to help us when we are in most need. If we are distressed or face difficulties, those who take a long-term interest in our wellbeing will be the people who have genuine care. A person who has love and compassion for you will not abandon or neglect you in times of hardship. If the relationship is based on a fleeting attraction or attachment for you, the other person will not stick around for too long because their concern for your wellbeing is not genuine. Therefore, we need to recognise who genuinely cares for us and value their concern because these are our unflinching friends.

There are many examples in our lives that show this is true. In the past, I have pointed out instances from the animal realm because the affection that pets give to owners that care

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for them is astounding. Recently, on *Bondi Vet*, the main veterinarian was caring for a young lamb, and the lamb knew the doctor had its best interests at heart because it would show the veterinarian a lot of affection and follow him around. Another time, *Bondi Vet* showed a young goat that bleated and cried when the owner went away, and its great affection towards the carer when she returned. There was also a young lady training to be a veterinarian, who was looking after the dogs and cats, and although she was not their owner, they responded very well to her and her care. The level of recognition that animals have for a person that is genuinely kind and caring towards them is astonishing. Animals have less intelligence than humans, but when it comes to showing affection towards those who have been kind to them, they are able to respond and recognise the care they have been given. Our intellect is greater than animals, so we too need to recognise those who have been kind to us and hold them dear in our hearts. If we recognise and respond positively to those who have shown us genuine concern, they will appreciate our response and a mutually good relationship will be fostered and developed.

Television shows like *Bondi Vet* are worthwhile to watch because we can learn a lot from them. I am fond of shows about people caring for animals because I can see the animals' response to their carers. Of course, there are times when I am too busy to watch television because I have prayers to do, so I often miss these kinds of shows, but whenever I get the chance I watch them because I learn a lot and they remind me of the basis of love and compassion. Animals definitely recognise kindness because when they are treated well, held and patted, they immediately relax, but they will also defend themselves or run away from a person who threatens them. Humans similarly have different reactions to others based on how they treat us. If someone grabbed us out of anger, we would respond negatively and would not be comfortable, but if someone touches us in a caring and nurturing way, we would appreciate it.

The point is that animals and humans are alike because they are sentient beings. "Sentient" means a mind that is able to feel and perceive different things. When one sentient being cares for another sentient being there is recognition of that care and a mutual benefit. We can increase our day-to-day happiness through this genuine and shared sense of nurture we have with other sentient beings with minds. This is what secures a very happy life for us.

When we are young and trained in caring for others, our genuine concern, love and compassion becomes part of our development and upbringing, and the care that is instilled in us becomes natural. Indeed, fostering a genuine sense of love and compassion is very far reaching because it moves from parent to child and on to grandchildren. A lady once told me that she had brought up her daughter with the best care and love she could provide, and consequently her daughter grew up to be joyful and happy. This lady now has a granddaughter who is also a very happy child and it seems that this is because the lady's daughter has provided her child with the same kind of nurture and care she received from her mother. If we are trained to be loving and caring when we are young, this nurturing side of ourselves will develop and extend towards others we come into contact with later in life. This is how love and compassion can be carried through generations to create happy families, happy friendships, happy communities and happy societies.

We can use the rest of the time we have for questions. Does anyone have a question?

*Question:* How can you differentiate between love and attachment—is there a point where love or compassion can turn into attachment?

*Geshe-la:* If the love or compassion was genuine to begin with, there is no way it can turn into attachment. This is because sincere love and compassion is based on a genuine concern for the other person. I can see why you asked that question because many people confuse genuine love with attachment. In fact, many people mislabel their feelings of attachment as love. Often, when people say that they can never love him or her, or that he or she could never love them, what they really mean is that they could never have attachment towards a particular person and that person could never have attachment towards them. Clarity on the distinctions between love, compassion and attachment can prevent these kinds of misunderstandings.

The distinction between attachment, love and compassion can be simply made in the following way. Attachment is based primarily on the nice appearance and actions of another being—we wish to be near them and befriend them because of what they do for us. This longing can be obsessive and because it is based on attraction to another person, it is attachment. Love, on the other hand, is based on a genuine wish for another sentient being to be happy, regardless of how they appear and act towards us. It is an attitude that extends beyond our personal wishes and is not based on personal gain. Similarly, compassion is also not based on our personal needs because it is the genuine wish for another sentient being to be free from misery and suffering. These distinctions are important to remember.

Our attachment to some individuals can bring about some closeness and fondness, but the extent we wish to help and benefit them is limited by the attraction we have towards them—if they do not respond to us in a positive way or show us appreciation, then our closeness and fondness for them fades away. In contrast, genuine love and compassion cannot fade away because the very willingness to be with them is based on attitudes that do not involve self-centred benefits. If we are in a distressed or deprived situation, a person that extends a hand to help us, will do so because of his or her genuine love and compassion. If you are well-off financially and others show you concern and wish to be your friend, the reason is most likely because of attachment. Whether their care for you is attachment will be established when your financial situation changes and your wealth decreases. If the person shies away from you at that time it would be a sign that their attention was based on attachment.

*Question:* The younger generation has so many different technologies in their world, like mobile phones, the internet, PlayStations, Wii, television and paid TV. What do you think the effect of looking at so many different screens has on them?

*Geshe-la:* On an immediate level, I have heard that the radiation from those kinds of devices can cause damage to the brain. On a more practical level, however, these types of technologies often harm a young person's focus on their studies, and can cause envy and distress in the minds of children who do not have access to the same forms of entertainment as their friends. There is additional suffering when it comes to technology because each new gadget, television, game and so on, is soon superseded by a new

version, which prevents satisfaction from ever being obtained. Of course, advertising and having the “latest version” is a business tactic the various companies use to create dissatisfaction and encourage people to buy more. However, the companies’ advertisements can only work if there is dissatisfaction to begin with; if companies provide new versions to make others obsolete, they can capitalise on a person’s dissatisfaction with what they currently have and use that person’s desire to have the most advanced version. In fact, this suffering of dissatisfaction is the real suffering and is not limited to the younger generation.

In traditional Buddhist teachings, one of the faults humans have is dissatisfaction—to not be satisfied with what we have and to constantly want more. Another fault is to never find or define what we want, which means we are constantly striving for forms of satisfaction that cannot be fulfilled. Companies often exploit this psychology of dissatisfaction for their own gain. A personal example I can give of this relates to my television set. I have had a television for many years and it works perfectly, but I recently received a government notification that the older analogue models will no longer work from mid-December because the service will soon only be provided digitally. The notice did say, however, that because I am an older person, they will offer me a digital television. Since my analogue television is not going to work anyway, I accepted their offer. The government then sent out someone to install the new digital television and I was very grateful and thankful. This is an example of how the government takes care of us. There must have been thousands and thousands of other analogue televisions that needed to be replaced, so a lot of time and money would have been necessary to update everyone to a digital system.

The person who came to install my new television was very considerate because he took into account that I might not be able to read the English instructions. He drew specific diagrams and explained which buttons I need to push [*Geshe-la gestures on an imaginary remote control and says in English that this is number one, so you push this one, and that is number two so you push that one. Everyone laughs.*] The person who installed my digital television was very considerate of me and that is a true mark of kindness. If we can implement kindness in our work, we can really benefit others. This is true no matter what field we work in. Of course, doctors and nurses care for others as their livelihood, but if they further treat their patients with genuine concern and kindness there is even greater benefit. Likewise, people in professions that do not directly care for others also have the opportunity to do their work with concern and kindness for others.

On one occasion I was hospitalised for two or three nights, and the doctors and nurses cared for me very well, so, before I was discharged, I went to their main unit to thank them. When I was at their office I thanked everyone and said, “You have cared for me, and I had a really good time.” They were all very surprised to hear me say that! [*Laughter.*] I was being honest because I genuinely felt happy and wasn’t in much pain during my stay—the hospital was comfortable and my appreciation of their care was truthful. An example of this is that the painkillers prescribed for me gave me constipation, so I stopped taking them. When a doctor noticed this he asked me why I was not taking the painkillers, discovered the reason and prescribed a different form of medication that was more comfortable for me. The doctor told me that one of the side effects of the original painkillers was constipation

and he congratulated me on using my intelligence and logic to work out what the best action would be for me to take.

I hope I have not caused restlessness in your mind by rambling on with my stories! [*More laughter.*] I just wanted to share a few significant points in relation to my own experiences.

Before we end the session for the evening, let us again take the opportunity to settle our minds by meditating. This time the object to focus on can be the sound of the mantra to be recited, Buddha Shakyamuni’s mantra. We can place our full attention and focus on the sound of the recitation, and as it subsides, we can keep our focus on where the sound was, that sense of vacuity and blissfulness, for a few moments. This is the way we will conduct our meditation for the next few minutes.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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