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So the point here is that if one has secured enough conditions for inner happiness, then being deprived of external conditions will not harm one. But if one has not secured enough conditions for inner happiness, and we lack external stimulants and it appears that we are lacking the sources of happiness, it can cause a lot of agony and distress if one does not know any better. That is something that we really need to pay attention to.

It is definitely good to think about all these points, and keep this in mind. Of course I only share this with the intention that it can be of some benefit to you in your life, some points to really ponder and think about. One example of how securing the conditions of your own happiness surpasses any kinds of external factors is that if one secures these conditions one will not experience the sufferings and pangs of loneliness. Some people have confided in me that, 'I live like you. I don't have a girlfriend and so forth, but I am quite happy. I don't have many associates but I am quite contented and happy.' What they are telling me is that they are maintaining a certain level of satisfaction and are not completely dependent on external friends. Indeed when one has an unfailing internal friend, the internal companionship of one's positive state of mind, it definitely minimizes our having to rely on external companionship all the time.

One of the main points that I am emphasising here is that one should not allow small matters or conditions to cause one great agony in one's mind. If one has the right perspective and attitude, one can overcome difficult situations because they are actually not that insurmountable when we think about it.

As I regularly share with those I associate with, families and especially young people, we all need companionship and to have girlfriends or boyfriends. Just like parents need companionship, children also need companionship. So it is not about not having relationships and cutting oneself off from relationships altogether. The main emphasis is to have a genuinely good relationship that comes about when it is based on genuine love and compassion for each other. So that is where we really need to put the emphasis. Your relationships with others need to be based on love and compassion.

Of course when a couple first meets it may be attachment that brings them together. So the first connection might be attachment, but what will sustain the relationship is love and compassion, and this is something that we really need too. Love and compassion is something that is developed throughout the stages of the relationship, from the very early stages on, day-by-day. If there is a genuine sense of caring, concern and real nurturing of each other that will make that relationship genuinely healthy. A harmonious good relationship is a real, genuinely happy one. If a relationship is based only on attachment then after a number of years together it might completely break up with hostility and one leaves the other without anything to go by and completely ignores their concerns and rights. That is a clear indication that there was really no love and compassion in the relationship at all, it was just pure attachment.

Having made these points for you to ponder we can now take the time to apply the meditation practice technique which, as mentioned previously, is a method and technique to train our mind so that it does not allow the afflictions or the delusions to fester in it. For the purpose of our meditation practice now, we need to be fully committed that for the next few minutes we will not allow our mind to be

influenced by what we call the afflicted distractions. If we allow our mind to be influenced by the afflicted distractions then that is what causes all of the earlier mentioned disadvantages of attachment, the anger and so forth. So for the purpose of this meditation, we need to completely withdraw from all forms of afflicted distractions and bring our focus inward and place it upon our object of meditation, which is our breath. So place your focus 100% on the breath and maintain that focus for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*).

That would be sufficient for now. Is there a question?

*Question:* Geshe-la mentioned earlier that one needs to limit one's attachment to external things, but to what extent does one give up material things such as money and so forth?

One thing that I regularly emphasise, which may bring out this point, is that reducing attachment to things doesn't mean getting rid of those things. One thing that is specifically emphasised in the Buddhist teachings is to practise satisfaction and contentment. Practising satisfaction and contentment doesn't mean that one has to get rid of all things and live without anything. It doesn't mean being satisfied with nothing. So the main point here is that practising non-attachment doesn't mean getting rid of the object, it just means that the mind should not be obsessed or overly attached to objects.

The earlier explanation would have clarified this point. As I have explained many times, being satisfied with not having too many things doesn't mean that one is left with hardly anything to survive with. Of course we all need a sufficient amount of clothing, food and shelter and so forth to survive. But to be obsessed with having more and more, and not being content when one already has enough to sustain one, is a sign of attachment taking over, and that is something one needs to be aware of.

Your question was about the extent you should go to. Those who have achieved high meditative states called meditative concentration can sustain themselves just on concentration, and don't need to rely on external food. The sustenance of these high level meditators is termed 'the food of concentration'. That, of course, is a very high level of concentration that only some meditators can reach.

The teachings explain that there are different kinds of foods. There is the gross food that we need to consume to sustain our ordinary level. Then there is the food of concentration, mentioned earlier, of great yogis or meditators who have reached that level of concentration. There is also category called mental food. One example of mental food that is given concerns certain kind of birds who leave their eggs in the nest and travel great distances. The mother by merely thinking about her eggs is able to sustain the chicks and even after a number of days when the mother returns, the eggs have hatched and survived. This is said to be an example of mental food. We also see this occurring with sea turtles. Normally for eggs to hatch you have to sit on them and be near them. However with sea turtles we see that the mothers leave them by themselves by the beach and they hatch by themselves and crawl into the sea. I am not sure if this would be in the same category or not, but this is something that we also notice.

On another note: I personally consider the practice of leaving a will to be a very good practice. I think that it is a good thing. My reason for thinking that making a will is a good practice is that after the will has been made there will be less attachment to one's possession. It will seem like a good thing

to have done at the time of death. The inevitable time of passing will be a peaceful passing because of a feeling of fulfilment because one has been able to disperse one's wealth in the way one wants, giving a feeling of satisfaction in one's mind. So that is why I think that it is a good practice and a way to reduce attachment. Does that help to make it clear?

*Questioner:* Yes a little bit, thank you!

Just to refer again to the practice of leaving a will. If someone has not made a will, because they are not able to, or have not got around to it, there could possibly be more attachment. The reason they did not make a will may be because they have too much attachment towards their possessions. Someone confided in me that if one hasn't made a will it might be quite difficult at the time of death. I have a friend who had some sort of patch on his foot. Some people said it might be a serious disease—it could even be leprosy. So out of fear for what it could be and wanting to treat it, he went to a Burmese herbalist. This was in Sarnath in India and we were sharing a room with the herbalist. The herbalist applied something to the foot, which caused it to flare up further. That night my friend came down with a fever, and was in pain, and getting very hot. When he started to have a very high fever it occurred to him, 'Oh, I might even die tonight'. The first thing to occupy his mind, even though he didn't have much money himself, was thinking about others who had left some money with him for safe keeping and how to handle that. You know all of these worries come to mind. This is just an example of a friend relating to me how issues like money and wealth can bring about a lot of worries, particularly in that kind of moment. So one needs to be careful about that. Apparently some sort of poisonous remedy had been put on the foot that initially causes stress, but after it flares up whatever is affecting the skin is drawn out, and it will be cured afterward. That was the idea of the practice.

The main point again relates to practising not becoming attached to objects and one's possessions. If one has sincerely intended to leave one's wealth to others and made a will it will cause less agony and problems in the mind. Of course if one has made a will, but has not really given up possession in one's mind, then making a will on paper would not suffice, because that worry will still affect one if one has not given up attachment to one's possession.

There is a practice in our tradition to reduce attachment to one's possessions such as clothing, food, shelter and so forth. Whenever, for example, we are consuming food or drink we do this not just for the sake of sustaining myself, not just for the sake of sustaining my body, but so that I can be able to benefit and help others. We form the attitude and motivation, 'May the food that I consume now, the drink that I consume now, as well as clothing and shelter, may all of this become a condition for me to be able to benefit other sentient beings'. This attitude and motivation is said to help one to reduce attachment. I have, of course, shared this practice with you many times.

There is another practice that one can use when one consumes food. It is explained in the teachings that our body is filled with numerous kinds of different beings, bacteria, worms and so forth that we are feeding when we feed ourselves. And so, before consuming food and drink one makes the aspiration, 'May giving them sustaining food become a cause for me to later be able to give them the spiritual food of the Dharma and thus help to liberate them

from their sufferings'. If one is able to practise in this way, it is a very significant practice.

Every spiritual tradition has their own methods and ways to make an offering of food and drink before consuming it. We can see this in Christianity and other traditions that have similar practices. It is also very meaningful to consume food and drink in a fully aware, mindful state, not with a distracted mind. That also has benefits. There are many different methods and ways for even the small activities that we do regularly to become a practice. Since we need to consume food and drink all the time then to turn that into a practice is really meaningful. It is in this way that we can see that if one is so inclined that there are ways and methods to also transform our normal activities into a practice.

We can also have a wrong attitude to consuming food. The great Nagarjuna said that if one were to consume food with the mere intention looking more lustrous and more beautiful, then that would be consuming food out of mere attachment. If one were to consume food so that one would become strong and mighty and could fight one's foes and overcome them in battle, then that would be eating food out of anger. The by-product of consuming the right kinds of food is that one will gain good lustre and strength and so forth. If one does not pay attention to that, but instead pays attention to the way it will help to benefit others then one's consumption of food becomes a means to reduce attachment and increase positive virtues. Further, when one applies this practice the mere act of eating becomes a practice to further develop one's kind attitude towards other living beings. When we take the right initiative we can find many different ways to promote love and compassion in our hearts.

Thanks again for paying such good attention this evening. Before we end the session let us again spend a few moments in meditation, this time using the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited as the object of our focus. So, we put our focus on the sound of the mantra and when the recitation subsides we can then just maintain a focus on the residual, positive feeling in our mind.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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