
is much you do not know. Your mind cannot experience pride and its antidote at the same time.

Likewise, if you have an overly ignorant mind or a mind dominated by dullness, the antidote is to meditate on the ultimate nature of reality. Focusing on the emptiness of all phenomena—that nothing exists independently by itself—is the supreme antidote for overcoming ignorance. Your mind cannot be dull while it is focusing on the true nature of things and events.

If you are affected by a discursive, overly active, busy or distracted mind, what in Tibetan is known as a “superstitious” mind, the supreme antidote is to focus on the breath. Meditating on the breath is the best method to settle a mind full of chaotic thoughts.

Actually, the antidote of focusing on the breath to calm the mind is a very suitable object for beginner meditators, because they usually have overly active states of mind. If you are focused on the breath, your mind will settle because it will not be influenced by various delusions like anger, attachment, jealousy, pride, ignorance and so on. The technique of focusing on the breath is not an antidote for overcoming a specific delusion, but it will definitely help calm the mind so that the manifest levels of delusions do not arise. Beginner meditators may not have had much experience in the various types of mind that are possible, so if you were to present the technique of focusing on love as a way to overcome anger, the practice might be too overwhelming for them to try. If a person does not have a good understanding of the ill-effects of anger and what love means, focusing on love may not work very well to counteract that person’s angry mindset anyway. So, the method of focusing on the breath is a simple introduction to the meditation technique which appeases the mind from any form of manifest delusions, but it does not target a specific delusion except for soothing a hyperactive or easily distracted state of mind.

The great worth of focusing on the breath is that it is readily available and easy to meditate on. Since it is very effective in calming all kinds of thoughts which are influenced by the various delusions, we adopt the technique regularly here to settle our minds and make them peaceful. To apply the technique properly and take it to heart, you need to first commit to yourself that you will not allow your mind to wander and follow any thoughts that may occur while you do the practice. This is an intentional decision to withdraw your mind completely from distractions and do your utmost to apply your focus to the best of your ability. When you approach your meditation practice in this way you protect yourself from developing a habit of pseudo-meditating, where you have some focus on the meditation object but part of your mind wanders off every now and then. Your focus must be 100 per cent so that you prevent creating a pattern of partial focus that is accompanied by background noise. Once you have made this strong commitment to yourself, you can adopt an appropriate posture and relax your mind to focus completely on your natural rhythm of breath.

[Pause for single-pointed breathing meditation.]

You can meditate regularly in your daily life just as you attempted to do now. A consistent meditation practice is

one of the best ways to cure your inner conditions to achieve real happiness and wellbeing. You need to create the causes for your own happiness because you cannot rely or expect others to create the causes for you. The causes for your happiness are internal so you need to adopt methods, such as a regular meditation practice, to cultivate good inner conditions for yourself. You will definitely experience a happy life when you adequately secure your external and internal conditions. We all depend on both conditions: good external conditions help to sustain our physical bodies; and good internal conditions help to sustain the happiness of our minds.

If you secure your inner conditions so that you experience a happy state of mind, you will be protected from spiralling into despair and helplessness when your external conditions are inadequate or difficult. There are many examples amongst the practitioners here who have faced serious physical illnesses, but have found their inner conditions to be of great solace because their mind training enabled them to maintain a positive attitude and cope with their external difficulties.

None of us here can say we are deprived of good external conditions because we live in a fortunate place where there is general freedom, and a stable structure of government and services. Of course, we need to exert ourselves to take advantage of and secure these good external conditions for ourselves, but we do live in an area that has numerous opportunities and is free from many hardships. Despite this, many find that while their external conditions are favourable, they lack genuine inner wellbeing; and that is because they are missing some important internal conditions. The external conditions may be excellent but some feel empty inside; this indicates they have not yet secured mental happiness. These are the kind of points we need to reflect on in our meditation practice.

So, I regularly emphasise that the meditation technique is the ultimate means to protect the happiness in your mind. If you are not able to establish and protect a joyful mindset, you might spiral in despair and reach a state of depression when a difficult situation arises in your life. An unhappy mind escalates the distress of external problems and makes you vulnerable to being easily distraught when you face challenging conditions. Further, your lack of having the inner strength of a joyful mind will add to your woes, ending up in a situation where externally things are not going well and internally one is completely distraught. The combination of both external and internal conditions being unfavourable for you is how you will experience many more unwanted and unhappy states of mind. A happy state of mind helps you to overcome many of your problems because it encompasses an optimistic and courageous attitude which definitely alleviates your difficulties. An unhappy state of mind will only bring you more problems and complications. To be able to make the distinction between what does and does not contribute to your mental happiness, and then to adopt the appropriate states of mind that benefit you most, is what you need to put into practice.

We never hesitate to associate with someone who is joyful and happy because we enjoy their company, but someone

who is always sad or complains is not pleasant to be around—we might consider the person a friend but if we had a choice we would prefer to be with a happy person! Therefore, our own experiences show us that a happy mind does affect the person and others, and so your own happy mind contributes to yours own and others' wellbeing.

You can explore this further by paying attention to yourself, to notice that a happy state of mind initiates your good behaviour. Your actions and speech are more appealing to others because you are courteous, pleasing and likeable; your happiness encourages your positive qualities to come forth and others appreciate and are helped by that. However, if you are in a despondent state of mind, you are more likely to have unappealing speech and behaviours, and your gestures and words are more likely to hurt and affect others in negative ways that harm them. Therefore, you need to relate the significance of a happy state of mind as being the forerunner to pleasing others, and appreciate that it benefits them as well as yourself. If you do not want your unhappy state of mind to harm others, especially your loved ones, you need to take the initiative to protect them and yourself from negative mindsets. These advantages of a happy mind are important for you to thoroughly contemplate.

Your attitude is expressed through the three doors of your body, speech and mind, and is usually communicated to those who are close to you. You would not go out of our way to find a stranger or someone in a remote area to express your joy or ill-will towards! The immediate effect of positive actions from your three doors on those dear to you is a harmonious and strengthened relationship. On the other hand, negative behaviours from your body, speech and mind affect your close ones in negative ways so that they become unhappy, there is conflict and the relationship is harmed. I am emphasising these points because they are significant. This rationale will motivate you to adopt behaviours and conduct that promotes harmony for the wellbeing for yourself and others, and to minimise and overcome actions that harm yourself and others. This is the real practice in your everyday life. A happy state of mind is infectious and noticed by all. I went to my dentist this week and he commented that I seem to be a happy person. I confirmed that with him by saying, "Yes, I am happy. I have every reason to be happy."

[Geshe-la describes in English that he told the dentist he was very happy and that he'll happily lie back in the chair for him... (everyone laughs). Geshe-la says that he told the dentist he has a happy mind and a healthy body, and that both are needed for happiness. The dentist then very honestly confided in Geshe-la that his mind was not happy and achieving a happy mind was not easy for him.]

Our session has been taken up by my emphasis on the benefits of a happy mind and the necessity to cultivate it in our lives. However, these points are very significant and the reason I relate them to you and again and again is so that they sink in. If you contemplate the benefits of having a happy mind and give the points serious thought, you will see their truth and relevance to yourself. You then will take the initiative to use your wisdom to verify the significance of practising having a

happy mind in your life. Meditating on the great benefits of having a happy state of mind will develop your understanding and wisdom so that your way of thinking about this issue becomes sound. You need a firm conviction based on your own experience and reasoning to cultivate your personal wisdom. If you practise meditation in this way, the benefits are great because then you will act from a place of insight rather than from what someone else says.

Are there any questions?

Student: What is the antidote for fear and anxiety?

Geshe-la: A direct antidote would be developing a courageous mind! [*Geshe-la chuckles.*] You can overcome fear by practising to be brave and this is a relevant way to look at the problem, but another way to address anxiety and fear is to consider where these minds are coming from. Are they based on truth and reality or are they mostly paranoia and speculation? Often fear and anxiety arises because of an overly active and superstitious mind.

Anxiety seems related to how we conduct ourselves in our everyday lives. At work there may be pending issues, but if you take the approach of focusing on one task at a time and do not think about the other tasks that need to be done, your anxiety will lessen. Your fears will decrease by taking the systematic approach of focusing on one task, and completing it before going on to the next thing. Otherwise you will be concerned about all the tasks yet to be done and the task at hand will not be completed well.

An overly anxious mind affects our effectiveness too. When some people sit an exam, for example, it is common for them to skim through the questions quickly and try to answer the ones they know the answer to immediately, but their haste often confuses their responses. I completed many exams during my studies and I found the best approach, especially when faced with one exam after another, is to focus on the current exam to do that day. Of course, you need to initially revise and prepare for all the exams you will undertake, but when the exam period starts, focusing on the exam at hand, completing it and focusing on the exam the next day is the best approach. You can prepare in the evening, go to bed and think only of that particular subject still fresh in your mind the next day. When that exam is over, you do the same for the next exam.

This approach can be related to all activities you engage in: doing one thing after another prevents haste, mistakes, additional anxiety and becoming overwhelmed. If your mind is in an anxious state, you definitely will not be able to focus well on the task in front of you and you will skip around finding other tasks to do.

Excitement can be another form of anxiety in the mind. Tibetan New Year is one of the biggest festivals and holidays in my culture and one of the traditions is to wear new clothes on New Year's Day. As a young monk, I recall our new clothes would be ready to wear the evening before and we could not sleep well because of our excitement for the next day. There were also many goodies and treats to be excited about that could not be eaten before the holiday began.

Anxiousness does not help you to accomplish your tasks, because it prevents you from doing things properly. I remember a group of us were flying back to Melbourne from Sydney and did not have much time to get to the airport. We were hurried and packed our belongings quickly so that when we arrived we could not find our tickets and the plane was about to leave! [*Laughter.*] I recommend you pack the important items first, and well before the actual time to travel. If everything is in the right place before you depart for airport, you will be prepared if you are rushed.

Anxiousness does bring about a strange atmosphere, you feel like you are being lifted and cannot contain yourself, which, in itself, may not be a negative thing. Although, like the person who rushes through the questions in an exam, a person talks a lot when nervous and is hasty, so they can make mistakes. As this is the case, training your mind to be calm, to do things systematically and to think before acting so that important tasks are not left to the last minute, will definitely reduce your anxiety.

Similarly with fear, analyse a situation and see whether your analysis can help you to overcome it. Fear in relation to your everyday experiences can be monitored and appeased with training. On a subtler level, fear comes from the delusions inside yourself and these take more time to work through because they are at a deeper level. These sort of subtle fears can occur without any apparent reasons so dealing with these is a more gradual process; however meditation definitely helps these more elusive anxieties.

Before we conclude the session for the evening let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object of our meditation can be the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. After the recitation subsides, we can maintain an inner focus on the good feeling that arises. That will suffice as a contemplative meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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