
effect on our future, and we start to transform our mind from a negative state to a more positive state—a more genuine and kinder state of mind—then that definitely will have a positive effect in the long run. To summarise the main point here, it is most important that we contemplate that the way to improve our conditions for our genuine wellbeing is to work on our state of mind, and not to always relate to external conditions. Focusing entirely on external conditions in the belief that it is external conditions that contribute to our wellbeing, while they do contribute somewhat, they don't really contribute to our overall happy state of mind—that is something we need to embrace and understand.

Leading back to the earlier question—how does meditation actually work to bring about a peaceful state of mind? We have maybe a little more insight into meditation as a technique which improves our state of mind, developing a more positive attitude and positive state of mind. As our wellbeing and happiness, particularly mental happiness, are dependent on having a positive state of mind, we can now relate to the meditation technique as being significant. More specifically, the way that the meditation technique works to bring about a more peaceful state of mind, is that the meditation technique involves focusing on an internal object. Thus to apply the meditation technique, we need to bring our full attention and entire focus on that chosen object, and not allow our mind to become distracted and focus on other external objects or random thoughts and so forth. When we adopt this technique of focusing on an internal object and placing our entire focus on that, by default it does not allow any other states of mind to manifest in that moment. This is because we are completely occupied by focusing on a positive or neutral internal object, which does not allow other states of mind, memories or other distracting objects to cause us distress. Because there is nothing to cause us distress in the moments that we are focusing on the internal object, during the time that we are focusing on an internal object, we experience a sense of genuine ease, calmness and tranquillity. This is not just a hypothesis or a random thing which may work occasionally, it is proven to actually work. Many people have confided in me personally, saying that it definitely helps when they apply this technique in their life. Of course it needs regular and consistent practice. When we have been introduced to this technique, it becomes something that is always at our disposal. We will always have access to this technique, being an internal training that we have developed. At times when we might be starting to feel agitated, rather than allowing ourselves to spiral down, with the agitation in the mind becoming more and more negative, it will be much more worthwhile to remember this technique—just be calm and try to focus on the breath. Spending even a few minutes focusing, for example, on our breath is really worthwhile. It will then cause our mind to settle down and thus not escalate our problems and troubles—whatever the agitation may be causing us in the moment will not escalate. In this way, it is really worthwhile to adopt this technique.

To explain it in a more practical way, we would naturally protect ourselves from any external harm—we would do

everything possible in our power to try to protect ourselves from an external enemy. We would do whatever it takes to protect ourselves, because we don't want to be harmed by them—we don't want to experience any hurt and harm. Likewise, what we are identifying is an internal enemy, which are the negativities, such as anger and so forth, in various different forms. These are what we call the delusions or afflictions in our mind, and are identified in the teachings as the real enemy that causes us harm. If we recognise that the main cause of our harm, the real trouble maker is these afflictions within our own mind, then we will not be swayed and completely overpowered and influenced by the afflictions when they arise in our mind. We will be able to recognise them and the moment that they arise, we will be able to remind ourselves to be careful here, because this state of mind—what we call 'the afflictive or negative state of mind'—is going to harm me. As I have shared in the past, I take this measure in my personal life to look after myself. Whenever a negative state of mind is about to rise, I tell myself, 'Geshe Doga, be careful, a negative state of mind or affliction is about arise here. If you are not watchful and alert, it could overtake you, and hurt and harm you and others as well.' This is how I train my mind and when I have shared that, others have confided in me that it has been very helpful. Whenever they are a little agitated and start becoming negative, they remember what I have said, and they take that upon themselves saying, 'I have to be careful here too'. [*Geshe-la chuckling*] These are practical ways to deal with our state of mind.

What we need to take into consideration and understand in relation to each and everyone of us, is that we have both states of mind—on the one hand a positive state of mind but on the other hand also a negative state of mind. When we are influenced by a negative state of mind, such as strong anger or lust, attachment and so forth, then it may appear to us that we have no control, and are completely overpowered by that. However, in fact, it is within our own capacity that we also have a positive state of mind that can first of all recognise this as a negative state of mind; that very recognition will help to reduce the intensity. Furthermore, there are means and measures so that we can actually overcome the influence of these negative states of mind. We need to acknowledge that we also have a positive state of mind. If we really believe and focus on the negativity, and don't pay attention to the inborn qualities and abilities that we have—the potential we carry at all times to overcome these negative or afflicted states of mind—then that is when we fall under the control and sway of the negative states of mind. The result may be that you just follow whatever command anger gives you, and that is where the destruction may occur. Likewise with other negative states of mind, if we just follow that and don't do anything about it, then that is when we are more likely to engage in actions that will harm ourselves and others. We need to understand that we have to use our internal tools—the positive state of mind—and more specifically, the antidotes to overcome these negativities. So it is a matter for us to understand, acknowledge and apply that in our lives. Some have asked me, maybe half jokingly, but maybe they are

serious, 'Geshe Doga, I don't think you are actually ever angry, are you?' [laughter]

Then I respond honestly, saying that I have had anger, I have definitely been influenced by anger many times, and in fact it led me to having quite a few fights—I have quite a few scars on my head as a result of that! [laughter]

[Geshe-la says in English: "Two scars here, all blood going here. Five monks all together. Blood all coming there, not heavy, just going [laughter] Anger there, it really is like that."]

The personal incident Geshe-la related was in his youth, when he was 12 or 13 years old. Then by training to develop a positive state of mind, there was a gradual transformation which took place. This is testimony that there is definitely change, the positive can rule, and the positive state of mind can prevail. On a practical note, we also need to consider the people that we deal with in our regular everyday life, particularly people that we live with—our close ones. It is said that one of the main conditions of having a happier life is to have a good harmonious relationship with others. Therefore we need to understand the cause and condition for having a harmonious relationship with others—it is again a positive state of mind, so our relationship with others is very much dependent on the ways we relate to them, which is initiated by our state of mind and attitudes. If we have negative attitudes and states of mind that cause us to engage in negative actions, such as an inappropriate physical gesture, inappropriate speech, saying hurtful words and so forth, then that definitely causes friction and conflict between yourself and another. That conflict is what will destroy an otherwise good or harmonious relationship between yourself and the other. We need to start right here with ourselves, and relate to the person we live with, be it parents, children, partner and so forth, and understand that generating a positive state of mind is what contributes to our good relationship with the others. Contemplating this is a really good practice, and I would consider it a high level practice—a way to further develop the good qualities within ourselves. Thus a positive state of mind, which initiates appropriate, kind physical gestures, such as nurturing someone in whatever way it is expressed, good physical behaviours, then likewise with appropriate and pleasant speech which is in accordance with making others feel self-worth. That is what will contribute to a really good harmonious relationship, which is most important for our wellbeing, and is something we really need, since we have to relate to others and depend on others. It is in this way that we can really take the initiative as to what the states of mind are that cause us distress and then cause others distress as well. When we identify these negative states of mind, these are what we need to overcome, and try not to be completely under their control and dominance. These are the states of mind which harm ourselves and others. In contrast to that, what kinds of states of mind are those I would consider positive? We can easily identify that with the very experience we have, because as soon as the mind arises, if it makes us feel agitated and then starts to influence us in negative ways, that is a negative state of mind—what we call an affliction. Whereas as soon as a state of mind arises that makes us feel calm and peaceful, and contributes to our appropriate speech and physical

actions, then that is a positive state of mind. It is in this way that we have to do the self-analysis, and it is really worthwhile for our wellbeing.

This is an account of one of the previous great masters, Geshe Ben Gungyal. In the earlier part of his life, he was quite notorious, engaging in robberies and theft. Later when he developed, he began to acknowledge his wrongdoings and then took a strong initiative to transform himself and improve. He started to develop his practice and then became a monk. At one time he was visiting a family, and while staying in the family's home, he was put in a room. He apparently started to have the urge to take something from the family, so then at one point he shouted out that there is a thief in the house. Of course the family were very worried and came running down to where he was screaming, saying that there is a thief. When they came upon him, he was there alone, holding his own hand. This is also a story to show how old habits die hard.

[Geshe-la says in English: "Robber is coming, robber is coming!" The whole family asked "Where?" Then he says, "Here, here"] [laughter]

This story is related as part of the biography of Geshe Ben Gungyal, whether it actually happened or not, it is definitely a personal instruction and good advice for ourselves. The moral of the story is that once he took the initiative to transform his mind, even when the habituation was quite strong, he immediately was able to avert that, and counteract his urge to engage in some negativity. This is how we need to really look at ourselves, acknowledging that we might still have these negative tendencies or urges and then if we take the initiative to look at ourselves, that would be more acceptable to us rather than others having to point it out. Otherwise we might be in a seemingly naive state, thinking that I don't really have any faults and I am okay, I haven't done anything bad, and we might consider that we have no faults at all. So it is good to point that out, and acknowledge that ourselves. *[Geshe-la laughing]*

There is a story in relation to the student here, Tara—maybe I shouldn't mention that, it might make her feel embarrassed. [laughter]

I have related the story in the past and she didn't seem to mind too much, so I think it is okay. Tara was about four years old and her sister, Susie would have been maybe around 2 or 3, I am not sure about the age difference. One time when they were serving lunch, they came to me during a course.

To see how Tara would respond, I tested her out by saying, 'Susie is a very nice girl.'

Then Tara immediately responded saying, no, she is naughty sometimes.

[Geshe-la in English: I said, "It doesn't matter. Sometimes naughty—your father?" She said "Yes." "Sometimes naughty—your mother?" "Yes." "Sometimes you are naughty?" "I am not naughty." "Father yes, mother yes, sister yes. I am not naughty!"] [laughter]

All of us would experience times when strong afflictions arise and we find it really hard to overcome them. If we have some faith in the higher powers of the deities or

Buddhas, then that is the time when we can make strong prayers to really help and protect me not to be overcome and completely influenced by the afflictions in my own mind. This is how we need to seek guidance and help when we feel really overpowered, with no control, and this is where it becomes significant to do prayers.

Prayers in relation to seeking inspiration from the enlightened beings, such as—'Please bless my mind, so that it becomes calm and at peace, and is not influenced by the afflictions'—such prayers would be really significant. On a more practical note, we need to consider the advice the great master, Shantideva gave in his works. He said that it would be quite impossible to try to cover the whole earth with leather so that we would not be pricked by sharp objects such as thorns and stones where we walk. Whereas it would be possible and worthwhile to cover the soles of our feet with leather, which would protect us from sharp objects and thorns wherever we walk—that would be equivalent to having covered the whole earth. Likewise it is impossible to try to overcome and vanquish all external enemies who could harm us, but if we were to overcome and vanquish our own internal enemy of afflictions or negativities in our mind, then that would be the equivalent of overcoming all enemies. This is particularly in relation to anger, so if one has no anger, then basically one would have no enemies. One's enemy will cease to be if one has no anger anymore. This is a very significant point to contemplate and try to work on, in relation to oneself.

The crucial point here is that the reason why we need to be very careful not to let anger completely dominate and influence us, is that when strong anger arises, our dear and close ones will not appear as being someone really dear and close. Due to anger in the mind, that is when we could start to make big mistakes which could be really regrettable and cause agony later on, so we need to be really careful here.

I would have many more anecdotes to share, however because of our limitation of time and because we have promised to do some meditation, let us now spend a few minutes in meditation. To summarise the whole point earlier, what I was attempting to relate is how meditation contributes to having a peaceful state of mind. Bearing that in mind, that can be the inspiration for us to engage in meditation practice—desiring a peaceful state of mind for ourselves and for others. To engage in the meditation practice and adopt the technique, first of all readjust the physical posture so that it is comfortable and upright. We need to ensure that we give this practice our full attention for the next few minutes, and really adopt and take on board the meditation technique. What it involves is first of all distancing ourselves from all other preoccupations, which includes past memories or future speculations or any random thoughts. We completely withdraw from that preoccupation and bring our entire focus upon the object that we choose for our meditation, which is our own breath. Based on natural breathing, we place our full attention and focus on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath, imagining we can see the breath coming in and going out. We place our entire focus on the breath itself, not allowing our mind to be half distracted and so forth, but keeping our full attention and focus just on the

breath. In this way, we will then experience the positive effect of the mind being calm and settled, if we were to apply this technique fully. For the next few minutes, we will adopt this technique.

[Pause for single-pointed breathing meditation]

Relating again to the personal story of my youth about a particular young monk at that time—as soon as we saw each other, we would be fighting. We were like arch enemies to begin with, however at a later time, we actually started to become very good friends and that turned into becoming best friends. From my own experience in the early part of my life, I could see how transformation can definitely take place, situations can change and positive change can definitely occur, which is the moral of the story.

However we also need to take into account that it is also possible for very close friends or companions to turn into arch enemies, so therefore we need to be careful not to allow that to happen. What are the conditions to nurture good relations with close ones, companions and so forth, and the contributing factors to nurturing a good relationship? It really comes down to two main essential positive states of mind, which are love and compassion. Therefore I emphasise again, that the good qualities we mainly need to pay attention to and develop can all be condensed into love and compassion. When we develop a genuine love and compassion for the other, the more we develop and increase that love and compassion, the more likely our relationships will not only maintain but improve—we really need to pay attention to this.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, we can again take the opportunity to spend a few minutes in meditation, and this time the object on which we focus can be the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. As we hear this chant, adopting an appropriate physical posture, we can then place our full attention and focus on that sound. If we have placed our focus and attention on that sound and nothing else, then we would have again experienced the sense of tranquillity and nice feeling within ourselves. When the recitation stops, we can just focus on that nice sensation and feeling that we have generated within our own mind for a few moments. In that way it can suffice for our meditation practice.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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