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## Dealing with anger and attachment

Some people have confided in me that meditation is all very good, and that they can meditate quite well for an hour or more, but as soon as they come out of meditation and something challenging happens, they immediately become angry and upset again. They are being honest. In our daily lives, we will be challenged, and we will be prone to being angry and upset, or agitated. Of course, we cannot completely avoid situations that aggravate us, however when we apply mindfulness and retrospection, we can at least be aware of the situation, and that we are likely to become angry and upset. Being aware helps us, because when we realise that our mind is about to become angry and agitated, we won't add fuel to it, thus reducing the intensity of the situation. We won't allow ourselves to be completely influenced by our negative state of mind. While the word 'mindfulness' may have different connotations in English, the 'mindfulness' that is being referred to here is an aid or tool for our meditation practice. It is a specific state of mind that encompasses three different attributes or qualities. However the main point is that we need to understand mindfulness as being the mind that constantly remembers, and doesn't forget the virtuous object. Furthermore, by engaging in meditation practice and becoming interested and wanting to adopt it, we need to further investigate and try to understand the outcome. By adopting a meditation practice, we need to understand how it will change and help to transform our life. How will it help us make decisions and apply our intelligence in daily life? Will it contribute to sharpen our intelligence or increase our wisdom? Is that possible? How do we do that? Those are significant questions.

I tend to share with you what I normally think about, and find out through my own investigations in trying to apply this meditation technique myself. What I am trying to share with you is also explained in the teachings. I feel that it is necessary for beginners to understand meditation in a simple and practical way. We understand more about meditation when we talk about our own situation. We have a positive state of mind that helps and benefits us, but at the same time there is a negative state of mind that harms us. Since we have identified that there is a mind that benefits us, and a mind that harms, we need to befriend and always associate with the mind that helps us, and avoid the mind that harms us.

Once that becomes our practice, then through that familiarity, our transformation will take place gradually, where we start to become more easy going. Our mind becomes genuinely relaxed and more at ease and peaceful, and not so tight and agitated.

When we become familiar with meditation, then even in the face of adversity, particularly when someone may harm us out of anger, our typically spontaneous reaction of retaliating will not arise. We will be able to maintain our own dignity and stability and a calm state of mind. Even an event that would normally aggravate and agitate us, because of our training in a positive way of thinking and adopting a positive attitude, others' inappropriate gestures and remarks will not affect us to the degree where we become angry or upset. Before learning and practising meditation, and familiarising ourselves with a

positive attitude, when others made inappropriate gestures, we might have immediately responded with anger, adding fuel to fire. Being angry causes more anger and agitation, and both of you will get upset. You are both harming your own state of mind and both of you will become affected negatively. When we practice meditation and not allow our mind to be affected by others' anger, we will notice that we have a stable and calm state of mind. This again shows us that the real cause of harm is not from the outside or external objects but rather it arises within our own mind.

Likewise this is true with other afflictions such as attachment. Even with external objects of attachment, if we train our mind not to be affected and not to allow it to become attached to the object, then it will not affect our mind. Our mind will be able to maintain a level of stability and sanity, and not follow or go after the object of attachment. In our normal state of mind, we seem to practise the opposite of stability and sanity. If we familiarise our mind with an object of attachment, then naturally the more we think about it, this increases the attachment in our mind. But if we familiarise ourselves with an object of non-attachment, such as the breath, then our mind will remain without attachment. As the great master, Nagarjuna mentions in his *Commentary on Bodhicitta*, there are three different ways of seeing a beautiful woman. Those who have a lustful mind of attachment will see the beautiful body as a desirable object—something to long for. Whereas someone who is meditating on the natural imperfections of the body, will see it similar to a corpse. As for wild dogs, when they see a body, they will perceive it as something to eat.

The great Nagarjuna would be relating this from his own experience and practice—something which is really profound. To summarise the main point, we all carry both positive and negative states of mind. Having identified this, we need to take the initiative to familiarise ourselves with a positive state of mind. The more we accustom ourselves with a positive state of mind, the more likely we will behave well, both physically and mentally, having positive attitudes and thoughts.

## Love and Compassion

As I regularly emphasise again and again in my talks, the most positive states of mind are love and compassion. These are the most valuable and worthwhile states of mind that we need to familiarise ourselves with again and again. The more we are acquainted with love and compassion, the more likely we are able to see others as close, like friends and relatives to us, and not as enemies. It is because the Buddha perfected love and compassion, that he now sees everyone as a friend and close to him. For the Buddha, there is no appearance or no perception at all of someone as being an enemy. Having perfected love and compassion all beings appear to the Buddha as dear and affectionate. For ourselves too, when we practise, it is a matter of acquainting and familiarising ourselves with this positive attitude of love and compassion. The more we do so, the more likely we are able to see others in a positive light. Some people may treat us nicely and affectionately, while others may mistreat us. But regardless of how they see and treat us, even if they see us as close or as an enemy, if we develop

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a positive attitude of love and compassion, then we are training our mind to be able to see all beings as close and dear.

This is an important attitude to have in relationships with others. With the understanding of what was presented earlier, we can understand the phrase, 'Dharma is the root or basis of all happiness'. This is the statement made in the teachings. We understand that the essence of the Dharma is love and compassion because we are sustained by love and compassion. When we think about our upbringing, when we were a baby, we were completely nurtured and cared for by others through their love and compassion, beginning with our parents. It is through their care and nurturing, love and compassion that we survived when we were toddlers. Then, as we grew up, we were again sustained by others' love and compassion; for example, being provided with the necessities to survive such as food, drinks, housing, and education. Then as we age, again we have to completely rely on the compassion of others to care for us.

Thus, throughout our lives we are sustained by the love and compassion of others. So it is befitting and natural for us to develop and express our love and compassion for others in return. As I have regularly mentioned, we need to see the value of love and compassion, by thinking about the care and love that we have received ourselves. Furthermore, it is those who have a genuine sense of care, concern and a basis of love and compassion for us, who will come to our aid and help us, not those who don't really care about us. Therefore we can see the value of love and compassion. It is essential to sustain ourselves, and our companionship and relationships with others. When we see the value of love and compassion, it is essential that we cherish and not neglect those who have love and compassion for us. We need to hold them in great esteem.

### Summary

To summarise these points, this is how meditation can help us begin to see the value of having a positive attitude, and to be able to carry this positive state of mind in our daily lives. This familiarisation and acquaintance with love and compassion is also referred to as having a good heart, which is something that makes a difference in our outlook and behaviour, beginning from our childhood. Others have shared their experiences with me, which I find valuable, so I am sharing back. People have said to me that they see a great difference between a child brought up in a family that holds love and compassion in high esteem, and so imparts a message of caring, love and compassion that extends to everything. So a child brought up in such a family naturally hesitates in killing insects such as ants. They avoid killing an ant, seeing ants as living beings, and do not want to destroy their lives. With that sense of caring, these children want to protect rather than destroy, whereas there are children who have no hesitation in killing a bug or an ant.

For example, a young child was astonished and alarmed that his grandmother killed a mosquito. These are positive ways of thinking, with attitudes that respect the lives of other beings. This kind of positive outlook comes from familiarity with a positive state of mind. The more

we think about it and see the value of positive states of mind, the more likely we will be inclined to adopt them, and then the more likely this mind becomes spontaneous and natural, and it becomes part of our normal way of living. So in this way, we can see how we progress in a positive way. This is, in essence, what we are discussing here. What I have related so far is not complicated, or too hard to adopt. It is not a complicated practice at all but something quite practical. These practices are manageable and possible to adopt in our life. Because it is something you already know about, and it's possible to adopt, then why not familiarise yourself with this positive way of thinking and behaving. I often remind the older students who have been coming here for many years that leaving aside a practice that is manageable, and going after a more profound practice is really missing the point. Everything that we achieve comes from the success of our preliminary actions. We all have to go through the first level and build on a good foundation. It is like climbing a ladder, we have to climb the first step in order to get to the next steps. I also have to remind the older students again and again, to consider adopting and putting into practice what you already know. In terms of knowing, there is no lack of understanding the basics, but where we do fall short is in implementing it in our daily practice.

### Adopting a practical daily practice

The most important practice is adopting this positive attitude on a daily basis, to not intentionally harm any living beings and try to benefit any living beings that we encounter. This way of thinking is what I consider the most important practice in my life.

Using this train of thought in meditation is worthwhile. I find that just contemplating these thoughts brings solace, and a great sense of ease and relaxation to the mind.

So now we will do our meditation practice, and for the purpose of our meditation, the object that we will focus on will be our breath. This neutral object of the breath is the way we train our mind to focus. As a way to make this practice more meaningful and to fully adopt it, we need to make the commitment in our mind that for the next few minutes we will not allow our mind to be influenced by random thoughts and distractions. Temporarily we will leave all thoughts aside, and bring our full attention and focus one hundred percent on the breath. Have full awareness on each in breath and out breath, following the breath coming in and going out.

*(meditation)*

*Question:* My sister and her husband tried to save a small bird that fell in between the walls of their house. When they failed, they thought it was better to kill the bird rather than let it die a slow death. What are your thoughts?

*Answer:* It is a complicated issue, particularly in the western world, because there seems to be a strong notion that we need to do whatever necessary to end their misery. As far as the intention is concerned, there is no flaw. There was good intention. However, it is complicated because it can easily get out of proportion. This is an instance with a small bird, but I have heard that there is a lot of debate now when it comes to the human

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level there is a strong debate about euthanasia. There is a lot of discussion whether that is a criminal act or not. An ethical dilemma is a hard thing to decide.

When I was teaching in Brisbane, there was one person in his sixties who had a dream where he thought he saw a Buddha, but it was a monk. He heard about the course, came here and the monk was me.

Evaluating his own life, he confided in me that he has done some bad things that he regrets and some good things that he can feel joyful about. The bad thing was killing his friend's horse or dog with a broken leg; I can't remember whether it was a horse or dog. The good thing is that he has paid his taxes very well. So now to answer the question from a Buddhist perspective. Even though Buddhism considers taking a life as an ill deed, because of the good intention, it is not considered as a heavy negative deed. For any deed to be either heavily positive, or heavily negative, there are four conditions that need to be intact.

For a negative deed to be completely heavy negative, one of the factors is to have a negative intention. For example, if you kill with malice or strong negative emotions in your mind, then that is one factor which makes that deed very heavy. The intention of wanting to kill has to be there. That is missing in this case because there was no intention to kill the bird; the intention was to try to save and protect it from suffering. In relation to the actual deed, the action that completes the act of killing, that is intact. However, the other factors are missing that make it a complete heavy negative deed. Even if there are some misdeeds there, it is not a heavy negative deed. On the positive side, because the intention was to help the bird, that definitely has great value, in having a good mind and a good intention to want to free the bird from misery.

This is similar to compassion, where we want others to be free from suffering. If we evaluate it in this way, it appears that the virtue of this deed seems to outweigh the negativities. So if we are talking about gain and loss, there is a little bit of loss but perhaps a greater gain. If with a small loss, there is a great gain, we think it is something worthwhile, don't we?

Before we end the session, I would like first of all, show my appreciation to all of you; I have noticed that you have paid great attention. For that I would like to show my appreciation and say thank you.

Let us again now take a few minutes to engage in a meditation practice. This time we can use the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. We bring our full attention and focus on the sound of the mantra and when the recitation subsides, we can focus on any residue of nice feeling and sensation we may have.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor  
Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
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