
much disturbance or angst in your mind because your mental happiness has been secured. Further, your inner jewel is what brings other people joy. Your external ornaments and jewellery then serve as an extra way of beautifying yourself so that you are attractive to others—a kind of double appeal. On the other hand, you may wear lots of external ornaments, but if you had a scornful and angry look on your face, then, no matter how much jewellery or makeup you have on, you would not look beautiful, or appeal to others.

When the mind is in uproar with the distractions of afflicted mindsets, meditation is an incredible method to use to quieten it. Someone who has spent years and years following external distractions will have a mind that is in turmoil, but if that person practises meditation, his or her mind will be appeased and will settle. Some people feel soothed and calmed, and are released from many anxieties in their minds. Prior to meditating, their minds were like boiling water, but the technique for them was like adding cold water, which reduced the heat and caused their boiling minds to subside. Many people have told me that when they were first introduced to this technique, they experienced immediate benefits and were astonished their minds could settle that quickly. If, however, a person does not maintain a meditation practice on a continuous basis, the individual will lose the positive effect that was initially achieved. This is not a reason to become disillusioned with the meditation technique though; meditation needs to be adopted regularly and consistently so that it becomes a practice and a deep transformation can take place. Many people comment to me that their experience is to feel happiness and joy when they meditate, but if they don't meditate, they don't feel happiness.

The reason I emphasise, again and again, the need to meditate is because the practice is crucial to your wellbeing in securing and protecting your mental happiness. Your mental happiness will degenerate if you do not meditate, and it will be very difficult to regenerate that sense of internal wellbeing. This is in contrast to external conditions—there are times when business is not good and your wealth decreases but after a while business picks up again. Relatively speaking, it is easier to acquire, establish and increase the conditions for material gain because internal conditions are much harder to achieve. This is partly because we do not readily have examples of good internal conditions. We are not able to look around and say, "Oh, yes. They are adopting methods to develop good inner qualities. I will emulate them." Instead, a person needs to be strong minded and use reasoning as to why adopting a meditation practice is beneficial for personal inner wellbeing and happiness. This is something that individuals have to do for themselves because other people will not actively encourage you to develop your inner conditions since they are unseen by everyone else.

If you gave someone a million dollars and asked them to find you a beautiful house, they probably could accomplish the mission, but if you asked them to instead find you mental happiness, they would not be able to do it. [*Geshe-la says in English that even having a million dollars to buy a house will not make you happy.*] So, we need to use

our intelligence, more specifically our wisdom, to discern what is essential for our wellbeing rather than just following what other people say. You will be easily deceived if you fall for what others suggest without utilising your wisdom. Irrespective of whether the other person's intention is to mislead you or not, there is a danger you will be misled if you are gullible, or, because some people are confused themselves, their limited understanding could sway you to act in a way that is not in your best interests. This is why developing and using our own intelligence is important.

Another essential point I regularly emphasise is that you do not need to feel despondent or think you cannot manage or change your conditions. If this does happen, you can remind yourself that you are human so have the ability to achieve the full potential of human happiness. As this is the case, there is no reason for you to have low self-esteem regarding your situation. Rather, you should encourage yourself and remember you are a human which entails having human intelligence, and the ability to acquire and achieve the full potential of human happiness, whether that is in the form of external or internal wellbeing. This reiterates the importance of having a meditation practice because it is the supreme method to cultivate your internal wellbeing and happiness.

We can now adopt the meditation technique. We can remind ourselves that the cause of our inner turmoil and dissatisfaction is because our minds are familiar with following distractions. Distractions can be external or take the form of internal diversions, such as discursive thoughts. These thoughts are called "discursive" because they encompass afflictions and delusions. They are random, have no real essence and are a type of daydream that occurs in our minds. To meditate appropriately, we need to distance ourselves from these thoughts. You can do this by making a decision that for the next couple of minutes you will not allow your mind to wander off in every direction, and follow every whimsical thought that arises in your mind. Rather, you will place your full attention and focus on the inner object of your own breath. You imagine seeing the breath coming in and going out, and fully concentrate on that process. When you apply this technique properly, your busy mind will naturally calm, because there will be no stimulus for your mind to be distracted by and you will feel the immediate benefit. So, for the next few minutes, we can bring our full attention and focus fully on the breath. [*Pause for single-pointed breath meditation.*]

If we were to adopt this technique in our lives, just as we have attempted in our short session, it would definitely contribute to our wellbeing. Meditation helps us to have a more peaceful and positive state of mind, so it is worthwhile practice to consider.

When you are not formally meditating, you can have a constant vigilance over your state of mind in your daily life by checking what kind of thoughts are occurring, what state your mind is in and how you are reacting to certain events or thoughts. This internal investigation is almost like a separate awareness overlooking what you

are doing and thinking. It is something we all have the ability to do and is a worthwhile skill.

One result of this kind of internal investigation is that you will be able to notice negative states of mind that make you uncomfortable, such as anger. When you detect anger, for example, the recognition that you are becoming upset prompts you to evaluate whether the mindset is useful. You could ask yourself questions like, does this anger benefit me? Am I going to allow my mind to be in this angry state? Are there any advantages of anger? What are the disadvantages of anger? Doing an honest investigation of yourself enables you to immediately acknowledge when anger arises, and recognise the discomfort it causes you. You may notice you were comfortable and relaxed prior to getting angry, but the moment you became angry, you felt agitated and on edge. An honest investigation of this sort shows you how unwelcome an angry state of mind is, because it does not contribute to your inner calm and peace. This recognition alone can help appease your mind so that it is not further aggravated, and you can then be in the position to deliberately reduce your anger to prevent it causing you further harm.

This is particularly useful for you to mitigate negative states of mind when they arise, and to stop you from engaging in actions that are motivated by harmful mindsets. This means you can avoid harmful actions and their negative consequences. When we act under the influence of a negative emotion, the results are usually destructive, so if we can stop harmful states of mind arising we can avert negative actions and consequences.

Buddhist teachings recommend avoiding all negative states of mind and adopting virtuous ones—I think all religious traditions advocate this way of conducting yourself.

Reciting these words is meaningful, and if you can remember them, and remind yourself of their significance, it will be useful for you in knowing what to discard and what to adopt. You may readily accept that you prefer virtue and beneficial thoughts, and want to help rather than harm others. If that is the case, then you can see that hurting another person with a harmful intention is a negativity and will encourage a habituation of negative states of mind, which will lead to harmful intentions. So, by avoiding acts that harm others and have negative consequences, you avoid internal negativity. Whereas if wish to benefit others then that automatically encompasses a positive state of mind and benefits them too. If you can adopt this simple practice in your life, it will serve as a means to develop a good and genuine relationship with others. You can begin the practice with those who are close to you. When you avoid harmful intentions to those you are close to, they really appreciate and notice your goodwill. Similarly, when you adopt a beneficial intention towards others, they appreciate that too and hold it in high esteem. This way of thinking will definitely foster the most harmonious relationships with others because it is the basis for trust and friendship. Indeed, the happiness of a harmonious relationship is one of the highest forms of happiness we can have as humans.

Even generating the thought on a regular basis to only benefit the living beings you encounter, and to at least not intentionally cause any of them harm is one of the noblest thoughts you can have. This thought in itself can be a form of meditation if you spend a few minutes generating and developing it. The result is that wherever you go and whoever you encounter, your thoughts and actions will be kind. I consider this to be a valuable practice and it is something I do in my own life. I am sharing it with you with the intention that it might be a practice you can adopt too, to help you with your way of thinking. Incorporating such attitudes into your psyche is beneficial for you because it enables you to see everyone as being appealing, dear and close, which is a really wondrous state of mind to be in. My personal experience of spending time generating this attitude has been that many people I do not know smile, greet and seem happy to see me. If we allow negative states of mind to dominate us though, we will have negative intentions, and our negative attitudes will naturally have negative consequences. From this we can see that our experience really is dependent on the state of our minds.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of you who have been diligently coming throughout the year, and the many of you who have a good intention and a genuine wish to learn ways of working with your mind. I really appreciate these qualities in those who have been coming regularly, and many have related to me that they have derived some benefit from their steady attendance. If this is the case for you, that is great. From my own side I have definitely benefited from these regular sessions so it is appropriate for me to thank you. I have benefited, because I spend quite a significant amount of time adopting positive states of mind prior to coming to these sessions, so my preparation becomes a form of a practice, and ensures my mind is calm and in a good state. I can assure you that my mind is not affected by the afflictions, only positive attitudes, when I come down. So, since this occurs on a regular basis, throughout the year, and year after year, I definitely benefit from having a calm and composed state of mind. Thank you.

On behalf of Tara Institute, I would like to wish you all a merry Christmas and a happy New Year. I still have not yet been provided with a good explanation of what “merry” means. Everyone has a different explanation. Perhaps you all have your own personal understanding! Some say it means drinking a lot and having a good time! [*Everyone laughs.*] Maybe there is some truth in that, but I am not sure. Nevertheless, the Christmas and New Year period is when people, particularly family members, get together and try to have a joyful time. From a religious point of view, I believe the Christian tradition uses the period as a way to remember God or Jesus. Again, whether Jesus is considered God is another issue I often get different responses for when I ask. In any case, a religious tradition that believes in God has faith in and loves God. Since everything is created by God, “enemies” and “friends” are his creation, so someone who wishes to please God would emulate him by developing compassion and love for everyone and not discriminating between enemies or friends. That would be the true meaning of loving God.

So, please try not to harbour negative states of mind towards your family members and close friends, particular on festive occasions where large groups of people are gathered together, and jealousies and resentments may arise. These states of mind are harmful to you and do not contribute to a joyous occasion. If you went to festive gatherings with a genuinely happy and joyous state of mind, and brought your positive intention of not harming others, and wishing to benefit them with you, then, that would be the best contribution you could give the gathering. This is because your peaceful and calm state of mind will contribute a sense of ease with your surroundings, and make the get-together positive. You may have noticed in the past that if one person has a negative state of mind, it causes discomfort and disrupts the nice atmosphere for everyone else. All it takes is for one person to become upset and angry, and say inappropriate things for the joyous occasion to cease. Just as a positive mindset can contribute to a positive atmosphere, a negative state of mind can disrupt and cause problems. This is true regardless of how large the gathering. If a group has two, three or more people, the state of just one person's mind contributes to the overall wellbeing of that gathering. Therefore, my parting gift to you is in the form of encouragement: I encourage you to adopt the intention of wishing to benefit others and not harm them. Your gift to me can be practising this attitude and familiarising your mind with it so that it benefits you and others in your life. Again, the happiness of a harmonious relationship is one of the highest forms of happiness we can have and a very valid form of personal practice to foster.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, we can again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time we can use the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni name's mantra as the object to focus on. When we hear the mantra, we can place our full attention and focus on it, and when it subsides, we can focus on the residual good feeling. This can suffice as our meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Tanya Simmons
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

© Tara Institute