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unwell. Likewise, when the conditions for our mental health are missing, the consequence is that we may be unwell mentally.

If you look into how mental disturbance occurs you will see that it comes about in relation to certain objects we interact with. The meeting or connection with certain kind of objects can cause mental pain and unrest. To explain further how this actually occurs, one can be feeling mentally relaxed and calm, but when the mind thinks about, or comes into contact with a certain object, one can immediately experience distress, and a feeling of unsettledness in the mind. If one had not made a connection with that object then that distress would not have occurred. Therefore there is a relationship between coming into contact with certain objects and mental distress. When we don't have a connection with the particular object that causes distress, we experience mental well being and happiness.

Once we are able to identify certain objects that immediately cause us distress as soon as they come to mind, we can take action to sever the connection with the object as soon as it appears, and avoid mental distress and unhappiness. We need to intentionally not to recall or bring that object to mind.

The training here involves intentionally avoiding dwelling on those objects that cause us distress, and acquainting our mind with objects that oppose the objects that cause us distress. We intentionally focus on and pay attention to positive objects, and the more we become familiar with those positive objects, the less likely it is that the negative objects will affect our mind.

Let us consider the consequences of not adopting the training of familiarising ourselves with positive objects, and just letting our mind be in its normal state of thinking of negative objects. Our mind is already acquainted with focussing on objects that cause us distress, so if we let it become further acquainted with those objects, the outcome will be that we are perpetually engaged in focussing on the objects that causes us distress, which means that we will be in the state of perpetually feeling a little bit depressed in our mind. This can escalate to a stage of feeling quite overwhelmed, and it may be quite hard to get out of that state. We get trapped into a vicious cycle of thinking of that object that causes us distress, worry, anxiety, or fear, over and over again. Contemplating one object that causes us distress may escalate to thinking of many other worries, which then adds to one feeling overwhelmed and one will be in a perpetual state of feeling depressed and down. Once we get into that state it is very hard to come out of it. So we need to be really cautious, and from the outset try to protect our own mind. That is the point that I am trying to make.

When, instead of focusing on objects that cause us distress, we intentionally focus our mind on a positive object, an object that does not cause distress, anxiety, fears and worries, then the more we acquaint ourselves with the positive object, the more likely we will be able to start to override our mind of anxiety, worries and fears and so forth. It is then possible for the mind to experience a more calm and tranquil state. We can then see that this

is something that is possible due to familiarity, and we can start to see the significance of the practice of meditation. That is exactly what meditation practice and training is, familiarising ourselves with a positive state of mind.

When we understand the meditation technique in this practical way, then we can begin to understand that meditation is indeed essential for our well-being.

When we adopt the proper technique of meditation with this understanding on how it works, we can see it eliminates a lot of unnecessary preoccupation with discursive and meaningless thoughts that cause us a lot of distress, anxiety, worries and fears. When we have established the good conditions to eliminate those unnecessary discursive thoughts from our mind we will naturally experience a more genuinely relaxed and calm state of mind, and that will contribute to our mental well being. I have no doubt that all of you understand what I mean when I talk about meaningless discursive thoughts that cause us anxiety and fears. Being able to recognise and identify this is a good start, and a very significant point to have reached. The next important point is how to overcome these meaningless discursive thoughts in our mind. That technique is something that many of you may not readily be able to recognise and understand how to implement. So this requires training.

When one starts meditating one begins to see its positive effects in one's daily life. One is more able to deal with a distressed state of mind when it occurs. After attempting to meditate for a while, we may still notice that these meaningless discursive thoughts will still occur in our mind, but we are more equipped and will be able to readily avert that. The effects will not be as long lasting, dominating and overpowering. That is a significant achievement. In the past we may have been completely overwhelmed and dominated by these negative, disturbing states of mind. The more time we spend focusing on the opposite of these distressing objects, positive objects and states of mind, then due to that familiarity the more we will be able to overcome negative states of mind when they do occur.

There are some who lament that even after meditating for a while they are still quite affected by the negative or discursive states of mind. That is because of familiarity, and the length of time they have been acquainted with focusing on these negative states of mind. With our meagre attempts at meditation we cannot expect to completely change and transform our mind, and to quickly overcome all negative states of mind, and suddenly have a very clear mind. However we will be able to notice that our mind becomes cleaner and clearer through the practice of meditation. With that clean and clear state of mind our positive intelligence and wisdom will naturally increase and lead to a more peaceful and calm state of mind. That will gradually take root within us.

When we put adequate effort into adopting the proper technique of meditation to settle our mind down, then our calmer mind actually contributes to our physical health. Our physical health will be affected in a positive way. This correlation between a calm state of mind and

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good health is something that even professionals in the health field are beginning to emphasise, and talk about more and more. When I first came to Australia over thirty years ago I didn't hear health professionals talking about the necessity of having a calm and quiet mind as a means to contribute to good health. Now, however, the positive effects on our physical health of having a calm mind through the practice of meditation are well understood.

In summary, the practice of meditation can definitely be considered as a very positive, worthwhile action and spending some time in meditation is very meaningful. As we experience the positive effects of meditation on our own state of mind and it produces a calm and peaceful state within us this then definitely has a positive effect on others that we associate and surround ourselves with. Therefore, when there is a positive benefit for us and others, we can definitely say that it is a positive action.

Another thing that we can take note of is that any activity that we may wish to engage in naturally involves our physical body and mind. There is no activity we can undertake that does not involve our physical body and mind. So we need to consider our proper physical posture and the state of mind we need to be in. When we involve our physical body and mind in an activity that is conducive to our well being, it will naturally have a positive effect. We need to understand this co-relationship between our mind and body.

I regularly emphasise the activities that we are normally engaged in that are obvious to others, are our physical activity and our speech, our verbal activity. All our physical and verbal activities are initiated by our mind. They begin on the mental level first. It is the intention of the mind that initiates our physical activity and our speech. Therefore we need to be very, very cautious, and check our intentions before we engage in any physical and verbal activity. We need to first check our state of mind and the intention that precedes those activities. If we fail to investigate our state of mind to see whether we have positive or negative intentions, our activities can turn out to be quite harmful and disastrous.

We all like to be known as nice and courteous in our physical gestures and speech. We like to be considered a well behaved and well mannered person. If we want to be nice and courteous to others, we need to look into what initiates our physical and verbal activities. It is none other than our intentions and state of mind.

Therefore, as I have regularly emphasised, it is very important to first investigate and check our state of mind before we engage in a physical or verbal activity. Prior to engaging in a particular action or activity, and committing oneself or others, we need to first investigate whether or not that activity is meaningful, whether or not it will have a good outcome, and check the pros and cons of that activity. If one is satisfied and happy with the choice that one has made, then engaging in that activity is more likely to have a better outcome.

To summarise the main point, we need to understand that having a positive attitude or state of mind is important and essential for one's well being. The more inclined we are to have positive thoughts and attitudes,

the more likely we will experience more happiness and less suffering or unwanted experiences. The more we acquaint ourselves with negative attitudes and negative ways of thinking, the more we will experience unhappiness, problems, difficulties and suffering. This is something that we need to contemplate and consider and then find ways and means to promote positive ways of thinking and attitudes and minimise negative attitudes and ways of thinking.

When we think in this way with honest, internal investigations, we will begin to understand the meaning of the main theme in Buddhist teachings, *one's happiness and suffering is dependent on one's state of mind*. We will understand that quote, or saying, at a more profound level, when we can relate it to our own experience.

I mentioned earlier that the main training is the practice of meditation. In our next session, for those who are not so familiar with them, we can go through the physical posture and some points on how to sit properly. We will leave that for later.

However just to familiarise you again, the main point I was attempting to share with you this evening is that as humans we all have the natural inclination and potential to be good natured. This is part of our natural existence, but at the same time as humans we all have the tendency to sometimes have a bad and rough nature too. What determines whether we are adopting good natured kindness, good manners and gestures, the positive side, or the negative side of being rough natured, self-centred and selfish is none other than the mind. So both positive and negative sides are dependent on either a positive or negative state of mind.

We need to understand the correlation between our gestures, mannerisms and our state of mind. The importance of recognising this is that the mind is possessed by us and we have the potential to work and shape our mind. Working with our mind means promoting positive attitudes and thoughts that initiate good behaviour.

To emphasise the point again, humans do have a good nature and naturally undertake many good actions, such as being kind to other fellow humans and other species of animals, and being courteous and helping those who are in need. All of these good qualities come from the good nature of humans—this is something we can see abundantly. On a personal level, we all have that potential. It is a matter of training the mind to have good intentions and attitudes and, on the other hand, minimising the negative states that initiate negative behaviour in us.

Furthermore, if we take the initiative of taking the responsibility of working with our own state of mind, promoting positive states of mind and attitudes, then that becomes our own best protection. Whether or not we have an external protector, ultimately we need to be equipped with self-protection and be able to protect ourselves under any circumstances at all times, and the ultimate protection is our own state of mind. When we train ourselves to have positive attitudes and a positive state of mind this will naturally contribute to our physical and mental well being and it will also promote good

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communication, relationships and rapport with others. Therefore it becomes our best protector.

Protecting our state of mind is paramount to our well being, and protecting one's mind arises through the practice of meditation. Thinking about these points is in fact a form of meditation. Thinking about the advantages and benefits of meditation, and the consequences one will experience, and the ill effects and disadvantages if we do not meditate and allow our mind to become rampantly chaotic (as it normally does), actually helps our mind to settle down. Therefore they are all relevant practices.

If one protects one's mind, there is definitely a great sense of happiness to be experienced. This is something I can vouch for, and the consequences of not protecting one's mind can be quite disastrous, as it can have ill effects upon oneself, and this is again quite obvious.

To demonstrate the truth of how protecting one's mind can generate a sense of well being and happiness within us, one example that we can all relate to is protecting our mind from anger. The moment we are able to apply protection against our mind being dominated and influenced by strong anger, we have a genuine sense of ease and peace within our mind. Whereas from the moment we allow anger to dominate and overpower us, we feel agitated and uncomfortable, and when anger further escalates it can then initiate a lot of disastrous activities or harmful actions. All of these negative consequences and actions of anger can be avoided when we protect our mind from anger from the beginning.

Before we end the session for the evening, let us take a few minutes to engage in a form of meditation where the object that we focus on is the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. When the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni's name is being recited we can use it as a form of meditation by focusing and keep our mind on the sound of the mantra, and not allowing our mind to engage in any other thoughts. After the recitation ceases, just maintain that focus and imagine the residue of the sound. After the sound has stopped, we can continue to focus on that sense of vacuity and calmness. So, this can be our meditation for the next few minutes.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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