
practice of in meditation involves withdrawing from all discursive thoughts and bringing our full attention and focus on an appropriate object. With practise, we will be released from our disturbing thoughts. While we have not yet completely abandoned the root of those disturbing thoughts, we do get a temporary release, a temporary benefit, because they have not taken root in our mind. The more we familiarise ourselves with this practice, the more it will help us to reduce the intensity of those disturbing thoughts, and eventually overcome them.

I contemplate and think a lot about what is causing problems in our life. The way that I see it is that it comes down to our own state of mind, and our own attitude. In this world, there are so many beings who are suffering from mental turmoil. When I look into what could causing that, I find that in most instances the problems that cause people angst are not that huge. It's typically not some big problem occurring in their lives that has caused people to be in a state of mental turmoil, but rather it is many small insignificant problems. However, the mind starts to dwell on these problems and further fuels them. Even though they may be insignificant, we still hold onto them and we escalate them by thinking about them again and again to the point that they start to become a big problem for us, even though in reality nothing has happened. Our mind creates a big problem out of a small problem, and then it comes to a point where we are completely overwhelmed and burdened by it, and we don't know how to get out of it. Now, I am not saying that there aren't cases where big tragic things happen in people's lives to cause them mental distress, but for the most part, I feel that it is usually a case of making something really big out of something small.

We might look around and see someone who may seem successful in their careers, or everything seems to be going well for them, but we notice that they are troubled and wonder what is wrong with them. Everything seems to be going well for them, so why are they either depressed or have some kind of other turmoil in their mind? We need to understand that it is not as if they are intentionally creating problems for themselves, they are just caught in that cycle of small issues and problems that go round and round, and then escalate to a point that causes them significant mental distress. They have not willingly tried to create mental turmoil and problems for themselves, but only that they don't know any better; they are just used that way of thinking. They have set up a pattern of thoughts that are going round in their mind, over and over again. If we can recognise that our own mind has this sort of pattern, then we can start to actually unshackle these discursive thoughts going round and round in our head. We can start to unravel them, and start to feel a bit of release. Once we are released from these discursive and disturbing thoughts, we will start to experience a real sense of joy in our mind. This joy contributes to our true wellbeing and fulfilment.

When we begin to understand the meditation technique and how it works, we begin to notice that the reason why the meditation technique helps us to become genuinely calm and settled, is because in the actual practice of meditation we are severing the connection between the

mind, and the distracting objects that it focuses on. So we need to understand that whenever we experience some sort of mental distress or turmoil, it is because we are connecting with negative objects that cause us angst, anger, attachment and so forth to arise. Because we are focusing on those objects, we make a connection and that is what causes us mental distress. So when we sever that connection and don't focus on negative objects, we will experience a release of stress, and the mind will settle down. This is how we need to understand the meditation technique taking positive effect.

We can now spend some time for our meditation practice. I have already gone over the specifics of the posture that one needs to adopt and the state of mind and the benefits a few times previously, so I guess most people will be familiar with that. So let us now sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture.

While adopting a comfortable and relaxed posture, it is most important to adopt a positive mental state by generating a good motivation. When we generate a good motivation or intention for our meditation practice, that in itself will help us to become settled; it is also a reminder as to why we are meditating.

The meditation object we use regularly in these teachings is our breath. We use our breath to focus on. However it is also good also to understand that whatever object we choose to use for meditation, it is a mental image that we need to be focusing on. We need to first recognise the meditation object well, become familiar with it, and then we can bring up a clearer image of that object in our mind. When we meditate, it is not actual the physical object that we are looking at, but rather the image of the object. The main point here that it is the mental image that we are focusing on, so we are focusing within. For the meditation to be an authentic practice, we need to focus on this mental image and just really focus on that to a point where the mind and the mental image seem to become one and inseparable. Although they are actually separate, it is as if the mind merges with that object.

For our meditation now, again remind yourselves that you need to withdraw from all other preoccupations or focusing on any other objects, which includes all thoughts and memories. Completely withdraw from all of that and bring your full attention and focus on your breath. Imagine seeing the breath coming in and going out, and just focus on that for the next few minutes.

(Pause for meditation).

While we might experience some temporary benefit from our short meditation, it is good to reflect on what I have shared with you, and consider whether or not the points are relevant, whether they made some sense or not. Use your own judgement, and your own intelligence, to investigate whether what I say is true or not. If you just assume that what I say must be true, then your analysis doesn't really go much further, and it doesn't go much deeper. Rather, if what I have shared has made some sense, and you use it to further increase your understanding by investigating and thinking about these points, then it becomes personalised and more relevant to you. Through your own investigation you will come to a

deeper understanding of the concept and, it becomes much more profound, and therefore much more helpful.

Questions

Question: I have seen in the news in the last couple of days that His Holiness the Dalai Lama would be the last Dalai Lama. Is this true? What would the faith of Tibetan Buddhism be without the Dalai Lama?

Response: The media can say anything. In fact, the Dalai Lama has said that when he reaches the age of ninety then he will give a clear indication about his reincarnation. The communist Chinese like to believe that there will be no future Dalai Lama. And if there is going to be one, that they will be the ones to find the reincarnation. It is convenient for them to say that there will be no future Dalai Lama and that this is the last Dalai Lama. However, there seems to be a reform happening within mainland China, within the communist party itself. It seems things are now changing, and the party is starting to change its way of thinking. There seems to be hope for some real reform. When the Dalai Lama himself explains the significance of finding reincarnations of past teachers, he says that is for them to carry on with Dharma work started in the past but not yet completed.

This is a very significant point that the Dalai Lama is making. A real true reincarnation of the lama is one that continues the work of the former lama. I think it best for us to believe that there will definitely be a future Dalai Lama. At a teaching event in Sydney, the Dalai Lama was asked this question by a very young boy. The Dalai Lama told the boy that when he reached the age of thirty, the Dalai Lama could possibly come back as his child. At the event there was many students, and a few children around. One young girl actually sat on the Dalai Lama's lap, and there were two or three around him taking turns asking him questions. One of those children asked him that question.

Question: I just want to ask a question about anger. When anger reaches its peak, how do you control that?

Response: The traditional answer of how to deal with anger at any level is the practice of patience. So the more you familiarise yourself with the practice of patience, the more anger will begin to reduce. Now in relation to your specific question about intense anger, there might be some triggers. Sometimes we don't even notice the trigger, and we have a burst of anger, as you explained in your question. The triggers occur due to our long-term familiarity with anger. Now it may seem unlikely that maybe in this life we have been harbouring a lot of anger, but according to the Buddhist tradition teachings, we could have been harbouring anger for many, many life times before. So our anger is deeply ingrained, and it doesn't take much for it to burst out. Due to our familiarity with anger, it is easy for us to be angry, very quickly and very intensely.

The method is to recognise anger for what it is, even a burst of anger that is seemingly uncontrollable. In that moment, try to immediately recognise that we are angry and remind ourselves that we are experiencing anger, and then immediately think about the disadvantages of

anger. When we think about the faults of anger, then the intensity of anger will reduce.

In classical teachings such as the Mahamudra teachings, there is a specific explanation of a useful method when disturbing thoughts of anger arise. Look at what it is. What is the very nature of the negative state of mind, such as the anger you are experiencing? When anger arises, then immediately recall: what is anger? What is its nature? How does it arise? As a state of mind, what kind of mind is it? What are the faults if I were to continue to maintain this anger? What are the disadvantages? So, as the modern term says: don't escape from it but face it. Rather than hide away from anger, deny or justify it, just look at it for what it is. Just by the act of looking at anger, it will be defused. Its strength will be reduced.

An analogy given in the Mahamudra teaching describes this. On long sea journey, sometimes ships would have messenger pigeons. But when they fly off from the ship they will eventually come back right on the ship because there is nowhere else to land. Similarly negative states of mind will settle down once you recognise it. The main point is that we need to know the technique before applying it. However, initially this might be hard if we are also trying to analyse anger too much. Too much analysis can also cause agitation in our mind. If we are not familiar with this technique and if we find it becomes even more distressing, then an immediate solution to help settle down the mind is to focus on the breath, which does not require too much analysis and thinking. Sometimes if the mind is agitated because of disturbing thoughts and if we don't have the right method for analysing, this can cause even more agitation in the mind. It can cause even more turmoil. So we need to find the right balance, and apply the right technique, at the right time.

So therefore just looking at the nature of the angry state of mind itself is a very profound instruction. If we familiarise ourselves with positive states of mind such as love and compassion, then that will help us to counteract angry states of mind. One younger person coming to meditation had her own insights about how to deal with disturbing thoughts. She said recognising disturbing thoughts for what they are definitely helps to reduce them. Now while it helps to reduce the intensity of the negative states of mind by just recognising them, and it may help to pacify the moment, it doesn't stop anger from recurring. Anger still recurs, but recognising it definitely helps to settle it down. To recap, remembering the disadvantages of anger can help to reduce anger. Otherwise, when we are in the grip of anger and we are taken over by anger, then we can see the consequences are not favourable.

There can be disastrous consequences from the uncontrolled mind of anger. As advised in the classical Buddhist teachings, it is good to acknowledge whatever negative states of mind are predominant. It is good to recognise those and to deal with them first, and work on the other ones slowly.

Question: How does one practise patience in a situation of domestic violence, when the other is very abusive?

Response: Of course that is a difficult situation. It is difficult if the other person doesn't recognise that what they are doing is damaging, and they don't see any faults from their own side, because this ignorance will perpetuate their situation. Now from our own side, practising patience will help us not to add more fuel to the fire, and for our own practice, it is a great benefit. But as to the other person, unless they can recognise and see that there is a fault there, it is really difficult for them to change their behaviour.

These points will be explained further in the text we are covering in this class. But it is a problem when someone feels that there are no faults from their side, and that their anger is justified. As long as they maintain that attitude, it is very difficult to change indeed.

In relation to our own practice of patience, it is good to remember that any inappropriate gestures or remarks or improper actions of the other person is not done voluntarily from their side, and that there is something behind that; their wrong thinking is pushing them. Their ignorance or wrong attitude is what's compelling them to engage in negative actions and deeds. So when we think about that how they are a victim of their own negative state of mind, there is room to start to feel compassion for them, rather than feeling angry towards them. And that is true for us too. If we look back at our own past history, we would remember that at times we have said or done inappropriate things that we regret later. But what compelled us at that time could be that we were not happy, and that we were not settled in our mind. And it is when we are distressed that we say and do things that are inappropriate and not appreciated by others.

However, when we are feeling joyful and happy, there is no reason to go out of our way to say or do mean things. This is exactly the situation for others too. So in that way, when we see that people are the victim of their own negative states of mind, then that helps us to maintain some sort of level of compassion for them, as well as understanding and accepting what they are going through. Thinking about this will prevent us from retaliating and becoming angrier towards them. And then that will naturally begin to help them to start to see and reason for themselves.

If we have a genuine concern for them, like real compassion, then we would think of helping them. Normally we would not want to hurt them, and not want to cause them more distress, but want to help them. So if we consider the other person to be a genuine companion, we can then feel that we have a genuine concern for them, particularly at times when they are disturbed and in distress. If, in times of real hardship, we help the other person, then this is the mark of true companionship and a true friendship. When they are in distress that is the time when we need to extend our help and understanding. Normally we might react with annoyance or disturbance ourselves, because we didn't recognise or understand that they are reacting in negative ways because of their disturbed state of mind. If we understand that, then it becomes easier for us to extend our help when this is the time that they really need the help.

Practising in this way contributes to a genuinely good relationship. For those of us who are interested in the practice of meditation, the whole purpose of the practice of meditation, is so to protect our mind. To protect our mind when it is challenged, when it is in difficult situations such as when your companion or your friend is in distress, or saying words that are inappropriate, than this is the time we can maintain our composure and not allow ourselves to get angry and retaliate.

Our real protection comes when we protecting ourselves from anger, or being influenced by anger. We have the responsibility, and it is in our hands to not get upset and angry when there are situations which trigger anger. In that instance, not allowing ourselves to get angry is within our reach. Likewise with attachment. Even when there is cause for attachment to arise, we can prevent our mind from being taken over by attachment. Remember, we have control over our own mind.

Before we end the session for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object of our focus can be the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. As we hear this mantra, we maintain a focus on this sound, and then when the recitation subsides, just maintain that sense of vacuity of the sound, the nice feeling that we have, just focus on that for a few moments.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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