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technique suggested for someone who is affected by strong attachment is to meditate on the imperfections of the object that one is attached to. Because the mind of attachment is exaggerating the qualities of the object, by meditating on the imperfections, it helps overcome the attachment in the mind. This is a direct antidote to the faulty state of mind of attachment. Likewise for someone experiencing intense anger, which also causes the mind to be restless, agitated and not calm, the antidote which is presented in the teachings is to meditate on love. Love is the direct opposite of anger. Thus when love is generated in the mind, anger is naturally reduced and overcome. We can see how the techniques are presented in a very logical way. When they are applied, they can be very effective.

To explain further how the mind of attachment is generated internally, a mind of attachment is one which, by relating to an object, perceives that object as being very attractive. When the mind is obsessed with the object of attachment, which it perceives as being attractive, the more one thinks about that object, the more one becomes preoccupied with that object. The more the mind focuses on the attractiveness of that object, the more the attachment increases in the mind, and that is how attachment becomes intense to the point of becoming an obsession. It is at that point where it causes the mind turmoil and agony. As explained in the teachings, that attractiveness is actually an exaggerated state – one is exaggerating the actual qualities of that object. When one starts to meditate and focus on the natural imperfections of the object, it releases that mind which was initially very obsessed with that object, clinging on very strongly to the object. When one thinks about the imperfections of the object, it naturally counteracts the mind which otherwise was obsessively thinking about the attractiveness, seeing the object as being perfect. It is in this way that we can see how this technique works as a counteracting measure for our faulty state of mind – a mind which is falsely exaggerating the qualities of an object. Therefore when one meditates on the imperfections of an object, it naturally reduces the attachment, so the mind becomes more in tune with the realistic perception or appearance of the object.

The techniques which are presented will only work if we apply them. If you meditate superficially on the ugliness or imperfections of the object, while still strongly holding the object as being very attractive or beautiful at the depth of your heart, the meditation will not work. For the technique to work, we need to embrace the actual understanding within the practice and apply it from the depth of our heart. We need to understand that, if we allow our mind to be influenced by these afflictions, such as attachment, anger and ignorance (known as the three poisons) – if we give them the upper hand, then they will completely dominate and control us. Our situation is as though the three poisons are the masters and we are the slaves. Whatever attachment and anger tell us to do, we don't question it, we just follow their command and then we get into trouble as a consequence. We need to begin to understand that they are not our masters – the three poisons are in fact the real cause of our problems. By acknowledging that deeply, contemplating again and

again, we come to acknowledge and realise that the three poisons are the real trouble makers for us, and that we should not be influenced by them. Then our intention to apply these techniques and to try to overcome the three poisons will become a genuine attempt, and we will get a genuine result. The antidote to overcoming anger is to meditate on love.

We can look into how we view the object of anger, which appears to us as being completely opposite to the other extreme of attachment, where the object appears to be very unappealing. Because the object appears as unattractive, then the mind of hostility can start to develop, which causes angst. When we meditate on love towards the object, then the object will appear to have love's appealing attributes. When the object starts to appear as being genuinely pleasing to us, then there is no room to feel anger towards that object anymore. This is how meditating on love induces the good features and appealing aspects of the object, and we focus on those.

I have also regularly emphasised that in a committed relationship with another person, the most important factor is genuine love for each other. When one expresses genuine love and concern for each other, then that will help to maintain a really healthy relationship, not based so much on attachment, but rather a genuine love for each other. When we recognise that the afflictions, such as attachment and anger affect the mind, by destroying happiness and causing turmoil and problems in the mind, then we are able to make the commitment that we definitely need to overcome attachment. By applying these techniques and contemplating the disadvantages of attachment, as well as applying this meditation technique, we can then start to release our mind from the grip of attachment. Initially, it is difficult for us to completely release ourselves from attachment, but if we can begin to release 50%, or maybe 40%, – even to that extent we will find that we will gain a genuine sense of wellbeing and peace in the mind. Likewise with anger, when we are able to release 50%, or at least 40% of the intense mind of anger, through this technique, then we will consequently experience a genuine sense of wellbeing and happiness in the mind. When we talk about applying the antidotes, it means applying the appropriate measures to overcome these intense negative states of mind or afflictions.

When we make genuine attempts to overcome the afflictions in our mind, it is advised that we need to identify the strongest afflictions in the mind first, and apply the antidote. At whatever time we may be affected by a strong affliction, then target that first as an object to overcome and to be released from that. Otherwise, while we are affected by very intense afflictions, if we try to make attempts to do some other practice or meditate on something else, then we are missing the point – we will not experience the positive effect, and so we might end up going in circles. This is an important point.

When I was a very young monk, I was initially put in a monastery near my town. Because it was nearby, my mum would sometimes come to visit when I was in the monastery as a young boy. I recall that after the visit when she went back, and I was in the monastery, it

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would be very hard for me to focus on my studies – I kept thinking of my mum and missing her. It was a mixture of feeling a little bit sad and upset that she left me behind, because I was feeling close to my mum. However, my teacher, being very skilful, would not force me to study right away. He would distract me with other things and tell stories, and then I would start to forget about my mum having left. Then when my mind had settled down a bit, I went back to my studies, and found it was possible to study.

What I am relating to you, from my experience as a young monk, is how the distractions are related to attachment. Therefore in your life, in whatever activity you might be engaged in at a certain point, if the mind is obsessed with a certain object of attachment, it can cause a lot of distraction in the mind. The activity you need to be completing or fulfilling gets hindered, you are not able to focus well on the task at hand and so it can be disruptive. Therefore, if you can start to appease the mind, so that it is not so upset with the object of attachment, and can forget the object for a while, then you can get back to your task and are able to complete it more successfully.

These are examples of how the meditation can definitely help to overcome particular problems or difficulties in our mind. Those who have made genuine attempts to meditate have experienced the benefit of the practice.

A very significant, relevant point that we need to understand, is that generally speaking, a problem that is created by humans is something that humans themselves can solve. That is true too on a personal level—any problem that one created oneself, can be solved by oneself.

The reason that I emphasise this point is because it helps one to constantly remind oneself of this, as it becomes a means to encourage oneself not to feel hopeless or overwhelmed and that one cannot solve any problems. That mind can be overcome when one remembers these points – it is a problem that one created oneself, so one can find the means to overcome that problem. It is in this way that various types of mental problems or difficulties can definitely be solved through the practice of meditation, so our mind becomes much more relaxed.

I am not in any way suggesting that there will be quick solutions to one's mental problems and difficulties, that one can attempt to meditate and overcome them in a matter of a few days or months, but rather one needs to have farsightedness. When one is consistent with the practice, and has the approach that it will take time, not to be too overzealous or having high expectations of one's practice, which can set oneself up for failure. It is very important from the onset to have a farsighted approach of going slowly, day by day, which turns into months, then years, so we can see there is gradual but definite progress—a transformation which takes place in one's mind over time.

We need to understand that the reason why it is a gradual process of gaining the true benefit and transformation is because it requires familiarity. The very word 'familiarity' means that you won't become familiar with something right away or overnight, but that it takes

time. The practice itself, meditation, literally means to familiarise one's mind with a positive object, and generate a positive attitude. That familiarity is something which comes over time. By applying oneself in a relaxed state of mind with a farsighted view, then one can become a little more relaxed about it. When one is relaxed, then in that relaxed atmosphere, one can gradually apply the technique. These very important points are explained by the great Indian master, Shantideva in his text, where he says that when one becomes familiar or accustomed to bearing small sufferings, then eventually one will be able to bear great sufferings. What he is explaining in a very logical way, is that when one becomes more familiar and accustomed to certain small things, then we will be able to do this to a greater extent later on, through the virtue of familiarity.

Another point that is emphasised in the teaching is while our mind does have faults, it also has the natural potential to become familiar with positiveness. One of the natural features and characteristics of the mind is that it follows whatever it is accustomed to, both in a positive way and a negative way. When we familiarise with the positive, then naturally the mind will follow that – it will follow whatever it is accustomed to.

The point here is to understand that if we allow our mind to be accustomed to attachment and anger, then we are not applying the means to overcome attachment and anger. If one fuels it further, then one is accustoming oneself to anger and attachment, and naturally the mind will follow that. To counteract that, if we begin to familiarise our mind with objects of non-attachment and of non-anger, then as we become more familiar with these positive states of mind, then that is what our mind will be more inclined to follow naturally.

What I am attempting to share with you are points with which I have familiarised myself, and have found some use for them. I am not claiming that I am sharing great insight or experiences of these practices, but I have done the studies, and I have understood the points. In finding the significance, that this is something which is reasonable and logical, with that conviction in my mind, I confidently share it with you in the hope that it can be useful in your life too.

What I can also confidently share with you is that having made the attempts to familiarise myself with these topics and having done the studies and trying to apply it in my life, I can now confidently say that I definitely experience a happy mind. Wherever I go, I do have a happy mind and that is something which cannot be disputed. I cannot say with 100% accuracy whether I am striving for liberation and enlightenment, or even for a better future life, that is not something I can say with certainty. [*Geshe-la chuckles*] However, what I can say with certainty is that in this very life, in my everyday life, wherever I go, I do have a happy mind, and that is the benefit to that extent.

[*Geshe-la says in English that he is a lowly monk, a very simple monk, but with great happiness.*]

I find this quite wondrous and amazing.

I have shared openly with you as a friend, and you have definitely paid attention. That gives me some joy, so it is

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appropriate that I thank you for listening attentively and well.

Now let us take the opportunity to engage in a few minutes of meditation. Having explained the physical posture to be a comfortable, relaxed one, it is most important to adopt the right mindset. For the next few minutes during the meditation, we withdraw from all other mental preoccupations, past memories and so forth and bring our focus within. Having brought our focus within, we then apply our full attention and focus on the object of our meditation, which will be our breath. The actual breathing is advised to be a natural rhythm, so that it is not too shallow or too deep, but just the natural inflow and outflow of our breath. We bring up a mental image of our breath—imagining that we can see our breath going in and going out, and just focus on that for the next few minutes.

*[Pause for single-pointed breath meditation.]*

Anyone with a good question may raise your hand.

*Student:* You talked about our mental health, and how we create problems we can solve. I wonder about mental illnesses such as schizophrenia. What is the Buddhist view on how that develops, and how do we support people? I'm a social worker.

*Geshe-la:* With my understanding of such mental illnesses, one needs to be careful prior to one's mind being taken over by conditions such as schizophrenia and so forth. When one begins to have early symptoms of the mind not being so settled and a little bit in turmoil, then at that time, if one applies the right measures to prevent one from getting into that state, then it is possible to prevent it. However, once the mind is affected by such mental conditions, then it seems to be really difficult to avert that right away. They reach a point where they do not seem to be able to help themselves. When one tries to give advice, if they were to really pay attention and listen, then it might still be possible to work on their mind, but it seems like either they are not capable, or they don't want to pay attention. They do not seem able to take account for their own state of mind at this time. At that point, medication might be applied. Medication seems to help numb the mind a bit, but it also seems to lower the natural intelligence or the mind's ability to think properly and clearly.

There are many who say that it is inherited, and I feel like they may be holding onto it as being inherited, so it cannot be fixed and they choose to believe that nothing can be done.

On a physical level, I can accept that certain physical ailments can be genetic, that something is passed on through the genes. However, I don't accept that something can be passed on from another's mind, because the mind is a non-physical personal entity. I don't know how they would measure or investigate the mind, and what kind of instruments they could use to measure something passing on from the mind. That is my personal view. With the practice of meditation, it seems that prior to becoming a very severe condition, it may still be possible to apply the practice and help soothe the mind a bit, to prevent it escalating or becoming intense.

What I have also seen is that when medication, that has been prescribed for a mental condition, is mixed with some alcohol and so forth, then the combination becomes very lethal to the point where it becomes really out of hand, and nothing seems to work. They start saying things and doing things which are completely irrational, and that seems to be a very difficult condition to overcome.

I am talking in a general way about these conditions. When they are affected, it seems to be due to either an occurrence in their life or something that they are holding onto in their mind, which is causing the mind to become more and more agitated, to the point of becoming an unsettled state of mind. If they were to relate what is causing that problem and agony, then it might be possible to help them – to help to reason with them and to relieve them from whatever is causing them the turmoil in the mind. Often they don't seem to talk about it, and they say that it is something secret and personal. If they don't talk about it, then how could someone, who genuinely wishes to help them, be able to really help them?

*Student:* People don't talk about it because of stigmatisation. Mental health is looked on differently from physical health.

*Geshe-la:* What I have also heard is that when someone who has a mental condition gets a proper diagnosis, a skilled psychologist would not prescribe medication right away, they would try to see how this could be solved in a natural way. Those who are not so skilled may prescribe medication very quickly, and once they are on medication, it seems that it is hard to work with their mind in a natural process.

There has to be caution on both sides. If the doctor doesn't really know exactly what is wrong with the patient and then attempts to soothe their difficulties and problems by immediately prescribing medication, that may not be the proper way to treat that individual. The individual themselves also needs to be a little wary. They are suffering and they want to be relieved from their suffering, but if they follow the advice that the doctor gives immediately, then they might be led into a situation where they are unnecessarily taking medications. I feel it is a difficult situation. Without a proper diagnosis – if the doctor doesn't really know, then the doctor might be going by what they are saying or the physical gestures – then make some decisions just based on the immediate information they have of that individual. That is why I feel that it is important to take the proper measures right from the beginning, when there are some symptoms. The individual and those who are caretakers need to be mindful of that.

I spent two days in a hospital some time ago, and I noticed that the nurses were always carrying some pain medication, and that whenever someone complained of pain, they just gave them some medication. *[laughter]*

When I was first hospitalised, I was in great pain, so when I got to hospital they gave me an injection to soothe the pain, and then I was given some medication as well. When I took the medication the first day, I felt like it was affecting me adversely, so the next day I didn't take the

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medication. When the doctor came by, he asked why I hadn't taken the pain medication. I explained that if I took it I couldn't urinate, and I didn't have that much pain anyway, so I felt it was OK not to take it. The doctor was very pleased, saying, 'You have been very reasonable and logical here in checking your own symptoms and explaining that to me.'

A doctor learns through their engagement with patients and the experience they gain from that, so a genuine doctor would be pleased when the patient explains the symptoms and how the medication is affecting them. That is how the doctor can learn, and so when the doctor was pleased with what I was saying, I could relate to that. I could relate to a doctor who genuinely wants to care for the patient, and increase their knowledge of treatment through the interaction and feedback from his patients. This also reminds me of the dentist I used to see. When I first went to see him, I was told that I had to really clean the teeth completely, so a thorough clean was done, and later when I was told how to maintain the hygiene of my teeth, I followed that well. Then there was a young dentist aged about 21, who was really caring and said, 'You have really kept your teeth well'. She would work on the other teeth and then later she confided that she had learned so much from working on my teeth [laughter]. We had a very good rapport and she was very fond of me as well, but when I went back one time, I was told she had moved up to Sydney, and I couldn't see her again.

When I first saw her, I was warned that I might lose all my teeth, [laughter] but then after the cleaning and hygiene, I have not lost any of my teeth.

I feel that the practice of seeing a doctor for whatever ailment one may be suffering from, explaining one's symptoms and readily taking the medication without asking any questions is not a really healthy practice. I think it is far better to be a little bit intelligent oneself, to know about the symptoms and the disease oneself, so if the doctor prescribes medication or treatment, then to question how it would affect one. If one decides to take medication, see how it affects oneself, how it changes the symptoms, and then report back. I think that the combination between the doctor's treatment and one's own questioning, and being mindful of one's own state of being, is a better approach.

It was a very relevant and important question, so thank you very much. Indeed your actual service to help those who are really in desperate need is a very great service. It is really noteworthy and in fact, people who are in a situation where they have to be hospitalised or need to be cared for are individuals who are not able to be helped at home. They have no one else around them to treat them and help them, either because of the lack of means or lack of understanding. When they are in a situation where they have to be cared for by others, for example, in a hospital by doctors and nurses, then that is a safe haven for them, because there is nowhere else they can go. They cannot be treated at home, because no one knows how to help them in another setting, so this is the last resort, where they are coming without receiving any other help. Therefore doctors and nurses who care for them are really

doing a great service, helping those who are the most in need. I consider this to be a real act of compassion. When one considers how they are in such need, then one's own compassion will increase, and then the care and treatment will be much more effective for them as well. This is real spiritual practice.

*[Geshe-la says in English that when other people benefit – that is Dharma]*

I normally say that someone who claims they are meditating, but ignoring to care for their aged parents or others who are in need, I feel that is not really Dharma practice.

Before we end the session for the evening, let us spend a few minutes in meditation, this time focusing on the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's name. Keeping our mind focused on the sound, we maintain that and then spend a few minutes in silence after that.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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