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life. As I have emphasised in the past, between the age of fifteen and thirty, one's intelligence or the clarity of mind is in a heightened state and because of that one can absorb and learn much more at that time. One has the capacity at that time to learn so much. So, as one gets an education if one can pay attention even at an early age to the techniques of training of mind and try to apply that in one's life, then when one gets a little bit older one does not have to start from the beginning. It would be at one's disposal to put it into practise. It will become much easier later on.

The reason why I emphasise the need to apply oneself to education between the age of fifteen and thirty, particularly around eighteen or nineteen, is that this is the prime of youth when one can absorb so much understanding. I know this from my own experience. When I was eighteen or nineteen I was fully engaged in studies, and when I reflect back, that is when I learnt the most. Of course if one doesn't utilise one's intelligence when it is in this heightened state one will not benefit much from it. So in order to use that heightened state of intelligence in one's prime or youth one has to access and use further training so one can get the benefit. It is for these reasons that I encourage the younger generation. I feel that it would be good to seize the great opportunity that you have at this time of your life and it will benefit you in the future.

The reason why I emphasise this again and again is because one has to take an interest in one's own wellbeing. One has to look after one's own wellbeing because there is no one else that can provide that for one. One has the sole responsibility for the outcome of one's life. One's wellbeing in life is dependent on oneself. One's physical health depends on one's own initiative in looking after one's body. Others can encourage and help us to a certain extent, but the ultimate responsibility lies with us. Likewise one needs to take the initiative to acquire all the necessary conditions to have a happy mind. That is also something that others cannot provide us with. We need to take the initiative ourselves. So, because it is dependent on one's own initiative, one needs to take that responsibility.

One needs to consider these points well because if we lead a life filled with different kinds of distractions, and were to ask whether that brings some sense of pleasure or happiness, one may say 'Yes'. But if, because of that enjoyment, one devotes one's time completely to these distractions and pleasures one may spend quite a number of years in a seemingly happy state, but immersing and indulging in those pleasures hinders the development of the potential we have for an inner sense of happiness and wellbeing. Then one may reach a point where one feels completely empty and feels a lack of joy within. When one starts feeling a sense of lack of joy and happiness in one's mind it is a very uncomfortable place to be. Therefore one needs to try to be a little bit far sighted and see that if one does not put some effort into protecting a real, deeper, genuine sense of happiness within one now, and reaches a point of decline it could be quite difficult to restore without a lot of effort. So what I am attempting to do here is to help you to secure the great potential you have to experience a genuine sense of happiness and wellbeing.

My observations are that many youngsters like to immerse themselves in just having fun and enjoying themselves. By doing that they are wasting a great opportunity, particularly for their education. When they reach their late teens, early twenties, many youngsters neglect the opportunity to study and get an education. They seem to become quite drawn into

an easy going life with friends and enjoying themselves. However what I feel is that having a joy in studying is like having a good companion, a good friend. That state of mind where you just take it easy and don't care about one's studies and procrastinates is what I would call laziness. A friend is not really a good friend if they influence one in a bad way, and obstruct one from achieving one's goal.

That state of mind in which one just wants enjoyment, and to have a good time, is a form of laziness and the worst obstruction to gaining knowledge and good qualities. Initially, of course, when you are immersed in that kind of lifestyle of taking it easy, enjoying life and not paying attention to one's studies, one doesn't notice how one is wasting one's time and a great opportunity to get an education and good qualities. At a later point in one's life, in hindsight, one can realise that, 'Yes, I have wasted a lot of great opportunities by having a great time.'

That carefree life of just enjoying oneself and going out and partying is a distraction and obstructs one from paying attention to one's studies. One can also start getting into bad habits of substance abuse, such as smoking and drinking. When one becomes habituated to smoking and drinking it is not easy to give up, and then that bad habit remains with one for quite a long time and it is detrimental to one's health. Because I see this occurring I am taking the initiative to share this with those who can associate and relate to what I am saying. The reason why I again share this here is because many parents that I know have confided in me saying, 'Geshe-la, if you give this kind of advice it seems to be very helpful. My children would be keener to listen to you rather than listening to me'.

When one develops bad habits of substance abuse such as smoking and drinking, at worst becoming addicted, in the early part of one's life, the detrimental effect may not be seen or understood right away. But when one reaches one's sixties and seventies it becomes very evident that it has taken a toll on one's body. Medical practitioners and doctors have told me that there is a huge difference in someone who abstains from substance abuse in the early part of their life. Their health and their body are much sounder. Whereas the health of those who had abused their bodies with substances is much poorer and there are many complications.

I share this with the younger generation because your bodies are now in the prime of youth, pure and clean and full of vital energy. If you were to destroy your vitality and pure body with substances it would be a shame and a pity. The way to try not to fall into these bad habits is to constantly think about the ill effects of drinking and smoking and so forth, and not think about the advantages of it, as if there are any advantages of drinking and smoking. If you think about the pleasurable side you will naturally be inclined to drink and smoke more. But if you start thinking about the ill effects, and the disadvantages of such substances, then one can take the initiative to try to avoid or minimise their use and eventually to overcome them.

When one falls into these bad habits of substance abuse one may also end up in a situation where one may not have much money left to buy the essentials to really sustain oneself, and be short of money all the time.

I recall once seeing a mother with three children and I was informed that she was very destitute and didn't have enough money to feed her children. I said 'I don't think that she should be destitute because I am aware that the government provides enough money to feed herself and her

children'. The response I got was, 'Well, the government definitely gives money for food and drink, but not to drink alcohol', implying that she was using the money to buy alcohol and didn't have enough money left to feed herself and the children. I have witnessed situations that show it is true that if one uses substances, one can become quite impoverished and not have enough money for one's essentials. So when I see individuals who take the initiative to take care of themselves and avoid drinking and so forth, it gives me a sense of joy and satisfaction. I feel, 'Oh, that's wonderful that they are able to avoid using substances and take care of themselves'. I find that it is really a great thing that they are doing.

Returning to the main point, which is that the practice of meditation is a method and technique for subduing the mind; meditation also helps one to gain more self-control.

Strong, intense afflictions in the mind can influence one to take up bad habits that are detrimental to one's physical and mental health. So applying the opposite will contribute to our wellbeing through becoming more familiar with having good habits in one's lives. A good habit is influenced by a subdued, controlled mind that is not completely dominated by the afflictions. One gains a more subdued mind through the practice of meditation. This is a positive and practical way that meditation can benefit our lives. With that understanding we can see the significance of the practice of meditation and we would be more inclined to try and adopt it in our lives.

We can be more specific about how the afflictions influence one to adopt bad habits. Someone who consumes alcohol excessively does so because of the desire for alcohol. It is the desire for alcohol that causes one to consume alcohol and become quite addicted to it. Likewise someone who is excessively smoking does so because of the desire for the seemingly pleasurable effects that one has from smoking. Then, due to that desire, one becomes addicted to smoking. So this is how we can understand it.

To want to engage in training that helps to subdue the mind one needs to understand that one needs to have a more controlled mind. A controlled mind here means a mind that has control over one's afflictions. The mind is not swayed and influenced by afflictions in general but particularly by strong, very intense afflictions, so one needs to protect one's mind from being influenced by them. That is how we understand the significance of a subdued mind and meditation practice.

The meditation practice that we adopt here is one where we intentionally withdraw our focus from distracting objects. They are called distracting objects when their influence causes afflictions to start to arise in our mind. In order to not be influenced by those objects so that the afflictions don't arise in our mind, we need to withdraw our attention and focus from those objects. That is initially the only way to stop one engaging with those objects. So applying the meditation technique involves making the commitment that, 'I am not going to allow my mind to run after distracting objects, whether they be thoughts, memories or anything that distracts my mind.' So initially we withdraw from that, and bring our focus inward. This practice can then help one's mind to become more familiar with focusing on something positive rather than the distractions. When we bring our focus inward, we initially place our awareness within us and then we place our attention and focus on our breath as our meditation object, by observing our natural in and out breaths. We will keep a hundred percent focus on

the breath itself for the next few minutes and this will be the actual meditation practice. (*Pause for meditation*).

With the remaining short time we have Geshe-la welcomes questions. If you have a good question you can raise your hand.

Sometimes when there is no question it might mean that the question has been answered by what I have presented earlier. That seems to be the case sometimes. Once I was informed that a lady in Adelaide wanted to come over and ask me some questions. My immediate response was, 'Oh, she doesn't have to travel all the way from Adelaide to come here. There are some teachers there too, and she could check and could ask them questions'. The reply I got was, 'She really wants to come and see you to ask those questions'. I then emphasised that she has to either come by bus, which is a long trip, or airplane, which is costly, but apparently she wasn't deterred and really wanted to come. I gave her a time to meet on Thursday, but she came the day before on Wednesday, and came to the evening class. The next day I got a message saying that she didn't need to see me anymore because her questions were all answered.

We come to the end of our time. So, before we end the session we can just take the opportunity again to do a few minutes of meditation. This time we can focus on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. As we hear the sound of the mantra we try to keep our focus and attention on that sound. Then, when the meditation subsides, we try to be aware of the nice feeling one may get and the vacuity and that will suffice for our meditation.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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