
was experienced in the initial time together somehow was not protected, either by oneself or the other. Therefore whatever contributed to the sense of joy and happiness was not nurtured and sustained well, thus it seems to be lost. However from the Buddhist point of view and understanding, it shows that this kind of happiness is what we call samsaric happiness and worldly pleasures. According to the explanations of Buddhist teachings, it was never true happiness and pleasure to begin with, therefore it is no wonder it doesn't seem to sustain. For me, it is a good reminder to understand that there is no real pleasure and joy in the samsaric worldly pleasures. It can help my mind to have stronger renunciation.

In particular, within the categories of sufferings, this relates to the suffering of change. This is precisely how the suffering of change is explained in the teachings and how initially there may be some pleasurable feeling, but the fact in the nature of suffering, is that eventually it will become more and more uncomfortable, and then in the later stages it can be experienced as the suffering of pain.

The main point is that while it is relatively easy to adopt a comfortable, relaxed physical posture, however when our body is in a relaxed state, we may notice that the mind is still agitated and in turmoil. This is an indication that as long as we allow our mind to become distracted and go off in every direction, then that pre-occupation of the mind in all distracting objects is what causes the agitation and turmoil in the mind. To explain it in simple terms, the fault can be said to be that the mind is not contained where the body is. The physical body might be sitting here, feeling comfortable and relaxed, but the mind is not contained within, where the physical body is, but is going in every direction. This causes agitation and turmoil in the mind. The meditation technique is intentionally not allowing our mind to wander off in every direction, and following every distraction, but containing our mind by choosing an appropriate object to focus on – an inner object – and placing our entire attention and focus on that chosen object. In simple terms, meditation is applying our full focus and attention, which involves completely withdrawing our mind from all external pre-occupations and distractions, and placing our attention on the meditation object.

The essential part of the meditation technique is not to attempt to focus on the chosen meditation object for a long period of time initially, but to keep it short. The quality is much more important than the quantity of time. If we can initially keep our mind focused on the object even for a few moments without any distraction, and be satisfied with that, then one can come out of meditation. When one goes back to meditation again, one can apply the technique to keep one's attention and focus on the object. The reason why one is advised to keep a short-term focus on the meditation object is that, in the beginning, if we set ourselves up thinking that we have to maintain our focus for a long period of time, that will go against our normal habituation. Our mind is habituated to being distracted and focusing outwards – it would be too much strain for our mind and would defeat the purpose of meditation. We can end up thinking it's impossible to focus and want to just give up, therefore it

is important to maintain the quality of the meditation and have a good focus, but a short duration initially. This is how one should attempt to start the meditation, then one can gradually prolong the session.

To give a more specific example here is to initially commit oneself to focus on the meditation object for one minute, without any distractions. If one becomes quite comfortable in focusing for a minute without any distractions, then one can extend it to two minutes, and when that becomes comfortable, one can slowly increase to three minutes. In this way, when you increase it in a natural and progressive manner, then it becomes more stable.

With this proper technique and gradual process of increasing our span of attention on the chosen meditation object, one is able to reach a point where one can focus on the meditation object for an entire hour without any distractions. That is a wonderful achievement – to be able to focus comfortably for an hour without any distractions, and it is an amazing state of mind in which to be. This is possible because of the fact that there is nothing that cannot be achieved mentally through familiarity.

In this way, we can see that by applying the mental training, we can achieve the desired positive results. As mentioned previously, if we lack the protection for our mind, that is what causes our mind to become agitated. During meditation, if we don't protect our mind, it becomes completely distracted. The main purpose for meditation is that it should assist us in our normal everyday life. It is good that we are not so distracted during meditation, but most importantly, as we spend more time out of meditation in our everyday life, it is good for one to transfer that positive effect from meditation to other activities in which we engage. We can periodically check our mind to see that our mind is not becoming completely focused on negative things. In other words, we can try to maintain some sort of mindfulness and awareness of our state of mind. With that awareness, if we notice that our mind is focusing on something distracting or negative, then we will be able to notice that and try to change and shift our focus onto something more positive and keep it in a positive direction.

If the mind gets distracted and focuses on wrong objects, then one will experience the consequences of turmoil and agitation. If we have trained our mind to bring in our focus, and restrain ourselves and our mind from indulging in distracting objects, then we will experience the positive consequences. Even if the mind has the tendency and temptation to go towards wrong objects, when we restrain it and focus in the right direction, we are released from the agitation and turmoil.

Last Sunday at the Drolkar Centre in Geelong, I gave an analogy, to which many of you may be able to relate. During that session, I mentioned that when the mind is distracted by a negative object, it can cause turmoil, but if we change the object, it can appease the mind to become more settled. The very practical analogy I gave as an example was a mother focusing on the negative aspects of her husband, which can cause a lot of distress to the mind, with many reasons to be distressed. The way to change that is simply shifting the focus from the

husband's nagging, to the child she has in her arms, with love and compassion. The moment the mother looks at the child, and cuddles and talks to the child, rather than looking at the husband, the agitation caused by the conflict with the husband would be released, the mother would immediately feel at ease, and the mind would be settled. This is one example of how focusing on a positive object, such as love and compassion, can definitely release oneself from a negative and agitated state of mind. This is an example of a particular affliction, such as anger or agitation. This is true for all other afflictions of the mind. When you focus on a positive object, the mind will be released from the turmoil of afflictions.

The protection of one's mind is to protect it from the negative influences of the afflictions. This particular example is with anger, and the moment one replaces the object with a positive object on which to focus, using love and compassion, it immediately releases one from the anger. This is how we protect our mind at that moment. When we understand this, we can see that the protection is within our own reach. We have the means to protect our own mind, which otherwise would be influenced by distractions and agitations.

Understanding this process will help one to see the value of the practice of training one's mind in meditation. When we experience it for ourselves and see how it works, we can see the real value and how helpful it is for us. What we call meditation or in other words, the Dharma, is something that benefits oneself. The reason why we attempt to have a calm and peaceful state of mind in the meditation technique, is because whatever activity with which we engage, is preceded by a state of mind. If the activity is engaged in a calm state of mind, it is most likely that whatever activity we engage in will also be a positive, successful and fruitful activity, whereas if it is preceded by an agitated mind, the activity will also be affected in a negative way. That is why it is important for us to have a calm and peaceful state of mind, prior to engaging in any activity.

Thus when an activity is preceded by a positive state of mind, then it will ensure that the activity will not in any way hurt, but only benefit others or oneself.

This is a profound statement, to which we need to pay attention, as our lives are consumed by many activities, so it is good to take note. Having mentioned about the reasons, benefits and purpose of meditation, we can now attempt to engage in a few minutes of meditation practice.

As mentioned regularly, first of all, we need to have a clear understanding of the object of meditation and a clear image of the object that we intend to focus on. The next important thing is to maintain one's focus on it, and that is done with the help of mindfulness. The meditation manual says that one must hold the object of meditation with mindfulness. What that means is that we have to constantly remember the object of meditation that we have identified earlier. For the purpose of our meditation now, we use our breath as an object on which to focus, and imagine the breath going in and out. To adopt the meditation technique, we now completely withdraw our focus from all other objects, thoughts and memories, and

bring it inwards and place it upon the object, which is our own breath, and maintain that awareness for the next few minutes. (*pause for single-pointed meditation*)

That is sufficient for now.

Before we conclude the session, I would like to acknowledge and thank you for paying attention to what I shared earlier. What was shared is essentially how to keep the mind in a positive state and how to apply protection to the mind, protecting the positive state of mind. That positive state of mind is something that is able to be maintained and further increase its qualities. That is something which will assist one at all times in accomplishing meaningful and purposeful things in one's life, which is beneficial for oneself and others. So it is in this way that we can relate to the significance of the meditation practice as a means to protect our positive state of mind and to further develop it. That is, in essence, what the meditation practice is all about. Having paid attention to that, you can now maintain that understanding with consistent diligence, which will be useful.

Before we end the session, we can take a few minutes again to apply meditation. This time, the object we focus on is the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's name. As we hear the recitation, we will place our full attention and focus on the mantra and when the recitation subsides, we can remain in that space of vacuity and focus on the blissful feeling for a few moments.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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