
all this instability relates back to an uncontrolled state of mind. This understanding can really help us.

If we take the initiative to think about it, to contemplate on the effect of an uncontrolled mind, then this can help us, particularly in maintaining our composure regardless of how others may be treating us. If we can maintain our composure and maintain our dignity, then this will help us to not be easily influenced and affected by other people's hurtful behaviour.

When someone does something hurtful or inappropriate, we consider responding by being rude or whatever. But when another person is upset with us, we fail to see the real fault is the affliction, in this case anger, that is affecting them to be upset with us.. We fail to see that anger is the fault, that it is influencing them to be rude to us or to be upset with us. And instead of seeing the affliction of anger as being at fault, we immediately target the person themselves as being at fault. Therefore, we feel justified at being upset and angry in return. We react in the same way by getting upset ourselves. Therefore, we could not reasonably say that the blame is completely on the other person when we are getting upset ourselves. Normally we justify being upset because of their behaviour. But both are being influenced by afflictions—they are rude or obnoxious and we are also in turn affected by afflictions and react also with anger. Therefore, we both are affected by afflictions. Therefore, if there were any blame in this situation, it would have to lie with the afflictions, or the anger that is causing both of us to act in unreasonable ways.

Therefore, to help us maintain our composure when another person is getting upset, we should not allow ourselves to immediately react to that. Instead, immediately try to relate to the affliction that is disturbing their mind and do not take it personally. Know that they are saying these hurtful things because of the affliction that is affecting their mind. This can help us to not take their behaviour too personally, and not to react to it and be upset. If you think about these points carefully and it will dawn upon you as being true. It takes time; it may not be apparent right away but if we contemplate these points slowly, we will see that it is true. This is the reality. Thinking in this way will definitely help us to maintain a more level state of mind, a calmer state of mind.

Having heard all of this, we may wonder what is the practical benefit of all this analysis? Initially, though we might still get angry, our contemplation means that we will notice and identify our own anger arising and be aware that we are becoming upset and angry. This awareness helps us to prevent our anger from escalating further, and then we do not engage in harmful actions. In other words, by noticing the disadvantages of anger we will not become completely influenced and controlled by anger. We take a stance because we don't want to be overwhelmed by anger and follow it. We will be ever more vigilant, more careful and determined not follow anger. Although a negative state of mind may still arise, thinking and contemplating on the shortcomings helps prevent us from following a negative intention all the way through to form harmful actions.

The main point is that yes, we may have negative states of mind, but we don't need to be a slave to them. A negative state of mind creates negative attitudes, but we can replace them with a positive ones. We can change our attitudes into more positive ones. A positive state of mind will contribute to having a happier mind and a more positive outlook. Whereas a negative state of mind influences us to feel unhappy. The main point is that our happiness is dependent on our state of mind.

How can we ensure that we are in a positive state of mind? By developing a subdued mind. It is the subdued mind that keeps our mind in a positive state. Whereas a negative state of mind comes about because of an unsubdued mind. When the mind is not subdued, not controlled, then it will be influenced by a negative state of mind.

So how do we get a subdued mind? What are the methods and techniques? It is at this point in the teachings that the meditation techniques are introduced. Meditation is a method for obtaining a subdued mind. The condition for an unsubdued mind is when we are completely immersed and completely carried away with distractions, where we allow our mind to follow every distraction. The many distractions cause various afflictions to arise in the mind. So our mind is in an unsubdued state because of the afflictions in the mind. Adopting a meditation technique withdraws our focus from all distractions, initially bringing our focus on a word or on the breath, containing our mind rather than letting it go out and follow every distraction. We bring it inward. When we place our mind upon a virtuous object, or an object that doesn't cause distractions to arise, then the mind calms down. We experience that immediate relief from an agitated state of mind, an unsubdued mind. So even in that moment we experience that relief.

Gradually, as we familiarise our mind with being free from distractions, it won't be so influenced by them, and in turn makes it harder for afflictions to arise in the mind, which means the mind is more likely to be in a positive state. As we familiarise on focusing on a virtuous object, we are also de-familiarising ourselves with being in a negative state of mind. That is, we become less familiar with negative states of mind. This is the process of how we develop a positive mind.

The meditation technique is a training tool to develop our focus. More specifically, a single-pointed focus on a chosen object. Of course here we are relating it to a virtuous object, but the great advantage of a focused mind is that it can be used for anything we do. The more focused we are in whatever we do, the more likely we will achieve good results. Whereas in contrast to that, if we are very distracted and scattered in any given activity, we are more likely to make many mistakes and not get the task done well. Meditation training is used to train our mind to be in a more positive state. When the mind is distracted and lacks focus, we don't accomplish things well. Having a focussed mind is good not only for our spiritual practice, but also beneficial for our everyday activities.

For example, if you are writing and the mind is distracted you might find that you make spelling mistakes or leave

out words. This happens much more frequently if the mind is distracted. But if you are focused and settled, when you write you will notice that the writing comes out very well and there are not many mistakes. This shows that for any activity, whether it comes out good or not is dependent on our state of mind, whether we have a distracted state of mind or a focused state of mind.

Also, when we are focused on something, other activities become less important. I notice in football that the coaches watch the players keenly. Once I saw a coach trying to take a drink and miss his mouth because he was so focussed on the game. Normally he could probably put a drink in his mouth easily, but I noticed that he was missing his mouth!

To recap, we are affected either by a negative state of mind or a positive state of mind. Our state of mind influences our mannerisms, our gestures, our actions and our deeds. Therefore, in order to ensure our behaviour is not hurtful and harmful, then we need to maintain a positive state of mind. We do this by meditating so our mind will become familiar with being in a positive state. Meditation training involves familiarising ourselves with being in a positive state of mind. The more we acquaint ourselves, the more likely it becomes part of our second nature. The way a positive state of mind to become second nature, to be natural and spontaneous, is through familiarity. What seems to be spontaneous is a consequence of familiarity. The meditation training involves familiarising ourselves with being in a positive state of mind, and less familiarity with negative states of mind. This is the process. When we understand the main point then we will not be misled or lead astray.

As I have also mentioned previously, while we might have a certain amount of time to train in a formal sitting, such as meditation, the most important thing is to maintain this awareness in our everyday life, even when we are not sitting in a formal meditation session. Maintain an awareness in everyday life. This awareness comes from actively keeping that spirit of investigation alive, by maintaining it in our everyday lives. In whatever situation you encounter, whatever you are doing, rather than just jumping to conclusions and just reacting out of impulse, actually think a bit and stop to analyse the situation a bit. Analysing our thoughts and our behaviours, helps us to further develop.

When we understand this process and engage in this process of analysis, then that will help to increase our wisdom. We all naturally have an inborn wisdom or intelligence, which increases and starts to become more acute when we meditate. The wisdom here is that particular wisdom that we call analytical wisdom, which distinguishes between what is right and what is wrong, what to adopt and what to abandon. This discrimination helps us in our everyday lives.

Furthermore, this analytical process, which results in gaining more wisdom and understanding from our own insights, becomes an inner friend that helps us assess any situation we may find ourselves in. This inner friend is with us at all times and we need to rely upon it in order to make good decisions in our lives. We can get help from our external friends, who are also important. We need to

have external friends, but if we lack the inner friend of wisdom and are completely at the mercy and influence of external friends, then we may be led astray. There might be times when we might be influenced in negative, destructive ways. While of course we give some importance on having and maintaining external friends, the priority is to maintain and develop the inner friend of wisdom.

The older generation might not be too affected, but particularly the younger generation feel a strong need to have external friends and are easily influenced by them. Yes we do need external friends, but do not forget to rely mainly upon our inner friend. With that inner wisdom, we can assess most situations, for working out your friends and making sure that you are surrounded by good friends who will influence you in a positive way; who are beneficial for you rather than destructive.

Having mentioned some of the benefits of the meditation practice, we can now spend a few minutes in meditation. The technique we adopt here is to first of all be committed to placing our entire focus on the chosen object. That is done by first of all distancing ourselves from other distractions, to not focus on any kind of external distractions. We bring our focus inward on our breath. Then we try to maintain it. As with everything there is this process, step by step. First we bring our focus inward, place our focus upon the breath, and then try to maintain focus for as long as we can comfortably. While we are maintaining our focus, try to be completely focused, 100% focused on the breath itself. This is how we adopt a proper technique.

[breathing meditation]

While maintaining our physical meditative posture, we can continue in our meditation just by changing the object slightly. This time, when we hear the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Shakyamuni's name, let us keep our focus on that sound. When the recitation subsides, just maintain our focus on that sense of the absence of the sound, the vacuity. Just maintain our focus on that for a few moments.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Peter Boothby
Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version
© Tara Institute*