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meditate would be an indication that you have not made a seriously attempt to train it. So, unless you train your mind to properly focus and settle during your meditation practice, it will never reverse its habit of being busy and distracted. This would mean you would have a constantly distracted mind, which equates to an agitated mind, and your mind would never be able to experience genuine relaxation and tranquillity.

When our minds are distracted, our bodies become agitated too and that is when we can get involved in all sorts of frivolous and harmful activities. Of course, when you are young, your body keeps up with the distractions of your mind—your mind comes up with wanting to engage in a distraction, and it is possible for your body to follow through with the activity, because it is still young and energetic. However, if you lead your life by being completely consumed in doing whatever acts your mind tells you to do, then, at a later age you will be habituated with your mind's distractions and wanting to engage in all sorts of activities that your body is no longer able to perform. Because your body will not be able to keep up with your mind it will cause you agony.

Many people reach a point in their lives where they are physically incapable of being active and are confined to staying in one place, but their minds are agitated by past memories that sadden or anger them. These agitating emotions of sadness and frustration arise because they are dwelling on past memories, which is a consequence of not training their minds to settle and be in a calm state.

In contrast, people who have taken the serious initiative to train their minds by having a regular meditation practice have a natural mental tranquillity and peace. They have trained their minds in a personal practice for their mental wellbeing, so the result is that their minds are relaxed and genuinely happy. This contributes to their physical wellbeing.

Indeed, the more calm and relaxed your state of mind is, the healthier your body becomes. This is because securing your mental wellbeing nourishes your body and contributes to its physical health. Conversely, if your mind is agitated, it definitely contributes to your physical agitation.

So, understanding the correlation between your physical and mental wellbeing is important. And if you can appreciate the relationship between your body and your mind, the benefits of mind training for yourself can be seen as twofold: you, as an individual, will benefit from having a physically sound body and a mentally relaxed mind. These benefits will easily assure you and others that you are happy and able to enjoy whatever you are doing. Your sleep will be sound too because you will go to bed without worries, which in turn will assist your body's recuperation and ensure that you are physically and mentally well rested.

When someone asks you how you are, you say, "I am well", based on how you feel physically and mentally. Your response relates to your physical and mental wellbeing. You do not refer to your external situation when you answer this question and this fact indicates that the wellbeing of the "I" relates to non-other than the body and mind.

When I go out, I meet people from different walks of life, and at one place I go to have coffee, a person regularly comes over to me and we talk. Whenever we meet I ask how he is and he normally says he is well, but on one occasion, he said, "Oh, not so good." So I asked him what was wrong and if his business was not going okay, and he said, "Business is going very well and everything is fine in that regard, but I would really like to be happy like you!" [*Laughter.*]

Before we engage in a meditation practice, we need to really understand its significance and advantages in order to have a clear understanding of how meditating will benefit us. There are immediate benefits for us because we become calmer and less agitated as our minds become more focused, and this mind training prepares and benefits us in the later part of our lives as well.

For those who accept and believe in rebirth, there is no question that a maintained practice of meditation in this life will definitely benefit our future lives too. Of course, some religions do not accept that there are future lives, but most major religions agree that we do not cease to exist at the end of this life because there is a continuity—some sort of essence that goes on to a next existence. So, if the main religions agree that there is some form of afterlife at the end of this life, then, that is something significant to consider. If you believe that there is something that will continue after your life, you can be assured that the benefits you receive from meditation now will also help and benefit this future essence too.

So, meditation is fundamentally a technique to develop genuine control over your mind which otherwise is in a tumultuous state. The mind, if left undisciplined, is unruly because it is completely immersed in distractions and wanders in arbitrary directions. Meditating is a genuine attempt to discipline and subdue the mind, through intentionally focusing on a chosen object. When you adopt this technique skilfully, consistently and with a proper understanding you will definitely reap a lasting positive result and bring yourself happiness.

The main purpose of meditating is to subdue your mind so that you can foster positive mindsets and attitudes. As your meditation practice develops, you become better able to focus on cultivating your innate qualities of love and compassion. The formal meditation you do gradually becomes a focus of generating your inner positive qualities. These positive qualities that you consciously cultivate then gradually spill into your everyday life when you are not formally meditating, so that you engage with others with a genuine attitude of love and compassion. Your formal meditation practice extends into a continuous heartfelt consideration for others so that when they are in need, you are not hesitant and very willing to assist them practically to the best of your capacity. Meditation is therefore a practical way to bring love and compassion into your everyday life. This is the ultimate benefit of the practice.

I have outlined some of the benefits of meditating because appreciating them provides you with incentives to do the practice. However, the crucial aspect to meditating is to understand how to meditate effectively—

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if you apply the technique correctly you are certain to reap its benefits.

We can now spend some minutes in formal meditation.

The object that we use regularly in our sessions to focus on is the breath. Buddhist teachings explain that the use of the breath to focus on is ideal for beginners, because it is one of the best ways to overcome gross or manifest levels of afflictions, such as intense anger and attachment. A person experiencing intense levels of anger and attachment will definitely find relief from these disturbing afflictions if he or she makes a concerted effort to focus solely on the breath. The focus on the breath is also particularly effective in settling the mind's discursive thoughts, what Buddhism refers to as "discursive conceptions", such as having numerous thoughts, fears and doubts that crowd the mind.

The technique involves focusing on your breathing pattern and being present each time you inhale and exhale. The technique is not to see the breath objectively, as if it is out there. Rather, you imagine that your mind and your breath have become one. The breath that your mind is focusing on is exactly where your mind is, so that they are together and feel like they are the same thing. This is how you relate to the inner object of the breath during meditation.

So, now that the technique of meditating is clearer, we can start our practice. First, you readjust your posture so that you are sitting comfortably and are physically relaxed. Then, you make a commitment to yourself that for the next few minutes you will not allow your mind to follow every thought and distraction that occurs, but you instead withdraw your mind from all internal and external preoccupations to focus solely on your breathing pattern. When you have thus centred your mind, you can use the breath as a medium to focus on and in this way bring your entire attention to the breath for the next few minutes. [*Pause for single-pointed meditation.*]

You can maintain your physical posture and we will continue our meditation session by changing our focus to the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. As you hear the recitation, try to focus on its sound, and when it subsides, try to maintain awareness on the vacuity left behind and the pleasant feeling you experience for a few moments. We can continue our meditation in this way for a few more minutes.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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