
disadvantages, and the more likely you will be able to prevent it habitually occurring.

However, when you recognise an affliction, such as anger, jealousy or pride, as being a negative state of mind, you may still be influenced by it. This is because of your long acquaintance with the delusion. It seems to arise spontaneously and you may find yourself readily inclined to become upset. You can counteract this though by encouraging a positive state of mind as an antidote to the negative mindset. This can be done even if the afflicted mind feels automatic. You do not have to give in to the delusions because you can apply antidotes to reverse negative states of mind.

Of course, your mind's complete transformation will not take place over night, in a few days or even after a few weeks, but gradually over an extended period of time. Nevertheless, the transformation will definitely happen—just as your mind was influenced by negative states and became habituated to those mindsets, so too can your mind be made positive through acquaintance and practice with positive states of mind.

Ultimately, we have to eradicate negative states of mind completely, which will take time. However, the practice of cultivating positive mindsets does reap immediate results so although you may not be able to wholly overcome negative mindsets in a short period of time, the delusions will certainly lessen and you will reach a point where you are no longer influenced by intense or strong afflictions. That in itself is a significant achievement because when you are not influenced by intensely negative states of mind, you can avoid the negative consequences from having that negative mindset.

So, the practical approach is to initially not let your mind follow its patterns of negativity. The affliction is arising in relation to a situation or object that you are focusing on—your negative state of mind is arising because of your interaction with the object. If, however, you changed your way of looking at the object or focused on something else, your change in attention would help your mind not to be influenced in a negative way.

A vivid example I can give of this is of a mother holding her child and getting into a confrontation with the child's father. If the mother continues to focus on the father of the child and finds reasons to argue with him, she will become more upset and angry. However, if she changes her focus, and, instead of arguing, looks and holds her child with love, then, the moment she changes her focus, her negative emotions towards the child's father will naturally subside. This is because two opposite states of mind cannot take place in the mind at the same time. So, the moment the mother focuses her mind on her love for her child, her earlier hostility will naturally recede.

This example shows how shifting your mind's focus can have a positive effect on yourself. This is the way you can begin to overcome strong afflictions in your mind, such as anger.

Just as your mind is affected negatively by delusions, so too are other people's minds. Therefore, if someone is expressing inappropriate words or gestures, you can

recognise that the person's speech and behaviour is because the individual is influenced by a strong affliction.

As this is the case, I often suggest that if you are in a relationship to be very careful when your partner is upset and angry because in those moments your partner is controlled by afflictions so his or her behaviour is unpredictable. Since anything could happen, it is better for you to be quiet and not confront your partner about the issue at hand. Later, when your partner cools off and is more level-headed, you can discuss the problem calmly.

The reason why I spend time giving you practical ways of working with your everyday situations is to encourage you to make regular and consistent investigations of your mind. This is so you understand that the real purpose of meditation is to make a positive transformation within yourself. Otherwise, you may start a meditation practice, but limit it to just focusing and sitting quietly, which doesn't really have a beneficial effect on your daily life.

You need to understand that the whole purpose of meditation is to ensure that a genuine and long-lasting internal transformation takes place. This is to help you lead a beneficial and purposeful life.

Also, if you have a broad understanding of how the meditation technique works and that the goal is a personal inner transformation for the better, the insight will help you to develop a deep and acute intelligence. This personal wisdom is your unfailing guide and friend. You could consider it to be your most prized possession because it benefits you and cannot be destroyed once it is developed.

Wisdom is insight gained from your own investigations and experiences. It is cultivated by taking an honest look within yourself, acknowledging the faults and negativities in your mind, and developing positive mindsets as antidotes.

Currently, we all have negative and positive potentials. Your negative potential is strengthened by negative states of mind, which, if allowed to develop, will cause you distress and turmoil. However, you also have a positive potential. So, you can acknowledge the negativities in your mind and understand that there is a positive state of mind to counteract every possible negative mindset. If you recognise the positive potential you have within yourself, and spend time and energy training your mind to develop its positive potential, you will minimise your negative states of mind.

This directly benefits you but is very important for others too because, whether we like it or not, we are dependent on others. You have relationships with other people—your partner, your family, at work, or in society generally—so you have to deal with other people. You can only begin to deal effectively with others in a positive way when you know what is going on within yourself and can manage your own mind. When you are affected by negative states of mind, your calmness and happiness is destroyed, and it definitely affects others around you. So, your negative mindsets not only harm you but also harm your relationships with others.

The incomparable teacher, the Buddha, said that the greatest happiness a human can experience is the happiness of a harmonious relationship. He stressed the importance of harmony to the ordained community because they lived together, but it relates to the lay community as well. In our circumstances and at our level, the best happiness we can experience is harmonious relationships with others.

So, how does a harmonious relationship come about? It comes about through a genuine understanding and acceptance of others, and that understanding and acceptance begins with yourself.

First, you understand your own state of mind because if you do not understand how you are affected by negative states of mind and can be completely overpowered by afflictions like anger, you can act in irrational and inappropriate ways. This aids you when others are behaving inappropriately: through knowing yourself, you understand that their actions are governed by negative states of mind and they, like you, have trouble with the afflictions. In this way, you can see the benefits of honest self-analysis and the significance of training your mind in positive mindsets.

I took an interest in mind training, or meditation practice, early on in my life. I have seen its great benefits and have tried to apply it to my mind. At this stage in my life I can safely say that I am reaping some of the positive results from my efforts. Meditating has been incredibly useful to me, so I can confidently and without hesitation recommend the practice will bring you great benefits too. This is why I keep emphasising and sharing these points about meditation.

When you further develop your positive states of mind, the attempts will help promote your inner wellbeing. This is because a positive mental state cannot disturb your mind. Your mental happiness is always safe when you have a positive attitude no matter what activities you engage in.

I can share my experience of this. I usually wake up at 5am in the morning. This morning I woke up and noticed my mind was in a joyous and happy state. I had many things to do because I have a schedule of practices and prayers I needed to complete before the end of the day. As this is the case, like you, I had a busy day too. Since all the activities I engaged in were done with a positive state of mind and with a positive intention, I can tell you that my happy state of mind has not declined. It may even have increased a bit. So, I was able to come to this evening's talk with a happy state of mind because I was able to maintain this mindset, particularly kindness, throughout the day despite my busy schedule.

I will now summarise the main points I have explained so far.

The purpose of a meditation practice is to cultivate positive states of mind and to reduce negative mindsets. Since we all want to be happy and we all need good external conditions, it is appropriate that we strive to improve our external conditions. However, we need to ensure that the good external conditions we acquire contribute to our happiness, rather than to our detriment.

We can do this by understanding that the state of our minds is the most important contributor to our personal wellbeing—how our minds relate to our external conditions determines whether they are a source for our personal happiness. The practice of meditation, in conjunction with the self-investigation of distinguishing between positive and negative mindsets, is how a deeper sense of intelligence is instilled within us. This wisdom will help guide our conduct in ways that are useful and so that our lives are meaningful and filled with purpose. In our meditation practice, we need to avoid unrealistic expectations of gaining a happy state of mind right away. Instead, we need to practise consistently and have faith in our understanding that with time and familiarity, a positive and undisturbed mind is inevitable and can be achieved.

I want to emphasise and reiterate the point that a happy state of mind is the best companion you can have. There are occasions when I am by myself, but this happy state of mind is always good company.

As I mentioned earlier, I woke up with a happy state of mind and I have been able to maintain this happy mindset throughout the day. Therefore, I can confidently share with you that I will be in a happy state of mind when I go to bed this evening. This will then ensure I wake up with a happy state of mind tomorrow morning and can continue this happy mindset into the future.

Of course tonight I will be going to sleep alone because I do not have an external companion, but, nevertheless, I will have a very good internal companion to go to bed with! You may have an actual companion to go to bed with, which I do not have, so you may be happier than me! You may have a happy state of mind and your external companion may make you happy too! [*Everyone laughs.*]

More seriously though, if you cultivate a happy state of mind, and develop and protect it, you will find it of great personal solace. This happy state of mind is very possible and not out of your reach. The means and ways of gaining a happy state of mind is how I mostly occupy my time

To understand the real meaning and implication of a meditation practice is to understand Dharma, the Buddhist terminology for spiritual path or spiritual training. The essential practice of Dharma is to reverse negative states of mind into more positive ones. This entails applying a method to counteract the mind being influenced by negatives states of mind and following negative patterns. The transformation of the mind from negative to positive states is the beneficial effect of meditation and the ultimate practice of Dharma.

Now we can spend some time in meditation

The posture conducive for meditating is upright, relaxed and comfortable. The most important aspect of meditating though is the state of your mind. So, to begin your practice, you make a commitment to yourself that you are not going to allow your mind to be distracted with the typical thoughts that cause you distress. You may have a particular affliction which is causing you turmoil currently. This will be different for each

individual, but if you can recognise this negative mindset which is causing you the most inner turmoil, you can make a determination to not to allow yourself to be influenced and controlled by that affliction.

The main purpose of meditating is to withdraw your attention from all distractions and bring it inwards so that it is focused and anchored to one object. You then remain for a few minutes in that focus. The object of meditation you can use now is your own breath—you can be completely aware of the natural inflow and outflow of your regular breathing pattern for the next short while. [*Pause for single-pointed meditation.*]

You can now go into another meditation while maintaining your composure and calm state of mind. This time you can focus on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's name. As you hear the mantra chanted, you can maintain a complete focus on its sound and, when the recitation subsides, you can focus on the blissful feeling that results for a few moments. That will suffice for our meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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