
of thinking and the kind of negative thoughts that we might be holding. But when we take an honest and sincere look within ourselves, it helps us to develop our inner wisdom, particularly analytical wisdom. We can investigate within ourselves and begin to acknowledge the states of mind we may have.

We can only recognise a negative state of mind when we take an honest look within ourselves. When we recognise that we are holding a wrong attitude or an incorrect way of thinking, then we can apply the means to change our way of thinking. Most of our problems and turmoil come about from a completely erroneous or false way of thinking, where we maintain a wrong attitude. When we change that to a more positive way of thinking, then we'll start to have more positive attitude, which will lead to having a more content, happier and calmer mind. This is how it all works, leading back to again to our own internal investigation.

Many people have confided in me that this advice of looking within and investigating has been helpful in coming out of a negative pattern that they might otherwise fail to recognise and acknowledge. As discussed, when we begin to acknowledge any negative patterns and negative attitudes within us, then we can take the initiative to clear away and start to overcome those negative states of mind, and to come out of our negative patterns of thought and behaviour. Looking within clears our state of mind, and helps clear away lot of mental clutter. When the clutter of all the negative states of mind and attitudes is cleared away, then the mind becomes more positive, and with that more positive attitude the mind experiences a more joyous and happy state of mind.

Protecting our mind means to, first of all fully acknowledge the negative patterns and negative states of mind that we may be harbouring. The next step is letting go, clearing our mind of negativities and not allowing the afflictions to take root in our mind. We apply this technique of inner focus by meditating; this is the protection process. We experience positive consequences during our meditation session; meditation protects us at all times. When we can maintain that awareness or mindfulness that we gain during the meditation session, then we can start applying that in our everyday life. Continually maintaining that awareness and mindfulness and vigilance over our state of mind helps us to protect our mind. This gives us sustained protection throughout our day, and throughout our life. Using our inner wisdom, intelligence or insight in our everyday life makes our life much more meaningful, and much more purposeful.

Often the question arises that meditation is all very well when you have the time to sit down for a few minutes and focus inwards, but most of the time we are focused on the outside doing other things. We are not in formal meditation so how could that mindfulness during meditation help us in our lives? But when we know the correct technique and how to carry it out in our everyday life, we will then begin to see the benefits.

Using wisdom in our everyday life means periodically checking what kind of state of mind we are in, whether we are following a negative pattern or whether we are maintaining a positive state of mind. This understanding and awareness of whether our mind is influenced by negative or positive patterns is our inner wisdom, the intelligence that we have developed within ourselves. When we notice that our mind is influenced by negative patterns,

we need to apply great caution to protect ourselves. For example, if our mind is inclined to be influenced by anger, then when we need to apply extra vigilance and caution. For example, be careful if anger starts to manifest. If you allow yourself to remain in an angry state of mind, then all sorts of unwanted negative consequences are bound to occur. To stop this, you need to change your way of thinking. And this is done through meditation.

We can see how our inner wisdom helps us when we can see the change in our negative thinking patterns. It is our own inner wisdom, which is a form of an inner dialogue where we warn ourselves and apply caution when we recognise any negative patterns, such as anger or jealousy, emerging. This is the practice that I do myself, and whenever I find that there might even be hint of a negative tendency, or a negative attitude is about to rise in my mind, I have a dialogue with myself and say, 'Be careful here, Geshe Doga, because you may end up having a negative state of mind'. This is a practical way of thinking that helps change negative thinking patterns. Other people have confided in me that this has been a useful strategy for them as well.

To summarise the points so far, meditation is the training of a mind as a means to protect the mind. The protection here is mainly protecting our positive states of mind, and more importantly a happy state of mind. There are external conditions for our wellbeing as well as internal conditions. So while the external conditions contribute to certain degree of wellbeing for ourselves, the most important conditions are the internal conditions, such as the wisdom to immediately recognise our state of mind, and whenever there is a negative tendency, our wisdom will help us to immediately withdraw from that, and not to allow us to be influenced by those negativities.

Now we can spend some time in meditation. Adopt a relaxed physical posture. The meditation object that we choose to focus on is our own breath. To best apply the meditation technique, we need to make a commitment that for the next few minutes we will put our full attention and focus on our breath, and not to allow our mind to be distracted. If we don't have this commitment and discipline during the meditation session, then we would just follow our habitually wandering mind, and allow our mind to just wander off again. We might seemingly appear to be in a meditation posture, but our mind will not actually be one hundred per cent focused on the meditation object, but be mostly distracted. If we follow this pattern, then we will not master our own mind; we will not have control over our mind. Even for the short time that we have, we must try to apply the utmost attention and discipline to maintain our focus on our breath. Based on our natural breathing, not heavy forced breathing, just imaging an image of the breath going in and coming out and just focus on that. For the next few minutes we will adopt this meditation technique.

[meditation]

Question: Geshe-la, is there any benefit to remember past mistakes, when it makes us feel uncomfortable?

Answer: When reflecting on past mistakes, if you can acknowledge the mistake, then that will help the mind. The regret that you feel with that past mistake will help you prevent doing it again in the future. To give a practical analogy, when a child unknowingly touches something that is burning hot, they experience great pain. Because of that pain and unpleasant experience, they will remember in the future not to touch it again. If we don't recall a previous

mistake as a mistake, then there will be nothing to prevent us from doing it again. So therefore acknowledging and recognising previous mistakes as mistakes will help us to develop regret and not make the same mistake again in the future. This is how we can protect ourselves from repeating the mistake in the future.

Likewise, when we remember our past good deeds, then it can help us to, first of all, rejoice that we had an opportunity to do good deeds, and then recognising our good deeds will encourage us to engage in those good deeds again. Developing regret about our past bad deeds will help us to protect ourselves from further engaging in those negative deeds. This is how we use our wisdom to analyse what is appropriate and what is inappropriate, and then follow the right direction and avoid the negative path.

However, remembering some mistakes can cause great distress in our mind. For example, if remembering a connection we had with a former partner causes distress in our mind, and we feel unhappy, then we need to protect our mind from that kind of memory. Other people have confided in me that remembering the good times with a former partner can sometimes bring about such pangs in their mind, and even some people's faces becomes red with rage or sadness. For example, someone mentioned about having good times in a relationship with someone. They remembered strolling in the park, but after separation, just by merely seeing the park, it brings back those memories, and can bring a lot of pain in the mind.

We need to use our own intelligence or wisdom to be able to discriminate between different kinds of thoughts or memories. If they are useful for our wellbeing, then we nourish them, and further strengthen them. But if the thoughts or memories cause us distress, bring us down or cause us pain, then our wisdom recognises that they are not useful, and they don't contribute to our wellbeing now or in the future. So then we need to discard those thoughts or memories. If we do not reverse the state of mind that causes us distress, then that can cause lot of unwanted unhappy feelings within us. So therefore we need to use our wisdom to reverse that and be happy. This is where a meditation technique helps us to train our mind to be a more positive frame, a more positive state of mind. If we don't apply these methods to reverse or transform that unhappy mindset, then it can start to dominate our mind. Many people fall victim to their prolonged depressed state of mind, and this is something we need to protect ourselves from.

People who do not have any knowledge of meditation techniques or mind training techniques do seem to fall into negative patterns, and become a victim of their own thoughts. The more this keeps going, the more familiar our mind becomes with negative patterns. Our happiness and wellbeing will become worse and worse, where we can possibly reach a state where it seems there is no way out, and we think we are completely stuck in that negativity. But there are ways to come out of that negative pattern. We have access to the meditation technique, and we have familiarity with the meditation technique. It is incredibly useful when we apply it. The meditation technique is a sound technique to reverse our negative states of mind, into a more and more positive state of mind. And the more we familiarise ourselves with this technique, the more it will help us and become part of the tool set of our positive state of mind.

Of course, a negative state of mind and negative patterns are not something that can be easily eradicated. They resurface

again and again, seemingly relentlessly and repeatedly, and this is why we need to apply antidotes again and again. One of the great masters, talking about afflictions said that when they become strong, we need to strongly apply antidotes to overcome them, and when the afflictions relax then that's when we can relax too. This dialogue he shared from his own practice is something that is sound instruction for us. What he is saying is that that afflictions are relentless, they do come up strongly again and again, but that is when we need to apply the antidote again and again to overcome afflictions and negative states of mind. But when we find that, for example, when anger arises strongly, that is when we need to apply the antidote. Immediately we must apply the antidote at that time when anger arises. When there is no anger then we can relax a bit.

Another way to deal with the afflictions in our mind is to treat them as an enemy. The more powerful the enemy becomes, the more we need to apply a stronger counterforce. We have no choice, because if we don't apply a stronger counterforce then the enemy will completely control us and completely destroy us. Just as counter measures are applied, the degree of the force applied is an indication of the power of the enemy. As with any strong external enemies, when anger is strong, then that is when we need to apply a stronger antidote for overcoming anger. But if we give in to anger and think there is nothing we can do, then anger will eventually control our mind. This will lead us into all sorts of destructive behaviour. So thus rather than succumbing and giving in to anger, we need to apply the antidote, because we recognise the ill-effects and disadvantages of anger. This is true for all the other afflictions as well.

We can conclude here. I would like to thank you all for paying such great attention.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us take again an opportunity to apply few minutes of meditation. The object we focus on is the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. As we hear the chanting of the mantra, we maintain complete focus just on the sound. When the recitation subsides, we can focus on the absence of the sound, as well as the nice and pleasant feeling we get inside. Focus on that for a few moments..

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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