Mindfulness

"Thoughts are like ice cream put in your warm hand. It will melt all by itself."

Mindfulness means to be aware, in every moment, of your thoughts when they appear. You have to be mindful, but it does not mean that you are separating thoughts into good and bad, all thoughts are the same. During meditation time there are no such things as good thoughts or bad thoughts - thinking good and bad is not meditation. In the context of meditation, mindfulness means accepting whatever thoughts arise, seeing that they are just different types of thought. It is as if you look into the sky and see clouds. Some look like nice pink clouds, some are red clouds, some orange; sometimes they may have the shape of a lion, sometimes the shape of a dragon, sometimes the shape of a demon. When you keep looking at the patterns in the clouds, you can get too involved thinking, "When I went out of my door today, I saw this lion cloud; that must mean something for me," or "when I looked through the window I saw a dragon cloud, that must mean something for me." You are making trouble for yourself. If you see that everything is just a cloud it does not really matter. Even if the clouds fall down on your head it does not make any difference. If you have never been in an aeroplane and you look down on the clouds they seem solid. When the aeroplane goes through the clouds you might panic. You think you are going to fall down, or the aeroplane is going to crash into the cloud. This is the result of that kind of imagination.

In the Mahamudra teaching it is said that you should not look at the pattern of your mind - good pattern or bad pattern, beautiful pattern or ugly pattern. There is no such thing as ugliness, there is no such thing as goodness: they are all just different types of thoughts. You simply remain mindful of whatever is happening in your mind. In Mahamudra there is nothing to throw out and nothing to pick up. There is no separation, as in, "This is a good thing, I must keep it. This is a bad thing, I must get rid of it." In the meditation itself you simply treat everything the same.

In that case what do you do in meditation? In fact, in meditation you do not do anything. If you do something, then it is no longer meditation. Meditation is not like walking in a dark room, moving your hands to feel where the wall is or to feel if there is anything on the floor. Meditation means that you are walking as if in a very clear light. You see everything, yet you do not choose one and throw out the other. You let everything come and go freely. There is no need to sort anything out. The experience of meditation is the whole idea of being empty. Some people meditate saying, "We must get rid of all our thoughts because they are bad." The thoughts come from nowhere and they dissolve into nowhere. You will not be able to get rid of them until you accept them. When you accept thoughts, they dissolve by themselves. Thoughts are like ice cream put in your warm hand - it will melt all by itself. You do not have to make an effort to melt the ice cream, it just melts by itself.

Therefore in one way meditation can be very simple, but in another way it may also be very difficult. It may be better to think not only of meditation, but also of prayer, and learning scriptures and positive motivation, to think of the four ways of changing the mind and the different visualisations, because all these different things will help you to understand. Whenever you meditate, whether it is mahamudra, shinay or vipassana, or some other meditation, it is very important to meditate without expectations. Expectations are an obstacle for your practice. Receiving a degree for your meditation is an obstacle for your development.

In that case, how do you meditate? You should treat meditation like your food. You need to eat food three or four times a day in order to maintain your body and in order to have understanding. When we do not have understanding, we have so many delusions and so much suffering. Suffering is unnecessary. All suffering is due to misunderstanding and to the working of the mind. You could simply take less notice of all your suffering and from time to time you can sit and meditate. Maybe it is not necessary to sit for a long time, but in short sessions, not exhausting your mind, because the mind is very delicate. The mind is like the human being itself - it is very delicate so you need to be gentle but firm. It is similar to how you treat your child: you try to be kind, but at the same time you need to be firm.

If you are mindful of everything that you do, such as talking, walking or eating, then each action becomes a spiritual action. If you do something that is spiritual, it has the appearance of a spiritual action, but if your mind is not in the right place, it is no longer a spiritual action. So whether something is spiritual or not depends very much on your motivation and on how you apply mindfulness in your daily life. Be mindful all the time: mindful of your speech and of your conversation with other people, mindful of your thoughts when you are alone, mindful of how you move around other people. If you are mindful all the time then you are living a spiritual life all the time. A spiritual life is not different from mindfulness. It is very useful to be mindful, because you do not make mistakes and you do not cause other people suffering. All the mistakes we make are due to the lack of mindfulness.

You may find a great teacher when you need one, but it seems to me that you and me, we do not need a great teacher as our knowledge is a very tiny thing. If you do not know very much there is no need for a great teacher because there is nothing a great teacher can show you. A great teacher can only show you the way when you have reached a certain level. If you have an up-to-date computer and you show it to a three-year-old child, it is not very useful. The child needs a toy and can only deal with that particular toy. Similarly, we are very much beginners and therefore what we need is a very simple toy; we do not need a computer yet. There is a long way to go before we need a great guru. Maybe some of you need that, I do not really know. I think what we need is to develop a positive mind.

I find it difficult sometimes to understand people's reaction if you say, "I am a Buddhist." As soon as you mention that you are a Buddhist people think that you cannot make any more mistakes. According to the Buddhist point of view, if you are one hundred percent negative and just do wrong things, but then one day you are able to change five percent to positive, then you are still considered a Buddhist. Now you are only ninety five percent negative. In

order to be called Buddhist you do not need to be one hundred percent positive. As soon as you change a little, at least one or two of your bad habits turn into positive ones. Then you can appreciate this and call yourself a Buddhist. The whole idea is that when you start the process of changing your life you can be part of Buddhism, and you are never out of Buddhism. Even if you are ninety nine percent bad and just one percent good, then you are also a Buddhist. When you think about other Buddhist people you also think in that way. Everybody can become Buddhist, but some will be able to change more than others.
So you should not look for everyone to be perfect, because everybody is human, and humans make many mistakes. You should make allowances for those mistakes.

The important thing is to have compassion for others and for yourself. One must work constantly to develop compassion and mindfulness. Develop compassion for your friends, for yourself, your enemy, for everybody; and forgive if you see that someone made a mistake. If you are a Buddhist, revenge is not a Buddhist principle. The principle of Buddhism is how to forgive other people's mistakes, and how to forgive your own mistakes. Forgiveness is a very important part of Buddhism. Developing compassion is very necessary, and remaining mindful is good for that development. If you remain mindful, then the idea of Mahamudra is not far away.

Negativity is something that we invite without being aware of doing it. Actually, in the ultimate sense there is no such reality as negative or positive. Due to our upbringing, habit, or education we name things positive or negative. The negative comes because we invite it, but when it comes we are unaware of having invited it and we try to fight it. It is like shadow fighting: wherever your body goes, the shadow goes. When you see the shadow you do not realise it is your shadow, you fight the shadow that you see. If you do not take the negativity too seriously it will get less, because you are not inviting it or getting involved in it. If you are not able to do that, then you should think positively. Through putting greater value on positive things the negative may start to decrease,

Those are the things I emphasise for everybody: be mindful; be an ordinary human being, do not try to be something extraordinary. When children spend so much time watching cartoons, they copy and act out what they have seen in the cartoons. Sometimes they break their necks due to that, because they do not realise they are only human beings and cartoons are just made up. We also must not mix the two things up. We are human beings, so we must act as humans.

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