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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Please adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. As we are an assembly of good friends and like-minded people with warm feelings for each other, this gathering becomes very meaningful.

For ordinary beings, one of the main sources of happiness comes from harmonious relationships with others. Benefitting sentient beings in every way possible, having a genuine concern for others and an intention not to harm anyone really is the main source of happiness we can experience in our life. If we can foster a mutual understanding with others, then our life will be meaningful and happy. This is entirely possible. It is not out of our reach and is something we can definitely manage to do. The ability to interact in a meaningful way comes from studying and training in the Buddhistharma. I would say that the root of peace and happiness comes from a genuine intention to benefit others.

This is something we can see when a nation has a genuine intention of benefiting society. In such a society there is much less conflict and much more peace. When there is a wish to benefit others, there is a natural inclination to help others. When we help each other, it brings about close relationships and peaceful coexistence. Thus, we can conclude that what we call 'world peace' is really dependent on individual people having an attitude of benefiting each other.

On a global level, peace is dependent on people mutually benefiting each other and, on a personal level, it is exactly the same situation. If we want to experience a peaceful feeling within ourselves, then it needs to come from a genuine intention of wanting to benefit and help others. What really brings a sense of happiness is a peaceful feeling within. It is not dependent on the kind of clothes we wear. Even if we have nice clothes, if we aren't at peace, then we will not be happy. Likewise, with food. We may have delicious food to eat but that does not bring about happiness in our mind if we lack peace in our heart. Therefore, what really contributes to happiness is a peaceful feeling within ourselves. Regardless of the external situation, even if we have poor conditions—poor clothing, poor food and so forth, when we feel peace within, we can still maintain a happy attitude. If we lack that feeling, the opposite is true.

We all long for inner peace. Since this is the case, it makes sense to look into how we might cultivate a peaceful feeling and find a way to bring more peace to our mind. We really need to understand that a peaceful state of mind does not depend on external conditions. Some people don't seem to get this point. They don't seem to

understand that peace is dependent on internal conditions rather than external conditions.

If we fail to recognise and understand the actual conditions that bring peace to our mind and habitually think that the conditions for peace and happiness lie outside ourselves then, for as long as we hold that attitude, we will lose our peace and sense of happiness whenever we lose our good external conditions. It may appear that when we lose those conditions, we lose our sense of happiness as well. But that is because we are looking at it the wrong way. If we have a proper understanding of what the actual conditions for peace and happiness are, then regardless of what is happening externally, our mind will not be disturbed. We will maintain the peace and happiness within our mind because we have recognised its real source.

So, based on our recognition of the internal conditions for peace and happiness, we can go ahead and cultivate them. The ability to do this is dependent on gaining an understanding through study and mind training. Then, when the external conditions change, we can maintain a more balanced state of mind.

A close associate of mine was going through a difficult period due to a separation. Despite having separated from her partner, she seemed to be able to maintain a balanced state of mind and she was not too distraught. She said, 'Geshe-la, as you emphasised, the real source of happiness is within, not without.' She was constantly reminding herself of that fact and it really helped her deal with the situation. Of course, occasionally she found herself getting upset because she missed being in the relationship. But she didn't become overwhelmed by sorrow or anger. She even said that her previous partner was a good person. So, the ability to have that state of mind and not hold anything against the other is a true sign of inner strength. There are many such instances I could relate but this example definitely shows the validity of holding that attitude.

Training the mind in a proper way definitely benefits the individual. Because she did not lose the peaceful feeling within herself, she was able to assert that her ex-partner was a good person. She could see his good qualities rather than being resentful. If she had lost the sense of peace within herself, then, whenever she talked or thought about her ex-partner, she would have been very upset and angry. She would have had only bad things to say about him. The ability to see the goodness in others comes from not having lost our peaceful state of mind. This is the point. If we can cultivate a peaceful feeling within ourselves, it helps our mind to see the positive qualities in others. So, even in the event of being separated from one's partner, one will be able to maintain a positive view of them.

If we have a peaceful feeling within, it will help us to develop discriminative wisdom. Discriminative wisdom means the deep intelligence of being able to differentiate between what is positive and what is negative. The mind-training I was referring to earlier, is what we call meditation. It is through meditation practice that we can gain a genuine sense of strength in our mind. Meditation practice contributes to and protects the peace and

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happiness within our mind. For this reason, I regularly mention its benefits. Some of you may have heard me mention meditation practice again and again and you may have even lost a sense of its practical benefits.

When some people first hear about meditation practice, they really relate to it. But if they don't practice and begin to realise the benefits, then, when they hear about it again and again, they will think... oh yes, I've heard that all before. They stop relating to it and applying it to themselves because they did not put it into practice. When someone actually practises meditation, hearing about it again and again only reinforces the idea that it is not only acceptable but also helpful for the mind. For someone who has not put meditation into practice, hearing about it again and again might put them off.

What we need to understand is that meditation practice is a technique to control our mind. Controlling our mind means not allowing it to be under the control of the afflictions. We also need to understand the negative consequences of allowing our mind to be under the control of the afflictions. If we allow our mind to be dominated by negativity, does that contribute to the peace in our mind or not? This is something we need to investigate.

To give a particular illustration—we naturally have a very strong sense of 'me', a strong clinging or grasping to the 'I'. Based on that strong grasping to the 'I', when one encounters unfavourable or unappealing objects, aversion and anger arises. By the same token, when one encounters favourable conditions and appealing objects, attachment and desire arise. Furthermore, other afflictions, such as jealousy, pride and competitiveness arise towards others. If we were to do an honest internal investigation and check our state of mind, then when anger or attachment arise in our mind, we can recognise how influenced we become by these afflictions and how our mind becomes agitated and is not in a peaceful state.

This complete focus just on one's own interest is called the self-cherishing mind. The stronger our self-cherishing, the more prone we are to afflictions such as anger, attachment, desire, jealousy, pride and so forth. The self-cherishing mind actually produces these afflictions and, as it grows stronger, the afflictions increase and intensify causing a lot of turmoil in our mind. When our mind is dominated by the afflictions, there is no chance for us to experience real peace and we lack the basis for a happy and meaningful life. This is something which becomes quite obvious. In contrast, a mind which thinks about benefiting others is full of love and compassion. We become patient and generous; the exact opposite to anger and jealousy. When we have these positive attributes in our mind, we begin to experience a genuine sense of peace and happiness within ourselves. When we have a peaceful and happy state of mind, then naturally we will have a meaningful and happy life. Someone may have an abundance of material wealth and so forth but if they lack a genuine sense of happiness and peace within, then they are not really enjoying their life.

I can use myself as an example of this. I don't have an abundance of wealth. However, based on the mind training and study I did in the earlier part of my life, I can

safely claim that now I have quite a peaceful and happy state of mind; a real sense of joy. I often have great gratitude in my mind and think that my life is very happy. I really don't have any complaints in my life now to speak of. This is attributed to my earlier training. The training and study I embarked on when I was quite young, seems to have been worthwhile. I have not gone astray or wasted my time on some sort of meaningless pursuit. While experiencing a true sense of wellbeing and happiness within, I am now able to share with others the results I reaped from my earlier studies in my life.

From my own experience, I can assure you that if you study and train your mind now, you will definitely reap a good result. I endured many hardships in order to continue my training and studies. I went through a lot of physical hardships in the early part of my life. However, many of the challenges I went through actually helped me to develop perseverance. I have reached a point where I can confidently say those hardships were of benefit. Therefore, based on my experience, I try to share and emphasise the point about the importance of maintaining the internal conditions for happiness. I could share many more stories, but we lack time now, so I won't go into them. Again, the main point is that we need to really think about the importance of maintaining a peaceful feeling within ourselves.

As mentioned earlier, being under the control of the afflictions can cause us to lose that peaceful feeling within our mind. So, we need to put every effort into protecting our mind from the afflictions. However, we may feel that it is too difficult to refrain from being influenced by the afflictions. Yes, initially it can be quite difficult. But we should not give up hope. In the beginning, it will be hard to stop our mind from following the afflictions completely; to completely stop them from arising in our mind. While we may not be able to do this, we can try to reduce the intensity of the afflictions when they arise in our mind. That is something we are able to do.

In particular, we can train our mind to withstand and not succumb to the strong afflictions which cause great mental agony. We can prevent ourselves from being a victim to those kinds of intense afflictions. Initially, we can prevent our mind from being influenced by the afflictions for one minute. Then, we can extend that to two minutes and then to three minutes and so on. By applying this technique, we can gradually improve our mental strength and not allow the afflictions to influence our mind. If we engage in meditation practice and sincerely adopt this technique, then, for the duration of the meditation, we will not allow the afflictions to dominate our mind. Through this training we gradually strengthen our mind and the duration of the afflictions affecting it becomes shorter and shorter. This is how the actual training takes place. With the proper training in meditation, we can reach a point where we can maintain focus on a virtuous object and not allow the afflictions to rise in our mind for up to an hour, gradually building up to two hours. In this way, we gain the inner strength to prevent the afflictions from arising in our mind. At the same time, by maintaining focus on the chosen object, we are also making the mind clear and bright. So, through training the mind, all this really starts to take effect.

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When we engage in the proper practice and the duration of the mind to remain free from the afflictions becomes longer, then, when we come out of the meditation practice, the afflictions will not arise so readily in our mind. While the opportunity for an affliction to arise is still there, we will be able to maintain an awareness and immediately recognise it for what it is. That recognition in itself will help to reduce the intensity of the afflictions, stopping them from completely dominating our mind. In this way, the time spent in meditation assists us when we are out of meditation.

Now we will actually spend a few minutes in meditation. The instructions on how to sit in a comfortable and upright proper posture is something I have presented previously.

Having adopted a proper meditation posture, we need to bring our attention to the state of mind we need for meditation. First of all, we should choose an appropriate object on which to focus our mind. Our mind is an entity that cognises. It is aware at all times. So, we have to place our focus on an object. It is like having a certain object we want to place somewhere. We need a support, like a table, on which to place the object. Likewise, for the mind, we need to have an object to focus on as a means to anchor the mind.

The object we regularly choose to focus on in our meditation sessions here, is our own breath. Thus, for the next few minutes, we will try to stop our mind from dispersing in every direction and following every thought. Rather, we will bring our full attention and one hundred percent focus onto the breath itself, being aware of it coming in and going out. This is the commitment we will make to ourselves. Our breathing needs to be in natural state, which means it should be free from deep and laboured breaths. So, for the next few minutes, let us engage in this meditation.

*[Meditation]*

While maintaining a focused state of mind, we can now change the object of our focus to the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. As we hear this recitation, we try to maintain our focus on the sound. When the recitation subsides, try to maintain your inward focus for a few more minutes.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

If there is a question, I can address it.

*Question:* I was thinking about calm abiding—fully meditating with the whole mind on the object, and then I wondered where thoughts and feelings and the whole sense of personality is, while the mind is fully focused. When we come out of that meditation, they kind of pop up again. Also memory: I was wondering where the memory in the mind is. I am just trying to get an understanding of this.

*Geshe-la:* When the conscious mind is completely focused on an object, like when having a single-pointed focus, then the other states of our mind, such as feelings, emotions, thoughts, memories, all of that, actually go into in a latent state, where they do exist but in an unmanifested state. So, they are still within us, but they are

in a latent state. They are not active or at a manifested level. That is how it is described in the teachings.

So, I think that will be sufficient for tonight. Thank you very much everyone.

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