
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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18 April 2018

As usual, let us adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. As I regularly share, this posture can facilitate a more calm, relaxed, clear and bright state of mind.

It is essential to consider how to adopt a clear, bright and lucid state of mind.

The advantage of having a clear, bright state of mind is that we will be able to identify our state of mind more adequately, particularly in being able to recognise certain faults that may be within the mind, as well as certain qualities. In a normal state of mind, this may be a bit obscure to us, but when we are in a clear state of mind, it becomes more apparent. This is important because we have a tendency to blame external conditions and situations for mishaps that occur, but in fact there are many causes for faults within oneself, which is important to recognise.

When we get in tune with ourselves, we will be able to acknowledge that a lot of mistakes are faults that we can recognise through our own experience.

All of us have noticed that at certain times we feel exceptionally relaxed and in a clear state of mind, and this is when we are more likely to be in a joyful and happy state of mind. This is a quality we already have, which becomes more apparent when we are more genuinely mentally relaxed.

At other times, we will notice that our mind can be a bit dull or foggy, with a sense of sinking within ourselves. Furthermore, we may notice that the mind is quite agitated and in turmoil. In instances like this, we would notice that it is not conducive to be in this state of mind. This state of mind is to our disadvantage rather than our advantage.

If we allow our mind to be in a dull and agitated state, and we become adapted to this state of mind, then it will start to become quite predominant. As a result, our life starts to take a turn and we will become unhappy and in a gloomy state. We will notice this after some time as we start feeling a bit unsettled within ourselves.

When our mind becomes obscured and we feel down and in a sinking state of mind, then we are prone to feeling agitated at any time and any given instance, and particularly very prone to feeling anger towards others or situations. The mind can become temperamental and easily upset with things, which can include those who are close to us, such as our immediate relations. We can even start getting upset and angry with our own pets. It is unfortunate to be in this state.

When one starts to notice that this situation is taking place within one's life, one needs to make every attempt to change this and not to hold on to the situation. If the situation is not changed, it will become more and more grim, making it hard to have a happy and joyful life. It is important to acknowledge this and to make every attempt to make a change, otherwise it will become part of what one believes is one's personality. When I have made suggestions to some people to change their outlook in life and way of thinking, they said, 'That's my way and this is how I am'. It seemed like they were not open to the possibility of changing the situation, which is very difficult.

It is good to acknowledge and recognise this state of mind and make attempts to change one's state of mind and outlook, rather than thinking that one can just change the external situation. Some seem to think, 'If I change my job or career, or change my friend or partner, then things might be better', Unless one makes an attempt to change the internal conditions for one's state of mind, changing the external conditions will not really help. It may seem like things get better for a short while, but then it becomes exactly the same, and one has to experience the same situation again, continuously.

Initially when you meet someone new, it may seem like this person is so likeable, but after a while they begin to show their true colours and you will face difficulties and the same situation.

After getting into a relationship, some make comments such as, 'Maybe I have made a mistake'. At this stage it becomes a difficult situation, because when you have already started getting into a committed relationship, even if one feels it's not worth it, the other one is already clinging to you, so then it becomes complicated and that is how I see that unnecessary complications in life begin to take place for oneself.

If one is able to adopt a clear and bright state of mind, then within this state, one will be able to utilise one's wisdom and deeper insight, particularly the wisdom of being able to discriminate between what is beneficial and what is harmful to oneself. With this wisdom, one will be able to make better choices for one's well-being.

When one utilises wisdom and intelligence, one will be able to clear any doubts, which facilitates decision-making, because our doubts tend to hinder our right choices. We may wonder whether to do this or that, and we can hesitate because of doubts in the mind. These are essential points, which are not simple, but have been mentioned in the great teachings about how wisdom is a way to clear away doubts. The reason this is important is because we need to take personal responsibility to accomplish our own well-being, which is within our own hands.

The importance of utilising the deeper wisdom within oneself, which enables us to distinguish between good or bad, and what is beneficial or harmful and therefore making the right choices, is because all of us strive for our own well-being and have a goal to accomplish, so we need to utilise methods to accomplish that. If we have a big goal, but small means, it will be insufficient to achieve the goals we set for ourselves, therefore we need to apply

the right methods, and that is why wisdom is important in accomplishing what we want.

The main point is the way to accomplish what we need to obtain is the practice of meditation, which is the most suitable means.

The way to overcome the dull, sinking or despondent state of mind and an agitated mind which is in turmoil is to adopt the practice of meditation, which is the most supreme way to overcome that.

The meditation practice is a technique of training our mind to be focused on a particular chosen object. This training needs to be adopted properly so that we can get the benefit of the practice. Initially, it will be hard for us to maintain focus on a chosen object for a long duration. It is advised to keep our focus on the object for a short duration to begin with, such as one, two or three minutes. If we can maintain a proper focus on the chosen object for two to three minutes, and due to the familiarity of having a proper single-pointed focus on the object, we can start to develop a more stable focus, and then the duration can be lengthened. This is really important, because when we initially make an attempt to meditate, it may seem like we have accomplished something by being able to focus on the object for a short while, but then as we go further, we start to notice that if we don't pay attention to the mind, it will start to wander off. It may seem as if one is in a meditative state of mind, but actually the mind is getting more and more distracted. If this continues, after a while, one becomes weary and one starts to notice that one is not able to focus at all. This is when one may give up the meditation practice completely because one will not see the value and receive the advantages of meditation if that happens. As a way to maintain and get the true benefit of the meditation practice, we need to begin with a short duration, and try to focus and stabilise the mind on the chosen object of meditation. As we gradually increase the duration, the stability will improve.

If one is able to maintain one's focus firmly and single-pointedly on the object, then a long duration is good, because this is what one needs to obtain as part of one's practice. However, if the mind is constantly wandering away from the meditation object and one needs to try to keep bringing it back, after a while one will become weary. If the mind becomes habituated - seemingly focused on the object but half distracted - one may spend years seemingly in meditation, but not being able to focus on the object properly. The great Master Lama Tsongkhapa mentioned that one should be wary about a mind which is not fully focused and stable on the object, and not get into the habit of the mind being distracted. The point being emphasised is having a stable and firm focus on the object.

What is presented here is the training of the mind, and like other studies, as beginners, we need to go through the different stages in a gradual process, therefore one begins with a stage where one is able to maintain one's focus and then gradually increase the duration. For someone who attempts to engage in meditation to assume that they can immediately have a stable and single-pointed focus with long duration is unreasonable, apart from exceptional cases where certain individuals

may have imprints of being meditators in past lives. As soon as such exceptional individuals adopt the meditation technique, they will be able to have a stable single-pointed focus right from the beginning of the meditation. Otherwise for beginners, the appropriate approach is to go through the gradual process and stages of the meditation. Even with regular studies, there are different grades you have to go through as you gradually build up to the highest education, which is comparable to the practice of meditation. This training involves single-pointed focus on the object for a short duration initially, and if we can focus well for one minute, we can gradually increase to two minutes. Along with the single-pointed focus, the mind should be in a joyful, happy and peaceful state and without losing this state. If we can gradually increase the duration of meditation, then this is the proper way.

There is a story from Tibet to illustrate this point. A particular meditator went into meditation retreat, and when an acquaintance came to see the precious teacher, the attendants said, 'You can't see the rinpoche as he is meditating in retreat'. The visitor asked, 'How can he be in retreat when he was wandering around in town?'

When the meditating rinpoche was informed later about the comments of the visitor, who had exceptional clairvoyance and was able to read the mind, the rinpoche said, 'At the particular time when he visited me, there was a lapse in my focus, where I started thinking about the town, therefore he was right'.

It is definitely possible for the body to appear to be in a seemingly proper meditative posture, but the mind could be wandering off all over town.

The benefits of maintaining a focused mind are far-reaching. Apart from developing spiritual qualities, the meditation technique is most essential to develop a focused mind, which is useful for example to enable students to be able to retain information. When one is studying and the mind is focused, one is able to better comprehend and understand the subject matter. When one spends a lot of time studying, one will not feel fatigued, because the mind is quite fresh. Likewise, in regular worldly job situations, when the mind is focused and if one maintains one's interest and focus on the job, many say they can accomplish more in the work situation. One will not feel tired or overwhelmed by their work, because there is a sense of enjoyment as well. In this way, we can see that there are many practical benefits in our daily life situation.

We will now spend some time doing our meditation practice. We will adopt a comfortable upright posture and identify the object to focus on, which is our own breath. Based on our natural breathing, we put one hundred per cent focus on the breath itself, with complete awareness of the breath coming in and going out. This is what we need to adopt as a way to be fully committed to our practice.

The commitment we make is that we will not allow our mind to follow the normal thought patterns and distractions, but to bring our focus within and place our complete focus on the breath itself. In this way, we will

adopt this meditation technique for the next few minutes. [Pause for single-pointed meditation].

While maintaining a focused mind, we will now change the object of our focus to be placed on the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. When the recitation subsides, we maintain an inner focus for a short while.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

If there is a question, I will be able to take one question, otherwise we can conclude.

Student: If all the beings were liberated, what would be left on the planet?

Geshe-la: The state of being liberated, leading to the ultimate state of happiness, is not going to a different universe or planet, but it is removing the causes for one's own suffering, which are the afflictions within one's mind. What would be left are happy beings. They can still be somewhere in this universe, but they will not be suffering beings, but happy beings.

Beings who were previously experiencing misery and suffering, but due to having transformed and been led to the ultimate state, will be experiencing happiness, having removed the causes of suffering.

This is a similar attitude when one develops the awakening mind, where we are striving to dedicate all our merits, and our aspiration is to lead all beings to a state of happiness and free them from suffering. This is the bodhicitta attitude.

One part of the aspiration is wanting all beings to be free from suffering, leading to a state of happiness. Another part of the aspiration, called the awakening mind of bodhicitta, is that although one has a strong intention, one will come to realise that one does not yet have the full ability and potential to place all beings in a state of happiness and lead them out of suffering. When one seeks further, to see who has the potential and where can I get the potential ability, it is only when I become a perfect being myself – an enlightened being. When I am completely free from the causes of suffering and removed all my suffering and been led to the ultimate state of happiness myself, only then will I have the full ability and potential to free other beings, because someone who has faults cannot help others get rid of their faults. One has to be free from faults in order to help others to be free from their faults.

To give a contemporary example, a father may have a wish for his daughter to be skilled in a particular area, but if the father himself does not have the skill, he will not be able to help his daughter gain those skills. It will be just a wish, but if he himself had mastered those skills and had the understanding and knowledge, then the father would not only have the wish, but would also be able to help his daughter.

With good intention, he can still pay a lot of money for his daughter to go somewhere to get a good education and master those skills.

The father would not need to spend so much money if he was able to teach the daughter himself.

I have also heard of home schooling – I don't know if it is less expensive to study at home. I have heard that when you do home schooling, it is still possible to do the test.

The means to develop the awakening mind of bodhicitta is dependent on its pure conditions, which are primarily love and compassion. That is the prior cause for developing the awakening mind. One needs to first acquaint one's mind with feelings of love for all beings indiscriminately. Love is defined as a state of mind wishing complete happiness to those who are deprived of happiness. As one trains one's mind to wish others to have complete happiness, then one starts to develop one's mind to feel greater love towards other beings. Compassion is the state of mind that wholeheartedly wants others to be free from suffering, when one sees others who are suffering. The more one develops one's mind in wishing others to be free from suffering, the greater one's compassion. When love and compassion for other beings spontaneously reach a heightened state, where one wholeheartedly cannot bear to see others who are deprived of happiness and are experiencing suffering, then the love and compassion will develop into a higher state of mind, called superior intention. In this superior state of mind, the love and compassion has reached such a level where one is completely committed to taking responsibility of freeing other beings from all suffering and leading them into the ultimate state of happiness. Prior to this, it was just a noble wish, but now the superior intention has turned the wish into a personal commitment and responsibility of freeing all other beings.

What I may have left out earlier is that love and compassion are developed on the basis of seeing how other beings have been extremely kind to us, and how our happiness is dependent on other beings, who provide us with all the conditions and means for our well-being and happiness. By contemplating this again and again, then thinking about their kindness and wishing to repay their kindness will develop into genuine love and compassion towards others. If this is taken further to a state of not being able to bear the suffering of other beings even for a moment, and not being able to bear seeing other beings deprived of happiness, it will lead to taking personal responsibility that I need to free all beings from suffering and lead them to happiness.

At this point, it will become apparent that one does not have the ability yet, and in searching for a means to help all beings to be free from suffering and to be endowed in a state of happiness, one will recognise that there is such a supreme being called the Buddha, who has the full ability to do that. Enlightenment is a state which is achievable by everyone. We all have the potential to achieve enlightenment, therefore when one becomes fully committed to the sole purpose of benefitting sentient beings, and one is fully committed to achieve enlightenment in order to lead all beings to happiness and free them from suffering, then one develops the awakening mind of bodhicitta. Having developed the awakening mind, the actual method and practices that

are done in order to benefit sentient beings in order to achieve enlightenment is to engage in the practice of generosity and so forth, and engaging in the four means of acquiring disciples. These are the methods.

This is an incredibly profound and meaningful practice of developing bodhicitta, because as one trains to develop love and compassion and generate the state of an awakening mind within oneself, with every attempt as we develop further, there is a transformation that takes place within oneself. The anger and jealousy that one has towards others will decrease, there will be less possessiveness and desire towards others, and pride, competitiveness and all of the afflicted states of mind will definitely decrease. One will benefit by developing love and compassion, because when all these afflictions decrease, then one's mind will naturally become more joyful and happy, because the conditions for an unhappy mind is the afflictions. When they decrease, we will naturally be in a happy state of mind.

We can use a contemporary example of a mother with toddlers. This is the time when a mother seems to have the strongest love and affection towards her child. This is because children are at their most vulnerable. It is of course a difficult time, as toddlers are always prone to danger and mothers need to keep a look out to protect them. Nevertheless, mothers seem to do it willingly, without any sense of being burdened with a big task. They do it joyfully because of the strong affection and feeling they have for the child. We can see that it is actually a certain level of the manifestation of love and compassion. The mother is willing to sacrifice themselves and do anything for the young child because of their love and compassion.

His Holiness has previously shared this story, which occurred during a long-haul flight, He saw a couple with two children, an older son and a younger child. The Dalai Lama noticed that after a while, the father and the older child had fallen asleep, but the younger child was very restless and was always moving around. The mother was constantly running after him to bring him back to the seat. She was up almost the whole night looking after this small child, whereas the father and older child were still sound asleep. He commented that the mother seemed to have taken more responsibility to look after the children. The father could have said at one point, 'You take a rest, I will look after the child'.

The main point that I emphasise regularly is that the element of love and compassion is what we need to develop within ourselves, as well as a way to share the love and compassion. When there is a mutual sense of love and compassion in any kind of relationship, then there is a genuine sense of care for each other. With love and compassion, there is a genuine wish for the benefit of others, wanting them to be happy and not suffering, therefore the concern and care becomes really genuine. There is a mutual benefit when love and compassion is developed in our hearts, then there is naturally a more harmonious and good co-existence with others.

Thank you very much everyone.

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