
The Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Please sit comfortably

We are here to cultivate a positive state of mind which brings true happiness and peace and also supports good physical health.

The most effective tool for developing happiness is our own intelligence. By recognising that we have this intelligent power or wisdom within ourselves and then using it, we can effectively overcome unhappiness. Through the power of intelligence, we can be our own best guide and will clearly know what kinds of thought we should have and should not have in our mind, and what kinds of actions we should and should not do.

Our main problem is not being able to recognise the true source of our unhappiness. If we do recognise it then we won't blame other people or things, which are not the cause. We are deluded with respect to the true cause of our problem, and that's why no matter what we do, we are not able to find a solution to our problem or find the happiness that we seek. Rather, we are harbouring the cause of the problems within ourselves instead of getting rid of it. Therefore, we are perpetually facing problem and not finding happiness.

It is important to take time and have a really close look at our life. As we do this, we can recognise that the main cause of ups and downs in our life is our own state of mind. For instance, when our mind occupies or thinks over some things or events, we feel sad and find it disturbing. We can clearly see the pattern of how the stronger the disturbing thought arises, the more hurt, pain and suffering we experience. So, unless we recognise that thought as the real cause of our unhappiness and then fix it, all other good conditions that we may have in life will not give us happiness or meaning to our life. Sometimes we undergo suffering and misery simply because of a thought or memory of certain things or events, yet we opt to feed that thought instead of detaching ourselves from it. It is important to be aware of our thoughts because they can have a detrimental effect on our life.

When we face problems, we need to question to ourselves. Is there a remedy for getting rid of this problem? Is the remedy in our own hands or does it depend on other people or factors? Upon close analysis we can see through our own intelligence that our mind is the primary cause of our crisis. We can see that our mind is over powered by distortion, distraction and delusion and needs to be brought under control in order to change our life for the better. As part of controlling or subduing our mind, we need to work on diverting the mind from things and events that bring disturbing thoughts, and

focus on the things and events that bring a peaceful and calm mind. Sometimes I say that we are better off forgetting about certain things and events and remembering other things.

Now, we can really appreciate the benefits of engaging in meditation practice. In meditation practice, we make a concerted effort to gain control over our mind. If it is wandering after a disturbing object we try to divert attention from that and focus on the meditation object.

In the early stages of meditation, it is not easy to make the mind focus on the object. However, if we make an effort and repeat the meditation over and over again, we can see improvement as we slowly begin to gain control over our mind, until it is eventually calm. In this way we can overcome disturbing thoughts. When we get up from meditation and go about our everyday life the meditation makes a difference. It makes us more aware of our thoughts and our ability to control them.

Meditation is also a form of mental training which is necessary in order to break down negative patterns in our way of thinking. It is important to recognise the benefit of gaining control over our mind. If we do not control the mind when it becomes distracted and influenced by uncontrolled thoughts, the result will be a build-up of stress and tension.

In meditation practice, our job is to prevent the mind from wandering after external distractions and objects that cause agitation. We need to train our mind to rest on the meditation object. If we do this properly we can feel the benefit. The moment our mind rests on the meditation object we immediately feel peace and stillness. This experience will motivate us to meditate more. As a benefit of meditation practice, even when we are not meditating we will become more mindful of our thoughts and actions. We will understand that if any unwanted thoughts suddenly arise, it is possible to remove them by getting rid of mental agitation and having some sort of restraint over our thought process, before it drags us into an emotional crisis.

One great Kadampa master, said that without knowing where the mind should or should not be going, there is no chance of finding mental happiness. Those who have mastered this are in a position of transforming adverse situations into favourable ones.

Whether we experience of happiness or unhappiness has a lot to do with our state of mind, and where our mind should or should not be going. It is therefore important that we use our own intelligence or wisdom to closely watch our state of mind and try to discriminate between states of mind that bring about happiness and those that bring suffering. Based on that, we can make effort to bring more peace and happiness in our lives.

Another Kadampa master, Geshe Sharol said that getting rid of the desirous mind is the beginning of a happy life. One major cause of our unhappiness and dissatisfaction is an unending desire that is never fulfilled. As soon as we fulfil one, another one comes. Because of this it is impossible to find contentment. That's why, the moment we get rid of this desirous mind, we will begin to find enjoyment and happiness in life.

There are many such pith instructions by the great Kadampa Masters. Another instruction says that if we are able to be contented with ourselves in whatever we possess, we will find both mental and physical happiness, and we will make our time useful in terms of increasing our learning, contemplation and meditation. There is less to worry about in terms of accumulating more wealth or losing what we have accumulated. Contentment is very important element of spiritual practice. Without it, we won't be able to follow or engage in spiritual practice.

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Cultivate contentment by thinking that the very purpose of the material wealth we accumulate is to bring satisfaction which in turn more depends on our mental contentment. In developing contentment, we also need to work on reducing desire.

What we have covered here is the background or purpose of meditation, which is training and developing more positive states of mind and diminishing negative and deceptive states.

Think of meditation as an effective means of bringing mental calmness and stillness. Remind ourselves that without doing something to become aware of and subduing our mind, we will end up living a very stressful and restless life. For instance, some people are mentally so hyperactive and agitated that they can't even physically relax, even rest for a minute. They always have to do something like go out for a run.

To begin this meditation, we need to sit in a comfortable posture, fully relax the body and try to empty the mind of all distracting thoughts and external wandering. Let the mind abide within.

Focus on the incoming and outgoing breath.

Meditation

Continue with the meditation. Now we will chant the Buddha's mantra, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's name. Direct your mental attention on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

There's a bit of time left, does anyone have any questions please feel welcome.

Question: (inaudible)

Answer: Usually when you are reciting the prayers, the prayers should serve as a guideline for your meditation. They make it easier to meditate because you have something to follow; it can be more difficult to meditate or keep the mind in if you don't have such guidance for the meditation.

Sometimes, for example, you can use a painting as an object of meditation where in you simply focus the mind on observing the details of the painting. This also makes it easier for the mind to focus.

Thank you.