
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་ལུ་ལམ་རིམ་འགྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

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23 May 2018

The literal meaning of the Tibetan word *gom* is 'getting used to', so when we engage in meditation practice we are trying to get used to gaining control over our mind. It is indeed very important that we set this as a goal of our meditation. Hence, we need to understand the benefits of achieving control over our mind. The great Sakya Pandita said that having independence is happiness, whereas being under the control of others is misery. Supreme happiness is the happiness we find within our mind, supreme wealth is the practice of generosity and the supreme friend is an unfailing friend.

To quote Sakya Pandita Kunga Gyaltsen,

To be one's own master is counted as happiness.
To be in the power of others is held to be misery.
The chief wealth consists in charity,
The greatest happiness is tranquillity of mind;
Experience is the most beautiful ornament;
The man without desires is the best companion.

So, what does it mean to gain control over our mind? What is the outcome if we don't have control over our mind and what are the benefits if we do? If we don't discipline our mind, then our mind will rule and overpower us. Have a look at what sort of mind we have? We have a mind which is very scattered, unruly and has so many negative habits. If we do nothing and let ourselves succumb to this mind and the impulses within it, then we will be completely under the control of destructive emotions like desire, jealousy, anger and pride. We know from experience how miserable and difficult we feel under the impulse of these afflictive emotions, which we need to overcome through our meditation practice. Instead of letting our mind act as if ruled by a king, we can elevate ourselves to the role of the king and rule over our mind. By practising meditation, we can achieve this because we can control the mind.

In order for our meditation practice to provide lasting benefits, we need to be clear about its purpose. The benefits should extend beyond the meditation practice into our everyday life. The aim of meditation is to counteract the destructive emotions or mental afflictions such as desire, anger and the delusions. We come to understand that our mind is plagued with mental afflictions and that there is no solution to our problems unless we do something to overcome these afflictions. As a phenomenon, we are not our mind so it's worthwhile to step outside of our mind, and try to recognise our true potential, strength, courage and knowledge that enable us to overcome the mental afflictions. Otherwise, due to overwhelming presence of the mental afflictions within the mind, we may feel weak, as if we lack self-confidence

and the potential to defeat them. The great Indian master Aryadeva said that when the Victorious One (Lord Buddha) observes a person completely overpowered by mental delusions, he sees no fault in that person. He only sees the faults of the mental delusions. So, when we see someone who is totally under the control of the mental afflictions, it is important to understand that they have no control over their mind. They have no choices but to react to the impulses of those mental afflictions. So, we cannot hold them responsible for their behaviours for their behaviour is just a manifestation of their mental afflictions or delusions. If we had this kind of understanding, imagine how it could help us in our everyday life. Normally, when our partner loses their temper, we immediately lose ours but if we had this perspective, we would be in a much better position to maintain our inner sanity, peace and happiness.

If our car is hit by a car from behind the force of the impact is so strong that there was nothing we could have done to prevent it. The force of the mental afflictions is like this. Someone we know can be very calm but the moment their mind is afflicted with the force of anger, suddenly they change. They become negative and destructive, to the point where we can't imagine that they would be like that. Even their facial expression becomes frightening. Under the influence of mental delusion, they express such destructive force even to their own children or their close partner as if they are completely blinded by the destructive emotions. But if we were able to recognise that they were under the control of mental afflictions and that it wasn't their fault, then we wouldn't get upset with them. We'd be more tolerant and patient. One form of patience is accepting harm from others and taking their suffering upon ourselves. It just takes some understanding and knowledge to be able to practise patience.

So, now we will do some meditation together. It is important to make every effort to focus the mind on the meditation object rather than letting it come under the influence of external distractions. If the mind drifts towards other objects, simply bring it back to the object.

Some of us might have certain thoughts which disturb our peace of mind and ability to think clearly and so forth. These thoughts can interfere with our concentration and spoil what we are doing, whether we are lying in bed, taking a walk or eating dinner. Therefore, we should try to recognise how destructive these thoughts can be and get rid of them. We also need to understand the cause of a particular thought.

A thought doesn't arise for no reason. It could stem from a memory or an object. If we have such disturbing thoughts, then we should try to motivate or direct our meditation practice as a way to get rid of them. Rather than letting our mind get caught up with various things and events which brings disturbing thoughts, stress, anxiety and tension within our mind, we should try to anchor the mind on the meditation object. In this case, that is our breath; ensure that both the incoming and outgoing breaths are even and flow as natural as possible. So, let's do this for a few minutes.

(Pause for meditation)

Keeping our mind focussed, we will begin to chant the Buddha's mantra. As we chant, we try to direct our focus on the sound of the mantra and keep it there as much as we can.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA

Does anyone have a question?

Question: How do we know our act of helping others is not driven by the selfish mind driven?

Answer: It depends. If what you are doing is one hundred percent for others, then you are completely doing it for them. Or it could be fifty percent for others, and fifty percent for oneself. If your mental attitude is related to clinging to your sense of 'I' or 'my', then it is related to your self-cherishing mind. If you do something for others on the basis that they are 'my' family, then what you are doing is not completely for others because it is also associated with self-cherishing mind. There could be a situation where we see that our neighbour is in a far worse situation than ourselves, so we might decide to help our neighbour because they are in more need than us. This is an act where you place others before you.

Harmony and a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood in the family and in the wider community is a very important factor for bringing stable peace and happiness. That is why it is important for us to cultivate love and compassion as well as taking some responsibility of helping out others. We should love and help our father, our mother, our sisters and brothers all the time. Having a family makes a great difference to our lives because we always have someone to turn to when we need help and to share our lives with. We need to show loving kindness and care to our family members and friends and always be prepared to help them in difficult times, instead of forgetting them. In this way, if we face difficulties they will come to help us out.

This is what I believe and try to put into practice; cultivating love and compassion, as well as considering the needs of other beings. Only thinking of our own needs all the time is very self-centred. It is important to consider other people's needs, especially the needs of those close to us like our friends and family. It is important to be supportive to others and reach out and help them in times of need. It is not right when they are undergoing hardship and we forget about them and go off somewhere, like to a movie or a party, to enjoy ourselves. This is not right. So, you should take care of your family and take responsibility for meeting their needs, as well as being a responsible person in society.

The true sense of taking responsibility of other people's needs and so forth, comes from a genuine feeling of love and compassion for others. This is something I always emphasise in my teachings. I often say that the quality of love and compassion is something priceless that we can cultivate within ourselves. If we have this, then we would be able to genuinely care for and help others. As a result of showing love and compassion towards others, we will receive the same from them as if our love and compassion were bouncing back to us. Out of their love and

compassion, they then come to help us whenever we need them. It was a very good question which we should be asking to ourselves more often. We need to be aware of our thoughts and actions and whether they are related to a self-centred mind or a caring thought of benefiting others.

Even though an action is related to a self-centred mind, if it is of some benefit to other beings, then it is still worthwhile and wholesome. Sometimes, our action may be motivated by desire and attachment, yet its outcome may be of some benefit to others so from that angle it is worthwhile. However, any action which comes from anger or hatred is very unlikely to benefit others.

Question: Giving the description of love as a mental attitude of wishing others to have happiness and compassion as a mental attitude of wishing them free from suffering, when we cultivate compassion, aren't we also cultivating love? So, what is the difference between the two?

Answer: They are not the same in terms of the mental aspect and the observed object. The difference lies in the way these two arise due to the different way in which the object is observed. Compassion arises when we see beings experiencing pain and suffering. At that time, we are unable to bear the sight of other beings undergoing pain and suffering and genuinely we wish them to be free from what they are going through. This is a compassion. Whereas cultivating love is when we see others being deprived of happiness and privileges, and we genuinely feel for them and wish them to have happiness.

In terms of our response to these situations, with compassion, we will direct our actions to rescue or relieve other beings from their pain and suffering. Whereas, with an attitude of love, we will direct our actions to fulfilling their need for happiness. Hence, love and compassion are the dual principles of fulfilling the happiness that all other beings want and overcoming the suffering that they do not want; these are the fundamental principles for benefitting other beings.

Thank you very much.

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