
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་འགྲུབ་པ་བཞུགས་པའི།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Please make sure that you are in a comfortable sitting posture and that your body is relaxed. If we can also relax our mind, then we will feel a total sense of peace within ourselves. In order to relax our mind we need to learn about how it works and how to relax it. There are many external factors providing us with the opportunity to physically relax but, if our mind is not relaxing at the same time then we cannot feel relaxed. However, relaxing the mind is more difficult. If we could find mental relaxation and happiness, then that would be wonderful. I am here to share with you how to find mental peace and happiness, in regard to which I have some knowledge and experience.

I consider myself fortunate to be surrounded by favourable outer conditions, and on top of that I am able to maintain inner peace and happiness through my meditation practice. I find that inner peace and happiness is my best companion. When our mind is not at peace, then, no matter what we do or where we go, whether we are at home or at the office, or whether we are sitting or walking, we are restless and unhappy. Experience shows that we will find true peace and happiness when both our body and mind are relaxed.

There are situations in which we are physically relaxed but not mentally as our mind is overly busy, wandering all over the place and occupying itself with all sorts of issues when we find ourselves overly stressed and tense. However, when the mind is relaxed and calm we find ourselves at peace, and then finding ourselves in favourable external conditions is a bonus for our peace and happiness.

There is no doubt that we all want peace. We want our mind to be relaxed and in the present moment wherever we are or wherever our body is. But our mind doesn't have this natural tendency of stillness. If we check our mind closely we will see that it has a tendency to wander off after external things all the time. Why is this? Well, we can notice that our mind is overpowered by the force of external agitation and afflictive emotions, so it needs to be trained to calm down and abide within. It lacks familiarity with this kind of training.

Meditation is an effective means of training the mind to abide within. It is a regulated process which helps to familiarise the mind with a positive way of thinking and with positive objects. We need to apply meditation or some form of contemplative practice because if our mind is in a negative and distracted state, we will suffer as a result of the detrimental effect it has on our life. In this way, we can really appreciate the benefits of meditation.

If we apply meditation properly, then it will calm our mind.

So, we should try to develop an understanding of our mind, of how it works and what sort of effect it has with regard to our experience and decision-making and so forth. When we observe the rational mind, we will see that there are certain states of mind which bring about unhappiness and other states of mind which bring about happiness. One factor, which allows a state of mind to arise, is the object with which the mind is occupied. This means that a negative state of mind won't arise if we distance it from the object that brings about that mind, thereby overcoming the unhappiness that derives from it. In this way, disciplining our mind in meditation practice is an effective means of preventing unwanted states of mind and emotions. Whereas, if we familiarise our mind through meditation with a positive object and positive way of thinking, we can generate experience of happiness and peace. Through the lens of our wisdom knowledge we can clearly discriminate between the states of mind which bring happiness and those that bring unhappiness. The main tool for maintaining positive state of mind is the application of the power of memory or mindfulness and alertness.

We should discriminate between positive and negative states mind; is it worth having or not; is it beneficial or harmful on the basis of its effect on us; do we experience happiness or suffering? If our mind becomes agitated, disturbed and unhappy when it is occupied by certain thoughts or objects, then we need to recognise those thoughts and objects as negative and wrong, which we need to avoid in meditation. However, any thoughts or objects that bring about peace, tranquillity and happiness in the mind should be recognised as positive and right, with which we need to familiarise our mind in meditation. This essentially explains what meditation and spiritual practice is about.

In meditation practice, we will begin to recognise the importance of our own intelligence and wisdom and how tapping into this can we prevent lots of problems and suffering. In fact, there is a tremendous benefit in utilising our intelligence and wisdom, not only in our spiritual practice, but also in our everyday life. It is vitally important and more beneficial to use our own inner knowledge than having our decisions and views always being pre-empted by outer forces and conditions. The Lord Buddha advised his followers to utilise their own knowledge and analyse the teachings regarding what is right or wrong, beneficial or not beneficial, not just following him out of respect and faith. He gave his followers the freedom to decide what is best for themselves. The development of wisdom is a very important aspect of spiritual development. Not only that but even in worldly life we will find our own knowledge is our best guide and with its support we cannot easily be deceived or cheated by others. Utilising our own wisdom knowledge or rational mind and a clear sense of judgement is the single most effective means to solve various problems and puzzles of life and what is right or wrong.

This, the Lord Buddha taught, is the methodology of applying the Dharma. Initially, we gain knowledge by listening to the teachings given by others such as our teacher. However, such knowledge gained through another is not yet established within us. The next step is to further develop this intellectually acquired knowledge that we have acquired from others. The Lord Buddha advised us to reflect on our intellectually acquired knowledge by utilising the power of our intelligence. By applying our own logic, analysis and contemplation we should gain a deeper insight or knowledge with the firm conviction and faith in the subject matter in terms of what is right or wrong; relevant or irrelevant; beneficial or harmful. Lord Buddha devised this approach because everyone has different needs, capabilities and interests. However, through contemplation and analysis each individual will build on the knowledge they acquired from others in accordance with their own needs and suitability. Buddha said that after we have gained intellectual and contemplatively acquired knowledge, we should then distil it by engaging in meditation, and experience it as a deep meditational realisation.

You can apply this methodology right here. You have to check for yourself whether or not what you have heard tonight makes sense or not, whether it is beneficial to you or not. Then you can decide accordingly. If you think what I have said is makes no sense or irrelevant to you then you can treat it as a garbage. However, as I have requested the same in the past, you need to dispose the garbage outside, not here in the temple. Everyone has that liberty. If there is something you are unsure and sceptical about, then there is no point holding on to it and keeping it in your mind. You can simply say it makes no sense and just forget about it.

We are going to do a short meditation together. As I said earlier, make sure you are sitting in a comfortable posture. If it's not comfortable, it can interrupt your meditation. So the right sitting posture is important. The purpose of meditation is to train and familiarise our mind with the right object. Therefore, we have to know what the object of meditation is. It should be clear to you. Here, the meditation object is the incoming and outgoing breath. To meditate on this object, we have to get rid of mental distractions and ongoing thoughts and, as much as possible, apply mindfulness and the power of memory to direct the focus of the mind on the object. As an analogy, the application of memory is like a rope with which we tie the mind to the object, in this case the object to which we tie our mind is the incoming and outgoing breath. We will do this for a little while.

(Pause for meditation).

We will continue with the meditation by chanting the Buddha's mantra and focusing our mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

If anyone has any questions please put up your hand. Hopefully it's a nice and easy one!

Question: In a mandala, we offer objects of attachment. Why do we offer these objects to the Buddhas?

Answer: You are referring to the mandala prayers where we say, 'we offer the objects which bring attachment of anger'. This helps us to overcome attachment and anger. We offer the body, the resources and the virtues of the three beings of friend, enemy and stranger. What exactly is your question? Do you want to read it out?

Student: What does 'Please enjoy and bless me and those sentient beings to be released from the three poisonous minds. I am offering without attachment enemies, friends, strangers and those possessions which are the objects of my greed, ignorance and hatred' mean.

Answer: What we are offering is the body, the resources and the virtue of each of those three beings which, for us, induce desire, anger or indifference. If an object is perceived as something unattractive and unpleasing, then this induces anger and hatred. But when our mind perceives something as beautiful it, induces attachment and desire.

Are you satisfied or not? Do you need further explanations?

The Buddha is in a state of absolute purity, so there are no impure perceptions. From that angle, even if we offer, what we consider to be, an impure object, it will not be impure as an offering to the Buddha. Therefore, in the literal sense, it is OK to offer an object of attachment. Of course, if it's something we like, then we can offer it to the Buddha. There's no issue. We need to look at the pure and impure - it is subjective. In the Buddha's mind, everything is pure.

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor
Edit 1 by Katherine Boland
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering
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