
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་ལུ་ལམ་རིམ་འབྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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We begin with our usual meditation, so make sure you choose the right sitting posture and feel comfortable.

The aim of engaging in meditation practice is to bring about a positive mental state within ourselves. Meditation practice is really about training the mind so that it becomes more familiar with positive mental attitudes and a positive outlook.

This depends on having the knowledge of how to bring this about. As we said, the aim of meditation practice is to bring about positive mental attitudes. This depends on having a knowledge of favourable conditions that induce such a positive way of thinking, as well as knowing the main obstacles or unfavourable conditions that impede such positive mental attitudes. It is important to understand this.

First of all, we have to have a very relaxed and peaceful state of mind. If our mind is not relaxed or is disturbed by some unwanted thoughts then it is impossible to actually to train our mind. At the same time, it is also important to have bit of confidence and conviction that, despite the fact that the mind is unruly and undisciplined, it is trainable. That is very important to understand. If we look at the nature of the mind we can see how rather than being very fixed or static the mind is very flexible. So through gentle training we can modify our state of mind.

The things that are beneficial or harmful are not always external things. If we really observe our mind we will see how we continuously cultivate various states of mind and attitudes. As we observe these, we can notice how some states of mind are indeed very beneficial and bring about things that we want, and other states of mind are harmful, and actually bring about things that we don't want. If we have a state of mind that shows a concern for the wellbeing of other beings, then that state of mind is beneficial not only to others, but also ourselves.

Likewise, there are other states of mind that hold an attitude of, for example, hostility or animosity towards others. The result of such an attitude it is that not only will actions arising from such an attitude harm others, but they will also harm us. It is important to recognise how the kind of mental attitude we cultivate within ourselves acts as a very important factor in how much happiness and suffering we experience in life. Yet in our normal mental outlook, harm and benefit always appear as depending on some external factor, but in reality that isn't the case.

Knowledge of what lies within will determine whether you will find more happiness or suffering in the future, and whether your life is going to be successful or not. I

believe that recognising that the main cause of our future experiences lies within our minds is really the key to living a very happy and peaceful life.

Take a moment to think about how important it is to be very mindful of our mental attitudes, and to understand that 'if I do this kind of action or hold this kind of mental attitude, then that is beneficial to others, whereas if I hold this other mental attitude my actions will be harmful'. So we can see how having this kind of awareness and being mindful in our everyday life can be very beneficial in daily life.

The next step is to think of how we are going to develop more positive qualities and diminish the negative ones. We have to ask the question, 'To whom should I show a caring and beneficial attitude?'. In practical terms, you have to begin with those who are closest to you. Your closest circle of people could be members of your family or your partners or your friends. These are the people you have to think of when you think of cultivating a positive mental attitude.

As we just mentioned, you have to think of practising being very thoughtful and sensitive to their needs, thinking, 'if I do this kind of action it might hurt them, whereas if I do that action it will benefit them. Try to see, as we said before, that if I cause any harm to that person, or if I hurt their feelings then I am actually hurting myself. Likewise, if I do some good for that person and make them happy, that also brings happiness to my own life.

Eventually, you will always be doing something that is beneficial for those beings, and never cause them any harm. As you do this as a natural course of human reaction, not only will the people you benefit appreciate you, but other people around you also start to admire you, and then gradually your reputation as being a very kind thoughtful person will spread. Everybody will recognise you as a kind and good person. This begins with this practice of benefiting the few people who are closest to you.

Essentially we are talking about developing kind heartedness. Someone who always practises kind-heartedness develops very close relationships not just with close friends and family members, but also with those at their work place or any other organisation that the person is involved in. Everyone in those organisations admires that person's kindness. In fact, the organisation will see them as being almost indispensable. When a person creates a friendly, warm, very pleasant working environment and then leaves that place, everybody will sorely miss that person and feel a sense of emptiness there. This is because of the fact that everybody there remembers that person as being kind and someone who will never upset or hurt others and who is always be very helpful to others. It is important to see that practice of kind heartedness is much admired by all. Therefore, be kind and helpful others such as at the workplace, always be helpful to any colleagues who are new to the work or not as experienced as you are. Kind hearted people make a great contribution to individuals, organisations and communities.

We have to start with recognising those factors that are conducive to increasing kind heartedness and recognising those factors that are an impediment to cultivating such kind heartedness. Then we can start working on developing this kind heartedness. This practice of kind-heartedness is admired in mundane world and in terms of spiritual practice, it is the most effective way of ensuring inner peace. Through cultivating and enhancing kind-heartedness, you create inner peace, and when you have inner peace, then outer adverse or unfavourable conditions won't have much effect on you. In other words, with inner peace there is more resilience when facing external unfavourable situations.

If our mind is filled with kind thoughts or some sense of concern for the wellbeing of other beings, then our mind will naturally be accompanied by other positive states of mind such as love and compassion, and then there will be tolerance and patience. When all these qualities accompany our mind there will be no room for hostile feelings or anger or any of those states of mind or emotions that we find very disturbing to our inner peace.

Conversely, if we have a sense of concern only for ourselves, and then along with it that mind will be filled with various afflictive emotions such as feelings of jealousy, envy, competitiveness or intolerance. Due to all these afflictions we can't have inner peace and we will find ourselves in a very restless and disturbed state.

You have to see that these things are very much related to our meditation practice. We are engaging in meditation practice to develop or increase positive states of mind such as a sense of concern for other beings, as well as diminishing the negative states of mind. It is important to understand that this is what we are trying to achieve in our meditation practice.

When you engage in meditation practice, you try to direct all your efforts to overcome the negative states of mind and try to enhance the more positive states of mind. Even in day-to-day life when you are not engaged in a formal sitting meditation practice, it is also important to apply mindfulness and alertness as much as possible. You need to be constantly mindful of the importance of maintaining positive states of mind and the favourable factors for cultivating these positive states of mind, and overcoming the unfavourable factors preventing these positive states of mind from arising.

So now we will begin the usual breathing meditation. Ensure that you find a comfortable and very relaxed sitting posture, and then try as much as possible to empty your mind of all mental distractions and let it fully rest within yourself. After that try, as much as possible, to direct the attention of the mind to the inhaling and exhaling of the breath. Try to keep your focus one hundred percent on the breath without wondering off to other objects. Just focus on inhaling and exhaling for this short time.

(Pause for meditation).

We will now chant the Buddha's mantra; without losing your mental focus try to direct your attention onto the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA

There is a room for one or two questions, otherwise we will finish for tonight.

Question: Where does the name Doga come from?

Answer: The literal meaning of the syllable *do* means adamantine stone, *ga* means liking or fondness. So literally Doga means one who likes this stone. (but traditionally it means The Fond Stone One)

My full name is Lobsang Dorje. It was given to me by a famous geshe from my home town in Tibet, who, when he gave me this name said, 'One day this child will become a geshe'. This prophesy might be the reason why I chose the novice life. The *do* was taken from the first syllable of my second name Dorje and the *ga* is a suffix commonly added to names in the region of Tibet where I come from to shorten the name. It connotes a meaning of closeness or fondness., so people use the suffix *ga* after someone's name (usually after the first or second syllable of the name) to indicate closeness and affection. That is how I got the name Doga. Then, when I became a monk, I was given the religious name Lobsang Gyurme.

The famous geshe who gave me my name was Geshe Sangye Phuntsok. He was a prominent contemporary scholar and practitioner and also very well known for his clairvoyant powers. He had a very special relationship with His Holiness the Thirteenth Dalai Lama, that gave him a privilege of securing an audience with His Holiness whenever he wanted.

The Thirteenth Dalai Lama gave him a sangha mat as a gift which he deeply cherished, kept folded as an object of reverence and never used it to sit on. As you may know, that the current Dalai Lama, His Holiness the Fourteenth Dalai Lama paid a visit to China, and during his journey, he stopped over in my region where Geshe Sangye Phuntsok had an audience with him. At that event the Geshe-la placed that folded mat on His Holiness' table. His Holiness picked up that mat, unfolded it and commented that the mat was still in good condition. As this comment clearly indicated His Holiness' recognition of the mat as a belonging of his predecessor and hence proving himself as the undoubted re-incarnation of His Holiness the Thirteenth Dalai Lama that it made Geshe Sangye Phuntsok very emotional and tears streamed down from his eyes. This is all happened before the Chinese took over Tibet.

One of my nephews was an attendant to Geshe Sangye Phuntsok who as I said before was very famous for his spiritual feats. He predicted that although the monastery would be completely destroyed, it might be restored later on. At that time as part of the rituals, they made a specially designed tormas that had a particular decoration, which started to melt. As he had predicted, following the Chinese scale invasion of Tibet, the local monastery was completely destroyed, and now it has been fully restored. And, I became a geshe too.

Geshe Sangye Phuntsok spent his whole life following meditation practice, but now and then he used to visit a nearby nunnery as well. In the region where I come from it was a tradition that the monks pursuing further monastic study were sent to Sera Monastery. I heard a story that in his first three years in Sera monastery he

didn't do very well. Indeed he became quite notorious for quarrelling and fighting with others and so on. After three years he went back to his home town, and then regretting how he had wasted his time in Sera monastery, and realising the importance of pursuing his studies, he went back to Sera to study and became a well known master of his time.

Later on when the Chinese came to the town, he was arrested and interrogated even though he hadn't committed any crime. From time to time a Chinese soldier would point a gun at him, and he would say, 'Why don't you just pull the trigger and shoot me? Isn't that your job? Come on you can do it'. He showed no sign of fear of dying. 'Don't hesitate. It is your job. You should perform your job!'

Once, one of his nieces came to pick him up to the village as he fell ill. She took an ox for him to ride on, but he sat on it backward. When his niece told him that was not the way to ride, he said, 'I know the proper way, but I would never want to turn my back on my monastery'.

On day there was a flock of crows¹ flying in the sky and one of the soldiers started to fire at them but the bullets bounced back onto his forehead and killed him. There were all these mysterious things took placed and on that same night Geshe Sangye Phuntsok passed away peacefully.

This of course all happened in my own generation, so I remember the account very clearly.

This story is also a very good example of what we were discussing earlier in the teaching. When you have cultivated love and compassion for other beings you have great strength in dealing with external situations. Because of that, even in the face of his own death, Geshe Sangye Phuntsok had no fear, no hesitation, no loss of any calmness. Even when he was confronted with an external life-threatening situation, there was no sign of him losing his mental peace.

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi
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¹ In English a flock of crows is technically called a murder of crows.