
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཇུག་ལམ་རིམ་འགྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

11 July 2018

As usual, it is important to begin with a correct sitting posture and feel complete relaxation in your body. Recognise that within you there is a positive and wholesome state of mind that is very beneficial. We need to tap into this positive state of mind and work on developing it. Firstly, we need to clearly understand the benefit of training our mind in cultivating a positive state of mind so that we will be more motivated to achieve it. Through cultivating and relying on a positive state of mind it is possible to reduce problems or difficulties, and even if they arise and we must confront them, we will be able to maintain our inner peace, strength and joy and manage them much better.

Having a relaxed, calm, happy and positive frame of mind obviously benefits us individually, but also others who are close to us or who we interact with. Our positive energy can make them feel good and want to build friendship and connection with us. From this perspective, I say that the positive state of mind within us is like an inner friend or priceless object that supports us with an abundance of peace and happiness and guides us in the right direction.

Conversely, having a negative state of mind within us is very harmful both on us and others. Think about having negative states of mind such as anger or hatred or unfulfilled desire. How do you feel? You feel bitter, tense, disturbed, frustrated; emotionally very unhappy. Not only would you feel that way, but you would cause the people around you to feel the same. They would feel tension and stress and be uncomfortable being near you. This is something that you can understand from your own experience. Imagine how you feel when you are near someone who is emotionally charged with a disturbed state of mind such as hatred etc. You wouldn't feel comfortable near that person because you would feel tension and stress too.

Thinking on the direct impact that our mental attitude and outlook can have on our life and on our family, friends and social circles, we can truly see the benefits of understating our mind more and engaging in the practice of mind training. We all look for a good friendly relationship with others and this is an important factor for happiness. The fact of the matter is that nobody is perfect, which means that no matter what we do there will be moments where we or other people will lose their temper or become moody. In order to manage this kind of situation so that we can remain proactive and not be overwhelmed, we definitely need some sort of self-control through applying the practice of mind training. We must always remember that inner peace and happiness within us is very important for us and for maintaining good relationship with others. For this reason, it becomes important for us to work on cultivating a positive state of mind. It may take time, but if we put in consistent effort, then gradually we can see our mind transform. When we turn our attention inward, we can see that we could do a lot to bring more benefit, and to minimise the problems in our life. In other words we can see that there are certain

ways of thinking (or mental attitudes) and certain ways of looking at things and if we habituate ourselves with these they will bring tremendous benefit in our life. Not doing to investigate our mind is like missing an important opportunity to improve ourselves.

Each of us has certain obstacles within ourselves, and unless we overcome them, or at least minimise them, we cannot really minimise the obstacles in our life. Despite our best efforts in trying to overcome various hurdles in life, there seem to be unending obstacles, and these could be because of not overcoming those internal obstacles. As mentioned earlier, it may not be easy to overcome internal obstacles which require us to modify mental attitudes with which we are habituated. However, if we are motivated enough to work daily, gradually making an effort, we can change our way of thinking and then have more confidence and conviction in ourselves to be able to change and transform our mind. Through this we can see changes in our personality and daily actions. Essentially what's being said here is that if we turn our mental attention inward, we can see inside us there are things that we should accept and things we should abandon.

When you turn your focus inward and become more aware of your thoughts and emotions you can be called a spiritual person. This is a person who has found something within in which to have faith; to turn to for help and strength. Indeed, if we examine within we find we do have tremendous potential that can be fully trustworthy and reliable. The qualities within us such as intelligent wisdom, compassion are our self-potential. A while back I met a man at a dental centre and we had a casual conversation. He said to me, 'I am also like you, single and happy, but I admire your spiritual belief.' Then he asked my age and I replied, 'I am 74.' He said to me, 'you look like 55 years old- I am 58.' If somebody calls you a spiritual practitioner, what does the word 'spirituality' mean to you? Spirituality implies some sort of faith, hope and guidance within which is a very important factor for living a stable and happy life. Many find that without spirituality life is a bit empty, or something is missing. You hear this especially among older people. They say that they need to integrate spirituality into their life.

Spirituality can serve as an inner friend who is truly worth having. It doesn't matter too much if we have an external friend or not, if we have an inner friend then we can cope much better in facing relationship problems with outer friend/s. If we don't have an inner friend sometimes people find it extremely difficult to go through relationship problems. I know someone who went through a relationship breakdown who said to me that my advice that 'true happiness lies in the mind, not in any external object, is extremely useful.' That person was not particularly into dharma but has kept in contact with me and is trying to remember striking words of wisdom through my teaching. Some people find it useful to understand that our mental outlook toward things and events is the main determining force in our life. Here I am making two main points: the first is that the positive thinking can reduce a great deal of emotional problems; the second is that it can maintain mental peace and happiness in the face of problems. I want you to think over these two points.

So, we've been talking about how adopting a different way of thinking allows us to resolve certain problems. This refers to problems specifically created by the mind. If a problem is created by our own mind, logically it should become clear to

us that it can be solved by our own mind. As is also said, if a problem is created by a human then a human can solve it.

When we talk of bringing about change in our minds, we need to understand that every state of mind has an opposite force. These two forces, the negative state of mind and its counter-mind the positive state of mind, counteract each other. This means we have certain states of mind that have the effect of bringing unhappiness. Hence, when we experience states of sadness or disturbing thoughts we need to remind ourselves to understand this mind, how it arises, then how to counteract it by cultivating the opposite mental attitude. For instance, if someone is well trained in the practice of patience or tolerance, whenever they face certain adverse situations they can always modify their way of thinking. One of the type of patience is called *the patience of accepting suffering*, as this refers to voluntarily accepting the difficulty or suffering. People with this type of patience will be able to better tolerate their suffering and unfavourable situations. There is also *the patience of non-retaliation*, which refers to situations where somebody is trying to provoke, but where one is able to remain calm because of the ability to maintain a tolerant mental attitude towards that person.

In everyday life it is important to maintain a positive and peaceful state of mind especially when confronting difficulties. For example, if your friend is in a bad mood and expresses that to you, in that particular moment you have a choice of either reacting to it in which case you make the situation worse or use your wisdom by understanding that your friend is in a very volatile situation and be more empathetic. If you are reactive, you too will lose your peace and happiness and it will get worse. In a situation like that, if you choose not to react and remain peaceful (if possible showing caring and affection towards the person, even if you have to verbally say that you care for them, or 'I love you' etc.), even saying very few words makes a big difference in helping the other person. I have seen the immediate effect of people expressing their love to each other, and how this can actually bring them closer and support each other. What we are focusing on here is understanding how beneficial it is in our everyday lives to make situations and relationships better by maintaining a positive state of mind, and trying to express, as much as possible, verbal or physical actions that show positive qualities.

In everyday life, in situations where let's say your friend is in a very unhappy state, you can see something is not right even from their facial expression. In those kinds of situations, you should truly share love with that friend. Your mental outlook should be that you are concerned about the friend, not feeling 'Why are they showing such a negative face to me?' You should understand the fact that the friend is in a bad mood, and that this just shows that something is not right, that the person is not happy. Then, if you have an attitude that shows your concern for your friend, then you personally will not get upset or feel bad towards them. If possible, you should be supporting your friend. As I said before, do whatever it takes to show your intimate feelings towards them as a way to support them, even verbally saying that you care for them, love them etc. Showing your concern and care for friends means in spiritual terms is that you wish your friends have happiness.

Any small thing we do to support our friend can be considered part of our practice and part of training of our mind to develop love and compassion. In a situation where your friend is very, very down, if you have to, force yourself

to make a cup of tea and with a nice expression, nice words, as even this can help. Somebody said they've been trying this and that it was very helpful, but said it is not easy when the friend is always in such a bad mood. This kind of difficulty shows the positive state of mind is not strong enough, hasn't developed enough, and that we need to do more training to develop a deeper positive habit. An effective way to develop a positive state of mind is meditation practice. If the counterforce to a positive state of mind is mental delusions or afflictions, we cannot control our mind when it is under the power of mental delusions. Therefore, you should view meditation practice as a way to be in control of your own mind to protect it from the mental delusions. In other words, to gain full control over the mind is another purpose of meditation practice.

If you gain control over your mind, you have gained freedom, which means happiness. If you win over the mind, then you could even sleep better. There is a practice called creating a protection wheel, where when you go to sleep you imagine red light rays or nectar coming from Lord Buddha forming a tent of red light around your body. Then you imagine red lights in the form of spears shooting forth from your body in all directions, striking at all the hindrances, spirits, harms and obstacles. If you do this meditation properly then you can always sleep peacefully because all the obstacles and harms get pacified.

If you are able to gain full control over your mind then you can experience a total sense of peace and happiness without feeling any fear. With this understanding we can now continue with our meditation. Make sure you are sitting in a correct posture, and then relax your body. Try to calm your mind fully by overcoming all the external distractions. Then we can do the breathing meditation focusing on the inhalation and exhalation of the breath.

[Meditation]

Now begin the Buddha's mantra chanting, again without your mind wandering. Keep your mind on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed by Su Lan Foo

Edit 1 by Jill Lancashire

Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering

Edited Version

© Tara Institute