## Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

## ॐक्षेचेट.केय.जश.मुश.वर्चेट.च.चर्षयोश.मूर्रो।

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga Translated by Sandup Tsering

1 August 2018

As usual, please make yourself comfortable and relax your body. Our task is to do a meditation practice. Since we all consider ourselves great meditators, we should now meditate!

People get together for various reasons. When politicians get together, they always talk about politics. When business people get together, they talk about business. But when we get together as meditators, we should talk about meditation practice.

There are so many different focus groups, but as far as I can see, probably the best group is the one that focuses on meditation and something with a spiritual value.

We focus on the topic of the meditation practice or something spiritual, through which we cultivate and develop calmness and peace within our mind. Therefore, this topic is not like the topics of some other groups, like a group who talks about politics. People in these groups as they focus their minds and begin to discuss on their topics simply increase their desires, competitiveness, jealousy and so forth. However, when we focus our mind on meditation topics, then as a result we develop and enhance a calm state of mind and peace within us.

When we see the different effects between occupying our mind on meditation and on mundane activities such as politics, then we can better recognise the value and benefit of engaging in meditation practice. The fact is that all sentient beings without any exception seek peace and happiness. Therefore, we need to know how to cultivate it.

When our mind is filled with various disturbing thoughts or distractions, it becomes too agitated and disturbed and this sometimes has the effect of making us feel powerless, and we may experience low self-esteem. Just as Shantideva said, if our body is infected with a disease then it can become weak or lose its strength; similarly, if our mind is too agitated or too preoccupied with disturbing thoughts, it can lose its energy and power too.

In terms of knowing our mind and also the benefit of having a very peaceful and stable mind, it is really a matter of just observing our thoughts and our experiences. If we do this, we can see the difference in our mind when it is filled with so many agitated thoughts and when it isn't. When our mind is not filled too many thoughts, it is calm. But when it is preoccupied with too many thoughts, the mind loses its stability, focus and attention. Without good mental focus, we know from our own experience that whatever we do, despite our efforts, becomes ineffective and unproductive. This is something we can verify and recognise by just observing our experiences. If we ask whether there is any means or any way to overcome mental agitation and make our mind more peaceful and stable, there is, and that is the meditation practice, which we can say is the most effective and perfect means.

Therefore, it is important to recognise the effect our mind has on our life based on our experience, and in order to achieve what we want to achieve, we must understand our mind. At the same time, we must cultivate a sense of responsibility to achieve what we want to achieve, such as being successful in whatever we do and finding more happiness. We are saying here that meditation practice has great potential and benefits for our self-development and living a successful and happy life because it can bring peace and tranquillity within our mind. This is a very important cause for achieving lasting happiness and inner stability.

Even though we experience mental agitation or disturbing thoughts as being almost unstoppable, at the same time it is important to recognise that we can overcome and decrease them by engaging in meditation practice. We just need to apply the meditation practice to see its effectiveness. Let's say we are experiencing a strong wave of disturbing thoughts, and we resort to meditation practice to overcome it. We can certainly notice a difference at least in terms of lessening it. It is true that sometimes we experience disturbed sates of mind but there are also other times when we experience peaceful and happy states of mind. We therefore have to be more mindful and try to become more familiar with our meditation training and to remain vigilant in applying the meditation practice whenever it is necessary.

Sometimes we tend to forget meditation when things are going smoothly and feel as if we are on top of the world, for example, if you are making good money, becoming rich and making a lot of new friends. And then suddenly if we face some unexpected adverse situations, we get so shocked and overwhelmed that immediately we lose ourselves, we get so confused and just find it extremely difficult to cope with the situation. Therefore, it is important to integrate spiritual practice consistently on regular basis by watching our thoughts and trying to maintain a calm mind regardless of whether our situation is good or bad. Many people who follow meditation practice have found it very beneficial enabling them to live a more stable life and also to cope better with the difficulties of life. Likewise, we can also reap the great benefit of meditation in our life.

A meditation practice can help us to gain control over our mind. If we become familiar with meditation, then it will become easy to apply it whenever we need to, especially times when we face adverse situations that are very difficult to cope with. One of the main causes of our difficulty is relating to our emotions, i.e. our inability to control them. Furthermore, we can find it difficult to control within ourselves a very disturbed, very agitated state of mind. However, people who are familiar with the practice can, when they face a difficult situation, ensure that at least they remain calm within themselves by utilising their positive thinking. They can easily direct their mind onto a meditational object rather than simply worrying about and pondering over the problem. If we practise meditation we can see the difference in our experience how we were emotionally very disturbed a moment before, and in the next moment in a calm state of mind.

Through meditation practice we can enhance peace within our mind and also protect ourselves from external obstacles and adverse situations and circumstances. With meditation practice we can become a stronger person and less vulnerable to external unfavourable situations and develop an ability to protect our inner peace, happiness and sanity. On the other hand, if we lack a meditation or thought transformation practice, then we can easily lose all our peace

and happiness whenever we face any unfavourable external conditions.

I quite often share with others my experience in maintaining peace and happiness within my mind, even in the face of difficult external conditions. Even though we cannot prevent or overcome all the unfavourable external conditions, we can through our practice protect our inner peace and happiness from being harmed or affected.

I know of one Indian woman who used to come to teachings, and sometimes after teachings we'd go out for tea. On one such occasion she asked me, 'Geshe-la, what is your secret of living a happy and peaceful life?'. I began to talk to her a bit about my life story, how I lost my country and had to leave my family behind etc., and then suddenly she said, 'I know, the answer is you have no attachment'. I thought that was a very smart answer, clearly exemplifying the genius of the Indian brain.

Another emphasis that I have always been putting into my talks on meditation is to apply the meditation to maintain peace and happiness within our mind. This is extremely important. To maintain and effectively protect our inner peace and happiness we need to apply a meditation practice. A meditation practice is very important in order for us to enjoy sustainable peace and happiness, and to inwardly have some sort of resistance so that we are not always vulnerable to the continuous changing conditions and circumstances of life.

However, when we let our ability to maintain our inner peace and control our mind slide, then how easily those difficult external causes and conditions can overwhelm us. It is so easy to be influenced by external causes; we can completely lose ourselves We can easily get completely depressed. Some external situations result in us losing our interest and motivation, so much so that we cannot enjoy our life. We might find it difficult to even go to sleep or go out to eat; sometimes nothing helps. When we are very disturbed and agitated, we can clearly see how in that situation all external things fail to help us overcome these problems. So here we can see that the only thing that truly benefits us is learning meditation practice and integrating it into our life and getting used to it.

We are going to do our usual breathing meditation practice. In this meditation we don't need a lot of knowledge or to have to think about the topic or the reason for the topic. The meditation is simply just to direct our mind onto the object, on our breath. And of course, in order to do that, first of all we need to get rid of all our thoughts, like the very disturbing thoughts that have filled our mind. But the reality is that sometimes it is not always easy to get rid of all these disturbing thoughts. So we need to understand how those thoughts arise, and then how these different thoughts have an effect on our emotions, whether they are pleasant or unpleasant.

Generally speaking, in our case, lots of these thoughts are all related to our mind or consciousness, and its contact, mainly with the five sense objects, such as visual form, sound, smell, taste and touch. We experience the contact of our subjective mind and its object. For example, if you take the subjective mind or subjective consciousness as our visual eyesight or eye consciousness which perceives a form. When it has contact with an attractive form, desire arises, and contact with unpleasant form leads to aversion arising. So, depending on our mental contact with and perception of various external sense objects we generate various emotions,

which shape our experiences. If we cut the contact of our mind with an object, then we are getting rid of that particular state of mind or thought. So we can see how a meditation practice works in terms of disciplining our mind by fixing it on a specific object, and thereby preventing various disturbing thoughts from arising.

If we observe our state of mind we can see that when it is occupied on a negative object, we experience disturbances within us. So if we want to get rid of a particular state of mind, then one way is to divert our mind to a different object. However if, instead of trying to discipline our mind from going after a negative object, we simply let the mind engage with the negative object, then the result is that the discomfort and internal turmoil will be intensified. So I often say, sometimes it is wise to forget certain things and thoughts that bring us unpleasant experiences. I remember in my case, not so much now but in my young age, I suffered because of not being able to forget certain things and events. I can recall when I was young I found it extremely painful whenever I had to depart from my mother after spending some time with her. I just missed my mother a lot and suffered because I could not take her off my mind. Looking back, one of the main reasons why I found it so hard to leave her was because she loved me and looked after me so well that I was emotionally attached to her. I suffered because I could not emotionally cope well from being separated from her. However, the separation didn't affect me afterwards, as I got on with my life. Even if I thought about my mother, I didn't have difficulties. So in the same way, sometimes in our life, when things are going well and suddenly that changes, then we find it very difficult to cope with.

Some people may say, they don't have such problems, but in fact when they face a really testing situation, they realise that they are internally not strong enough and that they do have a problem.

Whatever we do in life, we need to be clear about our purpose or reason for doing it. When we engage in meditation practice, we have to recognise very clearly its purpose and benefits. So that is why it is good to discuss and think about the benefits of meditation before we begin our meditation.

Now let's begin the breathing meditation. Relax yourself and try to get rid of all the external thoughts so that the mind can rest inwards. Then breathe in and out, trying to direct the focus of the mind on the inhaling and exhaling of the breath.

(Meditation)

We continue the meditation by chanting the Buddha's mantra, and as we begin the chanting make sure that you keep the mind inward and try to use the sound of the mantra as the focus for the mind

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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