
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

8 August 2018

Please make yourself comfortable and relax your body and mind in preparation for meditation.

We all want to develop ourselves in terms of acquiring positive qualities and getting rid of negative ones. So, we should think of how meditation or spirituality can benefit us with respect to educating us about the good qualities we need to develop and the negativities that we need to eliminate.

There are many ways of integrating meditation into our life. Meditation practice enables us to recognise that there are desirable, positive, and constructive traits within us which bring happiness both to ourselves and others, as well as undesirable, negative and destructive traits which bring suffering and problems to ourselves and others. On the basis of this understanding we will know what to practise and abandon in everyday life, in order to enhance positive qualities and eliminate negativities.

As human beings we all possess a good human nature and intelligence. Meditation can help us to recognise these good human qualities and utilise them for the benefit of ourselves and others. Through meditation practice as we become more self-aware, we can learn that how sometimes, intentionally or unintentionally, we create negativities such as hurting those who are close to us and then feel bad and remorseful afterward. Moreover, we can clearly relate the main cause of negativities to our mind to impulses and afflictive emotions that serve a driving force for us to do these negative actions. We can see this very clearly in our meditation when we pay more attention to what is going on inside us than outside. Once we see that when our mind is overpowered by afflictive emotions whatever actions we undertake will become negative and destructive, and as a result we cause harm and damage to those around us, we will understand that we need to correct our mind in order to correct our deeds. As we look for an effective means of transforming our mind, we can see that meditation practice is the only true means to transform our mind, and that meditation is the best tool in utilising our own human emotional intelligence in order to eliminate negative thoughts and develop positive mental attitudes.

Meditation makes us more aware of what is going on in our mind. It gives us an opportunity to observe our thoughts and to be discriminating. Instead of blindly following our mental impulses or simply being overruled by our mind, we need to apply meditation, and observe our mental impulses – what actions or direction they are leading us to follow and the end result. In this way we can decide what to do and do it to achieve the best outcomes for others and us.

Whether or not our actions will have harmful or beneficial consequences depends to a large extent on what our motivation is. By using our intelligence, we can recognise that sometimes there are some actions which may look beneficial in the very short term, but in the long term they bring much harm and no benefit at all. So, obviously such actions are not worth undertaking. Meditation helps us to use this ability to discriminate.

Meditation practice has a great potential to benefit ourselves and others. Through it we can improve the quality of our life as well as extend benefit to others. At least we hope that through meditation or spirituality we are able to prevent harmful actions that bring suffering to others and become more aware of the cause and effect of the occurrence of things and events. The main reason we find it difficult to correct our actions and to change our way of thinking is because of the overwhelming influence of negative states of mind, or mental afflictions. We need to be aware of the fact that when our mind is filled with strong afflictions such as hatred or anger, any actions undertaken can be really unwise and harmful to ourselves and to others. Thinking of overcoming mental afflictions like anger is the most effective means of really understanding mind training, and for that we need to engage in meditation practice. Meditation practice helps us gain more control over our mind. We may not be able to prevent anger from arising, with our spiritual practice at least we can become aware of it when it does arise and recognise it as being negative and destructive. One way to overcome it is directing our mind to the nature of anger itself, rather than reacting to it or pondering over the object of anger. By doing this we will see that anger losing its force and diminishing by itself. In this way meditation practice helps us to enhance the peace and clarity in our mind.

We can see through our meditation practice that thoughts and actions that bring harm to others also bring harm to us. Whereas thoughts and actions that bring benefit to others bring benefit to us as well.

Bearing in mind that what we are trying to achieve through meditation practice is the transformation of our mind, our meditation is to free our mind from the influence or dominance of mental afflictions. When we look at the causes of negativities, whether in our thought, speech, or bodily actions, they all stem from mental afflictions, which overpower our mind. If we overcome the presence of those mental afflictions in our mind we then bring about a positive transformation within ourselves. When this happens then naturally the actions that we manifest through the three doors of body, speech and mind, will be more beneficial and positive.

With this in mind we will now do a short breathing meditation. When we meditate, we use two main tools.

Mindfulness is the power of memory and alertness or awareness. In order to apply these, make yourself very comfortable and relaxed. Try to gently calm your mind down by overcoming all external distractions, so that your mind is fully brought within yourself. Applying mindfulness or memory means remembering the object of your meditation. The object here is your incoming and outgoing breath. Keep your mind on the inhalation and

exhalation in such a way that it stays on the breath with full attention, and no part of your mind drifts towards any other object or outer distraction. You must use your memory to hold the mind on the object and prevent distractions. If someone is really very hungry the thought of food is always present in their mind. They cannot avoid that thought. Mindfulness or memory has to be applied in the same manner during meditation. It is used to hold the mind on the object.

We apply alertness or awareness to check if the mind stays on or leaves the object. Using this tool, if the mind doesn't stay on the object you will immediately become aware of that and bring it back onto the object. In meditation you need to be very vigilant and alert, so that even when the mind is about to stray, you will be alerted and then able to prevent the mind from being distracted. In this way you place your mind on the object. If you lose the object, simply bring the mind back.

Here the object is the inhalation and exhalation of the breath. For the next few minutes, try to place the mind only just on the breath, and apply mindfulness and awareness to that.

(Pause for meditation)

Now we are going to chant Buddha's mantra. We will continue the meditation, but switch the focus of the mind to the sound of the mantra. So again, make sure that the mind is not distracted by any other object but just focus on the sound of the mantra.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA

That is all for tonight. If anyone has a question, we have time for one or two.

Question: Geshe-la, what is the best thing to do if you have a sense of regret?

Along with the sense of regret what is also important is to generate a resolution not to repeat whatever wrong action you have done in the past. It is also important when such a regret arises to recognise that whatever has happened in the past has already gone, and you can't alter that. However, you can learn from the past experiences. If the past action was bad, then along with feeling remorse you should feel more motivated and determined to not repeat the same action. The positive aspect of feeling regret is to recognise and acknowledge what you did in the past is wrong. This sense of regret must be sincere and arise from the depth of your heart so that you grow as stronger person who is clearer about what is right and wrong. Of course, if you find this sense of regret very disturbing and getting in the way of doing the things that you need to do, then may be you should try to redirect your mind to something else, or try to do something to forget about the past.

In Buddhist terminology we use the sense of regret in the context of regretting past deeds. From this point of view, regret can be virtuous or non-virtuous, for example, regretting the good things that you have done in the past by thinking, "I should not have done that", is considered non-virtuous, whereas regretting misdeeds is virtuous.

In fact, in one of Vasubandhu's works there is a section on regret where he said that regret can be virtuous, non-virtuous or neutral, and there some debates about this.

When we get together we create actions, which have benefits both ways. It brings me joy and benefits me when you listen to the teachings with good attention and great interest. Likewise, as I try to teach with good intentions and with pleasant physical gestures, hopefully you get some benefit and joy. So, we all derive some benefit from gathering together here. I knew one lady who at one occasion had a cup of tea with me after a teaching. She confessed to me that she she found it difficult to understand the teachings which however she loved my smile and bodily gestures and that's the main reason she attended the teachings. Maybe some of you also have been coming for the same reason.

Thank you for paying very good attention to the teaching.

Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi

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Edited Version

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