
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་ལུ་ལམ་རིམ་འགྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Relax and we will meditate together.

The aim in meditation is to develop a calm and a clear state of mind.

In meditation we direct our mind and focus on a specific object and in this way we consolidate our energy, concentration and attention within us. This practice is very effective for developing and enhancing a peaceful and happy state of mind.

We all have the same wish to have a state of mind that is peaceful, happy and joyful. Let's look into the benefit of having a peaceful, calm and happy state of mind. In general, our perception of things and events are more positive when we have within us a very peaceful and joyful state of mind, whereas it is more negative when our mind is disturbed and agitated. We can note that when our mind is peaceful and happy or when we are in good mood, the world and external objects appear to be wholesome, positive, friendly and desirable. If when our mind is disturbed, not peaceful or happy, or we are in bad mood, the world and things appear to be negative, unpleasant and horrible, as if everything including inanimate objects hates us and wants to annoy and upset us. This is something important to take note of.

This shows that to a great extent whether the external world and people appear to us as friendly or not, depends more on our own state of mind than is objectively the case. If we have a more peaceful and happy state of mind, we have a more positive and pleasant perspective of the outside world and events. If our mind is disturbed and lacking peace and happiness, then we have a more negative impression of the outside world. How we perceive things or people has more to do with our own mental projection than how things appear objectively. In fact, the way the whole world appears to our mind is almost conjured or constructed by our own thoughts, rather than reflecting the way things are in terms of their reality. For example, we can feel hatred and attachment for the same object. We hate the object when it appears to be undesirable, unpleasant and ugly, and then find it desirable, pleasant and attractive. His Holiness Dalai Lama commented that a finding of scientific research concluded that in 95% cases when people are angry, the object seems negative, but this is a 90% mental projection. The research looked at the cause of why an object of anger or hatred seems to be very undesirable and negative - whether the element of undesirability was something in the object or projected by the mind. However, there is no similar indication by percentage as to why the object seems positive when a person is

attached to the object i.e. whether it is more related to the object or the subjective mental projection.

When we experience strong, possessive desire the object appears to be very pleasant. If we look into our personal experience, especially our feelings towards those who are close, we see how they can fluctuate from attachment to hatred very quickly. It is not always the case that our acquaintances change their feelings towards us. Sometimes they remain the same person and have not changed their feelings towards us but because of our unnecessary suspicion and mental projection they appear as being untrustworthy, unpleasant and annoying.

If we look into the cause of why disturbing thoughts bring negative thinking, we can see that the main cause is because our mind is too agitated or distracted and not under our control; it seems like a piece of paper in the wind, wandering about without any thought. When a certain thought arises a person might feel that the whole world is against them. He doesn't want to see other people, his self-esteem suffers, and he may even suffer from depression. We can recognise that this all derives from mental projection.

So, whenever we engage in meditation practice we should reflect upon the purpose of meditation, which is to calm our mind so that we are not misled and tormented by our own mind. The purpose of the practice is to bring about a state of mind that is peaceful, joyful, clear thinking and alert.

There is no question that we all want mental happiness. We also know that happiness, even on a mental level, depends on causes. We are also aware that if we want happiness we have to create the cause. In fact, our whole life is actually going around and around in pursuit of happiness and we are trying hard to achieve that.

If we ask ourselves what we think is the true cause of happiness, our answer is usually that happiness arises from external causes and conditions, such as making money etc. It is as if happiness is a consumer product. We have a preconception that more external wealth and successes more happiness we can have.

But then if we check those who are materially well off, all have happiness or more happiness, then they don't necessarily have more happiness. There are some people I know who do not particularly believe in religion or spiritual teachings, who despite their wealth and success are very unhappy, confused and frustrated with their lives. This means that accumulating material wealth does not necessarily bring happiness. So, we have to ask what other cause of happiness is missing?

Indeed, sometimes, we can see that those who have more wealth have more causes for mental distraction, worry and getting stressed. As discussed earlier if people are mentally very disturbed and stressed then, no matter how much wealth they possess they cannot be at peace and happy. They cannot have peace and happiness inside them because their increased wealth has become a source of increased attachment, pride, jealousy etc. Because of their wealth they look down on poor, are jealous of others who are richer than them and have a sense of competitiveness with those who equal to them.

Of course, it is not necessary, but if we are not careful our wealth and material successes can become a source of more worries and restlessness and burden inside, rather than bringing more happiness, satisfaction and peace in our lives. In order to feel peace and live a satisfying life we have to overcome desire within our mind. If our desire remained unchallenged then no matter how much wealth we possess we will never be contented. Desire will make us work hard and suffer just for the sake of accumulating wealth; then having accumulated it, wealth makes us worry about safeguarding it, and protecting ourselves from losing it, not to mention the suffering of losing it at the end.

There are some people who even acknowledge the fact that their life seems to be more unhappy and less fulfilled now than in the past when they were not so wealthy. This confirms how, when there is no control over our thoughts, we can lose our peace and happiness to the point where even good external material conditions and successes don't bring any happiness. In fact they don't bring any added value to our lives.

So, what we understand from this is that when we talk of peace and happiness we are talking about some qualities within ourselves, and the only way to cultivate and develop it is through meditation practice and through achieving a calm state of mind.

There are a lot of benefits from integrating meditation in one's life. Even if you meditate for a very short period, like one or two minutes, you will experience some peace and happiness. Even that short moment is important for your wellbeing. It is good to include it on a daily basis. Regardless of the duration, if you do a little bit of meditation on a daily basis, you will find it very effective in terms of enhancing your peace and happiness. If we already have found some sort of peace and happiness it will help to safeguard it and not lose it or allow it to disintegrate. It can even help us to have a good night sleep which is an important cause for our wellbeing. To ensure a good nights' sleep, our mind must be calm and not overwhelmed by distracting thoughts. If we are mentally agitated and disturbed, we can't fall sleep, can we?

The benefits of meditation include an increased focus, clear thinking, peace and happiness. It also helps stabilise these positive qualities, to which we all aspire. When we have these qualities, it benefits not only ourselves, but also those around us. I try to put all my efforts into always trying to recognise the importance of having and sustaining a state of mind, which is clear, peaceful and happy. I can say that I have achieved some results and I am convinced that my practice of meditation actually works in terms of achieving and sustaining a peaceful state of mind.

Reminding ourselves of the benefits we can have through controlling our mind, and the faults or shortcomings that can arise inevitably if we do not control our mind, is the best way to motivate ourselves to meditate regularly. Keeping this mind, we will now do a breathing meditation for a short time. We will use the technique of directing our mind and mental attention fully on the incoming and outgoing breath.

We do this is by applying mindfulness, like a rope tying the mind to an object. As much as possible ensure your mental attention is just on the breath and not distracted by any other object. Now begin the meditation.

[meditation]

Continue keeping your focus inward and we will begin chanting the Buddha's mantra. However, now you direct your mental attention to the sound of the mantra without being distracted by any other object.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA
So that's all for the teaching, but if anyone has a question, there is room for one question.

Q. One of the ten non-virtuous actions is called covetousness, what does it mean?

It is a type of attachment. When you go to shops you see an object that you desire and think 'I wish I could have that object'. The word 'desire' is not necessarily negative all the time, as you can have a positive desire. However, in our daily life we have desire or attachment to various objects. One psychologist categorised desire into three levels, small, middling and great, and made the remark that a small level of desire is not harmful to us. I like that idea.

Of course, it is not easy to overcome desire but making an effort over a period of time we can slowly minimise and overcome desire. Once I was having a chat with a girl who was a beginner and had an issue with desire. I advised her that her desire was very low level, so it was okay. She really appreciated that and said she felt much better. Later on, however she understood what I really meant when I said, 'it was okay to have a small desire'.

Covetousness can bring suffering at the shops especially if you don't have money. Covetousness is more to do with mentally craving for the object. At the shop you are visually attracted to various things and at the same time you mentally crave for those things. That is covetousness. When you get to home, your mind can be still craving for those things that you saw at the shop, so your mind is not really home because it is still out shopping. The more you crave, the more your mind is distracted and unhappy.

Tomorrow I get up happy, enjoy good harmony and a good mind. Good harmony makes you happy, makes you really happy. Good harmony creates a good mind. It is not outside. Monks are very, very poor, yet very, very happy. They are very harmonious and very happy.

Thank you

*Transcribed by Su Lan Foo
Edit 1 by Carla Betros
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering
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