
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་འགྲུབ་པ་བཞུགས་པའི་།།

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19 September 2018

We will begin with our usual meditation.

It's important that we begin the meditation with a proper motivation, ensuring there is a real interest and enthusiasm for engaging in meditation practice. Beginning a meditation with a positive state of mind as a motivation is very important, not only with meditation practice but also with any activities that we undertake in our everyday life. For instance, even when we have a casual conversation, if we do so with a positive and loving state of mind it makes a huge difference in terms of making our communication more effective and mutually beneficial. It is not just what we say to others that matters; the tone and the mental attitude that we adopt makes a huge difference. If our mental attitude is positive, then our interaction will have more positive impact.

Meditation practice is about learning about ourselves, our mind and living a more fulfilling life. Through meditation we can even make our everyday actions wiser, kinder and more compassionate. Meditation is about transforming our mind and bringing peace and happiness from within. Therefore, it is important whenever we engage in meditation practice that we direct our mind inward and ensure that we have a proper motivation and a clear recognition of why we are meditating and what we are trying to achieve.

Essentially, through meditation we are trying to achieve and enhance a more positive state of mind within us so that our actions of body, speech and mind are also positive. As all our actions derive from, or are presided over by some sort of driving thought, if this thought is positive then the actions that result from it will naturally also be positive. Likewise, if this presiding thought is negative, then any actions that arise from it will be negative too. With a positive motivation our actions will yield a beneficial result for ourselves as well as those who we interact with. If our motivation is filled with, for instance, hatred and anger towards others, then our actions will also have the same negative influence and as a result cause disturbance to both our mind and the minds of others.

Our actions directly affect us, and those around us, or with whom we interact. Thinking of this, and the fact that we all want happiness but not suffering, we should cultivate loving kindness or an altruistic mental attitude which is indeed the best frame of mind. If we cultivate and develop loving kindness then we will make a conscious effort in everyday life to try to prevent harm to others and benefit them through the actions of our three doors. Benefiting others benefits us too.

There are many inspirational people who are by nature very kind, calm, wise and patient. It is good for us to be around them and be inspired by them. We should observe how they maintain their happiness, calmness, consideration of and sensitivity to other peoples' needs etc. in all their interactions with others. Somehow this kindness is built into their

personality and is part of them. If we try to adopt their good nature and habituate ourselves to it through our spiritual practice, we can acquire the same qualities, and this will be of tremendous benefit for ourselves and for others.

We can remind ourselves of the following passage by Shantideva which indicates that we should check our thoughts before speaking or acting, and if we observe any faults or negativity in our thoughts we should remain silent and not act. This passage is a very practical piece of advice that we can apply in our everyday life. In this way, we will be able to prevent many actions which we may regret later.

The passage from Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life* reads:

And when you feel the wish to move about,
Or even to express yourself in speech,
First examine what is in the mind.
For steadfast ones should act accordingly.

When the urge arises in the mind
To feelings of desire or angry hate,
Do not act! Be silent, do not speak!
And like a log of wood be sure to stay

As well as subduing and transforming our mind, the purpose of meditation practice is also to make our mind serviceable or workable. If we check the present state of our mind, we will notice how little control we have over our mind and how it is overwhelmingly overpowered by mental afflictions. Through meditation practice it is possible to fully subdue the mind to the point where it becomes very serviceable and obedient, and our mind will listen to whatever we say to it.

Through meditation practice we learn to recognise unwanted states of mind, which bring about unhappiness and take away inner peace, and replace them with a calm and joyful state of mind. Having within us a calm and happy state of mind will benefit us, and those who we interact with. The way to find true peace and happiness is recognising negative states of mind such as anger and hatred and then overcoming them.

Through meditation practice we begin to recognise, learn about and become aware of how a negative state of mind arises, how it disturbs us from within and serves as a source of emotional turmoils, stress, tension and restlessness. We learn to recognise it to the point that we can look at this negative state of mind and then say to it, 'You are the continual source of all of the suffering and misery in my life. I've had enough of you! I want to completely finish you off and I will never listen to you or fall under your influence'. You should even feel a sense of animosity towards the negative states of mind.

There is a lot to learn in meditation, as through it we can experience a lot about life. Meditation involves removing distracting thoughts and allowing the mind to fully settle inside. After the mind is settled within, try to experience its effect of bringing peace and stillness within you. So, you can observe here the benefits of letting the mind rest within you. On the other hand, you can recognise the disadvantages of not resting the mind within but letting it constantly wander off to external objects. The impact it has on our experience is very disturbing and sometimes it becomes out of control. Because of too many thoughts and too much mental agitation, we get tense, stressed and anxious and sometimes get depressed and restless, and as a result we become unhappy and moody.

However, if our mind is settled inward such as when we are meditating it is fully focussed on a chosen object without being distracted by any other objects, we just feel peace and tranquillity. Of course, we cannot expect to be able to meditate well straight away as it does take time to do that. If you practise continuously with consistent effort and patience, you can gradually make progress in your meditation practice. The term for 'meditation' in Tibetan is 'gom', which literally means 'to become familiar with', so we need to become familiar with whatever we meditate upon. That's what the meditation is all about.

In our approach to meditation and to life, it is important we use intelligent knowledge and our sense of judgements. It is important that we practise meditation because with our own knowledge we understand the benefits of practising meditation and the disadvantages of not practising it. When we decide to undertake actions based on our own knowledge, it can be very effective in whatever we do. This applies to our everyday life. Whatever decisions that we make, it is good to make the utmost use of our own intelligence and judgement and go with that.

We are going to spend just a few minutes doing some breathing meditation. In this meditation practice, we want to direct the focus of the mind on the incoming and outgoing breath. The mind depends on or needs certain objects to sit on. Utilising our own breathing as an object of focus has the added benefit of calming our mind down. We need to ensure our full mental attention is on the object, not just half of it while the other half is on something else. The main obstacle that we face in meditation practice is losing our mental attention because of external distractions. Therefore, it is important to be vigilant about such distractions arising, then simply keep redirecting our mind back to the object with mindfulness.

We begin the meditation now.

[Meditation]

Now we will chant Buddha's mantra so switch our focus to the sound of the mantra we chant.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA.

There is some room for questions and answers. If you have a question just raise your hand.

Question: How do you offer support to a friend that you care about?

It depends on the situation. Sometimes you might recognise what they are doing is wrong, but they do not see it that way and they think that what they are doing is right. If they are so fixed on their own belief, it wouldn't work if you try to correct them. It will cause more confrontation. You need a bit of skill here!

It is said that we should abandon evil friends. In terms of practice it doesn't mean that you literally abandon or distance yourselves from them. Rather it is saying that we don't have to become like our friend; in particular we should not be influenced by their negative habits. However, we should maintain our feeling of intimacy, love, friendship and kindness towards them. Of course, if you think your friend is open-minded and ready to listen to your advice, then you may point out their faults and this might be appreciated. Sometimes you do not have to directly point out the fault but indirectly help them recognise it by themselves. This is the best outcome.

When other people don't recognise and acknowledge their own faults and mistakes, sometimes pointing out their mistakes enrages them instead of helping them, and they might become very angry with you. It is the same with yourself. If you are the kind of person who is very short-tempered with an angry nature, you don't like someone else telling you that you are that type of person, even though you are. However, you do not get upset if you recognise that you do have problems such as a short-tempered nature and communication problems. However, if someone else points out your faults to you, then you get upset. That's why you need a bit of skill to help others to correct their mistakes.

A great Tibetan master said that if you mix with bad people, and evil friends, you will easily be influenced by their negative habits. Therefore, you should abandon evil friends, meaning abandon or not pick up their negative habits and conduct. Whereas, if you associate or mix with virtuous friends, then you will easily acquire their virtuous qualities. Therefore, rely on or mix with virtuous friends. So the emphasis here is not being influenced by the negative habits or conduct of the other people; conversely you should be influenced and inspired by the positive qualities of other people.

Along with this I can tell you a story about two friends. One is an alcoholic and one is not. At one time they went separate ways. The one who was alcoholic went to Phenpo, a region of Tibet where he met a geshe and associated with certain high lamas. The other one went to a different area and he became alcoholic.

One day they met, and they had noticed the changes. In our association with different people, we have to always be very alert and vigilant about the influence they have upon us. In our social life, if we are not careful we can easily get influenced by others. If your friend is alcoholic and loves drinking, they will always encourage you to drink and will even buy you a free drink. But, later on when you become a real alcoholic then they won't buy a drink for you. They will say, 'It's your turn now!'. If we drink too much, not only do we waste a lot of money, we also damage our health and we can also lose personal qualities and damage our self-respect. A while ago a local Tibetan shared his experience about how much money he spent on alcohol. He said he spent \$70 every week on alcohol and smoking. Unfortunately, he passed away at a very young age. Some people keep drinking, and it makes you wonder if they are actually tasting what they drink. A very good question, thank you!

Thank you very much for your very good attention to the teaching.

All we want in life is happiness. We want to live a happy life and want to hear from other people, 'Oh you look happy'. We want something like that.

*Transcribed by Bernii Wright
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