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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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As usual we begin with just relaxing ourselves physically. For us to be at peace and in a state of happiness, as well as relaxing the body it is also important that our mind is at peace and in a state of happiness. So therefore, after relaxing ourselves physically, then we should look within our mind to also bring about peace and happiness within the mind.

If we check what kind of effect our mind has on our experience, then we will notice that there is a huge effect. The moment our mind is at peace, it becomes calm and very clear, then automatically (by just having a calm mind) we will be also at peace, and a lot of problems or difficulties within us will simply dissipate.

It is obvious that when our mind is calm and peaceful, then when we interact with others there is no way we would cause them any harm.

If we consider our own reality or our own life situation, we know we are a part of a community or society. Everyone as a human being is dependent on a community and some other person, hence, befriending or having a good relationship with other people - this is important as a social being. Whatever the nature or form of our relationship with others may be, such as between a man and woman, we do not want any stress conflict and tension. Therefore, we need to think about the main causes that bring about such stress and conflict, and any effective means to overcoming it in our relationships.

## How to build a happy relationship

We also need to consider why we need an amicable relationship with others, and consider what we are looking for, or what are our expectations in a relationship. We are hoping that a relationship will secure more happiness, more joy and more stability in our lives.

In a harmonious intimate relationship there are mutual benefits in the form of more support and loving kindness to one another resulting in more satisfaction, joy and happiness for all concerned. If we look into the main cause that strengthens or damages such relationship, we will find that it lies within us rather than related to something external or material objects. Therefore, our criterion for building this type of relationship should not be based on external values, such as the amount of wealth, physical attraction and social status. External things don't guarantee what we look for in the relationship, which is genuine happiness. It is not the case that increases of wealth, for instance, will bring more happiness. Therefore, the important element to build and make a relationship sustainable and beneficial is a true feeling of **love and care**. We know from our experience

that when there is a true sense of love, care and friendship in our relationship, then we enjoy the companionship regardless of whether the external condition is good or bad. However, when that feeling of intimate love and care is missing, then instead of happiness there is tension, fear and mistrust in the relationship, and any favourable external conditions will lack meaning.

Since having a good relationship with other/s is an important factor for ensuring lasting peace and happiness in our lives, we need to think about cultivating genuine love and care for other beings. Recognising that loving kindness and compassion will never arise within us if our mental continuum is too disturbed and distracted by unruly thought, we should first meditate to calm our mind down from all the disturbing thoughts. We need to be diligent and consistent in practising meditation in order to achieve calmness and clarity within us, which is a very important factor to bring about the kind of transformation that we would like see within ourselves.

There is no doubt that if we **cultivate a very positive and a peaceful state of mind**, then the benefit will be there all the time. No matter where you are, who you are with, at work or with anyone in the community, if you have a calm and positive state of mind you can be happy and peaceful. Even other people will see you as being a good natured and admirable person. We already possess some degree of peace and happiness within us, but we may be not doing enough to safeguard it against any obstacles such as when we face an irritable circumstance we are unable to tolerate by losing our temper or getting angry and as a result losing our inner peace and happiness. Due to anger in our mind, not only do we lose self-control and become restless but also our perspective of things will become negative, for example, beginning to hate our friend for no reason. It is not that our friend that has changed and begun to hate us, however he or she will appear to us to have changed solely because of our mental attitude under the influence of anger. Therefore, it is important to give a thought to what we can do to minimise such a negative mental attitude overruling our mind as it can damage our good relationship with others and also the positive qualities, we possess within us.

Given our experience in life, the most important thing is the feeling of peace, joy and happiness that we find within. If we think about the main factors or the main causes to achieve inner peace and happiness, of course the main causes are not to do with material or external objects. Suppose that material or external objects are the true cause of bringing mental happiness, then it has to be the case that the more we acquire those material objects, then automatically we should find more satisfaction, more peace and more happiness. But we know from our own experience this is not necessarily the case. On the other hand, we could say it is the case that inwardly if we enrich ourselves with or develop a more positive state of mind or mental attitude such as **the feeling of love and compassion towards others**, then this brings us more joy and happiness and satisfaction in our life. We should also think that developing inner qualities is a good investment, a true investment for our own happiness and satisfaction in our life. We should also believe that we can

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achieve that; developing our positive inner qualities is something within the reach of all of us, of most people with a sensible mind. We can do that. There is nothing stopping us from cultivating such love and positive way of thinking.

Whereas if our security of happiness and satisfaction is entirely based on external things, then this is not something that everybody can achieve. Because if our satisfaction and happiness is really dependent on the acquisition of material wealth such as a house or car, then as we know, we have to say that this is not within reach nor easy for most people. However, even if we gain much material wealth, it will not guarantee satisfaction and give us true fulfillment in our life. Looking from this kind of perspective, we should come to the understanding of the benefits of developing more inner quality, which not only is the true source of our happiness but also it is something that is within our reach or we have the capacity or potential to achieve it.

To summarise what we have discussed here, we begin with the importance of cultivating a positive, calm and clear state of mind. This is because a happy mind is essential to live our life in happiness. Then we look into what will impede or obstruct us from achieving that. Or if we have already peace and happiness, we need to know how to safeguard it. Positive and negative states of mind are mutually exclusive, in that the arising of one will preclude the arising of the other. We call the negative states of mind 'mental afflictions' because whenever they arise in us, we lose our mental peace and happiness. Therefore, if we want to feel peace and happiness within us, we must **overcome our mind being overpowered by mental afflictions** and understand that meditation is the most effective way to counteract the mental afflictions. So we should integrate a meditation practice into our lives.

We have been saying how true peace and happiness does not necessarily depend on outer conditions. Instead it depends more on our ability to maintain or to safeguard a peaceful and positive state of mind within ourselves. So of course, we ask the question 'is it possible to achieve the ability to maintain such a positive state of mind all the time?' Considering all of the normal unruly habits of the mind, we might think that it is difficult. But it is not necessarily difficult. It becomes difficult because of our lack of putting effort in this regard, and also a lack of our understanding and faith in our ability to achieve that inner transformation. If we **recognise our true potential** or capability as a human being - we will be amazed to find that what is possible to achieve. Considering humanity's accomplishment in the development of science and technology, I am so amazed that all these developments resulted from a human brain or mind - and we all have the same mind. - Look at the various human inventions; for example, just think of aeroplanes that allow us travel in space; it really astonishes me how we made it!

Likewise, some highly evolved spiritual practitioners can perform supernatural or miraculous powers through their ability in manipulating and controlling the natural force of elements. Also, if we observe the life of spiritual practitioners of various spiritual traditions, how some of

them always radiate peace, serenity, joy and happiness wherever they are and whoever they are with, this comes from their inner realisations. I may also say here that I have a bit of peace and happiness coming forth from my little experience of spiritual practice. Therefore, it is certainly possible to achieve a sustained state of inner peace and happiness, which we can maintain throughout all our actions such as walking, sitting, standing or sleeping and under all circumstances.

Of course, we are not saying here that we can immediately get rid of all the problems in our life. In fact, problems and difficulties are inevitable part of our daily lives. However, in the face of these difficulties it is important not to inwardly **lose our determination and our hope**, and not becoming discouraged by difficult situations. If we give up and we lose hope and just get discouraged, then we will become depressed or problems can overtake us. We need to recognise and **accept the fact that problems are inevitable**, but we should try to face this with a sense of hope and courage and never lose a positive outlook. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often remarks that one of the most important lessons that he learned in life was during the hardest and most difficult time of his life.

As usual we are going to do a short breathing meditation. Start by relaxing your body and making yourself comfortable, and then try to slowly overcome all of the distracting thoughts 100 per cent. The important point is to let the mind completely rest within yourself by overcoming all external thoughts. Having brought the mind inward, direct your focus and place the mind on the incoming and outgoing breath. As much as possible try to make every effort to keep the mind on the incoming and outgoing breath with single-pointed concentration.

*[Meditation]*

We can continue the meditation with the chanting of the Buddha's mantra

So as before, try to keep the mind within yourself but just shift your focus to the sound of the mantra that we chant.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA*

Maybe there is room for just one question. So please raise your hand if you have a question.

*Question: When you look at us, do you think that we should all join a monastery to excel in our development?*

Maybe that is the best option, but it is not for everyone. There are many cases where people join a monastery or nunnery and then afterwards a lot of them return back to where they started. So, the main prerequisite for joining a monastic community or choosing to live an ordained life is cultivating a true sense of renunciation, which is an aspiration to achieve liberation from samsara. The renunciation arises from a deep sense of disgust or remorse towards worldly pleasures because of recognising all the faults of samsara. Those who have cultivated such renunciation are suitable to become monks or nuns

I have many other stories where people who, due to some immediate problems, got so sick of their normal life and then they came to me and said they wanted to renounce

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the world and live a celibate life. But soon afterward they changed their minds due to the changes in their life circumstance. I had one woman who wanted to become a nun but a week later she got pregnant. Then, another woman who was so determined to become a nun and discussed it with me. But I said that she should take her time and there is no rush; essentially, I tried to discourage her. Then afterward she came back, and she said I was right, and she decided not to go ahead as she found a nice man!

Of course, I am not saying that those people who discussed their situation with me are lying to me. I knew that they were very honest and open to me and facing certain difficulties in their lives. However, as I am aware that our life situation is continuously changing, and along with that our perspective is also changing. So, what we think today is right thing to do is not necessarily the right thing to do the next day. So in general the advice that I give to others is to continue with their spiritual practice, that they can easily apply without needing to make a drastic change in their lifestyle, for example the practice of cultivating and developing loving kindness. This is something we can all do, and it is a very profound practice as well.

Whether or not you are going to become a spiritual person is not a matter of changing what you are wearing. And also simply putting on a robe doesn't mean that you are going to change, or become a different person. Any changes come from the mind. So in **between the two of changing our outer look and inner look, our inner look is more important**. Hence, the practice of thought transformation is what we need to adopt. By the way, becoming a monk or nun is a good thought! It is definitely true that if all of you became a good monk or nun - that definitely would be the best outcome, although I am afraid this will have a severe affect to sustenance of human evolution

So really the focus of tonight's talk is on the importance of the benefit of cultivating a positive state of mind, and the benefit in terms of maintaining a harmonious or a good relationship with others. Also how applying the meditation practice is very effective in terms of counteracting emotional difficulties, for example losing our temper or generating a negative state of mind. We have to do something, and if we don't counteract this, then it can really damage our life, our relationships, and our peace and happiness. In order to counteract any negative states of mind, think of practising meditation. If you bring loving kindness and compassion into your relationships, then naturally there will be support and care for each other, and this will strengthen our intimacy and our relationship.

So definitely, I welcome your question. However normally, I don't advise people to join a monastery or nunnery to become a monk or a nun. Rather, I prefer to focus on being kind to other people and being particularly kind and loving to those who are close to you - your friends and family. I understand the importance of having someone in life to rely on, just as our parents have each other. Even for ourselves having someone in our life is also important. Therefore in a practical sense, putting

an effort into cultivating love and compassion towards others is essential.

However, it is inevitable that we face problems such as separation from our friends. When we face this, again we have to be able to apply our meditation practice, so we can cope well, and we don't experience a great deal of suffering and difficulty in confronting such situations.

Thank you.

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