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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Translated by Sandup Tsering

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As usual let's begin by just relaxing our body thinking that the reason why we are here is to teach our mind positive habits, and positive ways of thinking, and indeed, this is a perfect time to achieve that. If we have a positive state of mind, or an ability to cultivate a positive state of mind, then whenever we find some moments of physical peace and relaxation, we can find ourselves truly at peace and happiness. **True peace and happiness arises more on the mental level than on a physical level.**

In reality, if we observe our experience, we can see that if our mind is at peace, we feel that way as well and we are able to say we are happy. If our mind is not at peace, then we not happy even if physically we are not busy and there is nothing to complain about. Unhappiness in the form of frustration, restlessness, stress, anxiety, fear etc., arises from an uncontrolled state of mind.

Whether you are rich or poor, of high or low social status, famous or not famous, educated or illiterate, everyone can become a victim of their own minds. If our mind is not checked and brought under control, it will wander off recklessly and be inundated with uncontrolled disturbing thoughts. That what we should blame for our restlessness, inability to think clearly, our misdeeds, feeling empty, hopeless and miserable. At worst, these thoughts can drive us to insanity and even suicidal actions.

For example, some people have sought advice from me on how to deal with depression. My advice to them is to try to diminish disturbing thoughts and feel the peace and tranquillity within themselves. I believe that sometimes too many distracting thoughts or too much mental activity can trigger mental disorders, like anxiety and depression. Some people have shared with me their experience of how their mental or emotional experience affects their cognitive or perceptive experience. For instance, when they feel depressed, their perception of the world and things outside also looks depressing.

So there is no question that if we do not do something to understand our minds and keep an eye on it, then our minds will enslave us and bring us much suffering.

Sometimes we hear in the news of very well-known public figures facing criminal charges in their later years when they really don't have much time left to live. In some cases, they face the prospect of ending their lives in prison. They suffer from having to cope with public opinion and having to deal with the media, lawyers etc. If we trace back the causes, then in some cases it is to do with their irresponsible actions and which were in turn driven by their irresponsible thoughts and minds.

So in this way, we can understand our potential for achieving peace, stability and happiness, simply through **calming our minds and thereby living more fulfilling lives.** With our mind at peace, we can be sure that whenever we find some quiet time such as when we stop busying ourselves with any work we can experience a true sense of peace and happiness. It is beneficial to utilise such quiet time to reflect upon our mind, in order to understand it more and clear away any unwanted thoughts and emotions.

Within the mind lies a force or capacity which can be positive and creative or negative and destructive. One aim of the **meditation practice is to increase the positive force** and decrease the negative force. The term for meditation in Tibetan is *sGom* which literally means 'to become familiar with', which is to say that meditation practice is to familiarise our mind with virtuous objects or states of mind, which the mind is not presently familiar with. For example, meditating on loving kindness means to cultivate and develop that loving kindness in our mind so that our mind becomes familiar with it. In other words, through familiarity with it, loving kindness will arise very easily within our minds.

We generate various states of mind and whether they arise easily or not is dependent on how familiar we are with that particular state of mind. Since the true cause of happiness is a positive state of mind, and the true cause of suffering is the negative state of mind, having more positive states of mind means we happy, and having more negative states of mind means we are unhappy. We know this from our own experience.

Therefore, the more we understand the benefits of having positive states of mind such as loving kindness in terms of bringing more peace and happiness, more we will be inspired to practise meditation. I quite often say that if loving-kindness is an object, then it is the most valuable object that we can possess. We need to realise that we can find a great deal of happiness and reduce so many problems in our lives through simply training, transforming or educating our mind.

Sometimes we suffer because of attachment or desire to possess an object. **Desire is a form of mental delusion or afflictive emotion** which gives an exaggerated notion of the desirability of the object. Caught by the influence of desire, not only do we undergo suffering, but we also lose our sense of clear discrimination. It is as if desire has blinded our intelligence and wisdom. Because of desire, for example, we cannot clearly discern what is beneficial or harmful for us now, or in the future. Hence, we should remain vigilant against desire and its harmful and destructive consequences

Some other times, we suffer because of an unwanted thought arising uncontrollably, which we find extremely difficult to overcome. When we think about it, the cause of the problem is just one single thought or emotion, yet we fail to recognise it. Instead, we fuel that thought and keep it constantly in mind, so it goes around and around in our mind. No matter what other things we do, unless we rid ourselves of that disturbing thought we cannot get back to our normal lives and find peace and happiness

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So in that situation, we can see that the solution or **remedy is meditation practice**, which is an effective means to direct our mind towards a virtuous object and rest it there. When we engage in a meditation practice our mind is fixed on the object of the meditation. Therefore, if a person has, for example, a covetous thought, the moment his mind is engaged in meditation, it is diverted or disengaged from that covetous thought, and as a result, he can feel some sort of inner freedom and ease in place of covetousness.

Sometimes you see people shedding tears while they are alone. This reflects their thoughts and emotions, more often to do with sadness than happiness, but we may find it difficult to recognise the cause. I remember once a monk named Tamding was found crying for no apparent reason. On another occasion, a monk was hosting his sister, and he found her crying. He asked his teacher why she was crying because he was unsure about the reason.

Considering all the points just raised, we should remember what was said by a Kadampa master: unless we understand the mind, where it is going, where it should be and where it should not go, then no matter what we do, we cannot find lasting peace and happiness.

When we contemplate this passage, then we can find all the teachings related to mind training are just so true, relevant and effective. This advice is like an arrow striking your heart.

Generally speaking, it is said that **worldly life is in the nature of suffering**. We also know that there are enough inevitable problems and hurdles in life that we have to face for survival. On top of this, however, if our mind is not subdued, then, it can add a lot more problems, and in this way making our lives even more challenging and difficult. In fact, a lot of people find the hardship of life too hard to cope with. Because they lack knowledge of their mind, they never consider looking into their mind and ridding it of built-in worries, stress and tension. So they have to live with those internal problems, as well as cope with all sorts of problems they encounter in the outside world. We can understand that life is not easy, and when people feel helpless and despair of their situation, we can feel sorry and empathetic.

On the other hand, if we are able to **gain a bit of insight into our minds**, and through meditation practice make some progress in controlling and transforming our mind the way we want it, then there is the great potential that not only for our own practice, knowledge, and meditation experience to overcome the problems related to our mind, but also through that knowledge, we have more energy, more courage, and a greater ability to cope with external problems, and therefore reduce those external problems.

In a situation where someone is really trying to annoy or provoke us, if we lose our temper and get angry with that person, then obviously we lose all our peace and happiness. However, if we are able to control our emotions and our thoughts and remain calm and not be mentally affected by that situation, then there is no cause for us to lose our peace and happiness.

You can see that when you experience an adverse or unfavourable situation, it is in your own hands whether

you will be at peace or not, because it is all dependent on your own state of mind, how you mentally react to or perceive that situation.

What we are discussing here can also be regarded as **educating ourselves about our own mind**. By educating our mind, and by putting that knowledge into practice, we can change our mental attitude. For example, we can change our mental attitude of holding hatred towards someone at one moment into one of loving, caring and compassion in the next moment. So you can see that with the change of mental attitude or outlook, our perception of the other people can change from seeing them as an enemy to seeing them as a friend and vice versa.

In relation to this, I can tell you a bit about my personal experience. There was a monk who lived in the same monastery as me. We used to fight a lot. Sometimes we hit on each other on our heads causing severe injuries and scars. However, eventually we became very close and the best of friends. Looking back on my life, it is quite astonishing to note how your thoughts and attitudes can change, so that someone you hated so much can become your best and closest friend.

I have many stories to in my life relating to my relationships with people, mostly to do with enemies or strangers becoming friends but none of friends becoming enemies

We will now do a bit of the usual breathing meditation.

We begin with a relaxed body and then we try to get rid of all outgoing thoughts. You may have the kind of thought which never stays inside but is always going out. Not only that, but the kind of thought that goes out always comes back with a lot of problems and garbage. So you are trying to recognise this thought, and the problems it brings. It is therefore important that after relaxing the body, fully rest the mind inwards by overcoming or getting rid of all outgoing thoughts. Having brought the mind fully inwards, you then direct your focus on inhaling and exhaling.

*Meditation*

And now, as before, hold your mind inside, but direct the focus of your mind onto the sound of the mantra and try not to get distracted by any other objects.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

We now have some time for questions, so please raise your hand if you have a question.

*Question: Is there a difference in the worldview of monks and lay people?*

Of course, there are lots of differences. Their views with respect to the cause of happiness and suffering, and the way to achieve happiness and avoid suffering are different. The lay people's view of life is very materialistic in that they believe that happiness and suffering are primarily conditioned by the external conditions. Therefore, they value material wealth and reputation and pursue these as a way to accomplish happiness.

However, monks and nuns view that true happiness as lying within us and pursuing external things as an impediment to happiness. So they renounce the world

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and join the monasteries or nunneries, which they believe, provides a peaceful environment suitable for accessing the peace and happiness that lies within us all through pursuing spiritual and meditation practice. This doesn't mean that there is a major conflict between the two, for example, that monks do not like lay people or can't get along with them. It is rather a personal decision; people choose the path that is most suited for living a fulfilling life.

In Tibetan, a town or village is called *Grong* which refers to a place where the community of both sexes reside, and cohabitation is permitted. In Tibetan, a monastery is called *dGonpa* which means a place which is isolated from the hustle and bustle of society, and where only ordained people live, and cohabitation is not permitted. Therefore, in the monasteries or nunneries, there are no problems and conflicts related to sexual relationships. From this perspective there is an advantage living there and also monks and nuns dedicate most of their time to spiritual practice. Once I met a guy in St Kilda who said he had been seeing me in the area in numerous times. Then, he asked me if I was a Buddhist monk. I said I was. He then asked if the Buddhist monks were allowed to marry. I said, 'No', to which he said, 'That's no good.'

I think Christianity and Buddhism are only two religions that have orders of monks and nuns, and this makes me think that there must be some connection between the two.

Thanks very much

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