
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕུལ་བྱེད་ཀྱི་ལམ་རིམ་འབྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

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Relax and make your body comfortable.

Along with a relaxed body, it is wonderful if we have a mind which is calm, clear, joyful and relaxed.

Since our mind has the habit of wandering after various objects and doesn't remain on its own course, we need to train it to rest. For this we require knowledge, skill and experience. We also need to be very clear about why we need to have a calm and happy mind.

Generally speaking, we all want happiness and do not want suffering. Everything we do throughout our lives is for achieving happiness and reducing suffering. However, we do need to remind ourselves of what we are trying to achieve from the myriad of activities that we undertake. Having recognised our goal, the next question is whether our actions are the appropriate ones for realising that goal. In this way we can minimise the waste of our time and energy and ensure that whatever we do brings us closer to our desired goal. It is important to make the best use of our wisdom and knowledge when making decisions and undertaking actions to achieve our goal.

In relation to this, Shantideva's *Bodhisattva's Way of Life* says, 'Those desiring to escape from suffering hasten right toward it. With the desire for happiness, out of delusion they destroy their own happiness as if it were an enemy.' This quotation means that even though beings do not want suffering, they create the cause of the suffering as if it is something they want. What they want is happiness, but what they do destroys happiness as if it is their enemy.

There is no doubt that what we all want in our life is happiness, and what we do not want is suffering. Paradoxically what we do creates the opposite of what we are hoping it will achieve. Our everyday actions, hinder the achievement of our immediate needs, let alone our long-term goals. Our wisdom can see the huge gap between what we do and what we seek, and the obvious errors or mistakes in our deeds. In particular, our focus here is to understand the correct mental factors that lead to happiness in our life. Our experience shows that the happiness we seek in our life is not something we can buy from others or achieve automatically with some sort of success or external accomplishment. There is also an internal cause of happiness, which, in fact, is a more important cause than the external one. The internal cause of happiness is having a calm and happy mind. If our mind is not contented and calm, but is disturbed, nothing we do or have in life will bring happiness or satisfaction.

It is important to examine why there seems to be no end to suffering and no increase of happiness in our life despite all our efforts. It may be the case that we increase our suffering and decrease our happiness even though what we want is happiness and not suffering. With this goal, we may have been working hard, dealing with challenges, day in and day out for months and years. Along the way, we might have been successful in accomplishing some things. Furthermore, if we take into account the amount of effort and sacrifice that we have made, there should be no reason why we have not achieved more of the happiness we want and less of the suffering we don't want.

Unfortunately, that is not the case. We can see here that something is not right. Something has gone wrong in our life. If we measure our achievement and hardship against the kind of happiness that we seek, then we have failed. In some cases, it could be worse. We can learn from this that material success does not necessarily bring happiness and satisfaction. We can also learn that all our effort in life is primarily focused on external success or favourable external conditions. We are not saying that favourable external conditions are not needed, but that we focus only on external pursuits and totally neglect the wellbeing of our mind.

As a result, even if you have found good external living conditions, you may not have the same level of satisfaction and happiness mentally. Internally you may feel very empty and unhappy. In fact, some happiness you had in the past might have evaporated like a rainbow. We can learn here that just as good external conditions are important, good internal conditions are also very important for happiness. In fact, happiness is derived more from the right causes within our mind than from external causes. That's what meditation practice is all about.

True peace and happiness are more than meeting our external needs. We find peace and happiness in good external conditions only if our mind is also in that condition. If our mind is not contented with our situation, we won't have happiness. If our mind is preoccupied with agitation and worrying thoughts, we won't have happiness and peace.

I am saying this thing to you because, from my own experience, I know it's true. I have spent a great deal of time studying Dharma and meditation. Sometimes it was tough because I did not have good external conditions. However, I put up with them happily, knowing that my studies would benefit me more in long run. I now understand clearly that I made the right decision. I have aged a lot and I know that I get amazing benefits from my Dharma knowledge and practice. I am speaking about what I find most beneficial in my life. It is really very important that we work on creating the causes of happiness both on the mental and material levels side by side.

We have to work and earn money for our livelihood and for the comforts of our life. However, that alone is not enough to guarantee us the peace and happiness that we seek. It is important that we take good care of our spiritual or mental and physical health. I advise people,

especially in the early stage of their life, to acquire a good education and work hard to invest enough wealth.

At the same time, I advise people to invest a portion of their time in learning about spirituality and trying to practise it as much as possible, so they know how to handle their emotional and mental crisis and how to calm their mind if it is too disturbed or agitated. In this way, later on there will be no financial problems preventing you from doing whatever you want. Since you will not have any financial problem and will be familiar with the practice of bringing your mind under control, you can be assured that, your experience of peace and happiness will be fuller. You won't have problems on a material, or mental level, such as the suffering of loneliness and attachment.

If our mind is disturbed, good material conditions don't bring joy and happiness. Sometimes the material conditions seem to add more suffering. In addition to good external conditions, if you are mentally able to maintain a calm and a contented state of mind, you will find a sense of happiness and comfort arising from the good conditions within your mind and from your livelihood. You will feel happy and joyful and the people around you will also see you as a happy and joyful person.

People who live a stable, peaceful and joyful life make friends with others easily because other people enjoy their companionship. We can also notice that they are considerate of and helpful to others. They possess many admirable traits that easily attract other people, so they are never short of friends and receive help and support from others whenever there is a need.

When we look at the cause of their qualities, particularly why other people like to be around them and be helpful to them it is because they recognise a very good-natured mind, which is calm, joyful, friendly and caring. Therefore, I always say, if you have to value things, there is nothing which is more valuable than the quality of love and kindness within our mind.

Conversely, the primary source of unending problems also lies within us. For example, if we do not control desire, it can be an unending source of dissatisfaction and frustration no matter what we achieve in life. As a mental factor, desire cannot be fulfilled. The more we have the more we crave. A true sense of satisfaction and contentment arises only if we are inwardly contented with whatever we possess. Regarding this, a great bodhisattva Thogme Sangpo says, 'If you know how to be contented with whatever you possess, you will be satisfied and will not suffer from accumulating or protecting(wealth).'

Question to student: What does agitation mean?

Answer. It means an unstable mind.

The other day I was looking at various photos that Nicole took at an exhibition in Singapore. Tenzin spotted one image, which he said was the image of the Dhammapala goddess, Palden Lhamo. He was right. I was very impressed with him for recognising the goddess and saying the name so clearly in Tibetan. He is showing signs of an awakening lineage.

Meditation practice is a kind of mental training to settle our mind. If we become familiar with bringing the mind inward and resting it during meditation, then we can apply the same technique whenever we want. We then ensure that whenever we take a break from our busy life, our mind is also resting. Our mind needs training to sit calmly and quietly, because it is not used to that. It is more used to wandering off and being agitated by various thoughts and objects. Meditation practice helps to break that habit of wandering and bring about a stable, calm and focussed state of mind.

We will now begin our usual meditation. The object here is the inhalation and exhalation of our breath. The meditation object we choose should not cause any delusions or mental afflictions to arise. In meditation practice we place or fix our mind on the object, which here is the incoming and outgoing breath. We begin with emptying our mind of all external distractions. Having brought the mind inward let it abide by directing all our mental attention single-pointed focus on the object and preventing it from going to any external objects. We will begin the meditation now.

(Pause for meditation).

We will continue the meditation with chanting the Buddha's mantra. Again, we make sure that we keep our mind within ourselves and as we begin the chanting, we focus on the sound of the mantra without getting distracted by any external objects.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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