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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, we should begin with a fully relaxed body. Just remember that we are here to find some relaxation and that this is the right opportunity to do so. However, we will find that experiencing a relaxed state of body also depends upon having the right frame of mind.

Finding ourselves in a peaceful external environment alone doesn't guarantee peace and happiness, even on the physical level. Two people can be in the same place with the same external conditions but while one might find it very calm and relaxing, the other does not. So, when we talk of finding a true sense of peace, relaxation and happiness, we have to consider both external and internal conditions – in other words, conducive conditions on the physical and mental level.

Therefore, it is important to direct our attention inward; to scrutinise and understand the internal conditions for the peace and happiness we seek. The internal conditions relate to our mental attitude, our emotions and our perspective of things and events, all of which are very important pre-determining factors for our physical and mental wellbeing. We don't normally do this but if we were to reject everything that came into our mind, we would go mad. In Tibetan, we say, 'He seems like he is insane because he has got rid of all his thoughts.'

Our actions and experiences reflect the thoughts and emotions we generate within us. If our thoughts are calm and positive, then our actions and experiences will be positive too. If our thoughts and emotions are negative, disturbed and destructive, then our actions and experiences will also be negative. Therefore, we need to consider and learn about adopting the right mental attitude and perspective. This is why we follow meditation practice. When we engage in meditation practice, not only do we fully relax our body, but we also need to relax our mind by avoiding distracting thoughts.

In fact, as a meditator our primary focus is on our own mind; understanding what is happening in there and recognising various mental states and thoughts and their effects. The meditator then makes a conscious effort to alter the mental state as a way to alter his/her personality traits, experiences and life situation. I would say that the mental attitude and perspective of a meditation practitioner is unique. They recognise happiness and unhappiness as the difference between the subdued and unsubdued mind and their main goal is to subdue the mind through overcoming mental afflictions.

So, if you want to follow meditation practice, first you need to understand why you meditate. You meditate to control the dominant force of the mental afflictions or

delusions. Now, this is not something people normally consider. Ironically, we all know that our thoughts and emotional processes dictate our feelings, moods and experiences, affecting our lives and relationships with others. Also, it makes sense knowing that when we have our mind under control, and it is not over-powered or troubled by mental afflictions, thoughts and emotions, we can be truly at peace and happy. Yet, I have to say that people seldom have such an understanding or even a consideration of this occurring in their mind. That's why I am saying here that whenever you engage in meditation practice, you should direct it to subduing your mind and overcoming afflictive emotions as a means to enhance peace and happiness within. You should also consider that the time you spend in meditation practice is a very special and valuable moment and you should use it in the most effective manner.

Although the topic of meditation is directly related to our everyday life experience, we don't talk or think about it in everyday life. Normally, our idea of peace and happiness is very much based on external values and indulging ourselves in the excitement of those things. We also perceive fulfilling the impulses of mental delusions as a means to bring about satisfaction and happiness for ourselves.

As we can see here, such a view directly runs against the understanding that we can gain through meditative contemplation and through scrutinising our life experiences more closely. Therefore, if we want to change our life in a positive way, we must change our view on the causes of happiness and suffering.

The primary source of happiness and suffering actually lies within us. If we do not have the right inner conditions, we cannot find peace and happiness. If we do not remove the cause of suffering within, then there is no end to suffering. To be happy we have to be inwardly calm and satisfied and free of mental afflictions and turbulence. How many people actually understand this or believe it? Very few. That's why I say that the understanding gained in meditation is unique and very special.

We have briefly touched on the purpose and benefits of meditation practice. What does meditation practice mean? In a nutshell, meditation practice introduces us to a practice in which we let go of all the distracting thoughts and rest our mental attention fully on a given object. We need to calm all the distracting thoughts because they serve as a cause to increase mental delusions as well as preventing peace and stability within us. If we compare our focus in meditation practice against our focus in everyday life, they are totally different. In our everyday life, all our thoughts and actions are focused externally and are influenced or motivated by mental delusions. Even our experience of pleasure and joy has an element of mental delusion. So, we can say we are pretty much under the full control of the mental delusions and disturbing thoughts. We cannot find lasting peace and happiness. At the same time, we cannot see an alternative way. Given this is the reality of our everyday life, it sounds like rather a strange concept to know that true peace and happiness lies within us and

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that, in order access it, we need to counteract mental delusions and disturbing thoughts.

Despite this fact, we should apply the meditation practice as an alternative means of achieving happiness and avoiding suffering. In meditation practice, we need to say to ourselves, 'I am going to discipline my mind on a given object and prevent it from going after external distractions. In particular, I will counteract mental delusions or afflictions.' Essentially, we have the freedom and opportunity to do whatever we like. We have a choice to try meditation practice as a means to bring about the peace and happiness we constantly seek. Then, whenever we engage in meditation practice, we should follow it sincerely, wholeheartedly and diligently. Then, we might receive what meditation practice offers us—a feeling of peace and happiness from within, without depending on any external objects of distraction or being influenced by mental delusions.

We can then benefit from meditation, not only in terms of the improved wellbeing of our mental state but also in terms of our improved physical health. Therefore, it is important to understand that we shouldn't always seek peace and happiness through external distractions. This may provide some immediate pleasure or gain but, in the long run, sometimes it brings more suffering and loss. We may, for example, end up with chronic mental suffering.

We will also find meditation practice useful in expanding our knowledge, broadening our mental outlook and dealing with various mental or emotional crises. If the cause of our problem is related to the mind, then really the solution or the way to fix it lies within the mind. For example, if the cause is a certain thought or emotion, then we have to remedy it. This involves cultivating a different kind of thought or emotion. Just as we feel low self-esteem and even depression due to a certain mental attitude, likewise, by cultivating another kind of mental attitude we can boost our self-esteem and confidence. In a way, we have a choice and the potential to modify our thoughts, deeds and personality.

There are people who do not know or who are unaware of the fact that mentally or emotionally related problems need to be dealt with mainly by the person understanding their own mind and emotions. When they confront problems, they are very helpless; so much so that other people also feel helpless when they try to support them. Unfortunately, they simply have to undergo the suffering caused by their own mind and emotions.

However, those who have come to understand the true cause of restlessness, suffering and unhappiness should try to deal with the cause as a remedy. They should not simply feel helpless or hopeless. They should direct their focus inward; reflecting and trying to recognise the cause of a certain neurotic thought or an afflictive emotion. In this way, at least they can see it is possible to eliminate it. By reflecting on our own experience, we can clearly recognise the effect of a negative or disturbing thought; how it makes us feel down and sad and how, through our facial expression, this becomes noticeable to other people.

Likewise, other people can recognise if we are in a good mood through our facial expression.

The key to solving our problems is mind training. To overcome certain thoughts, we train our mind to have a different perspective or we ponder a different object. If you are feeling hopeless, have low self-esteem and lack confidence, then you should reflect on things which boost and increase your self-confidence and worthiness. You should reflect on the fact that you are no different from any other human being. You have the same potential and the same right to achieve happiness and eliminate suffering.

As mentioned earlier, a lot of the problems we experience are created by our own mind or are due to a certain way of thinking. Therefore, if we consider the remedy to these problems, then we will find that really, meditation is the only true remedy. If we try meditation, we will actually find it very effective. As a result of our familiarity with meditation practice, we will find how easy it is to overcome mentally related problems. We cannot escape from the world and from various situations. For instance, we have to go to work and face various stressful situations. The thing is that sometimes we bring work related problems home. This is okay if we do something, such as meditation practice, to overcome it. Otherwise, we feel unhappy and stressed at home too and the next day we head to work in the same unhappy mood. If we continuously suffer the same thing over a long period of time, our situation may become critical in terms of our mental and physical health. Therefore, we should understand that meditation has the potential to benefit us throughout our whole life.

In our everyday life, we recognise certain activities and things as harmful and unbeneficial and other activities and things as advantageous and beneficial. Based on this, our natural tendency is to accept things which are beneficial and avoid things which are harmful. In a similar fashion, in meditation practice we can see that certain states of mind or thought processes are beneficial. We need to cultivate and habituate ourselves with these states of mind. We can also see states of mind that are harmful to our wellbeing, peace and happiness. These we need to diminish. So in this way, meditation helps us to increase our intelligence and the wisdom to be able to know precisely the difference between things to accept and things to avoid. Our lives should be guided by such wisdom and knowledge.

Now, we will start the usual breathing meditation. Again, just make yourself comfortable and relaxed. Having fully relaxed our body we cultivate the intention that the reason we are engaging in this meditation is to overcome the mental delusions overpowering our mind. We generate a strong motivation with a sense of aversion to mental delusion and we say to it, 'I won't let you overpower my mind'. Try to let go of all the distracting thoughts and let the mind just completely settle within yourself. Having done that, we direct the mind solely on the incoming and outgoing breath. We place our full attention on the breath as much as possible, without paying attention to external distractions. As we maintain

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this focus, every now and then we recall the object of meditation – our breath.

*Meditation*

We continue with the chanting of Buddha's mantra. We direct our mental focus on the sound of the mantra as we chant. As before, retain the focus there as much as possible without losing it to any external objects.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

If you have any questions, I give you that opportunity, otherwise I will have a vacation.

*Q1. What is the difference between the seed and imprint?*

In the context of mental afflictions or delusions, the seed is something which has the potential or capacity to produce the mental delusions. For example, a seed of wheat has the capacity to produce wheat. Whereas, the imprint, or sometimes we use the term latency, is different. The imprint or the latency of delusion doesn't serve as a cause to produce a mental delusion. The imprint serves as a cause to manifest some sort of dualistic appearance or conception which is regarded as a cognitive obstruction. An example is the smell in a pot. The pot can be clean but the smell in it makes it unsuitable to use.

*Q2. What about the seed and the imprint of self-grasping?*

With respect to the ignorance of self-grasping, its seed and imprint are different. You can have someone who has eliminated or uprooted self-grasping but not the imprint. Due to the imprint the person will experience a certain kind of subtle dualistic appearance. For example, someone who has not overcome the imprints of self-grasping will visually perceive things to have an inherent existence. For example, when you look at this flower with your eye sense-consciousness, it appears to have an independent existence; an existence from its own side without depending on anything else. It appears to have its own intrinsic qualities as its ultimate mode of existence.

So that's why we say that the eye sense consciousness is a mistaken consciousness because it has been stained or afflicted by the imprint of self-grasping. It is like when you go to sleep and you have a dream in which things are not true. The mistaken appearance in the dream is caused by or afflicted by the sleep. Another example to describe the falsity of things is the magician's illusion. A magician uses a certain kind of mantra spell or puts stuff into some liquid. This then causes the spectators in the audience to mistakenly see various objects such as a horse on the stage. However, spectators who are not affected by the magician's trick cannot see the conjured objects.

We can also talk about the seed of attachment or desire. If you have not overcome or abandoned the seed of desire, then when the seed meets the right conditions you will produce attachment or desire. So, unless you remove its seed, desire can arise.

Have I answered your question? Someone from Adelaide once wanted to come down to Melbourne to see me because he had some question. I advised him to take the

question to his local resident lama at his centre. But for some reason he wanted to see me, so he flew down to Melbourne. I advised him to bring the question to the Wednesday night teaching. So, at the end of the teaching I asked him for his question. The guy replied he didn't need to ask it because it was already cleared up.

So thank you everyone for your very good attention to the teaching.

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