
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཕམ་ལུ་ལམ་རིམ་འགྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

5 December 2018

As usual, we will begin with a relaxed body. If we also have a relaxed and joyful mind together with a relaxed body, then that would be wonderful.

When we experience a relaxed and joyful state in both our mind and body, then we can also feel truly relaxed and happy as a person. Since this experience makes us completely peaceful and happy, we can say to ourselves and to others, 'I feel peaceful and happy.' If we think about it, this is something we need. We have been looking for this and we have found it, therefore this experience gives us some sense of purpose and satisfaction in our life.

Now, if we delve into the reason why we feel peaceful and happy, it is because our mind and body are at rest and in a good condition. You feel good because your mind and body are in a good state. Understanding and recognising this close link between your well-being and the well-being of your mind and body is a very important part of learning meditation and understanding its benefits.

When we talk of happiness, we are talking about the well-being of our mind and body, which is why I always say that after you have relaxed your body, you also need to relax your mind. Your sense of feeling peaceful and happy is contingent upon both the happy mind and body. A happy mind is more important, because without it, you cannot find peace and happiness even if you have found peace and happiness on the physical level. You may be physically at rest but if your mind is preoccupied with restless and troubling thoughts then you can't find peace and happiness. Therefore, what I am saying is that if you are looking for true peace and happiness, then you need to rest your body as well as your mind by overcoming all troubling thoughts. We can understand this by observing our own experiences.

The next step is taking self-responsibility to find true peace and happiness. If we want peace and happiness, then we have the responsibility of controlling our mind and preventing it from being overpowered by disturbing and troubling thoughts. These thoughts cause our restlessness and unhappiness. Without getting rid of them, even if we are physically at rest and in a favourable situation, we cannot experience peace and happiness. Therefore, it is important to recognise that it is our own disturbing thoughts within us that destroy our peace and happiness. No matter what we try to do and change externally, we cannot find true peace and happiness until we fix our unsettled mind. The next question is how can we get rid of these troubling thoughts? First of all, we need to switch our mind from external things and direct

its attention to those thoughts that we generate within us. If we examine them closely we will notice that they reflect our perspectives on things and events, our mental attitudes and our way of thinking. This shows that if we change our way of thinking or our outlook, then our thoughts and emotions will also change.

In our discussion about positive states of mind that benefit us, and negative states of mind that harm us on the mental level and on the physical or material level, what we are saying here is that the mental level is more important in terms of our well-being, particularly by enriching ourselves with a more positive mental attitude. This will bring about true peace and happiness within us, which is the result of the meditation practice. The main benefit or purpose of meditation is to subdue disturbing thoughts and bring about positive mental qualities within us. I would say that the meditation practice, which enables us to achieve happiness and satisfaction from within, is more effective than the material approach, which leads us to pursue external objects as a means to happiness and satisfaction. With regard to the material approach, we can forget about achieving a true sense of satisfaction and contentment; it doesn't even guarantee us a material sense of success. For example, some people may think that if they own a big house or an expensive car, they become rich, but when they have these things, they don't make them rich at all. Sometimes the acquisition of material wealth requires a great deal of sacrifice and hardship, yet the end result does not necessarily secure us more happiness and satisfaction. It is even possible that our material success becomes the main cause of the downfall of our life, instead of adding more meaning to our life. However, if we also develop positive states of mind within us, together with material development, then not only do we live our life happily and peacefully, but we would also be able to direct all our material success - such as wealth, good physical looks and fitness - into favourable conditions to increase our virtue and positiveness. If we lack a positive state of mind and mental attitude within us, then our wealth and external success may become a source of increasing pride, jealousy and competitiveness, which dissipate our own peace and happiness and harm other beings. On the other hand, if we are able to enrich ourselves with good intelligent knowledge and a positive mental attitude through the meditation practice, then our material success can serve as a good tool to transform everything we do into a source of happiness for oneself and for others. However, if we don't do very well in terms of external pursuits, but inwardly we have developed good intelligent knowledge and a positive state of mind, then we can still feel content and satisfied with our lives because inner contentment is not dependent on external factors. The famous Kadampa Geshe Chekawa said that one should only meditate on cultivating excellent qualities within one's mind. This is to imply that the outcome of any effort we make in enhancing inner qualities is definitely a beneficial one.

The benefit of the meditation practice is in accord with our search for peace and happiness as the meaning and purpose of our lives. As I mentioned earlier, we must recognise that the main source of unhappiness and

restlessness is within us, in the form of negative mental attitudes. Therefore, we engage in the meditation practice to counteract these negative states of mind, but we need to know what meditation is and how it works. One common element of all the meditation practices is familiarising or habituating our mind to a virtuous object. By resting our mind on that object, even for a short period of time, at least at that moment our mind finds true respite from all the disturbing and restless thoughts. It is important for us to meditate regularly. You should put aside a certain time for the meditation practice every day, apart from the time you spend on work and other things. You will notice that your mind will gradually become calmer and develop a positive mental impetus which has the effect of preventing disturbing thoughts to arise. Even if they arise, you will be able to recognise them and be more vigilant against them. If you are not able to be aware of disturbing thoughts such as anger, pride and jealousy and recognise them when they arise, then these thoughts will destroy your happiness and completely overpower your mind. With the lack of such awareness and recognition, instead of remedying or counteracting them, you might hold these disturbing thoughts dearly as if they are precious. As a result, no matter what you do, you will not be able to find peace and happiness or get rid of the mental and emotional crisis that you go through. We should not be like the people who tell me that they have been practising meditation for three years, but ... This implies that meditation is not helping or not working. Meditation practice does work effectively to subdue our mind. Sometimes we do not experience the benefit of the meditation practice immediately, but we still get the benefits. If our mind is too occupied by stressful and anxious thoughts associated with our busy lifestyle, and does not find any moment of peace, self-awareness and relaxation, then eventually our mind can get too worn out and stressed, and the problem can get worse and become more difficult to overcome.

Peace and happiness in our lives primarily arise from within through cultivating positive states of mind, such as love and compassion. I have spent a great deal of time in my life focusing on cultivating love and compassion for others, so I am able to relate from my own experience in this area how beautiful it is to feel love and compassion for other beings. Having love and compassion ensures our mind has a positive mental attitude, whatever we do, whether we stay at home or go out. It gives us a sense of purpose in our life. When we have love and compassion for others, we feel connected to them and we feel good. In contrast, we feel bad and cannot stand being close to others when seeing them induces a negative state of mind, such as anger and hatred. It is important that we maintain the practice of vigilance so that whenever a negative state of mind such as anger arises within us, we recognise it and think about its shortcomings in terms of the harm that it brings to us and others - how it destroys our inner peace and happiness and damages our mental health. We should then say to anger, 'You are a destructive force, you take away my mental peace, stability and clarity, you are not welcome in me.' Similarly, if we generate any other negative states of mind such as jealousy, we should do the same by recognising its presence, shortcomings and

by saying to ourselves, 'I won't fall under your control.' When we say these things, and even if negative states of mind such as anger or jealousy arise, because of our awareness of their presence and their destructiveness, and reinforcing ourselves to counter them, these negative states of mind become less destructive and weaken.

The purpose of the meditation practice is to overcome and counteract negative states of mind. There are some people who ask, 'In what way will meditation or spiritual practice benefit one's life in the workplace?' There is a lot of benefit at work because the practice helps people to develop positive mental attitudes, which are very much needed for efficiency and productivity. Having staff with positive mental attitudes and thinking makes the workplace pleasant for everyone. Otherwise, the workplace can become a miserable, tense and stressful place if the staff are holding rather negative mental attitudes, such as when the staff are jealous towards others who are above them, or get promoted or treated better, showing pride towards those who are below them and competitiveness to their equals. Other negative mental attitudes are impatience and a short fuse. In such a workplace, there will be very low staff morale, and collaboration and support are very unlikely, but there will be suspicion, unnecessary worries, tension and stress. This will make the place very unhappy which naturally affects the work. If you think of each of these mental attitudes such as jealousy, the main result is losing one's own mental peace and happiness, but not causing as much harm to other people.

On the other hand, if you have an understanding and are aware of these negative states of mind, and are determined to counteract them, then you will have a completely different perspective towards others who show such negative attitudes to you. For example, if some colleagues show anger or pride towards you, you won't immediately react to it. You would recognise that as a fault or weakness of that person, as well as feel empathy because you know the person is unhappy about something. You would be able to differentiate the person from his or her faults, and therefore maintain empathy for the person despite his or her negative mental attitude towards you. This shows that we can prevent negative attitudes by cultivating a positive mental attitude. After living here for many years and meeting with people from different walks of life, I have some idea of what people go through in this society. Once someone shared with me the mental agony of feeling jealous towards her own sister because she had a nice boyfriend. Many people undergo suffering which is primarily created by their own unsubdued mind, yet they don't realise this is the cause. The focus of my discourse is for people to understand this, and direct their attention to changing their mental attitudes - changing hatred and jealousy into love and compassion and an altruistic thought of benefitting others. Through meditation and spiritual practice, we need to recognise that feeling jealous towards others who are above us, feeling pride towards those below us, and competitiveness towards those who are equal is the primary source of our suffering in our life at home and in the workplace. These mental attitudes affect our relationship with others. On a national level, these are the

source of conflict and dysfunction of our own government. Even though the leaders have been elected to manage the whole country, and not to argue with each other, we have observed how the influence of jealousy and pride causes them to waste their time and resources by putting each other down, and how this affects the unity within the government and the management of the important issues of the country. On the other hand, if as an individual person, we maintain the right mental attitude, then we can very easily get along with and become friends with people we meet, regardless of their status.

I am also talking about how to live our life meaningfully. There are certain things that are beneficial and other things that are harmful to us. We need to reflect on these two things, and after reflection, if you agree with me, then my advice relating to those things which are beneficial is to remember them and contemplate them later on. The next thing is to seriously consider implementing them into your life. If something is beneficial, then you need to cultivate and adopt that into your life, whereas if something is harmful to yourself and others, then you need to avoid it. As a way to reinforce your practice, you should think, 'This is something I must remember to prevent and minimise, whereas these things are beneficial to me and others, so I must maintain and develop them'.

We will now do our usual meditation. Without going into details, make sure you feel relaxed physically. Try to get rid of all distracting thoughts and let the mind be fully settled within yourself. Begin the meditation by directing the mind only on the incoming and outgoing breath. We will focus on the breath and try to prevent distracting thoughts as much as possible.

[Pause for single-pointed meditation]

We will continue the meditation with the chanting of the Buddha's mantra. As we chant, we try to direct the focus on the sound of the mantra without getting distracted by any external objects.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor
Edit 1 by Sandup Tsering
Edit 2 by Ingrid Leibbrandt
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