
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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Make yourself comfortable and relax. Being able to relax physically as well as mentally, as well as being familiar with mind training will give you a true sense of peace and relaxation.

Mental peace and happiness are more important than physical rest and physical happiness. You may have good physical health, and all the material possessions you need, but if your mind is restless, you cannot be happy. If your mind is agitated, you can end up in all sorts of unwanted places, even in the most favourable surroundings.

Through the investigation of my own and others experience I can say with confidence that the single most important factor for peace and happiness in our life is a calm and positive state of mind. That is why I always focus my Dharma talk on cultivating peace and happiness.

The purpose of our existence is finding happiness and we alone are responsible for achieving this goal. Therefore, we should always check that our current action is helping us to achieve our goal. If it is neutral in terms of achieving our purpose, maybe it is not too bad. However, if it goes against achieving our goal, which is to say it harms our physical and mental well-being, then we need to seriously reconsider what we are doing. It is up to each individual to create the causes for happiness in their life.

We all have a unique human intelligence. It is very important to tap into the ability to discern between right and wrong and identify what is beneficial and harmful. We should always check to ensure that our activities are aimed at benefiting other beings, or at the very least, are aimed at benefiting ourselves.

Each individual experiences peace and happiness from within. Achieving this is an essential factor for living a stable life and finding sustainable peace and happiness. Without inner peace, external successes don't have much meaning. Our peace and happiness is primarily dependent on our inner state of being. If we enjoy inner peace and happiness, and at the same time we meet with favourable external circumstances such as good health and prosperity, they will add more meaning to our lives.

The primary cause of obtaining inner peace and happiness is having the correct state of mind. If our state of mind is calm, clear and positive, we find peace and stability. If our state of mind is disturbed due to mental afflictions, we experience unhappiness and suffering. Therefore, we need to develop positive states of mind and rid ourselves of negative ones in order to tap into peace and happiness.

The self is made up of mind and body. The fact that we refer to the mind and the body as my mind and my body and to speech as my speech indicates that the self is a separate entity from our mind, body and speech. However, the self has a close link with the mind, and body. The state of mind in particular is a very important factor in determining the well-being of the self. In fact, the state of mind is linked to the health of the body. All our activities of body and speech are presided over by the mind. If the mind is peaceful and calm, the result is that all our actions, naturally become peaceful and wholesome. If our mind is disturbed, our actions also become disturbed.

We know from our own experience that when our mind is disturbed, we find it impossible to find lasting peace and happiness. If we find it through some external favourable conditions, it won't last long. To find peace and happiness, we need to free our mind from mental afflictions and to bring it under our control. This is why we need to meditate.

In meditation we use mindfulness to retain our focus on the meditation object and alertness to discern. Mindfulness here means remembrance of the object, whereas awareness is an intelligence of the mind, which has the function of discerning right from wrong. With the aid of these two tools, meditation trains our mind to remain on our chosen object and under our control, rather than being under the control of any disturbing thoughts or mental afflictions.

It is important to recognise that actions or deeds are preceded by a thought. The Buddhist concept of the law of karma is related to the idea that the mind is the source of all our actions and their results. Happiness and suffering results from karma which simply refers to actions that we create through body, speech and mind. As the mind is the primary source of all our actions, whether they will be positive or negative depends on the positivity or negativity of the mind that motivates them.

The Lord Buddha said that you are your own protector. He is also saying here that by subduing your mind you can be your own best protector, refuge or guide. Given this fact, we need to understand that our future is in our own hands. We have the choice to avoid any actions which will bring harm towards ourselves or others.

We also have the choice to cultivate positive states of mind such as loving kindness and compassion, which cause our actions to be beneficial to others and to our self. We need to be more aware of the results of our actions. Negative actions not only destroy our peace and happiness and make us suffer in the immediate time frame, they can also bring much more suffering in the distant future. Similarly, positive actions and a mental attitude of love and compassion for other beings benefits them and ourselves immediately, as well as in the future.

It is important to understand that if we carry out actions that benefit others, they will also benefit ourselves. If we create actions which destroy the joy and happiness of other beings, that very same action also destroys our own joy and happiness. If you harm other beings, you are harming yourself too.

Reflecting and developing knowledge about mind, actions and results of actions gives us an insight into what to accept and reject in our life. From this we will know the meaning of life, what to do and what not to do. Therefore, whatever we do and however we live; if we focus on cultivating and maintaining love and compassion for other beings, we will bring joy and happiness to all beings including ourselves.

The key practice here is to observe one's thoughts and actions, particularly the thoughts. Regarding this, the great master Shantideva said that prior to physically or verbally carrying out any actions, one should observe one's thoughts. If one holds, or is on the verge of, any negative mental attitudes such as hatred, craving or jealousy one should then stop the action. For example, don't speak and remain in silence. Before undertaking any activities think about them and consider the consequences. If we think before acting, we are making a choice, but to make the right choice we need to use intelligence.

We will now do breathing meditation for a short time. Reflect on the benefits of meditation. The primary purpose is to calm one's mind and to remove negative states. By 'negative states of mind' we are talking about harmful thoughts and mental attitudes such as pride, jealousy and wanting to compete with others, which serve as a source of restlessness and unhappiness. Meditation enhances calmness, peace and happiness within your mind, and as a result of that, enhances and encourages more hope, vision, positive thoughts, inner strength and self-confidence. When we have within us a state of mind that is calm and peaceful, it has an impact on our health, resulting in more balance in our physical systems, which in turn improves our physical health, including our complexion, giving a longer life span due to the improved blood and wind circulation in our body.

We should always begin our meditation practice by removing all distracting thoughts and mental defilements. It is due to these distractions that our mind doesn't know how to rest, but is always wandering off in all directions, all over the place, to different objects. The result is more tension, stress and anxiety for us, therefore we should try to forget about all of the wandering, distracting thoughts. Let the mind fully settle in stillness and allow the vividness of the to mind manifest. Then, simply direct the mind to the incoming and outgoing breath.

When we manage to retain our full focus, even if only for a short moment, we will experience a deep sense of peace and joy. If a person has never meditated before, experiencing such a deep sense of peace and happiness for the first time is memorable. If you are a beginner, you won't be able to retain the focus for a long period. In order to increase the duration of the single-pointed focus, it is recommended that you should shorten the duration, but increase the number of meditation sessions. In this way, you will be able to gradually increase your single-pointed meditative concentration.

[Pause for single-pointed breathing meditation]

As we chant the mantra, keep the mental focus on the sound of the mantra and then ensure that you keep the

mind inward rather than being distracted by disturbing thoughts and other distractions.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNIYE SOHA.

Thank you all for coming to the discourse and for your good attention.

This is our last gathering for the year, so I want to thank you all for your attendance and support for the program throughout the year. We all come here together in the spirit of friendship. As good friends, we are trying to help each other, so I hope the program is beneficial to all of us. Some people have expressed their appreciation of the teaching program. I would like to thank them for that. For my part, my intention to teach Dharma is solely to benefit others as a helping friend. I always think about the topic and prepare for the teaching before I come here. I also ensure my motivation is correct. Other than benefiting others, I do not have any ulterior motive for giving Dharma talks, nor do I regard my talks as a way to show off my knowledge. I thank you all for the opportunity to teach Dharma, because through this I have personally benefited a lot. I think when we get together here, it is important to cultivate a spirit of true friendship. Out of the spirit of friendship, we can help and benefit each other.

Christmas is one of the most important festive events. I will be off to India the day after tomorrow, so I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I look forward to resuming the teaching program next year and for many more years.

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Edited Version*

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