
Middle Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ཀྱི་ལམ་རིམ་འགྲིང་བ་བཞུགས་སོ།།

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The purpose of meditation is that it serves as a technique to clean out the mind which, in its ordinary state, is a bit dirty; it is as if it is filled with different kinds of garbage and filth. [laughter]

When we really think about the situation, we will see that this is definitely the case. Would it be comfortable thinking that we are in a heap of rubbish? It would not. I am just sharing my own experience of this being the case. and the meagre attempts I have made in trying to remove the garbage from my own mind.

We know that we are more comfortable with external cleanliness. For example if our room or environment is clean, we seem to experience some sort of joy from that, don't we? Just as we attempt to keep our immediate surroundings and environment clean, we need to make attempts to keep our mind clean as well. This is done by clearing away unfavourable states of mind and cultivating favourable ones, such as kind-heartedness, which contribute to our wellbeing, enabling us to develop a sense of joyfulness and real contentment.

If one were to ask, "What are the kind of stains that we have in our mind, and can they be washed away like we wash clothes with water?" the answer is, unfortunately, no. If we were to measure the quantity of water and tea that we have drunk thus far in our life, it would amount to quite a lot! So if our mental stains could be cleared away with water, we should have thoroughly cleansed our minds by now! [laughter]

It is the stains of superstitious thoughts that we need to clean from our mind. So many of our thoughts are superstitious thoughts, which means that they are not based on reality but mere whimsical worldly concerns. Our mind seems to be preoccupied with so many kinds of thoughts and ideas that are not conducive to our real happiness and wellbeing. When our mind is filled with these superstitious thoughts, they prevent a really pure intelligence and wisdom from manifesting. We all have the potential to develop pristine wisdom within ourselves, but these superstitious thoughts prevent that from being actualised. So it is the superstitions thoughts that need to be cleared away from our mind.

When we begin to identify and acknowledge the various types of superstitious thoughts, we realise that they are the cause of all of our problems. We begin to recognise that the real cause of our problems does not lie outside, but actually lies within ourselves. So clearing away the superstitious and unwanted problematic thoughts has to come from within; we cannot rely on external sources to clear them away.

The means to clear away these negative, unwanted states of mind is by developing wisdom, which is a particular intelligence that helps to identify superstitious thoughts. So

the first step is to generate wisdom. Then along with wisdom, we need to also cultivate the method for removing those unwanted states of mind. When we develop the combination of wisdom and method, then it is possible for us to develop a really pristine clear and bright state of mind, which is where all our positive qualities manifest.

When we begin to identify the potential to develop both wisdom and method, then we will be inspired to further transform our mind. The main point here is to realise that our unwanted emotions and difficulties are created by none other than ourselves. We have the potential to develop wisdom and method, through which we can develop the tools to rid ourselves of these disturbing emotions, thus further enhancing the method and wisdom we already have.

There is no reason to feel discouraged about having created our own problems, thinking that that they cannot be solved. His Holiness the Dalai Lama says that there are many problems in the world that are created by humans. As they are created by humans, it naturally follows that humans can also find solutions to solve those problems. This is really a very significant point that the Dalai Lama shares with us. Thus, because our own internal problems are created by none other than ourselves, we can definitely overcome them.

When we take the initiative to look into and clearly identify our problems we will find that what creates so many barriers and conflicts with others and so forth is none other than the attitudes that we hold. When we identify a certain kind of negative attitude that is a direct cause for particular kind of outcome, it is in our best interests to take the initiative to change that attitude. We might interpret a situation as being difficult, but that might only be because we are viewing it from a particular kind of perspective.

When we change our perspective and attitude to that situation, we can see it in a different light, "Oh, it's not as bad as I thought it was" or "It's not entirely as I initially thought." When we begin to see how situations or problems are related directly to our attitudes, then it is in our own best interests to take the initiative to change our attitudes. Who wants to have problems and difficulties? No one wants to have that!

Thus we can begin to see that we need to work on our mind to develop a clearer mind and more positive attitude, looking at things more holistically rather than being narrow-minded. As we begin to detect, on a small scale, that our problems and so forth are related to our own attitudes, then we can start to become more courageous about doing more self-analysis, and delve deeper into our state of mind.

So who is this 'me' or 'I' that is experiencing the problems? What is this 'I' or 'me', that we identify as ourselves? When we spend some significant time investigating these questions in a proper way, we can begin to really understand ourselves at a deeper level. Then we can begin to really recognise the positive qualities within ourselves.

We all have the basis of kindness and goodwill within ourselves, so we can start to think how beneficial and worthwhile it would be to further develop that kind-heartedness. Then, when we take the initiative to further enhance and develop these good qualities, we can reap the real benefit, the real cause for our own wellbeing. This is how we need to understand the process.

I am sharing the process that I feel works and benefits me; it is based on my limited experience of what I find beneficial.

This process of developing our mind begins when, through our own intelligence, or more specifically wisdom, we recognise that there are certain states of mind that are conducive for our wellbeing, and thus beneficial. Then we will be able to recognise for ourselves that there are certain states of mind that cause us problems and are thus detrimental to our wellbeing.

When we recognise that through our own self-analysis and wisdom, then we begin to really understand that positive attitudes are something which are to be adopted, further enhanced and cultivated, and that there are certain negative attitudes, emotions and so forth that need to be discarded. We need to slowly begin to minimise these negative attitudes, not allowing them to influence our mind. We need to immediately recognise a negative attitude when it arises and not allow it to take strong hold of our own mind. We know that if we allow that state of mind to prevail it will harm ourselves, and eventually harm others.

We need to recognise through our own wisdom that this negative state that we have is an unwanted state of mind, and that we should not harbour and further feed it, thus allowing it to dominate us. If we think in this way then that negative state of mind loses its intensity, and therefore its hold over us. Once we begin to recognise it for what it is and don't trust it, it will not have any power over us. If we want to make progress this is the way we need to develop ourselves.

We are always busy, trying to improve our financial situation, or in our work environment and so forth. While external resources do contribute to our wellbeing to a certain degree, they will not in themselves be a sufficient cause to bring about a real, true sense of inner wellbeing. The real cause for our inner wellbeing is having positive states of mind, which we need to develop within ourselves. Thus it is worthwhile to invest time and energy on our internal progress. While we spend some time and energy on developing things externally, it is also worthwhile spending some time on internal development.

When we spend time and energy in developing both external and internal conditions, then we can definitely experience a sense of wellbeing. If we have worked on our internal development then, even in the event that our external situation is not so favourable, it will not be a cause for unhappiness and misery. If we spend significant time in developing ourselves internally we will definitely reap the result of being able to maintain integrity, and a real sense of wellbeing, regardless of the external situation. If the external situation is good, then fine. But if the external situation is a difficult one, we can deal with it because we have developed our inner strength, though developing our inner qualities.

People become overwhelmed and depressed by external conditions because they haven't spent significant time in developing their inner qualities. Without inner strength, poor external conditions seem to completely overpower them to the point where they seem to fall into a state of despair. On the other hand when one has developed inner qualities, one can definitely withstand difficult external situations.

To summarise, the main point is that when we are able to identify that there are certain states of mind and attitudes that cause us problems, we should not be daunted by that. There is a solution. We can solve our problems by developing and enhancing our own wisdom and methods.

Now we come down to the point of adopting a technique that helps to enhance wisdom and method. It is a technique that we can actually utilise right now—the technique of contemplative meditation. When we are comfortable in acknowledging that we do have a lot of superstitious or discursive thoughts, called negative emotions, feelings and so forth, which are the cause for all our internal problems, then we will be comfortable about adopting a technique that can overcome those unwanted states of mind.

The technique that we adopt here as a contemplative meditation is focussing on the breath. As we begin to take that initiative, we make a commitment to ourselves, "For the next few minutes I will keep my focus on my breath and nothing else". If we do this practice sincerely, then all of our discursive and distracting thoughts will start to slowly subside, and as a result we will experience some sort of temporary tranquillity and calmness. We can't expect immediate results right away but as a result of the small experience we gain now through the practice of meditation, we can begin to identify this as a technique which, if we apply it slowly, will help our mind to become clearer and more steady. That is how the technique works. Thus for the next few minutes we will just focus on our breath.
[meditation]

If there are any questions, you are welcome to raise your hand and I can address them. Otherwise we will continue with the text.

Student: Is it a matter of just changing one's attitudes to events or does one have to do something else to amend one's past mistakes?

Changing one's attitudes can be understood at different levels. On a deeper level, changing one's attitude implies that by recognising past mistakes, one decides to not make those same mistakes again, and to make amends for those past mistakes, and try to correct them. It also implies recognising that one is experiencing the consequences of having made mistakes and committed wrongs in the past. So we need to resolve, "In order to prevent more problems in the future I should not make those same mistakes or commit those same wrongs now". Does that make sense?

Of course, this might be hard to understand from the western point of view, but from the Buddhist point of view the way to make amends for the mistakes one has made in the past is to engage actively in purification practices. There are different practices that will suffice that purpose. When one actually engages in a purification practice, one tries to bring to mind not only the wrongs that one might have done in this life that one can recall, but any kind of wrong one may have done in past lives as well, going way beyond the immediate situation to previous lifetimes.

As the teachings explain, we have engaged in so many unimaginable wrong deeds that have caused so much turmoil and problems and difficulties in this life. It is all linked back to the many wrongs that one has committed in countless past lifetimes. When one engages in purification practices, the technique involves bringing to mind all the wrongs one has ever done in the past and making this resolve, "May this practice that I do now suffice to purify every wrong that I have done in the past". When one sincerely engages in a purification practice with this attitude, then after the practice one actually experiences a sense of relief. Although the practice might involve some hardship and difficulties one feels, "It's been incredibly good. The hardships of the practice have been worthwhile because the

cause of my problems and difficulties have been purified." That is why it is said that a purification practice can be very powerful for one's sense of wellbeing.

Student: Those who get the benefit from this practice are the perpetrators, but what about the recipient? To the western mind one has a duty to make direct amends to them.

That of course differs from the Buddhist point of view. If we go back over countless past lifetimes it is not possible to make amends or correct our wrong deeds in relation to every individual. The Buddhist perspective is that one needs to make amends by removing one's own negative state of mind. A purification practice involves actually changing one's own state of mind. Doing so is equivalent to making amends to all those one may have wronged. Of course, when the time and conditions are right, one will actually be able to directly benefit them too. But the real point is the importance of purifying one's own negative state of mind. In Buddhism negative karma is not merely the actual physical act so much as the negative karmic imprint that is left on the mind, which is the main thing that needs to be purified.

I feel that this way of making amends through purification is not unique to the Buddhist faith. I believe that in the Christian tradition there is a confession room. Apparently if you went the priest and make a confession, then that would suffice to purify one's misdeeds

To return to the purification of a misdeed, let's say one has stolen \$10 from someone. If you go try to find that person again and give the \$10 back, then of course that might make the person a happy—if they are willing to accept it. As to whether that deed itself will completely purify the negative karma of stealing, I don't know. It seems questionable, so I don't know if it works that way.

Of course, the Buddhist way to explain this is that if you generously give \$10 to someone that you assume you have stolen from in the past, then that is a good deed of generosity. Then one is creating good karma, or positive merit. But whether that suffices to purify the negative karma of stealing is dependent on whether one gives with the specific attitude of purifying one's negative karma of stealing.

To be more specific, if one gives \$10 with this particular intention, "May this deed suffice to purify that particular negative karma I have created in stealing \$10", then it would work. It is not necessary to give it to the same person. If we had to make amends with the actual individual then we would have to assume that a negative karma of killing would never be able to be purified, because we could never bring that person back to life again. *[Geshe-la laughs]*

It is mentioned in the teachings that if we engage in any virtue with the intention that it be a purification practice, then it becomes a purification practice. So any virtue can become an antidote for overcoming a non-virtue that we have created.

Student: Does forgiveness have a place in the Buddhist tradition?

Forgiveness definitely does have a place. If the victim of a negative deed does not forgive the perpetrator then the victim feels very uncomfortable. People can hold onto a grudge if the other does not seek forgiveness, so seeking forgiveness is a form of apology, which makes the victim feel much lighter in their mind. They know that the perpetrator accepts that they have done something wrong and that, "It is not that they are gleefully happy with what

they have done to me". It makes the recipient of the harm more willing to let go, as well as helping the one who is seeking forgiveness.

It seems that forgiveness is easier with small things. But when it comes to big things, there are some who might say, "Oh it is not enough to say sorry and ask forgiveness. This is quite a major thing. Merely saying 'sorry' is not sufficient". To give a more contemporary example, consider the example of someone committing a murder and then immediately going the police and confessing, "Oh, I am really sorry, I killed someone." That doesn't mean that they're off the hook, and that they won't have to experience the punishment of the law. Although it seems that the punishment might be a little bit lighter if they confess, they will still have to serve their term in jail.

In the worldly view, the perpetrator has to be punished regardless of what has been done to the victim. So in the case of murder, how does punishing the person who committed the murder actually help the victim? It doesn't help the victim in any way. Nevertheless, punishing the perpetrator who committed the crime is seen as being justice in accordance with the law, isn't it?

We need to ponder the point that even something quite small can cause someone hurt, while even some small kind gesture can make someone really happy. It is really good to understand that it doesn't take much to make someone happy or unhappy.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us again take an opportunity to spend a few minutes in contemplative meditation. This time the object that we can use for our focus can be the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the chant of Buddha Shakyamuni's name, we maintain our entire focus on the sound. And then when the recitation subsides, we can maintain our awareness of that sound and just focus on that lingering after-effect of the sound for a while. That will suffice as a contemplative meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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