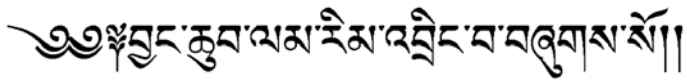


---

# Middle Stages of the Path to Enlightenment



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

20 June 2012

---

As usual, we can spend some time in meditation. As I have been quite regularly explaining the purpose and technique of meditation, we don't need to go into too much detail about that. However, to summarise, it is good to bear in mind that the purpose of meditation is a means or technique to help subdue one's mind.

Meditation helps one to subdue one's mind primarily by protecting one's mind from adversities or negativities. That protection in our mind *firstly* comes from the clear, sound intelligence or wisdom that we all have. We all have the potential for sound wisdom, that is called intelligence or, more specifically, the wisdom that is able to distinguish between what is right and what is wrong; what is beneficial and what is harmful. We all have the basis for that wisdom. *Secondly*, when we have a clear, bright state of mind that activates the wisdom within us and this combination allows our mind to protect us from adversities and negativities. Having that protection in our mind will allow us to really have a joyful state of mind.

Not only when things are fine will we have a joyful and happy state of mind but also, more specifically, when external situations are not favourable and things seemingly don't work too well, it will help to prevent the mind from becoming distraught and overwhelmed, and thus maintain a level of joy and happiness in one's mind. So that is when it really becomes most useful and beneficial in one's life.

The reality of this dawns upon us when we take the initiative to look within ourselves rather than allowing our mind to be focused outward and completely distracted with frivolous activity or worldly concerns. When one's mind is completely focused outside we are not able to recognise the great potential and ability that we have within us. So we need to try to adopt this practice and spend some time and energy looking within ourselves to analyse the good qualities one has and try to develop those further. That is something it is worth spending our time and energy on.

When we take the initiative and allow our mind to settle down and we focus within, it becomes clear that we do have this potential. We start to notice that we have the potential to have a clear, focused and bright state of mind. That is something that becomes evident when we take the time to focus within. Taking the initiative to focus within is in contrast to our normal state of mind where we seem to be preoccupied with focusing on external matters. Generally speaking, it seems that most of our time and energy is consumed by being busy with external conditions and factors.

Many people who have reached a significant age would have been quite overwhelmed by this in their life and quite daunted with so much busyness. They may then come to realise that this has not brought about any genuine happiness and contentment within themselves. If one pays a little bit of attention to this in one's life one begins to notice that one has spent so much time and energy focussing externally, trying to better external situations, and that has not contributed much to one's well being. This applies to someone who has reached middle age.

For younger people, we might all feel that it is okay that they haven't experienced that yet. We may all feel that it's okay for them to be a little bit distracted because they are gaining experience in their life and that they can learn from their own experiences. We might consider it acceptable for them to be a little bit distracted, focus externally and engage in frivolous activities and so forth. But those of us who have had a certain amount of experience in not getting real satisfaction and a sense of contentment in life, isn't it time that we spent some time and energy focussing inward rather than allowing our mind to be completely distracted and following the whimsical thoughts that arise in our mind? It is time for us to pay a little bit of attention and take some initiative to develop the good qualities that contribute to our wellbeing. That is something that would be worthwhile.

Having suggested that it is worthwhile to spend time focusing inward and applying meditation techniques to develop a clear and focused state of mind, one may still question the real benefit of that. Whilst someone may experience the benefit of focusing inward and settling the mind down during meditation practise they still need, of course, to engage in outside world. We all need to survive. We need to have a job and go out associate with others. So the question may arise, 'What advantage or real benefit can one derive from meditation practise if all it does is make one settled and calm during meditation when most of one's time is spent out of meditation engaging in the outside world?' Some people may not see the relevance or, rather than seeing the relevance, they may doubt the advantage of meditation thinking, 'it might prevent me from engaging properly in the outside world or might become an obstacle.' We can remove that doubt and question within one's mind by relating other meditators' experiences.

Many people, who have made a sincere attempt to adopt a regular meditation practice yet lead a normal life engaged in outside world and have regular jobs and so forth, have confided in me that having spent some time meditating before going into the outside world to work and so forth improves their life. They have found that when they have a good meditation session in the morning it helps them tremendously to be able to deal effectively in the outside world. When they go to work there are lingering positive effects of their meditation and their mind is more settled and focused. It removes the sensation of feeling on edge when dealing with others. If one feels on edge there is always the possibility of someone rubbing you up the wrong way and becoming irritated. When one is in a calm state of mind those small

---

---

insignificant things that normally easily upset us are less likely to make us become agitated. Therefore, a short meditation on a daily basis can help rather than hinder one's work and make normal life situations more effective, fruitful and worthwhile.

Of course those of us who have some understanding of and inclination towards Buddhist teachings would aspire for liberation and enlightenment. Nevertheless, when we find that meditation helps us in a practical way in our daily life then that is something to aspire to as well. While our aspiration might be quite grand, we need to lead a normal life and deal with normal situations in life. So a technique that helps us to have a more effective, calm, good, everyday life is something worthwhile. Even if one does not have grand aspirations of liberation and enlightenment in future lives, wouldn't it be worthwhile to adopt a technique that will help one to lead a calmer life?

Furthermore, when we apply the meditation technique properly it will definitely help to reduce the intensity of delusions such as strong attachment, anger, a sense of competitiveness, jealousy, pride and so forth in our mind. As a result, one's mind is firmer, steadier and one is not as prone to being influenced by these delusions. When those strong delusions don't dominate our mind then, when we deal with others in our normal working life, our mind is much steadier and calmer. This is something to really consider.

Furthermore, we also have to be very careful about the decisions we make in our lives in relation to our wellbeing. We all are concerned with the happiness of the self, or the 'I'. It is crucial, however, that we think properly about how this 'I', how the 'self', is made happy. Sometimes we fall victim to making the 'I' feel happy through a temporary solution that may give nice feelings or relief now but which may harm us further down the line. To be more explicit, when one resorts to taking drugs or alcohol or other external stimulants they may give some relief or enjoyable feeling to the 'I', the person, who is taking them and cause them to think, 'I feel good with this, I feel good.' However if one resorts to that and it becomes a habit it can bring about much more misery, so much more that it harms the physical body. It can also harm the self, the person, itself. This is how we need to understand the ill effects of taking substances that give temporary satisfaction but can harm in the long term.

What I am sharing here is how adopting a meditation technique can help to develop the clear wisdom that is the ability to analyse what is useful or harmful to us. What it comes down to is being able to develop wisdom that one can rely on to know immediately what is harmful to one. As in the earlier example, while taking certain substances may give some sort of gratification now, if one is able to apply one's own intelligence and wisdom one will know better than to take these substances because, even though it gives some sort of gratification and nice feelings now, it will harm one's physical body. When one's physical body is harmed then it affects oneself too because we are related to our body. When our body is weak and harmed we suffer as a consequence. When one is able to apply that wisdom and

intelligence one has developed that protection within oneself. It is important for us to develop that wariness and always be careful and mindful of what we do and the choices we make in life. With that sort of wariness we can be mindful and careful in what we do and not harm ourselves, and contribute to our wellbeing. So these are really essential points.

It is really worthwhile if we further analyse our own state of being and how that relates to our wellbeing. We all normally make statements such as, 'I am happy' or 'I'm not happy' when someone asks after our wellbeing and how we are doing. You can say, 'I'm well' or 'I am doing well' or 'I'm happy' or one might say 'I am not happy' or 'I am not well'. We make these automatic responses. It is worthwhile however, to take some time to analyse when one gives the response that one is happy, asking 'what is it I am feeling happy about? Whereas in other circumstances we immediately respond with not being not happy. So what is that in relation to?

When we analyse our responses they fall into two main categories. It is either in relation to our physical body or our mind. There is no separate 'I' that we can pinpoint that is independently happy or unhappy just by itself. It is either in relation to our physical body, having good sound health and feeling physically good that we can say, 'Oh I feel good, I feel happy'. Or it is in relation to one's state of mind that one can say that one is feeling joyful and happy and can say, 'I am happy'. We need to understand that our happiness and wellbeing is very much related to our physical and mental wellbeing. There is no way other than these two. So paying attention to these factors is essential.

When we do a self-analysis we come to acknowledge that our individual wellbeing and happiness is related to our physical and mental wellbeing. When we acknowledge that then we can start to take the initiative to apply contributing factors to our physical and mental wellbeing. Indeed it is only through these two sources that we can derive a sense of wellbeing.

External factors serve as contributing factors but are not the real source of wellbeing. We wouldn't find anyone in their right mind who would say that having a hundred million dollars, in itself, provides me with happiness. In fact people who have that amount of money are not necessarily always happy people. If external conditions are the true provider of happiness then someone who had a hundred million dollars would definitely experience happiness and always be happy. But that, in fact, is not the case. What really contributes to our immediate sense of wellbeing is our physical and mental wellbeing. Thus we can apply methods and techniques to contribute to our physical wellbeing. When our physical wellbeing is sound it also contributes, to a certain degree, to our mental happiness. But the most important thing is our mental wellbeing. When we are mentally happy that has a stronger influence on our physical body. There is definitely a direct connection between mental and physical wellbeing. If we work towards securing contributing factors for our mental wellbeing then that naturally contributes to our physical wellbeing. Then, as a

---

consequence, the person or individual who possesses that mind and body will experience that wellbeing.

It is really quite fascinating to think about this interconnection that we have between our physical body and mind and ourselves. We can add another factor to our wellbeing, which is speech. Our wellbeing can be very much related to our speech and that of others. When we experience mental wellbeing, then physically and verbally we also experience wellbeing, which is expressed as well. This is how it is good for us to ponder and look into this interconnection between our physical and mental state. When we see the connection between our mind and body then we can see the relevance of applying the proper technique that contributes to our mental wellbeing, which is the meditation technique. This is how we come back again to the main point; that the meditation technique helps to develop our real wellbeing.

We can now use some time for meditation practice. To prepare to meditate we readjust our physical posture to be comfortable and relaxed. I think that by now people would feel quite relaxed mentally. To apply the proper meditation technique it is good to acknowledge that all the problems that we have experienced thus far can be summarised into the fact of allowing our mind to be completely distracted. When we identify the distractions as being the cause of the turmoil and unsettled state of mind within us we can then take the initiative and make the commitment, 'For the next few minutes I will not allow my mind to become distracted and influenced by whimsical thoughts or any kinds of ideas and so forth that are not conducive to our practice.' Instead we will bring our whole attention and focus within and place it upon our own breath, which we use as an inner object to focus on. We keep our entire focus, a one hundred-percent focus, on the natural rhythm of our breathing itself. For the next few minutes we will just maintain that focus on the breath itself. (*Pause for meditation.*)

#### **4.2.2.1.2.3. The way to train the mind in the stages of the path of beings of the great scope**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2. The actual paths**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2. How to develop an awakening mind**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1. The stages of training the awakening mind**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1. Training the mind in the pith instructions on the six causes and effect, which comes from the lineage traced to the great master Atisha**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2. Extensive explanation**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2. The actual training in the stages**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1. Training the mind to strive for the welfare of others**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1. Establishing the basis for that mind to arise**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2. Establishing the appealing aspect of all**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2.3. Repaying their kindness**

##### **4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2.3.1. Though we may not recognise them due to having been transferred from death to rebirth, to disregard them would be shameful**

Following the outline from the text we have now come to a point about repaying the kindness of others who have shown kindness to us. As explained in our previous session it is appropriate, or fitting, to return an act of kindness towards someone who has shown kindness to oneself. This is presented under four headings in the text.

As the outline presents, 'Though we may not recognise them due to having been transferred from death to rebirth, to disparage them would be shameful'. This relates to the possibility that other beings have been our mothers in our past lives. Because of the process of death and rebirth we don't recognise them now but to give them up would be shameful.

I can relate an incident in relation to this point. On the Queen's Birthday holiday last Monday I was in Chadstone going to the shopping centre. In one of the shops there was a father with his daughter who was about two and half years old or maybe three. The young girl saw me and immediately extended her arm and wanted to come and hug me. Because she was running towards me her dad didn't seem to mind I felt compelled to hold her too. It was as if she recognised me. It was quite amazing that without any prior connection in this life that this girl would just run up to me. I held her for a while and then give her back to dad and he seemed to be really happy about the meeting.

When I asked her father where he was from he told me he was from Andra Pradesh in India. He also seemed to be glad to be talking with me. But for me it seemed quite amazing how someone could just come up and recognise me. People standing around were also quite surprised that a child would suddenly come up to someone, apparently a stranger, and show so much affection and recognition. Apparently lots of memories of past lives are still very prevalent at a very young age. It seems that there are many incidents where young children have mentioned things and recognised things that were apparently from past lives. Later, as they grow up, that memory starts to fade away. It seems that this is quite a significant age for memories of past lives to occur.

The text reads:

These beings, your kind mothers (whom you do not recognise through the process of death and rebirth) are suffering and have no refuge. There is nothing more shameful than to do your best to liberate yourself from cyclic existence while considering these beings, your mothers, unimportant and abandoning them.

The text quotes from another text to back that point up. The main point being made here is that those we consider as other beings, all beings who we encounter on a regular basis, are actually beings who have been our mothers in past lives. As explained earlier in the text, we have had countless past lives and at one time or another they have been our mothers. What prevents us from fully comprehending this is having gone through many processes of death and rebirth. However, if one comes to understand that it is only due to the process of death and rebirth that we don't recognise that they have been kind to us as our mother then, to abandon them now and seek only self liberation and happiness for oneself and not care

---

for the welfare for other beings, would be really quite shameful and inconsiderate.

If one trains one's mind to develop the attitude that whenever we encounter other beings in a very destitute situation, for example someone who is very ill or sick, it is fitting to try to help them rather than neglecting them and just walking away. When one provides help, it would be repaying the kindness of this person who in previous times has been kind to one. So it is definitely fitting for us to help them in whatever way we can now. Training one's mind to approach situations like that would be very, very meaningful as a way to consider all beings as having been kind to one. Then, naturally, whenever the opportunity arises, we would wish to repay their kindness and extend help to others rather than neglecting them. We can see how wonderful it would be if we can develop a keen aspiration and admiration for the bodhisattva's deeds. Bodhisattvas are noble beings who have developed such an attitude. We can see how they would be constantly engaged in helping other beings with that sort of attitude and mind. So we can develop a strong appreciation for that.

The text quotes Chandragomin's, *Letter to a Student*, which reads:

While you see that your relatives are engulfed in  
the ocean of cyclic existence,  
And are as if fallen into a pit of fire,  
There is nothing more shameful than to work for  
your own liberation,  
Neglecting those whom you do not recognise due  
to the process of death and rebirth.

We can conclude here for the evening, and before we end the session let us take the opportunity again to use some time for meditation. This time the object of our focus can be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra to be recited. As we hear the sound of the mantra being recited we again apply the determination not to allow our mind to be influenced by other distractions or thoughts and so forth. We place our full attention and focus on the sound of the mantra. When the recitation subsides, as a result of having focused on the sound of the mantra, we might experience a sense of relief and wellbeing within our mind. We can then just remain absorbed and focused on the residual sound and that feeling for a short while. This will then suffice for an actual contemplative meditation session.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi  
Edit 1 by John Burch  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
Edited Version*

© *Tara Institute*