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# Middle Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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It will be good to spend some time in meditation as usual. It is important that we understand what kind of activity we are engaging in when we meditate. First of all, it is worthwhile to consider that whatever activity we engage in our life, whether we call it a positive activity or negative activity, we primarily engage in it with an intention that it will benefit us. It should be clear that that is the intention behind engaging in an activity. Even though our intention may be to engage in an activity as a way to benefit ourselves, whether it benefits us or not is questionable, and if we look into our situation we will find that the actual benefit is very limited ... not that much. (*Geshe-la chuckling.*)

## Identifying the chronic mental disease

So, my observation when I look into our life, is that it seems that we get busy and caught up with doing things with the intention of benefiting ourselves. But this doesn't seem to benefit us and appease the real need that we have, which is almost like a sickness. It is like there is a chronic disease within our heart that feels dissatisfied and not content. I am, of course, not implying that this is the case for everyone, but it seems that most of us have, in our very busy everyday life, that sort of unsettledness within us. That feeling of being unsettled within us, which I liken to a disease, is primarily related, as I understand it, to our attitude.

We adopt a certain kind of attitude that we have become very familiar with and that keeps strengthening that unsettlement within us. Rather than helping to cure the disease it seems to further increase the ill effect of the disease within our mind. As I mentioned earlier, it seems to be related to our attitude. When we come to understand and acknowledge this for ourselves, we are beginning to hit the target of what is actually wrong. When we begin to see that it is really a kind of habituated attitude that is strengthening the mental disease within us then we begin to ask whether it is possible to cure this disease and whether there is something that would help change one's negative attitude. When we begin to acknowledge and see that for ourselves then there is definitely room for transformation. There is a possibility to apply a technique, which is like a medicine, to cure the chronic disease that we have within our mind.

The reality of our situation will only dawn upon us if we scrutinise and pay attention to our own state of mind, our way of thinking and the pattern of our attitudes. We might all relate to feeling unsettled and that somehow something is just not right. We might all have that unsettled sort of feeling within us without knowing what may be wrong but experiencing an underlying unease within us. This is something that most of us will be able to relate to. However, we often try to put the blame or reason for this unsettled feeling on external situations and conditions. We might blame friends, partners or external conditions around us as contributing to us feeling unsettled or agitated. We have that

habit of immediately looking externally and trying to find every reason and cause to blame others.

When we have taken an honest look within, and seeing how our attitudes are related to our unsettled and troubled mind; we will begin to detect and notice that the attitudes that we are holding onto have been strengthened over years and years and that they directly contribute to that agitation and unsettlement. They basically cause a troubled mind. When we start to recognise this for ourselves then, at that stage, we need to get a grip on understanding that all our troubles, all our uncomfortable feelings and all our problems, actually come from our own mind and the negative attitudes that we hold within us. When we begin to recognise this then, as I regularly share, this is where meditation practice can help us. When we apply the right techniques of meditation it begins to slowly unravel the state of mind we hold onto and helps us by loosening the grip of the negativity and attitudes within us.

Now, of course, in mentioning that we can apply the meditation technique to overcome negative states of mind and attitudes within us, I am not saying that this happens overnight. The very negative attitudes that contribute to our unsettled, agitated mind are something that come from years and years of familiarity and acquaintance. To expect to overcome what has developed and been established very firmly within oneself over long period of time overnight is completely unrealistic. Just as it has taken a long period of time for these negative attitudes that contribute to all the troubles within us to become firmly established, we need to be realistic that overcoming these negative states of mind will also take time. That means that it is only by applying the meditation technique regularly over long period of time, familiarising and acquainting ourselves again and again with a positive way of thinking and positive attitudes, that this technique becomes a cure for the disease-like negative attitudes within our mind.

I consider it my priority to find the best way in conveying this message to those who seem to hold onto a troubled mind. My immediate concern is how to relate to you, in an easy way for you to understand, that it is really dependent on your own mind and attitudes. So this is why I share these points with you again and again. As the great masters of the past have mentioned, for as long as we don't understand our own mind whatever we do will not contribute to a genuine feeling of satisfaction and ease within us.

## Putting the blame on one's negative attitude

I mentioned earlier that we are very familiar with immediately trying to find external reasons or blame for our situation. It is as if we ourselves are not to blame at all, and we think, 'I am not contributing to my own unsettled feeling and agitation. Rather it is external situations and other people who are causing me all the trouble.' We hold onto that as reality while the truth, as explained in the text, is that it actually comes from one's own mind and negative attitudes. I feel that a practical approach would be to initially try to train oneself to accept that maybe half is contributed from outside and half from my own mind. In that way one does not completely blame the other but also takes some responsibility upon oneself. I feel that this is a much fairer approach than to lay complete blame upon others. Now, check this out for yourself and see if it is going to be helpful for you or not. I feel that that it definitely helps to reduce agitation and anger in one's own mind, when in the event that someone confronts us by saying or doing something, we

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take responsibility and think half the blame and responsibility for what happened comes from my side. The moment we accept that, it immediately helps to appease one's mind and the tense level of anger begins to reduce. So in that way it benefits one. When anger reduces one feels more calm and peaceful.

To re-emphasise, we should cultivate the attitude of taking half the responsibility ourselves, for any situation that occurs in relation to others. Of course in moments when one is very agitated and upset we may be convinced that the complete fault lies with the other. For as long as we truly believe that, we will not be free from agitation because there is no way that we can make the other become completely agreeable to us. Therefore disagreements arise and will cause more and more agitation and anger in one's mind. Whereas if a situation has arisen where one feels agitated but we take the stance that the other is not completely to blame, and that we are also responsible then, the moment one considers that, one usually finds that one's agitated mind subsides and one feels much more relaxed and calmer. One is able to think more clearly as well.

This can apply to making normal decisions with, for example, your partner. One can become habituated with being very opinionated and feeling that the other has to agree 100% with me. One may think, 'I am not going to budge when the other makes a suggestion that I completely disagree with'. 'If it does not completely accord with my wishes, I am not going to accept it'. For as long as we hold onto that opinionated attitude there is no room for compromise or agreement with the other. That will also hurt the other because the other also has feelings and wishes.

If we have an attitude that we are not going to consider the other's wishes and feelings that is not going to go very well with the other. The other is not going to appreciate this and feel too happy. If, particularly in relation to those we associate with or have to live together with, we develop an attitude that even if someone makes a suggestion that is not completely in accordance with our own wishes we try to accept it and say, 'Okay, I don't completely agree with that but I will go halfway. I will try to find a compromise and go halfway.' that will create room for the other to also have that consideration.

Practically speaking this is a much healthier approach to resolving things rather than holding onto a very opinionated, self-centred mind and attitude. What I am proposing here is a practical approach to dealing with our daily life and everyday situations. I feel that it will help in everyday life situations if one is able to accept this way of thinking and attitude. One can develop this attitude where one accepts 50% of the other's wishes, if one cannot comply with 100%, and not force 100% of one's own wishes on others. 'I will agree 50% with what you suggest.' In that way one finds a compromise where 50% of one's wishes will be fulfilled and the other will also have 50% of their wishes fulfilled. That can help to have mutual satisfaction in relation to trying to make a decision.

Put very bluntly, if there were \$1000 to be divided and you say I am going to keep the \$1000 for myself it is definitely not going to be appreciated and accepted by the other. At the same time, one may not be able to give up all of the \$1000 to them. So if one said, 'Okay, I will keep \$500 and you can have \$500.' you can have mutual agreement around that. This makes both parties happy and satisfied. This is just a very simple example of how if in our everyday life we can

find that middle way approach to resolving situations which can lead to much more harmony.

Disagreements and disputes naturally arise with people that we feel close to. We don't have disagreements and so forth with strangers or people we don't normally associate with. It is with the very people that we live with and consider our loved or dear ones that disagreements, disputes or confrontations may arise. So it is reasonable for us to try to find a compromise to resolve that conflict because we do have a concern for the other. If that is true, then it is reasonable to find a practical resolution.

Trying to cultivate such ways of thinking or attitudes is a way to start to really utilise one's deeper levels of intelligence and wisdom that need to be utilised if we are seeking the benefits of happiness and wellbeing for oneself and others. So by cultivating such attitudes and really considering these ways of thinking, and seeing how it is in the best interest of oneself and others, would be a beneficial way to resolve conflict, disputes or arguments.

### **Relying on one's inner wisdom**

Cultivating one's own wisdom and intelligence will help one to clearly recognise one's own faults and qualities. We all have faults within ourselves and, by the same token, we also have good potential and good qualities within us. It is through our own intelligence that we will be able to detect and distinguish between the positive and the negative within us. Likewise, we will also be able to recognise other's qualities and strengths as well as their faults or weaknesses. Being able to assess and understand one's own and other's situations clearly we will be able to find the right ways to resolve situations because these conflicts arise with the very people we associate with. They arise with someone that we live with, our partner or work colleagues or friends or relatives. If being very stubborn and holding onto one's opinion contributes to one's wellbeing and one feels at peace and joyful and happy about that, then fine. But what is the result? If one honestly looks into one's opinionated and self-centred attitude, one finds it does not help and contribute to our wellbeing or genuine peace and happiness within our mind. So what may seem like a sacrifice initially, giving up 50% of one's wishes, will be a great benefit and help for one's own peace of mind while helping the other as well. This is a practical way to understand how this approach is beneficial.

### **Advice for the younger generation**

I can share further practical approaches to deal with relationships with others. I have shared advice in relation to the younger generation in the past and I will share it again now. In associating with others in your younger years try to find a good friend, be it a partner like a girl friend or a boy friend. I am relating this to the younger generation because this is something quite natural. There is nothing wrong with wanting to have a relationship but the problem arises when one is not able to make the right choices. This is where it might become problematic and difficult. Now, what I am about to share I feel is a very practical approach when associating with others. If you are starting to have a relationship with others, it is very important that you try to relate to their qualities and try not to focus too much on their faults. If you relate to their qualities and not focus too much on their faults, that would be a very practical approach to actually acquiring some of their good qualities.

We often find people are always talking about and relating other's faults, especially if there has been a break up. Often

people might say, 'Oh, they are very short tempered and get very angry easily.' as if one never got angry oneself. Would it be realistic to assume that one would have a partner or a friend who never gets upset or angry if one gets upset and angry oneself? To assume that one can find a partner or a friend who never gets upset and angry, one would have to be in the situation of not getting angry and upset oneself. It is only someone who never gets angry themselves who is likely to find a partner who never gets angry. To be very blunt, it is not very honest if one still gets upset and angry but fails to recognise or acknowledge this and tries to hide one's own fault by blaming the other completely, and saying that they are the ones who are getting upset and angry all the time.

So we need to fully acknowledge the fact that our partner is going to be like our other half. We have qualities and faults and most likely we would be associating with someone who also exhibits certain qualities and faults. That is only natural. It is the realistic situation. So, rather than focusing on their faults, if one can begin to train oneself in associating and relating to their qualities it is likely that one will be able to slowly adopt their good qualities. If you maintain a good relationship with them you will find your relationship can further flourish and mature. But in the event that you have to go separate ways then some of their good qualities would have rubbed off on you. Thus even if you are not together in a relationship, you would have acquired some of their good qualities.

Otherwise if one falls into the habit of constantly focusing on their faults, one may actually acquire many of their faults. There are people who say that they didn't use to be so short-tempered and agitated but by having lived with another they have turned out really short tempered and agitated. Whether that is true or not is yet to be assessed but, nevertheless, there are those who make those comments. If there is some truth in that then perhaps that is because one has been focusing too much on their faults. Rather than good qualities, the negative qualities of the other might have rubbed off. So it is really up to us and we need to make the right choices to benefit oneself and the other. This is another practical approach that I want to share, particularly with the younger generation.

### **In summary**

To summarise, the main point that I have been making is that when we look into our situation we may find that there is much unsettlement, unease and discomfort within us. There is a lingering unsatisfactory feeling within us and that is what I earlier compared a chronic mental disease within us. Having identified that, there is a cure to that disease and the cure is the practice called meditation. So if we are keen to find a cure for the chronic mental disease, we need to apply the meditation technique in an appropriate way. Understanding and applying the meditation technique well is promoting a cure within us, which is the positive attitude that leads one to counter what contributed to having that mental disease to begin with.

When we train our mind to think in a positive way it develops positive qualities within us. The more the positive attitudes and qualities within us increase, the more it is natural that the negative attitudes decrease. That is a law of nature. There is always an opposing factor in every situation, plus and minus, positive and negative and when one increases it is natural for the other to decrease. It is similar within our mental state and attitudes. While there are

negative attitudes, there are also positive attitudes. We all carry the potential for positive attitudes and qualities within us. So it is a matter of tapping into our own resources and further developing the positive attitudes within us. That then helps to increase what we call the wisdom within us. When we further develop and strengthen that wisdom it becomes our best friend or companion throughout our life. In every situation, particularly when we are feeling down and experiencing a difficult situation, it is the wisdom and intelligence that we have within us that will come to our assistance to bring us out of that. Ultimately our own saviour lies within us, within one's own mind. That is something we need to understand and therefore that wisdom or inner intelligence is something that we need to further develop and cultivate as a way to benefit us throughout our life.

We can now actually apply the meditation technique. First of all let us adopt the appropriate physical posture, i.e. sitting upright in a comfortable and relaxed position. Acknowledging that the cause of all our troubles, the mental disease that we have within ourselves, is the negative attitudes or the distracting thoughts we have and that all our thoughts, feelings and emotions are related to external stimulation, we determine to withdraw ourselves completely from all forms of distractions, mental and physical, and bring our mind within and place it upon an object that does not cause the mind to become agitated or excited; an object that helps our mind to be calm and focused. The object that we will choose, an internal object, for the purpose of our meditation now will be our own breath. Thus, we bring our full attention and focus inward and place it 100% on natural rhythm of our breathing itself. We remain focused on the breath and do not allow our mind to wander off in any other directions or focus on any distractions. We will apply the meditation technique in this way for the next few minutes. *(Pause for meditation.)*

We have spent most of our session already, but we might have a few more minutes left for questions. Please raise your hand if you have any questions.

*Question:* What is one to do in a situation where one is giving 100% to the other but they give nothing back in return?

*Answer:* Of course my earlier suggestion was based on the premise that both sides are in agreement about seeking an outcome that is beneficial for both. If one person maintains the stance of wanting the outcome to be 100% in accordance with their wishes it is unfair. It would also be unfair for the other to have that same attitude of wanting things 100% their way. My earlier suggestion was based on partners or friends or companions who both want to have a relationship but situations arise that cause an argument or indecision about something. So in situations like that, based on both wanting to maintain the relationship, it is reasonable for both sides to have that approach of 50-50. Now if the other is not in agreement at all and wants their way completely and doesn't give anything back, they might see there is fault if you try to reason with them. If that really is the case then what else can one do but just step back a bit and hopefully make them realise it eventually.

In the example of a dispute with another if one takes that reasonable stance of a 50-50 approach but the other is not going to agree with that then it may be because the other person is feeling very agitated and very unsettled. They are not able to think and reason clearly. If one were to pursue

the issue that might just aggravate and agitate them even further. In that situation one has to maintain one's own integrity and one's own wellbeing and, even for the benefit for the other, it is sometimes best to retreat and let them be. Given time, when their mind calms down and becomes clear, they might be able to reason and see that the approach you presented earlier is reasonable and they might come down from their very opinionated state of mind. I feel that is the best way one can handle it.

*Question:* You related to negative attitudes and emotions as being harmful, but aren't certain emotions and feelings necessary to protect us, such as anger and the wish to be satisfied?

*Answer:* In terms of satisfaction, there can be negative and positive satisfaction. It is not all considered negative in Buddhism. More specifically there is a distinction between attachment and longing or general desire. Desire itself is not categorised as necessarily being negative. We can desire positive, good things, whereas attachment is something a little more specific and has a more negative connotation.

From the worldly perspective it seems that if you didn't have anger you couldn't protect yourself from your enemies. How could you overcome your enemies? From a worldly perspective anger is also seen as something that is necessary. However, if one were to use anger as a way to protect oneself from one's enemy, how would that benefit one more than if one did not use anger? Could one still protect without anger and could it benefit us more without anger? The result is to protect oneself for one's own benefit.

We can use a very simple example. If someone is disagreeable in front of you and you are angry with him or her and resolve to try to hit him or her then it is likely that if the other person has the ability they would hit you back. So out of annoyance and anger you hit them but you get harmed because they hit you back, and it might escalate further. Whereas if one feels uncomfortable with someone but does not express one's anger and holds back a bit that can protect us from immediate harm.

The question that was asked concerned emotions being a way to protect oneself from criticism or abuse by others. We definitely need to take a stand to correct such behaviour. One must not misinterpret or misunderstand the Buddhist approach of not being angry with not responding to others wrong doing. One has to stand up for one's rights but it can be done without anger. It can be done through genuine concern, love and compassion for the other as well, because what one needs as an outcome is something that is fair for oneself and the other. So, when one is in a dispute and the other has done improper and incorrect things if one were to try to address that in anger one loses one's position. One is not able to reason clearly with them and point out their mistake.

That might be one of the reasons why we have to find a lawyer when we are in a court so they can help to make logical arguments on one's behalf. (*Geshe-la laughing*) They will be able to think clearly for us and use more intelligence and wisdom because our own mind might be tainted with emotions of anger and we are not able to deal with the situation. But if our fight for justice, so to speak, comes out of genuine concern, love and compassion then we are able to utilise that because it is not about trying to crush and defeat the other and be cruel to them. It is about fairness for the other as well as oneself, but particularly for the other. One does not want them to lose out; one wants them to have their

rights. So if one brings that genuine concern to the surface when one negotiates and tries correcting them then, because it is done out of wisdom, genuine concern and love, the outcome will be much more effective than one based on the emotion of anger. So that may be the approach to consider.

It seems, from a general or mundane perspective, that people encourage one to draw on the emotion of anger. It seems to give a false sense of bravery, (*Geshe-la laughing*) courage and superiority. So they draw on their emotions, become angry and it seems that they can be sent forth with that sense of emotion. It seems that when you go out and fight with the strong emotion of anger that if you are wounded and bleeding you are not able to recognise and see that. I know this from my own experience. It is not during the fight that one realises that one is wounded and bleeding. It is only after coming back from the fight that one realises that one is bleeding and there is a wound and one starts washing the wound. That's when it hurts, not during the fight. (*laughter*)

Again from a mundane perspective, it seems that when one takes the stance of being afraid that anger does not arise (*Geshe-la laughing*). On one occasion an individual from the class asked me whether I was annoyed and angry when the Chinese occupied Tibet and we had to escape. My response was that I was so afraid that there was no time to even get angry (*laughter*). The individual who asked that question might have wondered, 'Isn't there any occasion that the geshe gets angry?' (*laughter*) If your foe is very powerful there is not much room for anger to arise because it seems much more logical to have fear and try to retreat because you know you won't be able to confront them.

In contrast to that, it seems that the times when we get upset, annoyed and angry and exhibit our anger involve those who we consider less powerful than ourselves. It is in relation to these people that we seem to be brave and can combat and confront. That is why the Buddha's teachings explain the virtue of being patient with someone who is less powerful than oneself is much greater than trying to develop patience with an opponent who is much more powerful than oneself. In reality we don't have a choice about being patient with a powerful opponent. It is not real patience as we cannot harm them and cannot even dare to try to confront them. That is why we retreat.

I appreciate the questions. They were very good, thank you.

Before we conclude for the evening let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object of our focus is the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. As we hear the sound of the mantra we try to keep our full attention and focus just on the sound of the mantra and not to allow our mind to be distracted with any other thoughts, emotions or feelings. Then when the recitation subsides, we just remain for few minutes within that sort of inner tranquillity and calmness and focus on that for a few moments before we end the session.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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