
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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8 August 2012

As usual, we can spend some time in meditation. We need to initially adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. One of the main purposes of meditation is that it serves as a technique to train one's mind. One may feel, 'I have already engaged in so much training. What more is there for me to train in?' Even the attitude of some who come here for the first time seems to be, 'Could there be anything new for me to learn here?' It is as if they already know everything and don't feel the need to train in anything more.

However when we refer to the training in meditation, it is specifically a training of the mind which is otherwise very distracted and disturbed. The purpose of training the mind through meditation is thus to settle the mind to become more focused and less distracted. When the mind is free from busyness and distractions, it actually settles to a natural tranquil and peaceful state.

When we refer to normal education we may feel, 'Oh, I have already done all the education and study that I need to do.' If you really consider it, the education we have done so far has mostly been a study or education that involves learning about external things. We have mostly focused on understanding external things and it is because of this fact that the mind has naturally become acquainted with focusing on things that are outside of us more specifically material and worldly things.

If the mind were focused on things that help to settle and quieten it down then one could say that education might have been worthwhile in appeasing the mind and helping it to become peaceful. However if we were to look into most of the time that we spent in education we would find that we are mostly associating with things that disturb the mind and cause more chaos. When we see the connection between a mind that is mostly focused outwardly on worldly things and the disturbance in our mind, we then come to realise that it is essential to get internalised training that focuses on our own mind rather than external things. So that is where we begin to see the necessity for engaging in the practice of the training of the mind.

However, on a practical level, the conclusion is that for our overall wellbeing, we actually need both educations. If we have both, education that focuses on external things as well as an internal education of training the mind, then combined they will be very useful for our lives.

Another aspect of meditation is developing a focused mind. We will come to realise that if we lack a focused mind and our mind is distracted we will not be able to

accomplish even the ordinary things that we engage in. Even in the work environment, if our mind is completely scattered and distracted we are not able to really do the task at hand. Now when that is true for worldly things it is even truer when we apply our focus on developing our internal qualities. We definitely need to develop and cultivate a focused mind.

However developing a focused mind is not, in itself, so remarkable. We might already be quite experienced and acquainted in focusing on things that actually disturb us. Our mind is quite drawn to things that distract us. We might be focused on distracting objects. However, here we are talking about an internalised focus that helps to promote the good qualities and potential within us. So that is the type of focus that we are referring to here.

There are consequences of not having a mind that is focusing internally on appropriate objects. Such a mind is completely distracted and immersed in worldly concerns. To try to understand the advantages and the essential need of focusing within, we can look at the disadvantages of a mind that is completely focused and thus distracted outwards, particularly by the disturbing or discursive thoughts that we refer to as conceptual thoughts.

The discursive thoughts that we are referring to here are thoughts or attitudes that are tending towards negative attitudes. To give an example, when our mind is immersed in the external world and completely distracted with discursive thoughts and external concerns, then one of the consequences would be that when we relate to someone who one considers superior in knowledge, status or wealth we may develop a mind of jealousy in relation to them. As soon as that mind of jealousy arises it completely disturbs us. It is not a comfortable state of mind at all. Then when we relate to someone who we regard as being equal to us, a feeling of competitiveness may arise. Then, with those who we consider inferior to us in terms of knowledge, status or social standing and so forth, we develop a sense of pride. Each of these negative, judgemental states of mind in relation to the others comes from an overly distracted mind and worldly concerns.

From a general perspective we can all agree that these states of mind—jealousy, pride and a sense of competitiveness—are not really good attitudes. The only way to genuinely change these attitudes is by focusing within and developing a clear state of mind that is not overly concerned with worldly status. So, for example, instead of feeling pride in relation to people who we think are inferior we can replace that with a sense of true concern and compassion for them. How wonderful it would be if instead of pride we can develop genuine compassion and be naturally able to assist them rather than being snobbish or feeling superior. Likewise, instead of jealousy we can develop a sense of rejoicing and being happy about others' good fortunes and so forth. In this way we can see that these positive attitudes can replace the negative attitudes that we are normally acquainted with. We all appreciate positive attitudes and acknowledge that it would wonderful to have those attitudes. Unfortunately, these positive attitudes don't come about spontaneously without cultivating them. We

need to develop and cultivate them through internalising the focus of our mind.

These positive attitudes can all come about from training our mind. This is the training we need to involve ourselves in. While that training may not come about overnight and quickly, it is something that will come about step-by-step if we invest the time and really work at it. Because we have not been familiar with cultivating such positive attitudes in our life they may not come about readily, after just one or two attempts to cultivate them. Thus the practice of meditation involves a long, gradual, steady process of continuous familiarity.

Another factor that we need to take note of is the very nature of the mind itself. The mind has the inherent potential to adopt whatever it becomes familiar with. Thus, when we familiarise the mind with positive attitudes and positive ways of thinking, that will become the natural quality of the mind. That comes about through familiarity.

Having taken the initiative to engage in the practice of meditation we may be curious as to how we gauge our meditation practice to see that it is going well. Very simply put, the great masters have mentioned that the sure sign that meditation is working is when one notices that the delusions or the negative states of mind and attitudes within oneself is reducing. When that has taken place it is a sure sign that meditation is working.

So, it is in this way that we can understand the significance of practising meditation. The purpose of the practice of meditation is as a technique of acquainting our mind with positiveness or good qualities and slowly beginning to reduce and ultimately to overcome the negativities in our mind. So, to summarise, this is the real purpose of meditation.

Having mentioned the purpose and advantages of the practice of meditation, we can now formally adopt the meditation practice. Let us readjust our physical posture to be upright but relaxed. The suggested object that we choose to focus on in our practice of meditation here is our own breath. That means that we use our breath as the medium to focus our attention. As our breath is a neutral object, when we are committed and place our full attention and focus on it that quietens and settles the mind down. We remind ourselves that the whole purpose of the practice of focusing on the breath is as a way to counteract a mind that is otherwise very busy and obsessed with the attitudes mentioned previously, such as jealousy, pride and competitiveness. So for the purpose of our practice of meditation we need to intentionally commit ourselves to not allow our mind to be distracted with such attitudes. We make that commitment and discipline ourselves to use the medium of our breath and focus on that and nothing else. Then, because of our commitment and willingness, we will be able to manage temporarily to be free from such negative attitudes and the benefit of the practice will dawn upon us. Now with that intention and commitment to develop our mind, we just focus on our breath for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*). That will be sufficient for now. Let us now cover a few lines from the text.

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

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.1.2.3.2. Disregarding those who have been kind to us is not amenable to upstanding behaviour

In the last session we were covering the advice in the text to acknowledge others who have been kind to us and thus repay that kindness with similar acts of kindness from our own side. Where others have been kind to us it is appropriate that we return that kindness. What is being explained in the text may be from the spiritual context on a very grand level, but we can take this advice on a very practical level for the practical aspects of our life.

Anyone would agree that a sense of gratitude is something that is worthwhile. A sense of gratitude comes from acknowledging that others have shown great kindness and consideration towards us, and with that attitude of appreciation one further develops an intention to repay that kindness whenever the opportunity arises.

Even on a practical level in a normal social setting we know if someone has been genuinely kind to us at a time that we really needed help, a natural sense of wanting to help them in return when they are in need will also arise. If they are in need of help and assistance we will be able to provide that for them as long as the intention to repay their kindness is kept in our heart. If we were to do that it would be regarded as a good gesture.

Having gratitude is one of the causes for us to have a happy life. It also serves as a means to have good communication and a good relationship with others. When we acknowledge others being kind to us and generate a wish to repay their kindness that will contribute to a natural affinity with others. In this way we can see that they are many practical benefits of cultivating this attitude.

The teachings, of course, specifically say that this attitude is to be perfected to the level where one wishes to repay the kindness of all living beings. However that is on a higher level that requires the training of our mind. But even on a practical level we can see there is the benefit.

This point is the second subdivision of an earlier outline, 'Repaying the kindness of other beings.' It says that disregarding those who have been kind to us is not amenable to upstanding behaviour.

The text reads:

Therefore, reflect, "If abandoning such kind beings is unsuitable even for disreputable persons, how could it be appropriate in my case?" And then assume the responsibility to repay their kindness.

What is being presented in these lines is that it will be seen as completely inappropriate if we don't repay the kindness of others, even for individuals who are considered to be disreputable. Disreputable would mean people who are not considered to be thoughtful and considerate and so forth. It would definitely be inappropriate for someone who is inclined to practise as a bodhisattva or noble being and has developed that noble attitude to abandon individual beings who have been kind to them, because a noble being has taken the vow to work towards the welfare of all sentient beings. Thus to abandon those who have been kind to one would be considered completely inappropriate.

Now going back to the point where the text mentioned disreputable beings, if we were to take this to another level, we can see that even animals show appreciation towards those who have been kind to them. We can see how pets acknowledge their masters and are loving and affectionate towards their masters because of the kindness their masters have shown them. We can reflect on the fact that even animals are able to recognise the good gestures and kindness presented to them and act accordingly. So, as humans, we should be much more capable of repaying acts of kindness.

The presentation in the text may be relating to developing higher levels of practice. However if we were to relate it to us on a practical level in our everyday life, we can definitely see how these are worthwhile states of mind to develop even in our social context. It is a fact that in a worldly, social context, individuals who are known to be grateful and appreciative, who acknowledge others being nice and kind to them and show appreciation, are considered to be good people. Whereas in a worldly context people who completely ignore the fact that others have been kind to them, take it for granted and take advantage of that and don't have any sense of gratitude, let alone wishing to repay their kindness, are not considered worthy people. So we can see that as we live in a social setting it is worthwhile for us to develop these positive attitudes to have good relationships with others.

Now, regarding the sense of gratitude, in the animal world there are again some remarkable stories about animals who, even after a long periods such as ten or twenty years, don't forget the kindness that has been shown to them by humans. I don't recall the details but I was told about a movie that you might even have seen yourself about the death of the master of a dog but the dog, not really being aware of this, was still waiting for its owner to come back, even after ten years. You might have seen the movie or documentary about that. I came to know about this just the other day when I was invited for lunch at one of my friend's place and he was talking about this movie that he saw recently. In talking about the movie he started weeping himself and became very emotional. He had to go inside for a while and come out

again later. It seems that it was quite a remarkable instance that brought about a lot of emotion.

Apparently this is based on a true story. There are many incidents and accounts such as this where animals have shown remarkable recognition of the kindness shown to them, even after many years. The main point is that these are significant things to contemplate because animals are otherwise seen to be less intelligent than humans. Humans are supposed to be more intelligent, more understanding, more logical and so forth. Therefore contemplating these incidents in the animal world should inspire us to acknowledge the great potential that we have to develop the good qualities of recognising others' kindness and so forth. As a human this is something that we naturally should have and feel. So this is something we can learn from these incidents.

As humans, if we had a friend or companion who we were initially quite close to and had separated from for about twenty years, I think it might be quite hard for us to really remember them and relate to them because of the long separation. Whereas in the animal world we can see that even after twenty years there was that recognition and not forgetting that kindness.

This also reminds me of an occasion when His Holiness the Dalai Lama was last here in Melbourne giving a talk. There were some individuals who came to the talk whom I hadn't met for about twenty years. They came up to me saying, 'Oh, Geshe Doga, do you remember me?' Of course I have to admit in my case that some of them had changed so dramatically that it was hard to recognise them from twenty years ago, as they looked very different (*laughter*). There was no way for me to have immediate recognition. Whereas in the animal world it seems that no matter how much they aged or how much time has passed there is still recognition.

The text, of course, goes into more detail on these points about repaying kindness and how to do that. We will cover that detail more slowly in our next sessions. However with the few minutes that we have does anyone have any questions? If so, you may just raise your hands.

Question: When a state or country has been kind to you, some individuals may not acknowledge and appreciate that and even complain. What are Geshe-la's thoughts about that?

Answer: If we really pay attention, the complaints of those who complain and are angry with the state are usually related to their personal dissatisfaction. They might not have too many complaints about the state not being good to others and it may be a personal issue. This, unfortunately, is one of the characteristics or traits of certain humans who don't appreciate the overall wellbeing and goodness and just relate to some particular personal matters and immediately forget the bigger picture of how good the state or the government may have been.

This, again, is an example of not feeling appreciation and taking one's own personal interest as the main primary concern. As the great master Shantideva has mentioned in his great works, there are two particular causes that

can lead one to forget the kindness of others. One reason could just be ignorance and being completely oblivious to the kindness, and another reason could be intense anger.

Shantideva further elaborates that when anger arises in the mind, even towards someone who in reality is extremely kind to one, one may not only not remember their kindness and repay their kindness, but could enact acts of violence. One could kill someone out of anger. Anger completely darkens and deludes the mind. Because anger obstructs or clouds the mind from seeing and understanding reality, I regularly emphasise and share my suggestion that it is best not to make any hasty decision at a moment when the predominant influence within oneself is anger. The decisions that one makes out of anger can be disastrous because anger obstructs the functioning of our wisdom.

There are many examples of individuals, who in a moment of rage have killed so many innocent people. This clearly show that when the mind is completely polluted with anger it completely obstructs the mind from using one's wisdom and thus it impels us to engage in actions that are really disastrous and that we will regret later. There are many pitiful, unimaginable situations that occur when individuals take action because their mind is completely deluded and obscured with emotions such as anger and so forth. When that is the dominating force lots of disastrous things can occur.

These are all incidents that are directly related to the disadvantages of anger. If there was any thought there was any justification for anger and we thought that anger might be useful we need to relate to these incidents as warning signs. Unless one is free from anger there is always the danger that if anger becomes too intense it can lead to disastrous situations, destruction and so forth. A way to remind ourselves again and again of the disadvantages of anger is to contemplate these incidents and see what prompted people to do that. It was none other than the emotion of anger that we have ourselves. We need to be really careful to try to meditate to overcome that in ourselves. These are really the points that we need to consider.

The way we need to relate to individuals who enact such grave crimes, such great negative deeds, is as a real, primary object of our compassion. If we use anger against their anger this defeats the purpose. Instead we need to understand how they are completely ignorant and were completely deluded by their emotions and how it was an intense emotion of anger that led them to engage in such a great misdeed. The proper way to relate to these incidents or situations is seeing how they have caused their own destruction and destruction of others is a pitiful situation, and then generating great compassion for such an individual.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, let us again take an opportunity for a few minutes to engage in meditation practice. This time, as we bring our focus within let us focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. We focus our attention on that sound and try to maintain our focus on that. When the recitation finishes we can maintain our focus on the

residue of that sound and the nice sensation or feeling that we get within ourselves. In this way it can become a form of focus meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version*

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