
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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We can spend some time in meditation. So, for that purpose, we adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture, and ensure our minds are in a clear and bright state; when we are physically relaxed and our minds are in a clear and bright state, we are able to think more clearly.

I regularly mention that meditation is significant because it is a technique to stabilise the mind, which otherwise would wander in different directions. Meditating is important because it brings about a stable state of mind and that stability enables your mind to be focused and clear. Another way to look at the significance of a meditation practice is that it is a means to have more control over your mind.

Having a good understanding of what “controlling your mind” implies is essential. Having control over your mind is in contrast to being under the control of your mind. We need to control our mind rather than the mind controlling us. Some of us may ask, “What is wrong with being controlled by our minds?” and wonder, “What are the consequences of being controlled by our minds?”

If we are influenced or controlled by a positive state of mind, such as a genuinely kind and considerate mind, then that would be fine. There would be nothing wrong if the mind we are influenced by seeks out good friends and companions, which is something positive and good. However, if we are honest with ourselves and pay attention to the state of our minds, we will notice that we are mostly influenced by negative states of mind, which result in being influenced by negative friends, who mislead us to engage in harmful actions and behaviours. When we notice that our states of mind influence us, we will then understand that we need to be very cautious that we are not harbouring negative states of mind within ourselves.

The process of checking the state of your mind is the ultimate means to develop a genuine inner wisdom that is able to distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful to yourself. By looking at the state of your mind, and doing a thorough and honest analysis, you will be able to discern a positive state of mind from a negative state of mind. In this way you will use your analytical wisdom to distinguish positive and negative states of mind, and what is influencing you in a positive or negative way. This analysis then becomes your main source of inspiration to be cautious about where your state of mind is leading you, and to help you to always be diligent and maintain integrity when developing that cautiousness. That is the central purpose of this self-analysis: if you periodically check your state of mind, you

can ensure you are not being influenced by negativities. This is the positive outcome and benefit of developing your analytical wisdom.

So, when we meditate and utilise this self-analysis technique, which basically is checking your state of mind on a consistent basis, it becomes one of the main ways of ensuring your life is stable and protected from chaotic thoughts. Checking your mind regularly is the ultimate means and the best aid to guarantee you maintain stable conditions for yourself. When we think about this, we can recognise how essential and useful this self-analysis is in our day-to-day life. Also, by examining your state of mind, you become more familiar and skilful in the meditation process.

When we acknowledge that this technique of checking the state of our minds is beneficial—because it is a way to protect ourselves from negative influences and maintain stable lives—we also become aware that the ability to develop inner wisdom depends on having a mind that is willing to serve. A serviceable mind is in contrast to an unruly mind, which is uncontrolled. If we have an unruly mind that does not want to settle down, but instead always seeks out excitement and wants to be completely immersed in distractions, we will have a mind that does not have the integrity to do self-analysis, because it is constantly busy with external distractions. Such an unruly mind does not serve virtuous activities, such as, in the spiritual context, Dharma practice. However, an unruly mind is also a hindrance to mundane activities because an uncontrolled mind is an obstacle to accomplishing worldly goals.

We can all acknowledge that, even in a mundane and worldly context, there are certain behaviours we consider to be unethical or inappropriate, and certain behaviours we consider to be positive and good. People that conform to their environment and society are considered to be a well-behaved and considerate. To be able to conform, they need to develop the integrity of analysing and checking their behaviour and attitudes; the mind that does self-analysis needs to be serviceable so that it is able to implement the self-analysis with integrity. The way to develop a stable and focused mind, as opposed to a completely distracted and unruly mind, is to meditate. Therefore, a meditation practice is essential for our spiritual development, but it is also a technique that will assist us in being well-behaved and good citizens in a worldly context. This shows that the significance and benefits of meditation can be seen on many different levels.

So, before we engage in the practice of meditation, let us again adjust our physical posture, so that we are comfortable and in an upright position, and let us again adjust our minds, so that they are in a clear state.

The object that we will focus on in our meditation will be the natural rhythm of our breath. In order to adopt this technique wholly and to derive its ultimate benefit, we need to really understand why we are doing it.

The process of bringing our attention and focus on our breath is a way for us to take initiative and control our minds, which otherwise are very distracted. To put this in

simple terms, we are telling our minds to focus on one object and behave for the next few minutes, rather than be distracted and follow every whimsical thought in an uncontrolled manner. Basically, what we say to our minds before meditating is, "Now, for the next few minutes, I am not going to allow you to go off in every direction. I want you focus on the breath and I am not going to let you have your own way. In allowing you to follow every thought and distraction, you have caused me much distress thus far. I have had so many worries, doubts, anxieties and prejudices because you have followed every thought and indulged in negative emotions. So, in this meditation, you must focus on the breath."

When we meditate, we apply self discipline and choose to regulate our minds by making them focus on the breath. By committing to focus completely on the breath and not get distracted, we will experience the positive results of a tranquil and calm mind. This is because the mind will not be influenced by objects of attachment and anger. Instead, the mind will be tranquil because it is focused on the breath and so is protected from negative states.

How the meditation technique works—its significance, benefits and, most importantly, the discipline and commitment that it requires—is essential. So, with an awareness of these considerations, we will bring our entire focus and attention to our breath for the next few minutes, and not allow our minds to be distracted by other things. *[Pause for meditation.]*

That will be sufficient for now. If you have any questions, you are welcome to ask them; otherwise I can go to the text. Do you have any questions?

Question: In last night's teaching you mentioned the ten perfections, but I've only heard of the six perfections. What are the ten perfections?

Answer: The six perfections are: the perfection of giving; the perfection of morality; the perfection of patience; the perfection of joyous effort; the perfection of meditation; and the perfection of wisdom. On top of these there are four more: the perfection of method; the perfection of aspiration; the perfection of power or ability; and the perfection of primordial wisdom. So, these are the ten perfections—the six that are more commonly known plus these four practices.

We attempted earlier to control our mind, but it would be highly beneficial for us to adopt a daily meditation practice and remind ourselves that its main purpose is to develop a calmer mind and, more importantly, a kinder mind. Developing a kind and considerate state of mind is the ultimate goal in the practice of meditation. A kind and considerate mind is in contrast to a self-centred mind that is focused on personal needs and gains. Such an attitude of self-interest excludes others because the only consideration is one's own goals and benefits, which disregards others' needs and wishes, and is very narrow-minded. When we develop a kind and considerate mind, however, the mind naturally opens up to the needs and wishes of others. We realise that there are other people aside from ourselves, who also are in need of happiness, joy and good things. Meditation enables our minds to

become more expansive in thinking about others and that is its main purpose.

So, a daily meditation practice develops and increases our inner qualities, which cannot be acquired from external means. Our usual way of thinking, from a worldly perspective, is that the things we need are outside of ourselves, so we spend a lot of time and energy in trying to acquire them to make our lives better. We believe that external things will make us happier, but they mislead us and don't provide us with a sense of contentment. When we lack inner qualities and don't develop them, we try to acquire more external things, but the more we strive for external things, the more elusive and unobtainable they become, so that we never have a true sense of satisfaction. We try to gain more, but the more we get, the more miserable we are. Once we begin to understand that the real source for a true sense of wellbeing, joy and happiness lies within ourselves, we can spend time in developing internal qualities to make our lives better. After we have spent a significant amount of time in developing inner qualities, such as a clear, bright and stable state of mind, conjoined with a kind and considerate mind, then, we will have a true sense of joy and happiness. External things will become a means to further extend our good internal conditions and contribute to our wellbeing. Otherwise, when we lack inner qualities, external things do not serve their purpose. This is good for us to pay attention to when we think about the significance of practising meditation.

The best part of exerting ourselves to acquire these inner qualities is that the method is free! There is no cost involved! *[Everyone laughs.]* If there were costs involved, they may prevent us from applying ourselves. If developing our internal qualities was expensive, we may think it unaffordable, but we can rest assured that it does not financially cost us anything. Developing these inner qualities is entirely dependent on our will. When we acknowledge that inner qualities are essential to our wellbeing and happiness, we can generate a strong will to apply the meditation technique. We can meditate at our own time and pace, but the most important aspect of our practice is to be consistent. If we are consistent, we will definitely derive positive results and benefits. This is something else for us to acknowledge on a practical level.

So, the main point for us to understand and acknowledge is that our individual happiness ultimately depends on us; we need to take the initiative to develop the inner qualities that contribute to our wellbeing. Now, just as worldly education, which is the means for us to survive externally and derive material wellbeing, involves costs, so too does the development of our inner qualities. The development of a stable and kind mind does not incur any financial costs, as I mentioned earlier, but it does require our commitment and diligence. If our worldly education and our internal education did not cost us anything, they may not serve their purposes, and their benefits would be hard to derive. Ultimately, the combination of our external education and the development of our inner qualities are important for our wellbeing. This is something good for us to understand

and acknowledge—in both these aspects of our lives, we need to take responsibility.

In Buddhism, we train our minds to take responsibility for the welfare of all living beings, but while we work on developing that aspiration, we are practical and first take responsibility for our own welfare. After we take the initiative for our own wellbeing, we can extend our concern and take care of those who immediately surround us in our daily lives, such as our dear, kind parents, relatives, friends and colleagues. In this practical way we can see how we can develop, our kindness and gratitude towards those who have been good to us.

This again ties in to the importance of a daily practice of meditation, which helps us to increase good qualities. A meditation practice requires a certain amount of commitment and consistency, but the most important aspect to it is its quality rather than its quantity. We do not have to spend a long time meditating. Short sessions, even a few minutes, of a well-focused meditation are beneficial because the familiarity of a good practice will serve as a basis for us to slowly improve, develop and expand on. But, if we don't ensure that our minds are well-focused and well-maintained, even in a meditation of a few minutes, then we will never derive the benefits of meditating because we'll always be distracted. Also, if we let our minds become completely immersed in worries and negative states, then, we are allowing our minds to take their course and always be completely concerned about things which are not really significant because they are not happening right now. Some people seem to be in a constant state of anxiety and that is because they have let their minds perpetuate in that state. When we use the technique of meditation, we are consciously deciding to relieve ourselves from negative states of mind, and intentionally placing the mind on something positive, even if it is just for a few moments. The familiarity of our positive attempts will begin to take root in our minds, so that we will become less and less prone to worries, fears and anxiety. This is how we need to understand and relate to the practice of meditation.

That will suffice for this evening. We can end on the good note of meditation's importance. So, before we conclude, let us again spend a few moments meditating. We can sit in an appropriate physical posture, which is upright, but relaxed, and ensure our mind is free from distractions. This time the object we will focus on for our meditation will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra, we can place our full attention and focus on it and not allow our mind to be distracted by other things. Instead, we can be fully mindful and aware of the sound of the mantra. When the recitation stops, we can try to maintain an awareness of the residue of the sound, and by simply being aware and mindful of what we have heard, we will be practising a contemplative meditation.

*Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor
Edit 1 by Tanya Simmons
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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