
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

3 October 2012

As usual we can spend sometime in meditation, and so we adopt a comfortable, relaxed posture for that purpose. However, if we don't take some initiative to acquire a calmer and more settled mind, then just being physically relaxed won't be sufficient to if we are to enjoy a genuinely relaxed state of being.

So it will be worthwhile to engage in training to develop a naturally relaxed state of mind along with physical relaxation. This training requires us to take the initiative to develop what is called a controlled mind. In this case a controlled mind specifically relates to a free mind. The teachings indicate that a mind of freedom is a happy mind. And achieving that basically requires control over one's mind. Here, meditation is basically a technique that trains us in how to obtain that control over our mind.

We need to take the initiative and adopt specific techniques to develop and acquire control over our mind, because if we really investigate and look into our situation, we will find that rather being in control of our own mind, we are actually under its control. We seem to be controlled by our mind and thoughts, and the mind in turn is controlled by the delusions, or the negative states of mind.

When one falls into a situation where the mind is controlled by the delusions, then that means that the delusions control and influence every aspect of our life. We find that an individual who is controlled by delusions is an individual who experiences many problems and anxieties and fears. We come across those who have so many different kinds of problems in their lives, which are in fact mainly created by their own deluded mind. We need to understand that as this is the case, we cannot blame them. When they are under the control of their delusions, it is as if they have no real control over their own thoughts and actions. In fact they are completely dominated by their delusions. It is good for us to understand this process, so that we don't blame the person themselves, as they have no real choice about the way they act.

One of the main points that we need to really try to understand is that both positive actions, and negative actions or deeds are very much dependent on our state of mind. That said, we need to take the initiative to analyse our own state of mind in order to identify and recognise both the positive thoughts and states of mind, and the negative ones. And if we sincerely look into ourselves, we will be able to recognise those positive and negative states of mind.

The benefit of doing this is that when negative states of mind arise, we will be able to immediately send ourselves warning signals such as, 'Watch out, there is a negative state of mind arising here; if I allow it to escalate and allow myself to be influenced by it, then I may engage in actions that are negative and harmful'. On the other hand, when there is a positive state of mind, we can take the initiative to further develop that state.

The benefit or positive effect of doing this self-analysis of identifying and recognising negative states of mind, and the delusions that are present, is that we will be able to recognise their ill effects and dominating influence. For example, when under the influence of anger we seemingly lose control over what we say and do. When we recognise that through self-awareness and analysis, then the practical benefit will be that when we see others saying or doing inappropriate things, particularly if it involves ourselves, we will not take it too personally. That is because we know that they are dominated by the strong deluded mind of anger. When we clearly recognise that, we will not have that immediate wish to respond or retaliate, because we know that they are under the influence of a negative state of mind of anger.

If we think of those who we live with, and those we love, we know that they are not bad, and if they are saying inappropriate things, then that is because they are under the influence of anger. When we recognise that, then, as mentioned earlier, we will not take it too personally or retaliate. We will know that retaliating out of anger will not help the situation, and it won't bring any benefit or provide any solution to their behaviour or what they are saying. Rather, it will just contribute to more conflict, more problems and more troubles.

If others say or do inappropriate things under the influence of anger and we react in the same way, then there's no way that such an angry reaction will bring about a harmonious and peaceful resolution, which is what we really want. We all seem to need to depend on others and we want to live with others. So it is best that we have a good, harmonious relationship, because we all want beneficial and good outcomes. If we want the best outcome for ourselves, then we need to take the initiative. So on a practical day-to-day level, if we want to spend our life with someone else, the most conducive way is to take this initiative of self-analysis.

In a more practical way, what I am trying to emphasise here is that the practical benefit of self-analysis and identifying and recognising a deluded or negative state of mind such as anger, and not allowing it to dominate us, is that we will not retaliate when others, under the influence of a negative state of mind start to criticise us or use inappropriate words. And as mentioned previously, the whole point of being in a committed relationship is to derive some benefit.

When they marry couples take vows to look after each other in good times and bad times. In the Tibetan tradition, in the marriage ceremony the main binding factor is promising each other, 'We are now in a mutual relationship where we will experience good times and hard times together. We will stick together and not let

situations influence our committed relationship'. That is the Tibetan way.

The point to understand here is that when one is completely dominated by anger and other negative states of mind, then those mental states influence us towards conflict and confrontation with none other than those who are closest to us. It is almost as if we need to have conflict and confrontation with those who are close to us. From a worldly point of view, the real focus of confrontation is supposed to be an enemy. Yet we seem to spend so much time preoccupied with, and confronting those with whom we live, or with whom we have a committed relationship. In other words we are confronting those who are closest to us.

If we confront an enemy who is doing wrong and harming us, we can set that wrong to right, but we should not do so out of anger, because reacting out of anger will not bring about good results. One can confront others out of genuine concern and with a compassionate mind; confrontations do not have to be under the influence of anger.

Confronting those with whom we live and with whom we are closest while under the influence of anger, is a most unfortunate situation. As mentioned previously if we allow that to occur in our daily lives, and if we don't take the initiative to avoid it, we will be in a situation where we will be constantly having conflicts and confrontations with those who are closest to us. And that will be a recipe for an unhappy and miserable life, where there is not much joy or happiness to be found. These are points that we have to take on board.

On a practical level, we can see the disadvantages and ill effects of anger, and the advantages and great benefits of trying to control anger. As beginners, of course, we cannot expect to have such complete control over our mind that we don't become upset and angry at all. What I am trying to say here is that when we recognise and take the initiative, we can prevent anger from escalating to the point of influencing us to take drastic measures that will be harmful. We can protect ourselves from that.

Thus by using the techniques of analysing our mind, really scrutinising and looking into whether it is in a positive or negative state, we can really take the initiative if we perceive anger. If we can stop anger from escalating to the torment of being completely under its control, then that will be the real measure of having protected ourselves. That is how controlling our mind protects us.

We may feel that it is justifiable to become upset and angry, because others started it with criticism and abuse, but if we retaliate, then, as mentioned previously, rather than helping the situation and deflating the conflict, it will only add even more conflict. Any sense of mental peace and calm will disappear. Simply put, a lack of control over the mind leads to an upset and an unhappy mind. Whereas if we adopt the technique of giving ourselves control over our own mind, there is an immediate benefit. Because we are in control of our mind, we don't allow our anger to arise and we don't retaliate out of anger, and our mind is immediately appeased. It also has a positive influence on others, helping to calm them down a bit.

The main point here is that having control over our own mind protects our happiness. Whereas when you lose control, you hand over that control to the negative state of anger, and the consequence of that is a troubled unhappy mind. What I am presenting here is not a highly complex practice at all. It is very practical advice that we can all relate to, and we can all take the initiative to apply it in our lives, which will reap immediate benefits. It is good to take note of this.

Here we can quote the great Tibetan master Lama Tsong Khapa, who said, 'Adopting the practice of patience begins with those who are closest to oneself'. That is a very significant point—if we can't practise patience with those we are closest to, then how can we possibly think that we can practise patience with enemies or strangers? The practice of patience begins at home.

Having discussed the practical benefits of the practice of meditation, we can now adopt the practice. Let us readjust our physical posture to a comfortable, relaxed and upright posture. It is also good to check our state of mind and ensure that it is clear, and not drowsy or scattered. Try to focus inward and have a clear, bright and positive state of mind, with positive intentions in mind. That will be most appropriate.

Ensuring that one is in a positive and focused state of mind implies that temporarily we try to withdraw from all forms of distractions, particularly from those objects that normally cause attachment to arise, and objects that may cause jealousy or anger or other negative states of mind to manifest themselves. Simply put, we withdraw from all other forms of thoughts and ideas and memories of objects that cause these negative states of mind to arise, and having withdrawn from all of these, we then need to place our mind upon an appropriate object so that we can stabilise it, and develop it to a single-pointed focus. The object we choose regularly for our meditation here is our own breath. Based on the natural rhythm of breathing, we place our full attention and focus on the breath itself, thinking of nothing else but the breath. So we will adopt this meditation practice for the next few minutes. (*Pause for meditation*).

That will be sufficient for now.

This technique is actually quite simple. Focussing on one's own breath doesn't require much thought or analysis. In fact we are trying to have as few thoughts as possible. Some meditations require a lot of thinking and analysis and so forth, but if we are not ready for such meditation, it may actually make our mind more hyperactive. Whereas the technique of focusing on the breath is really quite simple. It may not be all that easy to actually maintain our focus on the breath for extended periods, but the technique itself is not difficult to understand and is easy to adopt.

We haven't been able to cover the text for a while. On one hand, it may be appropriate to try to cover a bit from the text but then again if you have any questions, that is also relevant. If you do have any questions, please raise your hand.

There being no questions we can continue with the text.

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.1.2.3. The way to train the mind in the stages of the path of beings of the great scope

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2. The actual paths

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1. How to develop an awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1. The stages of training the awakening mind

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.1. 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

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.2. Establishing the appealing aspect of all

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.3. Repaying their kindness

The topic we are on is how to develop the awakening mind or bodhicitta. This is a Sanskrit word which refers to an altruistic mind that is based on developing love and compassion. The text explains how to develop this mind, through training our mind in a sequence of different states of mind. This begins with recognising the kindness of all beings as one's mother, developing the wish to repay that kindness, and following on from that, developing love and compassion, leading to developing that state of mind that is called the awakening mind or bodhicitta. We may not be familiar with the terms 'bodhicitta' or 'awakening mind'; simply put it is the genuinely altruistic mind of wishing to benefit others.

We can see that a mind that wishes to benefit others is a very valuable state of mind and incredibly beneficial. The simple practice of making the commitment, 'I will do whatever possible I can to benefit others and only engage in activities that benefit others,' is based on an earlier state of mind of making a commitment not to hurt or intentionally harm others. Even if we are not able to fully adopt the action of benefitting others to any great extent right now, we can definitely resolve not to hurt others. Even that mind of committing ourselves not to hurt or harm others is an incredibly valuable state of mind. We can also easily see that resolving not to hurt others brings about benefits for ourselves as well as others. Refraining from harming others is definitely appreciated by others.

I was once in the vicinity of a Christian monastery somewhere in the Yarra Valley, and I was taken there by one of the nuns who used to be a resident here. It was a nice monastery with about twenty five monks in a very good location, which was serene, quiet and beautiful. The abbot also took a liking to me and we had very good rapport. I was told that they had about 1,000 acres, and they kept some animals such as sheep. Although it was difficult to maintain they were still ploughing the ground and growing vegetables and so forth. They also ran a facility for conferences and conducted outside courses as well. One of the younger monks mentioned to me that when he did some research into Buddhist teachings, he came across the explanation of the awakening mind. He commented that this is a highly valuable attitude and state of mind. So, the value of the awaking mind was

being confirmed as a valuable state of mind to me by a Christian monk, which is quite significant!

We can all appreciate that developing the altruistic mind wishing to benefit others, based on the sincere intention not to hurt others is a valuable state of mind. We have the capacity to distinguish between benefit and harm. We appreciate benefit and we don't appreciate harm. In fact the great Indian master Shantideva mentioned that one of the qualities of human beings is that they have this ability to distinguish between benefit and harm.

Furthermore, as His Holiness the Dalai Lama regularly reminds us in his teachings, one of the unique qualities of being human is that we have this incredibly high level of intelligence, which we also call wisdom. As His Holiness mentions, although human beings have naturally have this quality of intelligence, it can also become a cause to create great destruction if it is not utilised properly. Whereas if it is utilised properly, that intelligence can serve to bring about great benefits and advantages for humankind as well as other beings. As His Holiness mentions, it is up to us to utilise this unique intelligence in a proper way.

Again and again in my teachings, I try to encourage you to regularly spend just a few minutes each day, making these two commitments, 'I am not going to intentionally harm any living being', and 'I will do whatever I can to help and benefit others'. That, in itself, is an extremely valuable form of meditation. We will then experience the immediate positive effect of our mind settling down, and becoming genuinely calm. This is a really practical thing that we can do in our daily lives.

Returning to the text, having recognised the kindness of others, the next step is to generate the mind of wishing to repay the kindness. We can all relate to this in a practical way. Basically we are being advised to take the initiative to repay the kindness that has been shown to us by others, beginning with our mother in this life who has been so very kind to us. Then we extend this out to those who were our mothers in our past lives. In this way, we train our mind to begin to recognise that each and every individual being has been kind to ourselves at some time.

When we think about it, we need to take the initiative to repay the kindness shown to us in this life, whoever they may be. That is something that is appreciated by anyone; it is seen as the right and proper thing to do. No-one ever says, 'You should harm those who have been kind to you'. Anyone in their right mind says, 'It is definitely a good thing to repay the kindness shown to us by others.'

It is good to relate to these sometimes seemingly complex teachings in a practical way. Try to see how they are providing really sensible advice. From a practical point of view, the teaching is saying that if others have been kind to us, we need to take the initiative to repay that kindness. Even if we find it hard to repay kindness right now in a material sense, just that thought and intention, 'They have been kind to me, and I should never forget the kindness. When the time is right, and I have the capacity and ability, I would like to repay that kindness, and give something back' is an incredibly noble and beneficial state of mind. This, in a practical sense, is what is being presented.

The really practical aspect of this advice is that if we train our mind to recognise the kindness that others have shown to us, followed by generating the wish to repay that kindness, it will definitely work to prevent us from harming those who have been kind to us. We may have experienced situations where, rather than repaying the kindness of others who have been kind to us, we take the initiative to hurt and harm them. If you think about it, that is quite disgraceful!

An even more succinct approach would be to really identify the appropriateness of generating an attitude or mind of benefitting others, in contrast to the attitude that always thinks about one's own self-interest, thinking about 'me', me, me'—always 'me first'. When we fall into the habit of putting our own interest at the forefront of our thoughts, then the result is that we actually become more miserable, rather than feeling happier. The more we focus on ourselves, the more miserable we become.

Whereas if we take the initiative and practice of thinking about others, then as we go beyond our own self-interest and take steps to apply this concern to others and as our whole attitude and focus shifts to others, we will begin to experience a sense of release. When that obsessive sense of 'me', and 'my interests' is released, we will start to feel more settled and calmer, and experience more joy, purely as a consequence of thinking about benefitting others.

Another practical way to look at this is that most of our interest in gaining benefits and happiness is actually dependent on others. We haven't reached the stage where we are totally self-sufficient, and in control of our life, acquiring everything that is essential to us all by ourselves. We don't yet have the genuine wisdom and intelligence where we don't have to rely upon others at all. So if our joy and happiness is dependent on others it would be quite absurd to neglect others and think only about ourselves. This is another way to see how we need to extend ourselves to others and think of benefitting them, because our own happiness is dependent on others.

As mentioned previously, as ordinary beings, we have not yet developed the wisdom where we can totally rely on our own intelligence and wisdom to sustain ourselves. In a worldly sense we are dependent on so many things, in particular the person we are living with. Our happiness is very much dependent on those with whom we share our lives.

It is a fact that we have to work with and deal with others. The close relationships that we have contribute to our wellbeing and happiness. So, to really emphasise the point, how could we possibly expect to receive benefits from those we are dependent upon for our happiness, if we ignore or neglect them, or if we don't think about their interest, or if we don't have genuine concern for them? Ignoring them and completely shutting them out would completely subvert the principle of having to rely on them. If we take the initiative and shift our focus from ourselves and our own interests, and have a genuine consideration for the wellbeing of the other person in our relationship, then they will begin to appreciate that. They will open up more, have more trust and show us more

appreciation. Thus benefiting others will, in effect, benefit ourselves as well.

When we take the initiative to develop genuine concern for others, it actually has a positive consequence for our own wellbeing. On another practical level, let us take the example of your work environment. If you are on friendly terms with your work colleagues, then it makes your day at work much happier and more joyful. Having conflicts and clashes with those at work and in our everyday life is not at all comfortable. Thus at every level, we can see how, when we take this step of having genuine concern and wellbeing for others, they will appreciate that, which will in turn be conducive for our own wellbeing. When our happiness is heavily dependent on our immediate relationships, relatives and fellow workers and so forth, we can see that the best approach is to develop a genuine concern for the wellbeing of others from our own side. It is good for us to see the practical benefits of this approach.

I'm not sure whether I have been able to present something that is useful or of value to you. But what I am sure of is that all of you have listened very attentively. *(laughter)* Thank you very much! As it makes me happy it is appropriate for me to thank you back. So I am thanking you for making me happy by paying such good attention *(laughter)*. This is another example of the way our happiness is mutually interdependent.

Some folk have confided in me that, 'I have done so much for others, but they don't show their appreciation and didn't even say thank you'. That seems to be a concern for some people.

Before we conclude the session for the evening, let us again take the opportunity for a few minutes of meditation, this time the focus for our meditation can be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As the mantra is chanted, we can focus on the sound of the mantra, and keep our full attention on it, not allowing our mind to be distracted by other thoughts and memories, but just focussing on that sound. As the recitation subsides, just focus on the residue of the sound, and just sit with that awareness for a while; that will suffice for a contemplative meditation.

Transcribed by Ai Chin Khor

Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

© Tara Institute