
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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As usual, it's good to spend some time in meditation. One of the benefits of meditation is that it helps to protect our happy state of mind. So, a technique that protects mental happiness is really essential. Whatever activity we do, it is important that we ensure our mental happiness doesn't decline.

Any meditation or Dharma practice needs to serve the purpose of protecting the happiness within our mind. So it is important that we understand what mental happiness is. How do we experience it? What are the causes for mental happiness? Because our mental happiness is connected to our inner sense of wellbeing and happiness, it is something we need to develop ourselves, rather than relying on external conditions.

The main cause for our mental happiness lies within us, and not externally. We may not immediately be able to grasp this concept because we are so accustomed to believing that our happiness comes from external sources, in acquiring good external conditions. While external conditions do contribute to some level of wellbeing, our mental happiness is not completely dependent on the external. As long as we believe that external sources are the causes for happiness, then we will spend our energy on completely trying to focus on external things, and trying to accumulate more and more wealth and material things. Our mind will not be content, and it will always be focussing on external things. Prolonged outward focus causes the disturbance and busyness in our mind. The mind becomes completely overwhelmed by focussing externally. The mind starts to become more and more agitated, and more and more disturbed. When the mind is completely distracted with external worldly concerns, it becomes more and more disturbed, and more and more agitated.

It is to our own benefit that we try to apply a technique that helps to contain our mind so that it does not become completely scattered in every direction. Meditation brings about real positive change, and contributes to our inner happiness. We need to adopt a new approach and to train our mind. And of course in any kind of new training, it does require some effort and some difficulty, but it will be worthwhile.

We are talking about the disadvantages of a mind which is completely distracted, so to a certain degree we can all relate to the shortcomings of a distracted mind. Even in relation to mundane activities, such as our work environment or job or whatever task we might have at hand, when the mind is completely distracted we don't get good result we start making mistakes and we leave out essential things. We can see how a distracted mind affects whatever work we are doing, resulting in a negative outcome. When we can relate to the disadvantages of a distracted mind, then we start to take the initiative. Also we can see that when we have too many things at hand and our mind is completely busy and

obsessed with so many different things, then that is when we start to notice that our mind becomes agitated and unsettled.

We further develop our self-analysis skills using our intelligence or wisdom. We notice what is conducive and good for our wellbeing, what is harmful, and what kind of states of mind or attitude are harmful for our peace of mind. When we begin to recognise that, then that is a great step in that we have already gained a real sense of personal responsibility to take the initiative to meditate. The meditation technique helps our mind become more familiar with a virtuous object and protects it from focusing on a non-virtuous object. Familiarising ourselves with the virtuous mind is the main benefit of the meditation practice. That which produces happiness is virtue and that which produces unhappiness is non-virtue. A virtuous frame of mind becomes the cause for our own happiness and happy state of mind. Whereas when we refrain from a non-virtuous state of mind, refraining from focusing on non-virtuous objects, then that minimises and prevents us from experiencing the result of non-virtue, which is unhappiness. The ultimate purpose of meditation is for our mind to become kinder, more gentle and clear. A focused state of mind gives us clarity. Meditation allows these attributes to be developed within. Let us again adjust our physical posture to be a comfortable one. So while adopting a comfortable physical posture, it also important for us to develop a good intention in our mind, and a good motivation before we engage in the practice.

The positive motivation for meditation is that it benefits sentient beings, who are as vast as space. There are so many living beings, so meditation is a way for me to bring happiness to each and every one of them. My path becomes a means to alleviate the suffering of all living beings. With that intention in our mind, being mindful of that motivation, then we can make a commitment to not allow our minds to be distracted. Bring our focus inwards on the breath itself. For the next few minutes, just keeping our full intention and mind on the breath. *[meditation]*

It is beneficial to adopt a regular meditation practice in our daily life. As we adopt this meditation practice, our state of mind will become more clear and bright. In addition to a clear and bright state of mind, through meditation, we also develop the potential to gain wisdom, a profound intelligence that we can develop. When we possess this wisdom, we have developed an essential internal truth. Our wisdom also benefits the people around us. When we develop the positive qualities to practise meditation, we will benefit not only ourselves, but we will also have a positive effect on our surroundings. So this is a good way to look at it.

We are fully responsible in how we conduct ourselves and how we relate to others, and this depends on our own state of mind. We all have the potential to create good qualities within ourselves. Now whether those good qualities are expressed and shared with others or not depends on our state of mind. When our mind is affected by negative attitudes then we can't relate to others in a positive way. It is more difficult to be polite and pleasant, either through our physical gestures or speech. Whereas when we are in a positive state of mind, then we are able to bring out our good qualities. When we are in a happy positive state of mind, we can say nice words, be polite, and show nice gestures towards others.

While we do have good qualities and the potential to have good qualities, we also have some negative tendencies as well—some negative characteristics that are not very conducive in communicating with others. So if we want to have good relationships with others and show our good qualities to them, then we need to take the initiative of having a positive, happy state of mind. This is essential.

When we look in how we conduct ourselves, it becomes clear that our mannerisms and our conduct are completely dependent on our state of mind. So when we notice that for ourselves, then it becomes a strong basis for us to understand others. Based on our own experience, when we see others who may be saying inappropriate things or acting in unpleasant ways, then we will immediately recognise that there must be an unhappy state of mind. We can relate to their unpleasant behaviour and speech. When we understand that they are in an unhappy state of mind themselves, then this protects oneself from taking it personally and becoming upset. This understanding helps us when the people closest to us, and the ones we deal with every day are seemingly saying inappropriate and hurtful things. We know not to take it personally, but realise they are in an unhappy state of mind.

This is not some esoteric aspect of a profound teaching; it is not hard to grasp. You can all relate to these points through your own experiences. We can relate to this practical approach, and when we start conducting ourselves accordingly, then we will immediately see the benefits. When the advice is based on our own experiences, then this makes the instruction more profound.

Experience is considered important in working life. Apparently one of the first things they ask you in an interview is about your experience. When some Tibetans came here, they told me that when they go and look for work, one of the first things they are asked is, do you have any experience in the field? And they said that they have come without any experience; they haven't even begun to work in this country, so how can they have any experience?

Experience does not come about immediately, but it is slowly gained through working. It is good to help someone who is new in a job. People tell me that when they first come to job they don't have much experience and they don't understand everything right away. But when someone helps them and gently points out what needs to be done and how to do it, then they are grateful and appreciate it. When someone helps them out, guides them and gives good tips, then this is appreciated and a bond is formed and a good friendship can develop. But a new worker doesn't receive any help from an experienced worker, then they may not help the experienced worker later on. The main point is that if we help others with genuine concern and good attitude, then we are putting the Dharma into practice. People often ask me how they can apply the Dharma practice in their everyday working life. A practical way is to take the initiative to help someone out. Understand their situation and be patient with them and try to help them out. That is a great service. When we generate a good intention and engage in a good deed, then it is a dharma practice; and that is how we can apply it in our everyday life.

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

Following from last week, the text quotes from another source, Shantideva's *Compendium of Trainings*:

Crazed by the afflictions, blinded by ignorance,
Stumbling with each step
On a path with many a precipice,
You and others are always subject to sorrow—
All beings have similar sufferings.
Although it is said that it is improper to look for
others' faults and it is wonderful to know even a single
virtue. It is good to consider how others are helpless.

This is about taking responsibility to benefit others.

Intentionally looking for faults in others is improper. However, when others are experiencing great suffering, one can see some goodness there, that they still have virtues and good qualities. While dwelling in so much misery, if people can conduct themselves to accumulate even a slight virtue, then this a great quality. That is one of the points that is raised again and again in the Mind Training teachings. The main point presented here is to think about the nature of helpless beings and developing a keen wish to benefit them.

If we dwell on others' faults, then there is no possibility for us to see any of their virtues and good qualities. We hold onto our pre-conceived views and constantly look at their faults. But if we allow our mind to be in that space, then there is no possibility of seeing any good qualities in that person. Whereas when we intentionally look at their good qualities, even one good quality, and we are happy that they have this quality, then we are in a much more positive state of mind. When we see others in a good light, our state of mind improves.

We can benefit others by cultivating love and compassion towards them. We develop these positive states of mind with whole-hearted resolve and an altruistic motivation. Before we end the session for the evening, again adopt an appropriate physical posture for meditation. Spend a few moments in meditation, and the object of our focus is the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra, make a clear determination not to be distracted with other thoughts. Place your full attention on the sound of the mantra. When the recitation subsides, then hold that sound in your mind for a few moments. This will generate a good focused meditation.

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