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# 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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As usual, it would be good to spend some time in meditation. Most importantly for meditation, we need to be in a comfortable relaxed physical posture; but more importantly also a relaxed and happy state of mind. If we can adopt a technique that allows us to be relaxed physical and mentally so that we get a genuine sense of relaxation even for a minute, that is worthwhile. Since we want to be genuinely calm and happy, meditation helps us achieve this.

Being relaxed mentally and physically can be uplifting and a valuable asset in our life. Even just for a minute or two, to be in a relaxed mental and physical state is beneficial. Some people fall into the state of mind where they feel that happiness is not possible in their life, so when they get a calm relaxed experience even for one or two minutes, then they realise that there is the possibility of experiencing a genuinely happy state of mind.

The proper meditation posture is the seven point Vairochana posture, which means having a relaxed posture and to sit straight so that the channels in our body have a clear pathway. At the same time, and most importantly, we have a positive state of mind for meditation, which is having a proper intention. Adopting a proper intention for meditation also shows us what we are aiming towards. The most appropriate intention or motivation is to generate a state of mind along these lines: 'The time that I spend now for meditation is not for a mere personal benefit, or personal happiness for myself, but rather this meditation can enable me to benefit all sentient beings, who are as vast as space. I have the potential, through meditation, to bring them the ultimate happiness and to relieve them from suffering. So, this is the purpose of my meditation.'

This state of mind summarises the essence of the purest motivation, the best motivation that we can develop. This is a pure motivation because we are thinking of others and want them to be happy. Everyone wants to experience happiness, all they wish for is happiness; and likewise, no-one wants to suffer. We can generate the state of mind where we want to help people become happy. We can create the causes to relieve the sufferings of all beings. This is the noblest intention.

If we can generate this motivation in our mind, then that in itself becomes a real practice. This is what I try to adopt in my life; wherever I am going, whatever I am doing, I try not to lose sight of that pure intention in my mind. There is definitely some benefit from maintaining such a noble intention in the mind.

Generating a noble intention also helps reduce a lot of negative emotion in our mind. Negative attitudes or emotions that surface settle down when we remind ourselves of a higher, more noble purpose. This benefits our mind by putting it in a positive state. What we need to understand is that whenever there is a problem, we need to immediately recognise that we have the ability to overcome that mental angst, the mental problem. We have the ability, and we have to take responsibility ourselves. It is important that we recognise this.

Mental turmoil is generated from our own mind. No one implants that in us. We generate our mental problems by holding negative attitudes in our mind. But when we transform that negative attitude, then naturally the problems or angst in our mind settle down as well.

The angst in our mind and the unnecessary worries, anxiety, and fears in our mind arise because of an overly superstitious state of mind. This is called *nam-trok* in Tibetan, which translates as superstitious or discursive thoughts in your mind, the unfettered states of mind. Most of the discursive thoughts that we have are not based on reality; they are not true. If all our discursive thoughts, the ones based on fears, worries, anxieties and paranoias, were true, then we might have a reason to feel upset, but most of it is not based on reality and thus are not true.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama says our suspicious create unnecessary fears. He talks about his own life when he was a young boy in the Potala Palace in Tibet. There were many dark rooms that he wanted to explore, but the attendants, in order to prevent him from running in all these rooms, said there were spirits and ghosts there. So then the young Dalai Lama was a little afraid to go into these dark rooms because he thought there might a ghost. He uses that experience as an analogy now, saying that in reality there was no ghost there, but fear arises even though there is no ghost.

The main point is to make a genuine attempt to bring about a peaceful state of mind. We owe that to ourselves. We begin by taking responsibility for our own state of mind. We do this by meditating. To re-emphasise, the most valuable asset we have is a happy state of mind. We all have the potential to have that calm and happy state of mind. This is a most valuable asset, because we sustain ourselves with this happy state of mind. When we look into our busy lives, it all boils down to trying to achieve wellbeing and happiness. We find ourselves being so busy, making so many plans and it is as if we don't even have time to rest because we are so busy trying to achieve things that supposedly make us happy. Thus it is worthwhile that we look into why we are making ourselves busy.

The answer comes down to achieving genuine happiness and contentment. But are we truly working towards that? Are we achieving what we set out to do? Is our busyness and everything that we do in life taking us towards our goal of happiness? Is it contributing to our wellbeing and happiness? Most of our time and energy is spent in following external distractions and fleeting pleasures. It is worthwhile to ask yourselves, 'Is my busyness and all my worries and anxiety contributing to my happiness and

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wellbeing?' We need to think about these questions deeply, and if the answer is negative, and we are not achieving real happiness and calmness, then we need to look into the tools and methods we use to achieve happiness. Meditation protects our wellbeing and contributes to our genuine happiness.

To summarise, the main point is that while we do rely on good external conditions, we do need them for our wellbeing. We cannot deny the fact that we rely on external conditions. But by spending all our time and energy in acquiring external things, we completely neglect the internal conditions necessary for our happiness. This is where we fall short. We are naturally inclined to work towards improving the external conditions, but we can also work towards improving our internal conditions, our internal positive attitudes. This combination of directing our energy towards improving external situations, along with improving our internal conditions can bring about our genuine wellbeing and happiness. Then, while we enjoy our external comforts, we will not be deprived of a general sense of well being.

If we neglect developing the inner conditions, then when things go wrong, or something doesn't live up to our expectations, then our mind can become distraught. Mentally, if we rely just on external conditions for our happiness, then we are in danger of feeling completely down; our sense of hope can be lost, our aspirations might seem gloomy and we feel we have lost our direction in life. While we naturally spend time in improving our external conditions, we must never lose sight of how important it is to develop our internal conditions for our wellbeing and happiness. Even when things don't go well outside, we will be able to maintain our integrity and not lose hope, not lose our aspirations. We will be able to maintain calmness within ourselves, despite our external conditions.

I share with you jokingly, if I have to make a choice between being a rich person who might not be in a happy state of mind, and a poor person who doesn't have much but is in a very happy state of mind, then I personally would choose the poor person in a happy state of mind. We all acknowledge that we wish for happiness, and that is what we are striving towards. We all genuinely wish for contentment and happiness and a calm state of mind. We have every right to protect any calm state of mind we have achieved, as well as secure our sense of happiness and the conducive conditions for our wellbeing and happiness. If we don't protect our sense of our internal wellbeing, then negative states of mind such as suspicion, fears, doubts will disturb our mind.

Securing a sense of wellbeing and happiness relies on meditation. Why meditation? By not meditating, we are not securing the internal conditions for our happiness and wellbeing. By not meditating, we are allowing our mind to follow all our discursive thoughts. Discursive thoughts include superstition, doubts and fears, paranoia and so forth. These all are under the umbrella of the discursive thoughts. When we allow our mind to completely follow our discursive thoughts, this causes distractions that we completely immerse ourselves into. We completely allow our mind to be sucked up by those

distractions, and then we lose the good conditions in our mind.

Meditation helps us to protect our mind from following these discursive thoughts by, first of all, adopting an appropriate physical posture and proper intention in our mind. The meditation technique involves distancing ourselves and intentionally withdrawing from all discursive thoughts. Some discursive thoughts may be worthwhile, and some of them may not be completely based on reality. It is this unrealistic approach that causes us problems.

As a temporary way to train the mind, we need to distance ourselves from all forms of discursive thoughts, and bring our focus within ourselves. As we are not able to maintain this internal focus of no thoughts for too long, we can choose an appropriate object such as our breath to focus on. Our mind won't be completely distracted when we place our full attention on the breath. In the next few minutes, let us make a commitment to not allow our mind to be distracted, and not to follow discursive thoughts, but just place our attention on the breath. As meditators, we will experience a sense of release; we will experience a genuine sense of calmness and well being, even if it is temporarily. This sense of wellbeing and happiness is what we are trying to secure and maintain through our familiarity with the meditation practice. For the next minutes, let us adopt this technique and focus on our breath. (*meditation*).

As a beginner, as you put your whole heart into the technique, you will find that there is a general sense of wellbeing that you experience from this meditation. This is natural, but then if we can't continue it, then we may become distracted and stop meditating for a while, and get completely sucked up again in normal activities and discursive thoughts. This is where we fall short and we seem to lose that sense of wellbeing we experienced earlier. So it is worthwhile to adopt a regular practice in our life. Don't start your meditation practice with long sessions, but keep it short and try to do it more often, maybe throughout the day. It might be better to meditate in short but frequent sessions. We can begin either throughout the day or on a regular basis begin with a short time and then slowly, as we find our mind becomes more stable, we can increase the duration. But initially the quality is much more important than the quantity, so that is something we need to remind ourselves about, along with maintaining that practice consistently.

The Buddha says 'a subdued mind is a happy mind'. Thus we have to make every attempt to develop a subdued mind, which is a controlled mind, where we have control over our mind. Normally our whimsical thoughts control our mind. All our thoughts, superstitions, and fears are part of our mind. We are controlled by our nonsensical mind when we should be in control. We should be master of our mind. But it is as if we have to submit to every whimsical thought, every superstition, and every fear we have. This is where we fall short of being in control ourselves about our own life, when we allow ourselves to be controlled by an overly superstitious discursive state of mind. The way to reverse that is to acknowledge that we need to be in control of

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our own state of mind. A controlled mind is a subdued mind. We achieve a subdued mind by applying discernment, or analytical wisdom, which is knowing what kind of thoughts, and what kinds of state of mind will affect our speech and our actions. Indeed, our speech and our actions are a consequence of our state of mind, whether it is thoughts or attitudes or emotions. It is a state of mind that initiates our physical action.

For example, even though we may not be consciously aware of it, we have an intention to walk. We begin to take the first step, and from then on it is the unconscious yet active state of mind that perpetuates our walking. Initially, we are aware of our first moment of wanting to take a walk. Every action, whether it is verbal or physical, is preceded by intention, which is dependent on our state of mind. We need to apply discernment into checking what kinds of states of mind and intention leads to speech and actions that are destructive. What speech and actions disturb our own state of mind, and disturbs others' state of mind? What kinds of intentions lead to destructive speech and actions? Likewise, what kinds of attitudes and intentions are conducive for our own wellbeing and a happy state of mind, as well as contributing to others' wellbeing?

Our discernment or analytical wisdom will help us recognise behaviours and intentions that are harmful. Harmful intentions contribute to harmful speech and harmful actions, disturbing our own mind and that of others. When our intentions are based on genuine kindness and consideration, then that is where our speech becomes appealing and conducive to our own and others' wellbeing. Positive and kind physical actions perpetuate our and others' wellbeing and happiness. We have to take the initiative of applying discernment or wisdom, assisted by mindfulness. Mindfulness is called introspection, and helps our wisdom and discernment. I am encouraging you, as I do in my life, to apply that inner wisdom to be able to discern an intention, and to distinguish between positive and negative intentions. Try to embrace and fully develop proper intentions in our mind. This is most useful in our life. When we have a genuine interest to improve, we realise that our speech and actions can be either conducive for our wellbeing or not.

It is not a complex idea to realise that our speech and actions are preceded by an intention. And our decision is based on our intention, which is related to our attitudes. If our speech disturbs others, then it is because we don't have a genuinely kind intention in our mind. If we can recognise and embrace that, then we can identify what is causing problems for ourselves and others, as well as what causes a disturbance between our relationships with others, whether they are companions, friends, or parents' relationships with their children, or children with their parents. All our relationships are affected by our actions, which are preceded by our intentions.

Our ultimate happiness within our social existence is the happiness of a harmonious relationship, and that is indeed what is promoted in the Buddhist teaching. Harmonious relationships are the most essential factor for wellbeing in our life. As long as we live with others,

harmonious relationships are essential. Therefore we must make every attempt not to lose the conditions that contribute to harmonious relationships. This leads back to the earlier point that disruptions in harmonious relationships contribute to losing trust in a relationship. Negative speech and actions are consequences of intentions that are not imbued with genuine consideration, kindness and wellbeing for others.

Thus, as I emphasise again and again, try to adopt a positive intention in our mind. If we can put a positive intention in the forefront of everything that we do then we won't cause any hurt and harm to others. We need to familiarise our mind over and over with an attitude of contributing to the wellbeing of others, 'Whatever I do, whatever actions I do, whatever thoughts that I have, may they not lead to harming others'. This as I share again and again is the most essential point—a positive intention is the basis of everything that we do.

This being our final evening for the year, I would like to take this opportunity to show my appreciation for all of you who have come so diligently, paying so much attention. I do not imply that I have given any profound advice to you, or have any great knowledge to share with you, but from your side you have shown great interest and come with such genuinely good attitudes, and this is something that I really appreciate. The only thing I have is a good intention. While I am physically here above you on the throne, in terms of my attitudes I am sitting among you all. And that is the attitude that I always carry, that I am not up here on the throne trying to give you instructions and being holy, but I am with you, sharing what I have gone through in my life and what works for me. I feel that my good intentions have contributed to your feeling comfortable here. And indeed we seem to have a joyful atmosphere here. Usually what we share, and our interaction with each other here is joyful and contributes to something worthwhile. A joyful atmosphere seems to be experienced by those who come here, and this is mutual.

Finally to emphasise again, I encourage you to please try to secure a happy state of mind. Don't let anything that is going around you disturb your genuine happy state of mind. Protect it, because a happy state of mind contributes to your wellbeing and others around you. Disturbing attitudes such as anger and so forth is what hinders us in our relationships with others. While we might get upset with an insignificant external worldly matter, it is unfair to be annoyed with someone close to us, or someone we live with. And it is not something that contributes to our wellbeing.

I thank you for having come this far for the teaching in the evenings. The Wednesday evening gatherings have not ended. For the following three Wednesdays, there will be the Vajrasattva practice nights. Those who have the commitment to do this practice for the three evenings of course will be coming. Others who may not have the commitment to do the Vajrasattva practice, but nevertheless who do regular meditation are welcome too. The practice will be done together, and the description of the practise will be presented. If you wish to join in with the Vajrasattva meditation and practice you are welcome

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to do so. But even then if you don't feel you understand or are not familiar with the Vajrasattva practice, you can still come here and use the opportunity to do your own personal meditation. That is also fine.

It feels good to have everyone come together here meditating. The main point of gathering here is to be of some true benefit in your life, through the practise of meditation. You don't have to be Buddhist, you don't even have to be religious to be able to come and utilise what is being offered to you here. In fact, it is my commitment under the advice directly from His Holiness the Dalai Lama. His initial advice for coming to the west was not to go to the west with an attitude of trying to get a large audience for Buddhism or to promote Buddhism, or try to convert more people to Buddhism. That is not the attitude we should carry. We need to try to have an attitude of contributing to the wellbeing of others, and whatever is beneficial for them. My main attitude is to take from the teachings whatever maybe useful in your life. My intention is not that you would be happy to become Buddhist, or even religious, but I hope that the teachings help in your life. That's what my message is all about.

Tara and Chenrezig are the practices in January. Meditation begins on the January 9 2013. The Tara practice emphasises Tara as a deity like a Buddha. But if you are not familiar with the practice, or if it doesn't suit you, then you are still welcome to come here and do the prayers together, and then practise your individual meditation.

It is good that we can have a choice and we are not confined in having to just do one thing, but something that suite us. That is my personal approach. I appreciate having that opportunity. I have heard that some centres are very strict about what practices they have to do.

On this note I can relate an instance that happened some time ago. There is a hot spring on the Mornington Peninsula near Rye. Once I was in the sauna and there happened to be two ladies, a daughter and her mum. The daughter was very young, but she seemed to be very keen to speak with me and approached me. The mother was also appreciative and we started a conversation. I said I lived at Tara Institute in Brighton. They live in Mount Martha, and asked if I taught meditation and if anyone could come. I said, "Yes, everyone is welcome". The reason they asked is because some centres have asked them to sign something that asks them to not go anywhere else. I don't know, but they wouldn't be making something up. They were just sharing what they had experienced somewhere else.

So in conclusion, the main point is to try to maintain a genuinely calm and happy state of mind. Whatever we do, particularly as we approach the festive season of Christmas and New Year, we need to use our discernment. We shouldn't allow our mind to fluctuate and be carried away with the festivities. We need to a try to maintain happy state of mind, then the season will be enjoyable. You will enjoy the season more if you are in a happy state of mind. Remember to smile at everyone and don't show a frowning face. I have heard that Christmas may not always be a happy time, and that sometimes it

can be a hard difficult time. Some people just don't want to go to family gatherings.

This year is unusual for me in that I am taking longer leave than usual, which is why I am taking one or two weeks off earlier. In most other centres under our affiliated organisation, the vacation times for the teachers and the translators are much longer. Sometimes they take three months off, from December all the way up to end of February. And in between there are school holidays, and it seems they even take Easter holidays. Whereas I take the personal initiative to try to maintain continuity throughout the year, and not to have any significantly long breaks throughout the year. This is my approach and I conduct teachings with the intention that it might benefit others, and it might help them with the continuity of their practice.

So even though I am going to India earlier this year, it is not a pure vacation as it will involve hardships and difficulties. When I reached South India in the Drepung Monastery, I think on December 27, 28, or 29. Teachings by the Dalai Lama will commence the day after I arrive, and they will be for two weeks, with no break. Then after that I have the opportunity to go to Sera Monastery, which is my main monastery. But I only have a few days to stay in Sera Monastery. I arrive at Sera monastery around January 15, and January 19 I leave for Dharamsala, where I arrive on January 21 for teachings by His Holiness. I may be in Varanasi on from January 5 to January 10<sup>t</sup> and maybe January 11, when His Holiness may give teachings. I leave India on January 12.

Let us recite the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. Our object of focus is the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra, try to place your full attention on the sound. When the sound subsides, continue to place your mind on the residual sound for a few more moments.

Finally I would like to put my hands together; I thank you and show my appreciation to you because you have been all extremely kind to me.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

*Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi  
Edit 1 by Cynthia Karena  
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe  
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