
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Since we are a gathering of meditators, it is appropriate to engage in meditation. At a gathering of business people, it's natural they talk about business, and since we are meditators, it is naturally meditation that we talk about.

It may be presumptuous from my side, but I personally feel that among the various discussions that people can have, discussions on meditation are the most beneficial.

It is only when we see the benefits of meditation, and how it can help us, that we will agree that this true.

Another reason why this meditation discussion is significant is that it relates to our own experiences in life. First of all, we can all relate to any problems that we have experienced in life as being associated with an unhappy mind, and know that there is a cause for this unhappy mind. Likewise, when things are going well, we experience a happy mind and there's also a cause for this happy mind.

Since we all are naturally inclined to want happiness, and we do not wish to experience suffering, it is then worthwhile for us to be able to identify what the causes and conditions are to achieve happiness and avoid suffering.

We know the types of external conditions that contribute to our happiness or unhappiness—that is something that we can see clearly.

However, it is much harder for us to understand how internal causes or conditions can affect our happiness and suffering. Positive states of mind or good thoughts become the causes and conditions for our happiness, and negative states of mind are the conditions for our unhappy state of mind. When we recognise that, then we need to protect these good conditions within our mind. First of all, we need to protect and then further develop and increase our positive states of mind. We also need to discard our negative state of mind or any negative attitudes we have. We need to do this so we can be happy and not experience suffering.

We need to take the initiative ourselves because we are responsible for our own well-being. Likewise, we have the responsibility to overcome adverse conditions that disturb our well-being. A superstitious or discursive negative state of mind—a mind which is constantly engaged in negativities, doubts and fears—contributes to an unhappy state of mind. Likewise, a positive and kind attitude contributes to a happy state of mind. This is something worth paying attention to; we need to look within ourselves and analyse our own state of mind. How do we improve our well-being? We improve it by creating a happy state of mind. We need to work on

creating a happy state of mind, because it benefits us. The more we improve our happy state of mind, the more we will experience the benefit. Furthermore, we need to protect our happy state of mind from deteriorating. So how do we do that? We take the initiative. We intentionally overcome any superstitious or discursive states of mind.

But how does the discursive mind arise? How is our mind influenced by distractions? When we analyse these questions, we find that the discursive mind is related to focusing on external objects, which in turn distracts our mind. When we recognise this fact then we need to intentionally withdraw our focus and attention from the external objects that distract us.

As soon as our mind becomes angry, we immediately feel uncomfortable. Here, we can identify anger as the negative, discursive state of mind. How does anger arise within us? It typically arises in relation to focusing on an external object that appears to us as being disagreeable. This causes aversion to arise in our mind, and then anger develops.

That's the reason an angry mind is identified as being a negative conceptual state of mind. Being angry disturbs our mind so that it becomes agitated and uncomfortable. This is something we can verify from our own experience. When we are feeling angry, is it a pleasant experience or not? Most people will find that an angry mind is not comfortable. We experience a calmer mind when we are not angry. There are two states of mind—the mind of anger, which is a disturbed or discursive, negative mind, and on the other hand, the calm, positive mind that lacks anger. If we were given a choice, we will naturally choose the mind of non-anger, where we don't feel agitated. We choose non-anger because we do not wish to have uncomfortable, unpleasant experiences.

We may not have reached the stage yet where we are able to single-pointedly focus in our meditation, but there are practical benefits that can be derived from our investigative thinking and contemplating on these points. Our experiences with angry states of mind prove to us that if we allow ourselves to be influenced by the negative states of mind of anger, it causes a disturbance in our mind. To avoid that, and to try to work on having a positive and calmer state of mind, actually benefits us. Maintaining a vigilant and cautious mind is useful. As soon as we start feeling agitated, we will be able to immediately recognise that anger is about to arise in our mind, so we will need to be very vigilant and careful. The moment we recognise anger for what it is, it has a tendency to dissipate. Anger will gradually disappear when we recognise it.

Another technique to overcome anger is to focus on an object that does not cause anger to arise in our mind. This means changing our focus of the object. Rather than being obsessed with an object that causes us anger, we focus on another more virtuous object.

To give an analogy to illustrate how anger will dissipate when you recognise it. If a guard on lookout for the enemy starts shouting that, 'The enemy is here, the enemy is coming, I see the enemies', then when the enemy hears that, they are likely to run away.

Maybe a more relevant analogy is that of a thief; if someone announces a thief is approaching, the thief will run away. In the same way, if we maintain mindfulness it protects us from negative minds such as anger.

To summarise, we all carry negative and positive states of mind. Thus, we need to analyse and be able to differentiate the negative states of mind from the positive states of mind. As soon as we find ourselves in a negative, discursive state of mind, we need to acknowledge that, see its shortcomings, and then work towards overcoming that negative state of mind.

In meditation, we are attempting to increase our positive states of mind and decrease the negative, discursive mind. Meditation can help us to completely overcome and abandon the negative state of mind from its very root, which doesn't come about easily, but definitely possible. The meditation practice we adopt here will definitely overcome the many levels of the discursive thoughts.

Meditation will overcome our negative, discursive mind. This is a significant point.

The negative, discursive state of mind such as anger arises in relation to focusing on a disagreeable object. There is a relationship between external objects and anger. A disagreeable object can be the condition for anger to arise in our mind. When we deliberately focus our mind on another object, then that distance from the object will help to reduce an agitated mind. The mind first focuses on a disagreeable object, then anger arises after that. However, if we don't allow our mind to go to the disagreeable object, then there is no room for anger to arise.

When we apply a meditation technique that involves withdrawing our mind from focusing on any object that causes discursive and negative thoughts to arise, then there is no object for anger to engage with, so all forms of negative, discursive mind will subside.

To recap, when we avoid focusing on an object that causes anger to arise, there will be no reason for anger to arise, so the angry mind subsides and our mind becomes settled. There are many objects that will cause all types of negative, discursive states of mind to arise within us. When we withdraw from all forms of these objects, then the negative mind temporarily subsides and becomes calm.

There are specific antidotes and meditations to overcoming specific states of mind. However, within the various negative states of mind, initially it is advised that we meditate on overcoming the most prevalent, strongest negative mind.

The meditation that we typically engage in is to withdraw our focus from all objects. We first bring our focus within, and then we generate a positive motivation—to benefit and not harm any sentient beings, and to more actively bring about happiness for all beings. Based on this motivation, the object that we focus on during our meditation can be our own breath. So, pay full attention on the breath itself and try to maintain that. (*meditation*)

As we have attempted in our short session now, if we engage in regular meditation, sincerely even for a few

minutes, then the positive effects of meditation will benefit us in our everyday life. When we take gradual steps, then we can definitely reach the end quickly. However in relation to the text that we are studying here, we are covering it very slowly but don't seem to reach the end! I recall the time when we were escaping from Tibet in 1959. After we arrived in India, we still had to walk further. We would ask the locals on our journey, 'How long would it take for us to get there'? And their response was, 'It's OK, you go slowly, you will reach there quickly'.

This was profound advice at that time. If we constantly think about reaching the end of our journey, then psychologically it will have the effect of dragging along for a long time. Whereas if we don't pre-occupy ourselves with the end of the journey, but just enjoy the moment along our path, wherever we are going, then because of our joyous, happy mind, we will reach there before we know it.

Question: Geshe-la, you explained a lot about the ill-effects of anger, but it is very hard not to get angry with my son when he doesn't cooperate. When I ask him do to anything he gets very annoyed and that in turns make me angry! Can you please give some suggestions for dealing with this situation?

Answer: Of course what you are relating here is a common fact and a reality in almost every situation. Whenever we get angry, it is usually in relation to the other getting angry first. It is the conventional worldly perspective that if you don't respond to anger with your own anger, then you are admitting defeat, you lose. In worldly terms, you must not give the victory to others; you have to fight them.

Young children, three or four years old, make comments to their parents saying, 'Dad is naughty or Mum is naughty'. When the child themselves is being reprimanded for being naughty, that would have probably hurt the child's mind. Being hurt themselves, they likewise respond and tell the parents they are naughty.

This goes to show that it is uncomfortable for the child, and it hurts the child when you say they are naughty. They hold on to that and there will come a time when they will want to express that to their own parents.

I advise some parents that perhaps an approach where you separate the child from the action is good. Let the child know that the action is negative, not them. Do not reprimand them for being bad for having done that action, but rather point out the action itself is not appropriate or good. There is a difference in pointing out that the external action is separate from the person, instead of pointing to the person saying, 'You are bad' or 'You are naughty'. That is more personal and hurtful. But if you let them know that a certain action is not appropriate, then they may be able to reason it out and be inclined to accept it.

Some children will have enough information and won't do something because their parents have said that it is something that is not good to do.

As adults, we cherish our freedom, and even children have their own sense of freedom too. So to completely restrict them from doing anything and imposing a task without checking with the child first, will make them feel that they have no freedom. Children who are brought up with a strong sense of restriction often, later on in their teenage years, can become rebellious and completely out of control. But to negotiate with the child and ask them if they are happy to do a task, gives the child the freedom to make the choices. Give them a sense that they can choose the time and the way to do it.

A child whose mind has not been developed doesn't have much capacity to reason. They don't have much logic to distinguish between right and wrong. As adults, we are supposed to have much more understanding about that.

Dealing with children is not a competition where you need to win. That is not the approach at all. The approach here is taking care of a minor whose mind is not yet developed, who is completely dependent on you for their care and needs. It is natural for children to act unreasonably or illogically. Showing frustration or agitation means that something is not right for them. There is a reason they feel frustrated and they may not be able to express it; there is something disturbing their mind. Likewise, when children cry, especially when they are infants, they are not capable of saying what they don't want, and how they are feeling. But it is an indication that they are not happy. Do we cry when we are happy? We don't, do we? Or if we do cry, it means we are unhappy. The same goes for children, if they cry, it means that they are unhappy. So we should look into the reasons why. Some parents seem to neglect their children when they cry, but we need to try to understand what could be disturbing their mind and work out how to appease them. The main thing is that, having the responsibility to take care of them, there's time to understand their needs. Rather than thinking about our own needs, it is better to do something for them.

It is common knowledge that it is not easy to be a parent. It is very challenging and difficult. However, there are also parents who have mentioned to me that, while it is difficult and challenging, it also gives them a great sense of joy. Some mothers have mentioned to me that they have many sleepless nights, having to wake up in the middle of the night and feed their infants; nevertheless, they feel such a sense of joy in doing that. They do not take it as a task. That shows the unconditional love that a parent has for the child.

If we look at the situation, we would most likely feel that it is reasonable that a parent or guardian cools down and tries to maintain calm as much as possible. Then at times when they are really agitated and aggravated, just give them some space and leave them, rather than challenging them. Leave them as they are for a while. They might slowly calm down by themselves, and begin to understand the situation for themselves too, to some extent. Not wanting to confront children or not wanting to have an argument with them is a good example and most importantly, it will not escalate.

But do not to allow confrontations and arguments to become a habit. When that starts to become a habit, then

that will carry through as the child develops. It will seem that every time there will be some sort of negotiation, which have to be with some sort of confrontation. Then that in itself becomes a habit from both sides. And then when that becomes a habit, that can carry through in their adulthood and then a sad situation may occur later in life. Whenever people have to relate with each other, there will always be some sort of confrontation and disagreement. That is a sad and uncomfortable situation. If you start bickering and it becomes a habit, then it seems like you won't be able to have a conversation without that confrontation. That will become a habit, and the conversation will be a 'back and forth' argument. So it is good from the beginning to nip it in the bud and not allow that to become a habit.

Indeed, parenting is definitely not an easy job, as I have understood from people's comments to me. Often people comment to me that they don't want children because they don't want the responsibility and the hardship. Some say it's a nice idea to have children, but don't think they can take the hardship so would rather not have them.

Others think about the financial impact, thinking they can't manage because of all the expenses involved'. I noticed there was a discussion on a TV show discussing how much it will cost for the upbringing of a child. It seems that in some ways, it is discouraging and daunting to have children, with all the expenses and so forth.

However, the main point that I have been trying to emphasise throughout the evening is that the most important thing is to protect our happy mind. That is the main point. With that, I exhort you and in fact I plead, with my palms together in front of my chest in saying, 'please, please protect your mind'. As the great master Shantideva also pleaded with his listeners, I also plead with you to maintain a happy mind. However, because I mention this again and again so many times, for some it might be like the Tibetan saying, 'hurting your ears'.

It is not a mere plea, but I am actually presenting some suggestions on how you can maintain a happy mind. So that is the main point to keep in mind, to try to implement these strategies for developing a happy mind in our life.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. Focus on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra as the recitation takes place, focusing and keeping our attention on the sound. When the mantra recitation subsides, try to maintain focus on the residue of the sound.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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