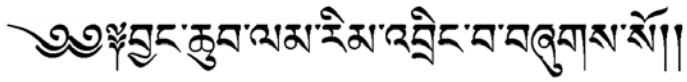

Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment



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As usual it might be good to spend some time in meditation. We begin by sitting in a comfortable, relaxed posture. Likewise it is important that we try to maintain a clear and bright state of mind. Having a relaxed and comfortable physical posture is a good start, but if along with that we can ensure that we have a genuinely calm, relaxed and happy mind then that would be much better. In fact that is most important. We all normally strive for happiness and wellbeing. If, on top of our physical wellbeing and comfort, we can generate a state of mind that is genuinely happy as well, then that combination will definitely contribute to our overall wellbeing.

These are points that are good to reflect upon in our daily life. If we are relaxed physically but our mind is not relaxed and is agitated we have not achieved what we want, which is genuine calmness. However even though we may be physically quite busy if our mind is relaxed and calm then that will not cause a chaotic situation for ourselves. These are important points to contemplate.

I have heard a contemporary example of this. Someone who surfs told me that while physically they have to exert a lot of energy, mentally they feel very relaxed and they are quite calm. Furthermore, they confided in me that when winter comes they still have a passion to surf because of the wellbeing they experience. So in winter they would still surf in the cold seawater. While they are surfing their mind is so focused on what they are doing that they don't feel the cold much. It is only when they come back after surfing that they start to shiver from the cold. The point here is that when the mind is occupied and focused on something significant then being in that state overrides any physical discomfort or hardships. In using that analogy the point I am trying to emphasise here is that meditation, being a mental activity, is something that is of real benefit for us.

We can explain how meditation practice is of real benefit for our wellbeing, particularly our mental wellbeing. First of all, we need to understand that what obstructs our wellbeing and causes the chaos and problems in our mind is being obsessed with negative, discursive thoughts. This is also called a superstitious mind. The negative, discursive states of mind are what cause the turmoil within our mind. As that is what is causing the disturbance in our mind, if we apply a technique that naturally causes the negative discursive thoughts in our mind to subside, then a calmer and more genuinely relaxed mind naturally arises in its place. This then naturally brings about a more genuinely happy mind. This is how the meditation technique works to provide us with the means to overcome a chaotic state of mind obsessed with negative, discursive thoughts. When we apply the meditation technique of focusing on a virtuous object, that helps the discursive states of mind to settle down so that it does not disturb us.

Just as with the earlier analogy, when we are really focused on something significant we will not experience any physical hardship such as feeling hungry. Temporarily we might even forget that we are feeling hungry. But later, when we leave what we are focusing on, then we start to feel really hungry! When our mind is preoccupied the hunger does not disturb us and we don't succumb to the unease of the physical discomfort of hunger. We don't even experience that. This is because our mind is preoccupied with something more significant. This shows that the attention that we pay on a mental level overrides the discomfort experienced on the physical level. That then shows the dominant cause of our wellbeing is really mental.

Now from our own experience we find that there are many instances where we temporarily forgot an object that caused us angst. When we don't bring that object to mind then the anxiety or angst in our mind will naturally subside. So, the sheer fact of forgetting that object appeases the mind. In contrast, as soon as the object that causes us distress comes to mind we immediately feel angst again. Our mind weighs down and we feel depressed and unsettled again. There will be many instances where we can see that this is true for us. So, in some sense, it seems that it is quite easy to appease our mind. We just need to temporarily forget about the object that causes us distress, and that will cause our mind to settle down.

Simply explained, meditation is a technique that provides us the means to divert our focus from an object that causes us distress. This is contrary to our normal habit of thinking about objects that causes us distress. We normally don't just think about these objects but we fixate on them, thinking about it again and again. It is like we are obsessed with the object that causes us distress; the paradox however is that thinking about it doesn't lessen the anxiety but rather increases it instead. The more we pay attention to the object the more it causes us distress and as a consequence we feel the ill effect of angst and worries leading to depression. If we allow our mind to continuously focus on the object that causes distress, we find more and more rational reasons to feel depressed, and if we are not careful and stop that process from escalating, it can turn into a state where one starts suffering from mental illness. The mind can reach a state where it seemingly has no control over itself any longer. That would really be unfortunate state to be in! So, at this time while we have the means to prevent something like that from happening to us, we need to take the initiative to not allow ourselves to go to that extent.

One of the best methods is to focus on a virtuous object, what is called a positive object. A positive attitude or state of mind can be a virtuous object. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has advised again and again that, from his experience, maintaining a genuinely kind and gentle mind is most beneficial. Maintaining a gentle attitude, rather than a hostile attitude, really seems to benefit and help one through any circumstances that one experiences.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is talking from his own experience of many hardships and many situations that would have normally caused anyone great trauma. His Holiness has mentioned that throughout all the difficulties and hardships he has faced, it is the gentle and kind attitude he has been working on which has helped him to overcome any kind of external hardship and difficulties. This is very profound advice that His Holiness is sharing with us from his own experiences. So this is something that we need to keep in mind.

As mentioned previously, we are all striving for happiness but most of us feel that we are deprived of the opportunity to experience happiness and wellbeing. In comparison to so many others in the world we have more conditions for our wellbeing than not. Far from being deprived of opportunities for wellbeing, physically and mentally, we are actually very well off but what I see here is that the causes of our suffering do not lie in being deprived of opportunities for wellbeing and happiness but rather in not being content and satisfied with what we have got. So the suffering that many experience here is actually the suffering of dissatisfaction and lack of contentment. In any way we look at, in this country there are good conditions and opportunities for physical and mental wellbeing, yet there is a lack of contentment. We are seeking even more forms of pleasure, more things to excite our senses and so forth but that dissatisfaction with what we have becomes a cause for one feeling angst and unhappiness. This is something that we need to contemplate and determine whether it is true for ourselves or not.

What I often feel is that if one is dissatisfied or discontent then it is important to recognise the great opportunities and good conditions that we already have. It seems that the lack of knowing or acknowledging this becomes a cause for our own suffering. Thus, the very good conditions that are conducive to our wellbeing become an obstacle to our wellbeing and a cause for unhappiness. To be more specific; physically we have all the conditions to allow us to be physically fit and well. The only thing depriving us of mental happiness is holding on to the discursive negative state of mind that we ourselves create. We have the ability to avoid allowing the discursive negative states of mind to dominate our thinking. So we have the basis for our mental wellbeing. I find it important to acknowledge these good conditions that we already possess.

One can come to the point where one can clearly recognise for oneself that the cause and conditions for one's wellbeing and happiness, as well as the causes for one's mental turmoil and unrest don't lie outside but rather within. So rather than pointing the finger outward and thinking that others are causing these problems and difficulties or that one should be getting happiness from some external source, one can take the initiative and responsibility to provide the right condition for one's mental wellbeing by developing the good qualities within our own mind. This is essential for us to recognise.

Maintaining a correct and positive attitude is essential for our wellbeing because it allows us to accept the reality of our situation rather than pointing the finger or blaming external conditions for our problems. We need to look within and see that the solution is inside and in our own hands.

I might have related this anecdote before but I will mention it now. This story is about a great meditator monk called Sangye, who was known to be a great practitioner of the altruistic mind aspiring to achieve enlightenment. He would travel around in different parts of South India and going out in the wilderness to meditate. Actually I know him quite well, as we used to receive teachings together from my late teacher. On one occasion when he was out in the wilderness he was residing under a tree and he gathered some wood to make a small fire to boil some tea for himself. As he gathered the wood around creeks and so forth some of the local youngsters noticed and accused him of cutting down the branches of trees. They started to beat him up and of course he was not someone to retaliate in any way. As he was being

physically beaten he started to think about what the best way to appease them and he put his hand in his shirt and found that he had three rupees. So he took those three rupees out and offered them to the youngsters saying, 'Thank you, thank you. You have been so kind to me, please accept this.' The youngsters were really taken aback and shocked.

The reason that he was thanking them was that from the point of view of his practice, they were giving him the greatest opportunity to practice patience. So, in his mind he felt that these were people that he should show great appreciation towards because they were allowing him to increase his practice of patience.

A great master from the past, Chengawa, said that those supreme beings who engage in real practice would be those who would return harm with benefit. So, when someone harms one, if, rather than returning that harm one were to benefit the other then that would be the practice of a supreme being. This is an indication of the very practice a master like himself would engage in.

These practices are an indication of the positive effect of maintaining a kind and positive attitude. If we really work at maintaining a positive and kind attitude then these practices will come about naturally. As mentioned regularly, one cannot practice true love without the practice of patience. The lack of patience would explain the remarks such, 'I have been so kind and so nice to him so why don't they show any appreciation?' and making inappropriate gestures. If one starts complaining about that and is not able to tolerate that, then that shows the real extent of the love one had for them.

We can practise this, even in a small way, beginning with those who we consider our companions, friends or close ones. With these people there will be times when they might say something that is inappropriate or make inappropriate gestures. If one were to retaliate and say something equally inappropriate in return, that will only escalate the situation and will not help. So there can be times when we accept this and don't retaliate. If you can say something nice in return that is great, if not at least don't respond negatively as it will turn into a bad confrontation. These would be the measures to avoid conflict and confrontation because what we call conflict and confrontation usually starts with something very small and insignificant, and retaliating can then escalate that further.

We might normally complain about our poor memory, but when it comes to something inappropriate that someone said, we know exactly when it was said, what year, what month, what day, even the time! [*laughter*] That is the extent to which we hold in our memory a feeling of hurt from something inappropriate that has been said, and the resentment we might have. We get into the habit of repeating this again and again. 'They did something', 'They said that to me at that time,' and that is repeated again and again. It is almost as if it becomes a mantra, like reciting OM MANI PADME HUNG.

There are some practical measures that we can take to avoid such situations and these can be verified through our own experience as being beneficial. This is something that I, through my own experience in life, have found to be beneficial. It is based on my experience that I share with you that you will definitely benefit if you try to adopt a more positive, gentler and kinder attitude. The way try to remember this point so you don't forget it is, rather than reflecting on this point at some later time saying, 'Oh, yeah,

Geshe-la did mention that in the teaching, 'you can actually reflect upon it as, 'Geshe-la said that to me.' Then it becomes personalised and one has something to remember as advice, an instruction at our disposal.

Having seen the significance, purpose and reason for meditation we can now put it into practice. So, we readjust our physical posture and the object that we focus on is, as usual, our own breath. Using the breath as an object to focus on is significant because most of us are likely to be obsessed with lots of discursive thoughts and a very busy agitated mind. As explained in the teachings, the breath is the most appropriate object to focus on to settle down an otherwise agitated mind that is very busy with a lot of discursive thoughts.

We begin by intentionally withdrawing our mind from all forms of discursive thoughts and any objects that causes delusions to arise within us. We withdraw from all objects as such and bring our focus within. Then, having brought the focus within, we now place our focus 100% upon the natural rhythm of our breath itself. We will spend the next few minutes in silent meditation in that way. (*Pause for meditation.*)

That will be sufficient for now.

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

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.2. The actual development of the mind that strives for others' welfare

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.2.1. Cultivating loving kindness

We are covering the part of text explaining the benefits of cultivating unconditional love. As explained in the teachings, the Buddha said that the merit one gains from generating love is far greater than that generated by making offerings to many holy objects, such as the buddhas and so forth. That is how it explained in the text.

4. The fourth subdivision in this category is: If One Cultivates Loving Kindness For The Field [Of All Mother Beings, The Merit Accrued] Will Surpass Even That Of The Previous Category. Having explained the benefits of love in general previously the text explains that because of the many conditions for suffering in this particular world system, generating love is of even greater benefit than was explained earlier. The text quotes from another sutra of the Buddha, *The Array Of Qualities Of Manjushri's Buddha-Realm*, which states:

In the northeast is the land of a Conqueror Bodhesvara called Decorated by a Thousand Universes. There living beings have happiness that is like the bliss of a monk who experiences a cessation. If you generate a loving attitude here in Jambudvipa, (meaning this world) toward all living beings for merely a snap of the fingers, the merit produced greatly surpasses the merit gained by keeping pure conduct there for one trillion years. Is there any need to mention the merits of a loving attitude abiding both day and night?

The main point emphasised in the above quotation is that in this world system when any being like ourselves develops unconditional love towards other living beings, even for the duration of the snap of a finger, one generates much more merit than that mentioned earlier. If that is true, even for the duration of the snap of a finger, then what need is there to mention the merit one generates if one develops unceasing love for all living beings, during the whole day as well as the night? There is no question that one accumulates much merit from that. So, since there is so much benefit in generating unconditional love, it is worthwhile to strive towards developing that.

5. We now come to the fifth subdivision. The text quotes *The Precious Garland* by Nagarjuna, which states:

To offer three hundred small pots of food

Even three times a day,

Does not equal a portion of the merit

Of a fraction of an instant of love.

Even if you are not liberated through love

You will attain its eight good qualities:

Deities and humans will love you,

They will also protect you.

You will have joy and much physical pleasure;

Poison and weapons will not harm you,

You will attain your aims effortlessly

And be reborn in the world of Brahma

The main point to be taken from this quote is that while offering food, such as three hundred small pots of food three times a day, would be considered a greatly meritorious act, developing unconditional love for an instant generates far greater merit than that.

One of the eight benefits that are explained here is that deities and humans will love you in return. When you develop that unconditional love yourself they will love you and protect you. As explained here, other teachings also explain that the best way to overcome any harm or evil is by meditating on love.

A further benefit is that you will have joy. This specifically refers to mental joy. You will have mental joy and much physical pleasure. What is being presented here is that the personal benefits one derives from meditating on love and familiarising yourself with love are that one will first experience mental joy and when one experiences genuine mental joy that naturally has a good effect on one's body. So there will also be a lot of physical pleasure and wellbeing.

Furthermore, poisons and weapons will not harm you. This explanation is derived from accounts of the Buddha's life. Once when the Buddha was meditating, there was apparently attempt to harm the Buddha with poison and also with weapons. None of that actually harmed the Buddha. It is said that his single-pointed concentration on love protected him from all forms of harm.

A further benefit is that you will attain your aims effortlessly. This is quite clear, which says that whatever aims you have you will be able to fulfil them.

Another benefit is that you will be reborn in the world of Brahma. The world of Brahma usually refers to an abode within cyclic existence of the highest gods or deities, the celestial god realm called the Brahma realm, but it can also refer to the state of liberation. Here it would refer to the state of liberation.

As stated in the verse, even if you are not liberated through love you will definitely attain the eight good qualities.

Lama Tsong Khapa then comments on the quotation:

If you have love deities then humans will love you and will naturally gravitate towards you.

This is a very significant point. As I have mentioned previously, if one wishes to have true companions close to you then the best way to achieve this is by expressing true love yourself.

Some people have come up to me and asked me if there is a special mantra that one can recite in order get friends and companions. My response has been that the best way would be to express true love for others. That is as explained here. When one generates a true sense of love for others then others will naturally gravitate towards you. Leaving aside humans, we can see that this is also true in the animal world. I have seen quite a few accounts of how animals respond to individuals who have showed them love. It is really quite extraordinary when one witnesses the clear appreciation and affection from the animal's side towards the human who has shown them love. When one sees that expression of appreciation from an animal we can clearly see that they feel a strong sense of gratitude towards the humans who have been kind to them. Of course there is no other way for them to repay that kindness but through their gestures, they clearly show closeness and a great sense of warmth towards the human.

We need to take that as an example for our own life, in relation to others who have been kind to us. As humans, do we have a natural response of appreciating others' kindness to us? Sometimes it might be doubtful whether we appreciate others who have been kind to us to that same extent. Just as animals recognise kindness shown to them we, as humans, definitely need to show appreciation and respond with true love ourselves.

His Holiness Dalai Lama has also emphasised that if you wish for a true and good friend, then the best way to have good friends around you is by expressing your own love towards them. A mark of the true love of someone else for you would be that they would help you in times of difficulties. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has gone further and said that if in times of difficulties those who claim to love you start to discard you and shy away, then that is a mark of them not having true love for you. Likewise if one wishes to express true love for others then it needs to be expressed particularly at times of difficulties.

This is really true when we relate it to ourselves. The person who we would remember as someone who has been kind to us is, most often, someone who has helped us at times of real difficulties, physical or mental hardships. Those who have shown affection towards us, those who have been close by our sides and helped us at those times, would be the people that we would always remember as being extremely kind to us. Thus the mark of true friendship and companionship lies in expressing true, unconditional love. So we need to take the initiative to express a true sense of love that goes beyond physical attraction and fleeting pleasures and expresses deep genuine concern for the wellbeing of the other. That is what we need to cultivate.

Another practical way to look at the benefit of love is recognising how we will not go out of our way to harm someone that we truly love. That is the last thing that will occur in our mind. Instead we will think of every way to benefit them, isn't that true? When you think about it, anyone you express true love towards is not someone that you will intentionally harm, but someone you would try

your utmost to benefit. So just looking at that, we can clearly see that the root cause of happiness in the world is based on love. If genuine love is expressed mutually towards all, there is no room for harm or violence to occur. So that is something that we can definitely see, isn't it?

We have extensively explained the benefits of love and we now need to relate that to ourselves. First of all we need to acknowledge that we all have the basis of love. It is not something alien to us. It is not something we have to try to figure out. We all have the basis of love. So it is a matter of acknowledging the basis for love that we have within us. It might not yet be unconditional love but whatever love we have now we need to try to further develop and strengthen so that it does become more and more unconditional. That love that we have as a basis is something that we can begin to express, beginning with those that are close to us and even those who we might have a disagreement with. There might be people who, from their side, may not show much appreciation or be close to us but, regardless of their attitude towards us, if from our side we take the initiative to feel and express love for them, we are developing our mind in the right direction.

As I mention regularly, one's ultimate companion is the love that we feel and express within our heart. That is our unflinching friend and constant companion. If we don't lose that inner companion then we don't have to worry too much about losing external companions. In fact, when there is a true sense of love within one's own heart that will be the means to gather external friends and companions. If one starts to lose that inner companion of a true sense of love within us we would notice that external friends will start to slowly shy away. When we start losing external friends we may end up experiencing angst and loneliness. Loneliness seems to be quite prevalent here in the west. I sometimes find it a bit intriguing to define 'loneliness'. It seems it is not necessarily to be without a companion or completely alone to experience loneliness. It seems you can have a companion and be surrounded with friends, and still express a sense of loneliness. So I am not really too sure how you define loneliness and what it relates to. Maybe you are more familiar with what loneliness is [*Geshe-la laughs*]. You are more skilled in that.

I would like show my appreciation for all of you listening so well, thank you. Before we conclude for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time the object of our meditation will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. As we hear the sound of the mantra we try to maintain our full attention and focus on that sound. Then, when the recitation subsides, we remain silent for a while. We might have gained a pleasant sensation, a sort of positive feeling in our hearts from focusing on that sound. Try to maintain that positive sensation within yourself and focus on that for a while after the recitation. That is the focus of our meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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