
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. So for that purpose we adopt a comfortable, relaxed posture. While doing that it would be good also to check what your mind is doing. [Short pause as people check their minds] It would be good if you find that your mind and physical body are both settled.

While this might be the case for some, others might find that the mind is not really settled. Through habit, the mind seems to follow a particular pattern of thought or adopt a particular mindset, and is in a constantly busy and chaotic state. It is worthwhile to investigate what the mind is up to, what kind of thoughts are going through it, and how the mind is behaving. When we undertake such an analysis of our own state of mind, we begin to notice that our mind has both faults and good qualities. We will also begin to notice the virtue of having a mind that is focused and settled, in contrast to a mind that wanders about in a completely distracted manner. Then one begins to notice that a mind that is not settled and focused is a faulty mind.

Once we have identified that we have a distracted and busy mind, we realise that it would be worthwhile to find a technique to settle down the mind, and help it to become more attentive and more focused. Having identified the existence of such a technique the next step is to adopt that technique.

When, through our investigation and analysis of the state of our mind, we begin to notice that there are certain positive qualities, then we can take the initiative to further increase those positive qualities. Likewise when we notice faults within our mind, we can take the initiative to decrease and eventually overcome those faults. It is really worthwhile to endeavour to work for our own well-being in this way.

We call that ability to differentiate between the faults and good qualities within our own mind analytical wisdom. As we further develop that wisdom, our ability to discern faults and qualities develops to the point where we take the initiative to overcome those faults and further strengthen those positive qualities. When one takes on that personal responsibility, then one is on the road to a true personal transformation. That would be really worthwhile.

When we consider things in this way, we will begin to realise that there are a lot of things that we need to work on. First of all, the mind is a neutral entity, and it is not really the mind itself that is at fault, but some of the associated states of mind that are faulty.

Having determined that our mind is associated with faulty states of mind, we then turn to identifying the specific faults. We can identify attachment and anger—particularly strong attachment and strong anger—as faulty states of mind, because of the fact that the moment we fall under their influence, our mind becomes disturbed and agitated. When one is influenced by strong attachment or anger, the mind is

neither settled, nor calm nor peaceful. Not only do attachment and anger disturb our mind, they also assist each other: attachment seems to breed more anger, and anger can affect the mind of attachment. For as long as strong attachment and anger are present we will experience their ill effects—a disturbed, unsettled and agitated mind. Conversely, the states of mind that we consider as good qualities such as love and compassion focused on other sentient beings, bring a more tranquil and focused mind.

We might also generate faith as a result of seeing the good qualities of others. Those of us with religious beliefs develop respect and faith, and an aspiration to achieve the same qualities that we see in those we admire. When we generate faith this brings about a natural tranquillity. These are the positive qualities with which we need to associate our mind, and then encourage ourselves to further strengthen them. That is how we begin to develop ourselves.

As mentioned at the beginning, while it might be relatively easy to adopt a relaxed physical posture, the most important thing is to check the state of our mind. If we find that the mind is genuinely calm and relaxed, then it is most likely that the mind is associated with some of the positive qualities we have just mentioned. When our mind is infused with those positive qualities, then we experience a genuinely relaxed state of mind. On the other hand we might find that even though our physical posture is relatively relaxed, we still have a busy, agitated mind that is in turmoil. If we really analyse our state of mind, we will find that it is more than likely that our mind is associated with what we identified earlier as faulty states of mind. Being able to identify these two states of mind is essential for our well-being.

The main point that I am stressing here is that it is really important that we establish a genuinely relaxed and calm mind to accompany our relaxed physical posture. Since that does not come about naturally, we need to train ourselves to achieve that relaxed and calm mind.

Meditation is such a technique that ensures that we associate our mind with positive qualities, and positive states of mind. It is a technique that allows us to familiarise ourselves again and again with our own positive qualities, while lessening our familiarity with negative states of mind. By familiarising our mind again and again with positive qualities, they become a more natural part of our mind. That is how we train our mind through meditation.

We also need to recognise that the mind has a natural propensity to become accustomed to whatever it is most familiar with. The more we train our mind by familiarising it with the positive qualities, the more prevalent the positive qualities of our mind will become.

Having analysed our minds and recognised how our minds are disturbed by strong attachments and anger, we need to take the initiative to gain control over our mind and not allow these delusions to take control. We need to hold the reins, so to speak, so that we are in control of our own mind, rather than allowing it to be controlled by attachments and anger.

When we actually adopt this technique of intentionally withdrawing our mind from its focus on objects of attachment and anger, and redirect it onto some other object, that will help us to free ourselves from influence of that attachment and anger. As we adopt this technique, and apply it properly, we will begin to experience more calm and more peace. For as long as it is free from direct influence of the delusions, we will experience genuine calm and a settled

mind. However, we need to take a practical approach and apply this technique of familiarising mind with positive objects in short sessions, and then gradually build it up. That is the approach that we need to take.

One often hears that the meditation technique is a technique to control one's mind. So, we need to better understand what it means to have control over our mind. When we have control over our own mind we can then use it for achieving greater purposes. We can place our attention and focus on something positive, and not allow it to become derailed. Gaining control over our mind in this way is quite a significant achievement.

The reason I spend some time explaining the significance of applying the meditation technique and how to actually adopt it, is so that you gain a clear understanding about what is it that you are trying to achieve through meditation. Without such an understanding of the reason for engaging in this practice we might end up thinking, "Why am I meditating? What is it meant to be for?", and thinking, "Why don't I experience any transformation taking place? It seems that I'm the same as when I first started meditating". Ending up with this situation would be quite unfortunate.

When we make a genuine attempt to apply the meditation technique to our own lives, then there is definitely the chance that a genuine transformation will gradually take place. When we adopt the meditation technique with the complete understanding of how to apply it in our everyday lives, and how to use one's intelligence and wisdom, we will definitely reap the positive benefits from our practice. Then, when someone approaches us and asks us about the meditation technique, we will be able to confidently share what we have gained through our own experience, which is very valuable to others.

Genuine sharing means being able to convey the positive effects we have experienced through adopting the meditation technique, such as being able to say: "Prior to engaging in meditation practice, my mind was in such a confused state, and my life was in a big mess. Having adopted the meditation technique I have found that my mindset and attitudes have changed. My whole way of living has been transformed". Being able to share our own experience with others in this way will indicate that it is not just some random theory. It's really valuable when you share something which comes from your own experience, as it will make sense to others when they hear about the positive results at a personal level. That of course, means that one has to actually make a genuine attempt to meditate!
[Geshe-la laughs]

If someone were to approach you and say, "Do you know about meditation?" and your answer is an enthusiastic and confident, "Yes, I know about meditation", and then ask, "Could you teach me to meditate?" and you have to say, "Well, I'm not sure. I don't know if I can teach you how to meditate", then that means that you haven't really applied the meditation technique properly.

Now, of course people have different temperaments. Some might have adopted the meditation technique and know how to meditate well, but are naturally a bit hesitant in sharing with others. Even though they feel the positive benefits of the meditation practice, they lack the confidence to share it with others. Others might be very eager to share whatever little they do know! However, even though it might be difficult to openly share with others because of temperament and personality, it is good to try to make that

attempt, to at least adopt that intention of wanting to benefit and help others. The greatest benefit of meditation practice comes from sharing our own experiences with others.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama quite often says, "I'm really saddened if I am not able to help others because I lack the necessary knowledge, or experience. People place their hopes in me, and if I'm not able to give them something in return, that really saddens me". What this clearly shows is that the Dalai Lama's sole intention is to benefit others. He is constantly applying whatever he knows as way to help others. That should inspire us to do the same.

Even though we may not come even close to practising as the Dalai Lama does, when others may seek our assistance in the hope that we will be able to help, it is really worthwhile actually provide whatever assistance we can to the best of our ability. They have come to us with trust and hope that we can assist them. It's not easy to ask for help from someone. Whether it is one's immediate family, a colleague or a friend, when someone comes up to us and seeks our assistance, then we should assist them to the best of our ability so that we don't disappoint them. That would be really worthwhile.

Any help and assistance that we offer to the best of our ability will be appreciated, and we will naturally be regarded as a kind person. Who doesn't like to hear that they are a kind person? That gives us some joy doesn't it? It is worthwhile to consider this point. These are attitudes that we can all adopt. In saying this I am trying to present practical ways of adopting positive attitudes which can be useful in life.

Now we can actually engage in our meditation practice. The technique we use is the one where we focus on the breath. Based on the comfortable physical posture that we adopted earlier, we now make the commitment, "For the next few minutes I will not allow my mind to be focused on the distractions". This means bringing our full attention inward, withdrawing from all forms of distracting thoughts and external objects. Having brought our focus inward, we place it upon the object, which is our natural breathing. Being mindful we remain 100% focused on the breath itself. So we will adopt this meditation to the best of our abilities.

[meditation]

That should be sufficient for now.

As we have just attempted in this short session, it is worthwhile trying to adopt a regular meditation practice in life. While we might only do a few minutes of formal meditation at a time, it would be good to try to adopt this habit of analysing our minds and thoughts in our everyday life, outside of our meditation session. It would be really useful to try to observe the kinds of thoughts that we have during the day.

The great master Shantideva mentions that there are many kinds of attitudes and ways of thinking that can assist us to have a joyful, happy mind. Adopting ways of thinking that are associated with fleeting sensual pleasures would be quite meaningless, and missing the point. As Shantideva indicated, it is better to focus on objects that induce a joyful, happy mind, rather than being completely overwhelmed by states of mind that cause us distress and only bring chaos to our mind.

There are those who seem to hold on to some idealised framework of how things should be, or there might be some sort of obsession with an object. They think, "If this comes

about, I'll be happy. But if I don't achieve that, or if I can't get this, there is no way for me to be happy", and become completely obsessed with that thought. The main point here is that going down only one track and thinking, "This is the only way", or "This is the only person I can be happy with", or "Only this situation will make me happy", means that there is no room or opportunity for anything else. We rule out other possibilities, or different perspectives that could help us. The main point is to not be obsessed with just one thing.

When an individual is fixated on only one thing, then for as long as the individual is fixated on that—whatever it may be, whether it's a career situation, or a relationship—then no-one seems to be able to help them. Family members see that they have an unreasonable ideal or that that they are putting themselves in an unreasonable situation, but when they offer help it is not accepted. Even advice from outside the family doesn't seem to be able to help them. When people are in that obsessed state of mind, being fixated on one thing and that doesn't work out, they experience great turmoil or sadness. They become upset, frustrated, angry and so forth.

However the individual themselves can in fact take the initiative to start to change their attitudes. The reality is that in this country, it can't be the lack of sufficient food that is worrying you, or sufficient clothing, or a place to stay. All of these external resources are plentiful. So that is not what is bothering you. It is good for you to recognise the causes of your turmoil.

Family members and relatives understand that the real problem is their fixation, and not the immediate situation. While being gentle and kind in helping others out, we need to understand what the real issue is. As much as others are trying to help this individual, that individual needs to start to open their mind, widen their perspective and adopt a different attitude. When they become a little bit interested, then this is where meditation practice can help to modify their attitudes and help them to see that there are different ways of viewing things.

When an individual who is really obsessed, almost imprisoned by their own thoughts, and not really taking the initiative to do anything positive in their life, is given a physical task by someone in authority or who they respect, then they might not want to disappoint them. In fact actually doing something physical seems to bring them out of that state of mind; physical work can actually be a positive distraction. It can actually bring them out of the immediacy of that obsession, and open doorways for their attitudes and perspectives to change as well.

Feeling that a situation is bleak and hopeless, or being completely obsessed with something and not feeling settled until it is sorted out, is an imprisoning mindset. One is trapped by one's own pattern of thinking, and attitudes. The way to counter that is by changing one's perspective or attitude. If one can actually do that then what seems like a big problem can be completely defused.

Here I usually relate an anecdote from my experience. I might have mentioned this incident previously, but it is relevant here. There was a lady who was very fond of me, who used to come talk to me and share things with me, On one occasion she was very, very sad and unhappy, and actually crying because her partner had left her. As a way to help her out of that state, I said, "You don't have to feel sad. What has left you is nothing more than rubbish. You

shouldn't feel sad about getting rid of something like that. You haven't lost anything—in fact you have gained your freedom and independence. You should consider what is best for you". Then she lightened up and actually smiled and said, saying, "Oh, I didn't think about it in that way. Maybe you have a point here. However, I am not too sure if it is appropriate to equate my partner with rubbish".
[laughter]

This is just one example of how changing one's attitude can definitely change one's own perspective, leading to a lighter mind that is calmer and more open. This is true for all of us. When we look into the problems that we experience, they may be due to none other than being fixated with some idea or situation. If we change our attitude, and our way of looking at it, it can definitely help one to lighten our mind.

Meditation can definitely change our perspective in a positive way, at a subtle and deep level. The person who diligently applies the meditation technique, and tries to really practise that in daily life will naturally gain the ability to be discerning with difficulties. Whenever there is a trouble, they will adopt a positive outlook or change their perspective to see a lighter side. That will come quite naturally to anyone who has meditated. If we were to ask, "What is the difference between someone who meditates and someone who doesn't meditate?" it is that the person who meditates will be able to apply the wisdom and discernment that they have achieved through their practice of meditation, to their own benefit.

We can conclude here for the evening. I would like to thank you all for listening so well. However, you should not misunderstand that to imply that I have said something well myself *[Geshe-la laughs]*. However, I can confidently say that I definitely have the best intentions.

Before we conclude for the evening, we can spend a few more minutes in meditation, this time focusing on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra. As we hear the mantra, try to keep your full attention and focus on that sound. Then as the recitation subsides, try to hold onto the residue of that sound.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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