
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation. Since we are a gathering of meditators, naturally that is what we will do, meditate. So, in order to do the meditation we need to adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. Sitting in the appropriate posture is to isolate our physical body from frivolous activities and distractions. The mind also needs to be isolated from conceptual and disturbing thoughts. That is most essential.

Whilst both elements are important for our practice of meditation, the mind being isolated from disturbing, conceptual thoughts is most essential. Because it is relatively easier to isolate one's physical body from frivolous activities, but if one's mind is still distracted with disturbing, conceptual thoughts then, though one's body remains composed one's mind will not actually be in meditation. Therefore, unless and until the mind itself is isolated from disturbing conceptual thoughts, one cannot be in meditation. If the mind itself is isolated from disturbing and conceptual thoughts, then even if the body is physically engaged in normal activities, such as being in social gatherings, these external conditions will not become a distraction for the mind, because the mind is composed. The mind will be able to maintain its composure and will not be disturbed.

Thus, when the mind is isolated from distracting conceptual thoughts, it will not be disturbed and we will experience a peaceful state of mind. We can see how this applies to ourselves. If we look into the state of our mind we will be able to notice that when we think in a certain way it causes disturbance in our mind. But if we think in other ways and adopt different kinds of thoughts, that can induce a sense of ease, peace and calmness within us. This is something we will notice for ourselves.

When we begin to notice for ourselves that there are certain states of mind, attitudes and ways of thinking that cause disturbances within us, we can then see that these are the states of mind that we need to discard. Whereas the attitudes and ways of thinking that induce a sense of well being, ease and happiness within us are the states of mind or attitudes that we need to adopt. So it is in this way that we will find for ourselves the things that we need to discard and the essential things that we need to adopt. This is also in line with how scientists analyse and investigate atoms and so forth, as a way to better the conditions in life. When scientists find something useful and beneficial that contributes to our well being it is adopted and utilised in a beneficial way. When they identify things that are harmful, they are discarded and eliminated, such as when tons and tons of foodstuffs had to be discarded because scientists had found that it was contaminated with hazardous substances. Having analysed the atmosphere they often find that there is something poisonous, such as radiation and so forth which is harmful, so they need to find means to eliminate that. These are measures that are taken which we can see.

When we can clearly detect certain attitudes and thought patterns and immediately recognise that they cause disturbances in our mind, then we need to try to minimise and completely eliminate them from our mind. Whereas if we recognise that certain thoughts and attitudes bring a sense of happiness, well being and calmness, then these need to be adopted, further cultivated and nourished. Thus, in very simple terms, we can all conclude that within our mind stream there are definitely certain attitudes and thought patterns that need to be discarded, and others that need to be adopted.

This self-analysis, analysing our state of mind, thought patterns and attitudes, is something that helps to further increase our intelligence and wisdom. I have emphasised, again and again, that this process is essential for our well-being.

Having initially recognised the positive states of mind that contribute to our well being and happiness, we then need to further analyse and recognise what factors contribute to these positive states of mind, to further cultivate and develop that mind. We also need to recognise the opposing factors. It is essential to recognise these. The reasoning and logic that we cultivate to recognise these factors is something that we can use in all facets of our life.

The factors opposing the cultivation of positive states of mind are basically disturbing, conceptual thoughts. Disturbing, conceptual thoughts oppose our positive states of mind. The method to further cultivate and develop the positive state of mind is with the meditation technique. Meditation trains the mind to further develop positive states of mind. It is basically the ultimate method.

When we know and utilise this system of identifying the opposing and contributing factors we will come to know and recognise what is useful and harmful for us—this understanding will be useful in every instance of our lives.

Having this knowledge will also assist us to assess the external situations that we encounter in our everyday lives and determine whether they contribute to, or harm, our well-being. We often place so many expectations and so much hope on something external, with the expectation that it will benefit and contribute to our well being, yet it does not have the qualities and attributes to help us. When we have not analysed the object and the situation carefully and place our expectations and hope on the assumption that it will help us and it fails to bring about what we hoped for, this can cause us so much distress, angst, discomfort and disturbance. While we may naturally blame the object and external conditions for our distress, the real reason is that we have not taken the time to analyse and assess whether the object is truly helpful for us or not. When we learn to analyse the factors that contribute to and those that oppose a positive state of mind we can apply that analysis to all external circumstances, and it will assist us to make the right decisions before we adopt something.

To summarise the main point again, we need to pay attention to developing our inborn wisdom and cultivate it through active analysis and actual reasoning. When one has developed that inner wisdom it will assist us in all circumstances—in the spiritual field as well as in mundane daily activities. It will be the inner wisdom that we have cultivated and developed that will assist us to assess every situation before we make any decisions or choices. Once something is analysed and seen to be useful it can be adopted. It is in this way that we can see the practical

benefits of analysing our own mind and applying it to other circumstances.

Having explained a bit about the significance and purpose of meditation which is training the mind to be in a positive state, we can now spend a few minutes in meditation. One needs to initially choose a particular object to focus on as a way to train our mind in focusing single-pointedly on an object. The object that we choose for our meditation here will be our own breath. We need to make that determination and decision that, 'I will keep my full attention and focus on the breath itself'. This means distancing ourselves from focusing on in any other object, completely letting go of all other thoughts, and bringing our mind to focus single-pointedly on the breath itself. When we do this practice wholeheartedly and sincerely we will begin to notice that our mind definitely does settle down and become calmer. When we notice that for ourselves, we can detect that there is a difference between a mind that is completely immersed in frivolous conceptual thoughts and a mind with a single pointed focus on an object. When we notice the calmness and tranquillity in a focused mind we will confirm for ourselves the benefits of practice and training in this way. With that in mind, we will now keep our attention and focus on our breath for the next few minutes (*Pause for meditation*)

That will be sufficient for now. It would be good to implement a regular, daily, meditation practice, just as we have attempted now in our short session. You can start with a short session and slowly increase your attention span. From the very outset make sure that you don't allow your mind to be distracted and maintain your focus and then slowly you can expand the duration. With familiarity with this training a positive state of mind will slowly and naturally develop and increase within you.

The reason we need to take the initiative to train our mind to adopt and increase positive states of mind, thoughts and attitudes and to decrease negative states of mind is because the mind that experiences these positive or negative states is solely ours. It is not something that can be experienced or shared with others. It is ourselves that experience what occurs in our mind. In other words, that which utilises either the positive or negative states of mind is none other than us, unlike material things that you may possess.

The material things that we possess, even though we may claim ownership, are nevertheless usually shared with others. You share your house, places and so forth. For example, even though you own a nice car it may often be used by others. You may not just utilise it for yourself. There may be times when you have a certain amount of control of your possessions but, generally speaking, our material possessions are usually shared by others as well. The mind is not like this. The state of our mind is something that is solely utilised and experienced by us. A positive state of mind and the well-being and happiness that are the results and consequences of that positive state of mind are ours alone. Our state of mind and experiences are not something that we can share with others. Likewise, the consequences of a negative state of mind, such as disturbances and the various form of suffering, are also experienced by us alone. Therefore, unlike external things, we have total ownership of our state of mind and because we have to experience it by ourselves we need to take the initiative to bring about well-being and a sense of joy and happiness within us whilst decreasing and overcoming those minds that cause disturbances. This is the main point.

The onus is on us to take the initiative to protect our state of mind by utilising our positive qualities and states of mind, and not allowing ourselves to be dominated and completely over powered by the negative states of mind. It is because of this that I remind you again and again to please protect your positive states of mind and don't allow them to diminish, decrease and degenerate. When the positive qualities within us start to degenerate it is very difficult to restore them again. So, we need to find the means to protect and further develop whatever positive qualities we have. This is something that I try to encourage. Rather than being overwhelmed with disturbing states of mind and being depressed, it is better to take the initiative to try to overcome that. Now, while you haven't mentioned to me that that is what is happening to you, it is a concern that I naturally have. I have the feeling that many do fall into that trap. It is out of a sense of concern and kindness that I always think about this. The only worry that I can say I have is seeing your mind degenerate by not maintaining your positive states of mind. That is why I emphasise this again and again.

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

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.2.2. Cultivating compassion

We can now read from the text and cover a bit of its content. The topic we are covering right now is *compassion*. As a state and quality of mind, compassion is incredibly beneficial. When one doesn't understand compassion in its full capacity, it may appear that it is a mind that experiences some difficulty and hardship because one is relating to other's suffering. However when one really thinks about what compassion is, how it is developed and what the actual experience is when one utilises and develops real compassion within one's heart, it is far from a disturbed mind and a mind of suffering. It is actually a very courageous mind, a worthwhile mind that induces a deep sense of well being rather than hardship and difficulties. It brings about a genuine sense of well being deep within us. So that is something we need to recognise.

The greater the compassion we develop within our heart the busier it seems we become. There's no lack of things to do; in fact there's lots to do. That is because one's mind becomes very expansive. One is not satisfied with helping just one person, or to overcome the difficulties and hardships of two people, but as one develops the skills and means to benefit others one goes beyond the normal limitations of extending help to just a few people and extends one's help and benefit to as many as possible, as expansively as possible. That is how one becomes busier benefiting others.

When a genuine mind of compassion is developed and focused on others, it is a mind that does not wish even the slightest harm to others and wishes them only benefit and happiness. Because one wishes them only happiness and not

even the slightest suffering, one's intention for them would also be to not wish them any harm. Thus the more the compassion increases in one's mind the more the sense of wishing to benefit others becomes greater and greater. We can see that anyone who is imbued with compassion only contributes to the well being of others. Compassion does not contribute in the slightest way to harm or bringing destruction to others.

It is because of the great value of love and compassion and the great purpose it gives us, that I try to remind you again and again that, at all costs, you must not allow the love and compassion that you have developed to degenerate. When that sense of love and compassion degenerates in one's mind it is a great loss for one's own well being as well. Because it is so difficult to restore, one needs to protect that sense of love and compassion within one's heart.

However you must not misinterpret or misunderstand what I am saying. I am not in any way implying that I have developed great love and compassion myself and attest to the value of that. The sense of love and compassion that I have tried to develop and work on is at a very minimum level, but even on that minimum level I can see its great value. What I can say is that whenever I notice someone who is in a distressing situation, impoverished or facing great difficulties, I have a feeling of concern and think about how I can help and benefit them. That is something that naturally occurs in my mind.

I can relate a personal story that occurred recently. In a place I was visiting I noticed a few women together and amongst them was a lady confined to a wheelchair whose hands were crippled. She looked like she was in a very pitiful and sad situation as she was disabled. When I thought about her condition and how hard it was for her to conduct her everyday life it moved me to tears. I was really moved and was thinking about the difficult situation she was in. As the tears were forming in my eyes I noticed she was giggling and smiling with her friends and seem to be light-hearted. Then, the moment after that, I thought, 'Isn't it strange that I am feeling sorrowful for someone who obviously seems to be in a difficult physical situation but she, however, seems to be quite jovial and happy'. It seemed awkward that I was shedding tears for someone who seemed to be joyful. In a way, it was an experience to lift up my own heart. Maybe I did not need to feel too sorrowful for her situation and condition. What I learnt from that encounter was that whilst she was obviously physically confined by her condition, mentally she was quite joyful. So that was remarkable, and a good thing to see.

I can also relate an incident that I just witnessed on the news this evening. This was a distressing situation. Someone in a wheelchair lost control and went near to a train track just as a train started moving. The person in the wheelchair was pulled forward and fell down and people were running up to help. I don't know how this happened, I just saw what occurred. Initially the train was stationary and if she had just bumped into the train and the train had not moved she might have been protected and saved. But the train moved at that very moment. Karma! This caused me to consider how these situations and coincidences seem to take place. There must be some sort of reason that she went out of control and hit the train just as it happened to move. I am not sure what happened after that but it was very distressing to see. You may also be aware of this occurrence. She hit the end of train and it moved at the same time.

Student: Apparently the brake of the wheelchair had failed, the train left, then she fell over onto the tracks, but there was no serious physical damage done to her.

Geshe-la: That is a good piece of news. It is a relief to know that she is okay, after having seen the incident on TV.

Of course, it was an unfortunate situation. On one hand, because she is confined to a wheelchair and she cannot do anything she has no control, but it is lucky that she wasn't harmed in that incident.

Before we conclude the session for this evening, I would like to thank everyone for paying very good attention. Let us again spend a few moments in meditation and bring our mind inwards and focus on the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. While we are chanting the mantra and hearing the sound, we place our full attention and focus just on that sound itself and try not to let our mind wander off and be distracted with other thoughts or objects. When the recitation subsides, we can maintain that awareness and focus for a few moments and that will suffice for our meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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