
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 can sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. While we adopt a comfortable, relaxed posture, we also need to have a proper state of mind, otherwise our meditation will not be effective. If we don't do anything about our distracted state of mind and just leave it to run its natural course, then it won't be calm and settled. I personally feel that having a relaxed and clear state of mind is essential for our wellbeing.

Everyday life problems are bound to be experienced due to internal and external conditions. We cannot control the whole situation around us, so there are definitely bound to be some problems that arise. However, if our mind is already in a calm and relaxed state then we will be able to handle problems much more effectively within a calm and relaxed state of mind. On the other hand, if our mind is already agitated and disturbed then even with the slightest mishap or difficult condition, our mind can flare up and end up making the situation much worse for ourselves.

So when a problem or difficulty arises due to external circumstances, then we need to accept and endure it with a calm and relaxed state of mind. We will be able to function properly because our mind is in a clear and calm state. However, when problems and difficulties arise and the mind is already agitated, then it is as if we are adding extra problems to our already agitated and unsettled mind. We need to pay attention to this. We can work towards training our mind to be more calm and relaxed, which will have positive effect on us. Willingly accepting a problem is one of the best ways to solve the problem. So we need to overcome the problem by accepting it. If the problem overwhelms us to the point where our mind becomes weighed down, then that can lead to a depressed state of mind or having low self-esteem, which can then take root within us. These states of mind make it difficult for us to function in society and live a normal life.

When we adopt methods and techniques that can help us to generate a clear and relaxed state of mind that leads to sound intelligence or wisdom. This discriminating wisdom is the main tool that assists us in making the right decisions in life. These positive mental qualities protect us and alleviate many problems. This is not something beyond our reach. We have the potential and ability to develop these positive states of mind.

However, we need to have the right conditions in order to be able to develop positive states of mind. We also need to overcome any opposing factors such as a distracted mind.

Of course you can check to whether this is true for yourself or not. I find that the both the conditions for and the opposing factors against having a clear and relaxed state of mind are not external but internal. The inner conditions for having a clear and relaxed state of mind are directly related to having a focused mind. A focused mind contributes to a clear and relaxed state of mind. Opposing factors include a mind that is distracted with attachment and trivia. When the mind is completely disturbed and turns towards external distractions, then that causes the mind to be agitated and unclear. Is there any method to develop a focused mind? This where the meditation technique comes in. Meditation is one of the most tried and tested techniques that help develop a focused mind. So we all need to meditate.

Otherwise we will have a distracted mind that completely focuses on external trivia. This impacts on our intelligence or wisdom to make the right decisions in our life. A completely distracted mind has no discernment, so it cannot clearly make a right decision, primarily because the mind goes in every direction. This is where doubts arise: 'Should I do this, should I do that. Is this better or that better?' The literal term for 'doubt' in Tibetan is the mind that has qualms in two directions. Doubt is a state of mind that is not able to make a choice or decision. To reverse that situation so that the mind is clear and can make a decision, we can meditate by focussing on a particular object. We train the mind to single-pointedly focus on the object and as we become more familiar with that technique, the mind naturally becomes more steady, calm and relaxed and creates the space for wisdom to emerge. As our wisdom increases, we begin to make more appropriate decisions in our life. It is good for those who don't have much familiarity of the meditation technique to have a clear understanding of how to apply the meditation technique.

As we gain more intelligence and wisdom, our ability to make good judgements also increases. Doubt obstructs us from making good choices. It is a state of mind that is not sure which path to follow or which direction to take. An analogy used in our Tibetan tradition to illustrate doubt is that it is like a two-pronged needle that is useless for stitching. Similarly, if we have doubts, if we are unable to make a decision and are constantly vacillating between options, then we are not able to accomplish what we need to accomplish. When we meditate, we need to set our mind in the right state of mind, that is, a mind that temporarily lets go of all thoughts and distractions, particularly in relation to external objects, whether they are positive or negative. We will not allow any of that to distract our mind. Let go of all forms and all kinds of objects and bring our mind to settle within. This is important for our meditation. We need to ensure that we have a mind that can distance itself from external distractions to allow us to focus within. If we pay attention we will notice that the main cause of distress in our mind is when it is completely immersed in external distractions.

If we withdraw from external distractions and place our attention and focus on an inner object, then we will experience mental relief and relaxation. It is like a rest for the mind, which is otherwise constantly busy. The object

we focus on is our breath. Place your full attention and focus on the breath for the next few minutes.

[meditation]

This practical approach is essential if you want to achieve any significant result from the practice of meditation. Don't, however, assume that you can easily focus inwardly and achieve a clear mind in a few days or even a few weeks. If you don't have a clear and relaxed mind after meditating for a few weeks, don't give up. Realistically, we cannot expect our mind to be in a clear and focused state after a few weeks or even a few months, when the reality is our mind has been so used to being completely distracted for years and years. From around ten years of age, we start to have more and more opinions, and likes and dislikes, and unfulfilled needs, and this is where the real distractions in our life begin. Throughout our lives, we get immersed into more and more distractions. Our mind is always distracted, almost twenty-four hours a day until we go to sleep. The younger generation have more of a chance to get rid of a distracted state of mind, but for those who have reached their 40s, it is more difficult because they have spent more than twenty years in the rut of being distracted.

However, we all have the potential to free ourselves from distractions. People who have reached the late 60s and even 70s have confided to me that meditation has really helped their mind. But they do wish they found meditation earlier in their life. Nevertheless, having adopted this meditation technique sincerely they have found great benefit and solace from it. They find it useful and positive transformations have occurred in their life. Meditation can definitely benefit anyone at any stage of their life.

The main point is that we need to meditate regularly if we want to overcome our normal distracted mind and reach a clear and calm state of mind.

People tell me that it is difficult to bring their mind inwards. Some young people tell me that their parents had pushed them so hard in trying set up lofty achievement goals. But these goals made them feel pressured and stressed. These goals are completely focused outwards and have in some cases stopped people from looking inwards. This ruins any possibility of focussing the mind inwards. Meditation gives genuine relief to people who have not gained any fulfilment in their lives or who are completely immersed in and overwhelmed with the demands, dramas and distractions of everyday life.

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

4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1.2.2.6. The measure of having developed great compassion

Now, to the particular point in the text we are on, which describes great compassion. We have reached the outline that presents the measure of having developed great compassion.

The text that we are studying, the *Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*, quotes from the great master Kamalashila's text *Stages of Meditation* which gives the measure for the development of compassion:

When you spontaneously feel compassion which has the subjective wish to completely eliminate the sufferings of all living beings—just like a mother's wish to remove her dear child's unhappiness—then your compassion is complete and is therefore called great compassion.

A mother's wish to remove the suffering of her precious child is a spontaneous one. A mother would go to any extent to relieve any kind of discomfort of the child. When I see how mothers take care of their children, it is truly remarkable and amazing the extent that they exert themselves in caring for their child. As we say in Tibetan tradition, the mother looks with compassion as she holds her dear child in loving and caring arms. This spontaneity is true for anyone who has experienced or seen mothers take care of their children. So, just like a mother who needs no reason nor has to think about why they care for their child—it is natural and spontaneous, we have developed genuine compassion when we have that similar spontaneous and natural compassion towards others.

The emphasis here is that great compassion is when we spontaneously feel compassion, which is the wish to completely eliminate the suffering of all beings. When great compassion is developed then within our mental continuum, we will have unbiased compassion, which does not discriminate and is felt equally to all. When that wish to free others from misery and suffering arises spontaneously within us, then as the quote from the text explains here, 'then your compassion is complete and is therefore called great compassion'. It is at this point that our compassion becomes what is known from the text as 'great compassion' because it extends to all beings.

Lama Tsong Khapa explains the quote:

Here Kamalashila says that when you spontaneously feel compassion for all beings commensurate with a mother's compassion for her very dear and small suffering child, then you have completely perfected great compassion. Through this, understand the measure for the development of great love as well.

We can definitely generate great compassion within ourselves by cultivating an attitude of unbiased compassion.

The text goes further explaining more detail about great compassion. So we can leave that for our next session. However, just to reflect on the point again. We need to

recognise that a sense of great love and compassion is most precious, and a most valuable asset. The most valuable asset we have within us is that seed of love and compassion, which we all have. If we can start to pay attention and cultivate it, we become gentler and kinder. Developing the supreme quality of great compassion not only has a positive effect on others but also our own mind becomes genuinely happier and more content. The value of love and compassion is unequalled.

Examples of mothers caring for their young child and displaying spontaneous love and compassion can also serve as a reminder and appreciation of the kindness of our own parents, particularly our mother. His Holiness Dalai Lama has also mentioned that when he looks around he seems to notice that the mother goes a little bit further in caring for the children. The Dalai Lama uses examples in his teachings from his own observations. As he related, once when he was flying on a long distance flight, in business class, there was a young couple with two very young children. The younger toddler went to sleep but the older one started to become agitated and ran around and was not settled at all. It was the mother that kept going after him and looking after him, trying to bring him back and settle him down. Meanwhile the father was lying down and sleeping. The mother spent all night trying to pacify the child. The next morning, the Dalai Lama noticed that the mother had dark rings under her eyes, deprived of sleep. The Dalai Lama observes and uses everyday life situations to learn from and applies as realistic examples to emphasise his points.

Thank you all for paying such good attention this evening.

Before we conclude this session for the evening, we can take the opportunity to spend a few minutes in meditation. We can focus the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra, we can place our full attention and focus just on that sound by withdrawing our attention from all other distractions. Focus on the sound, and then when the recitation subsides, just maintain your awareness on the residue of the sound. That in itself becomes a significant meditation practice.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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