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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation and to do that we sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. Whilst we adopt a comfortable, relaxed posture it is important we also ensure that our mind is stable and settled, because it is the mind that is doing the meditation. The reason why we need to pay attention to the mind specifically is because it seems that it is the mind that causes our physical posture to be either relaxed or agitated. It is really the mind that initiates that, so it is worthwhile paying attention to the state of our mind.

In simple terms, when we think about what initiates our actions—physical and verbal or speech—we will see that it is the mind. It is as if the mind is the master and when it commands the physical body to do something that's when we take physical action. When the mind commands certain kind of speech that's when we engage in verbal action. So we can quickly see that our physical action and speech follow the intentions in our mind.

We also need to consider that when our physical actions and speech are positive they contribute to our and others' wellbeing. But when our physical actions or speech is negative it harms us and others as well. That is something we really need to recognise.

We can recognise for ourselves that certain physical actions or speech are negative and harm us or others. These are actions or gestures that we do not appreciate ourselves. If we can avoid engaging in harmful physical actions and speech, we would want to do that. Since we don't voluntarily wish to have negative actions and speech we need to ensure that our mind is in a positive state. It is a negative mind that initiates our negative actions and speech. To address our negative actions and speech we need go to their source, the mind, as it is the mind that commands our actions and speech. As we all appreciate physical actions and speech that contribute to our wellbeing and the wellbeing of others, if we ensure that our mind is in a positive state then that will ensure that our physical actions and speech will also be positive.

It is ironic, when we think about it, that while we should be in control of our mind since we are the owners of our body and mind, it is actually the opposite. It is as if the mind has overpowered us and we, as individuals, become victims of the negative thoughts and attitudes that arise in our mind. When we realise that our mind is taking controlling over us, we need to take the initiative to reverse that and restore the right order of things. As we are the one's who possess our mind, we rightly need to be in control of it. That is something we need to be aware of.

When we have control over our mind we will be able to decide not to follow certain negative attitudes and will not allow ourselves to be influenced by negative states of mind. That is the significance of being in control of one's mind.

More specifically, control here means to subdue one's mind. Thus, when we have a subdued mind we are definitely in control of our state of mind and that means that negative states of mind will not have the upper hand and be the dominant force that makes decisions for us. These are points for us to consider carefully. There are a lot of ways of looking at how this is possible and significant.

Furthermore, when we gain control over our state of mind and can recognise what is going on in our mind, we will be able to immediately identify when negatives state of mind arise. We will be able to identify them and know that these states of mind influence us in a negative way to engage in negative actions. By the mere fact of recognising and identifying these negative states of mind when they manifest, we will be able to be very cautious and remind ourselves, 'I will not follow that negative state of mind.' When we are free from the dominance or control of negative states of mind then we are protected from it.

When we have been able to significantly apply this method to subdue our mind then, as a natural consequence, our mind should be in a happier and more joyful state. The significance of being in a happy state of mind is that this will then automatically prevent oneself from engaging in an inappropriate actions or speech. This is, again, something we can establish from our own experience. Normally we may not pay attention to the connection between our state of mind and our actions, but if we were to pay close attention we would notice for ourselves that it is when we are unhappy that we do or say things that are hurtful, harmful and inappropriate. When the mind is unsettled and not happy we are more likely to engage in inappropriate action. Whereas when the mind is settled, happy and joyful there is not much reason for one to say inappropriate things. Because we are in a happy state of mind our interactions with others will naturally be more appealing, gentler and nicer. This is something we can recognise for ourselves.

When we see this for ourselves from our own experiences, we will then be able to acknowledge the fact that being happy or unhappy is very much related to the state of our mind. While external circumstances such as having good food or joyful times may have some influence or connection to our being happy or unhappy, when we really look at it we can see that it is our state of mind that determines whether we are feeling happy or not. So this is a point for us to actually acknowledge.

If we are able to acknowledge that a subdued mind results in a happier calmer and settled state of mind then the question arises, 'How do we subdue our mind? What are the techniques or methods?' This is where the meditation technique comes in. Amongst all the various methods and techniques, meditation is said to be the best method for helping to subdue the mind.

I am sharing this with you based on some experience I have gained from my own practice in trying to meditate. I have seen that the effort that I have put in, and the time I have spent meditating, have definitely had a positive effect, causing my mind to become more subdued, happier and more joyful. This is not something I am relating to you just based on having read it in textbooks, but rather from experience that I have gained myself. Because it is based on my personal experience I feel quite confident in sharing it with you. I relate these points again and again, to convey to you that this is true; that it is based on fact and that there is a positive effect from meditation.

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As I have shared from my own experience, I personally feel that a happy state of mind is the most valuable possession that one can have. That is why I emphasise again and again that one's most valuable asset is a happy state of mind and losing one's happy state of mind would be one's greatest loss. There may be some loss in losing external things that we have, material possessions and so forth, but that is not really a great loss in comparison to losing a happy and joyful state of mind, which is invaluable for our wellbeing. So, applying a method for protecting a happy and joyful state that we have now and further expanding and increasing that happiness is most significant.

While this is the most important element for our wellbeing, we don't seem to naturally give it much consideration. We don't think much about how to protect the happiness in our mind and what is the best method to secure that happiness. Rather we seem to be preoccupied with how to maintain our relationships with others; such as how to keep our boyfriend or girlfriend. We put so much time, energy money, wealth, possessions into trying to protect things which are transient, while we seem to fail to put time and energy into protecting our most important asset, our happy state of mind.

Even if, due to unforeseen circumstances, we lose our external friends, if we have been able to secure and maintain a happy state of mind, then that being the greatest companion, we will not be completely lost. While we may have lost external friends, our most valuable inner friend will not forsake us.

I emphasised in our session last week the significance of the interaction or inter-connection between the subject and the object. In fact a lot of our experiences of happiness or unhappiness, feelings and emotions are very much related to the inter-connection between subject and object. Our mind is affected by how it holds onto an object, what kind of object it chooses to focus on and how that object affects one. As we begin to see and understand the interconnection between subject—our mind—and the objects that it focuses on, we will begin to understand the interconnection between various aspects of our life; the connection between ourselves and the outside world; the connection between ourselves and others and, in fact, how everything is actually interconnected. One of the most profound, fundamental teachings in Buddhism is the interconnectedness of all phenomena. In fact, this is something that even scientists are now beginning to become really interested in. Through their own investigations they are beginning to see that things are actually interconnected. So this teaching is not just an hypothesis or mere imagination from a religious point of view. Scientists using instruments and measurements are starting to see that this is the reality and it is true that things are interconnected. This is something that they are beginning to be quite fascinated with and they are finding out more and more about this truth and reality.

The fundamental reality of the interconnectedness of ourselves and others and the world around us, is something that we need to begin to understand and appreciate. In relation to the matter of subject and object, our negative thoughts, emotions and feelings are very much related to the object that we are focusing on. A negative object induces certain kinds of negative feelings, thoughts and states of mind to arise. When we choose an appropriate meditation object then, because the object itself is a virtuous object it does not cause negativities to arise in the mind. The more we familiarise ourselves with the object and focus on it, the more the mind becomes settled and calm. That is how we can say, scientifically, that meditation practice protects the

mind from negativity. That is why familiarisation is needed, because it helps to have a positive effect on the mind. I have explained this last week as well, but this is something I like to emphasise because of its importance.

To emphasise the point again, we gain a positive effect from meditation by focusing on an appropriate, virtuous or neutral object that does not cause the mind to become agitated, or cause negative emotions to arise. It would be good to look into how this works so that we can apply that understanding in other aspects of our life in any situation. The meditation technique involves focussing on a chosen object. If we are able to apply this technique effectively and focus on the meditation object then, because we have stopped the connection between our minds and objects of distraction, our mind will naturally come calmer and more settled.

So, we can see that when the connection with an object that cause us distress is severed or stopped, we experience relief from the negative emotions and thoughts that would otherwise arise. Using that as an example, what I would try to emphasise here is the very significant point that the understanding and learning that we can gain from this can then be applied to other aspects of our life. For example, we can apply this knowledge to our connection with another person such as a partner or someone we have a relationship with. While that relationship would initially have been based on mutual caring and wanting to be together, due to various reasons conflict and disputes might start to arise to the point where one completely wants to sever the connection with the other. One might even go to court in an attempt to try to stop every connection possible with this other person, so that you don't have to deal with them ever again. While the physical connection might have stopped the reason one may still feel distressed afterwards is because the mental connection is still there. One's mind is still obsessed and that is what causes distress. Even after the settlement and after the physical connection has stopped, because there is still a connection on the mental level, and one is still obsessed, it causes one to be distressed and unsettled. One has not severed the connection on the mental level. Therefore, because there is still a connection with the object, one is still disturbed and affected by it.

If one were to really sever the connection that would mean going beyond severing the physical connection. It would involve one mentally saying, 'I am not going to be obsessed with this object anymore. I am not going to have any connection that is based on misunderstanding or attachment or anger. All of that has completely stopped with the other person, and I am not going to have any connection in that way.' When one mentally decides to sever the connection then, from that moment, one will not be affected negatively and it will not cause one pain. If one can truly acknowledge that, then even if one has to separate, it will not cause the pain and distress that seems to be quite prevalent in this society.

So someone who has paid significant attention to meditation and applied the technique will not experience as much distress in situations where they break up, or end a relationship. That is the point I am trying to make. On the contrary, they may feel mentally relieved that they have severed that connection rather than feeling pain and distress. That is a significant achievement.

We have looked at the significance of meditation, the way the meditation technique works, and the benefits of practice.

We can now apply the next few minutes in actual meditation. The object we choose to focus on in our meditation here is our breath. The teachings explain that our object or focus should be our natural breathing; this means the natural rhythm of our breathing, which is free from any effort or labour. In its natural state, breathing is not laboured and is free from sound. The main thing is to try to find the balance between the natural in-breath and out-breath and keep one's attention and focus on the breath itself and nothing else. Placing our full attention and focus on the breath in this way, we will spend the next few minutes in meditation.

As I have mentioned previously, to develop concentration on the breath itself, the breath needs to be in a calm, natural, effortless state. One may also use the breath in the *tong-len* i.e. giving and taking, meditation practice. When one uses the breath as a means to do that practice one has to breathe in out forcefully as the technique itself requires that. So then we can have sound, breathing out forcefully and breathing in forcefully. But that is not the technique that we adopt now. *(Pause for meditation)*

It is good to try to consider the usefulness and significance of the meditation technique that we have attempted in our short session now. It is something good to keep in mind and try to contemplate.

Does anyone have a question?

*Question:* When you mentioned that we need to have a happy state of mind, what are you actually referring to? Is having a happy state of mind the same as emotionally feeling happy?

*Answer:* The way that this is explained in Buddhist psychology is that wherever there is a state of mind or consciousness, there is a feeling associated with that mind. Feelings are classified as one of three types, pleasant, unpleasant or neutral. The three types of feelings are associated with a consciousness or mind but are not a mind themselves. A consciousness or state of mind can be associated with one of the three feelings at any time.

When the mind or consciousness is associated with pleasant feeling then it is identified as being a happy state of mind. It is not that the mind itself is one with happiness but it is a happy state of mind because of the pleasant feeling at that time. So when we talk about a happy person we are not saying that the person themselves is happiness. When we call someone 'a happy person' it is because they are in a joyful and happy state, right? It doesn't mean that the person themselves is happiness. The point here is the connection between the feeling and the state of mind that we then call either a happy state of mind or an unhappy state of mind. So when we talk about an unhappy state of mind it is because an unpleasant feeling is prevalent. When an unpleasant feeling becomes predominant, causing one to feel agitated, that would be an unhappy state of mind.

This also reminds me of a time when the Dalai Lama was visiting and there was a seminar taking place in Sydney about Happiness. An aboriginal speaker at the seminar said, 'I don't know how to define happiness. I don't know what happiness is.' *(Geshe-la chuckling)* I think he was speaking for many when he said, 'I don't know what happiness is. What is happiness?' I guess many people have that same qualm about happiness.

If happiness is presented as if it is just a state of mind then it might be hard to identify what it really is. But Buddhist

psychology specifically explains that there are unpleasant, pleasant and neutral feelings and it is in relation to these feelings you can identify yourself as being happy or unhappy. A state of mind or consciousness is said to be associated with five mental states that are always present. These are feeling, discrimination, intention, mental engagement and contact. I have explained this in detail previously.

*Question:* In our society here in the West, we are obsessed with being busy. We usually greet each other by asking, 'Are you busy?' which seems to promote a busy lifestyle. What is the manner of greeting where you come from?

*Answer:* Of course there is a connection between a busy lifestyle and a distressed state of mind. That comes through a cause and effect sequence that I have mentioned previously. There is definitely a relationship there. In relation to your question about how we greet each other, even in remote places in Tibet sometimes there is form of greetings where we say, 'Are you busy today?' The general responses are, 'Oh, I am not too busy. I am relaxed.' It is a form of greeting sometimes; whether it is encouraging each other to be busy, I am not sure.

Of course here when you say, 'I have got a job', that also seem to imply that I am busy and thus I am doing something. Whereas when someone says, 'I don't have a job.' it implies that they must be sitting around and not have much to do. *(laughter)*

While it may seem that one could be relaxed and when one does not have a job and have more leisure time, I have heard about cases where people have retired but after a while of not working their mind is still busy and they can't sit still. They are not enjoying their life anymore and I have heard they go back to work. They have commented later that they feel more useful and more productive when they are working. When they have nothing to do they feel more distressed.

So it seems in our situation that where people have a good, secure job they complain that they are not really happy and they wish they had more time. But when the time for retirement comes where they should be able to enjoy life, they start to feel unhappy because they don't have a job and they begin to feel restless. *(laughter)*.

*Question:* I have heard in Buddhist teachings that the mind pervades the body, but I was wondering if there is a specific place in the body where the mind resides predominantly? The reason I ask this, is because here in the West many people suffer from mental illness and I was wondering if there is a specific area in the body that we could work on healing to help the mind to become healed?

*Answer:* As you have mentioned, it is true that Buddhism explains that the mind pervades the body. One indication of this is the fact that whenever you pinch any part of the body you have a feeling of pain. It is the mind that is experiencing the pain and the fact that you feel pain wherever you are pinched shows the mind pervades all parts of the body. Of course if the consciousness leaves the body then no part of the body will have any feeling or sensation. Now we need to be clear about where the mind is located. Locating it in a specific part of body is not easy to do.

To answer your question, trying to locate a certain part of the body where the mind is located and trying to heal that or work with that may be something that is not realistic from the Buddhist point of view. But what is realistic and what is

manageable is to work on the mind itself, such as changing the attitudes in one's mind and understanding the connection between the mind and what it focuses on, and choosing the right objects to focus on; also understanding how the mind is affected by what it is preoccupied with. That understanding and changing one's focus is within one's ability and one is capable of doing that. Most individuals have the capacity to change their mind or attitudes by changing the things they focus on. This is the way that one can better one's mental state or mental health. Of course, that technique will help whoever has it. So you might help to present that technique.

Again, the interconnection between the mind and the object that is focused on, and the effect that that has on the individual who possesses that mind is really significant. If we were to pay attention we would see that when the mind focuses on something then, dependent on what it is focusing on, that induces a feeling within oneself of being happy, sad or angry and so forth. So that connection between the mind and the object that one is focusing on is definitely there.

There are apparently quite a number of people in the older generation who are making comments about how things have changed so rapidly in the world that it seems to have affected the psyche of people. They have said that they are concerned for the younger generation because things were much simpler in the past. Because of the simpleness of life then things were much easier to deal with. But now there are so many stimuli and so much going on outside that the older generation is saying that they feel for the sanity or mental state of the younger generation.

The classification of the mind or consciousness in Buddhism is really quite vast. Within the six primary consciousnesses there is the one that is called the body consciousness. It is that body consciousness that pervades the body. The primary function of the body consciousness is to experience the pleasant or unpleasant feelings in relation to physical contact with things. The feeling that is experienced through the body consciousness, pleasant or unpleasant, has an effect on the mental consciousness as well. So it is all connected back to the mental consciousness as the experiencer. And so as long as there is a body, and physical consciousness pervades the body, there is an effect upon the mind or mental consciousness of the individual who possesses the mental consciousness. But when the body consciousness ceases and departs from the physical body, then there is no connection anymore. That is how it is explained.

We can explain a little bit more about how the consciousness functions to perceive and experience objects. In relation to the colour of this book, what identifies the colour of the material of the book cover would be the eye consciousness. The eye consciousness perceives the cover of the book and identifies it as being yellow. So it is the eye consciousness that identifies it as yellow. But the eye consciousness does not know whether it is rough or smooth. The roughness or smoothness of the book cover is identified by body consciousness. As soon as you touch that to your body you feel whether it is rough or smooth and so forth. So that's how the body consciousness functions.

The five sense objects are form, sound, smell, taste and tangible objects. These are the main objects that we interact with. There are five sense consciousnesses that perceive the five sense objects. Our five sense consciousnesses perceive these five sense objects and sometimes perceive them as appealing, and if they are appealing and attractive,

attachment arises in relation to the five sense objects. If we were to perceive any of the five sense objects to be unappealing, that can cause agitation or anger to arise in the mind. This is how we interact and function with the five sense objects.

The taste consciousness is said to be located on the tongue. So it is the tongue where the taste consciousness is located, and whether food is tasty or not is experienced through the tongue, and no other body part. (*Geshe-la laughing*). It is further explained that the taste buds, the actual taste consciousness, are located more on the rim of the tongue. So that is the way we gain the sensation, the feeling, of whether our food has a pleasant or unpleasant taste. If you were to experiment and put something in the middle of the tongue you will not be able to taste whether it is sweet or not. It is only when it goes to the edge of the tongue that we can actually discern this (*Geshe-la laughing*).

So understanding how the consciousness functions, as explained by Buddhist psychology, is actually quite useful. The significant thing to understand is that there is definitely, as explained in Buddhist psychology and Buddhist teaching in general, a very predominant connection between the mind and the body. The body itself is made out of the four elements. So therefore the mind, the body and the four elements within our body all have an interconnected relationship. We can also see and experience this for ourselves. When the mind is calm and restful and happy, the physical body also seems to be relaxed and in a healthier state. Whereas when we have lots of thing going on in the mind and feel very tense and stressed we start feeling aches and pains in our body. The shoulders and neck especially, start to feel very tense.

There is a particular term for the situation where a bit of pain causes a sense of joy (*Geshe-la chuckling*) and happiness within us. There is a particular term in Tibetan for causing a bit of pain that actually makes you feel relieved and good. It is something that is painful but when you go further and cause more pain it seems to bring satisfaction to the mind. An example of that would be liking very spicy, hot chillies. Hot chillies can be quite painful and unpleasant, but nevertheless there are those who are addicted to chilli and eat quite a bit of chilli.

Thank you for the questions, they were very good. Thank you also for listening with great attention. Thank you very much. We can also see here that our sense of pleasantness or joy experienced in this sort of gathering is very much related to the interconnection between ourselves.

Before we end the session for the evening, let us again take the opportunity to engage in some meditation for a few minutes. This time the object that we focus on is the sound of the mantra being recited. As we hear the sound of the mantra we try to place our full attention and focus on the actual sound of the mantra. When the recitation subsides, we focus on the residue of the nice feeling that we may have gained and try to just maintain an awareness of that pleasant sensation for a while. That, in itself, will suffice for the meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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