
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual we can spend some time in meditation and so we adopt a comfortable, relaxed posture. It has become a tradition to first announce having a relaxed body, the physical posture for meditation, but in fact, without a relaxed mind, we cannot have a genuinely relaxed body. So it actually seems that one should first have a relaxed state of mind and then the body will become relaxed.

As regularly explained meditation can be understood succinctly as the method to familiarise and focus the mind on a positive object. That is what meditation actually connotes.

When we intentionally adopt a technique of familiarising our mind with a positive state, the mind will naturally settle down. As consequence the person who possesses that mind will experience wellbeing and a genuine sense of tranquillity. That is the benefit for the individual who meditates.

If our task was only familiarising our mind with being in a positive state, and there were no opposing factors, our task would be quite easy and we could achieve the result of wellbeing quite rapidly. But unfortunately it is not just a matter of familiarising our mind with being in a positive state; we also need to act at the same time to oppose negative states of mind which afflict us. In fact because of our familiarity with the negative states of mind they are much more prevalent. They seemingly have the upper hand, and we appear to be dominated by them. They are the cause of so much turmoil and unrest within us. The negative states of mind are ultimately the cause of all our failings, the harm and troubles we experience, as well as the reason why we cause troubles for others. We can see in the world at this time the extent of the results of the negative states of mind, which are all the conflicts and troubles. The consequences of the negative states of mind are very prevalent. We can definitely recognise that in a wide scale, but the troubles one experiences are also the result of the negative states of mind within oneself.

As we gain more experience in familiarising ourselves with positive states of mind and notice the positive consequences of that, we will begin to notice for ourselves the ill effects of the negative states of mind too. That awareness and understanding actually induces a great intelligence within us and we derive a great sense of wisdom from that. As humans we have a natural inborn ability to use our intelligence to weigh the pros and cons, the negative and the positive and we need to use that as a means to achieve the wellbeing and the positive results for ourselves. Whenever there is a choice we would all naturally prefer to be in a calm, positive state of mind,

rather than in turmoil, just as we all naturally want to be considered as a good person rather than a bad one. So, positive qualities are something that we all relate to and wish for ourselves.

The way to obtain that doesn't come about randomly; rather we need to use our intelligence and wisdom to further take upon ourselves this training and practice. This is something that is worthwhile for us to consider. So in this way we analyse our own states of mind, and further investigate the causes of our turmoil, as well as the causes for our wellbeing. A consequence of that investigation is that we gain a clear understanding that there are certain states of mind within our self that are positive and conducive for our wellbeing and there are certain states of mind that as soon as they manifest, and for as long as they are prevalent, cause us turmoil. This is something we can begin to recognise for ourselves.

In each day of our life we can intentionally be aware of what's going within our own state of mind, being wary of the negative states and not harbouring them. In this way, as we investigate, we will find that regardless of the external situation we are able to protect our mind and maintain a good composure. This is something that we need to consider.

All of this is in relation to the significance of the practice of meditation. As we gain more familiarity with this practice we begin to see that we have the capacity to protect our own mind. We can then stop the self-deception and really begin to trust ourselves. I mention this because there seem to be many who don't even trust themselves, let alone others. Having recognised the potential within oneself and having developed those good qualities, one would then begin to develop that real self-trust, and thus one will not deceive oneself.

Giving the negative states of mind the upper hand is what really deceives us. We fall victim to our own negative states of mind if we don't recognise them and start putting our trust in them. When we begin to see the negative states of mind, what we call the delusions, for what they really are, we won't fall under their influence and at the same time we recognise the positive qualities which are conducive for our wellbeing. When we put trust in our own positive qualities we avoid self-deception. And so we try to further develop the qualities and begin to slowly eliminate the negative states of mind. As the positive qualities get the upper hand, becoming more prevalent, we will be able to make the right decisions and have more direction in our life.

Similarly in our relationships with others, we can often be easily influenced and deceived. If we are not able to really recognise the faults in others then it is easier for us to be influenced by them. When we are keen to protect our wellbeing, then in relation to others we would weigh their faults and qualities. When we begin to see their qualities are more prevalent, then that is when, despite some faults, we can develop trust in them. This is a significant point because if our relationship with others is based on mere attraction, what we call attachment, then one needs to be very careful, because the mind of attachment itself does not have the ability to distinguish between faults and qualities. In that situation one must be

very mindful to not entirely trust others. That is something we need to recognise.

Attachment is said to overpower the mind, covering up the faults of others, so that we only tend to see the qualities; everything seems to be good and appealing. So it is actually deceiving our own mind. That is what attachment does.

With anger it is the opposite. When our mind is infected with strong anger, then it actually covers any good qualities that the other may have and one focuses only on the negative. And the more you see the faults of the other, the more you find reason to become angry with them.

We definitely need to be mindful of this, and really pay attention to how our mind works. Even scientists are now taking a keen interest in further investigating how we perceive things in relation to different states of mind or emotions that arise, such as the projections of the mind. These scientists are now beginning to make a distinction between a mere desire or wish and attachment, whereas before they might have seen them as the same. Scientists seem to take an empirical stance on investigation and go into the subtlest detail. For example at this stage they might have come to find the subtlest sub-atomic particle and yet they go further than that. It is really quite remarkable how they do that research.

I have mentioned this regularly, but we cannot be reminded enough, that whatever the activity we wish to engage in, it is really important that we first analyse it and check out the pros and cons. The first thing to check is that even though the activity is still something we may desire to do, are we able to do it or not? Do we have the capacity to engage in that activity? When we come to see that we have the capacity, the next thing is to look at it whether there would be a good outcome or not.

This is how those of intelligent and those of dull mental faculties are distinguished in Buddhist teachings. A person with an intelligent faculty would be defined as someone who does not accept things immediately, but uses their reasoning and logic to investigate thoroughly whether something is acceptable or not. Whereas a person with dull faculties is said to be a little bit gullible, not doing much investigation and easily accepting whatever they are presented with.

When someone with an intelligent faculty decides to take upon a task, they would do so with a strong determination, having investigated and analysed the feasibility, the possibility of good results and having weighed all the pros and cons, and it is because of this that they are more likely to see it through. It is through one's own investigation and reasoning that one comes to the conclusion, rather than just because others say so. If one takes upon a task because of what others say, then it is quite likely that upon encountering challenges, one might give up. Therefore making a resolution based on intelligence is the key point.

Not doing a thorough investigation or making a strong resolution creates a lot of turmoil within society. We see that there are certain individuals who in the first month say, 'I am following this team or I am following them', and then by the next month they have changed and say,

'No I am going to follow another team now', based on someone else's suggestion.

Thus to summarise the essential point in relation to the practice of meditation, the significance of adopting this meditation technique is that we come to realise the good potential within ourselves. We all have positive states of mind, and the meditation practice is none other than a technique to further develop those positive states. As we develop these, we experience the positive results, such as a sense of wellbeing, a more genuine sense of peace and tranquillity, good judgement in whatever we engage in and good relationships with others. They would be the positive results from developing a positive state of mind and thus we will acquire a calm, relaxed, happy mind; thus we feel the sense of wellbeing.

In contrast to that we need to recognise that we all have negative states of mind or attitudes which we need to identify and recognise the consequences of. As mentioned previously, the negative consequence is the turmoil that we experience as a result of harbouring negative states of mind. When things go wrong we find that we are unable to tolerate that and we start to experience all sorts of unhappy feelings, unable to be patient. And so we start to feel more and more agitated, and when we are left alone we may become frustrated and depressed, feeling alienated from others and not wanting to associate or engage with them.

And so it is in this way that we start to become more and more alienated, dwelling in our own misery and distressed state of mind. This is none other than the result of harbouring negative states of mind and attitudes, while not recognising or doing anything to overcome them. So the meditation practice helps us to recognise and develop the positive states of mind, as well as recognising and overcoming the negative ones. This is really the essential point that I share with you and I feel it would be of a great significance if you can remember and implement this in your life.

We need to take a real initiative to develop ourselves in this way, cultivating and further developing the positive states of mind and slowly distancing and ridding ourselves of the negative ones. When we earnestly take up this task and really implement it, we become naturally gentler, have a more appealing demeanour, and will naturally gain more friends and companions. We all like to have friends and in fact having friends is really useful. Having friends is one of the means for our wellbeing, as it is nice to have the feeling of being loved and admired by many. Taking up these practices, in particular developing positive qualities, is what I would call a real inner jewel. Jewel is a metaphor for an object with which the owner can acquire whatever they wish for. When you have such a precious jewel, it is considered to be really valuable because its preciousness signifies being able to acquire whatever one wishes. So using that external analogy of a jewel, the real inner jewel is the positive qualities developed within one's own mind. And that is indeed an invaluable great jewel because, as mentioned previously, it is the cause for all of one's inner wellbeing, as well as the means to acquire good companions and so forth.

While someone may possess an actual external jewel it can still be taken away—someone could steal it. However the inner jewel is something that no one can take away as long as one protects it. It seems there is a system of putting your precious jewels in a vault in the bank, or sometimes using them as collateral. When someone possesses jewels, such as fancy earrings, necklaces, and rings made out of precious stones, they dare not wear them, they have to put them in the bank because of their value. So then you wonder how they are actually using them. Maybe they get some mental satisfaction for having these jewels even though they are not able to wear them?

The point is, that while people have to go to a great extent in trying to protect the external jewel, with the inner jewel there is no such worry. It may sound like I am boasting, but I do feel like I have an inner jewel which I carry within myself—my own happy state of mind. I may not have much more, but that is something that I do cherish; indeed everyone has the potential to acquire this inner jewel and further develop it. As we develop that inner jewel, it can actually then assist us with our sense of wellbeing, such as relieving us from pangs of loneliness, which seem to be one of the more prevalent miseries in our society.

If someone were to possess external jewels, but was lacking the inner one, then in the event that something happens to the external ones such as damage or loss, then because there is no inner jewel to protect oneself, that will cause so much misery, pain, and worry in the mind. That is also something you need to take note of.

I have previously related my own experience from the early part of my life, when I very suddenly and unexpectedly had to flee from Tibet, my home country. I had to leave everything behind, I could not take any possessions besides the clothes that I was wearing and some texts that I managed to carry. I had no money, but I was able to bring along my inner sense of joy and happiness. That is something that I did not lose because I was able to maintain and even strengthen it at that time, and to this day I feel that is what carried me through and what helped me to survive that whole situation.

During that tragic time there were guns and cannons being fired, ruins everywhere and they were destroying the external structures of houses and so forth, but I was able to escape with that inner jewel, which was not something they were able to destroy. Of course if I had been harmed physically and met with a tragic end, then I might have seemingly lost it at that time, however, I was lucky to survive and maintain my inner resources.

I might have related the story in the past about an Indian in Bombay who approached me, and said, 'Ah you seem to have a happy demeanour, very happy and joyful. Why could that be?' I said that I had lost everything, my family, possessions and country. When I first related that I had lost everything, he seemed to be really astonished as to the reason why I was happy. However eventually, without explaining much further he seemed to really understand the point. He said, 'So you are actually relaying to me that you have lost your attachment to your possessions and everything, so that is what makes you happy. Would that be correct?' He had actually taken a

very good understanding and instruction for himself from my statement, which is that if we lose something that we are very attached to it would cause a lot of mental agony and pain, whereas if we were to lose something that we are not attached to, and we can easily give it up, then there is no pain or suffering in our mind.

As mentioned previously we will now spend some time in meditation and for that purpose we re-adjust our physical posture and our state of mind. We need to have a clear, positive state of mind, with the correct focus in which we withdraw from all other forms of discursive thoughts and objects and focus 100% on the breath. Because we are placing our full attention and focus on an object that does not cause any delusion or negative state to arise in our mind, then during that period of time we will actually gain a release from the otherwise disturbing states of mind. So to that extent we can derive the great benefit from this practice. *(Pause for meditation)*

That will be sufficient for now. So we have few minutes remaining for our session, if there any questions you may raise your hand.

Question: Geshe-la, you mentioned at length about the importance of giving up attachment to material possessions, relationships etc. but how about our need for money? Don't we need a sufficient amount of money in order to survive?

Answer: Giving up attachment to something should not be misinterpreted as actually giving that thing up entirely. The main point is giving up the attachment, such as to money, relationships and so forth, because the less attachment one has, the less suffering one will experience in the event that it is actually lost. For example it is quite evident that those who have a genuine relationship based on mutual care and concern for each other, rather than based on attachment, can still maintain a good relationship even if there is a separation, instead of turning out to be sworn enemies. The main point here is that in the event of a separation, there wouldn't be much pain involved because there is not too much attachment. That is similar to anything that we possess, but having less attachment doesn't mean that we have to completely avoid it. We definitely need to use money for our livelihood and survival, but if we are too attached to it, then it will cause us extra pain.

Once when I was in Nepal I took a small, crowded minibus from Kathmandu to Boudanath. A Tibetan woman on the bus started announcing that her wallet was stolen. However immediately after, she started to say 'May it help them; whoever has taken wallet may the money actually be useful'. Someone else was relating another account which took place on a train in India, where some bandits came on board and started robbing every one of their money, jewellery and watches. Apparently there was one Indian on the train who had his savings snatched away, about ten thousand rupees. Later when the bandits were gone and people were lamenting about what had happened, he looked around and found that he had twenty rupees left in his pocket. So then he made the comment that 'God must have left me with twenty rupees'. He then used it to buy tea which he shared with everyone.

These are quite remarkable examples of individuals, who rather than becoming upset and depressed about a situation that has already happened, instead dedicate it to the benefit of whoever who took the money; which is a form of generosity. Since in your mind you are actually giving it away, and it has been taken, then it is a form of generosity. In fact the mark of being generous is when we practise generosity even in events like these; we turn them into a resource for our own practice. Money is nothing more than something which is to be used for the purpose of either oneself or others. So in the event that it is taken by others, then one can immediately think, 'May it help the others. May it be used well by the others' and it actually serves the purpose.

Those who have acquired a good sum of money and are able to utilise it in a good way, start to feel great joy thinking, 'I will be able to use the money for myself and for others'. The advice in the teachings says to developing less desire and more contentment does not mean we get rid of all the money, leaving nothing for ourselves, but rather that we develop less attachment to our possessions. The great Indian master Ashvagoshya says that there is no greater sickness or illness than discontentment. He explained further that for someone who has sufficient wealth for their survival and still wants more, never being satisfied, in fact has one of the worst kind of mental illnesses.

As I regularly emphasise, it is important that we protect our body, as well as our mind; both aspects are needed for our livelihood and development. This is regardless of whether we speak from a spiritual or a worldly point of view. In both cases we need to have sound body and mind. What helps us to have a healthy body, a good dwelling and so forth is acquired through money.

The great Indian master Shantideva also mentioned that it is in relation to this body that we are engaged in so many activities, in trying to clothe, ornament and beautify it. So because we have been so faithful and have cared so much for our body, it is now time to put it to good use by engaging in spiritual endeavour to better one's life. Thus Shantideva mentioned we need to put our body to good use to achieve the ultimate purpose. If one doesn't put it into good use then it seems that we start gaining more and more weight until we even find it hard to move.

They were showing on television the other night someone who is really obese and not able to move from the couch. This particular individual cannot even walk by themselves. So that would be the result of not having used their intelligence and just indulging in food, not thinking about the consequences. If one obsessively eats and doesn't think about the consequences then the result will be a loss of mobility. In America one individual was morbidly obese from having consumed so much food, and their partner was going out shopping for them and bringing back hamburgers and Coca cola cans for one meal. Four or five Coca cola cans, six burgers, crying and then off to hospital. Then, while the fat has been removed, it seems the flaps of skin are still there. That could be a good warning sign for ourselves of how we need to be careful. As mentioned earlier we need to be

mindful and use our intelligence prior to of the activities that we engage in. Here the consequence of strong attachment to food, and being obsessed with eating is that no matter how much is consumed, one is never satisfied and keeps eating more and more, causing obesity.

So it seems that most cases of obesity come from over-eating, never hesitating to consume food. So this again all falls into the fault of not being satisfied or content, and overly indulging in attachment.

So before we conclude for the evening, I would like to thank you all for paying such great attention, of course we seem to have side-tracked a bit, but it is all sharing one's own experiences, what we see and utilising what surrounds us for our benefit. Before we conclude for the evening we can again spend a few minutes in meditation, this time using the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra as an object to focus on. As we hear the chanting we can try to place our full focus on the sound itself. Then when the recitation subsides, one would feel a sense of tranquillity, a sense of joy in one's mind, so one can just focus on that for a few moments, and just use that object to focus on. And in that way engage in meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed by Kim Foon Looi

Edit 1 by Ven. Lozang Lhamo

Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

Edited Version

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