
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment



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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation. As I have explained previously, we adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture when we meditate.

As well as an appropriate physical posture we need to ensure that we have an appropriate state of mind and, most importantly try to generate a clear and bright state of mind when meditating.

Meditation can be understood as a training of the mind. The training of the mind here involves particularly training the mind to be in a positive state. Naturally, when we spend any significant time in training in something we become accustomed to that way of doing things. We start to adopt whatever we are trained in. Likewise, as the meditation is training our mind to be in a positive state, that is what we will eventually acquire.

Meditation can also bring about a settled mind, which replaces an otherwise unsettled mind. Even while our bodies are physically settled, our mind is constantly busy and wandering off in every direction, and it is because of our very distracted mind that we end up having a lot of problems in our life.

A positive frame of mind also protects our mind from going through the extremes of pride or laziness. If the mind is too heightened, then that will bring about a sense of pride which is a fault.

If the mind is starting to feel low and despondent, then that will lead to a state of laziness. If laziness takes over our mind, then we will not be able to achieve anything. Therefore, we need to adopt a balanced state of mind, free from the extremes of feeling either too high or too low.

This is how the training of our mind involves thorough analysis and investigation of our state of mind. When we engage in a sincere investigation of our own state of mind and its thoughts, then we can evaluate whether our mind is in a positive frame or not. If the mind is feeling too elated and proud, then we need to recognize it as a faulty state of mind. Similarly, if the mind is feeling too low and we are starting to feel despondent, we need to recognise that as a faulty state of mind as well. Being able to subdue one's mind has great benefits.

Whatever activities we engage in are preceded with an intention, with a state of mind that initiates that activity. Therefore, because all our activities are initiated by our mind, it is so important that the mind is in a settled state before engaging in any activity.

The best state of mind to be in is a subdued mind, which is a controlled state of mind. Now the question is, how do we achieve a subdued mind? This is where the meditation technique comes in. Without engaging in the practice of meditation, it would be impossible to really subdue the mind, and have complete control over it. For meditation

practice, as mentioned regularly, we need an appropriate object to focus on. The reason we need to have a meditation object to focus on is because if the mind is not anchored onto something, then it tends to go in every direction, following every whimsical thought. Thus, to maintain a quiet and still mind, it has to be anchored to an appropriate object. It has to be kept in one place. Focusing on an appropriate object keeps the focus of the mind in one place.

Our state of mind is influenced by whatever object it is focusing on. For example, if the mind is focused on an object of attachment, then the more we focus and fixate our mind on that object, the more naturally attachment will arise and increase in the mind. It is the same with an object of anger. When the mind is fixated on an object of anger, then that will naturally influence us to feel angry. The longer we remain fixated on the object of anger, the more the anger will increase, to the point where we uncontrollably express anger.

So we need to fixate our mind on an object that does not cause delusions to arise. We may first begin by choosing a neutral object, such as the breath. Focusing on that causes our mind to be in a neutral state, where we can then start to generate more positive states of mind. This is why we need to choose an object to focus on.

To re-emphasise the point, an object of attachment is inappropriate for meditation. Why? Because rather than appeasing the mind it will agitate it more, feeling excited about the object of attachment. Similarly, an object of anger is an inappropriate object to focus on in meditation. Thus choosing the correct, proper and appropriate object to focus on in meditation is crucial.

As explained previously, meditation practice is a technique that protects our mind, specifically against the influence of the delusions, such as anger and attachment. Meditation protects us, because the technique involves focusing inwards, choosing an inner object and placing our entire focus upon that inner object. When the mind is withdrawn from focusing on distracting objects of anger and attachment and the like, then the mind settles down. There is a genuine sense of ease that we begin to experience as well as a happier state of mind because the mind is not affected by delusions. We need to protect our mind so that it does not get influenced by delusions. Often how this begins is when we start to engage with an object that gives us some temporary pleasure. Thinking about our own welfare, we need to pay attention to what may be causing us temporary pleasure and enjoyment but may actually harm us in the long run. If something harms us in the long run, then we need to apply measures to protect ourselves.

As explained in earlier sessions, the appropriate object that we choose to focus on in our meditation is our own breath. We need to understand that we intentionally fix our mind on the breath, bringing our full attention on the breath itself. Again, to re-emphasise the benefit of this: fixing our mind on the breath protects our mind from wandering off to other distracting thoughts and objects. This protects our mind from being an otherwise busy and troubled mind. When the mind is completely dispersed in every direction and extremely busy, this causes the turmoil within us. Therefore, it's important to apply this technique to its fullest in order to get the most benefit from this practice. So complete full attention and focus on the breath is necessary.

Since the training of our mind in meditation is done with the intention to develop single-pointed focus, from the very

outset we need to ensure that our mind is single-pointedly focused on the breath. In order to achieve that goal of single pointed focus, from the very beginning we need to bring our full attention to the breath. If we find that our mind wanders off and we get distracted, we need to take notice of what is causing the distractions. When we sincerely investigate we will notice that our mind gets distracted with whatever we are most familiar with. If we are familiar with and accustomed to having virtuous states of mind and virtuous thoughts, then we could say that this fine, that's not bad. It is not such a big fault if our minds were to be distracted with positive thoughts. For example, while we are meditating and focusing on our breath, we might start to think about people who are suffering, and start to feel great compassion or love for them. This is a virtuous state of mind, a very positive state of mind.

Of course, for the purpose of meditation, particularly developing single-pointedness on the object, this is a distraction. However, if we are not too familiar with the positive states of mind, ordinary people like us might notice that it is mostly the delusions that distract us. Our delusions and afflictions are distracting our mind. Afflictions are a disturbed state of mind that causes destruction in our mind. There are various types of afflictions. Whatever affliction we are most familiar with, and most accustomed to, is the one that will cause the mind to be distracted. So, we need to intentionally turn away from strong afflictions and try to overcome them.

It is crucial that we identify our disturbing afflictions, our disturbed states of mind. How do they arise? We need to recognise and understand that it is this state of mind that hinders our ability to focus well: 'This disturbed state of mind hinders my ability to achieve single pointed focus. And furthermore, it is this state of mind that causes my mind to become unsettled'. Having identified that disturbing state of mind or affliction, we then target that as the enemy we need to overcome. This is a very useful analyses and self-investigation that we can apply in our daily life.

We need to bring our own awareness to what is obstructing our meditation. Even to be able to focus for five or ten minutes will let us avoid afflictions and disturbing states of mind, which causes the disturbance in our mind. Having identified this, we need to ensure that the afflictions do not cause us disturbance. In our meditation, we intentionally stop that state of mind when it arises as a distraction and we focus on the breath instead. We need to immediately recognise a disturbing state of mind and stop it. Be assertive in your meditation; resolve to not allow afflictions to disturb or influence you. And try to really keep them at bay. This is a state of mind that does not allow us to be calm and peaceful. When we can't meditate quietly and peacefully, even for five or ten minutes, this is because our mind is affected by the delusions. It is important to recognise that, because this understanding helps deflate the influence of delusions. It is just as one of the ancient great masters, Langri Tangpa, mentions in the *Eight Verses of Mind Training*. "In whatever activities I engage in, I shall always examine my mind. And whenever I notice an affliction arising, recognising that it harms myself and others, I will immediately avert it." This is exactly the type of determination needed to combat and overcome these negative states of mind.

This is the way we adopt a meditation practice. We do a stabilising meditation by focusing on our breath, but we can also periodically check our state of mind, which can be a

form of analytical meditation; where we analyse our state of mind. The ultimate purpose of being able to focus single-pointedly on any given object is to bring about a positive state of mind. We need to be able to distinguish between a positive and negative state of mind.

A negative state of mind has a negative effect on us. If we experience a disturbed state of mind, it causes destruction in our mind. These negative states of mind are called afflictions. It is in this process of slowly and gradually taking steps to sincerely recognise and analyse our own state of mind, distinguishing between the positive and negative states, that we slowly begin to see a true transformation take place. And of course, in mentioning this I am not implying that I have become a great master of meditation myself. I do make attempts and I do adopt these techniques in my daily life. So, I can assure you that I definitely find that there is benefit in these meditation techniques.

There is definitely benefit from engaging in this practice. However, what I also need to remind you of and caution you about, is that we will not get an immediate result. We should not have any expectations of having an immediate benefit from our meditation practice. Instead, we need to take the long-term approach. It will take time, but the positive results will certainly happen. The more we progress, the more our progress is certain.

As mentioned earlier, we need to have a controlled and subdued mind, because a subdued mind is a happy mind. No one else can subdue our mind but us. We are the only ones that can do it, so we need to take full responsibility. In order for us to subdue our mind, we need to know the proper technique and method. We need to recognise the opposing factors that cause the mind to be unsubdued. What are the factors, what are the states of mind that cause mental disturbance? What is it that makes our mind unsubdued? This is where we need to identify and differentiate between positive and negative states of mind.

In order to have a calm and subdued mind, we need to apply mindfulness to an object when we meditate. This is one of the main tools for meditation practice. Mindfulness allows the mind to continually remember the object and place the focus on that object. Then we periodically check whether our mind has become distracted, whether it has become influenced by delusions. This is done by a state of mind called introspection. Introspection is vigilance over our state of mind. So these are the two main tools needed in meditation.

Mindfulness is one of the most important tools during meditation. But it also has further benefits. Through the familiarity of accustoming ourselves with mindfulness during a meditation, the positive effects of being mindful continue after meditation. So we are mindful of our thoughts and actions even when we are not formally meditating.

Let us now apply the meditation technique for a few minutes. We can readjust our physical posture so we are comfortable and relaxed.

We need to remind ourselves of the state of mind we need to be in—a fresh, clear and bright state of mind. We need to also remember the purpose of the meditation. The technique itself involves withdrawing our minds from all forms of distractions. If our mind is already in a positive state and already in a calm state, then we need not put specific measures to calm our mind down or to remove our mind from distractions because it is already in a calm state. But if we find that our mind is distracted and busy, then we need

to meditate and really spend some time reminding ourselves to withdraw from all distracting thoughts and objects that come to mind. We need to completely withdraw from that. And then we can bring our focus inward and place it upon our breath. Keep full attention and focus just on the breath for the next few minutes. Try to do that with 100% resolve.

[pause for meditation]

Since we don't have too much time left for our session this evening, we could spend a few minutes for questions, good questions.

Question: When I apply introspection by analysing my state of mind and thoughts, it seems that I become more unsettled and agitated. Am I missing a point?

Answer: One needs to understand that introspection, for the purpose of meditation, is a specific type of analysis. Introspection, in the context of meditation, is a specific state of mind whose only job is to check whether our mind is focused on the chosen object or not. Analysing other thoughts is not applying introspection. Introspection is applied only when we notice that our mind has wandered off from the meditation object. Then we need to apply the antidote. There are specific antidotes to apply after introspection recognises that the mind has wandered off. But if the mind has settled on the object, in this case the breath, then we need not apply the antidotes. The only task of introspection is to detect if the mind is focused on the object or not, that's all. Whether the mind is in a disturbed state is because we have not applied introspection or because it is disturbed anyway is maybe something we need to work out for ourselves. Whereas introspection in our everyday life implies really investigating and checking what kind of thoughts and emotion arise in any given moment. What kind of thoughts are motivating our actions? If we apply introspection in everyday life, then we can avoid a disturbed state of mind.

Virtuous introspection recognises whether a state of mind is positive or negative. For example, if we are asked to find a distant relative we've never met before, then we can only go by description. They will have a certain height, certain coloured hair, certain features. So with that description we go around and investigate by looking at people. When we see the person who matches the full description, then we have no doubt in our mind that it is our relative. Introspection for a virtuous state of mind is checking what kind of state of mind we have, whether it is a virtuous or negative state of mind. If it is a virtuous state of mind, then we hold onto it and increase it. If it is a negative state of mind, then we decrease and overcome it.

As someone confided with us earlier in another session, investigating our thoughts and feelings is definitely beneficial. For example, when anger arises, the mere fact of recognising it is anger seems to help. Even though recognising anger doesn't prevent anger from arising, when we do feel angry, then at least there is a recognition and understanding that it is a harmful state of mind and if we allow it to continue then it will cause us trouble. People have the experience that it is helpful to recognise a negative state of mind for what it is. It helps to appease the negative effects

So if there are no further questions we can conclude for the evening. It seems quite humid and warm. There are some meditation techniques that can cause heat to be generated within our bodies. So I wonder if our meditation together here has generated heat because it seems quite warm. Some

diseases come from an element of lacking heat in our body, particularly in our abdominal area around the digestive system. According to traditional Tibetan medicine, when heat has decreased in our digestive system then that causes a lot of problems in digestion. So for people who have that element of lacking heat, it is good for them to meditate on generating heat (*tummo* in Tibetan) in their meditation. This can help them to restore their digestive system.

However, there is a negative aspect to generating heat. For example, when we become angry. When people are angry, the blood starts to warm and then you can see that even their face gets red. In severe cases of someone getting angry, I have heard that it can cause blockages in the brain because of the blood rushing to the brain.

It would be good maybe to assess ourselves if we are starting to get a little angry. A further way to be cautious about our state of mind is to look in the mirror and if we start to see that our face is getting red, then that is a good reminder, and maybe we need to start to calm down a little bit because anger can cause illnesses. Also, when parents become upset and angry, children seem to become scared.

Before we end the session for the evening, let us again take an opportunity to apply ourselves to meditation. This time we use the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra as the object of our focus. When we hear the sound of the mantra, we bring our full attention and focus on the sound itself. When the recitation stops, just focus on the residue of that sound. Maintain that serenity and calmness for a few moments.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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