
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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In order to conduct our regular meditation we can sit in comfortable, relaxed posture. It is good to remind oneself that the main purpose of meditation is to be able to exercise control over our mind. When one is able to have control over one's mind that brings about a peaceful state of mind.

When one begins to experience a genuine sense of a tranquil, calm, peaceful state of mind a lot of the turmoil and problems that are generated within one's mind begin to subside. When the internal problems within one's mind begin to subside the external problems also seem to subside and don't affect one to the same degree. This is because what we see as external problems are actually interpreted and perceived as problems by one's mind. There is definitely a connection there.

We can observe this in the relationship of two individuals. When both individuals are feeling calm and relaxed then, naturally, no problems and difficulties arise between these two individuals; this is clear. In contrast, when either or both are feeling some turmoil in their mind and start to become agitated, conflict can start between them.

Besides what we can observe in others, when we think about our own situation we can see that from time to time we experience mental turmoil, and that affects our relationships and so forth. So we all have all these problems.

Now the question is, 'How do we solve those problems within us?' This is where the meditation technique is most useful. Meditation practice is a method to bring about a genuinely calmer and more peaceful state of mind by reducing the turmoil within one's mind. Leaving aside the long-term benefits—I'm not talking about the benefits for our future lives—rather, simply reflect on the positive impact meditation has on your own well-being in your day-to-day life right now. When we can see how our well-being is related to a calm and tranquil state of mind, and that meditation can bring that about, we will begin to develop a genuine interest and aspire to meditate, because we can see its benefit.

In very practical terms, the way we need to relate to the benefits of meditation practice is to see the immediate benefits that we get from it. The technique involves choosing an internal object and bringing our full attention and focus to that internal object. When we apply that technique for about twenty minutes or so, then for that twenty minutes, we can be assured that our mind will be calmer and not affected by disturbing states such as intense attachment, anger or a sense of competitiveness

with others and so forth. These are the internal trouble-makers that cause us turmoil. When these don't have the opportunity to arise then, for the period of time that these negative states of mind are not manifest, we will experience tranquillity and the benefit of well-being. It is in this way that we need to understand the benefits of meditation.

To give a simpler analogy, we can basically say that meditation serves as a means to block out the states of mind that otherwise cause us trouble and turmoil. So, to the extent that it blocks them out and we don't intentionally follow them, we derive the benefit of a calmer and more peaceful mind. By applying this method we can protect our mind from these negative states and thus take care of our well-being. This is how we can see the benefits. As I share regularly, I have some personal experience of how external problems do not affect my mind when I have applied these protective measures. I have stories that I could share, but let's leave that aside for now as it would take too much time.

The main point here is that meditation practice requires a comfortable posture and, likewise, it is also important to have a positive state of mind to generate a good motivation for the practice itself. The practice itself also requires a commitment from our side.

In order for the time we spend in meditation to bear fruit and be effective, we need to make a commitment to ourselves that, 'I will not allow my mind to follow the distractions or negative states of mind such as intense attachment, anger and so forth. I will not allow my mind to be swayed by them and follow them. Right now I am experiencing the best of conditions. I have been born a human. I have all the necessary conditions for my basic needs to be taken care of, good food, clothing, shelter and the environment is perfect for me. However despite these good conditions and all my basic needs being met, I still experience distress and problems. The cause of this distress is none other than you, the negative states of mind. So while all other conditions are perfect for me the cause of the lack of happiness within my mind is none other than you. You are causing that lack of happiness. So, now that I have recognised that you are the main culprit, the main troublemaker, I am not going to allow myself to follow you. I am not going to allow myself to be under your control. I will not allow my mind to follow you even for a moment'. So with this sort of commitment, we intentionally withdraw our focus from any kind of negativity and place our focus entirely on the breath.

Applying this kind of commitment also helps us to identify the negative states of mind that cause the main trouble for us. If we were to apply meditation practice just to withdraw our mind from everything, not to think about anything and just focus inward, we may be able to achieve that quite easily, however we won't gain much more understanding. Whereas when we intentionally make the commitment that, 'I will not allow my mind to follow these negative states of mind for even a moment' we are identifying the negative states of mind as the troublemaker and willingly make the choice to not allow our mind to follow them. So, we get an extra benefit by making this commitment.

Having made that commitment to withdraw our mind from all forms of distractions and thoughts, we bring it inward and place it upon the object of our meditation. Here we use our breath, but if you want to use another object that's fine too. The main thing is identifying an internal object and placing our focus completely on that. That means that it is not sufficient to just identify the object to focus on such as our breath, but we must actually place our attention and focus on the object. If we can place our focus on the object then that serves the purpose of fulfilling all the criteria for the meditation practice to be complete. So, for the next few minutes we will adopt this technique to the best of our ability (*Pause for meditation.*).

Just as we have attempted in our short our session now, it would be really worthwhile to try to adopt a regular practice, even if it is only for a few minutes a day. During the few minutes we were familiarising our mind with being in a positive frame. We can all acknowledge that a positive state of mind is something that is useful and good. Even in worldly terms there is the general understanding that we need to try to protect ourselves from negative influences, and enhance positive influences in our life. So when we acquaint ourselves with positive things, such as being surrounded by positive people, we will naturally be more inclined to doing positive things. Whereas if we are surrounded by negativity we are more likely to be inclined to adopt negativities in our lives; that would be considered unfortunate. This is something that we can all acknowledge.

Everyone seems to be able to quite easily point to others and say that they have a bad habit, as if one is free of any faults and only endowed with good habits. We really need to pay attention to our own bad habits. Why do we have these bad habits? I notice that some parents tell children that they have bad habits. I try to tell parents not to say that to children, as it will make them feel they are being put down, or not acknowledged for good things that they do. We need to be mindful of these points.

If we don't like seeing bad habits in others, then that should remind us of our own bad habits. To overcome bad habits we need to replace them with good ones. When we start working on developing positive habits, then due to acquainting ourselves with the good, the bad habits will naturally subside. This is true because bad habits and good habits are the opposites of each other, so they are mutually exclusive. That means good habits directly oppose bad habits, so if one adopts one that naturally nullifies the other. This is basically how the meditation practice works. By familiarising our mind with the positive, we are forming good mental habits in our mind which nullifies the negative ones. This is again a practical way of understanding how the meditation technique works.

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4.2.2.1.2.3.2.2.1.1.2.2.1. Training the mind to strive for enlightenment

Now we will read a few lines from the text. We have come to new heading which is Training the Mind to Strive for Enlightenment. The earlier parts of the text that we have covered explained how based on love and compassion, one trains one's mind to benefit others by generating an altruistic mind. The section here is about how to train one's mind to strive for enlightenment.

What is being explained in this section is training the mind to strive or aspire for enlightenment. Striving or aspiring for enlightenment relates to what is known as the mind of enlightenment, which is the translation of the Sanskrit term bodhicitta. Training in the mind that strives for enlightenment is a mind that aspires to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all other living beings. Of course it is not a mind which is already enlightened, but rather a mind that aspires to achieve enlightenment.

A being who has achieved enlightenment is called a buddha, so it is good to understand the connotation of the word *buddha*. The word *bodhi* in bodhicitta has the connotation of being awakened. The analogy of a blossoming lotus is also used, to indicate that an enlightened mind is a fully opened mind. The word *bodhi* can also have the connotation of actualising or realising all good qualities. In the connotation of awakened, it refers to being awakened from the slumber of ignorance; so to be awakened means having completely overcome all ignorance attaining the state of omniscience. So a buddha is a supreme being who has completely eliminated all forms of ignorance and awakened to the state of omniscience. That is what buddhahood or enlightenment refers to.

The Tibetan word for bodhicitta is *jang-chup-sem*, which is a very literal translation of bodhicitta. It brings out the real connotation of the Sanskrit term.

The Tibetan word for *bodhi* has two syllables, *jang-chup*. The word *jang* has the connotation of completely eradicating or eliminating all faults. *chup* has the connotation of accomplishing all good qualities. So the state of enlightenment is the state where all adversities and negativities have been completely eradicated and all good qualities have been completely accomplished. That is the state of buddhahood. The term *citta* is *sem* in Tibetan which means mind, so the literal English translation for bodhicitta is, mind of enlightenment.

The term buddha is translated in Tibetan as *sang-gye* which refers to the being who has achieved complete enlightenment. This word also has two syllables: *sang* has the same connotation of completely eradicating or eliminating all the faults, and *gye* means to proliferate, which has the connotation of completely actualizing all positive qualities. So, the meaning of buddha refers to someone who has completely eliminated all possible faults from their mind and accomplished all the possible qualities that can be achieved. So that is who a buddha is.

It is good for you to know what the term buddha actually means. Whether you consider yourself a Buddhist or not, since you come to a Buddhist centre people might ask you what the name Buddha means, so it is good for you to have a proper explanation.

It seems that it is quite common these days to have a statue or image of the Buddha in your home. I don't think that everyone who has an image of the Buddha in his or her home is necessarily a Buddhist at all. Even some movie settings have nice images of the Buddha in the background. People seem interested and like to have that image. The Australian treasurer, Joe Hockey, has a very nice Buddha image in his office. Many people comment that just having the Buddha in their house seems to create a peaceful atmosphere. Even seeing the Buddha and his smile gives them a peaceful feeling. So that may be why some people have taken an interest in having a statue in their homes.

However coming back to the main point, we are describing the state of enlightenment of a buddha which is the state of having completely eradicated all faults and completely perfected or accomplished all good qualities. The mind that aspires to achieve that state is called mind of enlightenment, or bodhicitta in Sanskrit.

The Great Vehicle Buddhist tradition, also known as the Mahayana tradition, explains that this state of enlightenment is something that all of us can achieve. This has to be understood in the full context of what being enlightened or being a buddha means. A buddha is not a being who materialises suddenly out of nowhere. A buddha is a being who has achieved enlightenment by having engaged in the practice of removing each and every fault, one at a time, and accomplishing each and every small positive quality, one at a time, until they have achieved that ultimate state of completely eradicating all faults and achieving all good qualities. In other words, a state of enlightenment is not something that materialises out of nothing, nor it is a state that is suddenly or spontaneously achieved. Rather it is achieved in a progressive manner by having removed each and every fault. The Buddha was once an ordinary being like us and, like us, riddled with faults and the lack of qualities. But removing one fault at a time and achieving one quality at a time, led the Buddha to achieve the ultimate state of enlightenment.

The possibility for each and every one of us to achieve that state of enlightenment is explained on the basis of the fact that what we call faults are not intrinsic to our mind. The faults are not one with the nature of our mind. They are separable, and because they are separable they can be removed. That state of having the potential of completely removing all our faults is called, in our tradition, having a buddha nature.

One example of how the faults are not intrinsic to, or one with, the nature of our mind is the fault of anger. We can all recognise anger as a fault. Now if anger was intrinsic and one with the mind, then that would imply that we would always have to be angry. Whenever our mind was functioning, wherever the mind went, anger would have to be there at all times. But, through our own experience, we know that is not the case. We are not always angry.

Anger may manifest at certain times due to certain causes and conditions, but at other times it subsides and we don't feel angry all the time. That in itself is an indication that anger is not one with the mind, i.e. that wherever the mind is, anger will always be manifested there.

An example of something that is one with its nature would be heat and fire. Wherever there is fire there is always heat. That is because heat is one entity with fire. You cannot separate heat and fire. The nature of heat is that it is something that is within fire. Wherever there is fire there is always heat. Another example would be molasses and sweetness. Wherever there is molasses, there is always sweetness. You cannot separate sweetness from molasses, that is because sweetness is in the nature of, or intrinsic with, molasses.

Another example would be the cooling effects of water. The cooling effects of water is intrinsic to water but may not be felt due to certain conditions, such as when water is heated. When water is heated one may not experience that cooling element of water but the fact that the cooling element is one with water, intrinsic to its nature, is seen by the fact that once the heat is removed and water is allowed to cool down it would naturally become cold and the cooling element will be experienced again. The heat temporarily overwrote the cooling element.

Likewise, anger is not in one with our mind and when there are no conditions giving rise to anger, the mind does not experience anger and is naturally calm. But due to certain causes and conditions anger may arise and become manifest. The fact that we don't experience anger all the time indicates that anger is not one with the mind and thus it can be eliminated and completely eradicated. That is the logic used in our tradition to encourage one to adopt the techniques to overcome the faults—because they are removable we can overcome them.

By using our wisdom in this way and applying that logic we can start to see that we don't need to feel overpowered or helpless about our capacity to overcome certain negative trends that we may have. One may experience irritation, and easily become upset and angry now and maybe a little daunted, thinking, 'How can I ever overcome anger, it seems to be so prevalent?' However, when one uses one's logic and applies one's wisdom, one can see that because of various reasons that this is definitely possible. 'I can remove myself from anger, I don't have to be under the control of anger all the time.' If someone has a master or a boss who is very controlling one may feel quite daunted, "How can I ever be free of this situation?". But the fact and reality is that there are ways that one can be free. One doesn't have to be under the control of others all the time. Similarly, here one does not have to be under the control of negative emotions or negative states of mind all the time because they are removable.

We will just read and explain a few lines in this section of the text:

Once you have been inspired by the aforementioned process and have seen that you need enlightenment for the sake of others' welfare you develop the wish to attain it.

The aforementioned process is the process that was covered earlier in the text. We can go over that briefly for those who may have not heard it earlier. The process that is being referred to here is the process of developing the mind of enlightenment. This comes about in a cause and effect sequence.

The first step in the cause and effect sequence is *the development of immeasurable equanimity*. In order to have an unbiased attitude towards all beings one first needs to develop the state of mind that sees all beings as equal. So equanimity is the state of mind that one has to practise prior to developing the later states of mind. The next step in this training involves *recognising all beings as having been one's mother* at a previous time.

Seeing all beings as one's mother will naturally bring about the *recollection of their kindness*, which is the first cause in this process. Then, when one recognises that kindness, the wish to repay that kindness will naturally develop within oneself.

Based on that keen wish to repay the kindness of other beings, one then develops a strong affection, a warm hearted feeling towards all beings, seeing them as very dear to one self. That is when one develops *great love* towards all beings which is followed by developing *great compassion*. Great love and compassion is developed on the basis of seeing all beings as very dear to one.

When one has trained one's mind sufficiently in generating unconditional love towards all beings, which is a wish for all beings to be endowed with happiness, one then trains one mind in developing unconditional compassion which is the wish for all beings to be free from all suffering. When one has trained one's mind to a certain extent with these very genuine wishes for other beings to be happy and free from all suffering, a real transformation will take place within one's own mind.

Of course as one's mind is transforming it is not as if others have gone through much of a change. Unruly beings and so forth remain as they are, but one's own attitude towards all beings changes and one really begins to wish them genuine happiness and to be free from suffering. Now when that reaches a certain significant point then the attitude of love and compassion turns to into what we call *superior intention*. Superior intention is a state of mind where one develops the commitment that, 'I, myself, will ensure that all beings are endowed with happiness and are free from all suffering'. One willingly takes upon the responsibility to ensure that all beings are lead to the state of happiness.

One develops a strong determination within oneself to lead beings to a state where they are endowed with ultimate happiness and free from all suffering, which is the state of enlightenment. When one develops that superior intention one takes on the sole responsibility, without relying on others, to lead all beings to that state of enlightenment.

Superior intention is the last step in the cause and effect sequence prior to developing the mind of enlightenment. Superior intention is said to be the substantial cause for developing the mind of enlightenment. As mentioned earlier, superior intention is the state of mind where one

develops the commitment to take personal responsibility for freeing all beings from all sufferings and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness, which is the state of enlightenment.

However, when one has developed the keen determination to do that, one reflects on whether one has the ability to do that right now or not, and one realises that one does not currently have that ability. One then contemplates and investigates who would have that ability. In contemplating this one thinks about other beings who have achieved great realisations or states, such as the foe-destroyers. A foe-destroyer is a being who has reached the state where they have completely eradicated the afflictions in their mind but they have not yet reached the ultimate state of buddhahood. Even though a foe-destroyer has reached a very significant level by removing all afflictions within themselves, and is able to help a number of beings, they are not able to help all beings to reach the ultimate state of happiness, because they have not achieved the complete state of enlightenment themselves.

It is the same for bodhisattvas, who are known as superior or noble beings. Even one who has reached the tenth level, which is the final stage of being a superior being, doesn't yet have the ability to free all beings from all suffering and lead them to ultimate state of happiness. When one investigates in this way one comes to the understanding that it is only a fully enlightened being, a buddha, who has the ability to free all beings from all suffering and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness.

When one comes to that realisation one has no doubt at all in one's mind that one has to reach the state of enlightenment. In order to fulfil one's commitment and take up the responsibility of freeing all beings from all sufferings and leading all beings to the state of enlightened happiness one needs to achieve enlightenment oneself. So that is when *one develops the aspiration to achieve enlightenment*. It is called the mind of enlightenment because it is the mind that strives to achieve the state of enlightenment.

As the text says:

...by the aforementioned process and have seen that you need enlightenment for the sake of others' welfare, you develop the wish to attain it.

So that is the state of mind of enlightenment.

The text continues:

However this is not enough, first you must increase your faith as much as possible by contemplating the good qualities of the Buddha's body, speech and mind.

We will explain these passages in detail in our next session. The point here is that we have reached the point in the text where it says that having the wish to attain enlightenment is not sufficient. One needs to further develop it. That is the main point.

The subject that we are explaining is how to develop that particular state of mind called the mind of enlightenment. What needs to be understood here is that developing this very unique state of mind has to be based on love and

compassion. At our level we can take on the practice of further developing love and compassion within us. This is something that we can acknowledge easily. It is not something very obscure or something that it is hard for us or out of our reach. It is something we can relate to.

In fact, all traditions relate to love and compassion. We can see that each and every religion has a core principle of the practice of love and compassion. That element is definitely there. So while Buddhism may have more specific explanations of love and compassion all traditions adopt that practice. That is something we can definitely agree upon.

Love and compassion is something that is definitely experienced. When genuine love is shown to others it affects them in a very positive way and they respond in a very, very positive way. There are many stories of beings responding very positively and very affectionately to love shown to them.

I will share one account I witnessed on the television the other day. In this show a woman was caring for piglets. She had quite a lot of piglets that were coloured a bit like a tiger. The woman was very, very happy and wanted all the piglets to come to her and she would lick them all. We can also learn something when we see accounts of a mother animal caring for her offspring with such affection. That is a sign of love from the mother for her young ones and the mother does everything in her capacity to care for her young ones. It is really remarkable to see the affection on both sides, from the mother to young ones, and the young ones responding back to the mother. It was remarkable to see a woman caring in the same way for piglets. Some humans would consider pigs as dirty but when there is much love and affection there is not as much concern and they can be seen as an object of nurturing and caring.

When we see that this sort of relationship can take place between human and animals with so much affection we can start to feel affection towards human beings who care for each other and genuinely love each other. We can learn from others examples of how true love and affection is really worthwhile and essential for our well-being. It is because of these reasons that I emphasise again and again the need for true love and compassion for others. We need to develop it, exhibit it and share it with others.

It is because of the great value of genuine love and compassion and affection for each other that I repeatedly remind people that we need to treat this as a valuable asset and ensure we don't lose it within ourselves or lose those who show genuine love and compassion towards us. We need to regard those who show us genuine love and compassion as precious in our lives and if we give them up we have lost someone who really cares for us. We can see that there is a mutual benefit for two individuals who have genuine love and compassion for each other. They offer each other real protection and are there for each other when one is in need.

We can see this again between animal and humans. When a human takes good care of an animal such as a dog, we can see that the dog naturally responds to any danger and protects their master. They don't have to be told to do this; it comes about because of the affection they feel

towards their master. I am not sure if a cat would protect their master or not, but others might. With some animals we see it more obviously. The main thing again is using that as an example for humans. We can reason and rationalise and have much more understanding so that definitely would be the case.

I have heard that the South American Llama will protect other animals. Once I saw some llamas kept together with sheep and I asked why they were put together. I was told that the llamas protect the sheep from other animals. The word llama rhymes with the Tibetan word for teacher, lama, so they must be a real lamas too! (*laughter*)

I have witnessed another example myself in Tibet. The nomads in Tibet have huge dogs that I think are called mastiffs. The master would take good care of them and they would be tied up and sleep most of the day. At night they would be let loose and while the nomads sleep the dogs will go round and make sure there is no threat to the animals. They walk around all night and they take the initiative to protect and guard the animals. This is quite remarkable. Once a thief came and stole a blanket from a restaurant and a dog that was there ran after the man, got the blanket and brought it back home (*laughter*). There are many accounts of dogs protecting their masters and even their belongings. There is even one story of one master whose shoe was lost and the dog brought it back to their master.

The main reason I am relating these stories is to give examples of beings showing affection towards each other. As humans we definitely respond to that and we need it for our well-being. If we can see that all of these remarkable stories of affection between humans and animals have very positive affects, we can see how essential it is in the relationship between humans. Affection is definitely an element that is needed for our well-being. If that is the case then we need to initiate that from our own side and develop true affection and express it.

I would like to thank you for paying such good attention and listening very well I appreciate that and thank you. Before we end the session for the evening, let us again take an opportunity to spend just a few minutes in meditation. The object of our meditation that we can focus on this time can be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's name mantra being recited. As we hear the sound of the mantra we try to place our full attention and focus on that sound. Then, if we experience a sort of blissful feeling when the recitation subsides, we can maintain our focus on that sensation that we get within us for a few moments. In that way, this would suffice for our meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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