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# *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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We will engage in some meditation practice and to do that we sit in a comfortable, relaxed posture. Meditation is quite important for our well-being. When we consider what we really wish for in life we realise that we wish for happiness and don't want suffering. That is something that is relatively acceptable for all of us. We engage in a very busy life with the intention of gaining happiness and removing suffering. When we really consider it, what is our real purpose? What is it that we are trying to achieve in our life? We try to do so many things but are they really directed to that end of gaining some happiness and eliminating suffering?

Thus far in our lives we have accumulated significant good conditions that allow us to be in a happier state and to alleviate suffering. For example, we have secured sufficient conditions to free us from hunger, thirst, cold and extreme heat. We have definitely acquired these good conditions to a certain degree.

It is good to consider these points as we should then feel quite encouraged. We can gain some gratitude from acknowledging that we are borne in the right country, with the right conditions and are not deprived of the basic necessities for our well-being. It is good to acknowledge this because sometimes we might forget and fail to recognise the good conditions that we already have.

Since we wish to acquire happiness and to remove suffering, these are the main points that we need to pay attention to. Whatever our status, whatever we earn, ultimately we need to be thinking about how best to achieve happiness and remove suffering—that is the main point.

We have definitely acquired a lot of good conditions that we were deprived of earlier, which may have contributed to our happiness. However whether these conditions serve as a real cause for our mental happiness or not is something we need to consider. In fact when we examine our situation we will find that external material conditions may cause more disturbing states of mind for us.

If we examine this for ourselves and find that our good material conditions haven't really served the purpose of gaining real mental happiness, but rather they are causing more delusions, more distractions and more disturbances, to arise in our mind. Then, having recognised that, we need to ensure that whatever good conditions we have now do not become a cause for delusions to arise in our mind. We need to apply means

and methods to protect our mind and stop delusions that will disturb us from arising.

The point that I am leading up to is introducing how the meditation technique serves as an optimum means to protect one's mind from the delusions. Protecting our mind means not allowing it to be completely swayed by particular strong negative states of mind, such as intense anger, attachment or so forth. Thus, protecting our mind from being completely influenced by strong negative states of mind is the real purpose of meditation.

When we are able to apply the meditation technique to serve that purpose and protect our mind, then the good material conditions that we have will serve their purpose of bringing about a genuine sense of physical comfort while we maintain mental well-being. We will be satisfied with what we have. Otherwise, when the mind is in turmoil and influenced by intense delusions our mind will go into a very negative state, as we would all have noticed. When the mind is in that very negative state that then causes a lot of angst and darkness in our mind.

We need to understand that applying the meditation technique is a gradual process. We first tackle the very intense delusions, the very strong, negative states of mind. Once we recognise them we can apply methods that don't allow our mind to be completely dominated by them and then gradually we can work down to the subtler levels of the negative states of mind.

The main point that I am emphasising is that many of us here would assume that we know about meditation and are actually engaging in meditation practise but while we claim that we are meditators, when the object of attachment arises, we immediately follow it. You don't apply any means to prevent yourself from following the objects of attachment. Likewise, when we come into contact with an object of anger, we don't apply any means to overcome anger but are immediately completely influenced by the object, and we experience anger. So while we may on one hand assume that we are meditators, on the other hand being completely dominated by these strong emotions of attachment or anger indicates that our meditation practice has not served its purpose of overcoming these negative states of mind. How can we blame others who don't know anything about meditation, when we who claim to be meditators are not taking measures to protect ourselves from intense negative states of mind such as attachment and anger? This is the main point, it is a shame not to be able to tackle these intense negative states of mind.

Seeing this people would say, 'Oh, that person is meant to be someone who has a spiritual practice and follows the Dharma but still becomes angry and has strong attachment'. That then becomes a bad example for others, and could cause them to lose hope. So we need to ensure that the meditation technique becomes a means to combat the enemy of the inner afflictions, what we call the delusions. The main purpose of meditation is to combat and overcome these negative states of mind within us. If we assume that we are meditating but completely fail to apply the appropriate antidote when negative states of mind arise, we have definitely missed the point of the practise of meditation. Therefore we need to ensure that

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our practise hits the target for overcoming the negative states of mind. The intention is to overcome the negative states of mind so that we experience genuine peace and calmness within us. If we wish to experience genuine calm and peace within our mind, we need to overcome the real obstructions to that calmness and peace which are the negative states of mind.

The way that one ensures that one is not able to be influenced by negative states of mind is by being mindful of a virtuous object. In meditation practise we bring to mind a virtuous object and this serves as the means to overcome the negative states of mind. If one has been focusing on a virtuous object during meditation then, even when we come out of formal meditation, we should be able to be mindful of a negative state of mind arising. If we are mindful of the virtuous object then that will protect one's mind from being completely influenced by the negative states of mind.

When we apply the meditation technique to its full extent we will definitely begin to see that it becomes the means to overcome many unwanted problems and difficulties in our life. When things are going well then one would naturally be able to enjoy those good circumstances, and protect one's mind from being influenced by negativities. But even when things are not going well, particularly when there difficulties, one will be able to have a courageous mind and endure those difficulties and not let them affect the mind. When we apply the technique fully we will be able to derive these benefits.

We can tie this discussion up with our earlier discussion about our wish for happiness and not to experience suffering. What I am trying to present here is how meditation practice can serve the purpose of acquiring genuine happiness, and the well-being that comes along with happiness, as well as overcoming all the suffering that we experience. So this is how we need to understand the meditation technique in its entirety and how it fulfils not only our temporary purposes and goals but also the ultimate purposes and goals for our wellbeing.

I will explain again how meditation overcomes what we called the turmoil in our mind. For example, when we experience intense anger we definitely do not have a peaceful and happy mind. We all recognise there is turmoil going on in our mind. If we can then apply a meditation technique such as meditating on love or patience, the enhanced state of mind of anger, which is a very uncomfortable state of mind, will immediately subside. We will see the positive effect immediately taking place in our mind when we apply this meditation technique. This is just one example of how meditation serves this purpose.

Another way to understand the practical benefit of meditation is to recognise that when we apply a good meditation technique that will ensure that wherever our mind abides, a genuine happy state of mind will also abide in that place. Wherever we go, whatever we are engaging in, we will be able to maintain a happy state of mind, and that will ensure our well-being.

With regard to the younger generation, on numerous occasions I have shared practical advice about engaging in your studies now with the intention to do well, so that

you can secure a good job later on, and be able to accumulate a good bank account so that in future times would help you meet your basic, material needs. However, while you engage in accumulating money in your bank account it is also good to accumulate some happiness for your mind i.e. mental wellbeing, and ensure that you secure and increase that happy state of mind.

As I have also shared in the past, in my own case I have not had the opportunity to engage in normal work and so accumulate a good sum in my bank account, but I have definitely spent some time and energy in acquiring and accumulating a good stock of happiness in my mind, which serves me very well now. *Geshe-la speaks in English: "Happy mind is very, very good, feeling. Very relaxed. No more thinking about all the things one sees. My happiness is very, very good."*

We can now adopt the meditation technique and to do this we sit in a comfortable position. What I have been relating to you was an attempt to point out that we need to be paying attention to the meditation technique and not treat it as something to just pass the time, but ensure that it serves the purpose of improving our well-being. As mentioned previously, meditation practise is a means to overcome the intense negative states of mind within us and gradually eliminate them. That is when our true well-being will be established within us. My attempt to share this with you directly has no intention other than it might be of some benefit to you. I share it with love and genuine concern for your wellbeing.

To adopt the meditation technique we bring to mind that what disturbs our state of mind are the distractions that we mentioned before. These come in various forms, thoughts, emotions and so forth. Because we allow ourselves to be distracted by these, and focus on them, they cause us disturbances in our mind. Therefore, as a way to protect our mind, in adopting the meditation technique we need to intentionally withdraw all our attention and focus from disturbing and distracting objects, and bring our focus inward. Having brought our focus inward we then place it upon the meditation object that we adopt here, which is our breath. We focus on the natural inflow and outflow of our breath, bringing our full attention and 100% focus to the breath itself. So, we will spend the next few minutes in meditation in this way (*Pause for meditation*).

That should be sufficient for now. If there are any questions we can address them, otherwise we can continue with the text.

*Question: I am working with a boss who I personally get along with well, but he is very critical of my colleagues. They are so distressed sometimes that they cry, and I find that very hard and challenging. Is it negative for me to stay in that situation; is it better for me to leave that job?*

All we can really determine is our own state of being. It is really hard to determine what is going on in others. There might be a reason why the boss is hard on the staff, or maybe he is just being mean. It is hard to know the real situation of others; all one can do is protect one's own state of mind. The best thing is to try to have a good relationship with one's colleagues and so forth. One

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should greet everyone in the morning and say, 'Good morning'. That is something we can all say. When we leave we can say, 'Good evening' or 'Have a good night'. That is something we can do from our side.

*Geshe-la speaks in English: "Your job there is to get your money. The boss has lots of worry but gets more money. More money means more worries. If your job is easy you don't get much money, but have less worry."*

Protecting oneself means protecting one's karma. One's karma is basically dependent on one's own state of mind. If one does one's job honestly, and does what one is required to do, then that is the best we can do. We cannot really control others' situations. You have related reasons to feel proud of doing a good job. I have also heard of situations where someone is quite new, and they might be making mistakes, and not be able to perform as well as others, because they don't know everything yet. If one has a better understanding of how things work it would be good to try to explain things to new people. I have heard of situations where somebody complained that no one really helped them.

Then there might be some people who are really sad, and may be crying, because of others being hard on them. You could definitely help them out by saying, 'Let's go to have tea or a break'. *Geshe-la in English: "Getting them a cup of tea or a coffee and a few biscuits shows you are caring. Relax with no talk about work."* The main thing is to comfort the other when they are having a difficult time. That will be a real help. When you can help someone who is in distress it is the true mark of friendship, real caring. If when one sees others in distress and feels a little bit disturbed oneself, it is a mark of having some love and compassion for the other. So, if one of your colleagues is crying and not feeling too well because of the situation, and you feel uncomfortable that is a sign that you are concerned for them. Even though it feels uncomfortable, it is a sign of having concern for them, like love and compassion. To extend that in practical ways of comforting them and so forth would be the best way to respond to that feeling.

That was a good question, thank you. There are not many who feel uncomfortable because others are crying and unhappy. *Geshe-la: "Why, why, why is she crying?"* If others are in distress and crying and one just thinks, 'Oh, they are just being a cry-baby', and one cannot feel for them, it means that one is lacking love and compassion. Whereas if one feels concern for others who are in distress and crying, that feeling of being uncomfortable is a sign that one has love and compassion. One would then take the initiative, whenever possible, to help them in whatever way we can. Whilst it is the boss who is creating the conditions for your colleague to cry, I don't know whether he feels concern for them crying and feeling unhappy. But if you, on other hand, see that and feel for them and feel unhappy about it then that concern is a good sign from your side.

*Question: My Guru died three years ago. The reincarnation has still not been found yet and there is a bit of disharmony in the centre now. What are the best practices one could do, individually and collectively, for his reincarnation to be found soon?*

I know quite a bit of the situation there, and they have not indicated to me that there is any problem in the Buddhist Society. The late Geshe Loden wrote some notes and letters in which he mentioned my name, and said that I could help them out, and so forth. They have indicated to me what they have in mind. Apparently my name is also mentioned in the will, though I personally don't care much about that. While it seems like there are some clear instructions in the will, there might be other influences or some internal dispute that I am not aware of.

Practices must be done there as well. If you can do practices together with them then that will be a good way to do that. *Geshe-la in English: "Geshe Loden's centre, is your centre. So, you need to look after your centre, I look after Tara Institute, which is my centre."* Of course it is understandable that when your teacher was alive, he would oversee things and it was definitely under his supervision. Things worked well. It is quite natural that when he passed on, even though clear instructions about how to run things have been left, that after a time some internal disagreement might arise. It is natural for problems and difficulties to arise. The main thing is that the students are sticking together and following his advice.

How to manage the centre, and how to look after things were very clearly stated in his letter. In relation to his own reincarnation, he clearly said that if his reincarnation were borne in Tibet then maybe Geshe Doga could help with the search. Of course it is not practical for me to travel to Tibet now because of my age, but he mentions in the will, if I couldn't go then another lama could. My name and Geshe Choden's name are mentioned in relation to the rituals and so forth to be done. If we were to follow all the instructions he left, there shouldn't be too many difficulties. In his will he mentioned all these details, and at the end said Geshe Doga will help, ask him to help. This was all put down very clearly.

In relation to finances, I recall that Geshe Loden said that they didn't have any debts on the buildings and so forth. There are no debts. Geshe-la even went to the extent of buying a new car for the centre before he passed away.

Besides the instructions in the will, Geshe Loden personally requested me to help and support the centre. However, I don't take too much initiative from my side, because it is their centre. They make the decisions, and I leave it up to them what decisions they make. I know that all the older students are very loyal, very dedicated, and they follow Geshe Loden's instructions. I don't think there would be any problem there. If there are some newer people, then I am not too sure what the situation is.

So my personal advise to you is that if you could attend some of the practices that would be good. If you find that you are not able to go there the main thing is that you must keep in mind whatever advice and practices that Geshe Loden presented to you. You should keep these as your basis and if you hear something that I explain here as being complementary to that you can take it upon yourself. *Geshe-la: "Don't forget Geshe Loden's teachings. Keep that basis here and don't forget. He was a nice Geshe"*. It

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is difficult to find a teacher like that. *Geshe-la: "You were very lucky. Geshe Loden was, very, very nice, my good friend."* Geshe Loden was a good friend of mine and he was very fond of me. He would send me flowers and give me cake for lunch whenever I went there.

So just to recap, my personal instruction for you is to keep to heart what Geshe Loden has taught you and always maintain that as the basis for your practice. If, by coming here you can supplement or that it serves as a reminder of what you already know in your heart, then that is good. If you can go to the programs there without disturbing your mind, then that's great too. But if you find that it disturbs your mind, you don't need to get involved in what is going on there. If you can't help, then just don't harm and don't get involved there. Keep your own mind peaceful; that is the main thing that you need to do for yourself. The best way to please your teacher is to keep your mind peaceful and follow your practice well.

So thanks for the questions, I am sorry that it has taken a bit more time than usual to try to address this issue. However, because you have asked me the questions, I have addressed them.

Before we conclude for the evening let us again take an opportunity to spend a few minutes in meditation. This time we can use the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's name mantra being recited to focus on. We begin again by removing our mind from all other objects and bring our full attention to focus on the sound of the mantra. When the recitation subsides we just maintain our focus on the residue of the sound and the good feeling that we gained for a few moments.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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