
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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As usual it would be good to spend some time in meditation, sitting in an upright, comfortable position.

As mentioned regularly, meditation is basically a technique where we choose an inner, virtuous object on which to focus, and familiarise our mind repeatedly with this virtuous object.

Prior to adopting the meditation technique, it would be good to investigate why it would be worthwhile to adopt the meditation technique. What are the reasons; how is it useful, and how do we actually engage in the practice? Thinking about various different reasons why it is worthwhile, will then encourage us to adopt the meditation practice.

Meditation is generally described as a technique or a method to subdue the mind, and therefore it involves investigating our state of mind to understand why it needs to be subdued.

The process of investigating our state of mind by looking inward is a worthwhile endeavour.

When we employ this inner investigation, we will come to notice that there are definitely many states of mind which contribute to our well-being. There are positive states of mind within, which are beneficial, serving as a means to overcome many difficulties and problems.

Meditation practice ultimately serves as our own protector and saviour, by overcoming various problems within.

Since there are internal positive states of mind that help to support us and come to our aid when we are feeling down, they would be considered an unfailing companion. We need to recognise, and therefore cherish and try to protect these states of mind at all times, because they help us in times of distress. It is good for us to acknowledge that we have these positive states of mind within us, and to further protect and develop them—this should be our priority.

Having identified certain positive states of mind, on the other hand there are also states of mind which cause us a lot distress and turmoil. It is the negative states of our mind that become the initiator of many of the problems that we face in our life, including disputes and conflicts with others. When we investigate, we will find that our problems start from an attitude or a state of mind. There are also states of mind which, as soon as they are prevalent, make us feel very unsettled, with a lack of self-worth and self-esteem—an empty sort of feeling, as though we are lacking something, and that something is

not quite right within. These are basically just states of mind or attitudes which are generated within.

Through this analysis, when we recognise that there are two opposing states of mind within—one that causes well-being and one that causes distress—then it is to our own advantage that we take the initiative to distance ourselves and not associate with those that cause distress, and familiarise ourselves more with positive states of mind.

This is something which is not beyond our means, we are able to do this practice—it is a matter of taking that initiative.

When we have come to the point of clearly recognising that there are positive and negative states of mind, and are able to clearly recognise the distinction between them, then the initiative we take is to protect the positive states of mind, attitudes, thoughts etc, and to consider negative states of mind as our archenemies. We need to take up the challenge and apply the means to overcome our own negative states of mind at all times. Furthermore, when we consider how the negative states of mind arise, or how they are actually generated, it is in relation to bringing an object to mind. When there is a condition or situation, or a particular external object that comes to mind, we immediately notice that it causes us distress, and it influences a negative state of mind to be generated. In this investigation, what we come to notice is that the state of our mind is very much influenced by the objects on which we focus. Focusing on objects that cause the delusions to arise, is what influences the mind to generate negative thoughts and attitudes. The means and ways to protect our state of mind from being influenced by negativities, is to distance ourselves temporarily from those objects—intentionally diverting our attention and not allowing our mind to focus on objects which cause the delusions to manifest. The method here is to bring our focus inward, to choose an appropriate object which does not cause delusions to arise, and keep our full attention and focus on that. By doing that, we are lessening our familiarity with the object that causes distress in our mind, and we will experience a positive result.

When we adopt the appropriate relaxed posture and an appropriate technique for focusing on a virtuous or positive object, then naturally this is what will bring about a natural, comfortable relaxed body, as well as a clear, tranquil and peaceful state of mind. The combination of a truly physically relaxed body, while also mentally experiencing a tranquil and peaceful state of mind, contributes to a real, genuinely happy state of mind. I would define that as a genuine, relaxed state of well-being.

This is a practice I adopt myself in my life to ensure that I am relaxed physically, and within that physical relaxed state intentionally bringing a focused mind which produces a clear state of mind. I spend most of my time and energy within that genuinely relaxed, comfortable state of mind. As I don't really know the means and ways to acquire many external things to make me feel comfortable, such as companions, friends or wealth—that is something which I am not capable of doing anyway. This is how I'd rather spend my time.

By applying these means—as mentioned earlier, by doing self-investigation, checking my state of mind, ensuring that I am not being influenced by negativities and therefore not allowing the positive states of mind within to degenerate—this is what I adopt and in which I have found great solace. This is what I apply within my life and I find that I definitely reap the benefits of experiencing a genuinely relaxed state of being, and a more joyous, happy state of mind. So it is from these personal experiences of attempting to do this and reaping the benefits that I share the meditation technique with you. And so the main thing here is not to allow the mind to become completely distracted. While in meditation, we intentionally adopt a focused mind and try to maintain focus on the chosen object to the best of our ability. Even when we come out of meditation, it is necessary that we try to maintain a state of awareness and mindfulness of thought and actions. For example, when driving a car, you have to be focused on the road and on the immediate surroundings, in case there are dangers. Even if you get slightly distracted by looking at something else, you have to immediately bring your attention back to the front of the road in order to avoid collisions and dangers. This is how we drive a car safely, and we can use that example similarly here for adopting meditation. We need to be constantly vigilant and mindful of the positive state of mind, and if we notice that the mind starts to get a little distracted and generates negative states of mind and thoughts, then we need to apply the means to overcome and avert that. When anger arises, we feel distress and angst, and we don't feel comfortable. Of course, while we may not have reached the point where we completely avoid anger from arising—anger would still arise—but when we notice it for what it is, a destructive and negative state of mind, that recognition in itself allows us not to empower the negative state of mind of anger. It does not allow us to feed the anger, and give more reasons for the anger to increase. Thus the very recognition of anger as being a destructive, negative state of mind that causes us turmoil, helps to weaken its strength. To that extent, we reap the benefit. Gradually, by first recognising how anger is a destructive state of mind and seeing all the disadvantages, then slowly as we familiarise more with that understanding and apply methods and techniques to overcome anger, hopefully we will not allow anger to dominate our mind. In this way, all other negative states of mind can be overcome as well.

When we are presented with the techniques of adopting the positive states of mind, and recognising negative states of mind and therefore not allowing them to dominate or influence us, we begin to acknowledge that our state of our mind is entirely dependent on ourselves. Whether we are in a positive state of mind or not is dependent entirely on how we conduct our mind and thoughts etc. Therefore it is dependent on none other than ourselves, which means that it is within our own reach. How we feel mentally is dependent on ourselves. Furthermore, there is no expense involved in that, *[laughter]* it is completely free. *[laughter]* It is really worthwhile that we take it upon ourselves for our own well-being.

In order to treat ourselves well and make ourselves happy, if we attempt to go to a restaurant and eat a nice meal, I think that nowadays it would cost up to about \$40 or more. The happiness or pleasure we gain from that is actually quite fleeting and temporary.

Then if we add a few drinks on top of that, a few glasses of wine, then the bill will be much higher, it might go up to \$100. Again, we might gain some temporary happiness or pleasure with that, but once our meal is over, and our drinks are finished, then we might go back to normal again. Rather than spending a lot of time and energy on gaining those fleeting pleasures, if we were to spend ten minutes looking within and adopting this technique and applying some meditation, then that would be much more worthwhile. The positive effects of that would be much longer lasting, and we would get a true benefit from that. Once we gain well-being for ourselves through this practice, then we can confidently share that sort of benefit with others. We don't need to give lavish meals to make others happy, in fact, sharing what we have gained from our meditation practice with others would be much more worthwhile and beneficial for them in the long run.

We can also see the positive effects of a genuinely kind, loving attitude from the examples of the upbringing of children by parents. It is very clear that children brought up by very loving parents, who are genuinely kind to them, naturally grow up to be much more mentally healthy and also naturally kind and considerate to others as well. Whereas with parents who are not capable of showing genuine kindness or love to their children, it is quite noticeable.

When parents themselves are troubled, with an unhappy state of mind, then that also has a negative consequence on the children. Of course, if the parents are angry all the time, it has an even more negative impact, but if they are just not genuinely happy and content themselves, even that seems to have an effect on the children. When the children see an unhappy face on the parents, that also seems to make them feel unhappy.

Nurturing a family and happiness around ourselves does not depend on having sufficient money or wealth, it is dependent on the inner qualities of kindness, genuine joy and happiness. These are really significant points that we can take into consideration.

These positive attributes of kindness and genuine concern are qualities to be expressed within your close circles and at home. Often there is an attitude that you need to be kind to others, but it seems to be easier to be kind and considerate to others outside your immediate circles, while being a little bit hostile and in conflict with those close to you. That doesn't really contribute to a genuine heartfelt mind, or kind attitude and concern. So what we need to practice is to start with those who are in close proximity. Indeed, there is definitely a different atmosphere that you feel when you go to a family or a couple who are living together harmoniously, and are genuinely kind and nice to each other. When you go into the vicinity or home of such a person, you can feel that there is a more relaxed and positive atmosphere. Whereas if you go to someone's home where there is constant conflict or upheaval and a lot of turmoil going on,

naturally there would be a disturbed energy, and the atmosphere would not feel very calm and peaceful.

To summarise the earlier points, meditation is not just a method to generate a focused state of mind, but it is a technique ultimately to have a more controlled and subdued mind. This leads naturally to a more tranquil, positive and happier state of mind, that has a positive effect on all that we do in our relations and immediate surroundings etc. This is how we need to see and understand the meditation technique in its entirety.

Having mentioned about certain negative states of mind which cause turmoil and disturbance, which are named delusions—these are the ones from which we need to distance ourselves. For the purpose of meditation now, we intentionally withdraw from all forms of distraction, negative attitudes or thoughts. We completely try to overcome that, and that can be done naturally when we make a full commitment: “For the next few minutes I will not allow my mind to become distracted by thoughts, memories or other kinds of objects that may come to mind, but I will keep it entirely on the chosen object for my meditation” Here we normally use our breath as an object of focus, and having brought our attention and focus inward, we place it on the breath for the next few minutes and try to do this to the best of our ability, with sincerity. (*Pause for meditation*)

That will be sufficient for now.

Just as we attempted now, if we can adopt the meditation technique on a daily basis, we would derive the benefit which will be experienced gradually as we adopt the technique regularly. Of course, the technique that we adopt here should not be attempted in long sessions right away, but rather in short sessions and then we can increase that slowly. The process of achieving the benefit from the practice is that we adopt a technique which gradually will increase the ability to focus.

With the remaining time we have, I leave it up to you. If you have any questions, you may ask them.

Student: What is the best way not to react when someone is intimidating you?

Geshe-la: Well, generally the best technique we would say is to practise patience, but of course it is not an easy practice.

Ideally, if one is able not to react to the intimidating gestures, not to take it too personally or react to that, then of course it would be easy to practice patience, because we would prevent ourselves from becoming angry. [*Geshe-la laughs*] However, in the process when others are intimidating us, it maybe reaches a point where it becomes quite unbearable, and then you start feeling annoyed and getting angry. Is that the case?

Student: Yes, more anxious about the person, and feeling distressed.

Geshe-la: I acknowledge that it can be a difficult situation, with no easy, immediate solution. It depends also on the situation and the circumstances. Firstly, to summarise it into two main points: if it is a situation in which there is no way to avoid dealing with this person, then there is one way we need to think about it. Since we have to deal

with them, then we have to find an appropriate way to deal with that effectively, and deal with our own emotions. Of course, if it is a situation where we need not be in their presence and we could avoid being with them, if that were possible, then of course in a situation where we are being intimidated and we cannot stop that, it is also the easiest solution. These are two different ways to look at it.

We can take a work environment as an example. While we are dependent on that particular work situation, then of course we are in a dilemma where we need to go to work, but then in doing so, we might come into contact with this person who is intimidating, which is hard to avoid. So if it is ongoing, and because the situation is very uncomfortable, then we need to take into consideration that it's not healthy for us. I normally suggest that maybe it is possible that we find another job. First look for other work where we don't have to face individuals who are intimidating. Once we find another job, where we don't have to face the same thing and we are quite confident that it is secured, then we could leave the present job.

Now in the situation where one is dependent on that job and it is not easy to just resign, one has to be in that situation, then of course the next thing we need to take into consideration is how to protect our own mind. The first practical way of thinking about it is, “The main purpose for me to go to the job is to get my earnings. I need to go to the job because I need to have my earnings.” Of course that is why we cannot just resign. The first thing we need to have as a priority is not trying to please everyone there. The main thing is to do the job well and in that way earn a salary, which we rightly need. That is the priority. So with that priority in mind, then we should not allow someone else to affect us too much to hinder us from fulfilling that, the main purpose of our job. That is one broader sense of looking at the situation.

Then on a practical level, at least from your own side, if you can take the initiative to greet others, by smiling and saying good morning when you get there. Later, even if you don't want to interact too much while you are there during the day, when you leave just say good evening. From your own side, when you show those kind gestures, then even if there is someone there who is normally a little bit intimidating and a little bit hostile to you, your own positive gestures could have a positive effect on them. They may gradually begin to realise for themselves, “Oh, while I'm not being nice to her, she is being kind and saying nice things to me.” So it maybe has a positive effect on the mind to the point where they gradually transform and change to being kind and considerate themselves. This is something which I share with others, and others have confided in me later that adopting this sort of method has contributed to a change.

This sort of attitude and way of dealing with others, the earlier example was of course in the work environment, but if the situation is in relation to someone you live with, a partner, then of course it is even more necessary from your own side to take the initiative to relate to them in a good way. Then regardless of who the other person may be, someone close or someone a little distant or a work colleague, whoever it may be, if they are being intimidating and so forth, it is actually a sign of insecurity

within themselves. It is a sign there is something which troubles their mind. If they are in a joyful and really happy state of mind, they would not exhibit such rude behaviour and gestures etc. Instead of taking it personally ourselves, we could relate to their inappropriate behaviours immediately as being a sign of their own mind being in distress, and that they are unhappy. Rather than being upset and angry with them, we could maybe start to feel a little more considerate, empathic or compassionate towards them, because something is troubling their mind. These are important points to keep in mind, particularly if it is someone with whom we have to associate with on a daily basis. At times when they are a little bit distressed and unhappy, that is the time when inappropriate gestures would be more forthcoming, such as facial expressions or speech. At that time we can immediately notice that "Oh, they must be disturbed and they are unhappy", and if we can start to be kind and nice to them from our own side, then that is something with which they will be able to relate well—they will be joyful.

Then at a later stage when they start to really become appeased, they would be able to recognise your own kind gestures to them. Even though you may not get an immediate positive response from them, later down the track they would show their appreciation and mention how grateful they are.

There are some parents who also comment that their children are a little bit short-tempered, and get angry and upset easily. They ask me what they can do.

What I share with some parents who asked me what they could do about that situation, is that maybe rather than following a normal routine with food and clothing etc., change to a different approach—maybe give another kind of food for breakfast which they are more inclined to like, or take the initiative to buy some new clothes, which they fancy, or take them out for a small outing as a surprise. When we take the initiative to bring something new and fresh into their life, that might make them feel more joyful again. Even as adults, we know that when something becomes too much of a routine, the same meal which we are not too fond of, eating it again and again every day, after a while we get quite tired of that. [*Geshe-la laughs*] It's similar for the children.

This is actually the advice our teacher the Buddha gave to his followers, his ordained community, the Sangha, saying that if any individual monks are showing a little bit of distress and being unhappy, or a little bit angry and short-tempered, then feed and clothe them well for a while. That will help to appease them. It is that advice that I share with some parents, using the same method for their children. Some parents have confided in me later that it has helped.

Student: Do you bring a cake to the workplace?

Geshe-la: Of course, if we want to take that initiative, that would be very good.

Indeed, as it is explained in our manuscripts and teachings, for the return of hostility if you can actually repay that with kindness, then that is the best gesture—it is the gesture of a noble person.

Indeed, it is not something which would be common or usual, however it is an unusually kind act, and a good gesture.

That is definitely one of the best methods to appease others who are either hostile or negative. To be kind to them would be the best way, the best method.

As the great Indian master Shantideva advised, with external enemies, if you show kind gestures and be nice to them, it can appease them and they can turn out to be friends, and it can actually benefit oneself. Whereas with the internal enemy, the delusions, if you are kind, patient and nice to them, there is no way that they can benefit us, they harm us even further.

Thanks for the question and as you suggested yourself, that is something we can do in practice, that would be good.

The reason I thank you is that you have confirmed a practice which I acknowledge as being one of the supreme practices, a good practice. Whenever I see someone being kind to someone who is otherwise being hostile and negative, I feel that that is really the best sort of gesture, with the best benefit for the other person as well.

Before we end the session for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation, this time using the sound of the mantra to be recited as our object of focus. We focus our mind on the sound when we hear the recitation, and when the recitation subsides, we maintain that residue, that nice feeling from the focus and just maintain that for a few minutes. This will suffice for our meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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