
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment



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16 July 2014

As usual, we can spend some time in meditation. To do that, we adopt a relaxed, comfortable posture.

The great Indian master Atisha said, 'When we are alone we should check our mind, and when amongst others we should check our speech.' So after adopting a relaxed, comfortable posture, we need to observe our mind. Observing one's mind involves checking the state of mind one is in. Are one's thoughts and attitudes in a positive or negative frame? What kinds of thoughts are prevailing in one's mind? We can further investigate the positive and negative states of mind and look into the effects they have on us. We can see how a positive state of mind is conducive and benefits us, and how a negative state of mind is harmful to us. This investigation involves looking within oneself to see how a positive or negative state of mind has an effect upon one's wellbeing, instead of looking outside and judging others. This process of looking within, and checking to see if one's mind is in a positive or negative state is indeed a very useful and beneficial practice.

As I have regularly shared with you, when we take the initiative to look within we will be able to detect that some states of mind are harmful and some are beneficial to us. If one does not pay attention this may not be apparent but if one pays attention it becomes clear.

Having identified and recognised that a negative state of mind harms us and a positive state of mind benefits us, we need to take it upon ourselves to protect our positive states of mind and to apply an antidote to overcome the negative states of mind. When we study our mind we will begin to acknowledge the necessity to do this for ourselves.

When we look further into what causes the positive and negative states of mind to arise, we will notice that they arise in relation to interacting with an object. When interacting with a certain object a negative state of mind will arise. Likewise, when we interact with another kind of object a positive state of mind arises. As I have regularly shared, this becomes quite apparent.

So, when we notice and understand for ourselves that a positive or negative state of mind arises in relation to focusing on a certain object, we take the initiative to stop the relationship with the object that causes negativity to arise and develop, and strengthen our focus on an object that brings about a positive state of mind.

This is what Dharma practice means. Basically Dharma practice encapsulates two main actions that we need to engage in, adopting the positive and discarding what is negative and harmful to us. Dharma practice is the Buddhist term for spiritual practice. This practice is related to oneself and one's own mind. Dharma practice is initiated nowhere else than in one's own mind. When we understand Dharma practice in this way, we will begin to recognise and

acknowledge that engaging in Dharma practice has a practical benefit in one's life.

Having mentioned earlier the process that involves investigation and adopting the positive and discarding the negative, the question arises, 'What are the means and methods to apply this in my training?' Whilst there are different techniques and methods, one method in our traditions is called meditation.

Adopting the meditation technique involves choosing a virtuous object. When one intentionally and wholeheartedly focuses on that object, it naturally severs the relationship with distracting, negative objects that cause negativities to arise in our mind. When we familiarise ourselves with this practice of focusing on a virtuous object and distancing ourselves from, and severing the relationship with negative objects, we will begin to notice that for the duration of our meditation we actually gain a peaceful and calm state of mind. As we familiarise ourselves more and more with this process, it induces a peaceful and happier state of mind within us.

Acquainting ourselves and becoming familiar with this meditation technique where we intentionally maintain our focus on a virtuous object and refrain from focusing on a distracting, negative object will bring about a positive effect even when we are not in a meditation session. When we are out of meditation and in our regular world we will be able to maintain mindfulness of our state of mind. Unless we intentionally lead our mind towards negative objects that causes us distress, we will naturally have vigilance over our state of mind and be able to detect whether or not negative objects are influencing our mind. When we notice negative states of mind we are able to adopt measures to distance ourselves from them, and when we notice positive states of mind we can further strengthen them. This can be practiced in our daily lives. In this way meditation practice, for whatever duration of time, can help one to have a better daily life. This is how we need to relate to its real purpose and benefit.

When we apply this technique of meditation and begin to reap the benefits, it becomes our real protector and an unfailing friend and companion wherever we may be or wherever we may go. We are the combination of three things, the individual 'I' that we refer to, the physical body and the mind. The physical body and the mind are the sole possessions that we have and carry with us wherever we go. We carry our body with us until the end of this life. While we discard our body at the time of death when we go on to our next existence, our mind actually travels with us. So wherever the individual person is, the mind definitely goes with it.

The point here is that the qualities that are developed within our mind are with us at all times. When we have positively trained our mind with meditation to assist and protect us from adversities and negativities and to adopt positive qualities, these become our unfailing friend. Of course, whilst we do need and rely on external friends to a certain extent, even if we do not have that many external friends or companions, we can still have this unfailing internal friend. As mentioned earlier, this is more important as it is our real protector. This is why we need to take the initiative and begin to develop a real true sense of conviction with the effectiveness of Dharma practice. When we see how it helps us and protects our mind, we develop the real conviction to take the initiative that, 'This sort of training helps me so I

need to further develop and promote it.' And when we recognise a certain state of mind as negative, we need to take the initiative, 'This is the mind that deceives me and I cannot trust this negative state of mind, it always harms me.' We need to adopt this thinking and investigation within us.

This is also a recognition that the real medicine, what we can call the panacea, to overcome internal affliction and disease within our mind, is Dharma practice.

Furthermore, the conviction arises that the Dharma, or meditation practice in this context, is our real protector and that it helps us. This comes about when we apply the techniques, particularly techniques to overcome negative states of mind. For example, when we have a jealous mind it causes us a lot of pain. We feel agony within us when we feel really jealous. The way to overcome and remove the pain and suffering we feel from jealousy is to apply methods to stop jealousy arising in our minds. When we apply these methods they naturally remove the pain of jealousy and restore our mind to a calm peaceful state. Likewise, when our mind is affected by anger we again experience discomfort and pain. That pain of anger is removed when we stop anger within our mind. When we apply the appropriate measures and techniques to overcome this negative state of mind we immediately experience relief and a sense of well-being. This is how we get the conviction that applying the Dharma practice of meditation brings about a more peaceful and calmer state of mind. When one sees for oneself this transformation taking place one naturally develops that conviction.

Of course this does not come about immediately. We need to understand that it is a slow process and we need to engage in the practice again and again and then, over time, we will reap the positive results. The practice involves constant vigilance and investigation and checking the state of our mind. The more we distance ourselves from negative states of mind, the more we will find natural relief within our mind. It is through our own experience that we can develop real conviction in the practice.

Meditation practice, Dharma practice, is the ultimate protection for our mind and is also our ultimate real refuge. When we apply this technique ourselves and reap the benefits, we know we can confidently share this technique with whomever we acquaint with, to help them. They will derive a real benefit from what we share with them. The need to share this is not directed to relieving others' material suffering. This country has abundant good conditions. There are hardly any people who are deprived of basic food, clothing and shelter. These are normally adequate and this can be attributed to government services being very good. When we look at this in an unbiased and honest way, we find that the government does take the initiative to help the citizens very well.

Even though I haven't been to many other countries, I can definitely compare Australia with some other countries that I am familiar with. I can definitely vouch that Australia is one of the best countries in the world in relation to providing the basic needs and conditions for one's material well being. When it comes to mental well-being and happiness, I am not sure whether it is the best country or not. We can see that some people are deprived of mental well-being. *Geshe-la speaks in English: "Mental happiness – high or not, I don't know. Outside condition very good, but inside happy mind or not, I am not sure".* If the level of happiness is not high, then the technique I presented earlier

is something that would definitely be beneficial to those who are deprived of mental happiness. This is something I find will benefit them.

Just to relate an example, about two weeks ago some Tibetan refugees who had just arrived in Australia were provided with immediate care, and some even received pension money right away. They were really surprised and said 'Wow, that's amazing'. It is indeed a really a great privilege compared to the conditions in the country they had come from. (*laughter*).

We have 'side-tracked' a bit. However, coming back to the main point, the technique presented earlier, which basically encompasses the meditation technique, is something which, if we take the initiative to adopt, we will reap the benefits and can share with others. It will be worthwhile to share it with those that we live in close proximity with, such as our immediate relations, our partners, brothers and sisters. We can even share it with our children and it will be helpful in their lives as well.

When you present this technique, of course, you do not have to present it in a religious context. You do not have to say, 'This is a religious or Buddhist practice'. You just present it as a technique and let them find out the benefit for themselves.

I know the benefit that it will have from the feedback that I have received from others and, of course, from having taken the initiative to practise it myself. When I share this with others it is not in a dogmatic or religious context at all. I share it as something practical that everyone can relate to in their daily lives, and they can see whether or not it is something useful or meaningful when they apply it. As I have mentioned earlier, throughout the years many people have confided in me that this technique has been helpful and beneficial for them. In fact just last Sunday someone came up to me and relayed the great benefit they have received from the meditation practice over the years. Of course I share this on the basis of having taken the initiative to practise it myself. If I did not practise it myself and told others that, 'it is good for you to meditate', that would be fallacious.

Having presented this technique and ways to adopt it, it would be good if one takes the time to analyse and check one's state of mind and see what kind of thoughts one has and so forth. Then, after spending a few minutes on that, you can adopt the meditation technique that we are about to do now.

So let us readjust our physical posture to an upright but comfortable and relaxed posture. We then take the initiative to set our mind in the right state. For the purpose of meditation we need to withdraw our attention from all other distracting objects. We completely withdraw our mind, 100%, from all the objects that cause us distress, any thoughts, memories or external objects, and bring our focus within us and place it upon the meditation object. For our meditation here, we adopt the breath as the object to focus on. But if that is not suitable for you, you can choose any other meditation object that you are familiar with. So we will spend the next few minutes in this way. We will place 100% of our focus on the breath or our own chosen meditation object (*Pause for meditation*)

That will be sufficient for now. With the remaining time that we have, are there any questions?

Question: Does an enlightened being create any negativity at all, or are they completely free from all negativity? What comes to mind is the example of the bodhisattva who killed a person to protect 500 others, did he commit some negativity?

Answer: In the account that you are referring to, the captain of the ship was a bodhisattva who had to kill one person to save five hundred. Instead of creating negativity, it was a means for that bodhisattva to create an incredible amount of virtue. That practice may otherwise seem to be a negative act but, in fact, it created virtue rather than negativity. This is a practice that can only be adopted by high-level beings with a high level of attainments and not by ordinary beings.

In that particular story, it is confirmed that the bodhisattva's act did not create negative karma, particularly the throwing karma that causes one to be reborn in cyclic existence. That karma was definitely not created. There is still a little bit of doubt about whether or not there is some negativity on some minor level but, most probably, we can say that there is not even a slight negativity and definitely not negative karma.

It was explained in this account that out of incredible great compassion the captain of the ship took it upon himself to take the life of one individual whom he, the bodhisattva, knew intended to kill 500 sailors. The bodhisattva's compassion was not only for the 500 sailors who otherwise would be killed, but also for the individual who had the negative intention to kill and to save him from the negative karma of killing 500 people. If that person killed 500 sailors he would definitely have created the negative karma to be reborn in the unfortunate lower realms. In order to save him from creating that negative karma, plus saving the lives of 500 others, the captain, who was a bodhisattva, decided the best option was to take the life of this individual. A great, intense compassion arose, and the captain was unable to bear the thought of so much suffering by others and wanted to relieve them from that suffering. It is purely from that intention that he engaged in the act. Therefore it became a means to accumulate great virtue. However such pure intention and understanding of the subtleties of karma is something that can only be understood and practiced by high-level bodhisattvas.

There are other examples of actions that are once forbidden but that can, at times, be allowed for a greater purpose. If we can understand this act, we can see the relevance here. From a worldly perspective, for example, if it is known that someone is planning to kill 500 people and another person steps forward and takes the life of that person who was about to commit this act, they would be seen as very brave and courageous. They may be given honours for the act. Again, I don't think such a person would be seen as committing a crime but rather seen as doing a great service. I suppose that would be the case from a legal point of view too.

If this was a general civilian setting and one individual took the life of someone who was about to commit a mass murder, I wonder if this person would be punished, or face legal consequences. I am not sure.

I know of another incident where someone acted bravely to save others. The incident occurred in Japan and involved a Tibetan. It concerned a tall building where many people were living. A gas cylinder in the building caught fire and when he saw this the Tibetan knew that if it exploded it would cause a lot of damage and affect the lives of many people in the building. So he took the initiative and picked

up the gas cylinder with his own hands and jumped outside of the building. Of course his hands were completely scorched and he lost his hands.

This act of bravery was initiated by a concerned and kind mind, a state of mind that has a genuine concern for the welfare of others. So we can see that it is out of kindness that people risk their own life in order to protect others. The main point we can take note of here is that a kind mind is a very precious state of mind, it is a mind which will only help and benefit others.

The opposite to this would be an individual who has a heavy, negative state of mind and can cause destruction and harm to others. We can relate to examples of the mass murder committed by a general in Cambodia. Apparently many thousands of people were killed. Such unfortunate events occur, one individual can cause the death of many thousands of people. In the story mentioned earlier, the ship's captain took the life of one individual to save the lives of 500 people. This shows it was indeed an act of kindness, not only to help the lives of 500 people but also to save the person who was killed from great negativities.

There is another incident that some of you may be aware of. Apparently there was a big fire somewhere in Melbourne and policewoman risked her life to save many others and in fact later died.

These acts of bravery to save others are worth considering. Whilst we don't have the time to go through the explanation from the text, we are actually at the point in the text where it talks about the faults of cherishing oneself and the benefits of cherishing others. These acts of bravery to save others whilst risking one's own life are examples of a genuine sense of cherishing others.

I would like to show my appreciation for your great attention to what I have shared and to thank you for the questions.

Summarising the main points again, if we take the initiative in our lives and try to adopt some of these practices, applying the meditation technique and investigating our state of mind, it can really help a transformation to take place. The main point is to promote and generate a kind mind within us. That generous and kind attitude will be with us whatever we do or wherever we go. It will be of benefit and service to others and others will naturally be drawn to us. It is definitely true that when you show a genuine concern for others, they will start to appreciate you.

Before we conclude the session for the evening let us again take a few minutes to adopt the meditation technique. This time the object that we will focus on will be the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra being recited. When we hear this sound we will place our full attention and focus on the sound of the mantra. When the recitation subsides, we can focus on the residue of the nice feeling that we have in our mind, a blissful state of mind. We will try to maintain that focus for a few moments and in that way this will suffice for a focused meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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Edited Version

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