
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

འཇམ་དཔལ་ལྷན་པའི་འགྲུབ་ལམ་གྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ལྟར་།།

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As usual, let us adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. Within this posture we also need to ensure that we have a relaxed and calm state of mind.

In order to engage in the meditation, first we need to ensure that we are genuinely relaxed, both physically and mentally.

While it is relatively easier to adopt a comfortable and relaxed physical posture, to maintain a calm and more focused state of mind is something that many find difficult to achieve. You may be able to adopt the appropriate posture physically for meditation, but if the mind is wandering outside, then that would not be real meditation.

As I emphasise regularly, we need to ensure that we adopt a technique or method that will allow our mind to become genuinely more calm and relaxed. This is essential for well-being in our daily life.

To achieve a genuinely calm and tranquil state of mind does not come about spontaneously, but requires some training. Without proper training, it would be hard to achieve that. The training mainly involves familiarising the mind in a positive way.

The reason why we find it so hard to settle the mind, is because we are not accustomed to having a calm and relaxed state of mind. The mind is normally habituated with many thoughts and is easily influenced by external distractions. Our mind is mostly in a distracted state, so that is likely to occur in a natural state.

When there is a moment to relax physically, the mind, due to habituation, will most likely be occupied with distractions. The opposite of that is also true—for an individual who is accustomed to thinking in positive ways and has trained the mind to the point where it naturally and spontaneously generates positive states of mind, such as love and compassion, then that is likely to occur naturally. Whether within a relaxed physical state or otherwise, the mind is accustomed to be preoccupied with a genuine sense of love and compassion. So it really comes down to our habitual thoughts. Just as with our physical habituation, it is true for our mind that if we are familiar with certain thoughts or states of mind, those are most likely to be dominant. For example, for someone who is quite familiar with thinking about objects of desire or attachment, then that will dominate their mind. Therefore when they are physically relaxed and comfortable and in a meditative state, their mind will most likely be thinking of objects of attachment, and that is because of the habituation of that mind. Therefore we can see that if we are habituated in focusing and thinking

about objects of distractions such as attachment or other kinds of negativities, then that is how our negative mind will be influenced. When we make the connection between allowing our mind to be influenced by focusing on distractions, and the mind becoming agitated, filled with anxiety and in turmoil, then in contrast to that, we will be able to acknowledge that if we are in a positive state of mind, it will help us to become more calm. A positive mind brings about tranquillity, which contributes to our mental as well as our physical well-being. This understanding and acknowledgement comes from our own research and honest investigation in evaluating our own state of mind. The profound insight we gain from self-analysis, called ‘wisdom’ in Buddhism, becomes an invaluable asset. According to this tradition, our real protection is developed within our own mind, rather than outside—this becomes the real source of refuge.

Through this self-analysis, as we gain insight and understanding from our investigation, it is not sufficient just to have that understanding—it does not solve our problems. The next thing is to put it into practice intentionally, further cultivating positive states of mind and overcoming negative states of mind, and not holding on to negative attitudes and thoughts—that is the actual practice, which meditation practice helps to develop further. When we take that initiative, then our life will begin to improve and we can safely assume that we have a meaningful life. When we adopt the practice of cultivating and promoting positiveness within and removing negativity, then we can consider it a worthwhile life. This is why within the various different religions, for those who take the initiative to practice their religion with great sincerity and devotion, you can definitely see that there is a positive outcome. For any religious practitioner who sincerely practises their religion, we can see that there is definitely a difference in their demeanour, with a peaceful aspect. In relating to ourselves, we need to understand the paramount importance of a peaceful state of mind. When we have a genuinely peaceful and calm mind, we have a more joyful and happy mind as a natural by-product. Therefore, we need to recognise and not allow ourselves to fall under the influence of the distractions. Completely allowing ourselves to follow the distractions is detrimental to our peaceful state of mind. There may be distractions that we intentionally want to follow, such as distractions that will give us some sort of joy and excitement. We may feel elated for a while, but in fact, through our own experience, when we allow ourselves to become completely influenced by indulging in certain kinds of distractions, it actually causes us more distress later on. We need to protect ourselves from a superficially, elated state of mind on the one hand, and a completely despondent, discouraged state of mind with a feeling of hopelessness on the other hand. We need to find the right sort of balance for our mind. This is of course our own responsibility, and we cannot rely on others to do it for us—we need to take the initiative for ourselves. I relate this to all of you, and if I emphasise it again, it is because of my genuine concern for you—I share this out of a sense of love for you. If I were to ask whether I have any kind of worries myself, it is finding the best way to help you

understand how to deal with your own mind, and bring about a genuine, happy and more peaceful state of mind for yourselves. This is why I try different means, and relate these in whatever ways that are practical and possible for you. The most I can do is to share these techniques with you, but it is up to you to implement and to put them into practice—therefore it comes back to your own responsibility. Of course, we need to think about other people's well-being and feel concern for them, but we need to ensure that we ourselves are of sound mind, and are capable of taking care of our own well-being. Based on that, once we have a sound mind, then we are able to assist and help others too.

Someone who is happy themselves, is more capable of making others happy. If someone is feeling sad, it is quite hard to try to make others happy. Even if you were to go around and try to make others happy, people will talk behind your back and say, 'Look at them, they are always sad themselves, how do they expect us to be happy?' There is a significant point here—first of all, we need to take initiative to have a happy mind ourselves.

To illustrate how, if one is genuinely happy oneself, that can have a positive influence on others, we can take the example of a happy relationship between parents. It is very clear that when parents are in a harmonious, good relationship, it definitely has a positive effect on the children. When the parents themselves are happy, then the children will grow up with a happy atmosphere around them, which comes directly from the parents. A good relationship between the parents definitely helps the children to become healthier mentally, and it does not sow the seeds of distress in their minds. Children brought up in a happy atmosphere will grow up to be happier people, and the nurturing and good upbringing naturally will be passed on to their children in the future, the next generation. This is something we can see in many different aspects, as the positivity of religion is passed down from one generation to the next generation. For example, in Christianity—it started with Jesus Christ giving the positive teachings of love and caring for others, followed by his direct disciples and when they practised it genuinely, it passed on to the next disciples. In that way, up till today, religions such as Christianity and all other religions have the positive and good message that is carried on. This is what we call a 'lineage' – when something positive is passed on, and is embraced by the next generation, it will be passed on to the following generations. In this way, we can see that the positivity of happy parents with a good, harmonious relationship is passed on to their children and the next generation. In that way it will spread and help not only the immediate family, but the surrounding society, and contributes to a happier nation. These are things that we need to take into consideration.

Another point I would like to share is how often the cause of distress in our minds is due to a minor thing that we grasp and hold on to and attach so much importance. It may be as simple as giving it up, but I find that many don't give up the obsession in their mind and just hold on to it. The more they hold on to it, the more distress they feel. If you could just recognise what that obsession may

be, and consider letting go of that, it could bring a genuinely happier and calmer mind.

What I am trying to point out here is changing from an attitude or state of mind which causes distress, to a more positive state of mind and outlook. There are many antidotes and stories I could share, but one that comes to mind right now is an incident with someone with whom I am closely associated. The lady was really distressed and very unhappy, and related to me that her husband had just left her. My response to her at that moment was, 'Oh, that should be a good thing' (laughter). She seemed to be very shocked, startled and surprised at that response.

I related to this lady, 'You shouldn't feel too distressed that you have lost something. In fact you haven't lost anything, but rather gained something. You have actually gained your freedom'.

Geshe-la spoke in English, saying that she was more independent now, and good riddance to bad rubbish!

To relate another incident, again someone was really distressed because the person that they were fond of was not returning the attention that was given. When they were lamenting about it, my response was, 'Why do you keep pursuing someone who is not showing much interest and appreciation for who you are? It is as if they are walking in the other direction and you keep trying to follow them – that won't really help you. But if you turn around, you may see new faces, people who appreciate you, and you will get new companions and friends'. That individual thought about it and said, 'Maybe it's true, I may find another friend or companion'. She perhaps thought I was giving her some kind of a prediction (laughter), but I was just giving some practical advice about how pursuing someone who is not giving the same sort of response will be tiring and a waste of time and energy. These are all examples of being fixated on and obsessed with something and not letting go, which will cause more distress in your mind. Going back to the main point, there are certain things in our mind that we are not willing to give up, even though it is causing us distress. It is a matter of recognising that and changing. The change or transformation relates to changing our ideas, thoughts or attitudes which cause us distress, into something more valuable and worthwhile. There are those states of mind or attitudes that we need to change and adopt new ones, and those that we need to promote and further develop – this is something we need to recognise. The meditation practice will help us to recognise and understand what we need to change in our mind, and what we need to let go. I am relating all of this as a means to point out some practical aspects.

When there is a certain obsession or attitude in our mind that is causing distress, and if we were to give up that obsession, then we could experience relief in the mind, and as a consequence, a genuinely more peaceful and happy state of mind. The ability to be able to let go will be easier for someone who has the training to let go—someone who has taken the initiative to practice meditation, understood the significance and applied the appropriate means. When a situation occurs where the mind, through previous habituation starts getting attached, and a sense of competitiveness or jealousy

arises in the mind, but because of meditation training, we will easily be able to recognise it and let go. Whereas someone who has no previous training will find it very hard, and because they don't have the method on how to let go, they will just have to bear the pain for as long as it lasts. After sometime it may wear off a bit, but when the obsession, anger or state of mind of attachment is dominant and very strong at its heightened state, then it will cause much agony and pain at that time. When they don't have the method, it is a pitiful state – we can't blame them for not doing anything because they don't have a method and don't know how to deal with and overcome that. For those of us here who are introduced to this method of meditation, we need to understand that the meditation technique is a means to increase our wisdom and understanding, and develop insight within ourselves. With the insight and understanding that we gain from meditation, we are better equipped to deal with difficult situations when they arise. Of course, for the majority of us, we cannot entirely stop the negativities from arising in our minds, such as attachment, anger or jealousy, or a sense of competitiveness and pride. These are states of mind which occur quite readily. However, while we may not be able to completely stop them from occurring and manifesting in our mind, we can better equip ourselves to deal with them, so they don't completely dominate or influence us and cause great agony and distress in our mind. This is how the meditation technique helps us.

When it is not dealt with, and people do not adopt the proper method and training to overcome these situations and states of mind, then they may spend many years completely dwelling in a despondent, or very sad and depressed state of mind.

You can have a personal dialogue with yourself, asking, 'Why are you sad and why are you crying?' There may be very silly reasons (*laughter*). It's ridiculous, thinking about things that cause unhappiness. If you were to advise someone else who was thinking about certain things that cause them distress, you would think that it is really stupid, 'Why would you cause yourself pain?' That is not something for us to relate to others, but to ourselves. We need to catch ourselves being childish and silly, so that we can become stronger within ourselves. We need to take the initiative to take care of our mental well-being. We are living in a country with great conditions—no-one here is deprived of basic food, clothing and shelter. Materialistically, there is nothing lacking. However, many seem to have the problem of sadness and depression—this is something we need to address. There are ways to overcome that, and when we understand the technique, we have to adopt it ourselves for our own well-being.

When we are feeling down, if we were to take the initiative to ask ourselves, 'What is going on, why are you feeling this way?', rather than finding someone else to ask, this would help to relieve the mental agony. The meditation practice that we adopt here is the focused meditation, where we choose an appropriate object on which to focus. In order to apply this technique fully and appropriately, we will make our utmost commitment not to allow our mind to be influenced and distracted by

these deluded and afflicted distractions – 'afflicted' meaning it has an element of causing us distress. We need to protect our mind from the afflicted distractions. The way to do that is to bring our entire focus inwards on the chosen object, our breath. Based on our natural breathing, we place our full attention and focus on the awareness of our breath. If we are fully aware of each breath coming in and going out, and do not allow our mind to wander off, then we have adopted a successful meditation practice. This training, even for a few minutes, is familiarising our mind to be focused on an object which does not cause afflictions to arise. We are making a positive acquaintance, focusing on an object, and this training can help us to adopt a more mindful awareness in our daily life. We need to see that there is a relevance and significance here, that even if we meditate for a few minutes, that positive effect can help us in our everyday lives as well. So for the next few minutes, we will keep our full attention and focus on our breath. (*Pause for meditation*)

That will be sufficient for now.

We have time for one or two questions.

Student: How important is communication and honesty in friendship, and knowing when to communicate and not communicate?

Geshe-la: You seem to have answered your own question, because if it seems communication is worthwhile and you can resolve something with communication, then that's when you communicate.

Student: At what point do you stop communicating?

Geshe-la: You could judge for yourself, if you are in the mood of wanting to communicate, and if you feel it can resolve something, then you communicate, but if it comes to a point where it gets nowhere, then there's no point in communicating and that's when you don't communicate.

So we can notice with others, when they are not feeling happy, then they don't want to talk and they keep quiet.

Student: It also seems to be a problem with boundaries, both on a personal level and with countries.

Geshe-la: In relation to boundaries, it is not something which is fixed. Everyone has their own personal boundary, which may differ with each individual. So therefore all we can go by is our own boundary. If we can recognise our own boundaries, and are clear about that, then we can communicate or not communicate within the boundaries that we understand for ourselves, and in relation to another person as well.

If we were to follow the great Master Shantideva's meticulous advice on how to speak and how to look upon others in *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, speech should be concise and clear, with not too many words, and having a connection between the earlier and the second part of the talk.

He says that when we look upon others, we need to remind ourselves that this is an individual being who will cause me to become enlightened, and see them with great love and compassion.

When you see the other person as an individual who is helping you to fulfil your own ultimate goal, then naturally you will feel compassion for them.

Furthermore, Shantideva mentions very precisely that if we need to rely both on the buddhas as well as sentient beings in order for us to become enlightened, then why do we pay so much respect to the buddhas and then disregard and ignore the sentient beings? We need to have an equal amount of respect and veneration for both buddhas as well as sentient beings. This is very worthwhile advice.

That is a significant point and thanks for your question.

Student: In regards to love and attachment, what about a break-up in a relationship where there is good love?

Geshe-la: Whenever there is some pain or agony arising in relation to a separation, that would be an indication of attachment. What people need to tackle is the mind of attachment rather than the person. In order to overcome attachment, there are various methods, if attachment arises out of the exaggeration of the qualities of an individual. If there is a strong sense of attachment to the other person, then there are methods describing how to think about the natural imperfections of the other person, so that attachment reduces. The main point here is, either to relate it to the other, or to deal with your own mind in finding ways to overcome attachment by thinking of the imperfections or faults and disadvantages of attachment in general. The main thing is to try to outweigh that attachment with some genuine love. When there is genuine love, there is no cause for pain, whereas, if there is pain, that is an indication of attachment involved. So the main thing is to try to reduce attachment and slowly 'up-weight' the real love.

This needs to be understood in its proper context—when using methods and techniques to overcome attachment, it may seem as if you are seeing the imperfections of the other person, but ultimately, it is a method and technique to overcome the mind of attachment within you. So it is not about whether or not the other person is good, or whether or not to give them up, but it is about giving up attachment within the mind—that is the main focus and it needs to be understood. Within an intimate relationship, there are situations where things are not working out—there may be a physical separation and you have decided that you are not going to be together. Nevertheless, the mind hasn't given up the attachment to the other person. Therefore, even if there is a physical separation taking place, the reason why the mind feels agony is because you haven't given up the attachment in the mind.

One of the methods to overcome attachment which is presented in the teachings is to meditate on the imperfections of the object of attachment. Some people have confided in me saying, 'It may help a bit to overcome attachment to the other person, but it doesn't seem appropriate, and I don't want to see the other person as being imperfect.'

It would also be the case of translators not using the right terminology, where the faults are being used in relation to the object. When the translators are at fault, then some may find it inappropriate to see the faults in others, so

therefore they feel, 'I can't see the faults, it's not good to look into other's faults'. So the implication here is not seeing the faults of the person, but seeing the natural imperfections of the object. If it is an individual to whom you are attached, then focus on the natural imperfections of the body. If you still find that inappropriate and uncomfortable to do, then you can focus and see the imperfections of your own body. As the teachings explain, we do that by focusing on the tip of our toes and looking up to the top of our head, and going beyond the skin, looking at the flesh and the bones and what we are made up of. When we look beyond the surface, we would see what is inside of us—there is nothing really attractive. When you go to the internal organs and see what's inside, you will acknowledge to yourself what seems to be otherwise an attractive body, there are natural imperfections that if we were to consider and contemplate, it is not at all attractive. This is a meditation process to reduce strong attachment in the mind, which otherwise sees only the perfections and good qualities of the body.

As Shantideva advises, if this meditation does not help you to overcome attachment and you are still not yet convinced that there are imperfections in the body, then you will probably have to go and see a corpse, or an autopsy! (*Geshe-la laughing*)

I would like to thank all of you for paying great attention. We can definitely say that we have had a worthwhile time for over an hour in our gathering, sharing positive things which could be useful and meaningful in our lives, with mutual good heartedness.

Recently when we were at a teaching session in Warrnambool, after our discussion, a few people confided in me, saying, 'Thank you so much for sharing all the good information, but that gives us a lot of homework to do'. (*Laughter*)

Some have mentioned that, 'Yes, I will take this home and would like to bring it back again next year!' (*Geshe-la chuckling*).

Before we end the session for the evening, let us again take this opportunity to spend a few moments in meditation—this time using the sound of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra, to be recited as an object of focus. We keep our entire focus on that without allowing the mind to be distracted.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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