
Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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It would be good for us to consider that, as humans, we have a unique intelligence. It is important to acknowledge that, so that we can use that intelligence in a most meaningful way.

Human intelligence can be used in a positive or negative way, and it is good to really consider what contributes to using intelligence in a positive way, and what conditions would see us use it in a negative, or harmful way.

The way that I understand it, is that when one is in a genuinely calm, peaceful and joyous state of mind, then that is when one would most likely be using one's intelligence in a very useful and beneficial way. Whereas when the mind is agitated and disturbed, that is when it is most likely that one would use one's intelligence in destructive and harmful ways.

When intelligence is used in a positive way then the consequences are also positive. Whereas when intelligence is used when the mind is agitated and in turmoil, then the consequences of that seem to be undesirable and harmful.

When one understands that using intelligence in a positive way brings about positive results, then naturally we would like to see our intelligence used for that purpose. Since this requires a calm and peaceful state of mind, one can see the significance of the meditation practice, which is specifically a technique to naturally calm one's state of mind. The positive results that are brought about from using one's intelligence in a good way would be that there is a benefit for oneself as well as for others—there is definitely a twofold benefit. Whereas if one allows the mind to be in turmoil and doesn't know how to come out of the agitation, then naturally, one's intelligence would be tainted, or influenced by the turmoil and agitation, thus bringing about undesirable consequences that are harmful for oneself and others. So this is how we need to see the significance and benefit of the practice.

It is really quite significant that we consider the great positive and destructive potential of human intelligence. It is quite amazing to think about the extent of what can be achieved in a positive light, in terms of acquiring good conditions. We have achieved a state where transportation has become very easy, and we can travel great distances with airplanes, cars and trains. Of course, there are other good conditions that have really improved, such as food, medicine and so forth. These are all conducive conditions for our well-being.

By the same token human intelligence has produced mechanisms that can cause massive destruction, so that even within a few minutes whole cities and towns can be destroyed. This is one of the great fears in the world right now. It is not just speculation, but in fact we can see how human intelligence, both on the positive and destructive sides, can bring about unimaginable consequences. It is good for us to understand that, because this human intelligence is something that we all individually possess; it is good to acknowledge that one has both a positive and a negative

potential within. By seeing that, we need to understand how to develop the intelligence so it is used in a positive way. It is really important that we take this into consideration at individual, community and national levels. This is how we can initiate positive progress with our human intelligence.

Engagement in positive or harmful actions is dependent upon the intelligence which initiates those actions. Intelligence is a state of mind, thus all actions are initiated by a state of mind. Within one's states of mind it is intelligence that determines how the actions are carried out, and to what degree. Depending on how intelligence is utilised one may engage in actions which bring about a temporary short term benefit, or one can use intelligence to a greater extent initiating actions, which would bring about a long-term benefit. So depending on how one utilises intelligence, the actions that follow, and the benefits that one derives from that, differ. When the mind is in a calm and relaxed state, it is more likely that one will use intelligence in a positive way. However when it is in turmoil and agitated, it is more likely that one uses intelligence in a destructive way. To further emphasise this with an example, when we are in a calm state of mind it is less likely that we would consciously think about hurting someone else. When there is no one to settle a score with, then we don't really preoccupy ourselves with how to go about hurting anyone.

Whereas if we are feeling a little bit agitated and someone criticises, abuses or harms us, even in the slightest way, then our intelligence seems to go into great detail, thinking about how to get them back. If we were to be very honest with ourselves, we might find that our intelligence is more preoccupied and active in finding ways to retaliate when someone harms us. When someone is kind to us we seem to be a little bit more docile, not really thinking too much about going out of our way to actually repay that kindness. To summarise the main point, we all have a certain amount of intelligence, just by the mere fact of being human. Utilising that intelligence so that we bring about positive results for ourselves, and others, is something we would all acknowledge as being worthwhile. And the basis for one to use intelligence in a positive way is to have a calm and peaceful state of mind, and it is for that purpose that meditation is relevant.

The significance of adopting a technique such as meditation to acquire a peaceful state of mind, as well as how that would actually have a positive effect upon oneself, is something which we can relate to through our own experience. You would have noticed for yourselves on many occasions, when you are feeling quite calm, settled and peaceful within yourself, that when you look around and encounter others you tend to see them in a more positive light. One seems to have a natural affinity with others, and so seeing and relating to them becomes a joy. This is regardless of how others may treat us—from one's own side, due to the state of mind one is able to see others in a good light. In contrast to that, when one's mind is agitated, feeling sad or despondent, others might appear to be obnoxious, or irritating and so forth. What is being pointed out is that how others appear to us is not so much related to how others actually are, but rather related to our own state of mind. Therefore it is important to pay attention to, and acknowledge our states of mind, because otherwise we are prone to immediately blame the external. Thus the way to bring about a more peaceful, gentle and calm state of mind is through the practice of meditation. This is the practical relevance and benefit of the meditation technique.

These are points which may appear quite reasonable and obvious right now, but on a personal level it is something that we need to think about again and again in order for it to really sink in. To reiterate the earlier example, even in relation to one's immediate relations or close ones, they can appear in a different light. Someone who, on most occasions, appears to be pleasant and appealing to oneself, can at certain times appear as quite repulsive and as an object of scorn. The reasoning that one should use here is, "Has the object itself completely changed from one moment to the next?" If we were to be honest with ourselves we can realise that it is not really the other person that is changing so radically, but rather our own state of mind. We need to really acknowledge that it is our own state of mind that we need to work with, rather than trying to change the external world to suit us. If we can actually begin to change our own internal world to be more positive, then how we perceive things outside can definitely improve. That is the main point we need to acknowledge and work on.

There is a real significance and practical benefit in thinking about these points again and again, analysing why sometimes others appear in a positive or negative light, and whether it is entirely dependent on the external object, or related to one's own perception. As ordinary beings it may not immediately stop agitation and anger arising, however unlike previous times, one would be able to catch it, and think, "OK, now I'm getting angry with this person, and I'm seeing them in a negative light, but it may not be entirely their fault. It may not be entirely from their side, but rather my own state of mind." Thus one may be able to acknowledge and honestly catch one's own state of mind instead of putting the entire blame on the other. This will help to reduce the intensity of the negative states of anger and so forth. On this same note, when we talk about attachment and anger as described in the Buddhist philosophical teachings, attachment to an object is when we perceive it as being very beautiful. Thus because of the beauty or appealing nature of the object, we form attachment towards it. The particular aspect of attachment, which is said to be erroneous, is that it exaggerates the beauty in the object. If the question is whether there is some natural positive attributes in the object, such as beauty, then there is. What attachment does is that it exaggerates those natural attributes and sees the object as being much more beautiful or appealing than it actually is. Likewise in contrast to that, anger does the exact opposite. The mind of anger exaggerates the unappealing aspects of the object, seeing it as being completely repulsive, as having no redeeming qualities. Again, if the question is whether there are unappealing attributes in the object, depending on the object, there might actually be some natural imperfections. However what anger does is that it completely exaggerates, adding extra faults that are not actually there. Even scientists have come to acknowledge how the faults or attributes are not entirely dependent on the object itself, but that it is very much related to how we perceive the object.

There is the Buddhist philosophical view, and then there is the scientists' point of view. Of course the Buddhist point of view goes into subtler levels, including the description that everything appears to us in an erroneous way, because our perception of things is actually faulty. Things are perceived by an ordinary person's mind as having their own inherent identity, and existing really solidly from their own side. Thus the view of emptiness is presented, where things don't exist in that way—things are empty of existing independently and inherently. Of course this is going into

subtler levels of how due to the misconceptions we have, we perceive things in an erroneous way. On a more practical level based on our own experience, we can see for ourselves that, in the moment we are angry at someone, we perceive that person as being completely riddled with faults. We reach a point where we want nothing to do with that person, where we find everything about them to be negative and that they're completely at fault. However, later on when our mind starts becoming more settled, and the anger starts to reduce, then that person—particularly if it's a person that you normally relate well to—will start to appear in a good light again. So we can see that the earlier perception we had of that person has changed, to once again seeing them in a more appealing manner. In contrast to that, with attachment, it's the opposite. In the moment of strong attachment towards someone, they might appear to us as being without any faults, with not even a hint of natural imperfections. Thus the stronger the attachment, the more appealing the object appears. Again, later when the strong attachment starts to reduce, we might then acknowledge some natural imperfections the person may have, which we were blind to earlier. In relation to both of the states of mind of anger and attachment we are deceived. So when we relate to this in our everyday life, then we can actually start to really acknowledge that it must definitely be related to our own states of mind or attitudes.

Trying to generate a peaceful state of mind is of utmost importance for one's own well-being because it is the main conducive condition to accomplish that. Therefore protecting one's happy state of mind becomes a priority, because the opposite of a happy mind is an unhappy, agitated one. If one is preoccupied with an overly agitated mind due to excitement, being completely focused outwardly, then it naturally lacks calmness and thus peacefulness. Therefore protecting oneself against agitation, against an unhappy and despondent mind is something that we really need to apply. And so as I regularly emphasise, if we don't lose the happy state of mind, then we have been able to successfully protect our most valuable asset.

As I have shared with many of you in the past, I was under difficult circumstances back in my homeland of Tibet. When I escaped, I had to leave everything behind, my family, land and possessions. However one thing that I have been able to maintain, protect and bring along with me is a happy state of mind. And that is something which I have developed over the years to the point where I can confidently say that it is my most valuable asset and my best companion. In terms of my protection it would be equivalent to my father or mother, and this protection of a happy state of mind is constantly with me. It is my best friend, sister, brother, all of that combined into one, and it is because of my personal experience with the value of that, that I can confidently share it with you.

What I am saying here is that a happy state of mind is the equivalent of a father, mother, sister or brother, because even lacking all of these, and at times without any external companions, I have never felt a sense of real loneliness or lack of companionship, and that is because I have had a happy state of mind. That has been my solace and my companion. It is the equivalent of all the others.

If I had lost my happy mind along with losing my country, then I don't think I would be sitting here sharing this with you. It might have been a difficult situation for me. In fact there have been many who, out of sheer desperation, took

their own lives. They committed suicide because of the things that happened in Tibet.

Thus in seeing the value of the experience that I have obtained I try to encourage and assure you again and again that what is an asset for oneself is a happy state of mind. And along with that we need a healthy body, as our well-being is dependent on a combination of both. We all know that a healthy body doesn't just come about naturally, we need to work towards that. We need to take precaution of avoiding things that are harmful to our health, and adopting things that are beneficial. Likewise with the mind: we need to avoid certain things which are detrimental to our mental health, and adopt those conditions which are necessary for a happy mind. So it does require some effort. All I am doing here is encouraging you so that your effort won't be in vain, it will not be wasted time and energy. To bring it back to the main point, what helps promote and generate the happy state of mind is the practice of meditation.

One can also take note here of how a happy, calm and peaceful state of mind is something which directly contributes to our physical health as well. We can see that those who have a naturally happy state of mind, definitely have better health.

Now, to adopt the meditation technique we readjust our body to be in an upright, but comfortable and relaxed posture. From within that we need to set our mind so that we engage in this practice whole-heartedly, using this time for the actual practice of meditation. In order to develop a focused mind, we need to intentionally withdraw our attention from the distracting objects, which encompass our thoughts and memories or any kind of external object that we might be thinking of. We need to completely withdraw from these distractions, bringing our full attention and focus onto the chosen object, which is our own breath. The emphasis here is to be 100% focused, because if the mind is wandering off in other directions we will never really achieve the intended result of our practice of meditation. The breath is like an anchoring point, in that when we place our full attention and focus on it, then our mind is anchored there. It is just as if someone is tied to a pillar, they couldn't move away. Like that, our mind has to be bound to the object, which in this case is our own breath.

(Pause for meditation)

Just as we have attempted in our short session now, it would be really useful and worthwhile to try to adopt a meditation practice in one's daily life. That's how we get familiar with it. With the short time that we have remaining we can address one question.

Student: We spoke a little before about suicide and death. How does one overcome someone else's suicide?

If we really take into consideration why someone would have taken their own life, it may be due to difficulties they experienced, and that was the way they chose to end their suffering. It was not an intention to cause others any pain or hurt, but as far as they were concerned that was the only way of ending their suffering. With our previously mentioned intelligence, if we were to look into the reality of the situation, and ask if that was a good choice, we'd have to acknowledge that unfortunately it was not, because there are other ways to overcome suffering. But they chose that because they felt there was no alternative. It is unfortunate that there was some limitation of not being able to use their intelligence to see that there were methods to overcome difficulties, without having to take such drastic measures.

From our own side, with the understanding that they had taken their life to end their own suffering, then rather than getting upset or annoyed with the individual, we can have more compassion for them. Particularly when we understand that they didn't have an understanding of how to end their suffering and that is why they took the drastic means of taking their own life. But it is easy to forgive them if that is also something one is struggling with. There are different angles of how we can deal with this situation.

Relating to a previous time in which this topic came up, if one sees an animal suffering, and there seems to be no alternative way to end that, then it is decided that putting them down would be the best option. Of course it is with the intention to help the animal, not to hurt them. In some cases it is our own pet, and so of course we do not want to lose them, but we feel that it is the best way to end their suffering. If we look into the intention of why such actions are taken, we can't really find much fault, but what we have to acknowledge is that the method might not have been the best.

When we look into the intention of someone having taken their own life, it is definitely with the intention to alleviate their suffering. Using their limited understanding, they concluded that from within the two options of living and taking their own life, they chose to take their own life. They felt that would be the better option for ending their suffering.

I wish to thank everyone for paying such great attention. You have listened very well. Thank you. If you did find something useful or beneficial from the talk this evening, then please do keep that at heart.

For those parents with young children that I have a close acquaintance with, I have shared the advice that in thinking of the long-term benefit of the children, it is good for you to take the initiative when they are quite young to make a specific account in their name, and save \$5 a week. Then in ten to twenty years when they reach a significant age and may be needing some money to start something for themselves, that \$5 a week would have accumulated to a significant amount, which you will be able to comfortably give over to the child, because it was saved in their name, for them. Otherwise if you don't really consider that, then when the child reaches the age of eighteen or so, and they need some money, you may not have the money to be able to give to them. If it was saved in their name, and with their future in mind, then later on it will be much easier to hand it over. What I am trying to relate here with this analogy is also true. It seems that each time you hear something good, if you just keep one or two points in your mind, and try to utilise those, then slowly we can invest in obtaining increasingly positive conditions.

Before we conclude for the evening, let us again spend a few minutes in meditation. This time we can use the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. As we hear the sound of the mantra we place our full attention and focus on the sound. And when the recitation subsides just to spend a few moments on that residual good feeling that we have.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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