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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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Let us adopt a comfortable, relaxed posture, and also try to have a clear and calm state of mind.

This sets us up for mind training. We need to train our mind because our wellbeing depends on a positive state of mind. So we definitely need to train our mind.

I regularly also emphasise this as an important activity for the younger generation. As you develop yourself, as you embark on your life journey, it is very good to have a head start on training your mind. Furthermore, we need to have assertiveness, confidence and empowerment. That sense of empowerment comes with a strong mind.

For every undertaking in life we need to develop our skills, and these come with training. Even from a worldly point of view, we can say that whether we get a good job or not is dependent on whether we have had a good training based on academic study. Even though good academic study may not always guarantee getting a good job, it is definitely the basis of one.

The main point is, in order to achieve a worldly status, we need to engage in worldly training. Likewise, for our mental wellbeing there is also spiritual training. This is why we need to embark on a spiritual training. So we have two aspects of our training—worldly and spiritual.

Material achievement gained from worldly training is beneficial when it doesn't become a cause for delusions, or afflictions, to arise in our mind. On the other hand if we find that our material progress starts to affect our mind, and delusions such as anger, jealousy, pride and so forth, start to increase, then we can see that material progress and success don't really contribute to our genuine wellbeing. This is because we start to get more and more troubled in our mind. Our mind becomes more and more disturbed and in turmoil, and this is not conducive for our wellbeing.

When we really think about these points it becomes clear that it is essential to have both worldly and spiritual training. A worldly training helps us to achieve our materialistic needs, and a spiritual training, simply known as mind training, is essential for our mental wellbeing. The best mental training results in the mind not becoming under the influence or dominated by delusions. Thus when our mental training helps us not to become overly influenced or dominated by delusions, then it has served its purpose, and our mind training has been successful. Even if we have great success in the material world, such as achieving a high position at work, like a CEO of a company, if there is a lack of mental training, then we will still easily be influenced by delusions.

Even in the highest position, we might still have a strong feeling that we need to compete with others. Likewise, because of our high position we are anxious, trying to control everything. Gradually, a lot of mental agony starts to develop. While some people have reached a point in their life where they have enough material comforts to sustain themselves, and they have definitely more than a normal person, they are still not happy. They still do not have a true sense of joy and contentment in their minds, and this is because of the lack of the mental training.

When someone in a significant or high position, is making a lot of money, even reaching that point is insignificant if their mind is not happy. The unhappiness and unrest in their minds is due to the delusions or afflictions, such as jealousy, anger, sense of competitiveness with others, pride and so forth. These negative states of mind are what is causing that lack of a sense of happiness and joy. Now, because they lack mental training, they might not even understand why they are miserable. As far as material things are concerned, they are not lacking anything, so they might not really understand what is causing them this mental distress. It is good to use such examples as a reminder for ourselves, that people with high status and material wealth are not necessarily happy and satisfied in their life. These examples help us to be cautious, and understand the need for mental training.

We will start to have a happier and more joyful mind when we start to manage our afflictions, when we don't allow our mind to be influenced or dominated by anger, jealousy, pride and so forth. And we'll definitely sleep better. If we find that our sleep patterns are disturbed, and we are not sleeping well, it because the mind itself is disturbed by afflictions. So if we want to have a more joyful state of mind and have better sound sleep, then it is definitely essential that we look into our state of mind, and take care of it, which means not allowing our mind to be completely dominated by delusions.

I've personally experienced the disadvantages of allowing the mind to be under the influence of the negative state of mind of anger. In my young days I got into fights where I sustained wounds on my head. So I didn't gain anything from acting out of anger. Instead, I was the loser. There was no benefit as I was injured. We will all experience ill effects when we are influenced by the negative effect of delusions such as anger. These disadvantages are a good reminder for us to be more cautious. What we need to try to understand here is that the fault lies in not having control over our mind, and in allowing our mind to be under the power of the delusions. In fact, we are the ones who need to be in control of our own mind. But when we are not engaged in training our mind, we fall under the control of our delusions. So this is where we take a wrong turn in life, and end up with a lot of distress.

As mentioned previously, and particularly for the younger generation, I implore you to spend some time to think about your spiritual training, along with your worldly studies, which are necessary for your future wellbeing. If you spend a lot of time in both worldly and

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spiritual training at the same time, then you will have a happier life. But check this out for yourself. If you completely ignore the mental training and just focus on worldly affairs, and it does bring about real, genuine happiness and wellbeing, then that's fine. But if you look around and see that is not true, that just concentrating on worldly gain does not necessarily bring you a positive result in your life, then you may look for another strategy.

It is important, especially again relating to the younger generation, that you make use of the best opportunities right now in your life, when you have a good strong body and a sound state of mind. You have the best conditions right now, so it is essential to take advantage of this great opportunity by putting some time and energy in your normal studies as well as spiritual training, rather than letting yourself becoming completely immersed in some meaningless affairs, such as being completely obsessed with having girlfriends and boyfriends. Spending your entire energy and time on that, means you will miss out on a great opportunity to secure the wellbeing of your life.

It may not seem really appropriate for me to give you advice; it is not really part of my business to parent you. There's no doubt that the real responsibility for leading you in the right direction and giving you sound advice lies, of course, with your parents. So I feel like I am not in the right position to do that, but what I can say is that I do have genuine concern and compassion for your wellbeing. This is why I feel compelled to share what I feel is something useful for the right direction in your life. Nevertheless I'm also considered by many as the spiritual father and mother of Tara Institute, so perhaps it is fitting for me to share this advice with you.

To clarify the main point again. Now that you are in the prime of your youth, especially in the teenage years, this is the time where you definitely need to explore your options. This is the time when you need friends, definitely. However, if you allow yourself to be completely distracted and obsessed with friends and influenced by whatever they say and do, then you are missing out on a great opportunity to study. So the point is that while you have friends and companions, you must always remember that having these friends and companions shouldn't be at the expense of losing your opportunity to study. So do not lose that opportunity. In the prime of your youth, around the teenage years, you don't notice much while you are wasting your precious time and opportunity being immersed in your parties, and going out with friends. But later, when you're older, in your early 20s, you will look back you will notice that you have wasted time and opportunity.

If you want a high paying job, say up to \$1000 per hour, have a look at how people in that position got there. Typically, they get these high paying positions through training and hard work. So therefore, if you put your time and energy towards achieving that goal of having good earnings then you will be able to achieve that eventually, as you are steadily working towards that. So for each hour that you waste now, you are putting yourself further away from the possibility of getting a job with

good earnings. Likewise, every hour that you have diligently used for studying and to improve yourself brings you nearer and nearer to having that high paying job. We see many in the older generation who have a good job with good earnings and have a secure life. Now, the younger generations will follow that, and reach success through their efforts. So this is the main point. For example, someone with \$400,000 has not miraculously created it out of thin air, but through their studies and their training.

I encourage the younger generation to pay attention and use the prime of their youth to study. I am sharing advice that I feel is essential, and important for your life. Even though, in terms of material value, I may not be giving anything in your hand, this advice is something I share from the depth of my heart. If you pay attention to this advice, I feel you will definitely benefit from it. When I talk to young children, as young as three or four, they seem to understand. They think, nod their head and say, yeah, that is true! To summarise, if you prepare now and study and train, then it is likely that you'll get a good job in the future. Jobs are increasing in the business world, and many positions will be there waiting for you; but only if you have prepared yourself well. The quality of your preparation is dependent on the time and energy you have put into your studies and training.

When I was young, it was difficult. I had left home and my parents, and food was scarce in the monastery in Lhasa, and there was no way for me to be able to see them again as they were so far away. There were many hardships along the way, but I didn't allow myself to become discouraged. I knew if I studied well I could become a geshe, which was ideal for me, and a good goal to achieve. This reasoning was in the forefront of my mind, so I didn't allow difficulties to daunt me, or make feel like giving up and going back to my home. I continued, I persevered with the hardships and difficulties and continued. I did become a geshe, and this has brought significant benefits for me.

However, some people have only met the Dharma late in their lives. These are people are in their late 50s or 60s, and say that they wish they had known about the spiritual path and the techniques of meditation much earlier in their lives, realising how much it would have benefitted them.

As I mentioned previously, the prime of youth is considered to be between the ages of 15 and 30, when there is so much room for knowledge and intelligence to increase. This is the time when you can really learn and gain more and more knowledge. I know this from my own experience. Looking back at my youth, I can see that was the period where I could really pay attention and learn so much. Likewise, most people have that capacity. Of course, there will be some exceptions, but generally speaking, given all other conditions are intact physically and mentally then definitely during the ages of 15 and 30 is the time where you have the greatest opportunity to acquire knowledge and understanding.

So to summarise the main point that I have been emphasising from the beginning of our session: if you do not allow your mind to be influenced by afflictions or

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delusions, then you will definitely be able to maintain a sound mind, and have good control over it.

If you have a controlled mind that is not influenced by delusions, then any good external conditions that you experience are like a bonus. But if the mind isn't maintained in this controlled form and is completely under the sway of delusions, then you will be unhappy and unsatisfied, even if you have some material success such as fancy clothing, good cars, a nice house and so forth. So having all of these material possessions doesn't really serve much purpose. Therefore, as the Buddha said: 'a subdued mind is a peaceful mind, a happy mind'.

When we apply a genuine training of our own mind where we are not influenced by delusions, then we will gain great benefit. Even if there are others out there who are intending to hurt us or criticise us and cause us harm, then if we do not become angry and retaliate then regardless of what they say or do, we will be able to maintain our dignity and composure. Their actions will not disturb our mind because we refuse to give in to anger, and we do not allow ourselves to be influenced by anger. Regardless of how others treat us, we will be able to maintain a sense of wellbeing and happiness within our mind. In contrast to that, if we allow our mind to be under the influence or control of anger, then this can cause us so much distress.

People who go to the extreme of engaging in negative deeds such as killing others, are under the influence of delusions, which are leading them to extreme actions. Their minds are wild, completely controlled by anger and other delusions. You know yourself, when you don't have control over your mind you can easily be swept up by anger into behaving badly. So when we see other people behaving badly, rather than getting upset and angry towards them, it is possible for us to develop a genuine sense of compassion for them, because we can see how they are creating the causes for their own misery and suffering. We can get a controlled mind by meditating regularly. First of all we need to withdraw our mind from all forms of distractions, then have a focused mind.

Meditation involves focusing on a particular chosen object that does not cause us any mental distress. The more we familiarise our mind with that object, the more we focus and familiarise on that, the more likely our mind will be in a more tranquil and calm state. In contrast to that, the reason why we find ourselves getting easily irritated and upset when something goes wrong or someone criticises us, is because of our familiarity with the mind of anger. This is what we are used to. We are used to getting annoyed and upset when others criticise or hurt us in any way. Having a distressed mind is due to the familiarity we have with negative states of mind. However, the more we familiarise our mind with a positive object or an object that does not cause delusions to arise in the mind, then we will become more and more in tune, and more and more familiar with having a more controlled mind, not reacting to situations, whenever they occur, with anger. This meditation training is significant due to its extreme positive effect.

Withdrawing our focus from external distractions, bringing it inwards 100%, and placing our focus on the chosen object of our meditation helps us to develop a mind that is clearer and sharper. Along with the clarity and sharpness of our mind comes a natural sense of tranquillity. Through the meditation, we actually gain these benefits. It is good to meditate with a full understanding.

Adopt a relaxed, comfortable body. The object we choose to focus on for our meditation is our own breath.

To be able to focus on the chosen object of our breath fully we need to intentionally withdraw our mind from other forms of deluded distractions, such as forms of thoughts and memories, which cause only distress to our mind. We need to completely withdraw from all of that, and then we are able to focus our attention on the breath. So focus now just on the breath itself.

*(Pause for meditation)*

Now while maintaining our physical posture and maintaining this more settled state of mind, we will continue with the practice of meditation this time using the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. As you hear the sound of the mantra, try to maintain your full attention and focus on the sound. When the recitation subsides, just focus on that vacuity when the sound stops; just as if there is no object, there is nothing. Focus on that period of nothingness between the sound and it stopping. Maintain your focus on that for a few moments.

Engaging in regular practice to control your mind is good training where you benefit and feel happy, as well as help other people around you. If we have a controlled mind, then whatever we do, wherever we go, whomever we associate with, will be more pleasant. Otherwise, as mentioned previously, we just let the mind go uncontrolled in every direction, which just causes more disturbance, more annoyance and more anxiety. A wild untamed mind is detrimental to our own wellbeing. This is why we need to adopt techniques that will help us to have a more subdued and controlled mind. Having a positive state of mind and a kind and compassionate mind is a valuable asset.

When I was studying at a tantric university in India, we had a strict teacher who was very fond of me and I never really got a scolding from him. I think it was because I was always smiling and joyful. That is one benefit that I got from regularly meditating.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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