Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment ১৯৯খন ক্রন ক্রম ক্রম ক্রিন নান ক্রমাজ জি

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe 25 March 2015

As usual we can adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture so that we can meditate. A relaxed posture enables us to engage in a meditation practice appropriately because it helps our minds to settle and become clear.

A person with a settled and clear state of mind has something of high value, and the positive effect of this mindset can be experienced by others as well. If a father in a family, for example, had a genuinely calm mind, he would naturally have a kinder attitude. This would definitely bring a great sense of harmony and peace to all the other members of the household, including the pets, because the father's clarity, care and concern would contribute to their positive experiences.

We can see for ourselves that we feel comfortable when we are with someone who is relaxed and has a peaceful state of mind, and we can also see that when our own minds are tranquil, the atmosphere is joyful and others are at ease. Every person is capable of acquiring a naturally calm mind and sharing the positive effects of this mindset with others. In fact, sharing our joy and happiness with someone else is the ultimate gift we can give to another person.

I regularly emphasise that having a kind attitude is what contributes to good relationships—irrespective of whether the relationship is between two individuals or on a larger scale. We will always experience joy and happiness when we have a genuinely kind attitude and a sincere concern for others. So, meditating to settle and calm our minds, which promotes this good heart, is crucial to our personal happiness and wellbeing.

Usually we are accustomed to believing our personal happiness and wellbeing is dictated by our external conditions. However, if we thoroughly investigate what really makes us happy and feel good, we will notice that, although external circumstances contribute to our welfare, the genuine cause depends on our mental state. Indeed, I think external conditions account for less than ten per cent of a person's happiness—there are many people who are in unfortunate situations but are joyful and have inner peace, which proves that happiness and wellbeing is not dependent on external conditions. The real cause of happiness and wellbeing is having positive internal conditions.

A meditation practice is how you can train your mind to acquire positive internal conditions. This training is essential for your overall wellbeing and specifically for your mental happiness. I can vouch for the truth of this from my own experience. When I left my homeland, Tibet, and escaped to India with others, the external hardships we experienced were extreme. It was one of the most difficult times in our lives. Further, we had arrived in a new country, did not have any money and barely had enough clothing to cover ourselves. The living conditions were very poor. However, we were strongly determined to continue our studies and train our minds, and this resolve enabled us to not give up and allow the external hardships to affect us. We were in danger of becoming depressed and overwhelmed by our situations, but we were able to maintain a sense of joy in our minds because we continued to cultivate our positive inner conditions.

I share these kinds of experiences with you because training my mind through a meditation practice has helped me to mitigate challenging external situations. I also share these accounts with you because I want to assure you through my own experience that keeping a focused and strong motivation can reap very positive results. Hopefully you can use the veracity of what I say to consider your own studies and mind training as being essential and necessary in your life. You may face many challenges cultivating your own positive inner conditions and the work may sometimes be difficult, but the effort is really worthwhile. You can always encourage yourself to face external hardships by remembering that there will be positive results for your future wellbeing if you practise cultivating a calm and positive mind now. I emphasise this point regularly because it is so important.

So, for us to acquire a calm state of mind through meditation, we first need to understand what disturbs our minds' peace in order to better counteract the obstacle.

Generally, a calm mind is opposed by many different thoughts which act as distractions. If your mind is preoccupied with discursive thoughts, they cause a disturbance that makes your mind agitated, and if your mind is agitated, it cannot experience a sense of calm. Similarly, if you allow your mind to completely focus on external distractions and wander aimlessly, you will experience a mind of turmoil. Meditating, however, helps your mind to distance itself from its preoccupations so that it can settle.

Meditation enables your mind to settle because the technique is to focus on a chosen inner object. This specific internal focus helps your mind to withdraw from its fixation on external distractions. Initially you may not be able to completely withdraw your mind from all its thoughts, but even if you focus on the inner object for fifty per cent of the time, you will still feel the immediate relief of your mind being in a less distracted and agitated state. The sense of calmness will gradually increase as you become accustomed to focusing on an inner object because your mind will slowly become calmer with practise.

Many people have told me that meditating has been very helpful for their minds. They have said that distancing themselves from objects that disturb their minds by focusing on something else has been very useful. A lady recently told me that she was in a situation that was causing her to become angry, but in the moment her anger arose, she remembered my advice and focused on another object to distract herself, which subdued her anger. This was very good of her to do in the moment because usually our pattern of anger is so habituated that when it arises we immediately think about the faults of the object and that causes us to become even more angry. This is because the more we focus on the faults of the object, the more our anger escalates—our focus ensures we always find additional reasons to get angry. However, if we do not focus on the object or think of its faults and instead recognise the disadvantages and faults of anger itself, the anger in our minds will subside.

This method of thinking about the disadvantages and faults of a negative state of mind when it arises is very useful because it naturally appeases and reduces the negative mindset so that it does not intensify. The moment we look at the negative state of mind, question its value and analyse how it arises, we can recognise its faults so that it does not dominate us and is appeased instead. This method has great value and can be used to counteract all negative states of mind.

Of course we must be careful to distinguish negative state of minds, like anger, as faulty rather than the object we are getting angry at or ourselves. The faults are not with the individual we become angry with or ourselves, but the anger that is affecting the state of our minds. Anger is the troublemaker that we need to overcome so that it does not dominate us and disturb our minds. This sort of analysis relieves us from obsessions or justifications to feel negative states of mind because it creates a distance between ourselves and the negative mind.

When we find a reason to get angry with, for example, another person, we might react with anger and go so far as to confront the other person, which could lead to a physical fight. If a confrontation or fight occurred and the other person reacted back we could get emotionally or physically hurt. The factor that originally compelled us to act in a way that caused another person and ourselves harm was the state of mind of anger. Anger was the cause for the negative situation. However, we do not usually make this distinction and instead allow ourselves to angrily react. If we thought about it though, we would see that anger is what is causing us to react and it will only end up hurting everyone involved. So rather than being a slave to anger and reacting to it by criticising or hurting the object we see as being at fault, we will be harmed. If we took a step back and looked at the anger and saw it as being a fault, we would be wary about continuing in that state of mind because of the consequences.

The state of mind of anger, just like other negative states of mind, is said to be a faulty mind in Buddhist teachings. The reason why it is considered to be a faulty state of mind is because it distorts our perception so that we do not see things as they are. In the case of anger, our perception is distorted to the point where the object of our anger appears to be completely at fault and has no appealing features or characteristics. However, if the object really was at fault and had no redeeming qualities then everyone who interacts with that object would see it in this way, but as we know, that is not true. Similarly, when our anger subsides, we can see the qualities of the object again. If we understand how anger distorts our perception, we can understand that it is a faulty state of mind, which cannot be trusted when it arises. This is also true for other negative states of mind.

The techniques I have mentioned are not obscure to understand or unreasonable ways of thinking. Really they are simple methods to understand the absurdities of negative mindsets. Contemplating these points can help us to achieve positive ways of thinking and to recognise the faults of negative states of mind. They also ensure that our choices and judgements in life have a sound basis. As this is the case, the value of these techniques should not be underestimated.

We can now meditate since I have described some of the benefits and the technique.

To do this we choose an appropriate object and familiarise ourselves with it so that we have a vivid mental image to focus on. For this meditation session we can use the regular rhythm of our own breath. So, for the next few minutes, we can focus our minds on the mental image of our breath coming in and going out.

[Pause for single-pointed meditation.]

If you adopt the meditation technique in your everyday life, just as we attempted in our session then, the familiarity of your practice will slowly reap you positive results. The younger generation may particularly want to take an interest now and make the practice a regular part of their life so that it serves a great purpose when they are older.

Meditation requires consistency and persistence for it to bring a genuine sense of wellbeing and happiness. The great result that a regular practice provides is a sense of satisfaction and contentment in the heart. I consider this to be the greatest purpose and achievement in life. After all, the sense of wellbeing and happiness you have in your mind goes wherever you go. You cannot leave your mind somewhere and travel without it because your mind accompanies you wherever you are. If your mind is calm, peaceful and happy, you will experience the positive effect at all times. Therefore, cultivating a genuinely calm and happy mind through meditation is the way to make your life most meaningful. I emphasise this again and again because the kindest and greatest gift you can give yourself is a happy state of mind.

A person who is joyful and has a calm mind is someone everyone appreciates and wants to be with. Such a person would always be a welcomed guest because he or she brings happiness to others, whether in a relationship, family or wider community. If that person were to be missing from a gathering, others would feel that they are missing an essential part of their get-together because the person is highly valued. So a joyful and calm person is someone who is wanted and needed in all circumstances.

You can become that person because having a joyful and calm mind is within your reach. You definitely have the capacity to develop a genuine sense of personal wellbeing and happiness. When this is established through the technique of a consistent meditation practice, you will bring happiness to others wherever you go. This is regardless of whether you consider yourself to be a spiritual person or whether you follow a particular religion; giving yourself a happy and peaceful mind, and bringing other people happiness does not require you to be affiliated to a spiritual or religious organisation. I consider those that bring a genuine sense of ease and joy to others to be virtuous. To make others happy through your natural good qualities and not through devious or destructive ways is definitely a virtue. We all have the ability to establish our physical and mental happiness. We can consider taking care of ourselves physically and taking care of ourselves mentally to be our main priority and responsibility in our lives. The ultimate assets we have currently are our bodies and minds, so ensuring and securing their wellbeing is very worthwhile.

With the limited time we have left we can have some questions, but I implore you to ask good ones! [*Geshe-la chuckles*.] I feel like what I have related to you has been meaningful and worthwhile so to ask for a good question is not requesting too much ... but perhaps you are too afraid to ask a question in case it is not good! [*Everyone laughs*.]

Question: I am thinking about baptising my son. My reason for wanting him to be baptised is so he can go to the Catholic school down the road from us. It is a good school and I think the structure would lead him in the right direction, but I don't know if I am getting my son baptised for the right reasons. What do you think?

Geshe-la: A mother naturally wants her child to have the best education possible, so wherever that may be, it is befitting for the child to go. How you are thinking is natural and correct for a mother who has this responsibility. You want your son to have a good education and to attend a school that provides a sound direction for his life. Your son can achieve this by going to the school and he can choose whatever course of life he wants later on. Your personal interest in Buddhism does not stop you from having your child being baptised, and that is a good example for others.

I deeply respect and admire the Christian faith. The value of the Christian faith can be seen in those who practise it. I have had many personal encounters with Christian practitioners and I have found them to be genuine and good-hearted. There is definitely great value in sending your son to a Christian school. You could, of course, check with your son what his own personal interest is and see what he would like to do.

Those who follow the Christian faith to its fullest extent have a strong faith and belief in God and this provides them with the initiative to be kind, considerate and compassionate to fellow human beings. There are many great Christian acts of love and compassion that have been completed by practitioners because of their strong faith in God. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often praises the care that Christian brothers and sisters give to the needy and impoverished. He says the extent is really remarkable and noteworthy. In fact, some monks in our Tibetan Buddhist tradition have been sent to live in Christian monasteries so they can learn. Maybe some have become Christians. I don't know. [*Laughter*.] There is one lama who has become Christian. I follow His Holiness' teachings. His Holiness says that all religions are uniquely beneficial to others. This means that every religion contributes to the wellbeing of others and so are worthy of respect and admiration. I truly believe this myself. A religious leader of another faith once said to me that I have an incredible good and remarkable spiritual leader. He said he has found that only His Holiness speaks in favour of and respects all religions. He said I was very lucky to have a spiritual leader like that. A Christian priest then told me that genuine respect and harmony between different religions would contribute to world peace and the wellbeing of so many. He said it is really, really crucial for harmony between religions.

That was a good question. I hope my answer has served you.

I regularly mention to those I have a connection with that looking after the needs of your children is important. I mention the necessity of not being too narrow-minded by thinking that children have to follow their parents' beliefs or ways, but rather to think about what is the beneficial for the each child in the long run. Sometimes parents tell me that they wish their child had different interests, but they allow and support their children in their interests anyway. I think that is noble and the best way to bring up children.

So, before we end the session for the evening let us again take a few minutes to engage in a meditation practice. This time the object that we can focus on will be the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. As we hear the mantra being chanted we can try to keep our full attention and focus on the sound and when the recitation subsides, we can try to concentrate on the nice sensation we feel for a few moments. That will suffice as our meditation.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

Transcribed by Su Lan Foo Edit 1 by Tanya Simmons Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe Edited Version

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