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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

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As I mention regularly, meditation can be understood as a technique to help transform one's mind, changing certain attitudes so that our mind becomes happier, more positive and more peaceful.

I also regularly mention our identity is to be understood in relation to three aspects of ourselves: the individual self or the 'I'; one's physical body; and one's mind. The individual 'I' has ownership of the body and mind; they are inseparable. This means that wherever an individual self goes, the body and mind are always there as well.

Because of the fact that one's body and mind are inseparable from one's self, we need to understand that what contributes to one's overall happiness is none other than physical and mental happiness. Therefore we need to ensure all the conditions for our body to be well and healthy are met so that we gain physical happiness. We also need to ensure we have all the right conditions in place for the mind to be happy and settled so that we gain mental happiness. When there is both physical and mental wellbeing and happiness, then this contributes to the individual person's happiness. It is really important for us to take this into account.

When someone asks us 'how are you?', we immediately respond in relation to the wellness of our physical body, or the wellness of our mind. So, if we are feeling well physically and mentally, then we can comfortably respond with 'I am feeling very well!' There is nowhere other than these two aspects of ourselves where we would expect to find wellbeing and happiness.

If we were to ask ourselves 'what do I really wish for?' the obvious answer would be wellbeing and happiness. Similarly, if we were to ask 'what do I want to avoid?' it would be any level of suffering or misery. Each of us as an individual self naturally wants to have happiness, and does not want to experience any kind of suffering. We want to keep those conditions that contribute to our happiness close to us, and those that contribute to our suffering distant. Thus we develop 'likes' and 'dislikes', 'wants' and 'don't wants'. This comes about naturally through the sheer fact that there is an individual self. We all naturally have a strong feeling of this self as if it is something really solid and important.

We can relate this to our everyday life. We try to get as close as possible to whatever we have a liking for, whereas we try to avoid or distance ourselves from that which we don't like. We don't need to look far for the many different objects of our likes and dislikes. Even in relation to one person, there are times when we like them and want to be close to them, and times when we don't

like them and try to avoid them. So in relation to just one object, we have this constant fluctuation between sometimes liking, and sometimes not liking. When you like someone, you want to be close; when you don't like them, you want to keep distant.

It is intriguing to look into how we interact with others based on our likes and dislikes. When we have a sense of liking something or someone, attachment or desire manifests in our mind. And when we have a sense of not liking them, anger and aversion arise. As we said previously, if like and dislike occur in relation to just one person, it is no wonder our relationships are complicated. There are times when our attitude is more one of liking the other, and wanting to be as close as possible to them. But then a situation occurs where we start disliking them, and want to keep our distance. However, even though there are times we may dislike them for whatever reason and keep our distance, deep inside we may still have a desire for them. Thus the mind becomes confused. When the mind repeatedly fluctuates between sometimes liking and sometimes not liking, and between feeling attachment and anger, this causes a lot of distress and confusion.

We can learn from this that, ultimately, the qualities or imperfections of an object come less from the object's side than from our attitude. Whether something appears good or not is not so much dependent on the object itself, but rather on our mind. Sometimes the object appears to be nice and good, while at other times, it appears to be not so nice. That perception really depends on our mind. Noticing and acknowledging that is a great insight, a real achievement for ourselves.

So having investigated whether the object itself is rapidly changing from one moment to the next as being good or bad, we can see that is obviously not the case. The object is not something that changes radically from one moment to the next; rather it is how we view the object, depending on what kind of attitude one has at that moment. When we are relating to another person, if we know that it is our own mind that is fluctuating when they appear in a good light or a negative light—and not really the other person—we will not immediately jump to the conclusion that they are either good, or bad, and that we should avoid them. If, instead, we relate to it our own state of mind, we can think 'this is my perception, it is not really the other who is sometimes really good or really bad, but it is how I am viewing them, my perception'. If we are honest with ourselves and acknowledge that, then we will be more able to maintain harmonious relationships with others: we will not over-react when someone appears either in a good light or a negative light, because we will know that it is not really them who is changing from one moment to the next, but our own mind and attitude. That gives us a little more space, because rather than trying to change the other, we need to try to change our own attitude, take more responsibility for our own state of mind.

Once we notice that how others appear to us depends on our mindset, we can also relate that to how others treat us. Sometimes the other person seems to treat us nicely while at other times they simply ignore us. We can then

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relate this to the fact that, just as we have different attitudes and thus different views of the other person, they would also be the same. Sometimes one might appear nice to them, and at other times not so nice. So we should think, 'how they view me does not so much relate to who I am; rather it is related to their state of mind'. This will in turn help one to maintain one's temperament so that one does not take it too personally and get upset when they seem to ignore us, or become overly excited when they seem to like us. When we can relate this understanding of our own state of mind to others and how others view us, it represents great understanding, a great insight—in fact it is a great practice to maintain a state of equanimity where one's mood is not fluctuating from high to low.

If we take this on board and really begin to grasp its meaning, that understanding and insight can relieve us of many unnecessary psychological problems and difficulties. We will be able to maintain our composure and dignity, regardless of how others treat us. That mental stability will really contribute to both our physical and mental wellbeing.

As we said earlier, one needs to pay attention to both one's physical and mental wellbeing. There is nothing other than these two factors, in terms of ensuring our overall wellbeing and happiness. Taking care of one's physical and mental health is one's own responsibility. No one else can provide us with physical wellbeing and happiness; it is something we need to secure ourselves. It is owned by ourselves and we cannot share with others. And just as others cannot share their wellbeing with us, we can't share ours with others. Our happiness is something we experience ourselves; we can't share or give it away to others. Likewise we cannot share with others whatever misery and suffering we experience – even if they are willing to take a bit of our suffering away, it is not possible. The bottom line here is that we need to take responsibility for ensuring our wellbeing and happiness, and for not becoming engrossed in suffering and misery.

To summarise, since we all naturally wish for happiness and do not wish to experience any kind of suffering, the only way to ensure that is by taking care of our physical health and mental health. Therefore we need to periodically check on our activities; we need to ask ourselves, 'is this contributing to my physical and mental wellbeing or not?' If it is, then putting energy and time into that activity is worthwhile. But if the activity is likely to harm one's physical or mental wellbeing, we need to try to avoid it.

In day to day life, before deciding to engage in an activity, we need to check and ask ourselves, 'will this contribute to my physical, mental wellbeing or not?' So first of all, we resolve that the purpose of any activity we engage in will contribute to either our physical or mental wellbeing. Having made that resolve, when we engage in the activity, we need to again remind ourselves of our resolve and ask, 'is this activity really contributing to my physical or mental wellbeing or not?' Even if it is not directly securing one's physical or mental wellbeing but is not really harming us, it might be okay. We might

engage in that activity if we wish. However, certain activities harm rather than help our physical and mental state. If one finds this is the case, we need to take the initiative and avoid that activity. We need to assess every situation in this way.

When we have taken the initiative to look into which conditions contribute to our wellbeing and which are detrimental, we can resolve, 'as I need to take responsibility for my own physical and mental wellbeing, I am ultimately the one who makes the right or wrong choices'. Then we can assess any situation we are engaging in. For example, when we have taken the initiative to maintain good, sound physical health and wellbeing, we will avoid things that are detrimental to our health, such as substance abuse, or consuming certain drinks or foods. On the positive side, we can adopt actions—such as eating healthy food, doing exercise and so forth—which benefit our physical wellbeing.

As regularly I mention, I am particularly sharing these points about adopting positive actions and a positive outlook with the younger generation, to help them protect their very good conditions, such as having a strong, sound and clean body, full of vitality. Taking measures to protect that now will prevent you from experiencing unwanted complications in relation to your health later on. If one protects one's body now from too much substance abuse and so forth, one will be much healthier and avoid unwanted disease or complications in the future. That is good to remember.

For all of us, in relation to what we said earlier about the individual self, we can conclude that, to be happy, we definitely need the assistance of a good physical body and sound mind. Therefore one needs to ensure one has the right conditions, because these conditions are experienced by each of us personally, and cannot be shared with others. We need to take personal responsibility for securing those conditions. While we cannot actually give a portion of our wellbeing and happiness to others, we will be able to help others effectively after we have secured a sound body and mind for ourselves. For example, when we are feeling physically and mentally well, even the words we say to others will be pleasant and nice; they will like what they hear from us. Further, we will also have more energy and thus be more inclined to assist others on a physical level. Of course, having good intentions in our mind is also important. Thus while one benefits from securing the appropriate conditions for one's own wellbeing, others will also benefit. So there is a twofold benefit from securing the wellbeing of one's physical body and mind; it is also the best means to be of service to others. Without these two conditions—a sound clear mind and a healthy body—we cannot achieve anything we set out to do.

We can conclude that happiness is essential for one's wellbeing, particularly in relation to mental happiness. When we recognise that, we will take the initiative to increase our happiness. We already have the natural capacity to experience happiness. We all come into this life with a certain level of happiness, but there are times when it might degenerate. When our level of happiness decreases, we need to take the initiative to replenish it.

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One needs to protect whatever level of happiness one has gained and ensure it does not decrease. That is really how we can secure our wellbeing.

Earlier, I mentioned that we need to ultimately secure our mental happiness because that definitely has a direct positive effect upon our physical wellbeing. It has now been proven scientifically that this is true. Also our physical body is made up of the four elements. When the mind is in a happy state, it helps to balance the four elements within the body, which then contributes to our physical wellbeing. When the mind is disturbed, this disturbs the elements in the body: because the body is made up of the four elements, when they are not in balance, various ailments and sicknesses arise. So mental wellbeing helps us to have physical wellbeing.

I have also mentioned previously that the mind has incredible potential. For example when conception takes place and the substances of the mother and father meet, the actual being only comes into existence when the consciousness, or what we call the mind, enters that entity. From the moment the mind enters that union of substances, it becomes alive and starts to grow and develop. Here we can see that it is actually the power of the mind that brings beings into existence and allows them to develop and further grow. And it is the state of our mind that ultimately secures our wellbeing. If the mind is in a positive state, then, regardless of our external conditions, we can maintain our wellbeing and happiness. But if one's mind is not secured and is in an unhappy state, we will become vulnerable as external conditions change—to whatever extent we allow external conditions to affect us, we will be affected. Therefore, when we secure a happy state of mind, we can maintain a sense of wellbeing and happiness, regardless of external situations and conditions. That which helps us secure mental happiness and wellbeing is precious—it is the technique of meditation. So we can now relate our happiness to the purpose of meditation.

I've noticed that you've paid attention to what I've been saying and I appreciate that. From my side, I feel I'm sharing something significant that would help you. The only intention I have is that this might be useful in your life; there is no other motive than that. There is a Tibetan expression, 'to say it for the sake of saying it as way to show off'. This is nothing like that. Rather, I find these techniques and attitudes—which help one maintain a sense of wellbeing and happiness, regardless of external conditions—really significant. One can definitely gain happiness through training one's mind. It is something that can be achieved, something useful and meaningful in one's life. This is my intention in sharing this knowledge with you. So when you pay attention and listen to it, I feel like it might be worthwhile.

In my own life, there have been situations where adverse external conditions have been really difficult at times. But I have been able to deal with these difficult situations and come through them, because of having taken the initiative to secure my inner sense of wellbeing and happiness. So it is from personal experience that I can say with certainty that an adverse external situation does not

necessarily have to disturb one's mind if one maintains one's inner wellbeing and happiness.

As I've said in the past, when I had to escape from Tibet to India, I had to leave behind everything – all my material possessions. I came to India with hardly anything: no money, no personal belongings, basically just my clothing. However, when I finally arrived in India after the long journey, even though I'd left everything behind, I was able to maintain a sense of wellbeing and happiness within my own mind. Because of being able to maintain that sense of happiness in my mind, even the adverse difficulties and situations I faced did not make me feel completely distraught and despairing. I did not think, 'now I have lost everything, I am done for, what hope is there for me?' because of that sense of happiness in my mind. I always tell others that even though I'd lost everything in relation to material possessions, I did not lose the happiness of my mind.

It is from my personal experience that I try to share with you the methods and techniques of trying to protect one's mental happiness. Even though I would like to share my own happiness with you, as mentioned before, it is something I cannot do. But sharing these methods and techniques, generating a positive attitude: these are some beneficial things I can remind you of. So now we can adopt the meditation technique for a few minutes. We adopt a comfortable, upright, relaxed posture. Then we need to make the commitment that, for the next few minutes, we will not allow one's mind to become distracted. While our mind is normally directed to all sort of external distractions, now, for the purpose of meditation, we intentionally bring our focus within. We don't let the mind go off in all directions and towards every object, but rather we bring it within. Then we place it upon one's natural breathing, and maintain a 100% focus in the breath. In this way, we will spend the next few minutes. *[meditation]*

Before we conclude, just maintain that awareness again of space and quietness within our mind and determine that we will not shift our attention and focus from the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is Buddha Shakyamuni's name mantra. As we hear the mantra, we try to maintain our focus on it, again without distraction. Then when the recitation finishes, just maintain that awareness of the vacuity of that sound for a few moments.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*

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