Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment ২০০% ব্রুন:অমানীমারদ্বীনানানজ্যামার্মা

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe 17 June 2015

As usual we can adopt a relaxed posture to spend some time in meditation. We may find getting physically comfortable relatively easy, but the most important aspect of meditating is training our minds to be mentally calm and peaceful.

One way you can understand the significance of training your mind to be genuinely peaceful now, is that it will benefit your future as well. When you reach the age of retirement, for example, you will have more time on your hands and more opportunity to physically relax, but if you have not trained your mind to be calm, you will have great difficulty in knowing what to do with yourself and you could experience a lot of mental turmoil. If, however, you have trained your mind through meditating earlier in your life, you will have immediate access to mental peace when your external affairs quieten down, and you will feel mentally comfortable during your retirement. This would be an incredible asset for you at that time, and bring great meaning and worth to your life.

It is appropriate to be farsighted and think about our future wellbeing, and prepare for it well. If you are able to maintain a relaxed physical state and a relaxed mental state as you age, that combination will help remove many unwanted difficulties and problems you may otherwise face. Your meditation practice will be a source of real solace to you. So, while training your mind now by meditating brings you significant immediate positive effects, the practice will also benefit your future as well.

I consider the results of training your mind earlier in your life to become your best companion. The genuine peace and relaxed atmosphere you feel inside will be with you wherever you go, and you will always have access to it. Naturally this calm and peaceful demeanour will attract others because being genuinely happy ensures all your interactions with them are open and friendly. This is because your inner peace and joy enables you to see everyone as a friend, so that your gestures towards them are pleasant, and your smile is sincere. Of course, whether others respond in a positive way or not is up to them, but at least you have no hesitation in forming genuinely good-hearted connections. That is something definitely significant and of great value, because your peace and happiness will be with you wherever you go, and it will bring joy to whoever you meet.

I regularly emphasise the importance of doing one's studies well to secure a good job, particularly to those in their youth. As you engage in your study, it is also good to train your mind in meditation to support your mental wellbeing. Mastering your studies now will enable you to have stable and rewarding employment. Then, when you have secured a good job, instead of squandering your money, you can take the initiative to keep a savings account in order to be externally comfortable and to sustain yourself when you retire. In this way, training your mind will enable you to have the best internal conditions as well as the most favourable external conditions, and you will be able to truly enjoy the full extent of your life when you are older. There are many people here in their late seventies, eighties and even their nineties, who have regularly meditated and so have a sense of real joy and ease about them. This inner contentment is the result of having taken measures to secure your internal and external wellbeing earlier in your lives.

My life experience has been to spend a significant amount of time studying Buddhism during childhood and adulthood. These studies have predominantly focused on mental training, but I have also taken care of my physical health. I have not been trained to acquire material wealth, thus I lack this education, however I have found that consistently studying to train my mind and maintaining good physical health has placed me in the position where I am physically taken care of, and do not lack the material means to be comfortable. This is an interesting phenomenon because although I have neglected the study of acquiring external wealth due to my focus on training my mind for mental wellbeing, my material wellbeing has naturally occurred anyway as a byproduct. I think this is something noteworthy from my own experience that I can share with you.

The main point I am making is that meditating is not limited to being physically relaxed. The basis of meditating is to be physically comfortable and to have a relaxed posture, but the central practice of meditation is to train the mind to be genuinely undisturbed and peaceful. When you understand the meditation technique to its full extend and adopt the technique properly by training your mind to relax while you are physically comfortable, you will reap its positive benefits. The process is gradual but the positive results are definite.

Meditating for your personal wellbeing is a significant practice because wherever you go, your body and mind follow. Your body and mind, and what you refer to as your individual "self", accompanies you everywhere you are. You cannot leave your body somewhere and take your mind somewhere else, and you cannot leave your mind in one place and take your body to another place. Your self—body and mind—is interconnected, so the wellbeing of these three aspects of "you" is always interrelated. Understanding this interconnectedness gives you an incentive to meditate so that you can experience genuine inner peace and, by extension, cultivate the qualities of love and compassion each one of us has inside ourselves.

What would be the personal consequences if you did not train your mind through meditation? One consequence would be an inability to relax physically when you have the opportunity to do so because your mind would be disturbed and agitated. Even when meditating your mind would be disturbed because of its habituation with distraction. In fact, your mind being distracted while you meditate would be an indication that you have not made a seriously attempt to train it. So, unless you train your mind to properly focus and settle during your meditation practice, it will never reverse its habit of being busy and distracted. This would mean you would have a constantly distracted mind, which equates to an agitated mind, and your mind would never be able to experience genuine relaxation and tranquillity.

When our minds are distracted, our bodies become agitated too and that is when we can get involved in all sorts of frivolous and harmful activities. Of course, when you are young, your body keeps up with the distractions of your mind—your mind comes up with wanting to engage in a distraction, and it is possible for your body to follow through with the activity, because it is still young and energetic. However, if you lead your life by being completely consumed in doing whatever acts your mind tells you to do, then, at a later age you will be habituated with your mind's distractions and wanting to engage in all sorts of activities that your body is no longer able to perform. Because your body will not be able to keep up with your mind it will cause you agony.

Many people reach a point in their lives where they are physically incapable of being active and are confined to staying in one place, but their minds are agitated by past memories that sadden or anger them. These agitating emotions of sadness and frustration arise because they are dwelling on past memories, which is a consequence of not training their minds to settle and be in a calm state.

In contrast, people who have taken the serious initiative to train their minds by having a regular meditation practice have a natural mental tranquillity and peace. They have trained their minds in a personal practice for their mental wellbeing, so the result is that their minds are relaxed and genuinely happy. This contributes to their physical wellbeing.

Indeed, the more calm and relaxed your state of mind is, the healthier your body becomes. This is because securing your mental wellbeing nourishes your body and contributes to its physical health. Conversely, if your mind is agitated, it definitely contributes to your physical agitation.

So, understanding the correlation between your physical and mental wellbeing is important. And if you can appreciate the relationship between your body and your mind, the benefits of mind training for yourself can be seen as twofold: you, as an individual, will benefit from having a physically sound body and a mentally relaxed mind. These benefits will easily assure you and others that you are happy and able to enjoy whatever you are doing. Your sleep will be sound too because you will go to bed without worries, which in turn will assist your body's recuperation and ensure that you are physically and mentally well rested.

When someone asks you how you are, you say, "I am well", based on how you feel physically and mentally. Your response relates to your physical and mental wellbeing. You do not refer to your external situation when you answer this question and this fact indicates that the wellbeing of the "I" relates to non-other than the body and mind.

When I go out, I meet people from different walks of life, and at one place I go to have coffee, a person regularly comes over to me and we talk. Whenever we meet I ask how he is and he normally says he is well, but on one occasion, he said, "Oh, not so good." So I asked him what was wrong and if his business was not going okay, and he said, "Business is going very well and everything is fine in that regard, but I would really like to be happy like you!" [*Laughter*.]

Before we engage in a meditation practice, we need to really understand its significance and advantages in order to have a clear understanding of how meditating will benefit us. There are immediate benefits for us because we become calmer and less agitated as our minds become more focused, and this mind training prepares and benefits us in the later part of our lives as well.

For those who accept and believe in rebirth, there is no question that a maintained practice of meditation in this life will definitely benefit our future lives too. Of course, some religions do not accept that there are future lives, but most major religions agree that we do not cease to exist at the end of this life because there is a continuity some sort of essence that goes on to a next existence. So, if the main religions agree that there is some form of afterlife at the end of this life, then, that is something significant to consider. If you believe that there is something that will continue after your life, you can be assured that the benefits you receive from meditation now will also help and benefit this future essence too.

So, meditation is fundamentally a technique to develop genuine control over your mind which otherwise is in a tumultuous state. The mind, if left undisciplined, is unruly because it is completely immersed in distractions and wanders in arbitrary directions. Meditating is a genuine attempt to discipline and subdue the mind, through intentionally focusing on a chosen object. When you adopt this technique skilfully, consistently and with a proper understanding you will definitely reap a lasting positive result and bring yourself happiness.

The main purpose of meditating is to subdue your mind so that you can foster positive mindsets and attitudes. As your mediation practice develops, you become better able to focus on cultivating your innate qualities of love and compassion. The formal meditation you do gradually becomes a focus of generating your inner positive qualities. These positive qualities that you consciously cultivate then gradually spill into your everyday life when you are not formally meditating, so that you engage with others with a genuine attitude of love and compassion. Your formal meditation practice extends into a continuous heartfelt consideration for others so that when they are in need, you are not hesitant and very willing to assist them practically to the best of your capacity. Meditation is therefore a practical way to bring love and compassion into your everyday life. This is the ultimate benefit of the practice.

I have outlined some of the benefits of meditating because appreciating them provides you with incentives to do the practice. However, the crucial aspect to meditating is to understand how to meditate effectivelyif you apply the technique correctly you are certain to reap its benefits.

We can now spend some minutes in formal meditation.

The object that we use regularly in our sessions to focus on is the breath. Buddhist teachings explain that the use of the breath to focus on is ideal for beginners, because it is one of the best ways to overcome gross or manifest levels of afflictions, such as intense anger and attachment. A person experiencing intense levels of anger and attachment will definitely find relief from these disturbing afflictions if he or she makes a concerted effort to focus solely on the breath. The focus on the breath is also particularly effective in settling the mind's discursive thoughts, what Buddhism refers to as "discursive conceptions", such as having numerous thoughts, fears and doubts that crowd the mind.

The technique involves focusing on your breathing pattern and being present each time you inhale and exhale. The technique is not to see the breath objectively, as if it is out there. Rather, you imagine that your mind and your breath have become one. The breath that your mind is focusing on is exactly where your mind is, so that they are together and feel like they are the same thing. This is how you relate to the inner object of the breath during meditation.

So, now that the technique of meditating is clearer, we can start our practice. First, you readjust your posture so that you are sitting comfortably and are physically relaxed. Then, you make a commitment to yourself that for the next few minutes you will not allow your mind to follow every thought and distraction that occurs, but you instead withdraw your mind from all internal and external preoccupations to focus solely on your breathing pattern. When you have thus centred your mind, you can use the breath as a medium to focus on and in this way bring your entire attention to the breath for the next few minutes. [*Pause for single-pointed meditation*.]

You can maintain your physical posture and we will continue our meditation session by changing our focus to the sound of the mantra to be recited, which is the name of Buddha Shakyamuni. As you hear the recitation, try to focus on its sound, and when it subsides, try to maintain awareness on the vacuity left behind and the pleasant feeling you experience for a few moments. We can continue our meditation in this way for a few more minutes.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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