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# Middling Stages of the Path to Enlightenment

ལྷོ་མཁའ་རྒྱ་ལྡན་གྱི་ཐུགས་རྒྱུ་ལྟར་གྱི་ལོ་རྒྱུས་ལྟར་།།

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22 July 2015

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Please adopt a comfortable and relaxed posture. Likewise, it is good to have a relaxed and clear state of mind. When we have adopted a comfortable, relaxed physical posture as well as a relaxed mental state, then we can confidently say we are genuinely relaxed and settled. Our state of being is very much related to our state of mind and how we think. Since our wellbeing depends on our state of mind, it is important to find how we can be genuinely relaxed mentally. One of the best techniques to bring about a genuinely relaxed state of mind is meditation. The meditation technique helps us to achieve a state of mind that otherwise may be agitated, distracted and dispersed in every direction. Meditation will help us to bring about a mind that is more contained, more settled and so naturally more relaxed.

An agitated state of mind is not uncommon. We may feel that we are the only ones who have an agitated mind, but if we look around we can see that most people, regardless of their status, do have an agitated mind. There might be a few people who might not have an agitated state of mind, but for the most part you can safely say that everyone experiences an agitated mind at one time or another. What may differ is the length of the experience. But one thing that is certain is that for as long as the mind is agitated it is a mind lacking peace. In other words, when the mind is agitated, it is not in a peaceful state. The more the mind is agitated, the more it lacks peace. When we contain our mind against every distraction, then the agitation also settles down and the mind becomes more peaceful and relaxed.

Indeed, those who have adopted the meditation technique have told me that when they apply the meditation technique of focussing on an object to the full extent, even if it is only a few minutes, the mind definitely settles down and becomes more relaxed. We notice from our own experiences that we can definitely reach a state where our mind settles down and is calm. We have less agitation in our mind, and we attain a more peaceful state of mind. Familiarity with the meditation practice brings with it a prolonged calm state of mind, because with practice we can gradually lengthen the calm state of our mind. The success of this type of meditation training involves gaining more familiarity with the practice.

A clear and peaceful state of mind is definitely beneficial for us because there is a relationship between our mind and ourselves—the individual person—just as there is relationship between the physical body and the person. It is essential that we understand the relationship between our, physical body, our mind and ourselves. In particular,

we need to notice that our wellbeing is very much related to a calm and peaceful state of mind. Likewise, when our mind is agitated and unhappy, when there is turmoil in the mind, we experience that unease as well. Someone who has a troubled mind is someone who would be considered a troubled, unhappy person. Meditation involves training our mind to become more focused, and thus become clearer. The more we familiarise ourselves with adopting a focused mind, the more our mind becomes clear, and this also increases our wisdom or deep intelligence and insight, which brings about a more happy state of mind.

Strengthening the relationship between a person and their mind is critical in training the mind to become more settled and happy. Good physical health also contributes to our wellbeing. Thus, it is essential that we understand the relationship between ourselves, our mind and our body, and how it promotes the wellbeing of each of these aspects of ourselves. The relationship with our mind and body is much more important for our wellbeing than the relationship we have with external things, and other people. Even if our relationship with others is affected but our mind remains stable and undisturbed, then it doesn't really harm us. But if we exert all our energy and time in trying to strengthen our relationship with external things, then we have failed to understand what it is exactly that contributes to our wellbeing, which is our own state of mind. For example, anger is a negative state of mind, and we can see when others or we experience anger that we are not happy. We can see that anger is a state of mind that affects a person negatively. Whereas when we have a positive state of mind, it contributes to our happiness and we become more settled.

It's important for us to foster a good relationship between our mind and body, because this will increase our wellbeing. A positive state of mind is imbued with love and compassion. Whenever our mind is positively influenced by love and compassion, it only brings about good behaviour from us because we are experiencing that love and compassion in our mind and in our heart. Our good nature has love and genuine concern for others and is expressed as kindness and generosity to others, who naturally appreciate it. That good nature is extended towards everyone around us, such as family members including even dogs and cats. Every family member experiences kindness from a person with a good heart. Those kind gestures are due to a positive state of mind that has a genuine concern for others, which comes from love and compassion.

Conversely, when the mind is affected by a negative emotion such as anger, then all a person's good qualities are lost, including kind gestures and good behaviour. In that moment of anger, all good behaviours are completely destroyed. We all know people who are short-tempered or easily lose control; you have to always be a little cautious around them because of their temperament. Therefore someone expressing anger frequently is not a person who others appreciate being around. Everyone tries to avoid them; even dogs and cats don't come around them much. Dogs and cats are aware of an angry person and they try to hide away. People by nature have good qualities of love and compassion but what prevents

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those good qualities from manifesting, what temporary obscures those good qualities, is a negative state of mind such as anger. So if you recognise a negative state of mind within yourself that causes you to act inappropriately, then you need to be apply caution to your own state of mind. Do a self-analysis, periodically checking what kind of state of mind are you in now; are you starting to feel agitated here? Is anger starting to take over? When you notice that happening, then apply the antidote for overcoming it. If we are in a positive state of mind, then we can feel good about that and further encourage that. So it is in this way through our own self-analysis, where we check our own state of mind, that we can apply measures accordingly to overcome a negative state of mind.

Our task then is to train our mind to be in a positive state, which comes about from the practice of meditation. That is what we are doing, we are training our mind to become more and more familiar with a positive state of mind. The more we familiarise ourselves with a positive state of mind, the better the relationship between our state of mind and ourselves. When we have a strong and good relationship between the positive mind and the individual self, then that means that we will always have a positive state of mind, which is our good friend. Just as we want to be in the company of a good external companion and friend, here we are talking about being always in the company of our positive state of mind, which is our inner friend. When we are in the company of a positive state of mind, then there is no room for us to feel the pain of loneliness. We need to look into this, as loneliness seems to be a widespread disease in the west.

Loneliness arises when the mind is not happy, when the mind lacks a sense of joy, happiness and fulfilment. When the positive mind is not the dominant mind within us, then this is when we are most likely to feel lonely. So the stronger we develop that relationship and familiarity with a positive state of mind and when the relationship reaches a point where we are in a perpetual positive and happy state of mind, then there is no place for loneliness. A positive state of mind comes about only through familiarity, so we need to familiarise our mind with a positive attitude. Who can do this? Only we can do it. It is up to us to make that decision to familiarise our mind with a positive attitude, and we can do this by focussing on a positive object. This is why the meditation practice is important.

The benefit of adopting a positive state of mind is definitely experienced. I can relate many examples of meeting people when I go out and about, people in normal walks of life who exhibit a content and happy state of being even in their later age. I recently met a 90 year old elderly person who said he is content, he is happy, he has no worries. He seems to be someone who definitely is not experiencing the pains and sufferings of loneliness and that is because he has a positive outlook, and a positive state of mind. He is testament to how someone can, even at an elderly age, maintain a happy and positive state of mind. We need to reflect on this as it is relevant to us because definitely we will reach a point in our life where we will become elderly and possibly alone. The main point is that our best friend in the world

is our own happy state of mind. As mentioned previously, when we have a genuinely happy and joyous state of mind, then there is no place for loneliness to be experienced. Wherever we go, we will always have a happy and joyous state of mind with us. So whatever the occasion, we are happy and joyful, which brings joy to others as well.

In my own experience, I've gone through lot of challenges and hardships in life, but what has sustained me, what has kept me going in a positive way, is my happy state of mind. I am always cautious about not losing my happy state of mind; always ensuring that I am not doing things or having negative thoughts that might destroy my happy state of mind. Due to my familiarity with a happy state of mind and being always cautious not to destroy it, I have been able to maintain a happy state of mind. When I go out it definitely helps me to regard everyone as a friend. When you have that natural feeling of everyone being like a friend, then you want to smile at them, and they seem to appreciate that. The main point is to develop and to protect a happy state of mind.

Our inner state of wellbeing leads to a more courageous and happier state of mind. We can maintain a positive state of mind regardless of our external situation. For example, if someone loses all their possessions in some catastrophe, if they have the courage and a positive state of mind, then they won't lose their spirit, and slowly will be able to make things better in their life again. Whereas there are some people who will become completely lost, and may even take drastic measures of harming themselves if they lose all their possessions. The same situation for both people will bring different outcomes, depending on their state of mind. A happy state of mind leads to more resilience, while a person who has not paid attention to maintaining a positive state of mind will become easily dejected and lose all hope at the slightest mishap. Again, the meditation practice is the technique to help to move our mind to a positive state of mind.

Of course we need money to sustain ourselves and to live better lives, however to put all our energy and all our trust in only money won't contribute to our wellbeing. Money is not the most essential asset for our wellbeing. However, having a positive state of mind and developing our inner qualities is what really contributes to our deeper wellbeing. Our inner qualities are developed through the training of meditation.

In my visits to St Kilda, I used to regularly see an older man from Hong Kong, and then for a long time I didn't see him until recently. He told me that he went to Beijing in China for three months. I asked him whether he enjoyed himself there, was it nice. He said, "no, all they are concerned about is money, money, money". External wealth and money is not our most valuable asset if it doesn't contribute to our overall wellbeing. Instead, a positive state of mind and a positive attitude are our most valuable assets, and our unfailing companion. A positive state of mind develops positive qualities within us. To place our entire interest on money would be failing ourselves, robbing ourselves of wellbeing. As we work hard to acquire good external conditions, it is more important to develop the inner conditions for our

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wellbeing. I particularly emphasise this for the younger generation who are in the process of developing themselves. They need to pay attention to maintaining a positive state of mind. There are times when we might feel distraught and our mind wears down a bit, but on these occasions don't completely dwell on our distress. Try not to be overwhelmed by it and continue to sink into it, but instead find a way to come out of that distressing state of mind. We can come out of it a little bit weighed down with a depressed state of mind, or we can come out of it determined to further develop ourselves.

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Edited Version  
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So I encourage the younger generation, as I do regularly, to pay attention to your studies. This is important because doing your studies well now will pave the way for you to get a good job later on. If you get a good job, you earn a good living. When you make some money, don't try to spend it all on trivial things, but rather try to have some savings in the bank. But while you're saving money, do not forget about paying attention on developing your mind, specifically its positive qualities, with the practice of meditation. Adopting a meditation practice on a regular basis will help you to maintain our positive state of mind, like putting into the bank of our mind the positive qualities. That combination of the external bank with good savings of money and the internal savings of a positive state of mind will definitely benefit your future. Later in life you can then enjoy both money from your own hard work as well as a positive state of mind. This strategy ensures that you will have both good external conditions as well as the excellent internal condition of happiness.

Our regular meditation practice is done by choosing the object for meditation, in this case our breath, and placing our full attention on it. For the next few minutes, we make a commitment to not allow our mind to be distracted with our everyday normal thoughts and distractions. Instead, bring our focus inwards and place it 100% on our breath. So when the mind goes wandering off in another direction, always remind yourself to bring it back on the breath, and maintain that focus on the breath itself.

*[meditation]*

As we have come to the end of our session, let us again spend just a few minutes in meditation, maintaining our focus this time on the sound of the Buddha Shakyamuni mantra. As we hear the sound of the mantra, maintain our entire focus on that sound, and as the recitation subsides, maintain our awareness just focusing inwards on the final vibrations of that sound for a few moments before we end the session.

*TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA*