
The Quick Path to Enlightenment

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Benefits of meditation

The great Tibetan lama Je Tsongkhapa said in his *Concise Meaning of the Stages of the Path*:

A stabilised state of mind is like a king ruling over the mind:
With it, when placed our mind can sit like an unmoveable mountain;

And when released, our mind can engage in any virtuous objects.

It produces an experience of great bliss, making both our mind and body serviceable.

Understanding this, the yogi constantly applies concentration to subdue the enemy of mental distractions.

The reverend lama practised like this;

Those desiring liberation should do likewise.

We all follow meditation practice, so we should understand the benefits of meditation as explained in this quotation. The main cause of all the troubles and problems we face in life is our lack of control over our mind. Instead of being under our control, our mind is overpowered by unruly disturbing thoughts and destructive emotions, or mental defilements and afflictions. As a result, we experience stress, anxiety and unhappiness.

Subduing the mind

As Tsongkhapa said, by training our mind through meditation practice, we can completely bring it under our control; our mind will yield to us – if we command it to sit, it can sit unmoveable, like a mountain, or if we command it to go, it can go after virtuous objects single-pointedly, without any distraction.

By subduing our unruly minds through meditation, we can overcome most of the problems we experience in life. Through meditation practice, we can develop our mental focus, and direct our attention to whatever activity we wish to do because we will have the ability to prevent any mental distraction from interfering with that.

Be gentle with the mind

In training and disciplining our mind through meditation, we should not force our mind to behave in a certain way. Rather, we should enjoy our meditation and be gentle in the way we train our mind so that the outcome will be a joyful one.

In fact, when our meditation practice becomes effective, it will automatically benefit us because it will diminish unwanted thoughts and emotions, such as anger and desire, which are the direct causes of our problems. By reducing unwanted thoughts and emotions, we will find more inner stability, peace and happiness.

Know your goal and be passionate about it

Whatever activity we do, if we know it to be beneficial, we will engage in it happily and enthusiastically.

For example, if we are doing an activity to earn money, and we know that what we are doing will earn us a lot of money, we will feel enthusiastic and excited about it, even if we have to work hard and sacrifice our pleasure. Similarly, to enjoy meditation practice, we must understand its benefits and what we will get out of it.

We can see the importance of recognising the benefits of meditation in the first chapter of Shantideva's text, *A Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, which is on the benefits of the bodhicitta mind or the altruistic mind of enlightenment. This is because the main objective of the text is to enable practitioners to cultivate bodhicitta and engage in bodhisattva deeds. Likewise, the first chapter of Maitreya's text, *The Ornament for Clear Realisations*, is about the omniscient mind of a buddha, the achievement of which is the main goal of trainees.

So, it is important that whatever we do, we begin with a clear recognition of why we are doing that activity. When we clearly recognise the benefit and have a strong wish to engage in it, we will naturally be happy to do whatever is needed to achieve that goal.

Consistent effort is needed

We cannot expect to reach our desired goal quickly. To see the effectiveness of our meditation practice, we must make an effort over a long period of time and be consistent in engaging in meditation daily. This is very important.

Be patient

Another factor is making sure that whenever we encounter obstacles in our practice, we don't lose our motivation by losing our temper and being impatient. Rather, it is important to be patient with things and people, and not easily fall under the influence of anger, and so forth.

When we engage in practice, we cannot expect to always feel positive and good about it. Naturally, on some days we will enjoy our practice, and on other days we won't enjoy it as much. But if we don't enjoy it, we should not feel discouraged. Rather, it is important to still maintain our motivation. If we lose interest, we can remind ourselves of the benefits of continuing with the practice.

Take a break

If we get too tired or find it too difficult to do our practice, we should not push ourselves to try harder. Rather, it may be more beneficial to take a bit of time out and rest.

We should not see our practice as some sort of burden that we need to carry. If we push ourselves too hard, we will totally lose interest and get fed up with the practice, to the point where we will not want to come back to it again. Even seeing the place or the cushion where we usually do our meditation practice might cause us to feel dismay.

Beware of laziness

Having talked about the importance of taking a break from practice, we should also beware of not falling prey to laziness. There are different types of laziness, for example:

While taking a rest or break from our Dharma practice, we might indulge in idle or mundane activities. We might then begin to enjoy these and keep prioritising them. This is a form of laziness called the laziness of being attached to meaningless activities, which we must beware of and overcome.

After a rest, we need to get back to our practice as soon as possible, rather than thinking, 'I will do it later', which is called the laziness of procrastinating.

Laziness also comes in the form of saying to ourselves, 'It is too hard, I can't do it, I am not good enough.' This is called the laziness of self-discouragement or undermining oneself.

So, we must watch out for laziness when we try to overcome the tiredness and hardship we face when we engage in our practice.

We will now continue with our usual breathing meditation for a few minutes. In this meditation, as much as possible, we should try to place our attention one hundred percent on our breathing, without allowing thoughts of any other object to arise. Using the breath as a meditation object has the added benefit of being something we are already very familiar with, so it is an easy object to remember and focus on. *[Pause for meditation]*

Training the mind on the stages of the path shared by the person of small scope

We will now continue the teaching from where we left it last week.

The great teacher, Geshe Potowa, said: 'All the Buddha's teachings and the treatises by later masters are the means of subduing our mental continuum. If we have not subdued the mind, we will not create the cause to achieve liberation, even if we physically or mentally engage in virtuous actions for eons.'

Thus, the purpose of both the Buddha's teachings and commentaries or treatises on the Buddha's words by the later masters is for controlling or subduing the mind. Accordingly, we must always target our practice to subduing the mind and freeing it from being overpowered by anger and other destructive emotions. Once our mind is subdued, whatever practice we do will bring us true peace and happiness.

Otherwise, as Geshe Potowa says, if our mind is overpowered and under the influence of anger, for instance, then engaging in any outer practice – such as doing prostrations or saying prayers of praise to buddhas and noble beings – will not bring us more inner peace and happiness.

There are usually two levels of happiness that we seek in life. One is the happiness of sensory experiences or outer happiness – for example, our eyesight perceiving beautiful objects, or our hearing sense contacting a pleasant sound. The other form of happiness is mental happiness or inner happiness, which is not conditioned or dependent on any external objects or factors but is mainly experienced mentally.

By following the Dharma, we are seeking inner happiness. The reason is that, if we compare outer happiness experienced at a sensory level with inner mental happiness, the latter has greater value and a stronger influence on us.

Inner happiness is also more sustaining. Good spiritual practitioners can maintain inner happiness even when they face great external difficulties, such as a painful physical illness, because they can always maintain a positive mental attitude. They can recognise physical illness and other unfortunate life events as the result of their past karma, and hence recognise suffering as an inevitable part of life; they also understand that it is not just them – everyone experiences suffering and must learn to accept it.

So, through training our mind and cultivating a different way of thinking, we can prevent external adversity from disturbing our mind and thus maintain inner peace, stability, and happiness.

We can observe how some sportspeople, because of their strong ambition and passion to excel in their field, will exhibit great enthusiasm and readily endure physical pain and hardship. They will do so with great delight and a strong determination and wish to succeed; they don't regard the injuries and difficulties they encounter in training as suffering or as a burden. This all comes from their attitude of regarding such difficulties as positive and worthwhile.

On the other hand, despite being surrounded by good external conditions – such as success, wealth, and a good reputation – some people may be very unhappy and frustrated. So, we can observe how even external good conditions won't automatically bring the joy and satisfaction we pursue in life.

This shows the difference between inner and outer happiness. We can find inner happiness without external happiness, but if despite having all the factors for external happiness we lack inner happiness, we cannot feel happy.

Death and impermanence

We are studying the meditation topic of death and impermanence, the purpose of which is to control and subdue our mind.

When we think of death, we know it is something we must all face. It will come to every one of us. When it comes, of course, we will lose this life and this body, and we will become separated from all our material possessions, our wealth, and our family and friends.

We feel frightened of how we will cope with this when it happens. At the same time, we have to understand that this is the reality we all face. Whether we like it or not, we cannot stop death. It is a fact that birth results in death, which is the natural course of things.

So, when we meditate on death and impermanence, our aim is not to stop death from happening and not to become too frightened of being separated from and losing all the things we cherish. Death will happen, but through understanding death and impermanence, rather than it

being something frightening and unwelcoming, death will become something welcome, like going home, just as, after travelling for a long time, you feel a sense of joy when you return to your own home.

Death is the process of leaving an old body and finding a new body. We could have that kind of positive experience of death as a result of the practices we do in this life, such as engaging in the ten virtuous actions and getting rid of the ten non-virtuous actions.

So, the benefit and purpose of meditating on death and impermanence is that it will motivate us to prepare for our next life journey. It is like travelling somewhere – before the day comes, we prepare ourselves for the journey to ensure we have everything we need for the journey to go smoothly.

Working towards happiness in our future life brings happiness in this life

We may think that if we worry about preparing for the next life, we might miss out on the enjoyment and happiness of this current life.

In fact, by preparing for a future life, we will live even better in this life and find more happiness. The scriptures say that when we prepare ourselves for a better rebirth in a future life, as a by-product, we will automatically find more happiness and more satisfaction in this life.

We should not regard the meditation on death – for example, cultivating an awareness that death is certain – as something frightening, and hence not see any purpose to it. Rather, such a meditation has the purpose of making our current life even more meaningful, useful and enriched. Of course, the aim of the death and impermanence meditation is to remind us that this life is not forever and that we must make the best use of it; the meditation instils in us the motivation to engage in Dharma practice as the best and most effective way to find happiness now and in the future.

We will find out more about this later when we come to discuss what we have to do to find a good rebirth – that is, to engage in Dharma practice, for example by engaging in positive actions and abandoning negative ones. Engaging in positive actions and getting rid of negative ones is one of the main things we must do to prepare for our future life. As a by-product of these actions, we will automatically find more happiness in our current life.

According to the text, we meditate on death and impermanence in terms of three roots and nine reasons.

First root: Death is certain

The **first root** or point is to recognise that death is certain to come to all of us. The *first reason* is that death is definite: if we consider everyone who was born 100 to 200 years ago, very few are still alive, but all the millions of others have passed away. This clearly indicates that one who is born will die, for there is no place to escape from death; wealth, power - nothing can save us from death. We must try to understand that we will certainly die.

The *second reason* is that our lifespan is decreasing; regardless of how long we think we are going to live, it

never increases. In other words, our lifespan will always decrease and can never increase or be added to. At every moment our lifespan is decreasing, and we cannot add more years to it. That indicates the certainty of death.

The *third reason* is that the body we have and on which we depend for living in this life is impermanent and subject to ageing, and so on. As time passes, the body wears out, and eventually, it can no longer support our life. One day, we will die without having had time to practise the Dharma. This is also an indication of the certainty of death.

We will leave the teaching here for tonight, but if any of you have a question, please feel welcome to ask.

I have read that there are two different types of dharmakaya. Can you tell me what the two types are and what makes them different?

Your question is about the dharmakaya, which is loosely termed the *truth body of a buddha*. It is the state of absolute perfection you reach when you become a buddha or fully enlightened being – a buddha's form body and truth body.

Truth body refers to the state of perfection with regard to a buddha's mind and the purified qualities within it. There are two types of truth body - the *wisdom truth body*, such as a buddha's omniscient mind, and the *nature truth body*. The nature truth body can be further divided into two: the nature truth body with respect to a buddha's quality of being free of natural obstruction; and the nature truth body with respect to a buddha's quality of being free from adventitious obstructions.

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