

Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



16 November 1999

422.331.212.2 Forgetfulness (cont)

We finished the last teaching at the topic of forgetfulness as an obstacle to calm abiding. Forgetfulness occurs when the meditation object is lost as the object of mindfulness, and in order to counteract it, we have to apply mindfulness.

For successful calm abiding meditation the most important thing is recognising mindfulness and alertness, and the two main obstacles to mindfulness which are mental sinking and excitement. It is said that there is no hope of making any progress without a good knowledge and practise of mindfulness and alertness to counteract mental sinking and excitement.

Regarding the meaning of mindfulness, Asanga says in his text *The Compendium of Metaphysics*¹ that mindfulness is the process of familiarising the mind with an object which is already known to one's mind.

Characteristics Of Mindfulness

Mindfulness has three characteristics

1. The first characteristic concerns the object of mindfulness, which must be something which is already known to one and which one has seen before. For instance, the object of calm abiding that one has chosen, whether it is a visual object or some idea, must be well known beforehand. Applying mindfulness means we are trying to familiarise our mind with an object, which we have already seen before.

2. The second characteristic concerns the mode of apprehension of mindfulness. This is the ability to remember the object continuously, in the sense of holding it in the mind continuously. For example someone who is very hungry or starving, has constant thoughts of food. Having mindfulness means the apprehension of the object is always present in your mind. It does not mean remembering when you think about it, or when someone reminds you.

In relation to the practice of mindfulness Lama Tsong Khapa said in his Lam Rim text, *The Great Exposition to the Stages of the Path*, that practising mindfulness does not just mean your ability to remember what is being taught to you by the gurus. Rather, with mindfulness your mind is always tied to the object or to the instructions, so that it is actually holding the object continuously. Losing the object from the mind is an indication of the disintegration of that mindfulness. In other words if one

is influenced by distractions, then that is losing mindfulness.

Lama Tsong Khapa gives further instructions about the manner of applying the mindfulness. He says that it means that prior to the meditation you must familiarise yourself with the object. Then when you engage in the meditation initially you recognise (or recall) the object. From that point on the only thought that you have is the object of mindfulness, as if your mind is tied to the object.

The true practice of mindfulness means sustaining the same continuation of that initial mind, without allowing any distracting thought. The application of mindfulness continues with the same intensity of mind being focused on the object throughout the mindfulness practice.

3. The third characteristic of mindfulness is concerned with the function of mindfulness, which is that your mind is not distracted away from your given object by any other objects.

Mental Factors

If we examine our mind when it is focused on a specific object with single-pointed concentration, we can understand how our mind operates, because we can see how the various parts of the mind perform their own special functions.

That part of the mind, which enables it to stay on the object is called concentration. Concentration is the mental factor which accompanies all the mental states, and it allows us to focus on whatever object we have in our mind, and to stay on that object.

Mindfulness is the mental factor, which enables us to sustain that focus.

Intelligence or discriminating wisdom is the mental factor, which has the function of investigation. With mindfulness one holds the object in the mind, and discriminating wisdom enables one to monitor whether there are any distractions or obstacles occurring in the meditation. An element of this discriminating wisdom is alertness. If you have alertness then you have the ability to detect whether there is any fault arising in your meditation.

The Analogy Of Taming A Wild Elephant

The analogy of taming a wild elephant is often used to explain taming the mind. The Scriptural sources are Bhavaviveka's text *The Heart Of The Middle Way*², and Kamalashila's text *The Stages Of Meditation*.

We have discussed this analogy at various times in the

¹ Ed. The title corrected by the translator during editing. The actual quote is, "[Memory is] something that functions so as not to allow the mind to forget a thing with which it has been made familiar"

² Ed. Title amended during editing

past, so in short you think of how a wild elephant can be fully tamed and disciplined. To tame a wild elephant it needs to be initially tied with a very strong rope or chain to a very firm pole or tree. Then the trainer takes control of the elephant, trying to discipline and teach it. If the elephant is not listening or not obeying, it might be punished by being hit on the head with a very sharp metal hook. By doing this the trainer can fully control and discipline this wild elephant.

Here we also have to think, as Shantideva described in great detail in his text, of the damage the elephant can do if it is not brought under control. Shantideva said that the damage caused by an uncontrolled mind is far greater than what a mad elephant can do. Also you have to think that just as there are advantages in the elephant being tamed, because it can be used for many different purposes, likewise there are many advantages in having our own mind fully tamed.

Regarding the way the analogy is used, according to Bhavavevika,

- the pole to which the elephant is tied is likened to the object of the meditation to which our mind needs to be tied
- the rope with which we tie the elephant is mindfulness
- the metal hook which is used to discipline the elephant is like alertness in meditation
- the mad elephant itself is likened to our untamed mind
- the trainer who disciplines the elephant is ourselves trying to control and discipline our mind.

According to Karmalashila in *The Stages Of Meditation*, one must tie the mind of the elephant with the rope of the mindfulness and alertness to the pole. Here the rope is likened to both mindfulness and alertness.

Bhavavevika compares alertness with the metal hook, whereas according to Karmalashila alertness is compared to the rope used to tie the elephant. Lama Tsong Khapa makes the comment that even though these two masters explain the analogy in slightly different ways, there is absolutely no contradiction. Just as mindfulness is the most important factor in tying the mind to the object, so alertness has the same function of keeping the mind on the object. The only difference, he said, is that mindfulness is a direct means of tying the mind with the object, whereas alertness is an indirect means.

With alertness in meditation you are able to detect whether any fault or obstacle such as mental sinking or excitement has arisen, or is even near to arising. With alertness you will know if there are any possible faults in your meditation, and be able to apply the antidote to overcome the fault, which then allows the continuation of mindfulness of the object in your meditation.

To summarise, we have discussed how mindfulness is qualified by three characteristics. These are the object of meditation which is something which is known to one, the mode of apprehension which is not forgetting the object, and the function of mindfulness which is not being distracted from the meditation object by any other objects. Lama Tsong Khapa said that if you want to achieve single-pointed concentration there is no other

means apart from applying mindfulness.

We shall stop tonight's teaching here. Next week we shall continue with mental sinking and excitement, which is the third fault or obstacle. Of the five obstacles or faults of meditation we have finished the first two, and of the eight remedies we have finished the first five. The first obstacle of laziness is overcome by applying the first four remedies, which are faith, aspiration, joyous effort and pliancy. The second obstacle is forgetting the instructions, and the remedy for that is mindfulness.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

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23 November 1999

Cultivate the bodhicitta motivation, thinking "To achieve the full state of enlightenment for the sake of all beings I shall listen to these teachings properly, and afterwards I shall put them into practice".

422.331.212.3 Mental Sinking And Excitement

ཉེས་པ་གསུམ་པ་བྱིང་ཚོད་གཉིས་འབྲུང།

In calm abiding meditation, the next main obstacles we confront are mental sinking and excitement. To recognise them we must know their characteristics.

Excitement

ཚོད་པ།

Excitement is said to have three characteristics.

1. The **object** of excitement is something which is attractive or appealing to the mind.
2. The **aspect** of excitement is a form of attachment which is a cause of distraction which destroys peace of mind.
3. The **function** of excitement hinders the mind from abiding on a mental object

The scriptural source describing these three characteristics is Asanga's text, *The Compendium Of Knowledge*¹. This text says that excitement is a form of attachment to an attractive object, which causes the mind to become very agitated. So excitement is an obstacle to achieving calm abiding. This basically describes the three characteristics, which have just been listed.

This term "excitement" has a very specific meaning. In the Tibetan language excitement is called 'go ba'. There are also the terms "distraction" or "agitation". There is a difference in the way that these terms are used, and in their meaning. "Excitement" is not equivalent to, or synonymous with, the term "distraction" because, as we just mentioned, excitement is a form of attachment to some pleasant object. "Distraction", however, is not necessarily the result of attachment.

Generally speaking, there are two causes of distraction: those caused by delusions other than attachment, and those caused by virtuous objects. In fact if we study the topic of the mind and mental factors, then distraction as a mental factor is only one of the twenty mental factors of delusions.

The Lam Rim text, *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand* explains very clearly the difference between excitement and distraction in general. It also clarifies the fact that while excitement which arises from attachment is categorised as an obstacle to calm abiding meditation, the mental factors of distractions are not, although they are also obstacles. The text says, for instance, that if while engaged in meditation

practice you suddenly think of someone you hate this might induce anger in your mind, and as a result you lose the object of your meditation. Obviously your mind has been distracted by external objects. Likewise if while engaged in calm abiding meditation you have a positive virtuous thought such as thought of other Dharma practices like generosity or morality, that too is regarded as a distraction. If you do not overcome such distractions then you will never achieve calm abiding.

Whatever form the distraction takes, it can interrupt meditation practice. The text discusses very clearly how these different forms of distraction are different to excitement. Excitement arises when your mind drifts towards other objects because of your attachment to them. For instance if you have just been to a most enjoyable concert this can cause a distraction in your mind. For a long time your mind can still be thinking about that music. The reason why only excitement is regarded as an obstacle to meditation practice is because it is one of the main causes of distracting our mind to external objects.

Even in our every-day life attachment or excitement is the main cause of a distracted mind, and is of course the reason why our mind is not at peace, or abiding within itself. Not only that, but our mind is so used to being attached to any appealing object, that attachment arises very easily, and the degree of attachment is also very great.

Therefore excitement is emphasised as a fault in meditation practice.

Compared to excitement, distractions are not the usual cause of our mind not abiding within itself. For instance we are so rarely distracted by virtuous thoughts, and even though anger and some other delusions can be very distracting, in general we do not experience them very often. So for these reasons even though distractions are an obstacle to meditation, only excitement is listed as a fault.

Excitement can be divided into two - coarse excitement and the subtle excitement.

Subtle excitement occurs when the object of meditation is not completely lost. However due to the influence of some attachment part of our mental focus is distracted.

Coarse excitement is when we totally lose the meditation object due to the influence of attachment.

Excitement is said to be not very hard to recognise. However the next obstacle, mental sinking, is hard to identify.

Mental Sinking

བྱིང་བ།

Mental sinking is different from a form of dullness in the mind is called in Tibetan 'moog pa' which is a form of dullness. Asanga's text *Compendium Of Knowledge* says that

¹ Also known as *Compendium of Valid Cognitions* and *Compendium Of Metaphysics*. The title was clarified in the editing process.

dullness makes us mentally and physically very heavy and sleepy. Mental dullness is not mental sinking, however it can be a cause for mental sinking to occur. When mental dullness occurs it results in physical and mental inactivity, and due to this you lose interest in practising meditation.

What is mental sinking? In his lam rim text, *Great Expositions Of The Stages Of The Path*, Lama Tsong Khapa says that mental sinking arises when in meditation the mind loses the apprehension of the object. It also arises in meditation when the mind is not apprehending, or holding, the object tightly enough. Another indication of mental sinking is the degree of clarity of the apprehension of the object. Some masters have said that it is not something, which can be fully described in words, and that the only way to recognise mental sinking precisely is through personal experience. Compared with excitement mental sinking is very subtle.

Laziness is one of the main causes of mental sinking. As said before one can only really know mental sinking from personal experience, however there are some signs. It is said mental sinking is when you have the apprehension of the object in your mind, but somehow there is a feeling of over relaxation, as if your mind is falling down, and becoming overly peaceful. In other words it is when you lose intensity of mind, or force of engagement with the object. We also talk of mental sinking in terms of the degree to which you tie your mind to the object. If it is not tied enough, the looseness of the meditation is a sign of mental sinking. Like excitement, mental sinking can be divided into two forms - coarse and subtle.

The **course form of mental sinking** arises when there is stability in meditation, but there is no clarity of the object. This form of mental sinking arises when your mind is holding the object very well, but you lack the clarity of the object in your apprehension of it.

The **subtle form of mental sinking** arises when, although there is stability and clarity in the apprehension of the object, there is no intensity in the clarity of it. This is because of not holding the object tightly enough. In fact without knowing about the subtle form of mental sinking we might think that our meditation is going perfectly well. It is said that it is very easy to confuse this fault of mental sinking with true meditative concentration. If this confusion exists there is no hope of achieving calm abiding.

The only way to differentiate between subtle mental sinking and true meditative concentration is through experience in meditation. Both true meditative concentration and mental sinking have some common elements. Each can only be experienced when our mind is perfectly seated and stabilised on the object, and when there is some degree of clarity of the object. One needs to check very thoroughly whether we are engaging in true meditative concentration, or whether we have fallen prey to mental sinking. If it is mental sinking, then let alone being a cause to achieve calm abiding and a higher level of existence such as the form and formless realms in future lifetimes, it can be a cause of increasing forgetfulness and ignorance in this life too

Mental sinking is so easily confused with meditative concentration, that when you experience it you may appear to be in such a deep concentration that you even cease breathing externally. You have to check not only the stability and clarity of the object, but the degree of intensity of focus in the meditation. It is something you have to judge from experience. If you see that there is some laxity of intensity, even though there is stability and clarity in the

way the mind perceives the object, then that is a sign of mental sinking.

Of the eight remedies, the remedy of alertness is applied to overcome mental sinking and excitement. Alertness is likened to the secret agent in war who is sent to keep an eye on the enemy's tactics and preparations for war. The job of the secret agent is to inform. The actual force which defeats the enemy is the troops. Similarly if you apply alertness in your meditation you will be able to recognise when any fault such as mental sinking and excitement arises. Alertness plays a very key role in defeating the enemy.

Alertness is also an outcome of mindfulness. In meditation one first brings the object to mind. It is not a new object but a familiar one. Once the object appears, one applies mindfulness so that it is not lost. Alertness comes after mindfulness in the sense that after one applies mindfulness, alertness is the tool for mindfulness not to lose its object.

Without mindfulness alertness cannot function effectively. Consider the example of sending someone to search for a particular person. It is most important that you give a full description in terms of complexion, size of body, name and so on, and that this is committed to memory before they set out. He or she cannot afford to forget any part of the description. Then if he happens to meet with the right person he immediately recognises them. The fact that he identifies the right person is alertness. This analogy shows how mindfulness and alertness work together.

It is said that alertness should not be applied continuously, rather it should be applied every now and then. Like the secret agent the role of alertness is to inform the mind how the meditation is going. As you begin your meditation your mind focuses on the object, and in order to retain the object you have to apply very powerful mindfulness, qualified with the three characteristics we discussed last week. Then you have to apply alertness to check whether your mind is focussing solely on your given object, or whether it is distracted by some other object. Alertness keeps an eye on the mind to see if it is sitting on the object, or if it is distracted. However as we shall discuss later, we are also warned not to apply alertness unnecessarily, because that too can also be an obstacle to progress.

With regard to alertness, Shantideva said in *A Guide To The Bodhisattva's Way Of Life* that alertness is that which observes every instance of the mind and body over and over again.

Here alertness is specifically used to check whether or not there is any fault of mental sinking or excitement occurring in one's meditation. It is said that having recognised these faults of mental sinking or excitement, one must of course overcome them by applying the antidote. If no antidote is applied even though the fault has been recognised through alertness, then this is another of fault of meditation - not applying the remedy. The antidote to overcome this fault is the remedy of applying the antidote, which we shall discuss next week.

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30 November 1999

Cultivate the motivation of wishing to achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. Then think that it is out of this motivation that you are receiving these teachings, and that you will put them into practise to calm your mind.

We have discussed the two main obstacles of meditation - excitement and mental sinking - and how each can be divided into coarse and subtle forms. We also discussed how we have to apply alertness, because it is by applying alertness that we are able to identify these two faults if they occur. However it is said that if neither fault is present there is no need to apply alertness. Indeed applying alertness when neither mental sinking nor excitement is present is itself a fault.

422.331.212.4 Not Applying The Antidote

ཉེས་པ་བཞི་པ་གཉེན་པོ་འདུ་མི་བྱེད་པ།

If through alertness you identify the presence of excitement or mental sinking, and you do not apply the antidote to counteract these two faults, then it is said that this is the greatest fault in meditation.

The antidote to this fault of not applying the antidote is mental intention. Regarding this, Asanga in his *Compendium of Knowledge* says that mental intention is a type of mental factor which directs the mind towards its object, and which can be virtuous, non-virtuous or indifferent.

Five Omnipresent Mental Factors¹

It is important to have some understanding of the different types of mental factors which accompany our mind or consciousness. Such knowledge is also important for an understanding of topics like karma.

As we have briefly mentioned in previous teachings, each of the consciousnesses must have five mental factors called the Five Omnipresent Mental Factors in order to function. They are:

1. Feeling (tso-wa) which experiences the object as pleasurable, painful or neutral.
2. Discrimination (du-she) which enables this mind to discern the specific characteristics of the perceived object, and to discriminate between that object and other objects.
3. Intention (sem-pa) which directs the mind to the object.
4. Mental engagement (yi-la che-pa) which directs the mind to the particular object of observation.
5. Contact (reg-pa) which serves as the basis for the mind to experience the object. For instance when the

consciousness, its object and the sense organs all come together there is contact, and then you can experience that particular object.

Mental intention as a mental factor

Here we are specifically talking about the mental factor called mental intention (sem-pa). Its job is to drive the mind towards its object. All mental consciousnesses, whether virtuous, non-virtuous or indifferent, engage with their respective objects, and what causes the mind to engage with an object is the mental factor of intention.

Karma is another example of the mental factor of intention. Sometimes karma is divided into two: mental karma and physical karma. The difference is that mental karma is the mental intention which serves as the motivation to undertake the action, whereas physical karma technically refers to the mental factor of intention which coincides with the actual physical action taking place. Karma can be virtuous, non-virtuous, and neutral or indifferent depending on whether the driving mental intention is virtuous, non-virtuous, or neutral.

How To Apply The Antidote

The remedy of applying the antidote is generating a mental intention, the function of which is to direct the mind towards its object. Through alertness we recognise that our meditative concentration has the fault of either mental sinking or excitement. The first thing to do is to think of overcoming the fault, and to redirect the mind towards the object. That is mental intention. This mental intention is not actually counteracting mental sinking or excitement, rather it is reminding, or motivating the mind to apply the antidote to mental sinking and excitement.

The Actual Antidote To Mental Sinking

What is the actual antidote to mental sinking and excitement? If there is recognition that subtle mental sinking for instance, has arisen, and knowledge of why that fault arises then the antidote to remove that fault is very simple. As we discussed in the last teaching the cause of subtle mental sinking is that there is not enough tightness in the mode of apprehension of the object of meditation. In other words the indication of subtle mental sinking is that the mode of apprehension of the object is a bit too loose.

Another sign of subtle mental sinking is that even though there is stability in one's meditative concentration, and the mind is still focussed on the object with some degree of clarity, there is no intensity in the clarity of the object of observation. This happens because of the looseness in the mode of apprehension of the observed object. Therefore it is very clear that to

¹ From Lati Rinpoche, *Mind In Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 36. Inserted by translator Sandup Tsering during the editing process.

remove the fault of subtle mental sinking one has to increase the tightness of the mode of apprehension of the object. There is no need to replace the object, or to take a break from one's meditation session.

Making progress in meditation and knowing what one should and should not do can only be learnt by actually engaging in this meditation practice. It is only through experience that you can gain some idea of how to prevent the faults of mental sinking and excitement. The fault of mental sinking arises when we are too relaxed in our meditation, and the mode of apprehension of the object is too loose. As a result our level of mental activity is reduced. At the same time it is said that if we hold the object too tightly, then this can lead to the fault of excitement. So therefore we need to learn how to moderate the degree of tightness and looseness in our mode of apprehension of the observed object. Only by experiencing these faults and experimenting with their antidotes over and over again can you gain the knowledge of how to moderate of the degree of tightness and looseness in the mode of apprehending the object; and be able to recognise the fault before it even arises. The Scriptures use the example of tuning the string of a guitar: only when the strings are not too tight and not too loose, can they produce the right sound. It is something one has to try in order to know.

The famous Indian master Chandragomin recognised how difficult, and even discouraging, it is learning to maintain the right level of concentration so that the object is neither too tight nor too loose. When the object is too loose and you try to tighten it up by exerting more effort this becomes a cause for excitement to arise. Likewise when you try to relax and loosen your apprehension of the object it can bring mental sinking. It just shows that the only way to find out the right level of looseness and tightness of the mode of apprehension is through continuous meditation practice.

In order to overcome the subtle form of mental sinking which is caused by having too loosen a mode of apprehension, one should try to tighten the mode of apprehension. It is said if, having tried this, one notices there is not enough intensity in the clarity of the object, then it is most likely that the mental sinking being observed is the coarse form of mental sinking.

In the text called the *Heart Of The Middle Way* it says that when discouragement (Tibetan 'shum-pa') should be overcome by broadening, or widening one's mental scope, and if there is mental sinking then this can be overcome by uplifting the mind. With reference to this Lama Tsong Khapa also commented on the difference between discouragement and mental sinking, and made the further comment that discouragement occurs when the mind is too inwardly withdrawn, whereas mental sinking arises in meditation when there is a sign of the slackening of the mode of apprehension of the object.

As we have just discussed first we have to recognise the meditation fault through alertness. If, for instance, it is subtle mental sinking the indication of that fault is not enough tightness in one's meditation, so try to impose more tightness. If this does not overcome the fault, it is an indication that the fault is not in fact subtle mental sinking but may be coarse mental sinking or something else.

It is said that the cause of coarse mental sinking is mainly the discouragement which occurs when our mind is too inwardly withdrawn. Therefore to overcome this fault of discouragement one needs to widen or broaden the mind while remaining in meditation. All the preceding methods to counteract faults in meditation are applied without giving up the object of the meditation.

If despite all this one cannot overcome the fault of mental sinking, then one has to disengage the mind from the meditation object, take a break from the meditation, and apply some other means to overcome these problems.

It is easy to become discouraged and this is one of the causes of mental sinking. If this occurs one has to apply a cause to bring some joy, and a positive feeling to delight the mind. To refresh and rejuvenate the mind the suggested meditation topics are contemplating either the precious human rebirth, or the benefits of listening to the teachings, or the qualities of the three objects of Refuge, or the qualities of one's spiritual guru, or the benefit of bodhicitta mind. Engaging in contemplation on these topics, it says, is just like a refreshing splash of water on your face when you are feeling physically lethargic. These meditations can refresh your mind in the same way, and you can then start the meditation again.

The scriptural source for these instructions about overcoming the fault of mental sinking is the text *Heart Of The Middle Way*. In it Indian master Bhavaviveka says that if the mind is too withdrawn or too discouraged, then one should exert some effort in contemplating, for instance, the benefits of one's meditation in order to lighten the mind. Shantideva said in his text *Compendium Of Instruction* that to overcome a discouraged mind one has to meditate on the thought of joyfulness, which can then bring about positive states of mind.

If having refreshed the mind, one returns to the same meditation with the same object, and the fault of mental sinking still remains, then one has to rely upon special instructions from one's teacher to overcome the fault.

One such special instruction or technique to overcome mental sinking is a meditation where you think of your mind as a white drop at the centre of your heart; the drop is about the size of a small bird's egg. In the meditation think that with your exhalation you are pushing the white drop up through your body to your crown, where it exits going higher and higher into space, before vanishing there.

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7 December 1999

As is always the case we should begin by generating the bodhicitta motivation - generating the genuine wish to achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings - and then think that for this reason we are studying this lam rim teaching, and that we shall put it into practice.

Antidotes To Mental Sinking (continued)

At the end of the last teaching we briefly mentioned a meditation technique to immediately overcome the obstacle of mental sinking. It involves imagining the mind in the form of a white coloured drop at the heart (in some texts it says in the form of a light). Then, as one exhales, the breath forces the drop to move up so that it exits through one's crown, rising higher and higher until it eventually dissolves into space.

If, despite the application of all the methods of remove it, mental sinking still remains, it is recommended to take a break from the meditation practice. During the break one should try to overcome the cause of this mental sinking.

Causes Of Mental Sinking

The main causes of mental sinking include:

Sleepiness: There is no need to describe how if we begin to fall into sleep then we naturally lose the object of meditation.

Mental dullness: A symptom of this is a feeling of heaviness in our mind or body.

Cloudiness in our mind: This is when our mind feels overcast, as if some sort of darkness has enveloped our mind.

To eliminate these causes of mental sinking it is suggested to go to a high place, a cool place, or one with panoramic views. It also helps to splash some water on one's face. Another suggestion is to take a very relaxing enjoyable walk. These relaxing leisure activities can help to remove all the above causes of mental sinking. Then having cleared away the causes of mental sinking, you feel very mentally and physically refreshed, and can return to the meditation.

Excitement

Now we move to the remedies to the obstacle of excitement. We learnt in the preceding teachings that even though the object of observation in the meditation has not been lost, if the mind is still under the influence of mental distraction, this is the subtle form of excitement.

It is said that one of the main causes of subtle mental excitement is that the mind is too tied to the object of

observation, so therefore the first remedy is to try to loosen the mind a little bit. If this excitement is still present after the degree of tightness between the mind and the object has been loosened a little, this shows that rather than being the subtle form of excitement, the excitement is most likely to be the coarse form. One should try to remedy this obstacle as much as possible without discontinuing the meditation.

The text *Heart Of The Middle Way* suggests a remedy for such causes of excitement: one should contemplate a topic of meditation which can bring the mind inward and so overcome the influence of external distractions. It is said that this coarse form of excitement arises because there are too many feelings of pleasantness, and so the meditation falls under the influence of these distractions. The remedy is to contemplate topics such as death and impermanence. The text says that the effect of this meditation is just like pouring cold water into hot water. In this analogy excitement which is a form of desire-attachment is likened to the hot water. The cold water of the death and impermanence meditation draws the mind inward, away from the influence of external distractions, such as attachment to the sensual pleasures of this life. With this death and impermanence meditation we gain such a deep understanding and knowledge that our mind is naturally forced towards the Dharma, rather than being influenced by worldly objects.

Contemplating the suffering and misery that exists in samsara or cyclic existence in general, particularly in the lower rebirths, and gaining a deep understanding and faith in these topics is very effective in bringing the mind inward, and overcoming any form of distraction.

If the previous remedies do not remove coarse excitement, one has to rely upon instructions about other special meditation techniques. One of these instructions is the breathing meditation. This involves not only focusing the mind on inhaling and exhaling, but at the same time trying to see how long one can place the mind single-pointedly on the breath without the influence of any distraction. This is done by mentally counting the cycles of breathing, in which each inhalation and exhalation is counted as one cycle or round of breath. Continue counting the rounds of breath without being distracted from your focus on the object of the breath. Then as mental concentration increases try to extend the length of concentration on one's breathing from five rounds of breathing, to ten, then fifteen, and twenty and so on. It is said if one can stabilise the mind on the breath for 21 rounds of breathing, one has achieved the first of the nine levels of calm abiding.

In conjunction with this common breathing meditation technique, one can also incorporate the technique of holding the wind energy in one's body at the naval, and then fixing the mind on that as long as possible. With this technique as one inhales through the nostrils, try to move all the wind in the upper part of your body, or all the downward-voiding wind down through the heart to the level of your naval. Then while holding that, bring up all the wind from the lower part of the body, or all the upward moving wind energy to the level of the naval, so the wind from the upper and lower parts of the body is joined. Then try to focus the mind on that. This technique is said to be most effective if, when one can no longer hold the wind at one's naval, one exhales slowly, preferably through the nostrils.

During the sitting meditation it is essential to maintain the object in the mind through mindfulness and alertness, and not to loosen the mode of apprehension of the object, but rather to concentrate the mind single-pointedly on the object. It is also important to know how it is necessary to check to make sure that there is no influence of any fault or obstacle such as mental sinking and excitement. Not only does the meditator have to be able to concentrate the mind on the object single-pointedly by relying mainly on mindfulness, but he or she must also be fully alert and aware so that he or she is immediately able to recognise if any fault like mental sinking or excitement arises. Of course having identified a fault one has to know all the various techniques to remove it.

In Lama Tsong Khapa's *Great Exposition Of The Stages Of The Path* it is recommended that beginners commence the meditation session with a very forceful motivation, and make the duration of their meditation short. This means that the first part of the meditation is to bring to mind the chosen object, for instance some visual form, as vividly as possible. Then one directs or, we literally say, ties the mind to that object. At this point generate a strong forceful motivation or determination saying "I shall concentrate and fix my mind single-pointedly on that object without a flicker of movement for as long as possible". Having generated this intention, the actual meditation practice begins. Throughout the meditation practice make sure that the mind is on the object by checking on the mind every now and then to see if it is still tied to the object. This is the way of applying mindfulness: checking or remembering the object every now and then.

We should try to focus more on the quality of our meditation rather than focussing on the quantity in terms of how long we meditate. It is suggested in the lam rim text *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand* that it is good to make the session short, in the sense of finishing the session while it is still going well and you are still enjoying the meditation. This will make you feel that you want to do it again. If you try to push yourself too hard, and practise with no enjoyment it will take a lot of motivation to repeat the practice, and you may even begin to hate it. As you can read in the lam rim commentary text, it says that it is a good time to stop if the object is clear and the meditation is going well. You should also stop if the meditation object is not clear and the meditation is not going well. What this instruction

means is that you should finish the session at the point that it makes you want to do it again. It also implies that if it is not going well, and you are not achieving anything and finding it very difficult, then you should not force yourself. It is better to end the session.

The most effective way of making progress in meditation is to have as few obstacles or faults as possible, especially the faults of mental sinking and excitement. In the beginning, when our mind is not used to single-pointed concentration it is more beneficial to make meditation as short as possible, and focus on trying to do it without any fault of mental sinking and excitement. Look for quality in the meditation. You can perform this short session as many times as possible - in a single day you can do up to 18 sessions. Before you can extend the session you have to make sure that your mental concentration can be sustained and not influenced by distractions or mental sinking. By doing that short meditation over and over again, you can eventually develop to the point that you hardly have to make any effort to concentrate the mind, which can focus on the object naturally. When you get to that point then try to extend it, making your meditation a bit longer. This is the way that you eventually progress to achieving the state of calm abiding.

It is very important that we always enjoy our practice, and end it while we are still enjoying it, so that we have the thought of wishing to do the same practice again. The text uses the example of two people being separated for a long time. If they parted good friends, then when they meet again, they will naturally like each other. However if they hated each other at the time of separation, then when they meet again they will still hate each other. If we do not put the right amount of effort into our practice in the right way, it becomes a great hardship and burden. Then later on, let alone doing it, even the thought of the practice will discourage you. This should not be the case.

Next week there will not be discussion, but we shall continue with teaching on the remedy of equanimity, the antidote to the fifth fault, which is Over Application Of The Remedy.

Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.

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Note on authentication

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Study Group - "Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅངས།



14 December 1999

Once again try to reinforce the bodhicitta mind you have just cultivated. Using that as your motivation, think that to achieve full enlightenment for the sake of all beings, not only do you study the lam rim teachings, but you are determined to put them into practice.

422.331.212.5 Unnecessary Application Of The Antidote

ཉེས་པ་ལྷུ་བཀག་ཉེན་མོ་མཛོན་བར་འདུ་བྱེད་པ།

We are up to the fifth fault, which is Unnecessary Application Of The Antidote. This fault arises particularly at the eighth level of meditative concentration, which is the result of the progress you have made through applying mindfulness and alertness. At this level you have managed to completely remove all the faults of mental sinking and excitement, your mind remains single-pointedly on the object, and your meditation goes very smoothly. Applying alertness and making an analysis of one's meditation impairs that meditation and becomes a fault.

Remedy

To prevent Unnecessary Application Of The Antidote, one has to cultivate the state of equanimity, which is a state allowing the meditative concentration to continue without the application of any remedy. Even though applying an antidote is not generally considered as a fault, it is described as a fault at this eighth stage. Why? Because it is unnecessary. Not only that, but applying such an antidote can interrupt one's meditative concentration. So it is necessary to develop a state of equanimity in meditation. This helps to allow the meditative concentration to proceed naturally, without any intervention.

Types of Equanimity

With regard to equanimity there are three forms:

1. Feeling equanimity
2. Immeasurable equanimity
3. Compositional equanimity

It is the third form of equanimity which is cultivated at the eighth level of a meditation, which does not have the faults of mental sinking or excitement. Of the two types of compositional equanimity there is equanimity with effort, and equanimity without effort. It is the latter one which one cultivates as the remedy.

In discussions about overcoming the fifth fault by applying this state of equanimity, the terms "loosening and relaxing" are mentioned. There might be confusion here with the use of the term "loosening" in the context of mental sinking and excitement. However, in this context

it is used to refer to the loosening,relaxing or suppressing of alertness, and not to [the loosening of] mindfulness, or to the mode of apprehension of the object of observation. As we mentioned earlier, at this stage of meditative concentration there is no fault of mental sinking or excitement, so loosening or relaxing refers specifically to the amount of effort devoted to alertness, rather than to alertness per se.

There is more detail about this in the commentary text, *Liberation In The Palm Of Your Hand*, including the use of the phrase "loosening without being distracted". This phrase stimulates a lot of discussion among the various scholars.

Geshe Doga also recommends that you read the section of the Mahamudra teachings concerning the achievement of calm abiding using one's mind as the object. There are many commentaries on the Mahamudra teachings available, including one by His Holiness the Dalai Lama¹. Some texts explain this topic of calm abiding in detail using specific words found in the instructions of the early meditators or mahasiddhas. The basis for understanding these calm abiding teachings is that at the eighth mental state there is no fault of mental sinking and excitement, and the meditation proceeds "without loosening" or "relaxing without being distracted". It is important to understand the right meaning of these words, otherwise you can be misled in your meditation practice.

Next year we shall continue further with Calm Abiding and Special Insight.

Why We Need To Contemplate And Meditate

In the sutra, the King of Concentration, the followers of Dharma are compared with a patient, the teachings with the medicine, and the teacher with the doctor. A patient who, having consulted the right doctor, and having received the right medicine, refuses to take the prescribed medicine will never recover from their illness. Likewise, the sutra says, if having listened to the teachings, you do not afterward relate what you have learnt to your mind, and follow that up with meditation practice to calm your mind, you cannot gain any benefit from the teachings.

It is indeed very fortunate to be able to have the opportunity not only to meet with the Dharma, but also to be able to study it, and have the opportunity to put it into practice. Having spent a great deal of time trying to

¹ Editor: "The Gelug/Kagyü Tradition of Mahamudra" by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Translator Alexander Berzin, Publisher Snow 1997, Lion ISBN 1-55939-072-7

pursue the study of Dharma, we have to realise that the most important thing of all, as the Buddha said in this sutra, is to also follow up your learning with contemplation about what you have learnt, and then to meditate on whatever understanding you gain in your contemplations. You can only expect some positive result from your efforts in Dharma if you mix the word of Dharma with your mind and with your heart, and then make an effort to subdue your inner continuum. Then you can see some benefit.

It is important that we always see the Buddha's teachings as something which shows us the cause of the problems we have within ourself, and hence the remedy to those faults. In fact in the Tibetan language the Buddhist Scriptures are called *nang rig pa* which means the Collection Of Inside Scriptures. Whereas other non-Buddhist texts that do not refer to the inside are referred to as Outside Texts. The distinction between inside and outside is not meant to disparage other systems, but to illustrate that the Buddhist teachings show the remedy to, for instance, the view of self grasping which is within our ourself.

Our Good Fortune

We have to try to think how fortunate we have been to be able to have this opportunity to study the lam rim for a whole year. We can also think how fortunate we are in our current life situation, where we enjoy sound health of mind and body, and have met with the perfect teachings. Try to understand that this wonderful opportunity we have found now has enabled us to accrue enormous merit. At the same time remember that finding this opportunity has not occurred without the cause being created. Try to see that this excellent favourable situation now is the indication of the amount of merit and virtue that we have created in the past. Then to gain the same in the future think of making the best use of this opportunity, aspiring or wishing, or even just making a general prayer, that in the future we may find such a favourable situation again, and always have a connection with the Dharma - the teachings which help one to calm the mind.

We know that the essential practice of the Dharma is to always maintain the right frame of mind: to cultivate loving kindness, and compassion, and the good heart within one's mind. We should not misunderstand, and think that to take Dharma practice very seriously we have to give up our normal lifestyle, or even give up our job. We do not have to give up our job to practise Dharma, nor do we have to give up various activities of our life.

The practice of Dharma is all a matter of acting with the right motivation: it is the type of motivation behind our actions, rather than the action itself which is important. The ideal example of a Dharma practitioner is His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who is one of the busiest people in the world. One thing however is very clear: day in and day out he always thinks about how to benefit others, and how to bring peace and happiness to the world, and to the minds of other sentient beings. We should also try to think that if we cultivate, and try to develop our sense of love, care and compassion towards other beings, it is possible for any one of us to be like His

Holiness the Dalai Lama - a true Bodhisattva. We should try to understand how we can make progress in our Dharma spiritual practice, by always focussing on our mind, and particularly focus on trying to develop this love and compassion for other beings.

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