
Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness

འཇམ་དགེ་ལུན་ཕུག་རྒྱ་ཆེན་པོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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The motivation for our practice would be just as we have recited in the refuge and bodhichitta prayer.

Of course the motivation would not be active in our mind when we are engaged in the practice of meditating single-pointedly on the object. However by setting our motivation prior to our practice it is said that the meditation practice will then be imbued with the motivation that was generated earlier.

The 'refuge' in the taking refuge and generating bodhichitta prayer needs to be understood as a Mahayana refuge, a Great Vehicle refuge. Of course the qualities of the Buddha would be the same whatever the vehicle, however when it comes to the Dharma it has to be understood that the Dharma refers particularly to the Mahayana Dharma, which means the cessation and the path within the mental continuum of a Mahayana arya being, and the Sangha refers to the Mahayana arya being.

Of course we have presented the actual technique of meditation many times previously, so we will try to practise in accordance to the earlier explanations for the next five minutes. (*pause for meditation*)

You can come out of your samadhi now.

Only a buddha is capable of giving teachings while being in meditative equipoise or samadhi. For ordinary beings, giving teachings and engaging in other virtuous deeds are activities that are done in a post-meditative state. However an enlightened being is able to engage in those activities whilst in a meditative state, so for them the states of meditative equipoise and post-meditative equipoise are synonymous.

3.2. MAINTAINING MINDFULNESS IN PARTICULAR (CONT.)

Of the five subdivisions of the particular modes of maintaining mindfulness we covered the third, maintaining mindfulness by applying the appropriate measures, in our last session. We went into an extensive explanation of what the appropriate measure implies, and to recap, when focusing on the object with mindfulness and introspection the appropriate measure is to be found when the focus is neither too tight nor too loose.

One finds that appropriate measure as a result of experience in the practice of meditation, where one comes to the point of recognising, 'If I apply my focus too tightly then that will cause excitement to occur, and if it is too loose then that will cause laxity'. So one should find the right measure, where the focus is not too tight and, at the same time, not too loose. Ideally one should adopt the appropriate measure right at the beginning of the meditation session. Then when one engages in the practice of meditation it will not be the case of being a little bit relaxed in the beginning and then having to tighten the focus later, or where the focus is too tight in the beginning then relaxed later. Rather, whatever the level of

one's ability, the right measure should be maintained throughout the session.

It is said that if the focus is too loose then that will cause laxity to occur. I would posit that subtle laxity is actually a concentration. The reason why one can assume this is because the teachings present laxity as being either ethically neutral, or virtuous. Thus a virtuous laxity would be subtle laxity, because it is a concentration that is actually a virtuous state of mind, whereas we would call a laxity that is influenced by the delusions an ethically neutral laxity. I think we have to posit an ethically neutral laxity as gross laxity.

At more advanced levels of practice in developing single-pointed concentration there is, as mentioned previously, a great danger of mistaking subtle laxity for correct concentration. When one falls into the habit of focussing on the object while in a state of subtle laxity then, because it is a level of concentration, there is the danger of not being able to recognise it as laxity. One might be able to focus quite well on the object to the point where even the breath can cease, however if one fails to recognise the existence of subtle laxity it will be a hindrance to developing actual calm abiding in the long run.

4. Maintaining mindfulness with conventionally renowned techniques

The corresponding lines from the root text are:

21. *In this type of meditation whenever extraneous thoughts arise in your mind, if you observe their nature long enough, you will find that they all pass and disappear. You are then left with an awareness of the clear state of your mind in its stark bareness. Moreover, whenever [you are in this meditational state free of mental wandering and] you examine your mind intensely [asking yourself, 'What is my mind?'], its bare clarity appears vividly, unobstructed by thought-coverings.*
22. *Seeing no basic difference between these two methods of settling the mind is known to the meditators as mixing the two approaches.*

Here 'known' refers to being renowned or known by other meditators.

The auto-commentary explains the meaning of the above verse further:

At that time one must try to overcome the disturbing conceptual thoughts, and whenever a disturbing thought does occur, one observes the very nature of that thought; whereby the disturbing thought will naturally fade away and will be replaced with a vacuity. Likewise when the mind is stable with a focused attention, if examined, the clear state of one's mind will appear in its stark bareness. This state of mind where no distinction is seen between the past and future is referred to as the mixing of the settled and moving mind, which is renowned amongst the great meditators of the past.

As Kyiwo Tsang's commentary explains, when one actually looks into the nature of the discursive thoughts that arise in the mind, they will naturally fade away by virtue of the very attempt of looking into their nature, and the stark bareness of the mind will be apparent again.

Kyiwo Tsang's commentary points out that both the root text and the auto-commentary refer to these techniques as being renowned or known. Normally referring to something as 'being known' by other meditators has a connotation of

being contradictory to one's own system. Even though the auto-commentary does not really present 'being known' in a negative way, one may still have a doubt. Nevertheless Kyiwo Tsang's commentary says that when looking into it further, it becomes clearer that this is a sound technique. Even though 'renowned by others' can have a negative connotation, in this case when the scholars look into the validity of this technique, it is found in fact to be a sound technique.

The auto-commentary explains that when one focuses on an object and is able to maintain that focus without any disturbance, then that refers to the settled state of mind, and that a moving mind refers to the state when discursive thoughts arise and move the mind away from its focus on the object. However when one recognises and actually examines the discursive thoughts themselves, then the focus on the object is re-established. This technique of examining the nature of the discursive thoughts in order to bring back the focus on the object is called mixing the settled and moving mind. Thus the combination of mixing the settled mind and the moving mind is a technique for re-establishing focus on the object.

Mixing the settled and moving mind may sound contradictory, but the implication of mixing, as the commentary explains, is that the mind was settled before the discursive thoughts arose to disturb the focus of the mind. Then the mind is re-settled after discursive thoughts have been recognised for what they are. So, 'mixing' refers to relating the initial settled and focused mind to the mind that has been re-settled after the discursive thoughts have subsided.

Kyiwo Tsang's commentary goes on to further explain the ultimate implication of the mixing of the settled and moving mind. Ultimately the technique of mixing the settled and moving mind refers to the union of calm abiding and special insight. The commentary gives the analogy of the way a small fish moving at the bottom of the pond does not disturb the surface of the water. That unstirred water is an analogy for calm abiding, and the small fish moving in the pond is an analogy for penetrative or special insight. Just as in the analogy, when calm abiding has been obtained and then combined with special insight, the meditator is able to analyse the object of focus without the mind wavering from single-pointed concentration on the object. The commentary goes on to further explain that the past great Indian masters as well as contemporary masters such as Lama Tsong Khapa attest to this. This implies that the great masters did not diverge from the view that the mixing of the settled and moving mind is understood to mean the union of calm abiding and special insight.

The commentary goes on to explain that whenever one looks into the nature of the discursive thoughts that arise, one comes to recognise that these discursive thoughts are not a completely separate entity, but rather that they have arisen from the mind itself. That recognition alone helps to overcome the disturbance of the discursive thoughts.

Because the technique of mixing the settled and moving mind is known to a vast majority of meditators it is referred to here as a 'conventionally renowned technique'.

As mentioned previously, and as will be mentioned more specifically later on, one must understand the type of discursive thoughts that one needs to overcome during single-pointed concentration. As mindfulness and introspection are mental states other than concentration, they are also discursive thoughts, so getting rid of all

discursive thoughts would imply getting rid of mindfulness and introspection as well. However, as mentioned previously, mindfulness and introspection are an aid rather than a hindrance to developing concentration, so they are not the sort of discursive thoughts that one needs to get rid of. It is the discursive thoughts that hinder and obstruct single-pointed concentration that need to be overcome.

By actually trying to understand what the hindering discursive thoughts are, examining them, and seeing their nature, one comes to realise that they are actually a part of the mind and not completely separate from the mind. Thus because they arise from the mind, discursive thoughts can merge back into the mind. The analogy of the sky and the clouds can be used here: even though clouds may temporarily obstruct the clarity of the sky, they can also be absorbed back into the sky because they have arisen from within the sky. No other measure needs to be taken apart from allowing the clouds just dissolve naturally back into the sky. Likewise when one actually recognises discursive thoughts as being a part of the mind then they can be removed by merely recognising that and, without using too much force, or employing additional techniques, just allowing them to subside. Once the thoughts have subsided naturally, we then reapply our focus back onto the object by simply reminding ourselves to do so.

With this technique it is really important to recognise the discursive thoughts as being a part of the mind and not a separate entity. Otherwise we might pay too much attention and be too disturbed by them. We might have all kinds of superstitious ideas believing that we are helpless in overcoming the discursive thoughts. If we pay too much attention to them then our meditation will be compromised, and we will be overwhelmed by the discursive thoughts. Recognising discursive thoughts as being part of our own mind will help us to not be overwhelmed by them.

We can also use this understanding with other negative states of mind such as anger. Some techniques presented in the teachings imply that when one practises patience it is useful at times to actually generate a strong emotion of anger. Then one can actually see anger for what it is. So in order to practise patience one purposely generates strong anger and then examines it. What is this anger? Where does it come from? Is it an entity completely separate from my own mind or does it arise from within my own mind? Even though it arises in my mind is it something useful? Are there advantages in maintaining this state of mind? While investigating in this way the anger will naturally subside. When one begins to recognise it as being an unhealthy or unwanted state of mind it naturally subsides. This is the same technique that we use to get rid of the discursive states of mind when focusing on the object.

A very intense anger is like fire. The technique is to induce anger as intense as fire. When the anger is really intense ask: What does it do? Is it a beneficial state of mind or is it harmful? If the anger seems to subside before one has got the point then make it arise again. If the state of mind being investigated is not generated in one's mind one does not know what one is actually investigating. Thus, generating intense anger, for the purpose of overcoming anger, becomes part of the technique for developing patience.

It is good to periodically refer to the earlier presentations on maintaining mindfulness. As you recall there are the two main categories: maintaining mindfulness in general and the particular modes of maintaining mindfulness. We went into quite a bit of detail about the techniques of maintaining

mindfulness in general, and then under the heading of the particular modes of mindfulness we covered the subdivisions of maintaining mindfulness with a new mindfulness, maintaining mindfulness with old mindfulness, maintaining mindfulness by applying the appropriate measures. Now we have just explained, maintaining mindfulness with conventionally renowned techniques. So, if you can try to get a really sound understanding of these techniques and how they are actually used, that will definitely help us. These techniques are the means for perfecting our practice of meditation and developing concentration.

5. Maintaining mindfulness by allowing the discursive thoughts to subside naturally

22. *...Another method of settling the mind is not to block whatever extraneous thoughts arise, but to concentrate on the nature of the train of thought that has arisen and try to comprehend it.*
23. *What happens is like the example of a caged pigeon released from a ship in mid-ocean. As the scriptural reference states, 'A bird that has flown from a ship in mid-ocean, after flying here and there must inevitably land back on the ship from which it left'.*

The auto-commentary states

Alternatively you may adopt the following method for maintaining a settled mind: Whenever a conceptual thought arises and your mind wavers, do not refrain from it but just observe the distracted thought for what it is. Having placed one's attention on the distraction, when the distracted thought subsides and the mind reasserts its attention on the object, it is likened to releasing a bird from a ship in the ocean that has been long in captive. As the Doha says:

It is like a crow that flies from a ship,
Wandering off in all directions but then settling back
on the ship again.

The analogy used here is the crow that flies from a ship wandering off in all directions before settling back on the ship again. This refers to the ancient practice of taking a caged pigeon on board ships as a means of detecting dangerous creatures such as crocodiles and so forth, and also to detect the presence of nearby land. If, when the pigeon was released it couldn't find land, or if there were dangerous animals there, it would return to the ship. The return of the pigeon indicated to the sailors that there was no land in the vicinity, or that there were dangerous creatures nearby.

Similarly discursive thoughts arise from the mind. But one does not pay attention to them and just absorbs their nature. Since there is nowhere for them to go except back to the mind they will eventually subside. Just as they arise from the mind so they subside back into the mind. This is how the analogy is to be understood - just allow the discursive thoughts to subside back into the mind.

The auto-commentary further reads:

One must practise accordingly as explained with this analogy. Again Gonpo mentions:
By not seeing faults in the conceptual mind,
And not meditating for the sake on non-
conceptuality,
By posting the guard [of introspection], place one's
mind in its natural state,
One's meditation will then serve its purpose to
achieve calm abiding.

In this quote from Geshe Gonpo 'not seeing the faults in the conceptual mind' refers to not paying too much attention to the conceptual thoughts when they arise. In other words, by trying to employ specific methods and techniques to overcome them, you may end up not actually meditating. 'For the sake of non-conceptuality' means that by not employing specific techniques or being too concerned when the conceptual thoughts arise, but rather just maintaining one's focus with introspection, one's mindfulness on the object will be maintained. Just placing one's mind in a natural state of focus on the object will allow the discursive or conceptual thoughts to naturally subside. In that way one's meditation will serve the purpose of achieving calm abiding.

Kyiwo Tsang's commentary then summarises the main point of this technique, which is that by applying skilful methods one will be able to overcome the discursive thoughts in a natural way. That skilful technique is similar to the earlier technique of just observing the discursive thoughts, recognising them for what they are, not paying specific attention to them, and not applying specific measures to overcome them. When that skilful method is applied, then that technique is referred to as maintaining mindfulness by allowing the discursive thoughts to subside naturally.

The auto-commentary further explains this in the following lines:

Furthermore the king of instructions for the trainees of this time is to use the six methods of settling the mind. If asked what they are? It is as follows:
Place it like the sun unobstructed by clouds,
Place it like the great garuda who glides effortlessly
through the sky,
Place it like a great ship on the ocean,
Place it like a toddler who looks in awe at a temple,
Place it like the flight of a bird in the sky,
Place it like cotton-wool gently descending,
With these methods of placing the mind,
The yogi will surely achieve great meaning.

Both Kyiwo Tsang's commentary and the auto-commentary make the same points. 'The king of instructions for the trainees of this time' refers to the practitioners at this time who use six methods for settling the mind, which are then described in more detail:

To explain the **first**: for example just as the sun, which is unobstructed by clouds is extremely bright and clear, similarly the clear light nature of mind must be free from conceptual attributes and unobstructed by laxity or excitement.

Just as the sun that is unobstructed by clouds is extremely bright and clear, so too the clear light nature of the mind must be free from conceptual attributes and unobstructed by laxity and excitement. Then the auto-commentary explains the second method:

The **second** is, for example, when a garuda soars through the sky, it glides naturally without having to exert too much effort such as flapping the wings. Similarly, when placing the mind, it must be done so without being too tight or too loose, i.e. tighten the depth with intense clarity, while loosening the surface without lapsing from mindfulness and introspection.

This analogy uses the mythological garuda, but it could refer to any bird that can soar through the sky. When they reach a certain height they can just naturally glide through the air. Even though they are gliding they still have to use a bit of

effort to hold out their wings. So there is a balance between the seemingly effortless gliding and the effort involved in holding out their wings. This analogy refers to focusing on the object, tightening the depth with intense clarity, while loosening the surface without lapsing from mindfulness and introspection. As mentioned previously, in order to develop concentration that intensity and clarity must be maintained, however one actually loosens it to the point where it is not too tight, while at the same time maintaining mindfulness and introspection.

We have covered these points earlier, and this particular method is once again emphasising the point of needing to find that right measure of not being too tight or too relaxed, while never lapsing from the clarity in the focus on the object. Allowing the clarity to lapse is detrimental to developing concentration, so clarity has to be maintained at all times. Thus 'loosening' here must not be understood as loosening or lapsing from the clarity that must be maintained at every level.

To explain the **third** method the commentary then reads

For example just as the surface of the ocean may be slightly affected with a gust of wind, the stability of a ship in the ocean is not affected.

Even though the analogy refers to a ship it is actually referring to the depth of the ocean not being disturbed, even though there may be waves on the surface.

As the auto-commentary further reads

Similarly, when the mind is placed upon the object, it must be placed so that it is not disturbed by gross conceptual thoughts even though it may slightly be disturbed by subtle conceptual thoughts.

In the process of developing concentration one's focus must be such that even though it may be disturbed by subtle conceptual thoughts, no gross conceptual thoughts will be allowed to disturb that focus. Now in a broader sense there is of course a distinction between laxity and subtle laxity in relation to developing concentration. As explained in a previous session, we can subdue our mind with the three higher trainings: the training of morality, the training of concentration and the training of wisdom.

There are external and internal disturbing thoughts, and it is the *external disturbing thoughts* that are overcome by the training of *morality*.

There are gross and subtle internal disturbances. In terms of the subduing the mind with the three higher trainings the gross disturbing states of mind are *gross and subtle laxity*, which are overcome by the training of *concentration*.

'Subtle disturbing thoughts' refers to the *ignorance of grasping at true existence*, which is overcome by the training of higher *wisdom*.

My earlier presentation refers to subduing the mind from external gross conceptual disturbances all the way through to overcoming inner gross and inner subtle disturbances. However in the context here, we can see that it refers specifically to developing concentration, so we need to understand that subtle conceptual thoughts refers to subtle laxity.

We can cover the six methods briefly now, and go into more detail later.

The **fourth** method as presented in the auto-commentary is:

For example when a toddler looks at a temple, though it does not focus on the finer details of the craftsmanship, it is in awe with the general beauty of

the temple. Similarly, when placing the mind, whatever attractive or unattractive objects may appear to the five senses, without analysing or generating attachment or aversion the attention must be placed single pointedly on the object of meditation alone.

Here the analogy is of a toddler who stares at a grand temple in awe of its beauty, but not absorbing the finer details of the craftsmanship. Likewise, when focusing on the object, one just maintains focus on the object, without engaging in analysing the disturbing thoughts and so forth.

This method relates particularly to beginners who are learning to develop concentration, whereas the earlier techniques refer particularly to the first and second stages of the nine stages of concentration.

As this is a technique particularly suited to beginners we can easily relate to it. Rather than being concerned about analysing attachment and the other delusions that arise in the mind, we disregard those distractions and periodically bring our focus back onto the object. That is what we initially attempt to do in order to maintain some stability of focus on the object.

Then the auto-commentary reads:

The **fifth**, is for example, when a bird flies through the sky, there is no trace left behind. Similarly, whatever pleasant, unpleasant or neutral feelings may be experienced, one must not allow the mind to be influenced by attachment, anger or ignorance and place the mind only on the object.

Here the analogy is quite vivid and clear. When a bird flies in the sky it is obvious to us that it leaves no trace behind it. With respect to the delusions, normally when we meet with a pleasant object attachment immediately follows, and when we encounter an unpleasant object then we are immediately influenced by the anger that arises, and feelings of indifference can cause ignorance to increase in our mind.

What is being explained here is that one must not allow the mind to be influenced by these emotions or negative states of mind. Rather than being concerned with the particular states of mind that arise, one should apply effort to maintain focus on the object.

From this explanation we can also derive an understanding of how we need to be free from the worldly dharmas. When we meet with a pleasant object, or a pleasant situation, we feel joyful and happy; when an unpleasant situation occurs we become upset about that. So the fact that we are joyful and happy when meeting with a pleasant situation, or angry and unhappy when meeting with an unpleasant situation, shows us that it is actually the attitudes that arise in our mind that are the worldly dharmas.

It is important to understand that the joyful or happy situation itself is not a worldly dharma. If that were so then arya beings, who experience very pleasant situations, would be indulging in worldly dharmas. That is of course not the case as arya beings have overcome the worldly dharmas. It is not the pleasant situation that is a worldly dharma, but the attitudes that arise - joy and happiness from pleasant situation and unhappiness in unpleasant situations. It is those emotions or feelings that are referred to as worldly dharmas.

Thus, as explained in the teachings, one must try to overcome those states of mind, which is done by reversing our attitudes to pleasant and unpleasant situations, so that we are unhappy when a pleasant situation occurs, and joyful

and happy when an unpleasant situation arises. As absurd as it may initially sound for an ordinary person, when one actually looks into it from a practice point of view, there is actually great meaning to thinking in this way.

As explained previously, when we actually understand that a pleasant situation uses up good karma, we will of course be unhappy about that. Unpleasant situations on the other hand only occur because of one's previous negative karma. The more unpleasantness one experiences the more negative karma is being used up, which is actually something to be joyful about. The more we experience unpleasant situations the quicker we exhaust our negative karma. So we can be joyful about experiencing unpleasant situations.

Another way of looking at it is that pleasant situations will be a cause for attachment to increase. As attachment is a hindrance to our practices, that is something that we have to overcome. Likewise unpleasant situations could cause anger to arise, so rather than feeling angry, embrace the unpleasant situation and try to feel joyful about it. That prevents anger from arising in the mind. This is how one understands the method of overcoming the worldly dharmas.

We can leave the sixth technique for our next session. This method is more related to the near attainment of calm abiding. It would be good for you to revise these techniques, and refer to the text and try to become more familiar with it. These are quite important techniques.

The prayer to the lineage gurus of the Mahamudra has been distributed. My intention was that we should recite this prayer once in a while. Also it is good to recite it when you are trying to do your practice. It is specifically mentioned that without the blessings of the guru we cannot develop realisations. The analogy used to explain the need for the guru's blessings is that even though the sun may be extremely bright and very strong, the rays by themselves are not sufficient to create fire. For that we need a magnifying glass to concentrate the sun's rays. In this analogy the magnifying glass is like the blessings of the gurus, which are needed in order for us to gain realisations. That's why doing the supplication to the lineage gurus is an important element of our practice.

The extent of reverence for our teachers can be seen in India, where students pay great respect to the teachers sometimes even touching their feet. That is the extent of the respect shown to the gurus. Of course I'm not implying that you need to do that to me. In normal circumstances I prefer not too much respect because it prevents me from being myself whenever I go around. I find that there is more freedom to move and go about naturally if there is not too much respect. In reality, having very high status is not really a pleasant situation to be in. The singer Kylie Minogue once mentioned in an interview that it is not that much fun to be famous, because you can't move around easily and it is not really a very comfortable situation to be in. So we can consider ourselves to be in a good and appropriate position to be happy.

An indication of the way in which high status is not really a pleasant situation is that as soon as somebody is elected as Prime Minister you can see that their hair starts to go white very quickly. That is because there are a lot of worries and concerns with tackling the opposition brings them a lot of worry. It is good for us to prepare ourselves since we never know what status we may rise to.

The main point that I stress regularly is to try to maintain a joyous happy mind. That is what is important in our life. With a happy state of mind, it is quite irrelevant whether one is of high or low status. If one's mind is not happy then high status will not help at all, whereas if one's mind is happy, it doesn't make much difference if one is of lower status, as one's mind is joyous and happy anyway. That seems to be the main thing.

In the ordeal of escaping from Tibet I met the throne holder of the Gelugpa tradition, the Ganden Tipa, which is the highest status in the Gelugpa tradition. He confided in me that on reaching high status even normal food was not really enjoyable any more. He explained that previously, when he was quite a simple monk there were times when he would have to make *tug pa*, a soup with dumplings in it, with the hide that was used to store butter. Traditionally butter is put in a hide, which is later cut up and made into *tug pa*. He commented that even though as the Ganden Tipa he was offered a lot of delicious foods, it was not as tasty as the hide *tug pa* that he had enjoyed before. So he requested others to make hide *tug pa*, but even that didn't taste as nice as he remembered.

Transcribed from tape by Jenny Brooks
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

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As usual let us sit in a comfortable relaxed posture and generate a positive motivation for receiving the teachings, such as 'In order to benefit all sentient beings by liberating them from all samsaric suffering, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

Now we can do a few minutes of meditation. (*meditation*)

3.2. PARTICULAR MODES OF MAINTAINING MINDFULNESS

5. Maintaining mindfulness by allowing discursive thoughts to subside naturally (cont.)

With this method we do not apply any specific technique to get rid of discursive thoughts when they arise, but just allow them to subside naturally, by seeing them as being in the nature of the mind, a part of the mind. For beginners there are six different techniques of settling the mind in this manner. Of these we have covered the first five.

The **sixth** is for example when cotton-wool falls to the ground it descends softly and gently. Similarly, when in the meditative state one must be sure that the mind is free from a manifest level of the three poisons as well as coarse excitement and laxity.

This method specifically relate to the ninth stage of the nine levels of concentration. That completes the list of all six methods, which was presented last week.

Like a toddler

This is a method that is particularly relevant for beginners. There are two simple ways of understanding the fourth technique (when a toddler looks at a temple, even though it observes the general beauty of the temple it does not focus on the finer details of the craftsmanship) as a method for developing concentration.

a. It indicates that when we first place our focus on the object, we do not try to go beyond whatever detail initially appears to us, and we don't make further investigations or try to refocus on particular characteristics or details of the object. Rather we should be satisfied with just focusing on whatever initial appearance we may have of the object. That will then enable us to maintain a continuity of focus on the object.

This was explained earlier in the auto-commentary. By not going into finer details the focus will be just like the toddler in the analogy, who does not look at the finer details of the craftsmanship, but is just in awe of the general beauty of the temple. So one way to understand this method is that when focusing on the object of meditation, we should be satisfied with the initial appearance whatever it is.

b. Another way to understand this method would be to take an aspect or appearance that can be easily brought to mind. This is for example, initially using a physical object to focus on. If we use something more physical as an object then, through our experience, we find that it's easier for the image of that object to be brought to mind. If the object is too subtle, then we will find that it's a bit more difficult to actually grasp the object. But if we use simpler objects that any of the five senses can relate to, it will be easier to get the mental image. For example, in relation to the eye sense, when something has been seen it is easy to bring the image of that object to mind. Thus, such an object would be deemed to be a suitable object for beginners. This is how it should be understood.

So we can see why this explanation is specifically stated as being an appropriate technique for beginners. Having given this further explanation I feel that the rest might be quite easily understood, and that we don't need much further explanation.

Like the unobstructed sun

The first technique, can be easily understood just from the explanation given in the auto-commentary:

Just as the sun which is unobstructed by the clouds is extremely bright and clear, similarly, the clear-like nature of mind must be free from conceptual attributes and not obstructed by laxity and excitement.

Like a bird gliding in the sky

The second method is like the great garuda who seemingly glides effortlessly through the sky. This relates specifically to the ninth stage of concentration, just prior to developing calm abiding. The ability to apply this method relates to a really high level of concentration, which has, as mentioned previously, the right measure of being neither too tight nor too loose. The analogy used here is that it is like a garuda or a bird that soars through the sky. Even though it seems to be effortlessly gliding some effort is still required to keep up its wings. It is able to do this when it reaches the right measure of height in its flight. Similarly when the meditator has reached the point of being able to focus on the object without too much strain, without being too tight or too loose, then the level of concentration will be such that they are able to keep a continuous and appropriate measure of focus on the object.

Like a ship on the ocean

The third method is also quite simple to understand. The analogy of a great ship on the ocean refers to the fact that even though the surface of the ocean may be rough, the bottom of the ocean remains calm. Similarly, even if there are some slight disturbances of concentration on the surface, one's focus should not stray away from the object.

Like a bird in the sky leaving no trail

Just as a bird does not leave any trace in its flight path, we try not to grasp at discursive thoughts when they arise as we focus on the object. Rather we just let them go and don't hold on to them, as that would hinder our focus.

Then Kyiwo Tsang's commentary also makes the comment that these six methods of settling the mind are actually subsumed into the two main categories, which are the general techniques of placing mindfulness and the particular techniques of placing mindfulness. Kyiwo Tsang mentions that if we apply the earlier techniques well, then all of the methods just described will come about naturally, without having to make any extra effort. When we look into this and relate all of these techniques to the earlier explanations, we will find that this really is the case.

4. The resultant appearance of the benefits

Kyiwo Tsang's commentary presents a fourth subdivision from an earlier category¹, to explain the meaning of verse 24 of the root text. However the auto-commentary presents it just with this question:

If asked, what are the benefits of having meditated in such a way?

Having explained the general and specific methods of applying mindfulness, one can ask: 'what does one achieve from practicing these methods? What are the benefits that one derives from that?' With this rhetorical question the auto-commentary introduces an explanation of the meaning of the root text.

To explain this point more specifically, 'having meditated in such a way' relates to applying both the general and the specific methods of employing mindfulness in order to develop concentration. Thus it includes the development of concentration up until the ninth stage. So having applied mindfulness with general and specific methods, one reaches the ninth stage of concentration. The rhetorical question that is raised here is, 'What is the benefit then of having meditated in that way?' Presenting it in this way implies that one should clearly identify the result that is to be gained from having applied mindfulness in various ways to reach the ninth stage of concentration.

The result is presented in the following verse from the root text:

24. You attain in your meditation a clear state of mind unobstructed by anything. Although this state of mind lacks any form or structure, and in this way is as bare as space, yet it is precisely on this mind, as on a mirror, that whatever arises to consciousness appears vividly.

This verse clearly states that the benefit of having meditated in such a way is that the nature of the mind becomes apparent.

The auto-commentary explains the meaning of this verse:

As a result of meditating in this way, the nature of the equipoise [concentration on the mind] will be one which is not obstructed by anything, and which is extremely clear and bright.

Having applied all of the earlier methods and techniques of developing mindfulness in focusing on the mind, and thus having reaching the ninth stage of concentration, the

result is that the nature of that concentration would be such that is not obstructed by anything, and that the object is extremely clear and bright. That is how the mind would appear at the ninth stage of concentration.

Then, the auto-commentary further explains:

Since it is not established as a physical phenomenon in any way, it is bare and empty like space.

Again, this is referring to how the object appears to oneself. Because the mind itself is not a physical phenomenon and it is 'bare and empty like space', nothing can obstruct it and it appears very vividly and clearly.

The auto-commentary further explains:

Whatever pleasant or unpleasant objects of the five senses that it comes into contact with will appear vividly, just like objects reflected on a mirror.

The appearance of the object is explained in relation to the definition of the mind itself: that which is clear and knowing, where 'clear' refers to the nature of mind while 'knowing' refers to the function or ability of the mind. Thus when the mind reaches the stage where its own nature is apparent, then the function of the mind also excels to the point where things appear very vividly or very clearly to the mind. For example, when looking at a wall in such a meditative state, all the finest details of the wall, its patterns and so forth, will appear very vividly and very clearly to the mind. As with the analogy of a mirror, all of the details of an object appear without any fault. That means whatever characteristics of the object; they will appear exactly as they are to the mind, just as mirrors reflect the images of objects just as they are.

Furthermore, the auto-commentary explains,

It is a meditative experience, which lacks the discriminating perspective of viewing things to be either this or that.

This is indicating that in a state of clarity there is no sense of discriminative perspective of objects, and they just appear as they are. There is no discerning state of mind that distinguishes between this as being something (good or bad) and that as being something else. Rather everything appears very vividly and clearly just as they are.

First of all, the concentration presented here is the ninth of the nine stages prior to developing calm abiding. It is a concentration that cannot be disturbed by anything. Earlier the auto-commentary stated 'Whatever pleasant or unpleasant objects of the five senses that it comes into contact with will appear vividly, just like objects reflected on a mirror'.

To explain this analogy a little bit further, even though the objects of five senses may appear to that mind of concentration, they will not disturb the focus of that concentration. Although objects of the five senses may appear, they will not influence the mind to waver from the concentration. This will be clearer when we understand the analogy that is used. A mirror is able to reflect all objects, but the entity of the mirror is not affected by the nature of the objects. The mirror has the

¹ Trans: Geshe-la has been using Kyiwo Tsang's commentary to explain the auto-commentary, and has not been formally going through it. Therefore the earlier categories are not to be found in the transcripts.

ability to reflect everything - good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant - but the nature of the reflection does not affect the mirror in any way, does it? So the analogy to be understood here is that at the ninth stage of concentration, things may still appear to that mind, but they will not be a cause for the concentration to waver from the focus on the object. That is the level of concentration that has been obtained.

The attributes and benefits of mental and physical pliancy and bliss

The auto-commentary goes on to further explain:

Nevertheless, however firm and stable such a meditative concentration may be, if it is not accompanied by physical and mental bliss, it is yet only a single-pointed concentration of the desire realm.

What is being explained here in the auto-commentary is that if such a profound level of concentration is not accompanied by physical and mental bliss, then it is only a single-pointed concentration of the desire realm, and not yet the actual achievement of calm abiding.

The auto-commentary further explains:

When such a meditative concentration is accompanied with physical and mental bliss, then it is said to be an actual state of calm abiding. This then is the source of many qualities, such as obtaining clairvoyance and miraculous powers. In particular the arya paths of all three vehicles are obtained by relying on calm abiding.

What is being specifically explained here is when the ninth stage of concentration is accompanied by the bliss of physical and mental pliancy, then the stage of calm abiding has been reached. Even though this is not specifically explained in the auto-commentary, it is good to understand how the sequence of how physical and mental bliss and pliancy are achieved. There is mental pliancy and the bliss that it induces and physical bliss and the bliss that it induces. The sequence is that mental pliancy is achieved first, followed by physical pliancy. That is followed by physical bliss in relation to the physical pliancy that has been experienced, followed by mental bliss.

Mental and physical pliancy

When mental pliancy is obtained, it allows the mind to naturally and spontaneously engage in virtue without any sense of holding back, or any sense of tiredness. In other words it makes the mind serviceable so that it can engage in virtue. That is because when one obtains mental pliancy, it removes the subtle defects of the mind, the specific Tibetan word for which is *nye nge len*. When these defects are removed the mind becomes spontaneously serviceable in engaging in virtue. Likewise, when physical pliancy is obtained, it allows the physical body to spontaneously engage in virtue without any hesitation or difficulty. In other words because of the removal of physical defects the physical body is serviceable to engage in virtue.

As explained in Kyiwo Tsang's commentary, when the winds within the body are regulated and subside in a natural way, it induces a blissful sensation rising through one's body up to the top of one's head, which is felt like a

cap over the brain. This explanation is not found in the lam rim, and seems to be a unique explanation by Palden Yeshe. The analogy used is of a warm hand placed upon a shaved head in a very cold environment, which of course would feel very nice. So when it is really cold if a warm hand is gently placed on top of a bald head, one would experience a very warm and nice feeling. The onset of bliss is similar to that sensation of extra warmth on top of one's head.

The initial blissful sensation is not yet the bliss that is induced by physical pliancy, because physical pliancy has not yet been obtained, but is the onset of blissful sensation that one will experience on achieving physical pliancy. As mentioned earlier, when the wind channels have been made serviceable and regulated in the proper way, then that causes a blissful sensation to rise to the top of one's crown (at the level of the brain). As just explained, that blissful sensation is similar to a warm hand being placed on top of a cold bald head. At that time, however, there is the risk of developing attachment to that blissful feeling, and thus allowing the mind to become influenced by the delusion of attachment. Once one reaches the point of being able to prevent the mind from being influenced by attachment to that blissful feeling, then one has actually obtained mental pliancy.

When one prevents the mind from being influenced by the initial attachment to that blissful feeling (which arises due to the wind being regulated) then one overcomes the mental defects. As a result of having overcome the mental defects, one then obtains mental pliancy. Once one has obtained mental pliancy, then that induces physical pliancy. The result of having obtained mental pliancy is that there is no hesitation and an effortless ability for the mind to engage in virtue. Having obtained mental pliancy, one then obtains physical pliancy, which is where the body becomes like very light and supple, like cotton wool. There is no physical strain then in engaging in practices, and the physical body becomes serviceable in applying virtuous activities. That is the result of obtaining the physical pliancy.

In summary, mental pliancy is obtained first, and as a result of removing the defects of the mind, the mind becomes serviceable in engaging in virtue, it doesn't feel tired and can be applied to focusing on virtuous objects for as long as one wishes. Then as a result of that, one obtains the physical pliancy by removing the physical defects of one's body. With physical pliancy the body becomes supple and light, and one does not feel strains or aches and pains any more, and is thus able to engage in virtuous activities without feeling tired.

Mental and physical bliss

Having obtained physical pliancy, one then experiences the bliss induced by that physical pliancy. That will then in turn induce mental bliss, due to that combination of obtaining the physical and mental pliancy.

There are extensive explanations about these points in the *Great Treatise*, the *Lam Rim Chen Mo* as well as the commentary on it, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. It would be good for you to refer to those texts and read the relevant passages on calm abiding, so that you become much clearer about these points.

Definition of calm abiding

At this stage it is appropriate to present the definition stated in the texts, which is that *calm abiding is a meditative concentration which, by depending on the nine stages of concentration, has obtained the state of being able to focus single-pointedly on an object for as long as one wishes, and which is accompanied by the bliss of physical and mental pliancy*. So when one has reached that stage, one has obtained the state of calm abiding. Thus from this definition, we come to understand what calm abiding is.

Achieving the state of calm abiding means that one is able to focus on an object for as long as one wishes. 'For as long as one wishes' means remaining focused single-pointedly on the object for a few hours, a few days or even years, without any effort. And for as long as one is focused on the object, it induces physical and mental bliss from the pliancy that has been obtained. Thus we can understand what a great achievement calm abiding is.

We will conclude here for the evening, however it is good for you to revise and gain a better understanding of the state of calm abiding by referring to the definition and to other texts. What does physical pliancy mean? What does mental pliancy mean? And what are the benefits of obtaining them? By understanding the specific characteristics of calm abiding, one will also obtain a better understanding of what calm abiding is. It is good for us to have such a clear understanding in order to prevent the danger of claiming that one has obtained calm abiding, when one is nowhere near that state.

As the text explained earlier, having first achieved calm abiding one can then achieve other states such as clairvoyance and miraculous powers. If people claim to have clairvoyance we should check whether that is true or not. If someone who claims to have clairvoyance can meditate for an hour without their focus on an object wavering, then maybe we could have the sense that they have achieved something. But it is questionable for someone to claim clairvoyance when they cannot meditate even for a short period of time. A person who has obtained calm abiding will naturally be a very calm and a very subdued person, who doesn't exhibit manifest levels of the delusions. Such a person would never be annoyed, or angry, or jealous, or have strong attachment. Of course, they would still find it difficult to overcome grasping at the self, but the grosser levels of the delusions such as strong attachment, or anger, or jealousy will have definitely subsided. Even in external appearance that person would exhibit a very calm aspect.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness

འཇམ་དགེ་ལུན་ལུག་ཀྱི་ཚེན་པོ།

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

9 June 2009

As usual let us spend a few minutes in meditation. (*Pause for meditation.*)

Just as we generated the positive motivation while reciting the refuge and bodhichitta prayer earlier, it would be good to generate a good motivation before doing our daily practices. Then our meditation will be very meaningful even it is for only a short time. With a proper motivation one ensures that meditation practice is a genuine practice of Dharma, and specifically a Mahayana practice. With the right motivation, even a short time in meditation will be highly meaningful.

Since we naturally wish for a good and grand result we need to apply a good and grand motivation as a cause, for we will not achieve any results without the appropriate causes.

We cannot underestimate the need to engage in practice, since just wishing for great results, or waiting for them to happen doesn't seem to be sufficient for gaining any realisations. In our daily practice it would be really good for us to pay attention to developing a sense of loving compassion within our heart. Imbuing our practice with love and compassion makes it a highly meaningful practice. In particular it is a means of counteracting the anger that seems to arise so very readily and easily in our everyday life. That is because there are so many opportunities for anger to arise in our daily life. However the teachings present anger as a very destructive energy that destroys our merit. So if we don't pay attention to completing a good sound practice with the right motivation, then all our merits from that practice can be destroyed when anger arises. The more we become familiar with developing love and compassion, the more it will help to reduce the intensity of anger that arises in our daily life.

Paying attention to the essential points of the practice is also the means for us to subdue our own mind, which then serves the purpose of our practice. Having the right motivation that is imbued with love and compassion is not an obscure piece of advice - we have learned about it, and we know the implications. As mentioned in the teachings on developing bodhichitta, love is defined very clearly as a sense of wishing others to have happiness, while compassion is wishing others to be free from all suffering. We can easily develop these attitudes in our daily life if we actually set our mind to it.

Developing love and compassion is also the greatest remedy for overcoming the self-centred and self-cherishing mind. As we look into our lives we find that the stronger that self-centredness the more problems we seem to experience. Actually, if we look into it, the source of all our problems and difficulties really comes down to

having a self-cherishing mind. The self-cherishing mind is the root of all the concerns and problems of this life. Thus developing a sense of love and compassion is the best remedy for overcoming the main source of all our problems.

It is really a matter of actually incorporating the teachings into our practice. They won't come about naturally if we don't really make some attempt to cultivate these attitudes. You are already familiar with the techniques, so what I am trying to do is to remind you to put them into practice. I really encourage you to do this.

To actually incorporate loving kindness and compassion into our practice we can use, for example, these lines from the four immeasurable thoughts, 'May all beings have happiness and the causes of happiness', and 'May all beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering'. We don't need use other extensive formulas, just these two lines. If we can actually spend some time reflecting on their meaning we will notice that they bring a great sense of calmness and joy to the mind. So it is a really effective practice.

In our everyday life we may find that sometimes we are bogged down with worries and frustration. We also find that giving into these worries and frustrations and remaining pre-occupied with them does not help us at all. It is almost an indulgence if we just allow worries to take over our mind. Since they bring so much agony and unrest, we need to try to apply practices to free ourselves from that state of mind, raise our spirits, and gain a little bit more self esteem.

A very simple practice that we can apply in our daily lives is visualising Buddha Shakyamuni, our saviour and protector. Try to focus for a few minutes on visualising Buddha Shakyamuni on top of your crown, generating strong faith and trust in him. You can make a simple prayer by saying, 'You are my saviour. Please bestow me with your blessings to subdue and calm my mind.' With this kind of intention you could settle your mind and recite the mantra of Buddha Shakyamuni a few times. This very simple practice will make a real difference, and the mind will become calmer and more subdued, which is the sign that one's mind has been blessed. Through this simple practice one receives the blessing of the Buddha.

Regularly using the techniques mentioned earlier, such as meditating on the Buddha, is something that as Buddhists we are inclined to do anyway. As Buddhists we are inclined to remember the kindness of the Buddha, make requests and receive his blessings - this is one of our fundamental practices as a Buddhist. Thus as a Buddhist, focusing on and receiving the blessings of the Buddha is a very appropriate practice that we need to do.

Furthermore, when we find ourselves in an unhappy state of mind as we so often do, if we take time to really investigate, we will find that regardless of the circumstances the cause of our unhappy mind is a non-virtuous state of mind. As soon as a non-virtuous state of mind arises it immediately makes us feel unhappy. Then it becomes very clear that the real causes for our unhappy mind is none other than the non-virtuous state of mind that we have generated within ourselves. So how does

one overcome that? By generating the opposite, which is a virtuous state of mind.

Generating a virtuous state of mind is achieved with the various techniques of the meditation practice. The intention to generate a virtuous state of mind is in line with the literal meaning of Dharma, which means to 'protect the mind', and this is done by turning the mind to virtue. Thus, as I regularly emphasise, the meaning of Dharma and meditation come down to the same point. It is not as if meditation is one thing and Dharma is another, as they are actually the same. Thus, replacing the non-virtuous states of mind with virtuous ones through analysis and investigation is both a Dharma practice and a meditation practice.

Furthermore, as Buddhists we need to remind ourselves that our basic intent is to benefit our future lives. That is something that has to be as natural as our practice. When we think in that way then any practice that contributes to preparing for our future life becomes a genuine Dharma practice, unsullied by the stains of the worldly dharmas. That will also secure us in taking the essence of this precious human life.

The fact that we now enjoy a precious human life implies that we have all the perfect conditions to practise the Dharma: we have the teachings, and we have the perfect teachers. So with all of these perfect conditions the main thing is to try to take the essence of this life. As the lam rim teachings indicate, taking the essence of this life means engaging in a practice that brings about one of three results for a future life: at the very least practising Dharma so that we will be free from the lower realms and achieve a better rebirth in the human or higher states; the next best is to strive for liberation, which is the medium state of taking essence of this life; and the greatest state would be to make sure our practice results in a mind that creates the causes for achieving enlightenment. That is how we take the essence of this precious human life.

Another essential point of meditation practice is to contemplate death and impermanence. Although we are already familiar with the technique, we need to be really clear that contemplating death and impermanence is much more meaningful and deeply felt when it is done with a sense of longing to benefit future lives. If we don't really consider the benefits for future lives, just thinking about death and impermanence may not serve a purpose as a practice of Dharma. Just recalling death can generate some sort of fear, but the resulting anxiety will not really prompt us to make our life more meaningful. On the other hand, when the awareness and contemplation of death and impermanence is combined with a longing to benefit future lives, then that awareness is an impetus for us to practise in a manner that is unsullied with the eight worldly concerns.

We can clearly see how that is so. When we only focus on the benefits and achievements of this lifetime then that will lead us naturally into all sorts of non-virtuous states of mind. Because of the mistaken misconception we have of permanence in relation to this life, then attitudes such as attachment to wealth, attachment to status, and attachment to companions, name and so forth arise. Thus, as mentioned in the teachings, when we are really

concerned about a future life then the concerns for this life will naturally subside.

To contemplate the long term benefits of considering future lives we need to reflect upon how all achievements in this life are transitory, and do not last. The Buddha said that all high status will end in decline, all meeting will end in parting, all that is produced will cease and all that is born will have to die. Reflecting on these points should instil a really strong sense of the transitory, impermanent nature of this life, and then the concerns of this life will naturally subside. If we put some energy into practising in this way then we have a real sense of joy and accomplishment in our mind. When we are alone we will not experience the pangs of loneliness as we will be engaged in these practices of meditation and developing positive attitudes, which will naturally make us feel content and happy wherever we are, in whatever we are doing, and in whatever situation we may find ourselves in. Otherwise, being alone and full of negative states of mind, allowing our mind to be bombarded and influenced by the negative attitudes will just bring so much trauma and we will not be joyful and happy when we are by ourselves. So it is important that we have some sense of practice in our daily life, in all situations wherever we may be.

It is essential that we clearly identify one of the main sources of all our worldly concerns, which is the main misconception of holding onto, and grasping at permanence. Such an attitude leads to the notion that we are going to be here forever, and thus put time and energy into establishing the best conditions for ourselves. No matter how much we may have now it seems that it will not be enough, because we feel that it will not last us forever. So the result of grasping at permanence is that no matter how much we accumulate, and how much status we have it is never sufficient.

As you are aware the lam rim presents specific techniques on how to contemplate death and impermanence. There are the three roots, the six reasons and the three conclusions. The first of the three roots is that death is certain, the second is that the time of death is uncertain, and the third is that at the time of death nothing but the Dharma will help us. It is very important to actually apply that personally, reminding ourselves, 'I will definitely die, and I could die at any time'. By speaking to ourselves in this way we remember that it is only the Dharma that will help us at the time of death, as it is clear that nothing else can be of benefit, and no amount of money can help us at the time of death. Reminding ourselves of these points makes the practice of reflecting on death and impermanence much more real, and likewise the implications of this practice also become much more real and genuine. Then ones' practice naturally becomes much more meaningful and pure. When we think in this way we actually find a great source of encouragement and energy for ourselves.

The main point, as mentioned previously, is that since the source of all our problems, particularly with the concerns of this life, is cherishing ourselves, the more we immerse ourselves in these concerns the more problems we will experience. Thus these practices are a means and a direct

remedy for overcoming the concerns for this life. As the concerns for this life are slowly reduced, a real sense of joy arises in our mind and we will not tire ourselves trying to make everything right and perfect as we have to pass on anyway.

The Buddha presented the remedy for overcoming attachment and concern for this life, which is the contemplation of death and impermanence. Of course impermanence is implied in many other ways too, but it is very meaningful when used as a means of overcoming attachment and concern for this life.

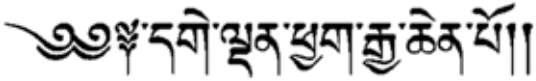
We can see this from the Buddha's teachings. It was the first point that he made when he gave the teachings on the four noble truths, the first of which, as you are aware is that suffering has the four attributes of impermanence, suffering, selflessness and emptiness. Of the four attributes, the first one is impermanence, which makes it very clear that in order to understand the nature of suffering, one first has to realise that the nature of one's existence is that it is impermanent. Specifically, the attribute of impermanence refers to one's contaminated aggregates.

The next point is that these contaminated aggregates are in the nature of suffering, which is the second attribute. When we contemplate in this way then we start to gain an understanding that the five aggregates have the nature of being impermanent and the nature of suffering. When that understanding sinks in and permeates us, we can really begin to lose the sense of strong grasping at the five aggregates, and thus loosen the grasp at samsaric existence. In this way we can see how profound the practice really is.

*Transcribed from tape by Jenny Brooks
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness



Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

16 June 2009

4. The resultant appearance of the benefits

We have been covering this fourth sub-division of Kyiwo Tsang's commentary, which is divided into two:

1. Identifying calm abiding
2. Introducing the mind

1. Identifying calm abiding

As mentioned in the auto-commentary, no matter how firm and how stable the concentration at the ninth stage may be, if it is not combined with physical and mental pliancy then it is still a meditative state of the desire realm, and is not yet calm abiding. The actual state of calm abiding is defined as engaging in single-pointed concentration on an object for as long as one wishes, accompanied by the bliss of physical and mental pliancy.

Obtaining the state of calm abiding, as explained in the teachings, is the basis for obtaining many further qualities such as clairvoyance, and miraculous powers. It is also the point where one obtains the mind of the higher realms i.e. form and formless realms, and the mind derived from meditation, as well as the preparatory stages of the four higher concentrations. Thus achieving calm abiding serves the basis for obtaining many higher levels. As mentioned previously the sequence of obtaining the bliss of physical and mental pliancy is that mental pliancy is obtained first followed by physical pliancy, while the bliss induced by physical pliancy is experienced first, followed by the bliss of mental pliancy. That was explained in a previous session, as was the definition of calm abiding. It is good to get a sound understanding of what calm abiding actually is by referring to the definition, along with an understanding of physical and mental pliancy. As mentioned previously, more detailed explanations of the nature of calm abiding and physical and mental pliancy are in the *Lam Rim Chen Mo* (the extensive lam rim) and *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*.

It seems that we have adopted the practice of considering the *Lam Rim* as a preliminary topic, whereas the reverse is true for the great masters. Great masters and meditators revere the lam rim as one of the most precious and essential texts for developing the mind leading to enlightenment. In fact if one is not able to subdue one's mind by studying and practicing the *Lam Rim*, then there is no other teaching that will help to subdue the mind. If we find that our mind seems to become coarser and that we have mental blockages, then that is because we have not been able to apply the practices described in the *Lam Rim*. When we notice that we seem to have less faith in the teachers and the teaching itself, and that our mind has not transformed, then the fault lies in none other than the unsubdued mind.

One of the verses from the *Lama Chopa* or *Guru Puja* mentions 'those who have not been tamed, even after a thousand Buddhas descending'. Rather than assuming that this passage relates to other sentient beings, we must understand that it relates to ourselves. If our mind is not yet subdued then we have not yet been tamed.

The main point that I am emphasising is that you must try to put into practice whatever understanding you gain from the teachings, making sure that they serve as a means of subduing the mind. If it becomes a means to increase delusions such as pride and so forth, then practising and studying the teachings will have not served their purpose. It would be a real shame if the teachings become a cause to increase, rather than decrease the delusions.

Actually, we find that there are ways and means to help to subdue the mind in every religion. However rather than putting into practice those techniques, it seems that the delusions increase in many of the followers of the different traditions, which is how sectarian attitudes arise. Saying things like 'our religion is better than others', leads to disputes and conflicts that cause destruction to each other's religion. This is very prevalent, even to this day.

When we really investigate the cause, it is not a fault of the religions themselves. The fault lies rather with those who follow the religion not being able to put it into practice as means to bring about the intended result, which is to subdue the mind. This is a really crucial point to understand.

Also, as the teachings mention, one must not judge the person but judge what's behind the person, the teaching itself, and examine whether it is authentic or not. But often it seems that the opposite is practiced, where one follows the teacher before really checking if they are qualified with the knowledge of the teaching. If we judge merely by the appearance of the person and not the teaching itself, then that too is a fault. This is something that we need to keep in mind.

As the great master Geshe Potowa says, 'the distinction between Dharma and non-dharma is whether the practice helps to reduce the delusions in the mind or not'. Authentic Dharma practice will be an aid to overcome the delusions in the mind, while non-dharma or worldly dharma increases the delusions in the mind. This is a very clear distinction. If one's practice helps to subdue the mind, then it is a Dharma practice. Likewise if meditating on whatever understanding one has of emptiness helps to lessen grasping at the self, then the meditation on emptiness has pointed us in the right direction, and is therefore an authentic practice. But if grasping at the self increases when meditating on whatever understanding one has of emptiness, then it has led us astray. This is something that we should keep in mind.

Dharma practice is to really help subdue the mind, to lessen its faults and increase its qualities. As I mention regularly, this cannot be achieved in one or two days. Rather we must have a realistic approach, and take a broad view. If we can lessen just one negativity and increase just one quality a day, then that will eventually lead to the removal of all faults from the mind and

increase one's potential to have all the good qualities in one's mind. Expecting that suddenly all faults will just naturally fade away and that we will be naturally and spontaneously endowed with all the good qualities is an unrealistic approach. It just doesn't happen!

In relation to the definition of calm abiding, Kyiwo Tsang's commentary further explains that obtaining calm abiding depends on whether one has obtained a complete subtle pliancy or not. When one obtains that complete form of pliancy, then one has obtained calm abiding. However if one does not apply continuous focus on the object, forming a strong familiarity with calm abiding meditation, then one will not obtain the state of signlessness, non-discursiveness and complete pacification.

The text then explains that 'sign' refers to ten different types of objects; which are the five sense objects, the three poisons and the male and female bodies. When we consider these ten signs as objects of distraction, we find that they do indeed subsume all forms of distractions. When in meditation, it is in relation to any of these ten signs that we become distracted. This explanation is also in accordance with the lam rim teachings.

The Kyiwo Tsang commentary then further explains that when one initially engages in the practice of focusing on the mind, then as soon as any of the signs appear one must immediately remember the faults of allowing one's mind to be influenced by the appearance of that sign. Remembering the faults will help to prevent one's mind from being influenced by the appearance of the signs.

Then, with further familiarity one will reach the point where the signs will not appear at all. Initially, if the signs do appear, they will naturally subside and not appear. Then as one further meditates and focuses on the mind itself, one will reach the point where none of the signs appear. At that point, the very stark bareness, or the nature of the conventional mind itself will be very apparent and clear, and along with that there will be a sense of real joy, and a feeling of natural ease. One then just remains in that state of focusing only on the mind.

When one reaches that stage of focusing entirely on the mind itself, where it appears very clearly and vividly, while also inducing a sense of real joy and ease, then because of the lack of any appearance of the signs, one has reached the state of signlessness. This explanation is in accordance with Asanga's *Hearer's Levels*.

When one reaches that point where one has the clear and vivid appearance of the mind itself, along with an experience of joy in the mind, then without allowing any other thoughts to interfere, one places one's entire focus on the mind itself. The experience at that time would be a sense of complete comfort and ease of mind. The bliss that is experienced will be like water bubbles that continuously form and then subside, before forming again. In that way the mind experiences a continuous sense of ease. At this point one has also reached the stage of being completely free from all discursive or conceptual thoughts. Thus it is called the state of non-discursiveness.

As one continues to engage in that meditative state of focusing on the mind, the experience of ease and bliss just

naturally fades away without intentionally having to discard it, just like a pine tree slowly sheds its bark. This means that the grosser level of that sense of ease or enjoyment fades away, leading to a more subtle state of bliss and enjoyment. In other words, the grosser levels of that bliss naturally fade away leading to a more subtle and refined form of bliss. Then, being completely immersed in that meditative state of focusing on the mind, one reaches the point where even one's own body will not be visible. As such there is no experience of physical discomfort or disease, and there will be no physical hindrance to one's focus on the object, which is the mind. At that level, the mind itself will appear to be like space where there is complete vacuity.

When the meditator comes out of their meditative equipoise, then as a result of having reached that state of clarity and vividness of the mind during the meditative state, a constant sort of awareness would be apparent in the post-meditative state as well. It will be similar to an upturned cup, a bowl of vacuity, at the level of one's heart. Even in the post-meditative state, that appearance remains as a result of one's intense and continuous focus during the meditative state. That post-meditative experience arises from one's meditative experience, and it is not something that is superimposed. Rather it is a result that arises from one's earlier familiarity of focusing on the mind. When one comes out of the meditative state, because one's body was not visible in the meditative state, there will be an experience of obtaining a new body again. Along with that experience there is a sense of joy with obtaining a body again.

When such a meditator goes about and interacts in the world again in the post-meditative state, the delusions such as attachment and anger will still occur, but at a very minimal level and with a much less intensity and duration than previously. That is the result of having meditated in such a way. As presented earlier, at this point one has obtained complete pacification.

The actual clarity of that meditative state is further defined as being such that when looking at a wall, for example, the meditator will see the wall clearly to the point of seeing every atom of the wall. That clarity is the result of the clarity of the object of one's meditation.

Stability refers to having applied effort in maintaining a stability of focus on the object, to the point where one is able to maintain a continuum of a meditative state, even during sleep. What is being indicated here is that the sleep state becomes similar to the state of concentration itself, and dreams become very vivid and clear as well. Kyiwo Tsang further mentions that these descriptions are in accordance with Asanga's text *Hearer's Levels*. Specifically, Kyiwo Tsang mentions that the explanations in Asanga's *Hearer's Levels* point out that all of the qualities described earlier are the attribute of focusing on a formless object such as the mind, in contrast to using an object that has form. When a formless object such as the mind is used, the qualities described earlier are evident.

2. Introducing the mind that is focused on

One needs to understand that it is the chosen object for developing calm abiding, which is the mind itself, which

makes mahamudra unique. As it is the mind focussing on itself it is as if the object and subject are actually one.

In introducing the mind as an object for developing calm abiding, there are two subdivisions:

1. That which is mistaken
2. Accepting that which is unmistaken

1. That which is mistaken

In order understand the points made here, one must first of all understand that there is the conventional nature of the mind as well as the ultimate nature of the mind. In achieving calm abiding, there are those who may mistake the conventional appearance of the mind as the actual ultimate nature of the mind, which is mistaken. The unmistaken, according to the explanations of the lineage lama, is being able to identify the object as the conventional mind.

The following verses from the root text state:

25. Thus although you can see this nature of the mind most obviously, nevertheless you can never hold on to or point to any particular thing as 'my mind'.

26. [After you have developed through these methods mental quiescence on the conventional mind], most meditators of the land of the snows agree that then to fix gently in meditation on whatever appears [on the clear mirror-like nature of your mind], without grasping at any extraneous thoughts or preconceptions is an oral tradition method for the easy forging of buddhahood.

The auto-commentary doesn't give an explanation of these two verses, however Kyiwo Tsang's commentary presents the following explanation: just as teeth falling out and the hair turning white are the nature of someone ageing, the conventional level of the mind is perceived as colourless and shapeless, and the mere vacuity of the mind itself. What is basically being explained here in simple terms is that as in accordance with the explanations given earlier, the attributes of the mind are that it is colourless, shapeless and unobstructed by any physical forms. Thus it has the propensity of being empty, like space.

Thus, when initially identifying the mind it will appear to the meditator as being colourless, shapeless and a mere vacuity. That vacuity is then mistaken for the actual emptiness of the mind itself. There are those who, being mistaken themselves, actually say, 'If you meditate on the nature of the mind in this way, when that becomes apparent you have reached an ultimate state, then that is what will bring you to buddhahood'. The root text refers to this when it says 'forging of buddhahood'.

As the commentary further explains, identifying the mind as being formless and shapeless and unobstructed is the identification of the conventional nature of the mind. That is basically how the mind will appear when its conventional appearance becomes apparent. As mentioned previously, there are many who mistake that for the actual ultimate nature of the mind. When the root text refers to 'the land of snows' it is referring to Tibet, and is pointing out that some earlier meditators fell into that mistaken view.

The commentary explains that this state is none other than a state of reaching calm abiding focusing on the conventional mind, which is in fact not unique to Buddhist practice, as it is held in common with even non-Buddhist meditators. So it is not such a unique and high achievement on the path to enlightenment. Rather it is merely the state of calm abiding focusing on the conventional nature of the mind.

As mentioned, there are those who mistake that for perceiving the ultimate nature of the mind and who even present it to others as the unique technique of realising the nature of the mind, saying, 'This is a unique instruction, and passing it on to you is as simple as giving you food or alcohol'. As mentioned in the root text it seems that at certain times in Tibet there were some meditators who actually mistook gaining that meditative state for the actual realisation of the emptiness of the mind. If that has occurred in the past there is no reason why it can't occur again, so that is something that we have to be wary of, as it is all too easy for us to fall into that trap.

The commentary then further explains and clarifies how that achievement in itself is not so unique, using the example of generosity. If generosity of giving even a mere morsel or piece of food to an animal is combined with either renunciation or bodhichitta, then just as that act of generosity will respectively be a practice of either the medium scope or the great scope, so too if reaching the level of calm abiding focusing on the mind is accompanied with either of these motivations, then one could say that it has some unique properties or attributes. Otherwise it is just a meditative state, and must not be mistaken to claim that meditative state as a genuine and unique state in accordance with Buddhist practice. If engaging in single-pointed meditation is preceded by a good motivation such as renunciation or bodhichitta, then in accordance with one's motivation, the practice itself becomes a virtuous practice and a unique Buddhist practice as well.

We must also relate this to our daily practices as well. As mentioned previously, a practice becomes a Buddhist practice if it is accompanied with refuge, and it is a Mahayana practice if is accompanied with the bodhichitta attitude. That is how we ensure that our practice is a genuine and unique practice. That is how we must understand and take these instructions on a personal level; we should remind ourselves to make sure that our practice is a genuine, unique Dharma practice used to subdue our own mind. We all understand that without refuge there is no way of it becoming a Buddhist practice, and the definition of 'refuge' itself, as explained in the past, involves having the fear of the lower realms and cyclic existence in general.

That fear of the lower realms and of cyclic existence does not just come about naturally, so how does one generate it? We do so by contemplating the reality of cause and effect, contemplating on how, due to positive causes, one will experience positive results, and due to negative causes one will experience negative results. When we contemplate that law of cause and effect of karma the reality becomes more and more apparent, then when one

combines it with one's own experiences, one will come to realise that even in this life one has engaged in many more negative karmas than virtuous karmas.

If that is true for just this life, not to mention previous lives, one will naturally assume that one has created much more negative karma, which becomes the cause to be reborn in the lower realms and cyclic existence again. So when one contemplates that reality, the wish to do something about it will be generated naturally and spontaneously.

When one reaches that level of understanding, and it dawns that one has created much more negative karma, which is the cause for lower rebirths in future lifetimes, then the need to engage in practices of purification becomes extremely strong, to the point when one cannot rest idly without purifying one's negative karma. If in the evening before going to bed, one finds that one has created negative karma during the day, then because of a sound understanding of cause and effect, there will be a natural impulse of wanting to purify that negative karma, as it cannot be left without being purified. That is the level that one will reach. One will also rejoice and dedicate the virtuous karmas that one has created during the day.

There is no one here who is not familiar with the purification practice. But what is the use of knowing the technique if we don't use it? Knowing the technique is useless if we don't actually use the technique.

If someone doesn't know the techniques of how to purify negative karma, then there is not much to be done. But it is really up to those of us who have belief in the karma, and who know how to purify negative karma, to put it into practice. A simple but effective practice would be to generate a strong sense of regret for the negative karma one has created and then with that strong sense of regret, to think 'It is really disastrous that I have created this negative karma, and I cannot go without purifying it. I must purify it, because if I don't it will lead to further negative consequences for myself'.

With an understanding of effect of negative karma, one develops a strong sense of regret within oneself. Then with that sense of regret, and strong wish of not wanting to repeat the negative karma again, even at the cost of one's life, one develops the strong resolution, 'I will not create this negative karma again'. If one develops that mind for even a short time and recites, for example, one mala of Buddha Shakyamuni's mantra; that then becomes the purification practice and one's negative karma is purified. As the teachings present, one of the methods for purifying negative karma is to rely on the names of the enlightened beings, and this is basically the technique.

If we find that it is hard to develop that resolve to not commit a negative act again, then that is because the regret is strong enough. The stronger the sense of regret one has, the stronger the wish not to repeat that negative action will be. For example, if someone were to find themselves engaging in an act of stealing, and comes to really see that as being a totally negative deed which shouldn't be done, then a sense of regret about having engaged in the act of stealing will arise very strongly. If it is a very strong sense of regret, then the thought of never

wanting to do it again will naturally occur, which will actually prevent the person from stealing again. This is how, on a practical level, we can understand how a strong sense of regret will help to prevent one from repeating negative actions in the future.

The following session, as you are all aware, is the discussion night. As mentioned previously, it is good for you to take part in the right state of mind, with a good motivation and so forth. It would be particularly good for the discussion to be focused on the actual definition of calm abiding, what calm abiding is, and its qualities particularly in relation to the physical and mental pliancy, specifically identifying physical and mental pliancy and the bliss that is induced by them. Those points are good to discuss in order to gain a better understanding of them.

The virtue of discussing and thus gaining a better understanding of all of these points will be that when one is ready to engage in the actual practice of developing calm abiding one will not need to be too worried about the need of finding someone for instructions, because one would have already become familiar with the technique. That is why we are becoming familiar with these topics now, so that when the appropriate time comes for us to engage in the practice, we will have all the tools at our disposal. Right now, we even have access to the textbooks and if at any time we have a doubt about a certain point, we can refer to them to make it a bit clearer. So, we are fortunate to have these resources at this time.

*Transcribed from tape by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnett
Edit 2 by Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe
Edited Version*

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DISCUSSION

BLOCK: 3
WEEK: 5
ASSIGNED: JUN 23RD 2009

Week 1 (26th May 2009)

1. Describe the technique of '*mixing the settled and moving mind*'. What is it used for, and what is its ultimate application? [3]
2. How does the analogy (whereby a crow flies off a ship) relate to subsiding discursive thoughts during a meditation? [3]
3. List the six methods of placing the mind. Briefly explain what their names refer to. [12 x 0.5]

Week 2 (2nd Jun 2009)

4. Having applied all the earlier methods and techniques of developing mindfulness on the mind you will reach the ninth stage of concentration. What is the result? Give an example or analogy.
5. a. Give the sequence of how physical and mental bliss and pliancy are achieved.
b. In summary, explain mental and physical pliancy.
6. Give the definition of calm abiding

Week 3 (9th June 2009)

7. The Buddha taught many practices for the Buddhist practitioner. Describe what these three simple meditations are and why we do them.
 - I. Buddha Shakyamuni [2]
 - II. The Precious Human Rebirth [2]
 - III. Death and Impermanence [2]

Week 4 (16th June 2009)

8. Why is a mere state of calm abiding focussing on the conventional nature (i.e. colourless, shapeless) commonly mistaken for the direct perception of emptiness?
9. What makes a practice a Buddhist practice?

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EXAM

NAME:

BLOCK: **3**

WEEK: **6**

30TH JUNE 09

MARK:

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2. How does the analogy (whereby a crow flies off a ship) relate to subsiding discursive thoughts during a meditation? [3]

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b. In summary, explain mental and physical pliancy.

6. Give the definition of calm abiding

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a. Buddha Shakyamuni [2]

b. The Precious Human Rebirth [2]

c. Death and Impermanence [2]

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