
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

5 June 2018

We begin with our usual meditation.

As contained in the meaning of the Refuge and Generating Bodhicitta prayer, which we have just recited, ensure that we all cultivate bodhicitta motivation.

All the religious traditions have some form of prayer to begin the day or practice with; Christians begin by saying, 'In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen'. In Buddhism, we take refuge in the Three Jewels at the beginning of our practice to signify that the practice we are following is a Buddhist practice. In addition to that, generating the bodhicitta mind signifies that not only are we following the Buddhist path, but also within the Buddhist path, the practice that we follow belongs to the Mahayana or Great Vehicle path.

In one sentence, bodhicitta is simply a wish or an aspiration to achieve full enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. When we reflect on the meaning of this statement we are implanting in our mind the seed to achieve the state of buddhahood. Rather than simply saying the words, it is important that we think about the meaning of those words and then cultivate that aspiration of enlightenment within ourselves.

Although the true bodhicitta mind is an uncontrived and spontaneous wish to full enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings, a similitude of that wish or thought is a concern for the wellbeing of other sentient beings, even a single sentient being, and is equivalent to having true bodhicitta within us. Therefore, we should cherish that mind within us as something very precious, and do our best to safeguard and enhance it by engaging in acts of benefiting sentient beings and preventing harm to even one sentient being. It is vitally important that whenever we engage in any spiritual practice we make sure we cultivate bodhicitta, an altruistic mind of enlightenment, so that our practice becomes a Mahayana practice.

We all want to know what to meditate on and the most beneficial meditation is cultivating an altruistic thought of benefiting other beings. Whenever this altruistic thought arises, even if it is a contrived one, try to recognise its preciousness and think of sustaining it. You often hear that 'meditation' means 'to become familiar with'. Therefore, when you cultivate that mind of enlightenment you are meditating because you are familiarising yourself with it. In fact, it is a most beneficial meditation and Dharma practice, and the most effective way to bring happiness for yourself and all other beings, as well as contributing to the flourishing of the Buddhadharmas.

We all say we practise meditation and are following Dharma practice. The question is 'Is it really benefiting

us?'. If it is not, then what is the point of doing it? Is Dharma practice helping us to develop ourselves? The answer to all these questions very much depends upon our integration of and approach to Dharma practice in our life, and where our practice is aimed at. No matter what form of meditation or spiritual practices we undertake, the best is at the end we direct or combine it to enhance an altruistic mental attitude or good heart within us. If you do this then there is no doubt that you will be able to reap the benefits of Dharma in terms of bringing more positive states of mind, and through this realising true self potential and development.

At this point we can recall the advice of the great Kadampa master, Geshe Potawa. He said that Dharma practice is a remedy to mental afflictions. If whatever practice you do is not remedying mental afflictions, then it is not a Dharma practice. As we presume ourselves to be followers of Dharma practice, it is very important that our Dharma practice is aimed at subduing mental afflictions within us. In this way, over a period of time, we can see a decrease in our mental afflictions, or at least we are able to better manage and cope with mental afflictions such as anger, pride, jealousy and competitiveness and so on as they arise. If, in the face of adverse situations that act as fuel for the mental afflictions we do not even think of applying our Dharma knowledge, then our meditation and spiritual practice is not going to help us in reducing suffering and securing happiness in our life. Take for example a situation that is very irritating, hostile or provocative: without the application of Dharma, we will simply lose our self-control and react with anger, and as a result bring harm to ourselves and others.

Lama Tsongkhapa said that because of meditation one's mental afflictions should decrease, and one's faith in spiritual practice and meditational deities and gurus should increase. As one practises meditation more and for a longer period, one should be able to find it easier to practise whenever one wants to and experience more control over one's thoughts, actions and emotions. The meditation practice should have a direct impact on one's mind; this is very important.

However, that is not going to happen unless one puts the Dharma into practice. Simply studying or learning about Dharma is not enough. If you do not think of applying what you have learnt to your practice then there will not be much benefit of your learning, even if you have gained much knowledge. As Lama Tsongkhapa said, meditation or Dharma practice is to remedy the mental afflictions. Accordingly, if we apply Dharma or meditation practice to remedy mental afflictions whenever they arise, we can then gradually see that an effect of our practice is overcoming those mental afflictions, and along with it various problems in our life. Consequently, we will gain more confidence and faith in our Dharma practice, boosting a stronger motivation to apply even more Dharma practice in everyday life.

In our last teaching, we came across these lines from *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons*:

Our spiritual practices are grand
Yet our practice of helping others is tiny,

This is again emphasising that the most important thing is to integrate the Dharma into daily life. Then, we will benefit even if our Dharma knowledge is small. On the other hand, if we don't put our knowledge into practice, then no matter how great that knowledge may be, there is no benefit.

How do you apply Dharma in your life? Recall this verse from the *Eight Verses of Thought Transformation*:

Examining my continuum throughout all actions
As soon as an emotional affliction arises
That endangers myself and others
By facing it I shall strictly avert it.

We should examine our continuum throughout all our actions. If we see any mental afflictions arising, then recognise that affliction as being a very destructive force that will bring harm to yourself, as well as others. We should then immediately apply the antidote. This shows the urgency of applying the antidote; the moment an affliction arises we should think of immediately applying the antidote, without giving any chance for mental afflictions to gain the upper hand. In other words, if we do not apply the antidote immediately, then the enemy of the mental affliction will gain more strength and become harder to combat.

In short, our approach to Dharma practice is to recognise it as a means to diminish mental afflictions and also understand that we must put it into practice. It is through practice we will really begin to appreciate the benefits of Dharma as being the most effective means of overcoming suffering in our life.

Dharma helps us in eradicating the internal causes of unhappiness and problems, which are the primary ones. For instance, there are external and internal cause factors for anger. Of these two, the internal factors are more influential than the external factors because if you could get rid of the internal factors, then you will be able to resist the external factors; resisting external factors however will not get rid of internal factors. This is likened to an analogy of someone who has to cross some ground covered with prickles. It would be a waste of time if the person tried to remove all the prickles on the ground; the solution would be to simply cover their own feet with leather. This analogy resonates with a deep meaning of Dharma. If you reflect on it, you will understand what the Dharma is and what it is for, rather than just knowing it.

To a great extent we can change our feelings by changing our mental attitude and outlook. Let's look at anger, which arises due to various factors, including the object on which the mind is occupied at that time. This means that we can overcome anger by switching our mind to a different object; however we need to meditate effectively to do this. In one such meditation we direct our mental attention to the anger itself, focussing on the nature and impulses of anger, rather than letting our mind ponder on the object of anger, such as a perpetrator. Shifting our mental attention in this way can diminish anger. This shows how shifting our mental attention to different objects can change our mental attitude, and thereby our feelings.

Therefore, whenever we experience any disturbing state of mind that brings about sadness or unhappiness, it should occur to us, 'I must do something to get rid of that and what I need to do is to transform my mental attitude and outlook'.

Recently, a young girl said to me she has been meditating for nearly a year and found that even just recognising anger when it arises within her, and being aware of its shortcomings, is of tremendous benefit. What she had said is very true.

Another young girl said that she finds meditation very helpful, and that she has been applying it as much as possible. She said meditation helps her in overcoming certain emotional problems. However, she confided that she finds it difficult to help her with overcoming romantic attachment to her boyfriend. I really appreciated her sincerity in sharing her meditation experience and trying out meditation practice. Indeed, it is said that of all the forms of mental afflictions desire-attachment, such as sexual craving, is one of the most difficult mental afflictions to abandon. Let alone adolescents, some men as old as ninety crave sexual activity. As we have gone over the time we will skip the usual meditation for tonight. I don't consider myself as a good speaker, nor do I want to be one, but I am here among you all as a close friend. So, with a good spirit of mutual friendship, I feel it is my duty to share with you all what I find beneficial in my life and what I think is relevant to you.

How to train in calm abiding

Posture

We have discussed at length the favourable conditions and the means for achieving calm abiding and then moved on to beginning the meditation practice. In our last session we discussed the sitting posture – on a comfortable seat possessing the seven features of the posture of Vairochana Buddha.

Object of meditation

As the lam-rim commentary states:

From the visualization of your guru on the crown of your head, imagine that a Shakyamuni image splits off. Place it in space at about the level of your navel.

Here the object for achieving calm abiding is the image of Shakyamuni Buddha. You visualise Shakyamuni Buddha in the space in front at the level of your navel. Here the term 'navel', which in Tibetan is *tewa*, also connotes 'central' or 'main'. It doesn't necessarily refer to the biological navel which is located a bit too low for the visualisation. Here the navel or *tewa* refers to the heart, which is also called *tewa* as it is the central part of the body. So you visualise the image of the Buddha in the space in front of you at the level of your heart, at the distance of about the tip of your hands when you do a full length prostration.

The visualised image should be about the size of your thumb. It is recommended to visualise the object in small size because it is said that it is easier to enlarge the object from the small to larger size than to reduce it from the large to a smaller size.

Some people might find it a bit awkward to visualise the object in the space in front, worrying about how it can remain in the space without any support. Therefore, it is advised that you visualise the image of Buddha on the mat of a mass of cloud, just as in the visualisation of the Tsongkhapa and lineage gurus in the practice of the *Hundred Deities of the Land of Joy*.

As to the weight of the object, nothing is mentioned here, but from the pith instruction of gurus such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama the object should be thought of as like a beaming light, but having a bit of weight. The purpose of imagining the object as a beam of light is to achieve the effect of overcoming mental sinking, while imagining it as having a bit of weight is to achieve the effect of overcoming excitement. It is like not being able to get up quickly if our body is loaded with some heavy burden. So thinking of the object as carrying a bit of weight has the benefit of overcoming excitement.

In order to have a clear visualisation, you should initially have a good close look at the actual object, examining all of its details, such as, in the case of the Buddha, observing the Buddha's face, sitting posture, the colour of the Buddha's robe, the hand gestures and so on. If you are relying on the instructions given by the gurus with respect to the object, then refer to the detail provided in those instructions. Then, when you start the meditation you have to try to bring to mind whatever details you can recall and be satisfied with that.

Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand says:

At first this visualization will not be clear, but it is not yet necessary to achieve clarity. All that appears may be, for example, a flickering yellow blob of just some part of him, such as the head, feet, hands, etc.

As it says here, in the beginning, whatever image that comes to mind as you begin the meditation won't be very clear but that's OK. The key is to try to maintain your focus on that object. Here, the focus is not like the way we view an object with our eyes, where the object we look at is out there. Rather, the object is within your mind in the form of a mental image that represents some object. The way your mental attention focuses on that image as an object is such that it is as if your mind is dissolved into the object, and the mind and the object have become one. It is important when you begin the meditation that you are satisfied with whatever first image of the object comes to mind, because it is said that trying to get a clearer picture of the object or analysing it will risk the danger of completely losing or scattering the object.

Do not let these slip from your memory; tighten your retention and do not allow the mind to become distracted. This system of nurturing your recollection alone will be all that is needed to interrupt dullness or excitement. This is why this is the supreme instruction that the great adepts hold in their hearts. Moreover, dullness is cut short by tightening up your image retention. Excitement is cut short by your lack of distraction. When you meditate in this way and achieve a measure of stability, you are most in danger of falling prey to dullness; so be wary of dullness and keep a tight hold on your retention of the image and its clarity. Once you have achieved some clarity the

danger is excitement. Take the required measures against excitement and seek further stability.

We have to be mindful of the object through the power of our memory. Keep that object in mind by preventing any mental distractions. As *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* says, this kind of application of mindfulness, or the power of memory, has the benefit of actually getting rid of both mental sinking and excitement. Great meditators take to heart this skill of utilising the power of memory or mindfulness. Through this one is able to hold the object without any influence of any mental distractions, as the key to success in meditation.

The meditators need to get right the skill of retaining the object to overcome sinking, and of preventing mental distractions to overcome excitement. At the same time, they should be able to remain vigilant. As they advance their skill to such a level there is good mental stability or retention of the focus and they realise the danger of sinking emerging. At the same time, when they tighten the retention of the object, they remain vigilant enough to keep the danger of excitement at bay. In this way, the meditators ensure that there is both sustained clarity and stability in the meditation.

Initially you don't see the full details of the object, and the object will also lack clarity. This is not unexpected in any way. What is important is maintaining single-pointedness, and then as the stability of concentration increases and becomes fortified, directing your attention to further details of the object won't interrupt the focus of the concentration. When your meditative concentration gains such a degree of mental stability that focusing on a specific detail of the object won't cause any loss of focus, you can then expand your visualisation with more details of the object, such as visualising the Buddha's face, colour of body etc., scanning the whole body from the head down to the feet, or from the bottom up to the head. It is eventually possible to clearly visualise the whole image as clearly as seeing it with your eyes, without being influenced by any distraction. As mentioned earlier, in the early stage of meditation, trying to visualise the object in more detail or with greater clarity can be an obstacle to achieving single-pointed concentration because this would completely scatter the concentration.

You should know now that when we meditate, we are focussing on an internal object, which, as the text says, refers to an image within one's mind and not an outer object. When we talk about achieving calm abiding, we are talking about achieving calm abiding on the basis of this object, which is an inner object within our mind. This is important because the main reason for achieving calm abiding is to achieve special insight, which refers to a realisation within one's mind. This realisation is dependent on a state of calm abiding in relation to an inner object within one's mind. There are some texts which mention the possibility of achieving some form of calm abiding through the eye sense consciousness, however, that kind of calm abiding is not a suitable cause to achieve special insight.

His Holiness The Dalai Lama's birthday falls on the 6th of July, which is a Friday; we will celebrate it the next day, on Saturday morning.

In previous years, Margie and her team have done a wonderful job in preparing lunch, which brought a lot of benefit in terms of not only making everyone happy but also creating a harmonious and friendly atmosphere in the centre. This is very important. From my side, I will make financial contribution for the lunch and I hope you all can take care of organising the lunch.

I am not saying that Tara Institute is not doing well, but I want to emphasise it is important to do whatever we can to maintain harmony in the centre, so that everyone who is involved in the centre gets along with others very well and enjoys very close friendships. When there is such a friendly atmosphere it really brings joy and happiness for everyone who comes here. However, if there is no harmony it can affect everyone who comes here and the progress of the centre.

As you know the Lord Buddha advised that harmony is a very important cause of happiness for the community of Sangha, and also for the flourishing of Sangha practices. You can also see how this is also very much relevant to the lay community. Even if there are two people living together, harmony is important for both of them. If you have chosen to live with someone, then the only way to live together very happily and mutually beneficial is having harmony in the relationship. Harmony is important for the happiness of the family. Even if the family has all the material good conditions, if it lacks harmony then there will be tension in the atmosphere and wealth cannot bring happiness. It is the same for the centre. If the activities of the centre are to flourish and benefit all the people, it is very important that we maintain harmony in the centre.

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Homework

June 5, 2018 teachings

1. How should we apply Dharma practice in our life?

2. What is the object of the calm abiding meditation? How should it be visualised?

3. In the beginning, is it important to focus on the clarity of the visualisation? Why?

4. Is it appropriate to use an external object for our meditation?

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As to the weight of the object, nothing is mentioned here, but the pith instruction of gurus such as His Holiness Dalai Lama the object should be thought of as like a beaming light, but having a bit of weight. The purpose of imagining the object as a beam of light is to achieve the effect of overcoming mental sinking, while imagining it as having a bit of weight is to achieve the effect of overcoming excitement. It is like not being able to get up quickly if our body is loaded with some heavy burden. So thinking of the object as carrying a bit of weight has the benefit of overcoming excitement.

3. In the beginning, is it important to focus on the clarity of the visualisation? Why?

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As it says here, in the beginning whatever the image that comes to mind as you begin the meditation even if it won't be very clear, that's OK. The key is to try to maintain your focus on that object. It is important when you begin the meditation whatever the first image of the object that comes to mind, be satisfied with it. It is said that trying to get a clearer picture of the object or analysing it will risk the danger of completely losing or scattering the object.

In the early stage of meditation, trying to visualise the object in more detail or with greater clarity can be an obstacle to achieving single pointed concentration because this would completely scatter the concentration.

4. Is it appropriate to use an external object for our meditation?

When we meditate, we are focussing on an internal object, which, as the text says, refers to an image within one's mind and not an outer object. When we talk about achieving calm abiding, we are talking about achieving calm abiding on the basis of this object, which is an inner object within our mind. This is important because the main reason for achieving calm abiding is to achieve special insight, which refers to a realisation within one's mind. This realisation is dependent on a state of calm abiding in relation with an inner object within ones mind. There are some texts, which mention about the possibility of achieving some form of calm abiding through the eye sense consciousness, however, that kind of calm abiding is not a suitable cause to achieve special insight.

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

12 June 2018

We have recited prayers for taking refuge and generating bodhicitta so accordingly make sure we cultivate a bodhicitta motivation. We will now do the usual meditation. [*Tonglen meditation*]

Please reinforce the motivation of bodhicitta, which is the wish for full enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings, and cultivate the thought 'I am listening to this profound teaching to achieve full enlightenment' and resolve to put it into practice.'

You should never underestimate the importance of beginning a practice with a bodhicitta motivation, which is essentially an altruistic mental attitude or concern for the wellbeing of all sentient beings. Such a concern is very much the essential element for one's spiritual development. Without going into detail, just try to understand how beneficial it is to cultivate an altruistic mental attitude, which will have the effect of decreasing your self-cherishing mind. A benefit of this is that you will find more joy and happiness within your mind, which is something we can all understand from our own experience.

If we cultivate this altruistic thought, it will automatically bring us happiness. So, it should occur to us that it is a very beneficial practice that we want to engage in. Cultivating an altruistic thought is not just advocating for the benefit of other sentient beings, but paradoxically it also benefits an individual being the most. Therefore, we should not leave it as just hearing about this mind. Rather in our everyday life we must recall its relevancy and benefits, and make an effort to cultivate, safeguard and develop it within ourselves. In this way, we will become the main beneficiaries of this precious mind of altruism.

If we imagine our everyday actions being driven by an altruistic thought, a sense of care for others, we can see the impact of our actions becoming greatly meaningful and less negative or unwholesome. Naturally we want to pursue that. Moreover, if we check what factors drive our actions, we find that in most cases these are mainly driven by the force of our mental intention. Therefore, if we have a positive mental intention, the action that follows will also naturally be positive. If the mental intention that drives an action is negative, then the action will also be negative. Having said that, there are, of course, many small movements and reflexes we do, like blinking our eyes or moving our hands, and it is hard to say that these movements have any relationship to our mental intentions. Apart from these, most of the actions we undertake in our lives are very much mentally driven or due to our motivation. Therefore, we can modify and change them by changing and modifying our mind, or the thought that drives us to undertake those actions.

It is especially beneficial to integrate the bodhicitta mind into our everyday actions. If we have bodhicitta in our mind then we will also have loving kindness, good heartedness, compassion, a sense of care for the wellbeing of others, and so on. These positive states of mind are the companions of bodhicitta. Then, whatever we do will undoubtedly become a part of our spiritual development.

In our situation, it is not that we don't have knowledge of Dharma. In fact, we may have a great deal of Dharma knowledge, or talk a lot about bodhicitta, or even about the highest yoga tantra, but we are not practising Dharma. As I have always emphasised, my key advice, which is also the essence of Dharma, is adding the kindness of bodhicitta into our daily actions.

Whatever action we do, we must try and generate the bodhicitta mind, and the rest will take care of itself. If we forget our practice in our everyday actions, then we are simply allowing our neurotic mind to run our actions and interactions. This mind operates under the command of various negative emotions such as jealousy, pride, and attachment. If we do that, all our spiritual knowledge is really of no use.

Essentially, the application of our Dharma knowledge to our everyday actions is what matters most to us. You may have a lot of knowledge but if you don't put that knowledge into practice, it is not of much use. So, when we talk about developing the bodhicitta mind we should think of bringing it into our everyday actions.

Harmful thoughts and actions towards others bring harm to us too. That is to say, any negative mental attitude and actions that we aim at others will in fact bounce back upon us. For example, if you express strong anger to others, the reaction you get affects you. Understanding and being aware of this can make us think twice before we cause harm to others, and that actually helps us to minimise harmful actions. It's important to always be mindful of our everyday actions; through these we can learn a lot about knowing what to do and what not to do. In relation to this, the great Atisha said in his thought transformation text *Jewel Rosary of an Awakening Warrior*,

Proclaim your own faults,
And seek not mistakes in others.
Hide your own good qualities
But proclaim the good qualities of others.

There is a lot to reflect on in these lines; they are absolutely relevant in terms of developing our spiritual practice and finding more happiness in our life. If we remind ourselves of this in our daily life it will be of great benefit to us. There is a lot to learn by just being aware of this.

In our case, we mostly do the opposite of what the great Atisha said. In the mundane world it is very common to see people always criticising others or digging up their faults. And they do everything possible to hide their own faults and weaknesses. This could be, in fact, the single most important cause of misunderstanding, friction, confusion, and suspicion in our relationships and interactions with others. In the end we live a miserable and difficult life.

We should instead admire others for their good qualities and successes and rejoice in them. In that way we will be inspired by and will learn from them. A person who is always trying to hide his own faults, but looking for faults in others, would appear as a very selfish, arrogant and mean person, and nobody wants to associate with them. There is a Tibetan saying that goes, 'When it comes to a fault of another being, even if it is as small as a head louse, you can recognise it. However, when it comes to your own faults, even if it is as big as a yak, you still can't recognise it.' If we take Atisha's advice and try to practise humility and speak of the good qualities of others and so on, then this can be a good contributing factor for us to develop good healthy relationships with others, and all involved will find it meaningful and joyful.

Atisha's *Jewel Rosary* also says:

Examine your speech when amidst many people,
Examine your mind when living alone.

This is also very practical and beneficial advice for us. When we are alone, if we do not observe our thoughts and calm them, we can easily find ourselves mentally very busy and burn out. Likewise, if we are not careful about our speech when with others, then there is a great likelihood that our speech can cause a lot of harm to other beings.

What is meditative concentration?

We have finished the subject of overcoming the five faults of meditation by applying the eight antidotes. What follows is the importance of recognising actual concentration. Obviously without a good recognition of what that is we cannot cultivate it.

In his *Great Stages of the Path* Lama Tsongkhapa says that the kind of concentration that we are trying to achieve here should have two features.

The two features are the intensity of the clarity of the extremely clear state of the mind and the non-conceptualised stability of the single-pointedness on the focus object.

Other lam-rim texts mention this as well. We need to understand from this that when we engage in meditation practice, our mind should be focusing on the object with these two features of concentration: an intense or sharp state of the clarity of the object in the mind, and also a state of stability of the single-pointed focus such that there is absolutely no distraction and wavering away from the object. These two features indicate the effectiveness of the concentration.

The main obstacle to having an intense clarity in one's mind is mental sinking. We have talked in detail about how there can be two types of sinking: a coarse one and a subtle one. The other main obstacle to having single-pointed stability is excitement. As the *Great Stages of the Path* says, this explains why sinking and excitement are the two main obstacles to achieving the perfect state of concentration.

In meditation we apply various mental factors such as mindfulness, alertness and so forth, and each of these mental factors has its own specific role. To develop concentration, we need to apply mindfulness in order to fix the mind on the object single-pointedly. But technically, the mindfulness itself is not the concentration

nor the generic mind that focuses on the object single-pointedly. So what is concentration? The *Great Stages of the Path* continues by defining concentration.

Concentration is the part of the mind which enables it to focus single-pointedly and enables it to sustain the continuity of the focus.

Therefore, concentration is a mental factor which has a specific role or the function of enabling the mind to have a sustained single-pointed focus.

It's important that you understand the distinguishing features of each of the mental factors such as concentration, mindfulness and alertness. The *Great Stages of the Path* continues:

Furthermore, there is a need of a means by which not wavering off from the initial object whatever it may be, and a means by which knowing whether or not distraction has occurred or will occur or not. The first means is mindfulness (memory) and the second means is introspection (awareness).

Again, the two main obstacles to concentration are sinking and excitement, and the two main means of maintaining concentration are mindfulness and alertness.

How to train in calm abiding (cont)

TAKING THIS AS THE BASIS, HOW TO ACHIEVE THE NINE MENTAL STATES

Going back to *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* we are up to how to achieve the nine mental abidings. It says that to be successful in achieving the perfect state of concentration, one has to gain an experiential realisation of all nine stages of mental abiding. As such, you should recognise the features of each of these nine mental abidings.

As listed in the text these are:

Placing the mind; placement with continuity; patch-like placement; the close placement; taming the mind; pacifying; complete pacification; single-pointedness and then the placement with equanimity.

Placing the mind

For the first mental abiding, the text says:

This is achieved by the power of studying the instruction on visualisation with your guru. However you are only evoking the visualisation at this stage. It does not stay and you cannot make it persist.

From this we should note that there are six powers. The first mental abiding is primarily achieved through the *power of listening*. At that stage there is only the ability to rest or abide the mind on the object just a little bit. There is no ability to sustain the continuity of the concentration.

In the first level of mental abiding the meditator is just able to rest their mind on the object but is unable to sustain the continuation of the focus or mental stability. As described in the text, at this time the meditator would feel as if their distracting thoughts have increased. In fact, it is not that distracting thoughts have increased but it is a sign that they are becoming more aware of conceptual thoughts. I know people say that they experience more conceptual thoughts when they meditate than they do on normal days.

So 'placing the mind' is an appropriate name for this stage because at that stage the meditator is only able to

place their mind on the object, and that's all. They cannot sustain or continue the mental abiding.

Placement with continuity

After the first mental abiding, the meditator reaches the point where they can not only place their mind on the object, but they can also maintain the continuity of the placement. Having just a little continuation of mental abiding is the second mental abiding of placement with continuity.

Here 'continuation' refers to the duration it takes one to recite one round of the mala of the six-syllable OM MANI PADME HUM mantra.

The text says,

... when you can meditate for about the time it takes to say a rosary of OM MANI PADME HUM without being distracted.

As described in the text, at this level disturbing thoughts are sometimes pacified, and they arise at other times. Hence, the meditator experiences the retreat of disturbing thoughts.

In terms of the six powers, the second mental abiding is achieved mainly through the *power of thinking*, following the power of listening in the preceding stage.

During the first and second mental abidings, the moments of sinking and mental excitement arising are great, whereas the moments of resting or mental abiding are small. Therefore, in terms of the four mental attentions, *forcible mental attention* is required at the first and the second stages.

Patch-like placement

The third mental abiding is patch-like placement. This is quite self-explanatory; the text gives an example of a garment with patches. Just like you would fix a hole in a garment by stitching a patch on it, in this stage of meditation you have some ability to continue the concentration if any interruptions or distractions occur. There is an ability to recognise and fix it.

In terms of interruption from mental distractions, the text states that the main difference between the second and third mental abidings is the duration of the distraction. Due to the greater force of mindfulness or power of memory, the duration of distraction is shorter in the third stage in comparison with the second stage, and hence the duration of the state of stability is longer here.

The text says:

The duration of your distraction is shorter than in the previous two states. At this stage you are developing more powerful memory.

Close-placement

The fourth mental abiding is called close-placement. An advantage of having generated a greater power of memory or mindfulness during the third level is that at the fourth level, the meditator has gained the ability of not losing the focus on the object at all. We can clearly see how this fourth level is distinguished from the previous three mental abidings. Although there is no risk of losing the focus of the object, there is still the danger of strong mental sinking and excitement arising, so it is necessary to be able to apply the antidotes for those two.

The text says,

Just the same, while all this is happening you fall prey to the strongest forms of dullness and excitement, and you must apply antidotes to these two.

Of the six powers, the third and the fourth mental abidings are achieved mainly by the *power of mindfulness*. In fact, in the fourth stage the meditators reach a state where they have fully completed the power of mindfulness.

The text says:

... from now on, memory is like a man at the height of his powers, for the power of memory has been perfected.

Subduing or taming the mind

The fifth mental abiding is called subduing or taming the mind. This is because during the fourth level of mental abiding, the meditator gains a fully developed state of mindfulness or memory. However, as they apply mindfulness, the result can be too much withdrawing of the focus of their mind inward. Therefore, at the fifth level, the meditator confronts the fault of this 'over withdrawing' in the form of subtle mental sinking and combats it through applying and reinforcing the *power of alertness* or introspection. They apply various techniques to overcome sinking such as reflecting upon the benefits of developing meditative concentration and uplifting the height of the mental spirit. If such reflection doesn't work then there are other techniques for overcoming the sinking problem, which we discussed earlier on, so we won't discuss that here again. The main difference between the fourth and fifth mental abiding is as the text says:

Only the fourth has coarse dullness and excitement.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright
Edit 1 by Jill Lancashire
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Edited Version*

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Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

19 June 2018

Make sure that you cultivate the bodhicitta motivation, just as we have recited in the refuge and generating bodhicitta prayer.

[Tong-len meditation]

Meditation and Dharma is the practice of adopting virtuous actions and abandoning non-virtuous actions.

It is good to do a bit of meditation practice, isn't it? Meditation practice is a form of training that familiarises our mind with a virtuous state of mind. Whether you do a meditation or a Dharma practise, recognising it as a means to practise virtue and abandon non-virtue is very important. What is a virtuous or positive state of mind, and what is a non-virtuous or negative state of mind? Thinking about that is fundamental to our practice.

Benefit and harm

We should also try to clearly understand the statement that a virtuous mind benefits us **indirectly** while a non-virtuous mind **indirectly** harms us. What **directly** benefits us is happiness, which is the result of virtuous mind, and what **directly** harms us is suffering which is the result of non-virtuous mind. Without understanding this, there is really no basis to our Dharma practice.

This also throws some light on future and past lives, and tells us that if we want happiness then we must create its causes beforehand, and if we do not want suffering then the causes of suffering must be abandoned beforehand. Understanding how we indirectly experience benefits from a virtuous mind, and harm from a non-virtuous mind is very important. We will then know that any virtuous practices we do in this life, even they don't yield a result in this very lifetime, are not wasted for we know they will yield a result in future lives. We need to focus on and take into account the result of virtue and non-virtue. We cannot anticipate happiness the moment we create virtue – this won't happen.

Virtue and non-virtue

A **virtue** can be defined as that which brings about happiness. What this means is that virtue has the potential or capacity to produce happiness. This does not mean that the moment we create virtue we experience its result of happiness; nonetheless, the potential or capacity of the virtue is left in the mental continuum. Similarly, a **non-virtue** can be defined as that which brings about suffering. However, the experience of suffering doesn't coincide with the creation of the non-virtue; when a non-virtue is created the potential for that suffering to ripen is left in the mental continuum. This potential will gradually ripen its result when it meets with its conditions.

Here, we learn that if we desire happiness, which is the result of virtue, then we must create virtue, and if we don't desire suffering, which is the result of a non-virtue, we

must abandon non-virtue. In this way we will develop a good knowledge of the practice of what to accept and what to reject, based on the law of cause and effect. With such knowledge deeply ingrained within ourselves we will automatically engage in practices to adopt virtue since we want happiness, and in practices that reject non-virtue, since we don't want suffering.

Ten virtuous and ten non-virtuous actions

As to identifying the differences between virtuous and non-virtuous actions in a broad sense, the kind Lord Buddha pointed out ten virtuous actions which are to be accepted, and ten non-virtuous actions which are to be rejected. This teaching is particularly relevant and suited to the minds of beginner practitioners.

The Buddha said that killing is an act of non-virtue. Why? It is because it brings suffering. Abandoning it is an act of virtue, which will bring happiness. I have raised this topic here because you are studying the lam-rim where this topic relates to the person of small scope. Yet if we think extensively, then we can see that this topic encompasses the entire path.

The Buddha advises us not to commit an act of killing because such an action is non-virtuous and will bring great harm upon yourself and others. Since everyone cherishes their own life as being very, very precious, committing an act of killing is a great sin or negative action. Of the ten virtuous actions, refraining from killing is the first virtuous action. To inspire his followers to protect the life of sentient beings and abandon acts of killing, the Buddha said, 'If you harm other sentient beings you are in fact harming me, and if you benefit other sentient beings you are benefiting me'. Just thinking about this one statement by the Buddha, we can understand how precious the Buddha's words are.

As to the practice of adopting virtuous actions, there are ten virtuous actions of which the first three relate to the bodily actions of refraining from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. The benefits of adopting an act of refraining from killing other beings such as animals or even other humans is just enormous. A person who commits an act of killing may not feel pain but the extent of his act of inflicting suffering upon the victim and all others related to them is unbelievable.

Just as life is the most precious thing that we possess, our wealth is also very precious. Therefore, the Buddha advises us to refrain from stealing. Sexual misconduct also brings much pain and suffering to others, and is one of the worst negative actions. That's why the Buddha advised his followers to forbid sexual misconduct; other religious traditions also forbid this and it can sometimes be against the law too.

All these ethical practices are a source of peace, happiness and freedom for humankind. If we consider ourselves to be followers of the Buddha, we must take his advice seriously, and remind ourselves of them from time to time by thinking, 'It is not right for me to go against of the Buddha's advice'. If we happen to commit any non-virtuous action such as killing, then it is important to try to acknowledge it as soon as possible, regret it and take a vow of not repeating it again. 'Oh no, what have I done? The kind Buddha advised me not to do it but I have, and I

really should not have. Alas! Ah ka ka, ah ka ka that's terrible! I won't do it again.'

There are four non-virtues relating to speech, which are lying, slandering, speaking harshly and idle gossip and three non-virtues relating to mind, which are covetousness, harmful thought and wrong view.

So, it is vitally important that you really understand the fundamental practice of adopting the ten virtuous actions and rejecting the ten non-virtuous actions very well, and put them into practice. I'm not going through all of them in detail, by explaining the result of each of them etc., as you have all learnt this in the past. I'm simply reminding you of what you already know. And more importantly, I'm reminding you to bring your knowledge into your practice. In the end, as I always say, what is most important is your practice.

As you know, all these topics are part of the lam-rim, or the stages of the path teachings. I can candidly say that there is no other way to control and calm our mind other than integrating lam-rim teachings into everyday life. I am not boasting when I say this, but I have been arduously practising the lam-rim since the early age of twenty-one or twenty-two, as I was very inspired by Tsongkhapa's *Three Principal Aspects of the Path*.

Around that age I practised lessening desire and cultivating a sense of contentment a lot. I realised that the ten innermost jewels of the Kadampa masters (the four entrustments, the three vajra-like convictions and the three changes in one's living status) are what Dharma practice is all about and this really moved my mind.

However, due to unforeseen changes in my situation I was forced to leave my country. In giving teachings I always focus on encouraging people to integrate the Dharma into their practice and to know how to combine their knowledge of Dharma and practice. I am not fond of judging people and things by saying this and that, but with a sincere thought of helping others I share with them what I have found beneficial to myself.

We quite often hear that we should practise virtue i.e. adopt virtuous actions and abandon non-virtuous actions. Do you now understand the meaning of the virtuous actions that we ought to adopt and the non-virtuous actions that we ought to abandon? The point here is that the happiness we want and the suffering that we don't want derives from these two actions. In fact, all the other major religious traditions including Christianity and Islam also teach the same principles of adopting virtuous actions and abandoning non-virtuous actions. So this practice is common to all the major religious traditions.

Community benefits

Even as just one person, you are benefiting others if you refrain from non-virtues such as killing due to your recognition of the principle of compassion. Conversely, if you commit an act of killing many will suffer as a result and your violent action will disturb the peace and security of the community.

Before you are able to benefit a large number of sentient beings or the larger community, you have to start your practice by benefiting those who are close by, even if it is just one other person. You have to start your practice with

that person, who serves as a basis for further developing your altruistic thought and actions. The practice of benefitting the other person is virtuous, which you ought to adopt, and harming them is non-virtuous, which you ought to abandon.

Imagine if all the people who are living in the country or the community where you are living show some respect for the life of other beings, which means they have seen the value of the first virtuous action of refraining from killing, or the second virtue of respecting the property of others. The more people who put this into practice the more peace and security and freedom they will bring to that community.

If, on the other hand, the people living in that area show no consideration for others, never hesitating to commit an act of murder, or theft if they feel they have some sort of need, then there won't be any safety in that community. There will be no peace, and nobody will feel really safe and free. Even if the country and people are doing well economically there won't be a sense of peace, happiness and freedom. From this perspective the Buddha's teachings on compassion really serve as a very important source of peace and happiness for both the individual and the broader community.

As I always say, part of your practice is trying to understand that if you benefit the person you live with or indeed any other person in any way, then you are also benefitting yourself. Conversely, if you cause harm to that person, then you are also harming yourself, and also destroying your own peace and happiness. So it's important to be a bit more sensitive to the needs of the other person; be sensitive about what makes them happy, and what will hurt their feelings. This is important.

Due to the influence of a deep-seated self-centred mind within us, we normally forget about other people. So is it possible to find happiness with that self-centred mind? Generally speaking we have to say that we are fundamentally social beings, so the friendship of others is a very important contributing factor to our happiness. With a self-centred mind there is a strong view that you are independent and that you don't need to depend on anyone else, and that you can become completely self-sufficient.

But in reality, the average person is not able to cope with a solitary life isolated from others. It's extremely difficult to cope with such an isolated kind of lifestyle. Therefore, from the point of view of personal happiness, it is important to have some consideration for other people and their needs, bringing them benefits, and as much as possible refraining from any action that harms them.

Personal benefits

As mentioned earlier, it's not enough to gain some knowledge of the Dharma. We have to reflect on that knowledge and try to gain a deeper understanding of it. For example, we hear a lot about the shortcomings of the self-cherishing mind and the benefit of the mind of cherishing others. We have to ask ourselves whether whatever understanding we have of any verse from a scripture that refers to the shortcomings of self-cherishing and the benefits of cherishing others has an effect on our own outlook and deeds in everyday life.

You really have to personalise your spiritual understanding. Do you really believe that the self-cherishing mind has the many shortcomings that are described in the texts? We also hear a lot about the benefits of cherishing others, but again does that understanding lie in the depths of your heart? From your own experience you know that self-cherishing brings suffering while the mind of cherishing others brings happiness. It's very important to relate whatever we learn to our practice.

We started tonight with the meaning of meditation, saying that it is to familiarise our mind with a virtuous state of mind, and then ended up discussing the question, 'What is a virtuous state of mind?'. In order to meditate effectively it is important to recognise a virtuous state of mind.

You must think about Dharma by relating it to your own self and your practice. Those of you who lead the Monday night introductory sessions would know how, prior to your Dharma talk, it is important that you feel good and at peace with yourself and have the right motivation, which is solely to benefit others. With such good preparation then as you begin the talk, the flavour of your talk will be unique. Without good preparation, no matter how many words you spout from your mouth when you teach, they will seem empty and have no feeling or real effect.

I tell those who give Dharma talks to others that teaching Dharma is also very beneficial for them too. So, I advise them that as part of their preparation, they should spend one or two hours to cultivating a virtuous state of mind, and a proper motivation, which is to think that your sole purpose in teaching Dharma and sharing your knowledge of Dharma is to benefit others and cause the Buddha's doctrine flourish. With good preparation, then as you begin to teach not only will you feel that the whole experience is very positive, but also your listeners will have an inspiring impression of you as well.

It is so important to reflect on whatever you know about Dharma over and over again and integrate it into your life. I have mentioned to you numerous times, that when I was about eighteen or nineteen years old I saw the text, *The Fragmented Collection of the Kadampa Masters Words* (consisting of about 30 sections) for sale in the Lhasa street market. Luckily, I had some money, so I bought it. I started to read it when I got to my room, and it really moved me and brought me a deep sense of happiness. I was particularly moved by Atisha's advice in that text:

The best friends are mindfulness and introspective awareness,
The best instruction is to observe your mind,
The best quality to have is altruism.

When I first saw these lines, I felt so happy; they touched me deeply. I thought about them a lot and they benefitted greatly, and I have taught about these a lot too. Although these instructions by the Kadampa masters are just a few words, I found they really struck a chord in my heart. I am not saying that I am a great practitioner; in fact, I am no different from all of you. As I find this instruction very beneficial I am advising you to think about the meaning of this pith instruction of the Kadampa masters and integrate it into your life.

Now we have used up the time for this evening, so maybe that's enough. I am sorry if it sounded like me gossiping or telling you about myself. Maybe I have chatted so much that some of you with greater knowledge might have find it too noisy for your ears, but maybe others might have found it useful. Certainly, I find this chatting enjoyable. Whatever you do it's important you don't forget happiness: be happy to drink tea, happy to discuss, happy to sleep, happy to get up, happy to go home, happy to go back, happy when eating, happy with what you are doing. Don't forget happiness. 'I am happy, I am all right'. Thinking like this is very, very beneficial, and recognising happiness is good. Some people have too much happiness, but they don't recognise and don't understand it. This country is rich materially, but is it rich in terms of happiness for people? To me happiness is inside in the mind; I don't see money a s happiness.

*Transcript prepared by Mark Emerson
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Edited Version*

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Homework

June 19, 2018 teachings

1. Describe how a virtuous or non virtuous state of mind can benefit or harm us indirectly?

2. How can we define or understand virtue and non virtue?

3. List the ten virtuous actions and explain why they are called virtuous acts?

4. What is the correct way to practice Dharma?

Homework

June 19, 2018 teachings

1. Describe how a virtuous or non virtuous state of mind can benefit or harm us indirectly?

We should try to clearly understand the statement that a virtuous mind benefits us **indirectly** while a non-virtuous mind **indirectly** harms us. You see what directly benefits us is happiness, which is the result of virtuous mind, and what directly harms us is suffering which is the result of non-virtuous mind. Without understanding this, there is really no basis in our Dharma practice.

This also throws some light on future and past lives, and tells us that if we want happiness then we must create its cause beforehand, and if we do not want suffering then the cause of suffering must be abandoned beforehand. Understanding how we indirectly experience benefits from a virtuous mind, and harm from a non-virtuous mind well is very important. We will then know that any virtuous practices we do in this life, even they don't yield in this very life time, are not wasted, for we know they will yield a result in future lives. We need to take focus on and into account the result of virtues or non-virtues. We cannot anticipate happiness the moment we create virtue –in fact this won't happen.

2. How can we define or understand virtue and non virtue?

A virtue can be defined as that which brings about happiness. What this means is that a virtue has a potential or capacity to produce happiness. This does not mean that the moment we create virtue, we experience its result of happiness; nonetheless, the potential or capacity of the virtue is left in the mental continuum. Similarly, a non-virtue can be defined as that which brings about suffering. However, the experience of suffering doesn't coincide with the creation of the non-virtue; at the time of the creation of a non-virtue, a potential to ripe suffering is left in the mental continuum. This potential will gradually ripen its result upon meeting its conditions.

Here, we learn that if we desire happiness, which is the result of a virtue, then we must create virtues, and if we don't desire suffering which is the result of a non-virtue, we must abandon non-virtues. In this way we will develop a good knowledge of the practice of what to accept and what to reject based on the law of cause and effect. With such knowledge deeply ingrained within ourselves we will automatically engage in the practices to adopt virtue since we want happiness and practices that reject non-virtue since we don't want suffering.

3. List the ten virtuous actions and explain why they are called virtuous acts?

The kind Lord Buddha pointed out ten virtuous actions, which are to be accepted, and ten non-virtuous actions, which are to be rejected. This teaching is particularly relevant and suited to the mind of beginner practitioners.

The Buddha said that killing is an act of non-virtue. Why? It is because it brings suffering. Abandoning it is an act of virtue, which will bring happiness. I have raised this topic here because you are all studying the lam-rim where this topic relates to the person of small scope. Yet if we think extensively then we can see this topic encompasses the entire path. The Buddha advises us not to commit an act of killing because such action is non-virtuous and will bring great harm upon yourself and others. Since everyone cherishes their own life as being very very precious, committing an act of killing is a great sin or negative action. Of the ten virtuous actions, refraining from killing is the first virtuous action. To inspire his followers to protect the life of sentient beings and abandon acts of killing, the Buddha said, 'if you harm other sentient beings you are in fact harming me, if you benefit other sentient beings you are benefiting me'. Just thinking about this one statement of the Buddha, we can understand how precious the Buddha's words are.

As to the practice of adopting virtuous actions, there are ten virtuous actions of which the first three relate to bodily actions of refraining from killing, stealing and sexual misconduct. The benefits of adopting an act of refraining from killing other beings such as animals or even just of humans killing each other is just enormous. A person who commits an act of killing may not feel pain but the extent of his act of inflicting suffering upon the victim and all others related to them is unbelievable.

Just as life is the most precious thing that we possess, likewise our wealth is also very precious. Therefore, the Buddha advises us to refrain from stealing. Sexual misconduct also brings much pain and suffering to others and is one of the worst negative actions. That's why the Buddha advises his followers to forbid sexual misconduct; other religion traditions also forbid this and it can sometimes be against the law too.

All these ethical practices are a source of peace, happiness and freedom for the humankind. If we consider ourselves as followers of the Buddha, we must take his advice seriously and remind ourselves of them from time to time by thinking.

4. What is the correct way to practice Dharma?

As mentioned earlier, it's not enough to gain some knowledge of the Dharma. We have to reflect on that knowledge and try to gain a deeper understanding of it. For example, we hear a lot about the shortcomings of the self-cherishing mind and the benefit of the mind of cherishing others. We have to ask ourselves whether whatever understanding we have of any verse from a scripture which refers to the shortcomings of self-cherishing and benefits of cherishing others, has an effect on our own outlook and deeds in everyday life. You really have to personalise your spiritual understanding. Do you really believe that the self-cherishing mind has the many shortcomings that are described in the texts? We also hear a lot about the benefits of cherishing others, but again does that understanding lie in the depths of your heart? From your own experience you know that self-cherishing brings suffering while the

mind of cherishing others brings happiness. It's very important to relate whatever we learn to our practice.

First you must think about Dharma by relating it to your own self and your practice. Those of you who lead the Monday night introductory sessions would know how prior to your Dharma talk it is important that you feel good and at peace with your yourself, and have the right motivation— the reason for teaching is solely to benefit others. With such good preparation then as you begin the talk, the flavour of your talk will be unique. Without good preparation no matter how many words you spout from your mouth at the time of teaching, they will seem empty or have no feeling or real effect.

I tell those who give Dharma talks to others that teaching Dharma is also very beneficial to them too. So, I advise them that as part of their preparation, they should spend 1 to 2 hours to cultivating a virtuous state of mind, and a proper motivation, which is to think that your sole purpose in teaching Dharma, and sharing your knowledge of Dharma is solely to benefit others and cause the the Buddha's doctrine flourish. With a good preparation, then as you begin to teach, not only will you feel the whole experience is very positive but also your listeners will have an inspiring impression of you as well.

It is so important to reflect on whatever you know about Dharma over and over again and integrate it into your life. I have mentioned this to you numerous times, that when I was about 18 or 19 years old, one day I saw the text, *The Fragmented Collection of the Kadampa Masters Words (about 30 sections in the Lhasa street market)*. Luckily, I had some money, so I bought it. When I got to my room, I started to read it, which really moved me and brought me a deep sense of happiness. I was particularly moved by the Atisha's advice in that text which says,

The best friends are mindfulness and introspective awareness,

The best instruction is to observe your mind,

The best quality to have is altruism.

When I first saw these lines I felt so happy; They touched me deeply. I thought about them a lot and benefitted greatly and have taught about these here a lot too.

Although these instructions by Kadhampa masters are a few words, I found they really struck a chord in my heart. Well, I am not saying that I am a great practitioner; in fact I am no different from you all. As I find this instruction very beneficial I am advising you to think about the meaning of this pith instruction of the Kadhampa masters and integrate it into your life.

Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

26 June 2018

We will begin with the usual meditation; just ensure that you have cultivated the proper meditation. [*Tong-len meditation*]

Once again, try to reinforce your bodhicitta motivation by cultivating the genuine wish to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. It is for this purpose that we will listen to this profound teaching and determine to put it into practice.

How to train in calm abiding

Taking this as the basis how to train in the nine mental states (cont.)

We will continue with the teaching on calm abiding. We were talking about the development of calm abiding in terms of the nine mental abidings. Of the nine, we finished the first five, and now we are up to the sixth.

PACIFYING

Earlier, we covered the faults of meditation such as mental sinking and excitement in detail. Regarding the **sixth mental abiding**, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* says we must be very cautious and vigilant about the danger of subtle excitement. The reason we face the danger of subtle excitement here is related to our effort in combating sinking and excitement in the preceding states of mental abiding. For example, our effort in the fourth mental abiding results in our mind being too withdrawn inwards, so in the fifth mental abiding, we try to uplift the mind to overcome that. However, our effort of over-uptlifting of the mind results in the sixth mental abiding, where we face the danger of subtle mental excitement.

In fact, in the fifth mental abiding, there is very good mental stability, and one has a very stable concentration. However, while we remain in that very stable state of concentration, we can experience too much withdrawal of attention, and this causes mental sinking to arise. To overcome or combat this mental sinking, as we mentioned in an earlier teaching, we need to apply the technique of reflecting on the benefits or qualities of meditative concentration. The purpose of doing this is to uplift the mind in order to overcome the depressed or overly withdrawn mind that leads to sinking. However, if the mind is uplifted too much, the fault of excitement, particularly **subtle excitement**, arises in this sixth mental abiding. As mentioned in the commentary text, the way to get rid of this subtle mental excitement is to strengthen the force of alertness or introspection. By reapplying introspection forcefully, we are able to get rid of subtle excitement.

As the text says, compared with the fifth mental abiding, in this sixth mental abiding there is less danger of subtle mental sinking. This is the difference between the fifth

and the sixth mental abidings – we are unlikely to confront the fault of mental sinking in this sixth stage.

The text continues by saying that, of the six powers, the fifth and the sixth mental abidings are achieved mainly by the **power of introspection**. The text also notes that another feature of this sixth mental abiding is that during it we fully accomplish the power of alertness or introspection.

COMPLETE PACIFICATION

The text notes that in the **seventh mental abiding**, because we have fully developed the power of mindfulness and introspection, it is unlikely that mental sinking or excitement will arise. Still, as a preventative measure in this stage, we need to reinforce or apply the **power of perseverance** so that we can recognise any subtle influence of sinking or excitement.

In other words, in the seventh mental abiding, we make an effort to **prevent subtle sinking and excitement**. Hence, the main difference between the sixth and the seventh mental abidings is the danger of falling under the influence of subtle sinking and excitement. In other words, in the seventh mental abiding, there is no danger of confronting subtle sinking and excitement. However, by applying the power of perseverance, we still need to make an effort to prevent them from arising.

The text makes it clear that in this seventh stage of mental abiding, the meditator's confidence, in terms of overcoming sinking and excitement, is so great that sinking and excitement cannot interrupt the meditation. The meditator did not have the same level of confidence and strength in the preceding stages.

During the seventh stage, not only is there no danger of subtle sinking and excitement arising, but even if one or the other did arise, it won't interrupt meditation and is not of any concern for the meditator. This is because at that stage the meditator is fully confident of easily overcoming subtle sinking and excitement through the power of perseverance.

The text also talks about the **four mental attentions**¹. In terms of those four mental attentions, from the third to the seventh stages of mental abiding – five stages in all – though the level of concentration is very good, it is still possible that one's concentration could be interrupted by sinking or excitement. Therefore, the mental attention during these five stages of mental abiding is called **interrupted mental attention**.

SINGLE-POINTEDNESS

The text then goes on to the **eighth stage of mental abiding**. In this eighth stage, the meditator only needs to exert a little effort and mindfulness when he or she first commences the meditation. But once the meditation has commenced, the meditator can remain in concentration without confronting even the subtle forms of sinking and excitement. They can remain in this almost perfect state of concentration for as long as they wish, for instance, an hour. So in the eighth stage, as the text clearly says, when you first begin the meditation, there is some need for effort and application of mindfulness at the start, but

¹ Referred to as 'types of mental process' in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*.

once it is started, the meditation flows perfectly and one is able to remain for a long time in that state.

In terms of the four mental attentions, the eighth mental abiding involves **uninterrupted mental attention**.

In explaining the progress of the stages of meditation, the commentary uses the analogy of the force required to overpower an enemy. You can classify the enemy as initially being in a very strong position, then progressively declining in strength and becoming weak, and finally completely losing their power or strength and becoming very weak. Like this, we can recognise how, with each stage of mental abiding, the meditator's skill in applying the remedy increases, until throughout the sixth, seventh and eighth stages, there is a progressive decline of the fault of sinking and excitement. Then, at the eighth level, as we just found out, the meditator only requires a little bit of effort and mindfulness to begin the meditation; after that, he or she does not require any effort at all. So during the actual meditation, it is not possible for sinking or excitement to interrupt the meditation. That is why the mental attention during this stage is called an uninterrupted attention.

In terms of the six powers, the text says that the seventh and eighth mental abidings are achieved mainly by the **power of perseverance**.

PLACEMENT WITH EQUANIMITY

The commentary notes that in the **ninth state of mental abiding**, there is no need to depend upon effort. This is because in the preceding eighth stage, the meditator has gained complete familiarity with the power of perseverance. Because of that, the meditator can now remain in concentration effortlessly and spontaneously. In fact, it is said that when one has reached this stage of concentration, not only does it not require any effort, but while remaining in the perfect state of single-pointed concentration, the meditator can also engage in other activities, for example, walking or sitting or some other Dharma practice, such as making offerings or doing prostrations.

The text says that this concentration is so advanced that you can spontaneously and effortlessly remain in the state of concentration, in the same way that someone who has memorised a certain prayer – e.g. *The Twenty-One Tara Praises* – can recite it without effort while doing other activities. The text also says that this stage of single-pointed concentration is not the actual calm abiding but is a similitude of it within the desire realm.

In terms of the six powers, this ninth mental abiding is achieved by the **power of complete familiarity**.

SUMMARY OF THE NINE STAGES

The text goes on to summarise the nine stages of mental abiding. It says that in the first stage of mental abiding, meditators are able to recognise conceptual or disturbing thoughts. In the second stage, the experience is as if the thoughts are taking a rest. In third stage, the experience is as if the thoughts are showing signs of tiredness.

The text then makes comparisons between the nine stages. It says that the main difference between the first and second stages is the shorter or longer *duration of the abiding of the mind*. Whereas the main difference between

the second and third stages is the shorter or longer *duration of distraction*. In other words, in the second stage of mental abiding, the duration of mental stability is shorter compared to the third stage as there is more distraction in the former. The third stage is called patch-like abiding, a term that indicates an ability to patch up your abiding if any interruption occurs. So the duration of mental abiding is longer in the third stage than in the second.

The text then says that the difference between the third and fourth mental stage is whether or not one loses the object of meditation: in the fourth stage, it is not possible to lose the object. The difference between the fourth and fifth stages is whether or not the gross or coarse form of mental sinking arises.

The difference between the fifth and the sixth stages relates to whether or not one needs to attend to the arising of subtle mental sinking. What we are going through here, of course, won't make any sense unless you have understood our earlier discussion about sinking and excitement, and have a good understanding and recognition of the two faults of sinking and excitement. Another difference between the fifth and sixth stages is the arising of the subtle form of excitement. As it says here, subtle excitement arises less in the sixth stage than in the fifth.

The difference between the sixth and seventh stages is whether or not there is an arising of subtle sinking and excitement. And the difference between the seventh and eighth stages is whether or not there is any interruption of mental sinking and excitement at all. The difference between the eighth and the ninth is whether or not one needs to apply any perseverance or effort.

There is also mention of what happens in the seventh stage, where there is no concern about being overpowered or falling under the influence of subtle sinking and excitement. The example given is that, if you are battling an enemy whose force or strength has already been weakened, then the next time you meet that enemy, you can defeat and crush it very easily; all you need is to confront it at the beginning.

When you know that the enemy's power or force is greatly weakened, to the point that they cannot come back to attack you, there is nothing for you to fear or worry about. All you need to do is keep an eye on it! You may even use that moment for your own forces to have a merry time feasting, etc. Similarly, in calm-abiding meditation practice, the main enemy or fault is sinking and excitement. Initially, it has the upper hand, so we have to put in a great deal of effort and develop a strategy for defeating the enemy, but later on, as it weakens, we don't need to make much effort at all.

Review

So, we have covered how to achieve calm abiding by applying the eight antidotes to the five faults and how, as the text has explained, these nine stages of mental abiding are achieved by **the six powers**. The first stage of mental abiding is achieved by 1) the power of listening. If you refer to the text, it says that the second stage of mental abiding is achieved by 2) the power of thinking and the third and fourth by 3) the power of mindfulness.

The fifth and sixth stages are achieved by 4) the power of introspection and the seventh and eighth, by 5) the power of perseverance. The last, or ninth stage, is achieved by 6) the power of complete familiarity.

Then the text summarises how the nine stages can be classified in terms of **the four mental attentions**. The first two stages involve a 1) forcible mental attention. The five mental stages from the second mental abiding up to the seventh involve the application of 2) interrupted mental attention. The eighth abiding involves 3) uninterrupted attention with effort. The ninth stage involves 4) attention that is effortless and spontaneous.

The commentary says that during the first two stages of mental abiding, the forces of sinking and excitement are intense, while the force of concentration is weak. Therefore, when we talk about the difference between the first and second stages, the text says it is not even worth mentioning the level or degree of interruption by sinking and excitement because the force of interruption is so great. What the text does mention is the need to strengthen mindfulness and introspection.

During the five stages of mental abiding from the third to the seventh, while there is a need to strengthen the application of mindfulness and introspection, there is also an increase in the level of mental concentration. So while the level of concentration is not continuous but interrupted, it does increase as one progresses through these five stages. Because of this, of the four mental attentions, interrupted attention applies here. With the eighth mental abiding, as we discussed earlier, the only time the meditator needs to apply a bit of effort is to commence the meditation. Otherwise, once it has commenced, there is no interruption. Therefore, the attention is uninterrupted, but with a bit of effort initially. Finally, at the ninth stage of mental abiding, the meditation becomes effortless and spontaneous.

We will stop here tonight. Next week, we will continue with how the actual calm abiding is achieved from this point.

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Homework

June 26th, 2018 teachings

1. Describe the sixth mental abiding and explain how it is different to the fifth mental abiding?

2. What are the features of the seventh mental abiding and which mental powers are utilised in this stage?

3. Describe the progress to the eighth stage of mental abiding. Which mental attention and which of the six powers is utilised in this stage?

4. Describe the ninth stage of Placement with complete equanimity and the powers utilised in this stage.

5. Summarise the nine stages of mental abidings, the six powers and the four mental attentions.

Homework

June 26th, 2018 teachings

1. Describe the sixth mental abiding and explain how it is different to the fifth mental abiding?

Regarding the **sixth mental abiding**, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* says we must be very cautious and vigilant about the danger of subtle excitement. The reason we face the danger of subtle excitement here is related to our effort in combating sinking and excitement in the preceding states of mental abiding. For example, our effort in the fourth mental abiding results in our mind being too withdrawn inwards, so in the fifth mental abiding, we try to uplift the mind to overcome that. However, our effort of over-uplifting of the mind results in the sixth mental abiding, where we face the danger of subtle mental excitement.

In fact, in the fifth mental abiding, there is very good mental stability, and one has a very stable concentration. However, while we remain in that very stable state of concentration, we can experience too much withdrawal of attention, and this causes mental sinking to arise. To overcome or combat this mental sinking, as we mentioned in an earlier teaching, we need to apply the technique of reflecting on the benefits or qualities of meditative concentration. The purpose of doing this is to uplift the mind in order to overcome the depressed or too-withdrawn mind that brings in sinking. However, if the mind is uplifted too much, the fault of excitement, particularly **subtle excitement**, arises in this sixth mental abiding.

As mentioned in the commentary text, the way to get rid of this subtle mental excitement is to strengthen the force of alertness or introspection. By reapplying introspection forcefully, we are able to get rid of subtle excitement. As the text says, compared with the fifth mental abiding, in this sixth mental abiding there is less danger of subtle mental sinking. Therefore, this is the difference between the fifth and the sixth mental abidings – we are unlikely to confront the fault of mental sinking in this sixth stage.

2. What are the features of the seventh mental abiding and which mental powers are utilised in this stage?

The text notes that in the **seventh mental abiding**, because we have fully developed the power of mindfulness and introspection, it is unlikely that mental sinking or excitement will arise within us. Still, as a preventative measure in this stage, we will need to reinforce or apply **the power of perseverance** so that we can recognise if there is any subtle influence of sinking or excitement.

In other words, in the seventh mental abiding, we make an effort to **prevent subtle sinking and excitement**. Hence, the main difference between the sixth and the seventh mental abidings is the danger of falling under the influence of subtle sinking and excitement. This is to say that in the seventh mental abiding, there is no danger of confronting subtle sinking and excitement. However, by applying the power of perseverance, we still need to make an effort to prevent them from arising.

The text makes it clear that in this seventh stage of mental abiding, the meditator's confidence, in terms of overcoming sinking and excitement, is so great that sinking and excitement cannot interrupt the meditation. The meditator did not have the same level of confidence and strength in the preceding stages.

During the seventh stage, not only is there no danger of subtle sinking and excitement arising, but even if one or the other did arise, it won't interrupt meditation and is not of any concern for the meditator. This is because at that stage the meditator is fully confident of easily overcoming subtle sinking and excitement through the power of this perseverance.

3. Describe the progress to the eighth stage of mental abiding. Which mental attention and which of the six powers is utilised in this stage?

In the eighth stage, the meditator only needs to exert a little effort and mindfulness when he or she first commences the meditation. But once the meditation has commenced, the meditator can remain in concentration without confronting even the subtle forms of sinking and excitement. They can remain in this almost perfect state of concentration for as long as they wish, for instance an hour. So in the eighth stage, as the text clearly says, when you first begin the meditation, there is some need for effort and application of mindfulness at the start, but once it is started, the meditation flows perfectly and one is able to remain for a long time in that state. In terms of the four mental attentions, the eighth mental abiding involves **uninterrupted mental attention**.

In explaining the progress of the stages of meditation, the commentary uses the analogy of the force required to overpower an enemy. You can classify the enemy as initially being in a very strong position, then progressively declining in strength and becoming weak, and finally completely losing their power or strength and becoming very weak. Like this, we can recognise how, with each stage of mental abiding, the meditator's skill in applying the remedy increases, until throughout the sixth, seventh and eighth stages, there is a progressive decline of the fault of sinking and excitement. Then, at the eighth level, as we just found out, the meditator only requires a little bit of effort and mindfulness to begin the meditation; after that, he or she does not require any effort at all. So during the actual meditation, it is not possible for sinking or excitement to interrupt the meditation. That is why the mental attention during this stage is called an uninterrupted attention.

In terms of the six powers, the text says that the seventh and eighth mental abidings are achieved mainly by the **power of perseverance**.

4. Describe the ninth stage of Placement with complete equanimity and the powers utilised in this stage.

The commentary notes that in the ninth state of mental abiding, there is no need to depend upon effort. This is because in the preceding eighth stage, the meditator has gained complete familiarity with the power of perseverance. Because of that, the meditator can now remain in concentration effortlessly and spontaneously. In fact, it is said that when one has reached this stage of concentration, not only does it not require any effort, but while remaining in the perfect state of single-pointed concentration, the meditator can also engage in other activities, for example, walking or sitting or some other Dharma practice, such as making offerings or doing prostrations.

The text says that this concentration is so advanced that you can spontaneously and effortlessly remain in the state of concentration just like someone who has memorised a certain prayer, e.g. *The Twenty-One Tara Praises* can recite it without effort and at the same time can do other activities. The text also says that this stage of single-pointed concentration is not the actual calm abiding but is a similitude of it within the desire realm.

In terms of the six powers, this ninth mental abiding is achieved by the **power of complete familiarity**.

5. Summarise the nine stages of mental abidings, the six powers and the four mental attentions.

These nine stages of mental abiding are achieved by **the six powers**. The first stage of mental abiding is achieved by 1) the power of listening. If you refer to the text, it says that the second stage of mental abiding is achieved by 2) the power of thinking and the third and fourth by 3) the power of mindfulness. The fifth and sixth stages are achieved by 4) the power of introspection and the seventh and eighth, by 5) the power of perseverance. The last, or ninth stage, is achieved by 6) the power of complete familiarity.

Then the text summarises how the nine stages can be classified in terms of **the four mental attentions**. The first two stages involve a 1) forcible mental attention. The five mental stages from the second mental abiding up to the seventh involve the application of 2) interrupted mental attention. The eighth abiding involves 3) uninterrupted attention with effort. The ninth stage involves 4) attention that is effortless and spontaneous.

The commentary says that during the first two stages of mental abiding, the forces of sinking and excitement are intense, while the force of concentration is weak. Therefore, when we talk about the difference between the first and second stages, the text says it is not even worth mentioning the level or degree of interruption by sinking and excitement because the force of interruption is so great. What the text does mention is the need to strengthen mindfulness and introspection.

During the five stages of mental abiding from the third to the seventh, while there is a need to strengthen the application of mindfulness and introspection, there is also an increase in the level of mental concentration. So while the level of concentration is not continuous but interrupted, it does increase as one progresses through these five

stages. Because of this, of the four mental attentions, interrupted attention applies here. With the eighth mental abiding, as we discussed earlier, the only time the meditator needs to apply a bit of effort is to commence the meditation. Otherwise, once it is commenced, there is no interruption. Therefore, the attention is uninterrupted, but with a bit of effort initially. Finally, at the ninth stage of mental abiding, the meditation becomes effortless and spontaneous.