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# Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

13 February 2018

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Based on the refuge and bodhicitta prayer that we have just generated, we can now engage in our regular meditation practice.

If whatever virtuous activity we may wish to engage in is preceded by taking refuge in the Three Jewels, and then without any self-interest dedicated wholeheartedly to the welfare of all sentient beings, then that virtuous activity will definitely bring great results.

The Mahayana refuge consists of taking refuge in the Three Jewels out of the motivation of wishing all sentient beings to be free from all the sufferings of the lower realms in particular, and cyclic existence in general. With that intention, we go for refuge to the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. When the Buddha is recognised as a valid and supreme teacher, then the Dharma will naturally be accepted as a flawless method leading to the ultimate goal of enlightenment. The third jewel is the Sangha Jewel – those who have gained the realisations on the path, and are thus the supreme assembly who assist us to achieve those goals.

The focus of the Mahayana refuge is extremely expansive. Our wish for happiness and to avoid suffering is used as a basis for recognising that all other living beings equally do not wish to experience any suffering and wish to achieve the ultimate state of happiness. So, the scope of the Mahayana refuge is the wellbeing of all sentient beings. The aim is also extremely expansive as it is the ultimate state of enlightenment, which is a state that is free from all faults, and which has acquired all possible qualities. Because it consists of these two elements, it is regarded as a Mahayana or Great Vehicle practice.

We need to recognise that this altruistic mind of bodhicitta does not come about spontaneously. Rather it depends on many causes and conditions, and the immediately preceding cause is the superior intention of taking personal responsibility for freeing all beings from suffering, and leading them to the ultimate state of happiness.

One of the methods to cultivate this superior intention is the practice of giving and taking based on equalising and exchanging self with others. This practice utilises the mind of compassion in the practice of taking, and the mind of love in the practice of giving.

Before we can engage in the actual practice of giving and taking we need to train our minds. First, we must generate the wish to benefit others, and this is dependent on having a genuine love and compassion for others.

Without that genuine sense of love and compassion, the wish to truly benefit others cannot possibly arise.

Cultivating this mind of love and compassion requires us to really contemplate the plight of sentient beings. Although they wish for happiness they are deprived of it, and although they do not wish to experience any suffering, they constantly encounter various sufferings. By contemplating this again and again, one reaches the point of really not being able to bear to see other sentient beings being deprived of happiness and encountering suffering. Then the wish to relieve them of their suffering and place them into the state of happiness will begin to develop quite spontaneously.

Training in the *tong-len* practice is dependent on cultivating that thought. We begin to first familiarise our minds with it by contemplating it with reasoning, and by thinking about it again and again. Then we can begin to feel those sentiments arising. When we reach that stage of really wishing to relieve the sufferings of other sentient beings, and place them in a state of happiness, then we can comfortably give our virtues to other sentient beings.

There are various visualisations we can do. For example, we can imagine giving all our virtues, which transform into the conditions that can bring about every happiness for all sentient beings that then pervades their minds. Then we can contemplate relieving all sentient beings of their suffering by taking all their sufferings upon ourselves. In this way, we train our minds to actually incorporate a true practice of giving and taking.

If we can make a genuine effort to engage in this practice as a form of meditation, we will soon see the results. The obvious benefit is the positive transformation in our attitudes. We have all probably had occasions of feeling glad when we see a particular person suffering, and feeling uncomfortable when they're experiencing happiness.

If we were to maintain such a negative attitude, then the end result is that it will actually make us feel constantly unsettled, restless and unhappy, and we will end up feeling empty inside. Harboring such an attitude only brings lack of joy. In contrast, by sincerely engaging in the *tong-len* practice, the earlier negative attitude will start to transform into wanting others to be free from suffering, and be endowed with happiness. When that occurs, then we will start to experience a true sense of happiness and joy.

As we become more and more familiar with cultivating love and compassion, and it becomes more and more stable, then it will definitely counteract negative attitudes such as jealousy, competitiveness, anger and so forth, which only cause us turmoil and unhappiness. As these states of mind begin to gradually decrease, we will be endowed with a happier and a more peaceful state of mind.

Then, as a consequence of having a genuinely happier and more peaceful mind, we will enjoy a greater strength of mind. The Tibetan term for this, *sems-shugs*, has the connotation of mental resilience, encompassing courage,

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self esteem, and the determination to achieve what one wishes to achieve.

That will in turn have a positive effect on our physical body: the bodily fluids of blood and so forth will flow well within our own body, and the four elements will be harmonised. This will rejuvenate and strengthen the vital physical energy within us, naturally bringing about good physical health.

Securing the combination of positive mental energy and mental health, and good physical health naturally leads to a healthy long life. Indeed, it has been medically proven that a sound body and mind definitely contribute to having a healthy and good long life.

Since many of you have already been practising the *tong-len* meditation for a long time, I'm sure you will have had some very positive experiences thus far. With this understanding, we can now engage in the giving and taking practice.

[*tong-len meditation*]

This is our first Tuesday evening study group class for the year, and we can rejoice in this incredible opportunity to study and practise, and as mentioned earlier, to cultivate love and compassion.

A practical way of thinking about the value of this on a personal level is to realise that we are responsible for establishing our own happiness, and that we have to take the initiative to remove our suffering. Seeing that we have both the opportunity and the ability to do that will encourage us to take that initiative.

We can establish ourselves in happiness and remove unwanted suffering through training our minds in establishing positive ways of looking at things, positive attitudes and so forth. In short, a lot of our happiness and suffering is very much dependent on the state of our own mind. We all strive to be happy and wish to remove suffering, and that's what keeps us so busy in life. If we ask ourselves why are we so busy we will find that it is ultimately because we wish to be happy and do not wish to experience suffering.

However, on a worldly level, the main aim seems to be achieving some sort of temporary physical happiness, and removing physical suffering. Do we achieve those goals? Yes, we do. Our endeavours are usually successful to a certain degree. On a physical level, we do acquire a certain amount of physical happiness and remove physical suffering. Hunger and thirst for example, and many other similar forms of suffering are definitely alleviated through our physical efforts.

Yet while we have acquired the conditions for our physical wellbeing and happiness, what seems to be really difficult to establish are the conditions for mental happiness and wellbeing. Despite all our efforts we still seem to be deprived of genuine mental happiness and continue to experience misery.

If we really contemplate this, it will dawn on us that it is very difficult to achieve inner happiness and alleviate mental suffering by relying on external means. For

example, when we have physical ailments we can utilise our money, or whatever that we have acquired, to go and see a doctor and get the appropriate treatment. However, when we start experiencing mental agony, then we find that it's very difficult to find any external means to alleviate that.

So we have to look into the main causes for our mental agony. If we were to really scrutinise our minds looking for the immediate causes, we will definitely identify the disturbing discursive thoughts that are the source of our problem. The Tibetan word *nam-rtog*, sometimes translated as superstitious mind, basically encompasses all disturbing and discursive concepts that cast a negative light on our ways of thinking and attitudes. According to the teachings there are of course more subtle causes that we can identify, but the main contributing factor for a lot of our mental agony is these disturbing discursive conceptual thoughts.

Just as a lot of mental turmoil and agony is caused by the negative attitudes that are based on these disturbing ways of thinking, so too adopting a positive way of thinking can alleviate a lot of unwanted mental agony.

We have all had the experience of feeling the negative emotion of anger. Do we feel happy when we are angry? Is our mind peaceful? If we really look within and ask ourselves those questions, the answer is always no, we didn't feel happy at all. The greater the anger we feel, the more our mind is disturbed and agitated.

When anger escalates it can even be seen on a physical level. The face of a very angry person can be quite disfigured: they look quite ferocious and their face becomes red. Then they are likely to do anything in the immediate moment, even using sticks or stones and the like to harm someone in the vicinity. These are all consequences of the state of the mind of anger.

When we see these negative consequences arising from anger in others, then that is when we need to feel compassion, because of the agony and the suffering that such an individual is going through.

When we experience anger, the more intense the anger, the more unpleasant or even repulsive the object of our anger will appear to us. The greater the anger the greater the extent of seeing the object as being unpleasant and repulsive. If this intense anger is not addressed and measures to lessen that anger are not applied then there will be no opportunity for real happiness.

You can't address, and overcome, or even lessen that anger by harming the object of that anger. Getting rid of the external object of the anger, or attacking it with stones or sticks and so forth, will do nothing to help to lessen that anger.

Through contemplating the disadvantages and negative consequences of anger we see how it brings such great harm to others, as well as mental trauma to ourselves. We see how physically attacking the object of that anger does nothing to alleviate the anger. So, the question

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arises: what methods can we use to alleviate this illness of anger?

This is where the practice of patience comes in. Here we purposely and intentionally cultivate a mind that counteracts that mind of anger, which is basically a mind of impatience. Anger occurs because we are not able to tolerate something that is caused by the object, such as inappropriate words, or gestures, or facial expressions. Because we are not able to tolerate that, we become impatient. Then the wish to act upon that impatience and to retaliate develops. It's when we act on that wish and actually retaliate that the negative consequences occur.

Practising patience means intentionally and purposely counteracting that reaction of irritation by thinking how these inappropriate gestures, words, and so forth are just mere words. Why should we take it personally? Why should we allow them to affect us? By thinking in this way, and not allowing those words or facial expressions to actually disturb your mind, you are implementing the practice of patience. Through this patience you will be able to bear those insults or whatever inappropriate gestures the other is making without anger. Then the mind of not being able to tolerate things and the wish to retaliate does not arise. That is how to practise patience as a way of counteracting anger.

The next remedy for anger is of course the practice of love. When we can counteract anger by really embracing the other out of love, then the more we feel love for the other, the more we can then definitely counteract the mind of anger within ourselves.

So, the real remedy to overcome the illness of anger that causes us so much pain and agony is implementing the practice of patience and generating love. These are the optimum ways to counteract anger.

Meditating on love definitely brings about personal benefit as well as benefitting others. It has a positive effect that permeates our surroundings as well as ourselves. When we take the initiative to practise cultivating love within ourselves then that is, in turn, implementing a real practice of the Dharma. If we are cultivating love we can safely say that we are practising the Dharma.

As this is the first session of the year we will not go into the material of the text right away. Rather, we can reflect upon some of these points that I've shared with you. I might have been rambling along a bit, but what I have shared with you are points that I regularly contemplate and think about myself. My mind has really benefitted from really taking this to heart, and that's why I'm compelled to share these points with you regularly. Since I've seen you paying good attention I thank you for listening.

Of course, these points that I share with you are all a part of training our minds. Adopting these positive qualities of love and compassion definitely has a positive effect. We can safely assume that with our ordinary minds we have a lot of faults, however at the same time we carry

the potential to develop those positive qualities within ourselves.

As we really pay attention and cultivate positive states of mind such as love and compassion, we will definitely begin to see positive effects taking place, such as feeling more at ease, having a more joyful mind, and being able to see others in a positive light. Others will also start to have a positive reaction to us and our interactions will be positive ones. That in turn further contributes to our own happiness. In this way we can definitely see the positive effects of this practice.

Before we end the session for this evening let us recite *The King of Prayers*, and dedicate it to Julie who passed away this morning. As some of you may know, she was not only a member of Tara Institute, but a very kind-hearted person, who was genuinely interested in the practice of Dharma.

We dedicate our own goodness combined with our prayers for her to have a good rebirth with all the conditions intact. She had faith in the Dharma and practised it in this life, so we dedicate our practice for her to have those conditions continuously to further her practice and develop in the Dharma in her future lives, with all the conditions intact. Of course, *The King of Prayers* also has very detailed dedications towards that end. So, we can think along those lines.

Last Thursday a Medicine Buddha puja was conducted on her behalf and I've heard that she actually had a very positive reaction after the puja was done for her. When she heard about it, it brought great joy to her.

I heard that before that puja she was not very responsive, but shortly after the puja she was able to make comments and seemed very joyful. It seems like it really helped her mind. So Julie benefitted from our gathering here and praying for her. We can use the same logic and reasoning to understand that even when she has departed from her physical body, doing prayers and dedicating them to her will definitely continue to benefit her mind.

Indeed, when like-minded people with a good intention gather together and do prayers on behalf of someone, it definitely seems to have very, very positive effects. When you are doing prayers for someone you have a particular connection with, then that makes the prayers that you dedicate to them even more powerful.

It would be good for Tara Institute to offer flowers or whatever is traditional as an act of condolence for her surviving husband and children.

[Recitation of *King of Prayers*]

Finally, we will recite the Tara Praises, and dedicate them to the success of the unfurling and exhibition of the Twenty-one Taras thangka on White Night on Saturday 17 February. May all the preparations for it go smoothly; may it serve its purpose of bringing positive imprints and great happiness and joy to everyone who comes and sees it. That can be our dedication.

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*Tara Institute 'Lamp for The Path To Enlightenment' Study Group 2018*

*Homework*

**Block: 1**

**Week: 1 (13 February 2018)**

**1. How do we train in the Tong Len practice?**

**2. What are the main causes for our mental turmoil?**

**3. How does anger occur and how do we counteract it?**

Homework

ANSWERS

Block: 1

Week: 1 (13 February 2018)

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**1. How do we train in the Tong Len practice?**

Before we can engage in the actual practice of giving and taking we need to train our minds. First, we must generate the wish to benefit others, and this is dependent on having a genuine love and compassion for others. Without that genuine sense of love and compassion, the wish to truly benefit others cannot possibly arise.

Cultivating this mind of love and compassion requires us to really contemplate the plight of sentient beings. Although they wish for happiness they are deprived of it, and although they do not wish to experience any suffering, they constantly encounter various sufferings. By contemplating this again and again, one reaches the point of really not being able to bear to see other sentient beings being deprived of happiness and encountering suffering. Then the wish to relieve them of their suffering and place them into the state of happiness, will begin to develop quite spontaneously.

Training in the *tong-len* practice is dependent on cultivating that thought. We begin to first familiarise our minds with it by contemplating it with reasoning, and by thinking about it again and again. Then we can begin to feel those sentiments arising. When we reach that stage of really wishing to relieve the sufferings of other sentient beings, and endow them in a state of happiness, then we can comfortably give our virtues to other sentient beings.

There are various visualisations we can do. For example, we can imagine giving all our virtues, which transform into the conditions that can bring about every happiness for all sentient beings that pervades their minds. Then we can contemplate relieving all sentient beings of their suffering by taking all their sufferings upon ourselves. In this way, we train our minds to actually incorporate a true practice of giving and taking.

If we can make a genuine effort to engage in this practice as a form of meditation, we will soon see the results. The obvious benefit is the positive transformation in our attitudes. We have all probably had occasions of feeling glad when we see a particular person suffering, and feeling uncomfortable when they're experiencing happiness.

**2. What are the main causes for our mental turmoil?**

So we have to look into the main causes for our mental agony. If we were to really scrutinise our minds looking for the immediate causes, we will definitely identify the disturbing discursive thoughts that are the source of our problem. The Tibetan word *rnam-rtog*, sometimes translated as superstitious mind, basically encompasses all disturbing and discursive concepts that cast a negative light on our ways of thinking and attitudes. According to the teachings there are of course more subtle causes that we can identify, but the main contributing factor for a lot of our mental agony is these disturbing discursive conceptual thoughts.

Just as a lot of mental turmoil and agony is caused by the negative attitudes that are based on these disturbing ways of thinking, so too adopting a positive way of thinking can alleviate a lot of unwanted mental agony.

**3. How does anger occur and how do we counteract it?**

This is where the practice of patience comes in. Here we purposely and intentionally cultivate a mind that counteracts that mind of anger, which is basically a mind of impatience. Anger occurs because

we are not able to tolerate something that is caused by the object, such as inappropriate words, or gestures, or facial expressions. Because we are not able to tolerate that, we become impatient. Then the wish to act upon that impatience and to retaliate develops. It's when we act on that wish and actually retaliate that the negative consequences occur.

Practising patience means intentionally and purposely counteracting that reaction of irritation by thinking how these inappropriate gestures, words, and so forth are just mere words. Why should we take it personally? Why should we allow them to affect us? By thinking in this way, and not allowing those words or facial expressions to actually disturb your mind, you are implementing the practice of patience. Through this patience you will be able to bear those insults or whatever inappropriate gestures the other is making without anger. Then the mind of not being able to tolerate things and the wish to retaliate does not arise. That is how to practise patience as a way of counteracting anger.

The next remedy for anger is of course the practice of love. When we can counteract anger by really embracing the other out of love, then the more we feel love for the other the more we can then definitely counteract the mind of anger within ourselves.

So, the real remedy to overcome the illness of anger that causes us so much pain and agony is implementing the practice of patience and generating love. These are the optimum ways to counteract anger.

Meditating on love definitely brings about personal benefit as well as benefitting others. It has a positive effect that permeates our surroundings as well as ourselves. When we take the initiative to practise cultivating love within ourselves then that is, in turn, implementing a real practice of the Dharma. If we are cultivating love we can safely say that we are practising the Dharma.

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

20 February 2018

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As usual, let us engage in our meditation practice, based on the motivation generated with the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer* that we recited earlier. Indeed, every practice we do is preceded by reciting the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*; this serves as a reminder to generate actual refuge in the pure object of refuge and generate the bodhicitta mind to the best of one's ability. This will ensure that one's practice becomes a Mahayana practice. Therefore, we need to ensure that whatever practice or virtuous activity we engage in is preceded with this altruistic motivation.

The significance of reciting the refuge prayer - which also encompasses the bodhicitta attitude - is a way to remind ourselves that we are Buddhists. If you do not yet consider yourself a Buddhist, then that is another matter. However, for those of us who are Buddhists, reciting the *Refuge Prayer* whilst taking refuge in Buddha, Dharma and Sangha becomes a means to remind yourself that 'I am a Buddhist'. The criteria of being Buddhist can be condensed into two main factors: abiding with a particular view and particular conduct - the view is of selflessness and the conduct is non-harmfulness. Bringing this to mind really encompasses what it means to be a practising Buddhist who takes refuge in the Three Jewels.

The significance of generating the altruistic mind of enlightenment means that whatever practice of virtue you engage in, you are reminded to make sure that it is not tainted with self-interest, but rather that it is dedicated wholeheartedly to the benefit of other sentient beings. As a way to benefit other sentient beings, to alleviate their suffering and lead them to ultimate happiness, you need to achieve enlightenment. Thus, the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta inspires one to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. That is the sole purpose of engaging in the practice, which will definitely make it most purposeful and meaningful.

As I emphasise regularly, the significance of this motivation is that it encompasses the whole path to enlightenment. When you take refuge wholeheartedly, that in itself can encompass the whole path. All of us are familiar with the lam-rim, or graduated path to enlightenment, so you can understand how the topic of refuge encompasses the entire path to enlightenment.

When thinking about the meaning of being a buddha, we bring to mind that a buddha is not a being that spontaneously materialises without depending on causes and conditions. Rather a buddha is dependent on particular causes and conditions, and bringing that to mind already sets the foundation for the path.

One way of understanding the causes and conditions that bring about the embodiment of a buddha, who is a supreme enlightened being, is that it is obtained by actualising the five paths and the ten grounds. That serves as the means to achieve buddhahood.

You can also think along the lines of how buddhahood is dependent on method and wisdom. The method is the generation of bodhicitta and the wisdom is the realisation of emptiness. On the basis of the two truths and with the aid of the two accumulations of method and wisdom, the result is to obtain the two bodies of a buddha. So the state of buddhahood is the result of engaging in these profound practices.

It may seem that I am repeating what I have already presented many times before, but for someone who is keen to put this all into practice, there is no fault in hearing these points again. In fact, repetition is a constant reminder that we need to be thinking about these points again and again. For those who are interested in practice this would not be seen as redundant or mere repetition, and for those not interested in practice then perhaps it might hurt your ears.

This also reminds us of what it means to be a Buddhist. As most of you are aware, the advice of the precept to be kept after taking refuge, particularly going for refuge in the Dharma means, at the very minimum, refraining from harming other sentient beings. Think about these points again and again to remember that as a Buddhist your practice is to refrain from harming other sentient beings. The Buddha has presented certain harms that one should refrain from, such as taking the life of other beings and so forth. The more we think about this, the more it will reinforce our commitment to lessen the intention to harm other sentient beings. This will be the benefit of putting the advice into practice.

If you consider yourself to be a Buddhist you should have a good understanding of what it means to be a Buddhist. The simple definition of what it means to be a Buddhist and to practise Buddhadharma is someone who practises non-harmfulness and regards the Buddha as their supreme guide and teacher.

What counteracts harmfulness or harmful intention? The best antidote for overcoming harmful intention towards other sentient beings is the cultivation of love and compassion. There is no optimal means other than this. And one of the best methods to further enhance love and compassion in your heart, is by doing the tonglen practice of giving and taking that we do here regularly. Thus, let us now engage in the tonglen meditation practice.

[Meditation]

Generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, so for that purpose I will now engage in the practice of listening to the Dharma and put it into practice well.

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## TRAINING IN THE PRECEPT OF THE MIND<sup>1</sup>

Earlier we covered how to engage in the training of morality. Now we look at the training of mind; how to train the mind in concentration.

This is subdivided into two

- Training in calm abiding in order to gain clairvoyance
- How to train in calm abiding

What is presented next is a meticulous way of training one's mind. The heading itself encompasses the material to be presented.

### Training in calm abiding in order to gain clairvoyance

What is implied here is that the cause of obtaining clairvoyance is calm abiding, therefore as a way to gain clairvoyance one needs to first train in the cause, which is calm abiding.

The next four verses in the root text read:

34. *All Buddhas say the cause for the completion  
Of the collections, whose nature is  
Merit and exalted wisdom,  
Is the development of higher perceptions.*
35. *Just as a bird with undeveloped  
Wings cannot fly in the sky,  
Those without the power of higher perception  
Cannot work for the good of living beings.*
36. *The merit gained in a single day  
By one who possesses higher perception  
Cannot be gained even in a hundred lifetimes  
By one without such higher perception.*
37. *Those who want swiftly to complete  
The collections for full enlightenment,  
Will accomplish higher perception  
Through effort, not through laziness.*

The commentary now presents a summary of each of these verses:

Sharawa summarises these by saying that the first verse (34) shows that to fully gather two accumulations for one's own sake is dependent on clairvoyance (literally higher or heightened perception).

In the translation, clairvoyance and higher perception are used interchangeably, but the more literal meaning of the term is higher perception.

The second verse (35) shows that to fully and perfectly benefit others is dependent on clairvoyance. The third verse (36) shows that to vastly gather merits is dependent on clairvoyance. The fourth (37) shows that to quickly achieve Buddhahood is also

dependent on clairvoyance. Hence, these show the significance of generating clairvoyance.

The commentary goes onto explain that

Now, with reference to the line (Verse 33), "The collections for complete enlightenment, Will be thoroughly accomplished," the question is - what is the excellent means of gathering two accumulations?

As you may all know, the two accumulations refer to the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. The question now posed is: what is the excellent means for gathering these two accumulations?

More specifically, the accumulation of merit arises from practising the perfection of generosity, the perfection of morality, the perfection of patience and the perfection of concentration. The accumulation of wisdom arises from practicing the perfection of wisdom, and the perfection of joyous effort is encompassed in both.

As mentioned earlier, the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta, is generated when one fully develops the altruistic mind that generates the aspiration to achieve enlightenment to alleviate all beings from all sufferings and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness. There is a specific term called mind generation, which means generating the altruistic mind of bodhicitta. It is not sufficient to merely generate the altruistic mind and then sit around and do nothing with it; that will not benefit sentient beings. Therefore, committing to engaging in the six perfections is the optimum way to fully benefit sentient beings.

Having generated the altruistic mind of enlightenment, to be fully committed to engaging in the accumulation of merit and accumulation of wisdom, you need to actualise the six perfections. As a result, you achieve the two bodies of the Buddha, namely the wisdom truth body and the form body.

As an answer to the earlier hypothetical question the commentary further explains:

Buddhas of the three times observe that the special cause to fully gather the two accumulations which are in the nature of merit and exalted wisdom is precisely to generate the six clairvoyances. Hence, as mentioned in the Ornament (Maitreya's Ornament for Clear Realisation), there is a purpose for instructing (Bodhisattvas) on the six clairvoyances as a quintessence instruction.

An illustration from the Mother sutra is presented next to show how the accumulation of the collection of merit and wisdom is dependent on both.

The Mother (in Tibetan the Perfection of Wisdom sutra is called Yum Chenmo or Great Mother) in which it says "Subhuti, just as a bird without wings cannot fly in the sky, similarly Bodhisattvas, too, without relying on clairvoyant power cannot teach Dharma to sentient beings nor can they put those sentient beings who are on a deviated path, onto the (right) path."

The commentary then explains the meaning of this quote from the sutra where it says:

The point here is that just as a baby bird which has not yet developed wings cannot fly, likewise, without the power of clairvoyance, it is impossible to vastly

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<sup>1</sup> The sequence of headings preceding this is:

Presenting the characteristics of a being of the great scope

Extensive explanation

Explanation of the path of perfection

Explaining the perfect path

Aspirational instructions

Engaging in bodhisattva precepts

Taking engaging vows

Manner of taking vows

Training in the precepts after having taken the engaging vows

Training in the precept of morality

Training in the precept of the mind



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benefit sentient beings in accordance with their predisposition and needs.

In explaining how clairvoyance or higher perceptions are indeed needed to benefit other beings the commentary gives a number of examples:

Moreover, the clairvoyant power of;

- The miracle that enables one to travel to Buddha's land and wherever the sentient beings are

Through miraculous power one is able to go the Buddha's land to receive teachings and so forth from the buddhas, and also go to various different lands where sentient beings reside and to benefit those with whom one has a karmic connection, in accordance with their predisposition.

Thus, if one has the higher perception of 'clairvoyance of miracles' or miracle powers, then one would not have to rely on aeroplanes to go to various lands.

The main point here is that in order to be able to benefit other beings vastly and to a great extent, having the higher perception of a miraculous power would be an immense aid.

The commentary next explains the clairvoyance or higher perception of:

- Knowing others' mind enables one to cognise their predisposition and temperament

This is also incredibly significant because in order to benefit other beings, one definitely has to know their predisposition and also their temperament. Predisposition refers to the capacities of their mind, their inclinations and temperament. It refers particularly to their emotional stability such as for those having great desire, being able to give teachings (particularly to overcome their desire) and so forth.

- Clairvoyance of divine ear. If one were to possess the clairvoyance (or power of) the divine ear, the commentary mentions here that it: enables one to understand their varied languages

Being able to master various different languages, such beings would not have to depend on translators to be able to give teachings in accordance with the capacity of sentient beings for them to understand.

In a worldly context, knowing five languages is considered a really great skill, almost like being a genius. But here the text implies all the different languages that sentient beings would be using. An older student who used to come here called Mira apparently knew about five different languages.

When Kevin Rudd first became Prime Minister, he was highly praised as being very eloquent, and because he spoke different languages such as Mandarin etc. There was lot of talk about how he was a great scholar, but then due to circumstances he lost his power and fell from his position.

- Knowing previous lives that enables one to understand past causes and backgrounds

This power enables one to aid other sentient beings by knowing their past predispositions and past karmas. Having this higher perception enables one to really discriminate as to what is proper and what is not proper; how to engage in things properly. Maybe Kevin Rudd

could have used this! Note that there is a connotation here that some may have some sort of natural inborn ability, some limited clairvoyance, to know certain things from the past or future to a limited degree, or have some miraculous powers to a limited degree. This is not what these powers refer to; rather they refer to real, highly developed perception.

- Divine eyes enable one to see what will happen in the future

This refers to seeing subtle forms and the subtlest details of what will happen in the future.

- Knowing the exhaustion of defilements that enables one to show the path of liberation and enlightenment, and thereby drive, ripen and liberate (sentient beings) through Three Yanas (vehicles)

This last power of clairvoyance summarises that having all of these higher perceptions means that one is able to unmistakably show the path to liberation and enlightenment to other sentient beings, and thereby set them onto the right path, and for those who are already on the path, to ripen and liberate them through the three vehicles.

The great benefit of developing clairvoyance is that it is the optimum means to benefit sentient beings. By knowing their previous predispositions, mind and temperament, one is able to fully engage in benefiting them in a vast way. So, because of these great benefits, one aspires to develop higher perception or clairvoyance, which is dependent on first having developed calm abiding. Therefore, what is presented here is the need and purpose of developing calm abiding.

The commentary further explains:

Since it is very difficult, without the clairvoyant power, to actually undertake other tasks of benefiting sentient beings ...

This implies that having clairvoyance is the optimum means to benefit sentient beings because one knows their temperament and predisposition exactly and so can guide them and give them teachings, in accordance with their capacity and inclination etc. Otherwise, one may give seemingly profound teachings but if these are not in accord with the disciples' inclination or temperament, then it might not be suitable for them. They might not understand nor take that teaching to heart. If one were to have that ability to know the sentient beings' previous disposition, state of mind and inclinations, then one would be much more effective in guiding them and giving teachings. Since it is difficult to help beings fully without clairvoyant power, the next best thing is what is presented here:

it is said that the focus should be placed on (establishing) vinaya holder or sangha community in order to flourish benefit and happiness to sentient beings and Buddha-dharma. As emphatically advised by Jowo (Atisha) to establish a Sangha Community ...

Jowo, or Atisha, advised Tonpa (Dromtonpa) to establish a monastery so Dromtonpa founded the well-known monastery at Radreng. Hence Radreng Monastery was established by Dromtonpa on the direct advice of Atisha as a way to propagate and uphold the Buddhadharma in the sangha community.

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In summary, that which brings about benefit and happiness for sentient beings is dependent on the flourishing of the Buddhadharma. And this is dependent on those who uphold the Buddhadharma, specifically those who observe the vinaya, which is the sangha who uphold the vinaya vows, since the propagation and flourishing of the Buddhadharma is dependent on the sangha who uphold the vinaya vows. In accordance with Atisha's advice to Dromtonpa, this shows that there is a connection between the establishment of a community of sangha and the propagation of the Buddhadharma.

Holding the vinaya refers to sangha who have the basis to practice the three higher trainings of morality, concentration and wisdom. The ability to fully utilise the three higher trainings is dependent on sangha who are able to uphold the vinaya. This is actually the Buddha's doctrine. This shows that what connotes the Buddha's teachings is those who do not engage in non-virtue; who always engage in virtue and work in subduing their own mind. When that is established, the Buddha's teaching is established.

To further expand on the meaning of 'benefiting and happiness for sentient beings' the way to bring benefits and happiness for sentient beings is, as mentioned previously, to intentionally engage in not harming other sentient beings. If, based on this non-harmfulness, one can practise benefitting sentient beings, this really encompasses the Buddhadharma. The state of mind one needs to develop is basically love and compassion, because this will enable one to bring about benefit for sentient beings, and not harm them. As a personal instruction, one should generate the thought that the optimum way to extend genuine benefit to other sentient beings is by not harming them, and by developing love and compassion for them. 'If I were to develop love and compassion, I would be committed to only benefiting sentient beings and not harming them in the slightest.' The practice of only benefiting sentient beings, and not harming them in the slightest way can be actualised by generating the mind of love and compassion. That is how one creates the personal resolve to take this as a personal practice.

As Lama Tsongkhapa has mentioned, to benefit sentient beings it is essential to have a mind of not being able to bear their sufferings and not being able to bear them being deprived of happiness. In effect, what Lama Tsongkhapa is saying is that in order to generate a genuine wish to benefit other sentient beings, one definitely needs to cultivate love and compassion for sentient beings. Love means wishing beings who are deprived of happiness to have happiness, and compassion means wishing beings who are suffering to be completely free from suffering. It is a significant point that even though we may have the noble intention 'I would like to benefit sentient beings', if we do not have the state of mind that is unable to bear others' sufferings and that they are deprived of happiness, then the genuine wish to benefit others cannot arise.

This is really the main point you need to focus on as the way to put it into practice. Really think about these points and spend time thinking about the plight of sentient beings who are suffering. Generate that genuine

wish, 'how wonderful it would be if they were free from suffering' and then contemplate on how sentient beings are deprived of happiness and generate the wish that they be endowed with happiness. I would say that if one can generate this thought and state of mind even for a few minutes, then that is the real practice of meditation. Just being able to focus on an object or something for a while does not, in itself, have much impact on one's mind. What it comes down to is really seeing that the main thing one needs to work on developing comes down to generating love and compassion.

The significance of developing love and compassion is that it will accomplish one's own purpose as well as the purpose of other sentient beings. That is the two-fold optimum benefit.

The commentary refers to a quote from *Bebhum Ngonpo*:

"the God(?) says if you can't directly benefit sentient beings as (understand) from the previous example, one must understand that the long sustenance of Buddha Dharma in the world is dependent on the sangha community. Hence, if one possesses any capacity, then direct it to that and if one does not possess any capacity then focus on not breaching one's committed pledge to benefit sentient beings."

This summarises the main point mentioned earlier.

The commentary goes on:

Any amount of merits that a Bodhisattva with clairvoyant power can accumulate within a day and night, for a bodhisattva without clairvoyant power won't be able to accumulate the same even within hundreds of aeons. This also applies to the accumulation of wisdom. On the basis of this reason, one should exert effort in cultivating clairvoyant power to quickly achieve the state of Buddhahood because clairvoyant power enables one to quickly gather the two accumulations.

The point emphasised here is that *a bodhisattva without clairvoyant power will not be able to accumulate the same amount of merit as one with such powers, even within hundreds of aeons*. As mentioned here, this also applies to the accumulation of wisdom. So, on the basis of this, *one should exert effort cultivating clairvoyant powers to quickly achieve the state of buddhahood*.

It is good to keep some of these significant points in mind.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltzen is used with the kind permission of Sandup Tsering.

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Edited Version*

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**Block: 1**

**Week: 2 (20 February 2018)**

1a. As you may all know, the two accumulations refer to the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. The question now posed is: what is the excellent means for gathering these two accumulations?

b. To be fully committed to engaging in the accumulation of merit and accumulation of wisdom, you need to actualise the six perfections. What is the result of this commitment?

2. In explaining how clairvoyance or higher perceptions are indeed needed to benefit other beings the commentary gives a number of examples. Give these examples.

3. What is the optimum means for benefitting sentient beings and why?

**4. Even though we may have the noble intention 'I would like to benefit sentient beings' what do we need for the genuine wish to arise?**

**5. Why should one exert effort in accumulating clairvoyant power?**

Homework

Answers

**Block: 1**

**Week: 2 (20 February 2018)**

**1 a. As you may all know, the two accumulations refer to the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. The question now posed is: what is the excellent means for gathering these two accumulations?**

As you may all know, the two accumulations refer to the accumulation of merit and the accumulation of wisdom. The question now posed is: what is the excellent means for gathering these two accumulations?

More specifically, the accumulation of merit arises from practising the perfection of generosity, perfection of morality, the perfection of patience and the perfection of concentration. The accumulation of wisdom arises from practicing the perfection of wisdom, and the perfection of joyous effort is encompassed in both.

As mentioned earlier, the mind of enlightenment or bodhicitta, is generated when one fully develops the altruistic mind that generates the aspiration to achieve enlightenment to alleviate all beings from all sufferings and lead them to the ultimate state of happiness. There is a specific term called mind generation, which means generating the altruistic mind of bodhicitta. It is not sufficient to merely generate the altruistic mind and then sit around and do nothing with it; that will not benefit sentient beings. Therefore committing to engage in six perfections is the optimum way to fully benefit sentient beings.

**b. To be fully committed to engaging in the accumulation of merit and accumulation of wisdom, you need to actualise the six perfections. What is the result of this commitment?**

Having generated the altruistic mind of enlightenment, to be fully committed to engaging in the accumulation of merit and accumulation of wisdom, you need to actualise the six perfections. As a result you achieve the two bodies of the Buddha, namely the wisdom truth body and the form body.

**2. In explaining how clairvoyance or higher perceptions are indeed needed to benefit other beings the commentary gives a number of examples. Give these examples.**

In explaining how clairvoyance or higher perceptions are indeed needed to benefit other beings the commentary gives a number of examples:

Moreover, the clairvoyant power of;

- The miracle that enables one to travel to Buddha's land and wherever the sentient beings are

Through miraculous power one is able to go the Buddha's land to receive teachings and so forth from the buddhas, and also go to various different lands where sentient beings reside and to benefit those with whom one has a karmic connection, in accordance with their predisposition.

Thus, if one has the higher perception of 'clairvoyance of miracles' or miracle powers then one would not have to rely on aeroplanes to go various lands.

The main point here is that in order to be able to benefit other beings vastly and to a great extent, having the higher perception of a miraculous power would be an immense aid.

The commentary next explains the clairvoyance or higher perception of:

- Knowing others' mind enables one to cognise their predisposition and temperament

This is also incredibly significant because in order to benefit other beings, one definitely has to know their predisposition and also their temperament. Predisposition refers to the capacities of their mind,

their inclinations and temperament. It refers particularly to their emotional stability such as for those having great desire, being able to give teachings (particularly to overcome their desire) and so forth.

- Clairvoyance of divine ear If one were to possess the clairvoyance (or power of) the divine ear, the commentary mentions here that it: enables one to understand their varied languages

Being able to master various different languages, such beings would not have to depend on translators to be able to give teachings in accordance with the capacity of sentient beings to understand.

In a worldly context, knowing five languages is considered a really great skill, almost like a genius. But here the text implies all the different languages that sentient beings would be using. An older student who used to come here called Mira apparently knew about five different languages.

When Kevin Rudd first became Prime Minister, he was highly praised as being very eloquent and because he spoke different languages such as Mandarin etc. There was lot talk about how he was a great scholar, but then due to circumstances he lost his power and fell from his position.

- Knowing previous lives that enables one to understand past causes and backgrounds

This power enables one to aid other sentient beings by knowing their past predispositions and past karmas. Having this higher perception enables one to really discriminate as to what is proper and what is not proper; how to engage in things properly. Maybe Kevin Rudd could have used this! Note that there is a connotation here that some may have some sort of natural inborn ability, some limited clairvoyance, to know certain things from the past or future to a limited degree or have some miraculous powers to a limited degree. This is not what these powers refer to, rather they refer to real, highly developed perception.

- Divine eyes enable one to see what will happen in future

This refers to seeing subtle forms and the subtlest details of what will happen in the future.

- Knowing the exhaustion of defilements that enables one to show the path of liberation and enlightenment, and thereby drive, ripe and liberate (sentient beings) through Three Yanas( vehicles)

This last power of clairvoyance summarises that having all of these higher perceptions means that one is able to mistakenly show the path to liberation and enlightenment to other sentient beings, and thereby set them onto the right path, and for those who are already on the path, to ripen and liberate them through the three vehicles.

### **3. What is the optimum means for benefitting sentient beings and why?**

The commentary further explains:

Since it is very difficult, without the clairvoyant power, to actually undertake other tasks of benefiting sentient beings...

This implies that having clairvoyance is the optimum means to benefit sentient beings because one knows their temperament and predisposition exactly and so can guide them and give them teachings, in accordance with their capacity and inclination etc. Otherwise, one may give seemingly profound teachings but if these are not in accord with the disciples' inclination or temperament, then it might not be to suitable for them. They might not understand nor take that teaching to heart. If one were to have that ability to know the sentient beings' previous disposition, state of mind and inclinations, then one would be much more effective in guiding them and giving teachings. Since it is difficult to help beings fully without clairvoyant power

### **4. Even though we may have the noble intention 'I would like to benefit sentient beings' what do we need for the genuine wish to arise?**

As Lama Tsongkhapa has mentioned, to benefit sentient beings it is essential to have a mind of not being able to bear their sufferings and not being able to bear them being deprived of happiness. In effect, what Lama Tsongkhapa is saying is that in order to generate a genuine wish to benefit other sentient beings, one definitely needs to cultivate love and compassion for sentient beings. Love means wishing beings who are deprived of happiness to have happiness, and wishing beings who are

suffering to be completely free from suffering. It is a significant point that even though we may have the noble intention 'I would like to benefit sentient beings' if we do not have the state of mind that is unable to bear others' sufferings and them being deprived of happiness, then the genuine wish to benefit others cannot arise.

This is really the main point you need to focus on as the way to put into it into practice. Really think about these points and spending time thinking about the plight of sentient beings who are suffering, and then generate that genuine wish 'how wonderful it would be if they were free from sufferings' and then contemplating on how sentient beings are deprived of happiness and then generating the wish that they maybe be endowed with happiness. I would say that if one can generate this thought and state of mind even for a few minutes, then that is the real practice of meditation. Just being able to focus on an object or something for a while does not, in itself, have much impact on one's mind. What it comes down to is really seeing that the main thing one needs to work on developing comes down to generating love and compassion.

The significance of developing love and compassion is that it will accomplish one's own purpose as well as the purpose of other sentient beings. That is the two-fold optimum benefit.

## **5. Why should one exert effort in accumulating clairvoyant power?**

The commentary goes on:

An amount of merits that a Bodhisattvas with clairvoyant power can accumulate within a day and night, for a Bodhisattava without clairvoyant power won't be able to accumulate the same even within hundreds of aeons. This also applies to the accumulation of wisdom. On the basis of this reason, one should exert effort in cultivating clairvoyant power to quickly achieve the state of Buddhahood because clairvoyant power enables one to quickly gather the two accumulations.

The point emphasised here is that a bodhisattva without clairvoyant power will not be able to accumulate the same even within hundreds of aeons. As mentioned here, this also applies to the accumulation of wisdom. So, on the basis of this, *one should exert effort cultivating clairvoyant powers to quickly achieve the state of Buddhahood.*

It is good to keep some of these significant points in mind.

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# Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

27 February 2018

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As usual let us spend some time in our meditation practice.

If our practice is accompanied by strong refuge and a strong bodhicitta motivation then, whatever study and practice that we do will definitely become a means to develop meditative concentration. That will then serve to further develop our wisdom, and thus enter onto the paths that ultimately lead to achieving enlightenment. This is how we can see the significance of the very basis of our practice. With that understanding we can now engage in our meditation practice.

*[Tong-len meditation]*

Based on the earlier motivation, we can now generate the specific motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and so for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings, and put them into practice well.

Generating such a motivation ensures that our practice is not tainted with a self-interest that stems from a self-cherishing mind.

Just as Buddhism emphasises the importance of overcoming a self-cherishing mind, so too do other traditions such as Christianity. They also seem to recognise self-cherishing as a fault. In the Christian faith, for example, an antidote to overcome the self-cherishing mind can be the mind that generates single-pointed devotion and faith in God. When an individual places their complete faith in God and generates the thought, 'Whatever I experience is in God's hands', then the mind of self-cherishing or self-importance is definitely nullified. I see this as being a very significant point.

Furthermore, just like Buddhism, a core practice for Christian monks and nuns seems to be the practice of having fewer desires and feeling contentment. That is a practice that they actually engage in. This practice also comes from having strong faith and reliance on God. When they truly generate the mind, 'Whatever I experience is by the grace of God, and I entrust everything unto God', this frame of mind definitely reduces personal desires, and enables them to practise contentment.

The equivalent attitude in our tradition is to have strong faith and conviction in the law of karma and its effects. If we develop a strong conviction in the incontrovertibility of karma, we will be able to generate a state of mind that completely relies on karma. Without being too concerned with our immediate needs and immediate gratifications, we will be able to rely upon the consolation that, 'Whatever karma that I've created in the past is what shapes my present, and whatever karma I create now

will shape my future'. With that understanding we will not be swayed too much by desires, and we will be able to practise contentment as well. Furthermore, developing a strong faith and conviction in karma will also definitely serve as a means to overcome the self-interest which is based on the self-cherishing mind. So all virtues - i.e. purifying negative karmas and accumulating merit - are dependent on having a strong faith and conviction in karma. This is really a very significant impetus for personal practice.

To further contemplate how practising morality is dependent on having a good understanding of, and a strong conviction in karma and its effects, consider the example of the non-virtue of killing. The non-virtue of killing is a negativity and the result of any negative action is definitely going to be suffering. Karma is incontrovertible and unmistakable - the effect of negativity is definitely suffering. Likewise, shunning negative deeds such as killing and so forth is a virtue, so the results will definitely be good, positive results.

At the very beginning of his teachings on morality the Buddha said, 'avoid killing'. This is based on the natural consequence that killing is a negative act that brings about a suffering result. Practising the opposite of that will bring a positive result. With the conviction that karma is definite and incontrovertible, one will naturally and willingly avoid creating negativities such as killing and so forth, and adopt virtue. Without that strong faith and conviction in karma, one will not hesitate to engage in negativities. So just as faith plays a most important role for practitioners of other faiths such as Christianity, so too faith in karma is an essential element of Buddhist practice.

Other faiths such as Christianity also practise ethics or morality, such as the avoidance of killing and so forth, as the basis of their practice. However, while the basic practice is the same, the approach is slightly different. While both may be based on faith, in the Christian tradition for example, the practice of morality is based on the words of God. So, following the practice of morality is mainly based on faith in the words of God.

In our tradition, there is a distinction between those of sharp faculty and those of dull faculty. The practice of those of dull faculty is mainly based on faith. Those of sharp faculty however, don't base their practice merely on the words they hear. Rather, they investigate the meaning of those words, and use reasoning to verify whether what has been taught is valid or not. This is a unique presentation of the Buddhist tradition.

A practitioner who is of a sharp faculty will use reasoning and logic based on the words presented by the Buddha, for example, to further investigate and test whether they withstand reason and logic. They follow the process of first hearing the words or the explanation, then thinking about it, and finally meditating on the meaning of those words. Through this thorough investigation they develop complete conviction in the teachings of the Buddha. Then they are said to have developed an indestructible faith that is based on reasoning. The wisdom that is based on this kind of investigation is very sound.



This process of only accepting things through reasoning and logic is very useful in everyday life situations as well. We should not immediately believe or accept what someone says, but rather use our own intelligence and wisdom based on reasoning to investigate whether what they are presenting is true or not. If it withstands analysis and is based on sound reasoning then we can accept it. That is not to say that we don't seek advice or listen to what others have to say. The main point is to not blindly follow what others say without using our own intelligence and wisdom to ascertain whether it is valid or not. Without that intelligence and wisdom, we could easily be misled.

Therefore, as I regularly emphasise, particularly to the younger generation, really pay heed to the importance of investigating and reasoning. Whatever you engage in, check what the results will be. If there are positive results then engage in that activity; if there will be negative consequences, then avoid engaging in that. That is the best way to proceed, even with worldly activities.

We need to ensure that we are using our wisdom to further enhance and enrich that wisdom. If we adopt faulty reasoning, then our intelligence and wisdom will only become duller and duller, and then we will not be able to make proper distinctions between what is right and what is wrong. If, however, we adopt the practice of sharpening our intelligence and wisdom, then they can only become better and better. That is how to train in wisdom.

Otherwise we may fall victim to being permanently consumed by doubts and not able to achieve anything of significance in life. We often find people hesitating between, 'Should I do this?', or 'Should I do that?', and always lingering in doubt. Then they always have to resort to finding out by asking someone else. If the other person is a reliable source then the advice may provide some consolation. If, however, that person is not a reliable source, then they will fall victim to bad advice.

However, if we use our faculties of wisdom and intelligence then that will ensure that whatever we do will be based on sound reasoning from our own side. Then, without hesitation we will be able to decide what to do. Decision making is easier for those who are habituated to making decisions based on sound reasoning and logic and proper investigation. Whenever something comes up, they will be able to decide what to do. The analogy for those who are always in constant doubt, having qualms in two directions, is that just as you would not be able to sew with a two-headed needle, you will not be able to achieve anything when you have doubts in your mind.

## **TRAINING IN THE PRECEPT OF THE MIND**

### **Training in calm abiding in order to gain clairvoyance (cont.)**

The commentary reads:

An amount of merits that a Bodhisattva with clairvoyant power can accumulate within a day and night, for a Bodhisattva without clairvoyant power won't be able to accumulate the same even within hundreds of aeons. This also applies to the accumulation of wisdom.

The significant point here is that *this also applies to the accumulation of wisdom.*

On the basis of this reason, one should exert effort in cultivating clairvoyant power to quickly achieve the state of Buddhahood because clairvoyant power enables one to quickly gather the two accumulations.

As presented last week, the means to achieve Buddhahood quickly is dependent on having developed higher perception or clairvoyance. That being the case, it is emphasised here that *one should exert oneself in cultivating the clairvoyant power as a way to quickly achieve the state of Buddhahood.* The reasoning is that having clairvoyant power will enable one to accumulate the two accumulations of merit and wisdom *quickly.*

As the commentary further explains:

Moreover, one needs to exert a strong wave of effort to achieve clairvoyant power, ...

Of course, *effort* here refers to the particular type of effort which is usually translated as 'joyous effort'. Through seeing the benefits of clairvoyance, we need to develop a joyful effort to achieve those benefits. Thus, *one needs to exert a strong wave of effort to achieve clairvoyant power.* The emphasis here is that it is not any kind of effort that is required to achieve the six types of clairvoyant power; a really persistent and strong effort is required.

Then the commentary further concludes:

... it is not something achievable by a lazy person, thus one needs to be enthusiastic and generate effort.

Again, the specific effort described here is joyous effort. The definition of joyous effort is having joy in engaging in virtue. That joyous effort, or what is translated here as enthusiasm, is deemed to be essential for engaging in virtue. It means having joy in engaging in virtue. Anyone who does not find joy in engaging in virtue can thus be defined as *a lazy person.* In fact, following the afflicted minds of desire and so forth is said to be a form of laziness! This is my personal definition. If the definition of enthusiasm is to joyfully engage in virtue, then the opposite would also be true; engaging in non-virtue joyfully is a form of laziness.

Going further into the commentary:

Now, it is said in the verse 37, 'Will accomplish higher perception, Through effort ...' With reference to that if you ask, 'Applying effort into what will bring about clairvoyant power?'

This hypothetical question is raised to introduce the next verse, which reads:

38. *Without the attainment of calm abiding,  
Higher perception will not occur.  
Therefore make repeated effort  
To accomplish calm abiding.*

Then the commentary further clarifies the nature of the clairvoyance that is being presented here:

This is not necessary in the case of a little bit of clairvoyance arising naturally by birth or through some power of substance and mantras or just an ability to remember the life (the immediate past or future lives), ...

This type of limited clairvoyance is not the clairvoyance that is being referred to in verse 38.

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There are instances of minimal clairvoyance that arise through some power of substance or mantra. One can use some substances to achieve some level of clairvoyance; also the recitation of mantras and so forth can bring about a certain level of clairvoyance. However, that is not the clairvoyance which is being referred to here.

As the commentary further explains:

... but in the case of a special clairvoyant power arising through the force of meditation, ...

The *special type of clairvoyant power* referred to here arises *through the force of meditation*. This relates back to the lines of the verse *Without the attainment of calm abiding, Higher perception will not occur*.

The commentary continues:

... without the attainment of calm abiding conjoined with pure pliancy, it is not possible to give rise to the vast power of clairvoyance.

This kind of vast clairvoyance is quite different to the limited clairvoyance that was presented earlier. The point is that *without calm abiding conjoined with pure pliancy, it is not possible to give rise to the vast power of clairvoyance*. It is this specific type of clairvoyance that is attained in the higher states.

The commentary then cites another text:

In another words, it is said that it is not a clairvoyance if the actual state (samadhi or meditative concentration) is not attained.

Then further, from another text:

It is also said that having attained the thoroughly pure level of the fourth meditative concentration, one will be able to hold a non-conceptual exalted wisdom, and abide in the object, and as a result will attain the supreme power of miracles.

What is being explained here is that if one does not attain *the meditative concentration of the fourth level*, then one cannot actually attain the vast power of clairvoyance. In order to attain that *fourth meditative concentration*, one has to firstly achieve calm abiding (also translated as mental serenity). So these two quotations are reiterating the point that without attaining the higher *meditative concentrations of the fourth level concentration*, one cannot achieve the vast power of clairvoyance.

The commentary further explains:

Due to this reason one needs to make repeated effort in the nine means of mental abiding in order to accomplish calm abiding.

Then here is a quotation from *Aryasura*:

Aryasura said,  
With an unceasing yoga,  
Make effort to achieve meditative concentration.  
If one takes a break again and again,  
Just like using a fire stick, one cannot be successful.

Here *yoga* relates to meditative stabilisation. The real meaning of 'yogi' refers to someone who endeavours to abide in perfect virtue. As I explained earlier, when someone earnestly takes to heart the practice of, for example, avoiding the ten non-virtues and adopting the ten virtues then to that extent they are a yogi. Of course, depending on the level of practice, there are different

types of yogis. In any case, here *unceasing yoga* relates to meditative stabilisation.

The *meditative concentration* in the second line can be related to actual calm abiding itself.

What is being explained here is that in order to achieve the meditative concentration of calm abiding, there needs to be *unceasing* or consistent meditation. *Unceasing* means a consistent practice of meditation. In order to achieve calm abiding, the concentration on the chosen object should also be unwavering.

The third line, *if one takes a break again and again*, explains that if one takes long breaks while attempting to engage in meditation to achieve calm abiding or meditative concentration, then one would not be able to achieve that meditative concentration.

The analogy is *just like with a fire stick*. In order to create fire from fire sticks you need to rub them together until the friction generates enough heat to create a fire. Of course, you won't be able to start a fire if you constantly take a break from rubbing the sticks. It has to be sustained, continuous friction.

The aborigines used this technique to generate fire. I've also heard that bushfires can sometimes start when strong winds cause branches of trees to rub against each other and the friction then causes sparks. The main point is that you can't successfully start a fire using fire sticks if you keep taking breaks.

In a similar fashion, the way of yoga too should not be given up until achieving its goal.

Of course, this doesn't mean one doesn't take any breaks, such as eating or sleeping. It mainly refers to consistently practising meditation.

### **Calm abiding conjoined with pure pliancy**

Here we return to the following point:

... but in the case of a special clairvoyant power arising through the force of meditation, without the attainment of calm abiding conjoined with pure pliancy, it is not possible to give rise to the vast power of clairvoyance.

It is said that contemplating the benefits of achieving pliancy will be a catalyst to really want to develop calm abiding. This is one way to understand it.

In order to achieve calm abiding, one needs to go through the nine different stages of the development of meditative concentration. The Tibetan word *ting-nge-dzin* is translated here as meditative concentration. So, firstly we need to understand what meditative concentration is. What is the nature of the meditative concentration that we are attempting to develop? How do we define that?

As I've explained many, many times, meditative concentration is to be understood as having two main attributes.

The first is a single-pointed focus on the meditative object with an unwavering mind, i.e. a mind not distracted by any disturbing conceptions.

The second attribute of meditative concentration is that it is a clear and lucid mind that is able to focus on the object with intensity. These attributes apply to the mind of

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meditative concentration itself, as explained in the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*.

Thus, meditative concentration is defined as the combination of an unwavering single-pointed focus on the object, accompanied with a clear and lucid state of mind.

The conditions of mindfulness and introspection that are necessary to maintain that concentration will be explained in detail later. However, for the purpose of explaining meditative concentration it is necessary to understand that one needs to have mindfulness in order to maintain a clear, lucid and intense focus on the object. As explained in the teachings, the mind should not be dull, and the focus should not be unclear or hazy. Rather, there needs to be intensity to the focus and the object needs to appear to a clear and lucid mind. These are the main attributes for developing meditative concentration.

When one attains that single-pointed focus of unwavering concentration on the object for as long as one wishes, then one attains what is called mental pliancy. As one develops steady and single-pointed concentration on the object, one starts to experience a mental bliss. At that time, the mental defects that cause hesitation in pursuing the focus on a virtuous object are overcome, and are replaced with a feeling of bliss as one focuses on the object. The mind becomes very serviceable and one is able to focus on the object and remain focused on the object for as long as one wishes. When one attains that ability to focus on the object for as long as one wishes without any mental defects being present, then that is when one has attained mental pliancy.

Attaining mental pliancy then induces what is known as physical pliancy. This is a state where one has overcome the physical defects of unwillingness and weariness that one experiences when focusing on an object to develop meditative concentration. When all physical defects are removed and replaced with a physical serviceability that enables one to maintain the physical posture to focus on the object for as long as one wishes, then one experiences a physical bliss, and that is where one attains physical pliancy. More specifically, when one attains physical serviceability by overcoming physical defects, then one attains physical pliancy. At that stage, one has attained both mental and physical pliancy, which enables one to remain focused on the object for as long as one wishes.

Having attained mental and physical pliancy through developing mental and physical serviceability, one is able to remain focused on the object for as long as one wishes.

Within meditative equipoise, one further enhances one's meditative concentration, and at a certain point the winds within one's body become serviceable, flowing very easily throughout one's body. When the physical body is pervaded with the wind energy, it induces an extraordinary physical bliss which then in turn induces an extraordinary mental bliss. So based on mental and physical pliancy one now attains physical and mental bliss.

One attains calm abiding when one's concentration is combined with that physical and mental bliss that becomes very firm and stable, without any disturbance whatsoever.

Therefore, calm abiding is attained by developing meditative concentration to the point where extraordinary mental and physical pliancy is developed, which in turn induces physical and mental bliss. When that is fully attained, then one attains calm abiding. Obviously, calm abiding is not easily attained.

This explains the passage *without the attainment of calm abiding conjoined with pure pliancy*.

### **How to train in calm abiding**

We can leave this for our next session.

In order to cover this topic, it would be good to refer to the lam-rim teachings, particularly *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hands*, which has a very clear explanation. If you have that text, it would be good to refer to it, and other sources mentioned in the past. Relating these teachings to the great treatises will enhance your understanding. We can't expect to gain a comprehensive understanding of a subject from just two lines of explanation.

The Tibetan term for calm abiding *zhi gnas* has two syllables *zhi* and *gnas*.

The word *zhi* literally means 'calm' or 'peaceful', which is a reference to a calm or peaceful state of mind that is not affected by internal and external distractions. When the mind is withdrawn from all of the external distractions along with the internal distractions of the disturbing conceptual thoughts, then it becomes calm. The word *gnas* literally means 'abide' which refers to abiding in that calm or peaceful state.

To abide calmly just by focusing inward is, in itself, not a great achievement. It needs to be combined with profound meditative concentration to make it most beneficial.

In contrast to the bliss that can be found in meditative concentration, we seek happiness in the worldly context by letting our minds become completely focused on, and immersed in external distractions. That is how we normally seek happiness. In that instance, the mind is focused one hundred percent on disturbing conceptions and external distractions. Just imagine the sense of rest and relief from that very distracted, busy, agitated state of mind, when that outward focus is reversed and the mind is one hundred percent focused inwardly, free from those disturbing conceptions and external distractions.

By reasoning in this way, we can see the relief it brings when our mind is inwardly focused one hundred percent of the time. The longer the duration of that inner focus, the greater the calmness and serenity we will experience. Even though we are attempting to achieve the ultimate states of meditative concentration and serenity, making an attempt to focus inwardly even for a few moments will be really beneficial. Even though it might be quite short-lived and temporary, it nevertheless brings a real sense of relief.

As mentioned earlier, when the mind is one hundred percent focused on disturbing conceptions and external distractions, then there is really no opportunity for the mind to be peaceful and happy. A true sense of happiness cannot be experienced in that way, because the mind is completely consumed by internal and external distractions. But, if we were to focus inwardly by five

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percent, there will be five percent relief! If we focus inwardly ten percent, twenty or fifty percent, then to that extent there will be a greater sense of happiness. Of course, a one hundred percent inner focus would mean being relieved from all of the agonies which are associated with the completely distracted and agitated state of mind.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama gives us practical advice about this. He says that if we make a genuine attempt to turn fifty percent of our focus inward, then there will be benefit to that degree. At the same time, we can also focus on external matters albeit external distractions. Indeed, this is something that we can see from our own experience. I'm not exaggerating here. Reason and logic show us that if our mind is completely distracted outwardly and swayed by the disturbing conceptions, then no matter how much external wealth and money we may have, it will not be a source of genuine happiness. These are points to carefully consider.

Those who are really interested, and who take up the mental training of meditation practice will see its value as a way of developing this inner focus in order to achieve real peace and happiness, and as a way of alleviating mental agonies and sufferings.

Those who have no interest in or understanding of this mental training won't be able to make the connection between the source of their problems, i.e. external distractions, and their mental agony. I hear this from people who come up to me. I don't know them but they come and confide in me saying that their business is going well and everything is going well, but still they are not really content or happy within. They ask me 'What could it be? What could be going wrong?' Of course, without some preliminary understanding of the meditation practice, it wouldn't be appropriate or the right place to tell them that it is because their mind is completely distracted outwardly. They may not be able to relate to that right away. However, it seems that they have an experience of feeling that something is not right, that the wealth and so forth that they believed would bring happiness has not done so. So they begin to question that.

I have many such stories of encounters with people who I meet in my trips outside. I used to go to Southland occasionally and have a coffee. Nearby there was a fruit shop, and when I sat down for a coffee the owner would come up and greet me saying, 'Hello, how are you?'. On one occasion, he came up as usual, and when I asked him as usual, 'Oh, are you well?', he didn't have an immediate response. He waved his hands about and said, 'Things are not going so well'. When I asked him, 'How's your business going?' he said, 'Oh, business is going quite fine'. Then he said, 'But, I would rather be like you!' He must have seen me always smiling in a joyful and happy state, and he seemed to relate to that when he said, 'I want to be like you'.

Here was a situation where someone had external wealth and so forth, looked at someone who doesn't have such wealth and saw that they were happier. This goes to show how our state of mind and our attitudes are really dependent on our state of mind and what we define as being happy and joyful.

The main point I'm emphasising here is that if you pay attention to developing a more stable, more focused and more concentrated mind, then that in turn will induce a happier state of mind. It also has a positive effect on your surroundings, and your immediate relations such as your partner or your children, or your relatives and even your colleagues. So, your state of mind can definitely have a positive effect on others as well.

This is a way to encourage ourselves to pay attention to the benefits of practising meditating.

This also reminds me of the story of the person who came to meditation sessions, despite their partner not being all that keen or encouraging. They did some meditation for a while, but then lapsed and stopped attending the meditation sessions. Then their partner started to say, 'Oh you had better go back to meditation! You definitely should go again!' After seeing the transformation, they started encouraging their partner to go back to the meditation sessions.

There are those who have gone to Dharamsala to listen to teachings and practise, and whose parents had reacted with horror thinking, 'Oh, our child has become crazy and is following a strange cult!'. Initially they were not at all pleased, but when the children came back and they saw the transformation, and how calm and peaceful their children have become, the parents were really happy and said, 'Oh, it's been good for you. You should go back to your teachers and learn more!'.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltzen is used with the kind permission of Sandup Tsering.

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*Homework*

**Block: 1**

**Week: 3 (27 February 2018)**

**1. "one should exert oneself in cultivating the clairvoyant power as a way to quickly achieve the state of Buddhahood". Give the reasoning for this.**

2. 'Moreover, one needs to exert a strong wave of effort to achieve clairvoyant power, ...'

**a) What is the particular type of 'effort' referred to here?**

**b) Give the definition of this type of effort.**

**3. There are instances of minimal clairvoyance that arise through some power of substance or mantra. One can use some substances to achieve some level of clairvoyance; also the recitation of mantras and so forth can bring about a certain level of clairvoyance. However, that is not the clairvoyance which is being referred to here.**

**Explain the type of clairvoyance that is being referred to here.**

**4. In order to achieve calm abiding, one needs to go through the nine different stages of the development of meditative concentration. The Tibetan word *ting-nge-dzin* is translated here as meditative concentration. So, firstly we need to understand what meditative concentration is. What is the nature of the meditative concentration that we are attempting to develop? How do we define that?**

**As I've explained many, many times meditative concentration is to be understood as having two main attributes.**

**a) Give these two main attributes.**

**b) Give the definition of meditative concentration.**

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**5. Explain mental and physical pliancy.**

**Block: 1**

**Week: 3 (27 February 2018)**

**1. "one should exert oneself in cultivating the clairvoyant power as a way to quickly achieve the state of Buddhahood". Give the reasoning for this.**

Training in calm abiding in order to gain clairvoyance (cont.)

The commentary reads:

An amount of merits that a Bodhisattva with clairvoyant power can accumulate within a day and night, for a Bodhisattva without clairvoyant power won't be able to accumulate the same even within hundreds of aeons. This also applies to the accumulation of wisdom.

The significant point here is that *this also applies to the accumulation of wisdom.*

On the basis of this reason, one should exert effort in cultivating clairvoyant power to quickly achieve the state of Buddhahood because clairvoyant power enable one to quickly gather the two accumulations.

As presented last week, the means to achieve buddhahood quickly is dependent on having developed higher perception or clairvoyance. That being the case, it is emphasised here that *one should exert oneself in cultivating the clairvoyant power as a way to quickly achieve the state of Buddhahood.* The reasoning is that having *clairvoyant power will enable one to accumulate the two accumulations of merit and wisdom quickly.*

**2. 'Moreover, one need to exert a strong wave of effort to achieve clairvoyant power, ...'**

**a) What is the particular type of 'effort' referred to here?**

As the commentary further explains:

Moreover, one need to exert a strong wave of effort to achieve clairvoyant power, ...

Of course, *effort* here refers to the particular type of effort which is usually translated as 'joyous effort'. Through seeing the benefits of clairvoyance, we need to develop a joyful effort to achieve those benefits. Thus, *one needs to exert a strong wave of effort to achieve clairvoyant power.* The emphasis here is that it is not any kind of effort that is required to achieve the six types of clairvoyant power; a really persistent and strong effort is required.

Then the commentary further concludes:

... it is not something achievable by a lazy person, thus one needs to be enthusiastic and generate effort.

**b) Give the definition of this type of effort.**

Again, the specific effort described here is joyous effort. The definition of joyous effort is having joy in engaging in virtue. That joyous effort, or what is translated here as enthusiasm, is deemed to be essential for engaging in virtue. It means having joy in engaging in virtue. Anyone who does not find joy in engaging in virtue can thus be defined as *a lazy person*. In fact, following the afflicted minds of desire and so forth is said to be a form of laziness! This is my personal definition. If the definition of

enthusiasm is to joyfully engage in virtue, then the opposite would also be true; engaging in non-virtue joyfully is a form of laziness.

**3. There are instances of minimal clairvoyance that arise through some power of substance or mantra. One can use some substances to achieve some level of clairvoyance; also the recitation of mantras and so forth can bring about a certain level of clairvoyance. However, that is not the clairvoyance which is being referred to here.**

**Explain the type of clairvoyance that is being referred to here.**

Then the commentary further clarifies nature of the clairvoyance that is being presented here:

This is not necessary in the case of a little bit of clairvoyance arising naturally by birth or through some power of substance and mantras or just an ability to remember the life (the immediate past or future lives), ...

This type of limited clairvoyance is not the clairvoyance that is being referred to in verse 38.

There are instances of minimal clairvoyance that arise through some power of substance or mantra. One can use some substances to achieve some level of clairvoyance; also the recitation of mantras and so forth can bring about a certain level of clairvoyance. However, that is not the clairvoyance which is being referred to here.

As the commentary further explains:

... but in the case of a special clairvoyant power arising through the force of meditation, ...

The *special type of clairvoyant power* referred to here arises *through the force of meditation*. This relates back to the lines of the verse *Without the attainment of calm abiding, Higher perception will not occur*.

The commentary continues:

... without the attainment of calm abiding conjoined with pure pliancy, it is not possible to give rise to the vast power of clairvoyance.

This kind of vast clairvoyance is quite different to the limited clairvoyance that was presented earlier. The point is that *without calm abiding conjoined with pure pliancy, it is not possible to give rise to the vast power of clairvoyance*. It is this specific type of clairvoyance that is attained in the higher states.

**4.' In order to achieve calm abiding, one needs to go through the nine different stages of the development of meditative concentration. The Tibetan word *ting-nge-dzin* is translated here as meditative concentration. So, firstly we need to understand what meditative concentration is. What is the nature of the meditative concentration that we are attempting to develop? How do we define that? '**

**As I've explained many, many times meditative concentration is to be understood as having two main attributes.**

**a) Give these two main attributes.**

The first is a single-pointed focus on the meditative object with an unwavering mind, i.e. a mind not distracted by any disturbing conceptions.

The second attribute is having a focus on the object. Such that the appearance of the object is clear and translucent.



**b) Give the definition of meditative concentration.**

Thus, meditative concentration is defined as the combination of an unwavering single-pointed focus on the object, accompanied with a clear and translucent appearance of the object.

**5. Explain mental and physical pliancy.**

When one attains that single-pointed focus of unwavering concentration on the object for as long as one wishes, then one attains what is called mental pliancy. As one develops steady and single-pointed concentration on the object, one starts to experience a mental bliss. At that time, the mental defects that cause hesitation in pursuing the focus on a virtuous object are overcome, and are replaced with a feeling of bliss as one focuses on the object. The mind becomes very serviceable and one is able to focus on the object and remain focused on the object for as long as one wishes. When one attains that ability to focus on the object for as long as one wishes without any mental defects being present, then that is when one has attained mental pliancy.

Attaining mental pliancy then induces what is known as physical pliancy. This is a state where one has overcome the physical defects of unwillingness and weariness that one experiences when focusing on an object to develop meditative concentration. When all physical defects are removed and replaced with a physical serviceability that enables one to maintain the physical posture to focus on the object for as long as one wishes, then one experiences a physical bliss and that is where one attains physical pliancy. More specifically, when one attains physical serviceability by overcoming physical defects, then one attains physical pliancy. At that stage, one has attained both mental and physical pliancy, which enables one to remain focused on the object for as long as one wishes.

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# Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by the Venerable Michael Lobsang Yeshe

6 March 2018

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Based on the motivation generated during the recitation of the refuge and bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in our regular meditation practice.

As a reminder, going for *refuge* protects us from taking a mistaken or wrong path. Thus, when we take refuge in the Three Jewels we commit ourselves to following a righteous path, in accordance with the Buddha's teachings. Generating the *bodhicitta* motivation protects us from following a lesser path and ensures that we engage in the Mahayana or Great Vehicle path.

If we understand and generate those mindsets as much as possible, it will ensure that our practice becomes an actual Dharma practice. Just focusing the mind inward will not necessarily guarantee that our practice will be a Dharma practice, let alone serve as a means to overcome our mental afflictions. So, we make our meditation practice meaningful by ensuring it accords with true Dharma practice.

As the teachings document, for those who are in the process of developing concentration, even their sleep can be transformed into meditative concentration. Whereas for beginners or ordinary beings like us, it's actually the other way around – our attempt to develop meditative concentration actually turns into sleep!

I don't need to elaborate too much, but the main point I'm making is that when we make any attempt to engage in meditation practice, we must ensure that it becomes an actual Dharma practice. If we are mindful of that, then every attempt we make to meditate will become worthwhile.

With that in mind, we can now engage in our regular meditation. It would be really worthwhile for us to engage in this meditation practice periodically, in our spare time, not just when we do the practice here before our session. If everyone of us had time to do this practice, it would be the best way for us to increase love and compassion within our heart.

In formal practice, this meditation begins by visualising all sentient beings from all the six realms surrounding us in human form. Then, on top of our crown, we can visualise either our guru, who is inseparable from all the buddhas, or Buddha Shakyamuni, whichever we are most comfortable with. In fact it is good to imagine the Buddha on top of our crown at all times. Then we make the supplication, requesting all buddhas and one's gurus to bless our continuum so that we can engage in this practice in a meaningful way.

In accordance with the meaning of the verse that we recite when we actually engage in the practice, it is good to begin with spending some time thinking about the plight of the sentient beings surrounding us, who are

experiencing various sufferings and deprived of happiness. Contemplate this to the extent that you develop a real sense of how unbearable it is to witness the suffering of sentient beings, and their lack of happiness.

When their suffering becomes unbearable, then it is possible to generate the mind of wanting to take responsibility for alleviating the suffering of sentient beings and endowing them in happiness. Based on this sequence, we then do the actual practice of taking in their suffering and giving them our own happiness, which is the actual taking and giving practice.

In this way, our practice will really become meaningful. As mentioned earlier, it will become the optimum means to further increase love and compassion in our heart, a very meaningful practice.

One may have a lofty idea of doing grand practices, but really, if one misses the element of love and compassion, those practices definitely cannot serve as the basis of real Dharma practice. One can safely say that the very basis of real Dharma practice is the cultivation of love and compassion. Without that, any other practice will not really be a true Dharma practice.

## **TRAINING IN THE PRECEPT OF THE MIND (CONT.)**

Last week, we covered the first sub-heading of this section, which was 'training in calm abiding in order to gain clairvoyance'. The second sub-heading is:

### **How to train in calm abiding**

This has three subheadings:

1. Relying on the collections (favourable conditions or circumstances) for calm abiding
2. How to meditate on calm abiding
3. The benefits of calm abiding meditation

The means for developing calm abiding is presented very meticulously here. You will notice that while I have mentioned many of the points presented here before, it may have been in different contexts. Here they are precisely presented as the means for developing calm abiding.

### **Relying on the collections (favourable conditions or circumstances) for calm abiding**

As will be mentioned later, even if we were to attempt to develop calm abiding over a thousand years, we would not be able to achieve it without first gathering all the favourable or necessary conditions – what is known here as the collections – for developing calm abiding.

The commentary mentions this line from verse 38:

Therefore make repeated effort ...

By way of explaining what this means, the commentary now presents the hypothetical question:

Does it mean that just making effort is sufficient to achieve calm abiding?

As I mentioned earlier, just making an effort to develop calm abiding, in itself, is not sufficient because, as presented here:

To emphasise the significance of relying on the collections for calm abiding, it says;

39. *While the conditions for calm abiding  
Are incomplete, meditative stabilisation*

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*Will not be accomplished, even if one meditates  
Strenuously for thousands of years.*

The commentary further explains:

Thus maintaining well the conditions mentioned in the *Collection for Meditative Stabilization Chapter*, Tonpa (Drom Tonpa) said, “when the meditative concentration doesn’t arise we get frustrated and lose interest in it thinking why it is not arising despite our effort in looking for a pith instruction, and blame (not finding) the instruction as if that is the only thing that matters. In fact, the blame goes to not being able to find ourselves in the collections (favourable conditions for calm abiding).”

Similarly, Potowa also said, “we are not able to gain the concentration because of having not seriously taken into account the (gathering) of the collections for concentration, yet we blame it on (not finding) pith instruction, and just keep looking for such an instruction, such as an instruction of relying on a pure celibate mudra as a means to arise it (meditative concentration).”

I’ve also mentioned previously the pitfall of looking for some sort of alternative instruction when all the instructions have already been presented in the teachings. His Holiness the Dalai Lama often mentions that if we leave aside studying the eighteen volumes of Lama Tsongkhapa’s teachings and look for yet another pith instruction, we are completely missing the point. What Lama Tsongkhapa compiled into those eighteen volumes is, in fact, all the instructions, means and methods that were passed down from the great earlier masters, such as Arya Asanga and so forth. All the methods and pith instructions can be found within these collections of teachings.

The commentary continues:

Hence, if the limbs of calm abiding, the collections of (favourable) conditions are paralysed, then even if one vigorously and energetically meditates for thousands of years, one won’t be able to achieve the concentration of calm abiding. With the decline of its limbs, it is impossible to achieve calm abiding.

Therefore, one should establish and abide well in the limbs (favourable conditions) to cultivate meditative concentration.

This is the essential point to understand. Anyone who keenly wants to develop calm abiding, the optimum state of meditative concentration, needs to ensure they have all the favourable conditions, the limbs of collections as they are called here.

Only when all the limbs or favourable conditions are intact is it possible for someone to go into a serious meditation practice and, as the teachings present, develop calm abiding in as short a period of time as six months. That is possible. Some may require a longer period, but it is possible to achieve calm abiding in this life. However, if the favourable conditions are missing then, as the teaching presents, even if one were to put effort into meditating over a thousand years, one would not be able to develop calm abiding.

These points are really important to keep in mind. There are those who have gone into retreat and meditated for six months with the intention of developing calm abiding. But when they came out of retreat, they had lost

their faith, saying, ‘I didn’t develop calm abiding, so what the teachings present is incorrect.’

This is the danger of going into such a retreat without proper preparation – without having all the conditions intact. There have also been cases where some ordained sangha have gone into retreat attempting to develop meditative concentration, but at the end, far from developing meditative concentration, have come out and even given up their vows to lead very ordinary lives.

Once, when I asked after someone, I was told, ‘They’ve gone off into retreat to develop calm abiding’, I made a comment to the effect, ‘Oh, that’s not a very good sign!’ That was because I had heard of those accounts that I just mentioned.

So, if we are presenting instructions and methods for developing calm abiding, we need to be mindful and careful to ensure that the listeners properly understand the instructions. If the listeners misinterpret, or don’t fully understand the complete method, and only have a partial understanding, these faults can arise. Therefore, we need to be cautious.

Indeed, it is important to ensure all the conditions, as presented in the teachings, are intact.

The commentary further explains:

Now, what are the limbs mentioned in the chapter of the *Collected Samadhi*?

Having emphasised the need for the limbs, they are now presented as explained in the commentary on the chapter of the *Collected Samadhi*:

In the commentary, it is said that the limbs refer to those mentioned in the Arya Buddhadrata’s *Collected Samadhi*, such as those limbs:

- to be abandoned;
- to be preceded;
- to be prevented;
- of cutting off from torment;
- emerging of the mind;
- remembering the qualities;
- worth putting effort into;
- combining together; and
- the means of abiding.

Since the translator Gewai Lodro Choe who translated this and who directly received teaching from Jowo, Sharawa concluded that the limbs refer to all those mentioned in the *Sravaka Bhumi* (by Asanga) and in the beginning of Avalokiteshvara’s *sadhana*, those mentioned by Buddhadrata and those mentioned in the *sutra of Collected Samadhi*.

My Omniscient Guru (referring to the author of the commentary, Panchen Losang’s own teacher, Lama Tsongkhapa) said that those who wholeheartedly wish to achieve the *Samadhi* of calm abiding and special insight should strive hard in the thirteen limbs of collections for calm abiding as described in the *Sravaka Bhumi*.

This corresponds with what is presented in the *Great Treatise*, the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*. The thirteen limbs of collections are not actually listed here.

In align with that, Shangrom also stated that it is though necessary to gather those thirteen, there are four main branches, which are indispensable to

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acquire. The four are pure morality, less desire, contentment and solitude place.

So these, in essence, are the main four branches. As all of the thirteen conditions are not listed here, I was thinking of presenting this section as it is presented in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. Actually, the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*, the *Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment* by Lama Tsongkhapa, has a very good, detailed explanation, beginning with the benefits of developing calm abiding, then the prerequisites, followed by the actual method of developing calm abiding. They are all presented in great detail, so it would be very good for you to refer to the text to familiarise yourself with this topic.

While the *Lam Rim Chen Mo* has a very detailed explanation, I have referred you to *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* because this topic is simply presented there, and I've already covered these points when I taught the whole text once, previously. So that will serve as a reminder for those who have heard it before.

On a personal level, I took great interest in studying *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* when I was back in Tibet. I only had a handwritten manuscript of the text, and received one teaching on it while in Tibet. Then, of course, in more recent times, I received teachings on the text from His Holiness the Dalai Lama in India. So apart from having read and presented it to you, I've also gone through it myself thoroughly.

I might have related this to some of you previously, but I would like to just share with you the hardships that I had to endure in really gaining some understanding of this text. At that time my personal situation was very poor and difficult. I was living and studying in Sera Monastery, when teachings were being given in Lhasa. I think the distance between Sera and Lhasa was about six or seven miles – I'm not exactly sure, but it was quite a distance. I had to walk to Lhasa every morning to receive the teachings. I didn't have proper shoes to wear, food was very scarce and my clothing was very ragged. I would have looked very malnourished and poor.

I would go down every morning and come back every evening until the teachings ended. That's how I went about receiving those teachings. Even under such difficult circumstances, I felt that what I did was all worthwhile, because putting energy and time into receiving these teachings has definitely benefited my mind. For many years afterwards, I have found that the effort I made has served a great purpose.

I recall that one source of comfort for me during the teachings was a nun sitting next to me. She seemed to be from a well-off family, quite well-to-do. She had a mandala set that was actually made of gold. Seeing my poor condition, she would give me some food during the teachings and looked after me a bit. So, that was some source of comfort for me. I would have been maybe 21 or 22 years of age. It was a time when I was going through great physical hardships, which I attempted to turn into my practice on the path.

While having a great interest in this topic and having really studied and even meditated on it, I cannot claim that I have developed calm abiding yet. The reason is

none other than because the conditions were not met for me to develop calm abiding. This particular teaching on calm abiding began on the twenty-first day of the teachings, so the rest of the teaching would have taken a few more days to complete.

I think, altogether, the teachings on *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* took about twenty-five or so days. Afterwards other teachings were presented to us at the same time such as, *The Swift Path*, *The Words of Manjushri*, and *The Wheel of Sharp Weapons* etc. Altogether, the teachings would have taken over a month. It was during this time that I was going back and forth every day, as I mentioned earlier.

However, when I think about those circumstances now, one thing I can say is that although in my earlier part of life when I went to receive these teachings, I was very poor and at times hardly had enough to eat, and when I present these teachings myself now, I have very good external conditions and everything is very good for me!

So, I feel that my life has taken a turn for the better in terms of the general conditions. The fact that I have been able to always sustain my practice is, I feel, definitely due to the early, strong faith I had in the Dharma. I had strong faith in the Dharma, and I had strong faith in the teacher. So, I feel that the good conditions I experience now are definitely a result of that state of mind, and the endeavours I undertook at that time.

Calm abiding is presented under six headings in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. They are:

1. Cultivating the prerequisites for mental quiescence (or calm abiding)
2. The actual way to achieve mental quiescence
3. Taking this as the basis, how to achieve the nine mental states (which refers to the nine stages of development)
4. The way to achieve the mental states through the six powers
5. How there are four types of mental process
6. The way true mental quiescence develops from this point.

Having presented these headings here, I feel it would be good if you were to go over the text in a discussion group, together. Go over the main points under each heading. For example, the first heading Cultivating the Prerequisites for Mental Quiescence, includes the subdivisions of dwelling in a conducive place and having few wants; and so forth. You don't need to go into the text elaborately, just the main headings and the main points under each. If you could read the text and go through these points first, it will be easier for you when I present the explanation later and you will gain a better understanding.

The second heading, The Actual Way to Achieve Mental Quiescence, is the most important point. We definitely must overcome what are called the five faults (or pitfalls) and apply the eight antidotes (or adjustments). We need to really understand these points well – the five faults or pitfalls, then the antidotes that must be applied to overcome them.

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The main point is for us to familiarise ourselves with these points, which establishes a basis of good understanding for our further self-development.

### **CULTIVATING THE PREREQUISITES FOR MENTAL QUIESCENCE**

Under this first heading there are further subdivisions explaining what we call the limbs, or the conducive or necessary conditions that we need to have. The six listed in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* are: 1) dwelling in a conducive place; 2) having few wants or having less desire; 3) being content; 4) completely abandoning the many demands of society, which is also translated in some texts as refraining from engaging in the hustle and bustle of worldly life; 5) having pure ethics; and 6) completely abandoning conceptual thoughts such as desire.

All of these prerequisites are essential, but having pure ethics is the essential basis for developing meditative concentration. Without a basis of pure ethics or morality, meditative concentration definitely cannot be developed. We might be able to focus for a minute or two perhaps, but beyond that, we will definitely be unable to achieve actual single-pointed meditative concentration. This is an essential point.

### **THE WAY TO ACHIEVE MENTAL QUIESCENCE**

Further on, the text quotes from Maitreya's *Distinguishing Between the Extremes and the Middle Way*, which summarises the points in this verse:

Abandon five pitfalls, cultivate eight adjustments,  
And that will cause you to achieve it.

So the first two lines here show that the actual cause for achieving mental quiescence is abandoning the five pitfalls, or the five faults, and cultivating the eight adjustments, or the eight antidotes.

This verse then mentions:

I claim the five pitfalls are:  
Laziness; forgetting the instruction;  
Excitement and dullness;

Note that this translation uses 'dullness' where some other translations use 'laxity'. The next line is:

Nonadjustment; and readjustment.

Again, some translations use 'non-application' and 'reapplication'.

So, these are the main points to cover in your discussion: cultivating the prerequisites for mental quiescence, the six of which I listed earlier as dwelling in a conducive place, and so forth. Then, the actual way to achieve mental quiescence, the points for which are summarised in the verse I quoted above. These are the two main topics that you can discuss in your next session, and on the Tuesday after that I can continue to present on this topic.

It might be good for Denis to perhaps lead the meditation first, or lead the prayers and the meditation, and then follow that with the discussion. I guess you already have a format for discussion nights? It would be good to follow that format.

If you have *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, you can bring it and read from that. For those who do not have

that text but have the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*, the great treatise, the points are essentially the same in both. Otherwise, you may also find these texts on the internet. Everyone is talking about the internet these days! If you are keen to browse the internet, you may as well use it for finding things on the Dharma, if you can find some reliable sources. That would be a good thing to do.

If we consider ourselves to be people interested in the Dharma and who wish to practise it, then we can make our spare time worthwhile, for example, by looking up and researching Dharma material. Most importantly, we should spend most of our time in a virtuous way, in accordance with the Dharma. That would then be in accordance with our commitment to practise or follow the Dharma. Otherwise, if we spend most of our time focusing on worldly distractions, we will not find the opportunity to have a settled, calm and happy mind.

The more time we spend pursuing worldly distractions, the more excitement, agitation and agony this causes in the mind. Therefore, if we wish for a really calm and happy mind, the best way to achieve that is by ensuring we spend as much time as possible with the Dharma – thinking about the Dharma, pursuing a Dharma understanding, and so forth. This is something we need to keep in mind.

There is a quote from one of the great Kadampa masters Dromtonpa, which makes this point in the first few lines: 'Don't try to just have an enjoyable time, but rather strive to pursue a virtuous mind, or endeavour to engage in practice'.

The point here is that we all naturally wish to have a good time. But this may undermine our readiness to willingly take difficulties upon ourselves and make an effort to practise Dharma. Therefore the advice or instruction here is that, while we may naturally have this mind that wants to enjoy leisure and have a good time, if we are not mindful, this can undermine our pursuit of real Dharma practice.

To emphasise the need for that Dharma practice, Dromtonpa goes on to give this analogy to illustrate the nature of impermanence. It is like being in a market, where you might have many people gathered at one time, but after a while, following all the hustle and bustle of the gathering, everyone will disperse and go their own way. Then, that place becomes empty and quiet; after so much activity and commotion earlier, suddenly there's no-one around.

Dromtonpa relates this to our life, pointing out that while we are right now living within this body, very soon we will have to depart from this body. That is the nature of our existence. So, it is actually a reminder of death and impermanence. That being the case, he is encouraging us here to make our time worthwhile and spend it in pursuing the Dharma.

There are similar lines from other Kadampa masters. Also, Padampa Sangye, in a few lines in one of his works, gives particular advice to couples, saying, 'Don't waste too much time having arguments and conflicts, because separation will inevitably take place, just like in any meeting'. He is saying that just as a meeting is finished

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after a few hours, similarly, your time together as a couple will naturally end; there will be separation.

This particular advice Padampa Sangye gave was addressed to the people of Tingri. At the end he says, 'You Tingripas follow this advice and instruction'.

I used to know quite a few of these verses by heart. Even just reciting them encourages me. They are really helpful, very essential words. I'm pretty sure there are translations of such verses from the Kadampa masters. I think there is a collected works of the Kadampa masters that I've heard has been translated. I once mentioned [Kadampa Master] Geshe Chengawa's four means of developing patience, which come from that text.

These Kadampa masters' collected works contain quintessential advice that really strikes a chord. One of the examples mentioned in this collection was that of a lama who was giving this teaching and said, 'This is not a time to be giving teachings to others, but rather it's a time to subdue one's own mind'. After reading that, another teacher is said to have started to cry and couldn't give any teachings at that time! The next time he attempted to give teachings, the same thing happened. Further on in the same collected works, the text mentions, 'It is not the time to go out and benefit others; rather, it's time to subdue one's own mind'. This is a very significant point: without first having subdued one's own mind, there's no possible way we can help others subdue their minds.

The same collected works mention advice from Atisha, who says, 'The pith instruction is to look at one's own mind. The best friend is cultivating mindfulness and introspection. The best quality is benefitting others.' Again, these are essential points, meticulously presented in just a few lines. Particularly for Dharma practitioners, the reminder that our best friend is mindfulness and introspection is a pith instruction.

In fact, many people who have heard this pointed advice have commented that it's very sound, helpful, and practical.

I sometimes read this quote from Dromtonpa's and relate it to myself. As mentioned, the quote says, don't think about having an enjoyable time, but spend your time putting an effort into your Dharma practice. Then it talks about how your life is impermanent; just like a gathering in a marketplace that eventually disperses, your life will end. I was just reciting and thinking about these points earlier today. Because I was thinking about these points, I was reminded of them now and share them with you. These sayings are not just some smart words to try to impress others. They come from these great Kadampa masters' own practice and experience. From having engaged in practising the teachings themselves, they have distilled what has moved their own mind, and have expressed it in their own words. So, repeating those words and thinking about the meaning will definitely help our own mind.

Indeed, contemplating these words reminds us of our own fragility, and the significance of our own imminent death. This is the reality – we have to experience separation from this body. If, whenever that time comes, we have had prior acquaintance with that reality and

have prepared our mind, we can willingly accept it. It will not cause great mental agony and fear.

Particularly at that crucial time when we have to leave our bodies behind, as mentioned in the teachings, our friends will not be able to help, and our wealth and so forth will not help. The only thing that will help us at that time is the Dharma practice that we have cultivated in our own mind. That is a significant point to remember.

Now we can recite the Tara praises for Sue Fotheringham. I think she's going under some treatment now. I happened to meet Sue a few days ago, and she confided to me that she was feeling very anxious at having to undergo this treatment. I don't know if she understood much of my English, but I tried to console her and tell her that it's OK, just have a calm mind, settle down, and do some prayers.

Indeed, sometimes we seem to be holding onto the preconception that we have to experience anxiety or a disturbed state of mind at difficult times. If we have already made up our mind that this is going to be the case, then we will have already prepared ourselves to be in that state of mind! That's why I was trying to give her a different perspective – it is possible to have a calm mind. Don't think about being anxious when it happens, or you will be anxious when it happens. If you just focus on Tara, and just do your prayers, your mind will definitely settle down, and you'll be fine. If we can just look at things in a different way, try to remind ourselves to rely on the deity, and mentally do some prayers, then definitely things will be much more manageable. We can deal with difficulties more easily.

So we will dedicate our prayers for Sue. Dedicate that whatever treatment she needs to go through, may it all be successful, and may she have a good outcome.

The translation of the commentary on *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* called *Joy of the Blossomed Excellent* by Panchen Lobsang Choekyi Gyaltzen is used with the kind permission of Sandup Tsering.

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*Edited Version*

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Tara Institute 'Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment' Study Group 2018

*Homework*

Block: 1

Week: 4 (6 March 2018)

1. 'As I mentioned earlier, just making an effort to develop calm abiding, in itself, is not sufficient.'  
Why?

2. List the limbs of Calm Abiding

3. List the prerequisites for Calm Abiding.

4. ".....the actual cause for achieving mental quiescence is abandoning the five pitfalls, or the five faults, and cultivating the eight adjustments, or the eight antidotes."

List the five pitfalls.

**Block: 1**

**Week: 4 (6 March 2018)**

**1. As I mentioned earlier, just making an effort to develop calm abiding, in itself, is not sufficient. Why?**

The commentary continues:

Hence, if the limbs of calm abiding, the collections of (favourable) conditions are paralysed, then even if one vigorously and energetically meditates for thousands of years, one won't be able to achieve the concentration of calm abiding. With the decline of its limbs, it is impossible to achieve calm abiding.

Therefore, one should establish and abide well in the limbs (favourable conditions) to cultivate meditative concentration.

This is the essential point to understand. Anyone who keenly wants to develop calm abiding, the optimum state of meditative concentration, needs to ensure they have all the favourable conditions, the limbs of collections as they are called here.

Only when all the limbs or favourable conditions are intact is it possible for someone to go into a serious meditation practice and, as the teachings present, develop calm abiding in as short a period of time as six months. That is possible. Some may require a longer period, but it is possible to achieve calm abiding in this life. However, if the favourable conditions are missing then, as the teaching presents, even if one were to put effort into meditating over a thousand years, one would not be able to develop calm abiding.

**2. List the limbs of Calm Abiding**

Having emphasised the need for the limbs, they are now presented as explained in the commentary on the chapter of the *Collected Samadhi*:

In the commentary, it is said that the limbs refer to those mentioned in the Arya Buddhadrā's *Collected Samadhi*, such as those limbs:

- to be abandoned;
- to be preceded;
- to be prevented;
- of cutting off from torment;
- emerging of the mind;
- remembering the qualities;
- worth putting effort into;
- combining together; and
- the means of abiding.

**3. List the prerequisites for Calm Abiding.**

**CULTIVATING THE PREREQUISITES FOR MENTAL QUIESCENCE**

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**4. ".....the actual cause for achieving mental quiescence is abandoning the five pitfalls, or the five faults, and cultivating the eight adjustments, or the eight antidotes." List the five pitfalls**



## THE WAY TO ACHIEVE MENTAL QUIESCENCE

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