

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུང་སྟེ།



28 September 1999

Cultivate the bodhicitta motivation, thinking "In order to benefit all sentient beings I shall attain the state of Buddhahood, and it is for this purpose that I listen to these Lam Rim teachings, and that I shall put them into practice to fully calm my mind".

Types Of Laziness (cont)

There are three main obstacles to the generation of joyful effort. We have finished the first, which is the laziness of procrastination.

422.331.142 The Laziness Of Being Attracted To Worldly Activities

བྱ་བ་དྲན་ཞེན་གྱི་ལེ་ལོ།

The second obstacle to joyful effort is the laziness of being attracted to inferior worldly activities.

This form of laziness is caused by our involvement in activities which are ultimately meaningless, and which we engage in because of distractions in our mind, or because they give us some immediate pleasure. We are talking here of meaningless worldly activities such as working to become wealthy, or reading very worldly texts.

We have a strong attachment towards all these worldly activities and never tire of pursuing them. The fact is that they are a hindrance to our spiritual practice. It is due to our pre-occupation with all these meaningless worldly activities that we don't engage in spiritual or Dharma practice. Therefore engaging in all these worldly activities and being attached to them is regarded as a form of laziness, because they directly hinder us from practising Dharma.

Remedy: To overcome this form of laziness we should contemplate the fact that all these worldly and inferior activities to which we are attached, and with which we pre-occupy ourselves, are a cause to take lower rebirth.

It is said that to understand our situation we need to realise that although there are a great many ways of finding happiness, the supreme one is the holy Dharma. Our daily actions are Dharma if they are positive. So if they are not positive this means that we have abandoned Dharma.

If we check our daily actions we may find that they do not accord with Dharma, and that they are the result of some form of mental distraction. If we check the result of these actions we see that they are leading us to lower rebirth, and this makes us realise there is no benefit in pursuing them. However, even if our actions look very worldly or mundane, we can make them a bit more positive, virtuous and wholesome by acting out of the right motivation.

In *The Great Exposition of the Stages Of The Path*, Lama Tsong Khapa says that there are two main obstacles to our spiritual practice.

1. The first obstacle is not engaging in spiritual practice, even if you have gained the knowledge of Dharma and see the possibility of achieving the state of Buddhahood.

This is obviously caused by the first two types of laziness: procrastination and being attracted to inferior activities. With the laziness of the procrastination we are always postponing our practice, and with the second laziness we are too pre-occupied with other inferior activities.

2. The second obstacle is to think "I am not able to practice Dharma" which is the third form of laziness of discouragement."

422.331.141 The Laziness Of Discouragement

ལུས་པའི་ལེ།

Discouragement Because Of The Result

With this type of laziness we do not engage in spiritual practice because we feel that it is impossible for us to achieve the goal of the practice. For instance we may think "How could I possibly achieve the state of Buddhahood, and how can I possibly benefit all sentient beings?"

The state of Buddhahood means that all your faults are exhausted but all the excellent qualities are attained. Thinking of how difficult it is to remove even a single fault, and how extremely difficult it is to perfect one good quality, you feel discouraged by the thought of how impossible it is for you achieve this state of Buddhahood.

Remedy: To overcome this form of laziness, we need to inspire ourselves by contemplating these lines from Shantideva's *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*,

The Buddhas only teach the truth.

The Tathagata (or Buddha) said that even ants

Have the potential to achieve the state of Buddhahood.

There is no doubt that a human with a discriminating mind,

Knowing what is beneficial and what is harmful,

Can achieve the state of Buddhahood ¹

We can encourage ourself by thinking that the Buddha's words are always true, and that he said that all beings have the capacity to achieve the state of Buddhahood. This thought can overcome laziness.

Discouragement About The Path

This is where you do not practice Dharma because you feel that the spiritual path is too hard to traverse, and requires too much sacrifice.

In order to achieve the state of Buddhahood you have to engage in the Bodhisattva's deeds, which include the practice of giving, such as giving parts of one's own body, giving ones body and so on. We are discouraged because we think "How can somebody like me give away parts of my body like my hands or legs?" This is discouragement about the spiritual path, which leads to the ultimate state of Buddhahood.

¹ verses 17-19, chapter 7, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*

Remedy: Although Bodhisattvas' deeds are difficult to follow, we must realise that they yield a great result: they fulfil the welfare of oneself and of all other beings.

Giving away the parts of one's body seems to be very difficult, however one has to see that it yields a good result in the end, and that through this practice one can accomplish both personal goals as well as what you seek for all other beings. You also have to understand that giving one's body is a matter of familiarity with the practice of giving. So initially you can make yourself familiar with giving some small object within your own capacity and build on that. It is said as you make progress and develop higher spiritual realisations, then even the practice of giving one's body becomes easier.

If you make gradual progress in the path then when you reach a certain level of realisation the practice of giving the limbs of one's body, or even one's body, becomes no more difficult than giving away ordinary objects like vegetables. When you reach a certain level of high realisation your mental capacity, and even your mental courage also becomes greater, so you can easily reach that goal of giving away your body.

We may think there is pain and difficulty with spiritual practice, but in fact we should also think of how much pain and difficulty we have to endure within this cyclic existence without spiritual practice. In cyclic existence, without any choice, time and time again we have to lose parts of our bodies, lose our limbs, lose our head and we have to undergo a great deal of pain and suffering. Let alone benefiting others we are not benefiting ourselves. On the other hand if we engage in the spiritual practice with all its hardships, it is more meaningful and fruitful.

These days there are a lot of people who generously give their organs to other people. I know that monks in the Sera Monastery have been requested by some patients to donate blood which they have done. I know of a recent case where one of the monks, aged 26, gave his kidney to a young girl who had been hospitalised for a long period of time, and who otherwise had no hope of recovery. The transplant has been successful and now they both are recovering very well in hospital.

Discouragement About Place

There is also the discouragement, which arises in association with place in the cycle of rebirth. This arises by thinking that completing the path to the state of buddhahood is going to take a long period of time, during which one has to be born over and over again in cyclic existence. One is discouraged because of the repeated cycle of rebirth, along with the sufferings one has to experience before achieving the state of buddhahood.

Remedy: To counteract this form of discouragement think that bodhisattvas do not find the cycle of being born and reborn in rebirth to be very painful. Rather they find it very joyful, and do not show dislike towards this process of rebirth. As Shantideva said in *A Guide To The Bodhisattva's Way Of Life*

Because bodhisattvas have abandoned negative evil actions

They do not have to face the suffering result because they do not create the cause.

Because Bodhisattvas have wisdom about the lack of inherent existence of cyclic existence

Their mind is always full of joy.²

This concludes the three types of laziness.

422 331 144 Armour-Like Perseverance

གོ་ཚའི་བརྩོན་འགྲུས།

The first type of joyful effort, called armour-like joyful effort means to armour one's practice with great mental courage and determination. In order to cultivate such a kind of joyful effort the mind has to be trained to be very courageous about practice. For instance you have to train the mind to be prepared to remain in hot fires for aeons and aeons of time, for the sake of each sentient being.

If you follow the secret mantra vehicle, then even if from your part you have courage to remain in cyclic existence as long as need is there, thinking of the other sentient beings and their suffering gives you the strong urge to ever more quickly achieve the state of Buddhahood. Just like a mother out of her affection and love would have no hesitation in jumping into the water to save her drowning child, you feel the need to achieve the state of buddhahood to rescue all other beings as quickly as possible.

There is one question here. When a Bodhisattva engages in the stages of the path shared by the person of medium scope he generates a wish to achieve liberation from cyclic existence. This wish appears to contradict the Bodhisattva's commitment to remain in cyclic existence to benefit other beings. However, there is no contradiction here because when a Bodhisattva takes a rebirth in cyclic existence it was his/her choice due to his/her compassion and prayer for other beings and not a result of karma and delusion. Because it was not a result of karma and delusion, a Bodhisattva dwells in cyclic existence but is not affected by its suffering. Even in cyclic existence he/she will only find absolute peace and happiness. Moreover just like a practitioner of medium scope, a Bodhisattva abandons the wheel of rebirth turned over by the force of karma and delusion. Hence, Bodhisattvas seek not only the liberation from cyclic existence but also the unsurpassed liberation of complete enlightenment.

When you are lazy or have no motivation to engage in spiritual practice to benefit other beings, then you must apply this armour-like joyful effort.

422 331.145 The Joyful Effort Of Gathering Virtue

དག་བཅོས་སྤྱད་ཀྱི་བརྩོན་འགྲུས།

The joyful effort of gathering virtue refers to ascetic practices of accumulating merits, purifying negativities, making offerings and engaging in the six perfections.

422 331.146 The Joyful Effort Of Benefiting Others

སེམས་ཅན་དོན་བྱེད་ཀྱི་བརྩོན་འགྲུས།

The joyful effort of benefiting other beings refers to engaging in the practice of the four means of gathering disciples, and also all the practices, which are similar to the practices of the morality of benefiting other beings.

It is said in the commentary that, the perfection of joyful effort, the perfection of morality, and the perfection of patience may seem to be very similar. However they can be distinguished by their different mental attitudes: taking delight in actions, the motivation of the action, and the thought to refrain with the opponent object.

Next teaching we shall begin the perfection of concentration or calm abiding.

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² verses 27, chapter 7, *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*

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ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལམ་རིམ་རྣམས་གྲོལ་ལམ་གྱི་འགྲུབ་ལམ་བཅུ་དཔལ་



5 October 1999

Please cultivate the proper motivation.

422.331.2 Training In The Last Two Perfections

ཀྱུང་པར་དུས་མཚན་ ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལམ་གྱི་སྒྲིབ་ལམ་

We are now up to the heading How To Train In The Last Two Perfections, which has two subheadings:

422.331.21 Training In Calm Abiding

བསམ་གཏན་གྱི་རོ་བོ་ཞི་གནས་ལ་སྒྲིབ་ལམ་

422.331.22 Training In Special Insight

ཤེས་རབ་གྱི་རོ་བོ་ལྷག་མཐོང་ལ་སྒྲིབ་ལམ་

422.331.21 Training In Calm Abiding

Training In Calm Abiding is presented under the following six subheadings:

422.331.211 Gathering The Prerequisite Conditions To Achieve Calm Abiding

ཞི་གནས་ཀྱི་ཚོགས་བསྐྱེད་པ།

422.331.212 The Way To Achieve Calm Abiding

ཞི་གནས་སྒྲིབ་ལམ་དངོས།

422.331.213 How Calm Abiding Is Achieved At Nine Levels

དེ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་སེམས་གནས་དགུ་སྒྲིབ་ལམ་

422.331.214 How The Nine Levels Of Abiding Are Achieved Through The Six Forces

དེ་སྒྲིབ་སྒྲུབ་ཀྱི་ལྷན་སྐྱོད་ལམ་ལུགས།

422.331.215 The Four Mental Processes

དེ་ལ་ཡིད་བྱེད་བཞི་ཡོད་ལམ་

422.331.216 The Criterion Of Having Attained Calm Abiding

དེ་ལས་ཞི་གནས་དངོས་སྒྲིབ་ལམ་

Benefits Of Calm Abiding

In Lama Tsong Khapa's text *The Great Exposition to the Stages of the Path* the topic of Calm Abiding And Special Insight begins with a presentation of the benefits of each. The *Sutra Unraveling the Thought* says,

All the spiritual qualities of the lesser and higher vehicles

And the mundane and supramundane qualities,

Are the result of calm abiding and special insight.

How can all spiritual qualities literally be the result of calm abiding and special insight? Lama Tsong Khapa clarifies the meaning of this sutra in the following way: any spiritual quality that you can think of is connected to either calm abiding, as in single-pointed concentration, or special insight, in the sense of discriminating wisdom. As there are

no spiritual qualities, which do not belong to either some aspect of concentration or of wisdom, therefore as is said in the sutra, all spiritual qualities are the result of calm abiding and special insight.

Lama Tsong Khapa comments that the reason why there is an emphasis on the qualities, which are the result of calm abiding and special insight, is to indicate that, without the combination of these two, it is not possible to gain any realisation, or spiritual qualities on the path of the lesser vehicle or higher vehicle. In other words, to achieve any spiritual qualities you need both the aspect of concentration, which is calm abiding, and wisdom, which is special insight - together and fully developed.

Definition Of Calm Abiding

It is said that calm abiding is a state of single-pointed level of concentration in which the meditator can remain for as long as he or she wishes. It is achieved by means of the nine mental abidings. While in a state of calm abiding the meditator experiences the bliss of pliancy and suppleness because of their level of concentration

How All Types Of Meditative Concentration Are Incorporated In Calm Abiding

Calm abiding is not something unique to Buddhism, as many other religions practise it. What is unique to Buddhism is that calm abiding when it is conjoined with renunciation becomes a cause to achieve the state of liberation, and when it is conjoined with the practice of taking refuge it serves as a true pure Buddhist practice. Whether you follow the Sutrayana or Mantrayana Buddhist path, calm abiding is indispensable.

If one follows the Sutrayana, it is said that there is no chance of gaining the realisation of emptiness without calm abiding, nor is there any chance of gaining realisation of the generation and completion stages of the secret mantra if one follows the Mantrayana path. This means that all the realisations of meditative concentration depend upon calm abiding. It is said that just as you need a container to hold the water, so you need to achieve calm abiding in order to gain any meditative concentration of the Sutrayana or Mantrayana. Thus it is important to first train oneself to gain calm abiding.

Why Both Calm Abiding And Special Insight Are Needed

All meditative success and concentration rest upon calm abiding and special insight. In fact Lama Tsong Khapa's *Great Expositions Of The Stages Of The Path* explains clearly why it is necessary to have both calm abiding and special insight to achieve the state of liberation. He uses the analogy of looking at a wall painting in a dark room. To see such a painting you need a butter lamp which is very bright and clear, and which has a very steady flame unshaken by any wind or draught. Only then can you see the painting very clearly.

In the same way you need the clarity of special insight and stability of calm abiding. In order to uproot yourself from cyclic existence to achieve liberation you need to gain the special insight realisation of emptiness, which is dependent on calm abiding. Just as in a dark room you need both the brightness of the butter lamp as well as a steady light, so you need both the clarity and sharpness of discriminating wisdom, as well as the stability of calm abiding.

Without achieving some level of mental concentration it is very hard to effectively engage in any virtuous practice, because we are so easily distracted. However it is said that if we have achieved calm abiding, then all the spiritual practice and meditation we do becomes very much easier, and then we can develop [spiritual] qualities very naturally and without much effort. For instance if we do the meditation on death and impermanence or the precious human rebirth, we can all make very fast and smooth progress. As a benefit of calm abiding whatever practice we do becomes more productive, is more stable and is not weakened easily by mental distraction.

The Order Of Gaining Calm Abiding And Special Insight

There is a quotation from Shantideva's *A Guide To The Bodhisattva's Way Of Life* which says,

Understanding that the mental delusions
Are destroyed by special insight which is conjoined with
calm abiding
So gain this calm abiding first.¹

This quotation actually shows the order of gaining calm abiding and special insight. It is definite in the sense that you first have to gain calm abiding, because without it you cannot gain special insight.

422.331.221 Gathering The Prerequisite Conditions To Achieve Calm Abiding

Atisha's text *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* says that without suitable conditions then even if you pass thousands of years meditating on calm abiding you will not achieve it. This shows the importance of first gathering the suitable conditions to achieve calm abiding, of which there are six.

422.331.221.1 Suitable Place

མཐུན་པའི་ཡུལ་ན་གནས་པ།

Maitreya's text *The Ornament for Sutra* lists the five qualities of a suitable place.

1. Easy access to food, clothing and so forth.
2. A safe location in the sense of being free of any violence or threats to your life from humans, non-human spirits or wild beasts.
3. The place should be clean, hygienic and healthy in the sense that one is not likely to contract a disease.
4. Having good friends whose actions and behaviour accords with pure morality, and who share similar views to one.
5. The place should be free of noise from people during the day, and from the noise of barking dogs during the night.
6. The sixth and most important prerequisite is having gained all the necessary knowledge about the subject of one's meditation. Before pursuing the meditation practice it is important to thoroughly study the subject matter, and also to have thoroughly contemplated it, so that there is no doubt about the meditation practice. If the meditation practice is a retreat on certain

visualisations or mantra recitations, then you make sure that you have fulfilled all the prerequisites for those practices, whether it be receiving the necessary initiations, or commentaries, or oral transmissions. When you think of doing some retreat you should not think only of material needs like the place to do the retreat, and the facilities such as food, clothing and so on, because when you then start the retreat you [may] become confused, eg if the retreat is for some recitation you do not know what mantra to recite, or [even] where to begin.

We should also understand that when we undertake some long meditation or retreat, what we want to achieve is not some moment of temporary peace or a temporary getaway. Rather we are trying to achieve something that can be of long term benefit. If, in your meditation practice you have achieved some level of mental concentration, and gained more understanding of your mind and so forth, then this is supposed to be of benefit later on when you confront the real world. When you go into a crowd you will be able to utilise whatever spiritual realisations and experience you have gained to some effect and personal benefit.

422.331.221.2 Having Few Desires

འདོད་པ་ཚུང་བ།

The condition of having few desires overcomes the thought of always wanting the best, and wanting as much as possible.

422.331.221.3 Having Contentment

ཚོག་ཤེས་པ།

Having contentment is contenting oneself with simple needs in terms of place of living, food, clothing and so forth. Without these conditions of having contentment and few desires we grasp strongly at various objects of sensual pleasures, and can easily be distracted from our meditation practice.

422.331.221.4 Having Pure Morality

ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་དག་པ།

Having pure morality is important because generally speaking morality is the basis for achieving all the excellent qualities. How is morality the basis for all excellent qualities? You know that without this practice of pure morality you cannot remove the very gross level of mental distractions, and all the gross faults in your actions. Without ridding ourselves of the gross faults in our mind or in our actions, there is no chance of removing the internal distractions such as the subtle faults and distractions in our mind.

Geshe-la says that he has explained a number of times in the past how morality is the basis of all excellent spiritual qualities. He has also discussed morality in the light of how each of the three-fold trainings are all dependent upon each other, and how each one is indispensable to success on the spiritual path. Please recall these teachings.

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

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Note on authentication

Transcribed from the tape by Kathi Melnic
Edited by Adair Bunnnett and Alan Molloy

¹ A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life, Ch. 8, verse 4

Checked by Sandup Tsering and Alan Molloy

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ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལུ་ལག་བཅུངས།



19 October 1999

Bodhicitta is wishing for the state of buddhahood for the sake of all beings. You should think that you are listening to this teaching on the lam rim to fulfil that aspiration, and for the same reason think of putting this lam rim teaching into practice.

We have been discussing the topic of accumulating suitable conditions for meditating to achieve the state of calm abiding.

The first suitable condition is the right place, which we learnt should have five characteristics. The remaining suitable conditions are ones, which you have to create for yourself. In other words if you have not created these suitable conditions of having less desire and so forth for yourself, then the first suitable condition of the finding a suitable place with all the right resources is of no use at all.

422.331.211.5 Abandoning the Demands of Society

བྱུ་བ་མང་པོའི་འདྲ་འཛིན་ཡོངས་སུ་སྤང་བ།

Having discussed the suitable conditions of having less desire, having contentment and having pure moral ethics, we now turn to the condition of abandoning the multiple distracting activities of daily life. To achieve the single-pointed state of concentration of calm abiding it is essential that we impose some discipline on our mind and body, in terms of isolating ourself both mentally and physically from all distracting activities.

The conditions of having less desires, achieving contentment and having pure morality are to remove the gross mental distractions caused by external activities and objects from our mind. With worldly activities our mind is naturally drawn to delusions such as desire and hatred. Then our mind experiences restlessness as it endlessly worries about these worldly and distracting activities, and meditation becomes so much harder.

If we think of the influence on our mind of the external distractions caused by daily life, we can see the tracks that they leave as they cause our mind to wander. Then we can see how easily we waste our time day and night, month after month, year after year, in activities which bring no meaning or purpose to our life. For instance how much time do we waste in idle gossip or reading worldly texts purely to entertain ourself and fill in time? Think of how many things we do just to fill in time. When we really honestly think about how we use our time, and then think about how we expect to derive some automatic benefit from the Dharma that we are studying, then it is not surprising that we see so little benefit in terms of calming our mind. The truth is that to achieve the benefits we seek we have to apply the Dharma to our actions.

422.3311.211.6 Abandoning Conceptual Thoughts Such As Desire

འདོད་པ་ལ་སོགས་པའི་རྣམ་རྟོག་ཡོངས་སུ་སྤང་བ།

If, on the other hand, we think of having less desire and mental distraction in our mind, then that means that there are fewer worries and things to do. This is more conducive to enabling our mind to pursue meditation practice. We should try to think that as part of our practice to achieve the state of calm abiding we have to minimise desire and mental distraction. In order to do this we should try to contemplate death and impermanence, and the shortcomings of cyclic existence. Just contemplating the various topics from the teachings of the small and medium stages of the path can help us to overcome or reduce, for instance, attachment towards this life and its superficial pleasures. This can help us to settle and calm our mind.

The main source of all immediate problems and the source of mental distractions is desire and hatred. We should try to learn that there is no good basis for desire or hatred towards any object. In other words there is no basis for any particular object to be perceived as very attractive and appealing, or very ugly and unappealing. Why? Because this perception of the perceived object as being beautiful or ugly is just a projection of our own mind due to some immediate conditions. When we look into our mind we see that the way we view things is always changing in that what we now see as very beautiful may in the next moment appear to be very ugly. If we think back over the last year, we can see how much our perceptions of the various objects in our mind have fluctuated between good and bad, ugly and beautiful.

Try to understand that having desire for a particular object is no reason to grasp at that object very strongly. Likewise for hatred or aversion: try to understand that there is no concrete reason for that hatred, and that it is just the way that you are perceiving things. We have to overcome desire and hatred, because without doing so we cannot find any peace, happiness or joy in our mind, and then we cannot rest. Normally of course, when we feel disturbed or unhappy we do not check our minds, and so we do not consider that it is because there is some desire or hatred in our mind. Rather we simply try to blame it on to someone else, who is usually someone close to us. In fact if we take a close look at the cause of our unhappiness and restlessness, then we can see that the real cause is desire or hatred.

In relationships we may develop an interest in another person because they seem to be more appealing, more

friendly, more beautiful or more handsome than one's existing friend, then out of this you somehow mistreat and abuse your existing friend. Although this conflict appears at first glance to be in our relationship, we are only perceiving it at a superficial level, i.e. with one's friend or partner, and are not looking to the deeper causes of our own perceptions and grasping as a result of a deluded mind. We should try to understand that we must always keep a check on desire and hatred and overcome it, because if we do not do so then we can accumulate a great many negative actions. We should also try to understand that the one who has to bear the result of these negative actions is ourself - that is the truth of the law of karma, the law of cause and effect which applies to all beings whether or not they accept the Dharma. You have to bear the result of your own actions, and the result of negative actions is misery and suffering.

This concludes the topic Suitable Conditions For Achieving Calm Abiding.

422.331.212 The Actual Way To Achieve Calm Abiding

ཞི་གནས་སྐྱབ་ཚུལ་དངོས།

In his text *Discriminating Between the Extremes and the Middle Way*, Maitreya Buddha said that calm abiding is achieved by applying the eight remedies or the opponent forces to the five obstacles.

In achieving calm abiding it is also important to know the right physical meditation posture, which is generally described as the posture of Vairochana Buddha, and which has seven or eight features, depending on whether or not you include counting the breath.

The five main obstacles are:

1. Laziness
2. Forgetfulness
3. Mental sinking and excitement. When we talk of there being five obstacles to meditation, these two are counted as one, however in Lama Tsong Khapa's text *The Great Exposition*, it says that you can sometimes count mental sinking and excitement as two, which makes six obstacles.
4. Not applying the antidote
5. Over-applying the antidote

422.331.212.1 The Obstacle Of Laziness

ཉེས་པ་དང་པོ་ལོལ།

To oppose the five obstacles there are eight remedies. Of these eight the first four remedies are the opponent forces to the first obstacle of laziness. The first four of the eight remedies are:

1. Faith in the benefit of concentration
2. Aspiration or interest in achieving single-pointed concentration
3. Joyous effort in single-pointed concentration
4. Pliancy which is the result of single-pointed concentration

It is imperative to first overcome laziness which is the main obstacle single-pointed concentration. Laziness is the first of the five obstacles because it is the one which initially prevents us from engaging in single-pointed concentration meditation. Laziness must also be counteracted even after one has begun pursuing single-

pointed concentration, otherwise one may soon lose interest and stop meditating. Until the end result is achieved laziness is a perpetual obstacle, and one needs to be constantly alert to its presence.

The fourth remedy to laziness is the bliss of pliancy, which is also the result of single-pointed concentration. When you achieve that pliancy of mental and physical suppleness you have totally removed laziness from your mind. Mentally there is some increase of bliss, and along with that your mind becomes very serviceable, in the sense that you have gained full control over it. With physical pliancy there is physical suppleness and bliss in the body, making it very serviceable, so that physically nothing hinders or impairs one in achieving single-pointed concentration. By achieving physical and mental pliancy you completely overcome laziness.

Obviously achieving the state of mental and physical pliancy is dependent upon making an effort, which means having joyous effort, or a strong determination to be diligent and make a continuous effort to achieve single-pointed concentration. How can one generate joyous effort? It has to come from the strong aspiration to achieve single-pointed concentration, which in turn comes from faith, and an understanding of the benefits of single-pointed concentration.

Benefits of Single-pointed Concentration

The most important thing is to develop the understanding of the benefits of single-pointed concentration.

1. As said before, one benefit is gaining the mental and physical pliancy through which one experiences bliss in mind and body.
2. It is said one can then place one's mind on objects, without any movement, as stable as a mountain.
3. One can release the mind, to roam far and wide.
4. One can achieve special insight if one analyses, and utilises one's wisdom to investigate and analyse the truth, and then conjoins this with calm abiding. As a benefit of achieving special insight one can overcome all the manifested mental delusions.
5. Furthermore, if one continues this meditation of the union of calm abiding and special insight conjoined with skilful means one can even remove the seeds or latencies of mental delusions, and of all the dualistic misconceptions.

Although at the moment we may not have actual experience of mental and physical pliancy, when we practise meditation properly we do experience a substitute for it in the form of mental peace and physical relaxation. Whenever we engage in meditation, we place our mind on the object and remove mental distractions from the mind as much as possible.

Generally, as much as possible, try to understand the benefits, qualities and advantages of achieving single-pointed concentration or calm abiding, and try to contemplate the benefits over and over again, developing this understanding until there is the beginning of serious interest in pursuing single-pointed concentration. When serious interest and aspiration for single-pointed concentration arises then naturally we become more determined and make an effort to pursue it.

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



26 October 1999

We must first establish the bodhicitta motivation, generating a genuine wish to achieve the state of buddhahood for the sake of all beings, and then think that these teachings that we are receiving are to achieve that goal. Think also that we must put the teachings into practice to achieve our goal.

In the preceding teachings we learnt that there are five main obstacles that we have to overcome in our pursuit of the state of calm abiding, and their antidotes are the eight remedies. Of the five main obstacles, the first one is laziness, which is the one that we initially have to confront and overcome before beginning the actual meditation. Of the eight remedies the first four are for counteracting laziness.

The Four Remedies To Laziness (cont)

The first remedy is faith, which is based on a true understanding of the qualities of single-pointed concentration. Second is the aspiration to achieve single-pointed concentration, which will naturally arise if we have successfully cultivated faith. Third is joyous effort, which we generate in achieving single-pointed concentration. The fourth remedy is pliancy, which is the result of the first three.

We briefly described these four remedies in the last teaching. We have to understand that laziness is the greatest obstacle to achieving single-pointed concentration. It is due to laziness that we have no interest in beginning to train to achieve single-pointed concentration, and it is also an obstacle during our practice, as it prevents us from making the continuous effort that is necessary to achieve single-pointed concentration.

In short, laziness is an obstacle in the sense that it drives our mind to the opposite of what we ought to do, for instance practising single-pointed meditation.

422.331.212.2 Forgetfulness

ཉེས་པ་གཉེས་པ་གདམས་པ་བརྗེས།

The next obstacle to single-pointed concentration is forgetfulness, which means losing the object from our mind. In relation to this it is said in the text, *The Essence of the Middle Way*, that we have to train our mind to remain in single-pointed focus in the same way that we train a wild elephant. This example explains the meaning of disciplining the mind with single-pointed concentration very clearly. Here the one point we have to consider is the fact that in order to achieve single-pointed concentration, we need an object with which to achieve single-pointed concentration.

Objects Of Meditation

As to the object of calm abiding, one sutra lists four sets of objects:

1. Pervasive objects
2. Objects of purifying deeds
3. Objects for scholars
4. Objects for purifying delusions

1. Pervasive objects include all the objects of knowledge, or any object that exists. As they include all the objects of knowledge, they are also pervasive in the sense that the other three objects are also included in this category.

2. Objects for purifying actions or deeds are those meditation objects used mainly to counteract whatever type of delusion or afflicted emotion, which is most forceful and intense.

- To counteract the most forceful form of delusion, such as attachment, the meditation on the ugliness or unattractiveness of the object is performed.
- In order to counteract a very forceful strong anger, it is recommended to meditate on love and cultivating compassion.
- To overcome very strong ignorance then one meditates on emptiness or dependent arising.
- To counteract strong pride, the recommended meditation is on the topic of the various divisions of phenomena, in terms of the number of constituents and so on.
- To counteract very strong mental distractions or disturbing thoughts, it is recommended to perform the breathing meditation.

3. The objects of scholars include learning about the various types of aggregates, the various types of constituents, the six sources, the twelve sources, dependent arising, and the difference between what is right and what is wrong.

- There are five aggregates: form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness. One who has mastered the five aggregates would know that all conditional things are included within the five aggregates, and that outside of them you cannot find the self or 'I', or mine - the belongings of the 'I'.
- With regard to the types of constituents there are eighteen constituents which are classified into three groups of six. The first group is the supporting six sense organs. The next six are the supported six consciousnesses, and the third group are the six objects of consciousness. We say that one who knows all the causes and conditions of each one of these eighteen constituents, and what seeds give rise to them, is an adept of these eighteen constituents.
- The twelve sources are the sources or conditions of the six types of consciousness. Of the twelve, six are internal sources and six are outer or external sources. The six internal sources are the six sense organs (which we have just listed), and these serve as the internal conditions to produce consciousness. The six external sources are the six external objects of the sense consciousness. Technically the six sense organs are the empowering conditions, whereas the six external sources, (i.e. the observed condition or object of observation), are the external conditions to produce consciousness. Using the way the eye sense consciousness is produced as an example, to produce that eye sense consciousness you need external objects such as a visual form. It is also dependent upon the internal conditions, (i.e. the eye sense organs), serving as the empowering conditions to produce the eye sense consciousness. One who is master of these twelve sources is someone who has gained a full knowledge of how consciousness arises.
- Objects of scholars also include the twelve dependent arisings or originations. Someone who thoroughly understands these twelve dependent originations knows that they are all subject to the fact of being impermanent, suffering and selfless.
- Another of the objects of scholars is to know the difference between what is right and wrong, or rather what is the

cause and what is the effect. This is to know the fact that if you create a positive virtuous action then the result is positive or happiness, whereas negative non-virtuous actions result in suffering.

4. Objects for purifying delusions are used to remove the seed of mental delusions. There are two ways to remove these seeds. The first way is temporarily weakening the seeds by delaying the results, or by weakening the potential of the seeds of the delusions. The second one is to actually uproot the seed of delusions.

When we say 'temporarily removing or weakening the seed of delusion', we are talking about how through the development of the practice of meditation like single-pointed meditation, you can temporarily close the door of the desire realm. Not only that, but it is also possible to close the door of the realms above the desire realm, such as the godly realms, within which there are so many different levels from the form to the formless realms. So you can close the door, or stop taking rebirth in the first concentration. Not only that but you can stop rebirth even in the realms above the second level of concentration. Without actually uprooting the seed of delusion you can go to the peak of cyclic existence, and prevent all rebirth below that, including the level of nothingness. In fact it is said that the way to, for instance, close the door to rebirth in the level below, and to take rebirth in the realms above, is that you have to view the realms below as very gross realms, and the one above as higher. In fact it is said that this state of calm abiding can be used to achieve higher rebirth even in this cyclic existence.

However, in order to completely destroy the seeds of the delusions and uproot them one has to meditate on the four noble truths, death and impermanence and so on.

Although there are four types of objects of calm abiding mentioned in the sutras, in practice each person must choose the object which best suits them. What is most important here is that you choose the most suitable object, and then stick with that object until you gain calm abiding.

In general, however, it is instructed that one should choose an image of the Buddha because of the added benefits. These benefits include remembering all the qualities of the Buddha, purifying negativities and accumulating merits. Most importantly it is said that it helps one later on in the tantric meditation of deity yoga. You have to understand how, in fact, all the teachings, the stages of the path that one follows and learns about, are ultimately to take one to the tantric path. Many past practitioners have used the image of the Buddha as the object to achieve calm abiding.

Learning the Details of the Object of Meditation

Next in the meditation we have to learn about the object, for instance where the object should be imagined in terms of distance and height, and its size. There is much information to be gathered, however it is said that you must retain the object with which you begin, in terms of its size, colour and so on, until you gain calm abiding.

In the text there is mention that the object should be located at the level of the middle of the forehead or level to the heart. One has to choose the level which best suits one, neither too high nor too low, because it is said that if the object is too high it can be a cause of mental distraction or excitement, whereas if it is too low it can cause mental sinking.

The distance of the object should be such that if you lie on the ground performing the full length prostration, it should be very close to touching the tip of your hand but not quite touching.

The object should not be too large, rather it should be a thumb-sized. The smaller the object the better, as smaller objects can help to draw the mind inward.

If the object is the image of the Buddha then one has to know all the details such the colour of the Buddha's body, the position of his hands, the shape and the size of them and so on.

All the details have to be gathered and identified very thoroughly in one's mind.

Having gathered this information, one must always use precisely the same object one has identified beforehand in terms of all the details of the object. In other words, the object you use should not be altered. If you use the image of the Buddha you should not keep altering the size or the colour, for instance in one session using white and the next session yellow or red and so on. Likewise all the other details of the image of the Buddha in terms of the position of the Buddha's hands and the colour of the body and so on, have to stay the same in all respects, throughout the whole meditation, which means all the time that you spend achieving single-pointed concentration.

In terms of the texture, it is recommended that the image of the Buddha be in the form of light. This helps to overcome mental sinking. At the same time one should also think of it as having some weight, just like when a heavy load is placed on our body we cannot move. This helps to overcome and subdue excitement.

422.221.2122.3 Excitement and Dullness

ཉེས་པ་གསུམ་པ་བྱིང་རྗེད་གཉིས་པ་བྱུང་།

Having learnt about the requirements of the object of the meditation or the object of the concentration, what qualities should the mind of single-pointed concentration have? The first characteristic is that it should have some intensity of clarity. The second characteristic is that the mind should have firm stability in terms of focusing on the object single-pointedly.

Mental sinking and excitement are the two main obstacles to our single-pointed meditation. Mental sinking deprives our mind or our concentration of this intensity of clarity. It is the main obstacle to this quality of concentration. Whereas excitement is the main enemy of firm stability in our concentration.

In order to use any particular object as an object to achieve calm abiding, one first has to learn about it. For instance, as the recommended object is the image of the Buddha, first one has to look at that object and try to thoroughly familiarise oneself with all its features such as the Buddha's hand gestures, his sitting position, the colours and so on, so that all the details are as clear as possible. After you have gathered all the information about the object, through looking at it and studying it, then you begin the meditation by trying to picture that object in your mind. If one has learned about that object before, then as soon as one starts the meditation one can immediately have a picture of that object in one's mind, as the actual object of your meditative concentration. You are meditating upon a mental image in your mind.

Achieving a sharp clarity of image comes from concentration and familiarity with the object. The obstacle of forgetfulness or forgetting the instructions arises when we lose that image of the object in our mind. Now we know why the object that we use in the meditation practice is described as an internal object. As we discussed before, it is the mental image, which we bring into our mind. This mental image is the actual object upon which we meditate. When meditating we should try to think that since the object is something within our mind, it is important to see that object as inseparable from our mind, as much as possible. As we focus on it we should feel as if we are merging with that object, and dissolving ourselves into it.

In the next teaching we shall talk about the remedy to the fault of forgetting the instructions, which is mindfulness.

To compulsory question for the next written test is to explain a verse from one of Lama Tsong Khapa's prayers. Roughly translated it is a verse which says "The meditative concentration that tames the mind is such that if mind can be made as stable and motionless as mountain, when released it

TARA INSTITUTE STUDY GROUP DISCUSSION NIGHT

2 November 1999 - The Six Perfections

1. With regard to the Perfection of Joyful Effort, what is meant by the laziness of being attached to inferior or worldly activities and how can this be overcome?
2. Explain the laziness of discouragement and how this may be overcome.
3. Describe the three types of Joyful Effort.
4. What is the definition of Calm Abiding and what are the benefits of developing Calm Abiding/single pointed concentration?
5. In relation to gathering the prerequisite conditions to achieve Calm Abiding, describe the qualities of a suitable place.
6. How is pure morality the basis for all excellent qualities?
7. What are the five favourable conditions for developing calm abiding?
8. How can we overcome the five obstacles to Calm Abiding?
9. In relation to Calm Abiding, what are the four remedies to laziness?
10. What are the four sets of objects for single pointed concentration and why is the image of the Buddha often recommended as an object of single pointed concentration?
11. What are the two characteristics of single pointed concentration and what states of mind do they overcome?
12. How do we develop the object of the Buddha for our practice of single pointed concentration?

Compulsory Question

Discuss these verses from Lama Tsong Khapa's 'The Foundation of All Good Qualities'

Meditation is the majesty that subjugates the mind
It is to be immovable as Mount Meru when sitting
When rising, to undertake all virtuous aims
Thus drawing forth great joy of supple mind and body

Understanding this, powerful yogis rely
On meditation, which subdues the enemy, wandering mind
The Reverend Lama practised like this
Those desiring liberation should do likewise

YOU ARE IN GROUP C

TARA INSTITUTE

(Study Group Test)

9th November '99

Answer any four from question. no. 1-6

Question.no.7 is compulsory

Time allowed one hour

1. Define laziness. How can the laziness of discouragement be overcome.
2. Describe the three types of Joyful Effort.
3. How is pure morality the basis for all excellent qualities?
4. What are the five favourable conditions for developing calm abiding?
5. How can we overcome the five obstacles to calm abiding?
6. What are the four sets of objects for single pointed concentration?
7. **COMPULSORY**

Discuss the following verses from Lama Tsong Khapa's "The Concise Meaning of the Stages of the Path".

"Meditation is the majesty that subjugates the mind
It is to be immovable as Mt Meru when sitting
When rising, to undertake all virtuous aims
Thus drawing forth great joy of supple mind and body.

Understanding this, powerful yogis rely
On meditation, which subdues the enemy, wandering mind
The Revered Lama practised like this
Those desiring liberation should do likewise."