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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

20 March 2018

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Based on the motivation that we generated while reciting the *Refuge and Bodhicitta Prayer*, we can now engage in our regular meditation.

The way to incorporate refuge and the bodhicitta motivation when we recite the prayer is to visualise the Buddha Shakyamuni in the space before us, and then develop a heartfelt conviction that the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha have the complete capability to protect us from the fears of the lower realms and cyclic existence in general. Having generated a sense of fear and disgust with the sufferings of cyclic existence and developed an urgent wish to be free from samsara, we rely entirely on the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha who have the unique ability to free us from our suffering.

With that conviction in mind, and having taken refuge in the Three Jewels one engages in the trainings of the paths and grounds to achieve enlightenment in order to liberate all sentient beings from the misery and sufferings of cyclic existence, and place them in the state of ultimate joy and happiness.

We can now engage in our meditation practice with the intention that ultimately it is for the purpose to liberate all sentient beings.

## *Tong-len meditation*

Now we can generate the motivation for receiving the teachings with the same intention: for the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment, and for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice well.

Indeed, just the mere act of generating this motivation is a really worthwhile practice. As we familiarise ourselves with setting the right motivation before engaging in practise, we develop the good habit of ensuring that we have a positive mind before we engage in any activity. As explained in the teachings, the mind is the forerunner of all activity, so if our state of mind or thought prior to engaging in any activity is virtuous and positive then there is no question that whatever activity we engage in will also be positive, and of benefit to others. That will be incredibly meaningful.

In fact, this is a great instruction. Our mind precedes every activity we engage in, so if we generate the mind wishing to benefit others, then that will ensure that whatever activity we engage in will not be non-virtuous and negative.

The giving and taking practice is a pivotal practice to enhance love and compassion within our hearts. More specifically, the giving practice enhances our love for sentient beings by giving happiness to those who are deprived of happiness. The practice of taking enhances our compassion by taking upon ourselves all the unwanted sufferings of sentient beings.

As we become more and more familiar with this practice, we reach a heightened or perfected level of love and compassion for others. At that stage, as soon as we see any

living being who is deprived of happiness, we will spontaneously and uncontrollably develop a strong wish for them to be endowed with happiness, and as soon as we see any beings suffering, we will not be able to bear that and develop a compelling, spontaneous wish for them to be free from their suffering. When that sentiment is developed further, we will inevitably come to a point where it is not enough to merely wish them to be endowed with happiness and free from suffering. Rather we must take the personal responsibility to actively engage in placing other sentient beings in happiness and free them from all suffering. When we reach the point of taking on this personal responsibility, then the *tong-len* practice becomes particularly relevant and fruitful.

When we really contemplate the necessity and value of love and compassion it is quite unfathomable – the benefits of love and compassion are incredible. One of the simplest methods of generating love and compassion is relating our own situation to that of all other sentient beings. Just as we wish to be happy and do not wish to experience any kind of suffering, so too all other living beings also wish to be happy and free from all suffering. As we contemplate this further we realise that out of our wish to avoid any unhappiness, we will not intentionally cause ourselves any suffering. Of course, in a state of extreme anger or frustration, if we are not in our right senses we might harm ourselves or place ourselves in situations where others may harm us. However, naturally and instinctively we have no intention to harm ourselves, because we hold ourselves most dear and precious. So we instinctively do everything possible to make ourselves happy and to release ourselves from any suffering.

When we contemplate the fact that all other beings are in exactly the same situation, then that will instil the understanding that it is right and befitting to wish other sentient beings happiness and to be free from suffering. That natural pursuit is something that we all share. Having contemplated in this way and genuinely wished for others to be happy we then contribute in every possible way to their happiness; having wished others to be free from suffering we then contribute in every possible way to freeing others from suffering.

On a practical level, we can see how these sentiments will definitely contribute to bringing about world peace – a world in which people are free from harming each other and free from conflict and distress. The same sentiments also contribute to harmony and goodness at a national level. Even in the relationship between two people, a good mutual relationship is really based on a mutual sense of real care and concern, wanting the other to be happy and be free from suffering. So, we can see the importance of these sentiments at all levels.

This is quite manageable, as we already possess the basis of love and compassion within ourselves. It is not as if we have to search for it elsewhere, because we already have the basis of love and compassion within us. We may have to cultivate and practise developing some other qualities to gain realisations, however we all already have the basis of love and compassion within ourselves right now.

So it is a matter of really cherishing and protecting that. As I regularly share with you, it is much more practical to develop what we already have, rather than trying to acquire something which appears to be much grander yet not within our reach right now. Why try to go after something grander

while neglecting the fundamental basis of the good qualities of love and compassion that we already have?

For example, it may not be within our reach right now to develop miraculous powers or clairvoyance. If we think that we have to develop those powers right away, we will only tire ourselves out. The main point is that neglecting to cultivate the essential qualities of love and compassion that we already have and aiming for something higher and grander is a fault. Many teachings emphasise this point as being where we fall short in our practice.

We definitely do not lack objects to focus on to generate compassion in our hearts. Just in the past few days there has been a lot of devastation as a result of bushfires, and the people who are affected are definitely in need of a lot of compassion. Around twenty years ago I stayed in that area for about two weeks. It was very different in those days compared to what it is like now. The main point is that we are not deprived of objects of compassion. When we look around, there are so many who are deprived of happiness and experiencing great suffering. By focusing on those who are in these pitiful states we can, on a very basic level, understand their plight, and then on the basis of that further develop compassion and love for them.

Even though we are not deprived of objects of compassion, we might not readily develop love and compassion for those who we feel some hostility towards; i.e. a difficult person or someone who we consider an enemy. Because of our unruly mind, we might even feel the opposite, wishing them calamity and mishap, and being glad when they are suffering and deprived of happiness. This is, of course, due to our unruly mind. Leaving that aside, even if we can't immediately practise love and compassion for such people, there are still so many others we can focus on as objects of our love and compassion.

The stronger our sense of not being able to bear the sufferings that others are undergoing and not being able to bear seeing their lack of happiness, the stronger our wish to benefit and help others will be. This is how our actual practice of helping and benefiting others develops from the sentiment of not being able to bear witnessing their suffering and seeing them deprived of happiness.

### How to train in calm abiding

#### ***Relying on favourable conditions for calm abiding***

#### **CULTIVATING THE PREREQUISITES FOR MENTAL QUIESCENCE (CONT.)**

In our last session we left off at the point of the favourable conditions needed for calm abiding. This is based on the following verse in the root text:

39. *While the conditions for calm abiding  
Are incomplete, meditative stabilization  
Will not be accomplished, even if one meditates  
Strenuously for thousands of years.*

This verse stresses the importance of finding the required conditions to attain calm abiding.

The commentary on *The Lamp for the Path* says:

There are four main branches which are indispensable to acquire. They are, [sound] morality, [less] desires, contentment and [relying on a secluded] place.

Last week, you might have discussed the favourable conditions according to the Lam Rim teachings. There are six: the four listed above along with abandoning the

demands of society and abandoning conceptual thoughts such as desire.

It would be good for you to read up on this topic in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* as well as the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*. My intention in suggesting the discussion was for you to actually do the research yourself - to read the text and make yourselves familiar with it.

### 1. *Dwelling in a conducive place*

While there are extensive explanations on this, the main point is that the place should be in accordance with the temperament of the practitioner; it should be a place that they like.

*Liberation in your Palm* quotes five particular features from Maitreya's *Ornaments to the Sutras*:

Any place where the wise practice  
Has excellent provisions, is a wholesome place,  
Is a healthy location, has noble friends at hand  
And has facilities to satisfy the yogi.

#### **Excellent provisions**

The place where you seek to engage in your practice should be a place where you can easily sustain yourself. This is an important point, because if you go into a really remote area it will be difficult for you to get necessary provisions, which would be an obstacle as a lot of time and energy would be needed to secure your basic needs.

Your supply of provisions should be free from being obtained through wrong livelihood or through negativity. They must be from an ethical source.

The significance of emphasising this point is that the food you consume definitely has an effect on the mind and therefore meditation practice. Food which is obtained through wrong livelihood, or which involves a lot of negativities, like stolen goods and so forth, seems to actually have a negative effect on the mind. It actually disturbs the mind of a meditator who consumes it. If the food is polluted it pollutes the mind.

Even on our level we will have had some experience of feeling lethargic and heavier after we consume certain food, and lighter and fresher after we have consumed other types of food. So even on our grosser level we can see that food does have an effect on the mind. On a more subtle level, where the food comes from and how it was obtained will definitely have an effect on the mind as well.

#### **A wholesome place**

A wholesome place is a place that is conducive for practice. As *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* explains, a wholesome place is one that has been consecrated by great masters and practitioners, i.e. they have actually been in that place in the past. It is explained that when a place is blessed it helps to bless one's own mind so that it is conducive for practice. We can have a similar experience when we go to the holy sites such as Bodhgaya. Just by visiting this holy place we naturally feel calmer and more tranquil; we feel the positive effects on us right away.

It is significant to recall that while we can go to places that bless our mind, as ordinary beings we have not yet reached a level where we can bless places. This reminds me of the time several years ago, when a lama who is a close acquaintance, Thubten Rinpoche, was going to do a three-year retreat in a remote area outside Dunedin in New Zealand. I happened to be there just before he went into retreat, and his attendant asked me, 'Oh, Geshe-la, can you

bless this place'. I replied, 'Oh, I am in no position to bless any place. In fact, I am someone who needs to be blessed by holy places! So I am not suitable to give a blessing'.

I think that was a good response and in fact a good practice to abide by. People may ask for blessings and assume that one could bless a place. Of course, if one has the ability then there is no question that it is good to do so, but if one hasn't reached appropriate levels then it is not proper to pretend that one has the ability. I have never attempted to follow that path.

Further, *Liberation* explains that if you cannot find a place blessed by holy beings, then at the very least you should not stay in the dwelling of someone who has broken pledges made to a Vajra master. It is explained very clearly in teachings that the place of someone who has broken pledges made to their own spiritual mentor or guide is an unsuitable place. One would not be able to develop realisations in such a place. Another unsuitable place would be where someone has created a schism within the sangha.

### **A healthy place**

On a practical level, it should be a place where there are no beasts of prey, such as tigers, thieves or wrathful spirits. Such a place could hinder one's practice. Even here in the west, there are those who feel that some non-human entity (translated in *Liberation* as spirits) has harmed them.

A healthy place implies a place with drinkable water and unpolluted fertile soil, so there is no sickness due to the environment. Otherwise, through illness, one could easily be disheartened and give up the practice of pursuing calm abiding. It could even reach the point where one may think, 'Oh, what's the point of staying in this place, I might as well go to a more comfortable and pleasant place. But I'll need to earn some money first', which may then involve getting a job and so forth, and delaying engaging in practice.

### **Friends at hand**

It is also important to have good companions – people who are ready to help you. You should not attempt to stay completely alone because if anything were to happen there would be no-one to help, and that would again be an obstacle. The friends to rely upon should be friends who are like-minded, who don't have contradicting ideas and advice or who have a negative influence. Do not befriend the disrespectful or unscrupulous. As Pabongka Rinpoche says:

It is very damaging for beginners to live alone without friends. You should have at least three friends at hand; and if they are Dharmic friends it is better to have even more. However, no matter how many friends you have, they must be people who command your respect.

When you have friends you respect, then they will be Dharma friends. Being worthy of respect they will be a reminder to be like them. When you have very good Dharma friends they can serve a similar purpose to a spiritual friend, like an actual teacher. Seeing them naturally reminds you of your practice. Together you remind each other of Dharma practice and so forth, and so you become very good and conducive friends for practice. They are definitely friends who can really help to enhance your practice rather than becoming a negative influence.

Of course, you can get a comprehensive understanding if you read the more detailed and thorough explanations in the text.

### **No distractions**

Pabongka Rinpoche says:

'because sounds are irritants to concentration', in other words the place must not have the sound of people by day or the sound of dogs or running water at night.

A conducive place means a place that does not have too many distractions in the form of noise, because that can hinder your concentration. This reminds me of the time when I was staying somewhere near the beach; you could hear the water crashing against the rocks and at night it was even louder. You should not be in a place like that where there are constant sounds that can distract you.

I have an acquaintance called Geshe Palden, who was once asked to go to a centre in Tahiti. The house he stayed in was near the ocean and there was constant sound from the ocean making it hard to sleep in the night. It was also very humid and hot. So he couldn't stay there for very long.

### **Facilities to suit the yogi**

The next point relates to the last line in the verse from the *Ornament to the Sutras*:

And has facilities to satisfy the yogi.

As Pabongka Rinpoche explains:

You should be someone who can stand on their own two feet through study and contemplation. You have eliminated inaccuracies about the meaning of the things that you are to meditate on.

These are really significant points.

As mentioned in the teachings, you first listen to the instructions well and then contemplate and think about them further. Then you will come to the point of actually being able to meditate on the instructions. *Liberation* further explains:

Such a person is equipped to gain satisfaction. However, this could also mean you have made all the necessary preparations – such as having the initiations, teachings, books and so forth.

For some practices you will need an initiation first, and to have also received instructions or the teachings on the things that you will meditate on. Furthermore, at times you will need reliable sources such as textbooks to rely upon. As mentioned here, the main thing is to be skilled at doing your practice. As mentioned further in the text, there are some who fail to prepare themselves well.

The point being made here is that the main preparation of some seems to be working hard at making a living. So, when it comes time to actually practice:

they have no idea what to do and are compelled to request dice divinations and so on.

This is the point I have mentioned in the past. After hearing teachings and relying on certain deities some later ask, 'Oh, what mantra should I be reciting?' It is the same here. If you have prior preparation and knowledge of what practices to do, then you will not have to find out from others at the last minute. As Pabongka Rinpoche emphasises in conclusion:

Do not act like this. You must make proper preparations for your Dharma practice.

That is the main point being emphasised here.

### **2. Having few wants**

This is sometimes translated as 'having less desire'. As Pabongka Rinpoche says,

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Having few wants means having no attachment to large quantities of fine clothes, good food and so forth.

This is not suggesting that you shouldn't have fine clothes and good food and so forth. Rather it is referring to wanting more than is necessary. There are those who have many desires, wanting large quantities of fine clothes and food and so forth. That is what we need to avoid.

Indeed, practising having few wants and less desire is really useful. If you don't try to develop this practice, then you will always be longing for something more than you have. Then it will always be very difficult when you go out, because every time you see a nice thing, your mind will start to think, 'Oh, I wish I could have that'. Going out and about will cause so much wanting and desiring that it can become quite uncomfortable and unbearable.

### 3. *Being content*

As explained in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*:

Contentment is making do with the bare necessities of food and clothing. You will be attached to sensual things if you are not content and do not have few wants.

Practising contentment and having few wants and less desire is, as mentioned earlier, a practice that can help your mind to be more satisfied and content. Wanting lots of things and being discontented about not having them can cause a lot of mental turmoil. There is always something you are not satisfied with, always something more that you want. That unsatisfied mind can really cause a lot of mental turmoil. As Nagarjuna mentions, the true meaning of wealth is to have contentment; the measure of wealth is being contented and satisfied.

Pabongka Rinpoche further explains, that as a consequence of being attached to sensual things:

You will not develop single-pointed concentration because you will be distracted by the need to protect your possessions and so forth.

As explained here, if you have too many wishes arising from sensual attachment or desire, you will make strenuous efforts to try to acquire these objects of sensual pleasure. Then, having obtained them, you will spend a lot of energy in trying to protect them, and there will always be the fear that they will be lost, or stolen by others. This will become such a distraction that you could not possibly develop single-pointed concentration.

Thus, developing a sense of contentment with one's wealth in any situation really helps the mind to settle down and not be overly anxious. Just think, 'OK, this is sufficient for me; that much is good for me. My situation is good'. The main point here is that you need to protect yourself against following sensual distractions.

### 4. *Having pure ethics*

As explained in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*.

In general, ethics are the basis of all good qualities.

Observing ethics is said to be the basis of all the good qualities that are to be acquired. The definition of morality or ethics is 'the mind of restraint', which relates to the ten non-virtuous deeds, one of first teachings on morality. In his teachings of morality, the Buddha first laid down the ten misdeeds that we should refrain from if we are to follow a righteous, moral life. These include refraining from killing, refraining from stealing and so forth. The practice of morality is developing the mind of restraining from killing

and so forth and making the decision to avoid killing and so forth.

The text further explains:

Pacification of the subtle internal distractions depends on the abandonment of gross external distractions.

If one does not follow ethics, then one is not refraining from even the gross levels of external distractions. Without overcoming these gross external distractions there is no way of overcoming the subtle internal distractions.

In this context, internal distractions refers to the internal distractions to developing calm abiding. In meditative concentration these are the faults of dullness or laxity, and excitement, which are gross inner distractions. There is also the subtle inner distraction of grasping at the self. The gross inner distractions of laxity and dullness and excitement are overcome by meditative concentration, whereas the subtle inner distraction, which is grasping at the self is overcome by the wisdom realising selflessness.

Overcoming this subtle internal distraction depends on abandoning the gross external distraction, because if the gross external distractions are not overcome then you cannot possibly overcome the internal subtle distraction. Observing ethics or morality will prevent you from engaging in pursuing sensual desires and following sensual distractions. When you lessen engagement with sensual distractions then the external distractions are naturally pacified, and thus your mental state becomes more conducive to engaging in meditation to overcome the subtle inner distraction.

In relation to the three higher trainings, by observing morality one's external distractions are pacified, and when the external distractions are pacified one is better equipped and able to work on overcoming the inner distractions. There are two types of inner distractions. The gross inner distractions are, as mentioned earlier, laxity and dullness and excitement, and these are overcome by the second higher training of meditative concentration. When the grosser inner distractions of dullness and excitement are pacified you are better equipped to overcome the subtle inner distraction, which is grasping at a self. That requires one to use the higher training of wisdom, specifically the wisdom realising selflessness or emptiness. More specifically, one uses special insight to overcome the most subtle inner distraction, the grasping at a self. This is how it is related to the three higher trainings.

As Pabongka Rinpoche explains:

Ethics restrain and pacify your misdeeds of both body and speech and do this by taking you out of the mental yoke of your greatest conceptual thoughts. So thus by overcoming, as mentioned earlier, when one follows ethics specifically when we relate to the ten misdeeds, by overcoming then ten misdeeds of one's body ...

The misdeeds of body and speech include the three wrong deeds of body, which are killing, stealing, sexual misconduct and the misdeeds of speech, which are lying, divisive speech, harsh speech and idle gossip. So one refrains from these misdeeds of body and speech. Then, by virtue of refraining from them, your mind naturally becomes much more conducive to overcoming the gross mental conception, referred to here as *the grossest conceptual thought of the mind*.

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## 5. Abandoning the demands of society

A more literal translation of the Tibetan word 'dutse' translated here as 'demands' is 'hustle and bustle'. As Pabongka Rinpoche explains:

This means restricting the time you spend on meaningless actions, conversations and so forth.

In the hustle and bustle of society, you get involved with the many gatherings of people and you then start to talk and gossip about all sorts of things. That's when you start gossiping, 'Oh, so and so is doing this and doing that'. You get involved in so many distractions in that way. If you become overly involved in such conversations, that will become an obstacle for the development of meditative concentration because of the time you waste in this way. As presented in the teachings, of the ten unwholesome deeds, idle gossip is said to be the least grave in terms of negativity. However, in terms of practising the Dharma it is one of the worst, because we spend so much time engaging in idle gossip which otherwise could be used for Dharma practice.

Further, the text explains that:

You must have very little to do with such meaningless actions in order to be completely undistracted by them. Development of concentration is much more important and so you will automatically have little to do with these things, because you have few wants and have contentment.

Having few wants or less desire and being contented will also protect you from having to engage in the meaningless demands of society. It is said that this will be the means to develop concentration

While there are more elaborate explanations on the earlier points, I'll leave that to you to read more in detail. I have only presented the essential points as a way to encourage you to read the text further.

## 6. Completely abandoning conceptual thoughts such as desires

As the text states:

Turn your mind away from these thoughts by thinking about the drawbacks of desire and about impermanence.

Conceptual thoughts such as desire are the disturbing discursive thoughts based on following the sensual desires. As mentioned earlier, if you do not practise having a mind of being content and satisfied with few wants, then your mind will just follow those conceptual thoughts and become preoccupied with how to acquire more wealth. A very good way to overcome such discursive conceptual thoughts is to think about impermanence; really thinking about the fact that 'no matter how much wealth I have, eventually I will die'. Indeed, there are many examples of individuals who are wealthy in the morning and who lose all their wealth by the evening. This is something that we can all see. Thinking about the transient or impermanent nature of wealth and so forth can help to reduce excessive desire to acquire more wealth and so forth. That is what we need to contemplate.

As the teachings present, there are four inevitable conditions: in the end all acquisitions are exhausted; all birth ends in death; all meetings end in parting; and all who have higher status will end up with lower status. These are said to be the conditions of cyclic existence.

On a practical level these points can be very helpful for our mind. Contemplating them can help to eliminate much mental agony. If one is of a high status, one suddenly loses

that status and as a result of a change, it will not be such a big shock if one has already contemplated the nature of impermanence; then there won't be so much mental agony. Likewise, with the second point that all meetings end up in separation. It's the same with one's relationships with partners and so forth, if there is excessive obsession, desire and so forth then when separation takes place there can be a lot of mental agony, due to not being able to give up that attachment. However, if the mind is acquainted with impermanence, then things will be easier.

Contemplating that everything that is produced is in the nature of impermanence and then contemplating the various aspects of this truth can be really helpful. This is really the point to keep in mind.

Now we will recite the *Eight Verses of Mind Training*, which we can dedicate for Kerrie who has been unwell, and for Marilyn's sister who has passed away. Marilyn used to work in the office. Both of them have a connection with us: one coming to the study group and the other has been here in the past. In any case we can dedicate for them, and others as well.

We visualise Buddha Amitabha on the crown and receiving nectar and light from Buddha Amitabha when reciting the verses, and pray to Amitabha for those who are unwell to be cured from their ailments soon, and recover well. For those who have passed away, pray for Amitabha to continuously guide them and help them on the righteous Dharma path leading to enlightenment. If we can dedicate this practice in this way then it will be a very meaningful practice, which will definitely benefit others.

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: 2**

**Week: 1 (20 March 2018)**

1. In our last session we left off at the point of the favourable conditions needed for calm abiding. This is based on the following verse in the root text:

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Are incomplete, meditative stabilization  
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This verse stresses the importance of finding the required conditions to attain calm abiding.

The commentary on *The Lamp for the Path* says:

There are four main branches which are indispensable to acquire. They are, [sound] morality, [less] desires, contentment and [relying on a secluded] place.

Last week, you might have discussed the favourable conditions according to the Lam Rim teachings. There are six: the four listed above along with abandoning the demands of society and abandoning conceptual thoughts such as desire.

**Give a brief explanation of each of these six favourable conditions.**

Homework Answers

**Block: 2**

**Week: 1 (20 March 2018)**

**1. Dwelling in a conducive place**

While there are extensive explanations on this, the main point is that the place should be in accordance with the temperament of the practitioner; it should be a place that they like.

*Liberation in your Palm* quotes five particular features from Maitreya's *Ornaments to the Sutras*:

Any place where the wise practice  
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A healthy place implies a place with drinkable water and unpolluted fertile soil, so there is no sickness due to the environment. Otherwise, through illness, one could easily be disheartened and give up the practice of pursuing calm abiding. It could even reach the point where one may think, 'Oh, what's the point of staying in this place, I might as well go to a more comfortable and pleasant place. But I'll need to earn some money first', which may then involve getting a job and so forth, and delay engaging in practice.

**Friends at hand**

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**No distractions**

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## 2. *Having few wants*

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This is not suggesting that you shouldn't have fine clothes and good food and so forth. Rather it is referring to wanting more than is necessary. There are those who have many desires, wanting large quantities of fine clothes and food and so forth. That is what we need to avoid.

## 3. *Being content*

As explained in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*:

Contentment is making do with the bare necessities of food and clothing. You will be attached to sensual things if you are not content and do not have few wants.

Practising contentment and having few wants and less desire is, as mentioned earlier, a practice that can help your mind to be more satisfied and content. Wanting lots of things and being discontented about not having them can cause a lot of mental turmoil. There is always something you are not satisfied with, always something more that you want. That unsatisfied mind can really cause a lot of mental turmoil. As Nagarjuna mentions, the true meaning of wealth is to have contentment; the measure of wealth is being contented and satisfied.

Pabongka Rinpoche further explains, that as a consequence of being attached to sensual things:

You will not develop single-pointed concentration because you will be distracted by the need to protect your possessions and so forth.

## 4. *Having pure ethics*

As explained in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*.

In general, ethics are the basis of all good qualities.

Observing ethics is said to be the basis of all the good qualities that are to be acquired. The definition of morality or ethics is 'the mind of restraint', which relates to the ten non-virtuous deeds, one of first teachings on morality. In his teachings of morality, the Buddha first laid down the ten misdeeds that we should refrain from if we are to follow a righteous, moral life. These include refraining from killing, refraining from stealing and so forth. The practice of morality is developing the mind of restraining from killing and so forth and making the decision to avoid killing and so forth.

The text further explains:

Pacification of the subtle internal distractions depends on the abandonment of gross external distractions.

If one does not follow ethics, then one is not refraining from even the gross levels of external distractions. Without overcoming these gross external distractions there is no way of overcoming the subtle internal distractions.

In this context, internal distractions refers to the internal distractions to developing calm abiding. In meditative concentration these are the faults of dullness or laxity, and excitement, which are gross inner distractions. There is also the subtle inner distraction of grasping at the self. The gross inner distractions of laxity and dullness and excitement are overcome by meditative concentration, whereas the subtle inner distraction, which is grasping at the self is overcome by the wisdom realising selflessness.

Overcoming this subtle internal distraction depends on abandoning the gross external distraction, because if the gross external distractions are not overcome then you cannot possibly overcome the internal subtle distraction. Observing ethics or morality will prevent you from engaging in pursuing sensual desires and following sensual distractions. When you lessen engagement with sensual distractions then the external distractions are naturally pacified, and thus your mental state becomes more conducive to engaging in meditation to overcome the subtle inner distraction.

## 5. *Abandoning the demands of society*

A more literal translation of the Tibetan word '*dutse*' translated here as 'demands' is 'hustle and bustle'. As Pabongka Rinpoche explains:

This means restricting the time you spend on meaningless actions, conversations and so forth.

In the hustle and bustle of society you get involved with the many gatherings of people and you then starting to talk and gossip about all sorts of things. That's when you start gossiping, 'Oh, so and so is doing this and doing that'. You get involved in so many distractions in that way. If you become overly involved in such conversations that will become an obstacle for the development of meditative concentration because of the time you waste in this way.

Having few wants or less desire and being contented will also protect you from having to engage in the meaningless demands of society. It is said that this will be the means to develop concentration

While there are more elaborate explanations on the earlier points, I'll leave that to you to read more in detail. I have only presented the essential points as a way to encourage you to read the text further.

## 6. *Completely abandoning conceptual thoughts such as desires*

As the text states:

Turn your mind away from these thoughts by thinking about the drawbacks of desire and about impermanence.

Conceptual thoughts such as desire are the disturbing discursive thoughts based on following the sensual desires. As mentioned earlier, if you do not practise having a mind of being content and satisfied with few wants then your mind will



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just follow those conceptual thoughts and become preoccupied with how to acquire more wealth. A very good way to overcome such discursive conceptual thoughts is to think about impermanence; really thinking about the fact that 'no matter how much wealth I have, eventually I will die'.

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# Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

27 March 2018

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As usual we will do the meditation first. We have already taken refuge and generated bodhicitta three times in order to remind us three times to ensure that we take refuge and generate bodhicitta in the beginning of our spiritual practice. The meditation we do here as usual is called Giving and Taking. To enhance or reinforce the focus of love we meditate on giving, and to enhance the focus of compassion we meditate on taking. Do you understand? Now cultivate the motivation 'I will seek the precious state of buddhahood for the sake of all sentient beings and for this reason I shall study and practise Dharma well.

To return to the teaching, we have learnt under the section on Relying upon the Collection that there are some favourable causes that we must gather to achieve calm abiding. These causes are four in number according to the *Lamp for the Path*. We must recognise these conditions well and gather them first in order to meditate to achieve the perfect state of concentration. There is nothing surprising about achieving an ability to rest or still the mind within us through meditation. In fact, we don't need to create many causes to simply rest the mind on the object; that is something anybody can achieve, and it is not that difficult at all. What is difficult is to engage in a form of meditation which can combat the mental afflictions; that is because we need to recognise the mental afflictions and their faults before we can do this.

## How to meditate on calm abiding

With reference to the text we are now on the section How to Meditate on Calm Abiding, pertaining to which the root text says:

40. *Place the mind on any one, Virtuous focal object.*

The commentary text states,

As described before, having abiding in the favourable conditions of calm abiding, one chooses the object, but 'any one' doesn't literally mean anything, such as a piece of wood. Rather it should be one of the four objects as taught by the Buddha, namely pervasive objects, objects for abandoning engagement, scholarly objects, and objects for abandoning mental afflictions'.

As instructed here, initially it is important to focus on one particular object. Regarding the four types of objects of focus that were taught by the Buddha, Tsongkhapa's *Great Stages of the Lam-rim* provides a detailed explanation. That's why I have been recommending that you study *The Great Stages of the Lam-rim*.

Generally speaking, there are specific objects for achieving calm abiding; here we learn about four types of objects.

The first is called **the pervasive object**. The pervasive object can be further divided into two; one which is non-conceptualised reflection, and the other one, which is conceptualised reflection. The difference between the two is that the focus object of calm abiding is non-conceptualised reflection and the focus object of special insight is conceptualised reflection. The point here is that when you meditate you don't focus on the self-characteristic of the object but on the reflection or image of the object. Again, you should remember to refer to *The Great Stages of the Lam-rim* in which you will find further explanations about this. To make it clear, let's say you use this glass as an object of your meditation; in your meditation you don't directly have this actual glass or it's self-characteristic as the object. Rather you only have the reflection representing the actual object, referred to as a generic image in the classical texts, as the object of your meditation, depending upon which you develop your meditation. Hence, here we are saying that such objects can be two, namely, non-conceptualised reflection and conceptualised reflection.

Bearing in mind that the purpose of engaging in meditation here is to accomplish calm abiding, what you focus on is the conceptualised or non-conceptualised mental image or reflection of the actual object, which falls under the pervasive object. The next question is knowing what that object or focus of that reflection represents.

This is addressed under the next three objects.

The second is called **the object of abandoning engagement**. You should refer to *The Great Stages of the Lam-rim* because knowing about this is extremely important and recommended. What does the object of abandoning engagement mean? It means, for instance, that if someone is very habituated to, or experiences strong hatred, then he should *meditate on love* to overcome that; whereas if he experiences strong desire, then he should *meditate on undesirability* of things to overcome desire; to dispel thick mental dullness he should *meditate on dependent origination*; and to overcome strong pride he should *meditate on the classifications of constituents*; and finally to overcome strong discursive thoughts he should undertake *breathing meditation*. These are the five types of the object for abandoning engagement.

In *The Great Stages of the Lam-rim* these objects are explained very clearly, whereas many other classics including *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* simply list the four objects without much explanation. Understanding this object for abandoning engagement is particularly important for beginner practitioners. The word 'engagement' here means engagement with the object of desire, for instance. Someone who is so forcefully and perpetually engaged or involved in the object of desire has no chance of developing single-pointed concentration because the desire will attack the concentration and prevent it from arising. Likewise, until and unless we are able to manage controlling the mental afflictions, it is impossible for us to undertake any virtuous activities. People who have strong desire can't observe the practice of morality for even a single day. For instance, I observed some people who took precepts such as four root precepts as part of the Nyung-ne practice,

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but they couldn't keep the precept of refraining from sexual activity, for instance, for even a day. Attachment is a big problem for a lot of people; even a monk said to me that he couldn't enjoy life without attachment. Of different types of attachment, sexual desire is the most difficult to overcome. There are five layperson's vows – the first is refraining from killing which refers to killing a person, second is refraining from taking what is not given, third is refraining from sexual misconduct, fourth is refraining from lying which again refers to the great forms of lies, and last is refraining from intoxicating drinks etc.

Of these, people most readily break the third precept of sexual misconduct, which shows how desire is the most difficult one to overcome. Relating to the fifth precept, sometimes when bestowing the lay person's precepts His Holiness the Dalai Lama allows a small exemption by saying that a little drink is OK.

In terms of overcoming attachment, we should meditate on recognising the faults of the desired object or reflect upon the undesirable aspects of the desired object from the depths of our heart. The fact that some people say that they experience an eruption of desire when they apply the meditation to counteract desire, such as the meditation of seeing the desired object as being unattractive, indicates that their meditation is not integrated into the depths of their hearts. In fact, deep at the bottom of their heart they are still craving for, and are not able to give up the desired object; that's the problem.

Next is **the objects for scholars**. This consists of five types, namely mastery over the subjects of the five aggregates, the twelve sources, the eighteen constituents, the twelve dependent originations, what is and what is not.

There are two **objects for abandoning mental afflictions** in terms of that which weakens mental afflictions and that which uproots the mental afflictions.

The first one refers to the meditation practices where you progressively observe coarseness and subtlety with respect to, or between the lower and higher realms, and then transcend yourself from the desire level up to the peak of cyclic existence. In this meditation process, individuals only suppress or prevent manifested mental afflictions from arising, without striking at the root of the afflictions.

The second type refers to meditating on four noble truths with their sixteen characteristics. Through this process individuals can uproot the mental afflictions and achieve the state of liberation.

This is enough for tonight. You should study these four objects of meditation as described in the sutra under the section on calm abiding in *The Great Stages of the Lam-rim*.

We have learnt here that the kind Buddha taught four types of meditation objects. However, all objects are included within the last three types of object, meaning there is no phenomena that is not included in these three. So, from this angle we can say it is not necessary to mention the first object separately. This also means that all the phenomena can be the object of calm abiding.cd

I hope and anticipate you will study the topic of calm abiding in *The Great Stages of the Lam-rim*. I also advise

you to hold discussion sessions because you should never forget what you already know. If you keep forgetting what you already know then you won't make any progress and will be like a yeti catching marmots. After catching one he holds it under his arm and then extends the same arm to catch the next one.

*Question:* Why is meditating on the object of impermanence, for example, not a distraction to calm abiding, because it is not focusing on a particular object. Understanding of subtle impermanence requires analysis so how it can be an object of calm abiding?

*Geshe-la:* Impermanence means a momentary change. One needs to understand and contemplate this and then it becomes possible to simply focus on that meaning or the cognition of impermanence that things are subject to momentary changes. Generally speaking, meditating on gross impermanence such as death impermanence is not all that difficult, but meditating on subtle impermanence is extremely difficult. In fact, it can be more difficult than meditating on emptiness. I said this to a Gaden Jangtse monk who sat behind me at the His Holiness' lam-rim teaching in Gaden Monastery. I had also met him in the past at a winter pramana debate gathering. The monk is from an area near my home town in Tibet. He is very learned and has become the abbot of the Gyuto Monastery. At that time as I was sitting on the platform of the teaching stage, he teased me by saying, you must be a learned one to sit here. Anyway, later he informed me that next day at 9 am, His Holiness would confer the Goddess Palden Lhamo empowerment and prior to that there would be the preparation ritual at 8am, and as part of the commitment for taking the empowerment we needed to meditate on emptiness. I replied to the monk that it is not hard to meditate on emptiness but much more difficult is to meditate on subtle impermanence. Thinking deeply about what I had said, the monk acknowledged my comment with appreciation and said to me, 'Yes, yes, you are absolutely right, absolutely right'. Meditating on impermanence is very beneficial, even meditating upon a gross form of impermanence is very beneficial in terms of cultivating spiritual qualities such as renunciation. We can generally say that there is no object that cannot be realised by calm abiding or special insight. When we talk about the object of calm abiding, we don't necessarily have to talk about newly accomplished calm abiding. There was another monk who I knew from Buxa and who is now quite old. At one point His Holiness took a walk around and when he reached where we were standing, as has happened previously His Holiness blessed me by holding me with his hand, and at the same time the monk in front also received the hand touch blessing. This made him so happy and he said to me with a great sense of joy and achievement, 'Inside this great venue today nobody has received a better blessing than us, absolutely no-one, and I am just so happy'. This monk is also from Eastern Tibet. He has two cousins who have both now become geshe. The weather was quite cold that day, but the monk had forgotten to take out his warm upper robe from the bag, so his cousin came over to remind him of the robe and suggested that he put it on.

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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

3 April 2018

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Based on the motivation generated during the bodhicitta prayer, we can now engage in our meditation practice.

[Meditation]

Now we 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 engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice well.

## How to meditate on calm abiding (cont.)

We covered part of this section of the commentary on *Lamp of the Path* last week. The verse from the root text is:

40. Place the mind on any one  
Virtuous focal object.

Then the commentary explains:

As described before having abiding in the favourable conditions of calm abiding, one chooses the object, but 'any one' here doesn't literally mean anything, for example a piece of wood, rather it should be one of the four objects as taught by the Buddha, namely pervasive object, analytical object, scholarly object, and object for abandoning mental afflictions.

[In *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* the translation of the terms for the four objects are quite different to those used here, but it comes down to the same meaning.] The point of saying, *any one*, as the commentary mentions, is to emphasise that it is initially important to stick to one object.

The root verse uses a slightly different Tibetan term, *chik dak* from that used in the commentary. The term actually means focusing only on one object in order to develop mental quiescence or calm abiding.

Next the commentary states:

Regarding this, Ashvagoshā says 'Maintaining the mental focus on one object will give rise to mental stability, whereas shifting to many objects will fatigue the mind and give rise to mental afflictions'. As to the mind, which focuses on that meditational object, it is a virtuous state of mind with the single pointed focus without being distracted by any other objects.

It is good to note that the object can't be any kind of object; it has to be a virtuous object.

Although not explicitly mentioned in the commentary on the *Lamp of the Path*, appropriate physical and mental conduct is necessary in order to engage in the practice of developing calm abiding. With respect to physical conduct, the *Lam Rim Chen Mo* explains that one needs to adopt the eight-point meditative posture. The eighth, which is regulating the breathing, is added to the seven specific points outlined in the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*. However it is not explained here in the commentary.

I have already presented the seven point posture, so there is no need to go through it in detail here. It is good to actually refer to the very detailed explanation in the *Extensive Graduated Path to Enlightenment*, where Lama Tsongkhapa mentions the five attributes of sitting in the full lotus posture, as well as explaining in great detail how breathing relates to the meditation. As I have mentioned previously, I refer to specific passages in the *Great Extensive Graduated Path to Enlightenment* by Lama Tsongkhapa and *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand* in the hope that you will actually refer to those teachings and start reading them yourself, in order to gain a deeper understanding.

The reason why I emphasise again and again that you should be reading these texts is because you have access to the English translations and you will be able to understand them as they are not all that complex. Some parts, of course, may be hard to understand initially but there is benefit in reading them again and again. When you read it the first time you may not seem to understand much, but when you read it twice or three or four times, then you actually start to get some understanding of the meaning. Of course, it is said that just reading a text is not sufficient if it is hard to understand because it covers difficult profound topics. That's why you need to rely on a teacher's explanation of the text to help you to understand it better. Whether by yourself or with prior explanations, you can gain an understanding through reading the text again and again, and then really contemplating it well.

With respect to the specific instructions on abandoning the five pitfalls and cultivating the eight adjustments *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* states:

In other words, they say you must cultivate the eight adjustments, which are antidotes to the five pitfalls. There are no better instructions on how to achieve single-pointed concentration than those to be found in the classical treatises—the works of Maitreya, Asanga's studies on the various levels, texts on the middle way and stages of meditation, etc.

As further explained in the *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*:

We must seek this sort of instruction and then meditate on it. Instead of doing this we might put a higher value on some lama's oral instruction that does not accord with the Dharma as presented in the classics, or we might value short miscellanies on spells, or class notes, short pamphlets, etc. This is searching for something in a place where it cannot be found and not where it can. However, there is no danger of this happening if we follow chapter and verse the section on mental quiescence in Je Tsongkapa's *Great Stages of the Path*

These are essential points.

The main instruction is that one needs to overcome the five faults or pitfalls and cultivate the eight adjustments.

## The first pitfall: Laziness

The first pitfall is laziness. As explained in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*:

This has four antidotes: (1) faith due to seeing the good qualities of single pointed concentration; (2) yearning and wishing for single-pointed concentration; (3) perseverance in seeking single-

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pointed concentration and (4) seeking the result of single-pointed concentration – meditative suppleness.

Of the eight antidotes, four are presented here.

What is the goal of our meditation? It is single-pointed concentration. As the text explains:

The faith that comes from seeing the good qualities of single-pointed concentration is as follows. The pitfall of laziness is not having any heartfelt desire to enter single-pointed meditation or not being able to continue with it on entering such meditation.

This is a very meticulous presentation.

As *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* further mentions:

The true end result of your training [in this concentration] is meditative suppleness.

As mentioned previously, the result of meditative concentration is physical and mental suppleness, or pliancy. When one develops physical and mental pliancy it removes all physical and mental defects, thus allowing one to meditate for as long as one wishes without any difficulty. Thinking about such an incredible result becomes an antidote for overcoming laziness. That is because knowing that the result will be incredible will generate a strong yearning to develop it.

In relating to developing meditative concentration, laziness is the mind that has no wish to engage in meditative concentration. That, as mentioned earlier, is overcome when one develops faith and contemplates the results of meditative concentration. Then laziness will definitely be removed.

As *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* mentions, you need to think about the benefits of meditative concentration as a way of removing laziness.

Although you do not have this at present, [referring to meditative suppleness] you must think about the good qualities of single-pointed concentration ...

As we have not yet developed mental suppleness, it is perhaps hard for us to imagine what it is like. The teachings describe the qualities of mental suppleness or pliancy; thinking in this way about the good qualities of single-pointed concentration becomes an antidote to laziness. The good qualities of concentration are presented in this quote from *The Bodhisattva's Way of Life*:

You may persevere a long while  
At recitation and all types of asceticism,  
With a mind distracted by other things,  
But the Knowledgeable One says it is meaningless.

[This is a different translation to what we normally use.] The main point being presented here is that reciting mantras and so forth is meaningless without developing concentration. As I have explained this previously, I am sure you will already have some understanding of this point.

The word 'meaningless' is not to be taken literally to imply that there is no benefit at all in reciting mantras prior to developing meditative concentration, because there are definitely some benefits. At the very least we can say that reciting mantras will prevent one from engaging in idle gossip. So to that extent, reciting mantras will prevent one from engaging in non-virtuous activities such as idle gossip, for example.

Here 'meaningless' refers to the mantras not having much effect because one doesn't have sound concentration. It can also be understood to mean that without developing meditative concentration, one will not achieve the ultimate intended purpose of doing that recitation. Because one is not able to achieve that ultimate purpose, it is referred to as 'meaningless'.

It is good to reflect on the very basic practical benefits one does gain from reciting mantras. As mentioned earlier, if you continuously recite OM MANI PADME HUNG for example, it will definitely help you to refrain from engaging in gossip. If you were not reciting it, you would be more likely to suddenly engage in gossip with whoever comes your way. So, it is worthwhile to note this very practical benefit from reciting mantras.

As *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* further explains:

In other words, think about the damage a distracted mind does to you.

The main point to be derived here is that at our level, remembering this point about reciting mantras as being meaningless reminds us that if we recite mantras with a completely distracted mind then we won't achieve our intended purpose. So if you are inclined to do some recitation, the point of this quotation is to remind you to think again and again, 'Oh, it is much more worthwhile if I can concentrate a bit more'. To that extent this point can help to make reciting mantras more meaningful.

Then the text mentions:

If you develop mental quiescence, you will be able to focus your attention on a subject quite firmly whenever you perform some virtuous practice. Because of this firmness you will soon gain actual attainments,

What is being presented here are the great benefits of having developed meditative concentration, such as being able to firmly place one's mind on a virtuous object. For example, if, when we recite the Four Immeasurable, our mind can be really focused on 'May all beings have happiness' we will be fully immersed in developing that mind and sentiment. Likewise, with 'May all beings be free from suffering'. Because of the firmness of our concentration, we will be able to maintain that very strong feeling for a long time. So to that extent it is beneficial.

Because of this firmness you will soon gain actual attainments;

This is the actual benefit of developing concentration. If we are actually focused on the object of the recitation, or whatever it is we are doing, then to that extent we will obtain that attainment more quickly.

Then the text continues:

... even the common clairvoyances and so forth;

We covered these clairvoyances earlier. They are also explained very clearly in the *Extensive Lam Rim*.

Furthermore:

... your sleep will become single-pointed concentration;

This is one of the really incredible benefits of meditative concentration. Here we can just reflect on His Holiness the Dalai Lama's regular pattern of sleep. He retires early and wakes up very early in the morning, but when he

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sleeps early it is after doing his practices. So there is no doubt that what appears to be sleep is actually part of his meditative concentration. It is the opposite for us however: when we try to engage in meditative concentration it actually turns into sleep, rather than sleep turning into meditative concentration.

Then:

... your delusions will become very slight indeed.

As some teachings emphasise, when one develops meditative concentration delusions are not strongly manifested.

And:

More importantly, it will be easier for you to quickly develop [realization] into the path, from devotion to your spiritual guide all the way up to the generation and completion stages. And so on.

These are the incredible benefits of developing meditative concentration.

Then:

Think about these good qualities. You will then have faith due to seeing the good qualities of single-pointed concentration. With this faith you will achieve the wish and perseverance to seek single-pointed concentration. With these you will wish to have meditative suppleness.

In other words, you will gladly engage in developing meditative concentration in order to develop meditative suppleness. As explained here:

This is how these four antidotes act as causes and effects—the latter ones developing from the earlier in an orderly fashion.

That covers the four antidotes to overcome laziness, namely faith, yearning (other translations use 'aspiration'), perseverance, (which other texts call 'exertion') and meditative suppleness (or 'pliancy' in other translations).

Pliancy or meditative suppleness is the main one. Thinking about that is said to be the real catalyst for overcoming laziness about developing meditative concentration. As mentioned here, having the faith in meditative concentration will be followed by having the aspiration and yearning and perseverance to develop meditative suppleness. This becomes the real way to engage in the practice of developing meditative concentration.

This is also true for normal mundane settings. For example, when someone sees the benefit, profit or gains from certain kinds of jobs, they will willingly endure hardship to engage in that work, knowing that the benefits will be great. Likewise, when you see the great benefits of completing getting a degree and so forth, you will have a strong aspiration and yearning to actually engage in study despite the effort it requires.

### **The second pitfall: forgetting the instruction**

Forgetting the instruction relates particularly to the development of meditative concentration.

In explaining what forgetting the instructions means, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* states:

This is what we term no longer recalling the meditation device.

Thus, forgetting the instruction specifically means *no longer recalling* or remembering *the meditation device*.

As the text further explains:

It is highly damaging to the practice of single-pointed concentration.

What is translated here as 'device' can also be understood as 'meditative object'. If we forget the actual meditative object, then how could we possibly develop the meditative concentration that depends on focusing on that object? It would be unreasonable to expect that we could.

As *The Heart of the Middle Way* says:

Securely tie the wayward elephant of the mind  
To the firm pillar of the visualization  
With the rope of memory;  
Break it in with the hooks of wisdom.

The text further explains:

You have to tie the elephant of your mind to the pillar of the visualization that you employ. You need something that you can fasten the mind onto—that is, the visualization employed to develop mental quiescence. The meditation device can be [almost anything—a visualization or a physical object.]

As explained in the text, there are four different types of pervasive objects that can be used. It is quite an extensive explanation and we do not need to read them out here. It later mentions that it is also possible to achieve mental quiescence by visualizing the form of the deity, as in the generation stage, or by visualizing the letter A and so forth.

In the *Extensive Lam Rim*, Lama Tsongkhapa emphasised using the image of the Buddha. Here *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* mentions that:

Nevertheless, when we go about achieving mental quiescence, we visualize the form of the Buddha in accordance with the oral tradition deriving from Tsongkapa. One major feature of this visualization is that it allows you to build up your [merit] collection and purify obscurations.

As emphasised here, the benefit one obtains from using the image of the Buddha to develop one's meditative concentration is that one will accumulate extensive merit and purify one's negativities. This is one reason. It further mentions that:

Another major feature: it accustoms you to the deity yoga to be found in the secret tantras.

By acquainting yourself with the image of the Buddha now, the practice of deity yoga and tantric practices will be very easy to do.

It is also most beneficial to be reminded of the Buddha. And so on.

This is only a brief account. In the *Extensive Lam Rim* Lama Tsongkhapa goes into much greater detail about the benefits.

As further explained, the visualisation is:

From your guru, visualized on the crown of your head, emerges Guru Shakyamuni, [which is about the size of your thumb.]

This explanation is in accordance with dissolving the visualisation of the merit field on top of one's crown into



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oneself. As explained here, the image of the Buddha is the size of one's thumb. It is said the benefit of visualising a small image of the Buddha is that it makes it easier to visualise a larger image later on. If, right from the beginning you focus on a larger image then it will be very difficult to focus on a smaller sized image later on.

As indicated here, the smaller size is the size of one's thumb; a larger size would be the length of one's forearm.

He comes to rest in front of you, about level with the gap between your eyebrows.

The image in the space before you is level with your eyebrows and centred at the gap between your eyebrows.

Alternatively, you could put him level with your navel

Here level with your navel is not as we normally understand it, because that would be too low. As clarified in other teachings, the word *te-wa* in Tibetan can also refer to the level of one's heart. That is because the starting point of our embryonic development is the heart.

Or you could visualize that you transform into Shakyamuni.

That would be a very suitable form of meditation.

Some people find it easier to imagine formlessness as their meditation device rather than visualizing something physical; so the Panchen Lama Lozang Choekyi Gyaeltsaen began a tradition in his teachings on *The Gelugpa Mahamudra* that is in keeping with Tsongkapa's thoughts in the *Medium Stages of the Path*. In this tradition you achieve mental quiescence by focusing on the mind itself, and these people could readily use it.

You can also use the mind itself as the object in accordance with the Mahamudra. As it says here:

It even has its counterpart in other sects, where you investigate the conscious operation of the mind.

Further:

It is also possible to achieve mental quiescence by visualizing the form of the deity, as in the generation stage, ...

So if one is doing, for example, the Yamantaka practice, one can develop meditative concentration by focusing on the image of the deity itself, and no other object is needed.

Then *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* continues:

... or by visualizing the letter A or a vertical stroke, as in the completion stage. There are further mental quiescence visualizations that involve pervading [everywhere with the visualization], employing some trick or a certain activity, ...

This is a slightly different translation of the four types of objects for meditative concentration.

... or even visualizing that some delusion has been purified.

As explained previously, these four types of objects can be used for developing meditative concentration. As it is not explained in detail here, I explained them in our last session using the *Lam Rim Chen Mo*.

*Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* presents a summary of the different types of objects that one can use for

developing meditative concentration, with an emphasis on practicality.

In practice, use whichever of these is easiest for you to imagine, and meditate on it until you achieve mental quiescence.

Really, it just depends on one's individual temperament. Some objects are better suited to oneself than others, and it is better to stick with one of those objects rather than trying to use others. That is what is most important.

It further explains:

Do not substitute some other visualization. You need not meditate on all four of the focal objects described in the sutras [the body, feelings, mind, and phenomena]. You must fix your mind on one thing, and this should be something that you feel comfortable with. As Acharya Ashvaghosha said:

Be firm in your contemplation:  
Always use the one visualization.  
With many visualizations in succession,  
Your mind will be excited by delusion.

Some of you may have the doubt, 'Oh, Yamantaka has many arms, and many implements and so forth, so perhaps that means that in using Yamantaka there are many objects of visualisation'. That would be a misunderstanding. Using one object specifically refers to sticking with the same object you initially chose until you develop meditative concentration.

Having checked and decided on the object most suitable for yourself do not substitute some other visualization. Stick with that same object and do not change it randomly from one day to the other. You need to have continuous meditative concentration on the same object.

In other words:

... fix the mind on the one visualization when you meditate. You will not achieve mental quiescence if you change the visualization.

Then *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* uses an analogy that was presented earlier:

Suppose you rub two sticks together; you will not make a fire if you shift to another stick. Further, you must meditate continually for mental quiescence, except when you eat, sleep, or move your bowels, just as you have to rub the sticks together without interruption until they catch fire. Do this continuously until you achieve mental quiescence – in six months, a year, or whatever. You will not attain it if you get sick of it and move on to something else, or if you take a couple of days off to rest, and so on.

The 'instruction' in the heading *Forgetting the Instruction* is to:

... memorize the features of a drawing or statue of the Victorious One for your meditation device so that you can imagine it as your mental object when you enter meditation or, as your guru has acquainted you, recall the image of the meditation device in your mind's eye.

For example, when you begin to acquaint yourself with the image of the Buddha or any other appropriate object as instructed by your guru, it will of course not be clear to begin with. However, through familiarity gained by focusing on it again and again it will become clearer. If it is an image of the Buddha, for example, it starts with a

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glowing yellow image of the Buddha that becomes more detailed as one further develops and maintains that image. This is how one progresses.

You have begun to utilize your meditation device when you are able to partially imagine your visualization as a rough mental image ...

Utilising your meditation device means using that visualisation, even if it is only a rough mental image.

We say that you have forgotten the instruction when you have lost this object of your recollection. This is the second pitfall. Its antidote is the fifth of the eight adjustments—memory.

The literal translation of the Tibetan word *tren-pa* is memory, often referred to as 'mindfulness'. It means recalling and always remembering the object.

Very strong memory is necessary to maintain the continuity of your meditation device, rather like a hand holding a rosary.

Just as you grip and hold a rosary in your hand, you need to constantly hold the meditation device or object in your mind. The emphasis here is on having a firm memory or mindfulness. As the text further mentions:

An individual's memory may be strong or weak, and this will make it easy or difficult for him to achieve mental quiescence.

Having said that the fifth antidote or adjustment is memory or mindfulness the question arises: what is memory? This means that we need to understand what memory or mindfulness actually means.

Here memory is defined according to the text *Collection of Abhidharma*:

What is memory? Something that functions so as not to allow the mind to forget a thing with which it has been made familiar.

In other words, memory is not forgetting whatever object you have become familiar with.

It is further explained:

In other words, memory necessarily has three properties. It must distinguish its object—that is, you have previously looked at your meditation device and familiarized your mind's eye with its aspects.

We will all have had experience of the first **property of familiarisation with the object**. As mentioned here, if we are not familiar with something it will be very hard to recall it, but once we have familiarised ourselves with it it is very easy to remember it over time.

Second is the **property of retention**. As mentioned here:

... you have not forgotten these aspects of the meditation device, and they present themselves to you continually.

The analogy used here is:

This is like your recollection of food when you are hungry.

Retention is being able to recall the object again and again. The analogy used here is quite vivid; when you are hungry you think about food again and again because you are hungry. Likewise, we become more acquainted with the object by recalling it again and again.

These are really important points for us to recall. We are all attempting to engage in the practice of meditation, so really understanding these points will be very useful.

Third is the **property of the function it performs**. As explained here:

the mind is made not to stray or unfocus from the object it is directed toward.

So the function here is not to stray or to move away from the object, and not allow the focus to move away from the object.

These are the three properties or attributes of memory or mindfulness. As further mentioned:

If these three are present, you will be able to visualize the form of, say, the Victorious One, Buddha Shakyamuni, clearly in front of you, in your mind's eye.

Here we can take note of how really meticulous these instructions are – they really are very clear. Further:

Do not become distracted—retain a tight hold on the visualization. You must imagine the visualization and nothing else.

### **The third pitfall: excitement and dullness**

Once one is able to retain focus on the object for a certain period then the next pitfall is excitement and dullness. The antidote to overcome that is presented as mindfulness or memory and introspection, which is translated here as vigilance. Here, mindfulness and introspection are presented as one.

Once one is able to place one's mind on the object and maintain a certain level of focus then:

You will fall prey to the third pitfall—excitement and dullness—during your actual meditation period while recalling your meditation device.

This is presented in quite some detail in *The Extensive Lam Rim*, as well as in the *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*.

The very detailed instructions on how to overcome excitement and dullness in particular are very effective. This of course can come from the fact that the explanation is so detailed. We can leave that for our next session.

For the next two weeks, it will be good for you to have two discussion sessions covering the five pitfalls which are overcome by the eight antidotes. Also discuss the six powers and the nine stages of development of the meditative concentration, thus covering the development of mental quiescence or calm abiding. It will be very, very useful to develop a good understanding of that through discussion over these two sessions.

You can also focus on the four types of objects, which are not explained in great detail in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. As I explained in the last session, of the four objects, the greatest emphasis in the *Lam Rim Chen Mo* is on meditating on the objects for purifying your behaviour or, as translated last week, abandoning engagement. These are subdivided into five, and the particular antidotes for overcoming attachment, anger, pride, ignorance and in particular discursive thoughts are presented. As the *Great Extensive Lam Rim* has a detailed explanation on these, it is good to familiarise yourselves



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with them and study them. Then you have something to say if someone were to ask you about them. We have already discussed this, and you can follow up some of the topics we have discussed.

If you are really serious about engaging in meditation you need to realise that developing meditative concentration will not be possible if you fail to recognise and overcome the pitfalls of excitement and dullness and have a clear understanding of what the antidotes are, which are mindfulness or memory, and introspection or vigilance. How can we possibly overcome these pitfalls without an understanding of their antidotes? So, it is very important for us to have a good understanding of that.

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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# Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

24 April 2018

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Let's begin with our usual meditation. Make sure you cultivate the proper motivation as described in the prayer for taking refuge and generating bodhicitta. We have just recited it three times in order to remind us repeatedly of the importance of beginning the practice with the right motivation.

[*tong-len meditation*]

Cultivating love and compassion, as you have just done, is the most beneficial meditation because it counteracts the mind that makes us unhappy and restless, which is the main source of all of our problems. If we generate love and compassion then all hostile mental attitudes towards others in the form of mental afflictions such as vengeance, anger, pride, jealousy, competitiveness etc. will cease.

As these afflictive emotions are responsible for our unhappiness, we will naturally find happiness if we subdue them. As I always say, if the relationship between two people is based on mutual love, compassion and caring for each other, then there will be less room for friction and anger. Less anger between two people means more joy and happiness in their relationship. Love and compassion is the foundation and the main protector of our life. It is a fact that in the early stage of our life we relied upon the loving care of our parents to survive. Likewise, towards the end of our life, our survival also depends upon support from others.

It is very important to realise that both happiness and suffering are dependent upon the mind itself. This is to say that within us there are cause and effect links: happiness arises from positive states of mind and suffering arises from negative states of mind. Recognising this fact will be of tremendous benefit in terms of motivating ourselves to engage in thought transformation. Just as education is the key for the success in worldly pursuits, it is equally important in spiritual pursuits. In other words, to do well in spiritual practices such as the thought transformation practice we must educate ourselves in how our mind works, and the various skills and strategies we can use to bring the mind under control.

## What is the purpose of life?

We need to reflect upon and ask ourselves some fundamental questions about life. What is the purpose of life? The purpose is simply achieving happiness and avoiding suffering, and in this respect we are all the same whether we consider ourselves believers or non-believers. Even though we can be very diverse in terms of our lifestyles, work etc. we are all the same in wanting to achieve happiness and avoid suffering.

Now, if we probe into why we are all the same in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering, one reason relates to the sense of 'I' that is embedded within all of us. It is because of this sense of 'I' that we all have this natural tendency of wanting happiness but not suffering. That sense of 'I', and along with it the thought of wanting happiness and not wanting suffering arises innately and forcefully, without requiring any reason to prove it.

## True happiness lies within us, not outside

Holding that fundamental wish to achieve happiness and alleviate suffering, worldly people work hard through various means, including knowledge, and are successful in terms of overcoming problems relating to physical health, food, clothes, drink, shelter etc., and making their living conditions very comfortable. Yet despite their advanced material success, they are not finding enough happiness within themselves or they experience a deficiency in mental happiness.

This is obviously because they are only rich on the outside, or materially in terms of possessing billions of dollars, but are poor inside without enough inner wealth. Inwardly they hold a strong egotistic mind accompanied by desire, pride, jealousy, miserliness etc. Whereas there are others who may not be rich externally, but they are rich internally in terms of possessing the qualities of loving kindness, compassion, lacking anger, jealousy, and pride. Between the two, those who are rich internally truly exhibit more happiness and joy. I choose the latter one. Which one you would like to choose is up to you.

On the television I saw a man who is very rich but very unhappy and experiencing a serious sleeping problem. On the other hand, I have come across a homeless man who did not have a house, proper clothes or a bed, but he was just sleeping out there very peacefully. In another instance I saw an elderly man living a life by selling a magazine. I went up to him to support him and tried to offer him some money. But the man said to me that he was doing fine and didn't want money from me because he was quite happy with what he was earning. I sometimes learn a lot by observing things around me, and you should try to learn in that way too.

The spiritual journey begins with the knowledge that no matter how great the external wealth it does not guarantee true happiness, because true happiness lies within us, not outside, and the means to access that is through spiritual practice.

## Love and compassion is the essence of the spiritual practice

Cultivating love and compassion is the essence of spiritual practice; in fact, it is the fundamental teaching of all the spiritual traditions. The Lord Buddha's saying, 'Do not harm other beings' is a distinguishing feature of Buddhism. The Buddha guides his followers to approach learning and practice on the basis of adhering to the principle of non-violence or non-harmfulness. We know that the principle of non-violence is the key factor for world peace and happiness. We also know that if we prevent harm to each other then there will be a genuine peace and happiness.

My frequent advice to you all is to try to keep a positive state of mind because it brings happiness in your life and

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try to eliminate a negative state of mind because that upsets you and brings unhappiness. I tell people all the time that if you keep a good heart then you will be happy. Is there really any point in harming other beings? No, there isn't any point or any benefit. In fact, if you harm other beings, harmfulness comes back to you.

Recognising this fact that harming other beings just brings you trouble will make you think twice before you cause harm to other beings. Taking into account the law of karma and its result, harming other beings equals directly or indirectly harming oneself. We can see how when we harm other beings our mind is immediately disturbed, and as a result we lose peace and happiness and all the goodness in our life. I advise people to start cultivating love and compassion for those with whom you live in the same house, with whom you eat and drink, and stay or go out together. In this way you will be creating a congenial atmosphere in the house and all the people living there will be happy living together and will be friendly, trusting and supportive of each other. After this we gradually extend our love and compassion towards all other beings.

In the last two weeks you held discussion sessions. I hope you have found them useful. As all of you already have a sound knowledge, it is important not to lose it. Participation in such discussion sessions provides an opportunity to review and refresh one's learning. Otherwise there is a risk of forgetting and losing it.

### **How to meditate on calm abiding (Cont.)**

Now let us go back to the teaching topic, which is on calm abiding meditation. The term for 'calm abiding' in Tibetan is *shi-ne*, *shi* means calm, meaning being calm from disturbing thoughts and *ne* means abiding single-pointedly on a given inner object. Having finished the presentation of the limbs or the favourable conditions of achieving calm abiding, we moved on to the topic of the actual means of achieving calm abiding under which we learnt that calm abiding can be achieved by applying the eight antidotes that overcome the five faults or pitfalls.

#### **The first pitfall: laziness**

Of the five faults the first is laziness. If we don't overcome laziness when we engage in meditation, then we won't get anywhere. The antidotes to laziness are four, namely, faith, aspiration, perseverance and pliancy. Of these four, the actual antidote to laziness is pliancy which we don't have at the moment. Nevertheless, if we gain **faith** or conviction in the benefits of attaining calm abiding, we will then generate an **aspiration** to achieve calm abiding and this in turn generates **perseverance**, as a result of which we will achieve **pliancy**. This state of serviceability or functionality of mind and body enables us to remain in meditation. Therefore, pliancy serves as the actual antidote to laziness.

#### **The second pitfall: forgetting the instruction**

During the actual time of meditation, losing the object of meditation after having found it previously is called the fault of forgetting the instruction. This is the second fault. The antidote to it is applying mindfulness, which as we have covered in a previous talk has three distinguishing features. One of the features of mindfulness is its

function of apprehending the focused object. When we apply mindfulness we need to vividly hold or retain the object of meditation without our focus drifting to any other objects.

#### **The third pitfall: mental sinking and excitement**

As we hold the object of meditation by applying mindfulness, the mind will begin to abide within us. However, we then confront the next fault or obstacle to meditation which is mental sinking and excitement. There are many antidotes to overcoming this mental sinking, but the primary ones are mindfulness and introspection, which are generally regarded as the two main tools of meditation.

Sinking and excitement are the two main obstacles for the single-pointed concentration, which must possess two factors: the stability of the single-pointed focus, and the clarity of the object. Excitement prevents mental stability, whereas sinking prevents clarity as well as the intensity or sharpness of that clarity within the mind. It is said that we will find it useful to overcome mental sinking by imagining the object in the form of flickering light, whereas to overcome excitement, we imagine the object as being something solid or having a bit of weight. For instance, if we are carrying some heavy weight we would find it difficult to move. Just as we cannot defeat an enemy unless we identify it, likewise we cannot overcome sinking, mental foggiess or dullness, and excitement unless we precisely identify them.

#### **Mental foggiess or dullness**

Mental foggiess or dullness, which in Tibetan is *mugpa*, refers to either a non-virtuous or an obscured state of neutral mind that occurs when there is a feeling of heaviness, or when one is near dozing off to sleep. This makes our mind feel low or depressed and acts as a cause to bring mental sinking, but it is not mental sinking itself.

#### **Mental sinking**

Let's now talk about mental sinking which can be two types: coarse mental sinking and subtle mental sinking. The term mental sinking in Tibetan is *jingwa* which literally means sinking or drowning. In Tibetan we use the verb, *jingwa* for sinking or drowning in water. Here *jingwa* or sinking occurs in the meditation when the cognitive clarity of the object fades away, or when we feel the height of the mind lowering down, or we begin to experience a kind of depressed state of mind. This fault of sinking occurs even though our mind remains on the object and there is a good stability of focus on the object. In other words, if our mind is not focusing on the object, mental sinking cannot occur; in fact when the mental sinking arises our mind is focused very well on the object. There is a good stability of the mental focus on the object but if the concentration lacks the clarity or vividness of the object, this indicates that there is **coarse mental sinking**.

*Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* says:

When you recall your meditation device, [and] its image may be steady but unclear.

**Subtle mental sinking** occurs when there is a good stability as well as clarity of the object, but the concentration lacks the required intensity or sharpness of

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the clarity of the object due to over relaxation or loosening of the apprehension or retention of the object by mindfulness.

To quote *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*:

You have not lost the retained features of the visualisation, you even have steadiness and clarity of image, but the force of your retention has slackened, and its clarity is not as intense.

Subtle mental sinking is considered as the main obstruction to meditation because it can be easily mistaken for a perfect meditative concentration as it has the good stability of single-pointedness. There were many experienced meditators who mistook subtle sinking for perfect concentration and so they failed to achieve calm abiding and thereby higher meditative states such as special insight. Some of them even boasted that perfect relaxation is perfect meditation.

In short, we can say that even though subtle mental sinking is a form of a highly developed single-pointed concentration, nevertheless it is an obstacle to achieving perfect concentration. Here we speak of the lack of the intensity or sharpness of the clarity of the object. What does that mean? It means that although there is mental stability and clarity it lacks the right degree of intensity, because the mind is too relaxed or too slack in its retention or apprehension of the object through mindfulness. At this point, the best way to go about recognising this is observing one's own meditational experience. From this you can learn to identify the arising of subtle sinking or excitement, knowing whether the mental height is too high or low, or whether the apprehension of the object too relaxed or tight.

To quote the text,

At such a time though the image's stability is quite firm, the slackness has acted as a cause for subtle dullness ... they say that this will become very clear in the light of experience in contemplation ... it is impossible to put it into words.

It is said that the sign of the intensity of the clarity is when the mind remembers its object forcefully, sharply and vividly, just like the thought of food is to a starving person.

To quote *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*,

If the image has an intense clarity, the mind is sharp, fresh, vital, and still on the meditation device.

Here the clarity of the object relates to the subjective mind rather than to the object. As mentioned earlier, whether the degree of intensity of the clarity is right or not is something that the meditator has to find from experience. If the meditator experiences something that is obscuring their mind, that may be a sign of sinking. The example is that if someone is very hungry, the thought of food will appear in their mind almost spontaneously; it is always present. This is the level of mindfulness with which one should hold the object, to ensure there is the right intensity of the clarity of the object. Another example which is given in the text is:

Suppose you are holding a rosary and bowl in your hands. You may hold them differently, one tightly and one loosely.

If you are not holding the object firmly enough or holding it loosely, that can bring about subtle sinking.

Furthermore, as *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* says:

If you mistake subtle dullness for meditation your meditations will not even act as causes for rebirth in the Form and Formless Realms, and even in this life you will be more absent-minded

Next week, we will discuss the fault of meditation called 'excitement'.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright*

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*Edited Version*

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**Block: 3**

**Week: 1 (24 April 2018)**

**1. Explain the connection between the antidotes to the first pitfall: Laziness**

*The first pitfall: laziness*

Of the five faults the first is laziness. If we don't overcome laziness when we engage in meditation, then we won't get anywhere. The antidotes to laziness are four, namely, faith, aspiration, perseverance and pliancy. Of these four, the actual antidote to laziness is pliancy which we don't have at the moment. Nevertheless, if we gain **faith** or conviction in the benefits of attaining calm abiding, we will then generate an **aspiration** to achieve calm abiding and this in turn generates **perseverance**, as a result of which we will achieve **pliancy**. This state of serviceability or functionality of mind and body enables us to remain in meditation. Therefore, pliancy serves as the actual antidote to laziness.

*The second pitfall: forgetting the instruction*

During the actual time of meditation, losing the object of meditation after having found it previously is called the fault of forgetting the instruction. This is the second fault. The antidote to it is applying mindfulness, which as we have covered in a previous talk has three distinguishing features. One of the features of mindfulness is its function of apprehending the focused object. When we apply mindfulness we need to vividly hold or retain the object of meditation without our focus drifting to any other objects.

*The third pitfall: mental sinking and excitement*

As we hold the object of meditation by applying mindfulness, the mind will begin to abide within us. However, we then confront the next fault or obstacle to meditation which is mental sinking and excitement. There are many antidotes to overcoming this mental sinking, but the primary ones are mindfulness and introspection, which are generally regarded as the two main tools of meditation.

**2. Sinking and excitement are the two main obstacles for the single-pointed concentration, which must possess two factors: the stability of the single-pointed focus, and the clarity of the object.**

**It is said that we will find it useful to overcome sinking and excitement by doing what?**

Excitement prevents mental stability, whereas sinking prevents clarity as well as the intensity or sharpness of that clarity within the mind. It is said that we will find it useful to overcome mental sinking by imagining the object in the form of flickering light, whereas to overcome excitement, we imagine the object as being something solid or having a bit of weight. For instance, if we are carrying some heavy weight we would find it difficult to move. Just as we cannot defeat an enemy unless we identify it, likewise we cannot overcome sinking, mental fogginess or dullness, and excitement unless we precisely identify them.

**3. Explain the following:**

**a) Mental fogginess or dullness**

Mental fogginess or dullness, which in Tibetan is *mugpa*, refers to either a non-virtuous or an obscured state of neutral mind that occurs when there is a feeling of heaviness, or when one is near

dozing off to sleep. This makes our mind feel low or depressed and acts as a cause to bring mental sinking, but it is not mental sinking itself.

### **b)Mental sinking**

Let's now talk about mental sinking which can be two types: coarse mental sinking and subtle mental sinking. The term mental sinking in Tibetan is *jingwa* which literally means sinking or drowning. In Tibetan we use the verb, *jingwa* for sinking or drowning in water. Here *jingwa* or sinking occurs in the meditation when the cognitive clarity of the object fades away, or when we feel the height of the mind lowering down, or we begin to experience a kind of the depressed state of mind. This fault of sinking occurs even though our mind remains in the object and there is a good stability of focus on the object. In other words, if our mind is not focusing on the object, mental sinking cannot occur; in fact when the mental sinking arises our mind is focused very well on the object. There is a good stability of the mental focus on the object but if the concentration lacks the clarity or vividness of the object, this indicates that there is **coarse mental sinking**.

*Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* says:

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**Subtle mental sinking** occurs when there is a good stability as well as clarity of the object, but the concentration lacks the required intensity or sharpness of the clarity of the object due to over relaxation or loosening of the apprehension or retention of the object by mindfulness.