

# Serenity

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Geshe Tenzin Zopa

A commentary on Meditative Serenity,  
Lamrim Chenmo, Volume 3

by  
Lama Tsongkhapa

Transcript

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on Meditative Serenity,  
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*Just a note ...*

With our hands folded, we bow down in great devotion, respect and gratitude to Geshe Tenzin Zopa for his precious commentary on Meditative Serenity based on the text composed by Lama Tsongkhapa, *Lamrim Chenmo, The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*.

Over the course of twenty-two online classes conducted between 28 April and 21 July 2020, Geshe-la skillfully and patiently guides us through Samatha meditation practice. With immense kindness, he infuses his teachings with guided meditation practice, offering his experiential wisdom and helping his students to calm their wild minds, in the midst of these troubled times we are in.

We offer our gratitude and appreciation to Taitung Foundation Inc. for organizing this series of teachings and more than that for generously offering the dharma and the course to anyone who has a yearning to learn and also preserving the precious teachings in audio recordings.

As beginners, we initially transcribed these important teachings for our own learning and to preserve Geshe-la's precious commentary in the written word. By sharing the transcripts, we hope other students will also find these notes useful.

We are encouraged by Shantideva's opening verses in his text, *The Way of the Bodhisattva* :

... And I am destitute of learning and of skill with words  
I therefore have no thought that this might be of benefit to others;  
I wrote only to sustain my understanding

The words transcribed are from the blessed speech of Geshe-la and endowed with his blessings. We sincerely apologize for any mistakes or omissions due to our own limitations and any errors are ours alone. We encourage the reader to refer to the audio recordings of Geshe-la's teachings for the true and exact meaning. The audio recording link is: <https://mailchi.mp/85da290b2f1f/shamatha-meditation-complete-course-with-geshe-zopa-audio-recordings>

This transcript is dedicated to His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, Geshe Tenzin Zopa and all our holy gurus. May our Gurus' have long and stable lives, continue to turn the wheel of Dharma and may all their holy wishes be spontaneously fulfilled.

May peace and serenity prevail in every sentient being and may all samsaric sufferings be dispelled.

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*[Please refer to recordings of the teachings as the true and exact meaning.]*

28 April 2020, Session: 1  
Introduction to Samatha Meditation

## SETTING CORRECT MOTIVATION

[Due] to interdependent conditions from your heart for not having the correct motivation, you may be able to receive the dharma lesson but that dharma lesson, or the technique, the wisdom that you have learnt won't serve as an antidote to subdue the pollution or negative emotion in your heart. Rather it may create the conditions to boost wrong views. For that reason [one must have] the initial correct intention. The best is to have an altruistic intention or bodhicitta intention and the motivation to benefit numberless sentient beings' temporary happiness up to their ultimate happiness, full enlightenment. For that purpose you then participate in any form of dharma sessions including reading one verse of the book. If not, then at least have a compassionate intention or if not, then at least a certain degree of selfless intention, that is free from worldly concerns. That way, the dharma session will be so beneficial for both our mundane life as well as our spiritual development.

During Buddha's time, Devadatta was physically together with Guru Shakyamuni Buddha and he attended all of Buddha's dharma discourses. He experienced Buddha's day-to-day life and Buddha's activities that are completely infused by enlightened qualities. But because Devadatta had the wrong motivation to be around Buddha and to be present at the discourses given by Buddha, he never received the blessings of the dharma. Each time he attended a dharma lesson, he learned many new information, logic and reasoning from Buddha's wisdom but because of his wrong motivation it became the conditions to hallucinate his mind and boost his ego until he became very rigid and an opponent to the Buddha.

There was a great philosopher who was one of the best philosophers in a great monastery institution. No one could defeat him when the monastery scholars engaged him in debate but when this scholar passed away he was reborn as a spirit with a donkey's head and a human body. The spirit who appeared in this form returned to the monastery and brought a lot of destruction to the sangha in the monastery who were pursuing extensive studies. Even though he was studying profound Buddhist philosophy but he studied to gain intellectual knowledge with the wish to win everybody and boost his own ego. Due to that,

even though he studied extensive Buddhist philosophy yet he was reborn as a spirit. This was all because of having the wrong motivation.

You can also witness there are many retreaters, mantra masters in the Himalayas who met the tantric teaching and received the transmission of powerful mantras. They recite the mantras extensively, hundreds and thousands in number and they gain powerful mantra power. But because they lack dharma motivation and altruistic motivation, even though these mantra masters have the capability to heal the mundane pain and suffering of others, but when they themselves pass away from this life, they are reborn as very nasty, stubborn spirits. This is all due to the lack of positive motivation.

Nowadays there are many people everywhere who meet Buddha Dharma and study extensively. They know a lot but instead of subduing one's mind there are many who misuse dharma and it is because of wrong motivation. Dharma is the antidote to your delusions but because of having the wrong motivation - worldly motivation, the interdependent conditions makes it such that even when you meet the antidote, instead of eliminating the faults and the delusions, it becomes a condition to develop even greater negativities.

There are many who learn dharma for many years but then they criticize Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and they criticize their guru and others' gurus. This is all due to having the wrong motivation for pursuing dharma and it causes these mistakes to happen.

There are even those who carry the name dharma teacher, who learnt great philosophy for many years and receive many teachings. But with the wrong motivation, they misuse the dharma. They take advantage of students and are completely overwhelmed with worldly concerns. All these mistakes are due to having the wrong motivation for pursuing the dharma.

Such wrongly motivated people and practitioners will contaminate the environment of pure dharma for you, other dharma brother and sisters and the rest of the community. Therefore, it is an extremely crucial responsibility by each and everyone, that whenever we pursue dharma, the first and most important criteria is to set a positive motivation. Otherwise, no matter how much dharma practice you do in the name of dharma practice; no matter how many mantras you recite; how many protection wheels you carry, they can't benefit you.

The correct motivation [to pursue] Buddha's teachings is at the minimum level, aspire to actualize liberation from the entire six realms of samsara. If you want to use dharma

practice for the wider benefit of numberless sentient beings, then one should aspire to actualize full enlightenment. For that purpose then one pursues the dharma. If one pursues any form of practice with that intention, without any doubt, it will benefit at the temporary level as well as benefit all the way up to the ultimate benefit of enlightenment.

Lama Tsongkhapa made it very clear that whether one's path will be beneficial or not, whether one's path along the spiritual journey pursuing the dharma will be the cause of enlightenment or liberation or not, depends on your intention.

Without the correct motivation we won't be able to succeed in the preservation of moral discipline. Without the correct motivation we won't be able to succeed in Samatha or calm abiding or *shinay*. Without the correct motivation, we won't be able to achieve the actualization of wisdom realizing emptiness.

Starting from today, there will be a number of sessions to discuss the subject of calm abiding or Samatha or serenity or *shinay*. Therefore, whatever amount of time you spend, whatever number of sessions that you are going to participate in, both from my side and from your side, we engage in these dharma session discourses with the altruistic intention, dedicating every single effort for the benefit of numberless sentient beings' temporary happiness up to the ultimate happiness full enlightenment. Every single moment, we do it for that purpose.

So take a moment to structure our positive motivation.

## **1. INTRODUCTION TO SAMATHA MEDITATION**

I will start with an introductory session on the topic [of Samatha], pointing out a few important headings and points that you can use to sum up the entire understanding of Samatha. Gradually, in future sessions, we will go through a more elaborate explanation of those points.

Today's session will be on the introduction and at the end of it we will do a short meditation together.



For those who might just attend today's session only, at least from the introductory points you can get a complete idea what the requirements are and what we should engage in, to actualize single-pointed meditation, Samatha or serenity. But for those who are serious about this topic and want to know more elaborate details on this topic, you have to put effort to be consistent to attend the following sessions until the entire course is completed. If you miss any classes, you can fill in the gaps by referring to Lama Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim Chenmo*; it is the third volume in the English translation and the subject is on Serenity. You can also refer to *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. The teachings [on Serenity] can be presented in many different ways, under different headings and using different texts. Also, experiential teachings can be presented in a brief way or in a more elaborated way. Here, [in this course], it will be based on Lama Tsongkhapa's direct words from one of the most important treaties, the *Lamrim Chenmo* and I suggest that for those of you who are participating in this, try your best to bite into Lama Tsongkhapa's text.

Samatha or calm abiding is within the content of meditation so it is a meditation practice. Meditation has two aspects; one is single-pointed meditation and the other is analytical meditation. Serenity or *shinay* falls into the first category. All meditation, whether it is under sutra or tantra, fall under these two categories of either single-pointed or analytical meditation.

Firstly, what does meditation mean? In Tibetan, it is called, '*gom*'. Meditation or *gom* means familiarization or habituation. Habituation to something is called meditation. The mind that familiarizes in a focused way is called single-pointed meditation. The mind that familiarizes the object of meditation in a more elaborate way by examining its characteristics is called analytical meditation.

Focusing on an object single-pointedly does not mean it has to be focusing on just one object. The object does not necessarily have to be a single object. As long as you create a boundary on the amount of objects that you want to stay concentrated single-pointedly on, then that 'object' becomes the object of your single-pointed meditation. Don't misunderstand single-pointed meditation as meaning just one object and one single mind. By defining the limits of an object, - whether it is to do with emotions, thoughts, sounds or a tangible, physical object - trying to focus within that limit and training your mind to do so until eventually you can achieve focus onto that defined object, that becomes single-pointed meditation. Even though, the 'object' can be 10, 20 or 100 in numbers or in characteristics.

For analytical meditation, even though it can be just one object, but the mind analyzes without any boundaries to limit the process or progress of the analysis. It could be on just one object but it can be analytical meditation.

The purpose of meditation is to actualize a perfect and clear understanding of the purpose of the meditation by finding – either through the single-pointed or analytical technique - the conventional and the ultimate absolute [nature] of that object. To understand Buddha's teachings just by listening and contemplation, we won't be able to understand the absolute meaning of his teachings. In order to understand the absolute meaning of Buddha's teachings, the entirety of his intentions of the dharma, we have to use either of the two techniques - single-pointed or analytical meditation.

In the concern of whether one understands Buddha's dharma or not, just by completing learning intellectually does not qualify as understanding Buddha's dharma. Even if you learn perfectly and even able to analyze what you have learnt, again it does not qualify as understanding the dharma perfectly. In order to understand the absolute dharma you have to do it through meditation. Without meditation you won't reach to the point where you can claim that you have understood the dharma. Without gaining experiential realization in the teaching, till then we don't understand the dharma completely. To understand the entire Buddha Dharma, then one has to become a Buddha. Until then we cannot claim that we have understood the entire dharma. Even if you may have finished all the Geshe studies or you are a great philosopher but if you have never meditated that means you don't understand the dharma. Until you have gained the experiential realization within, you have not understood. You don't understand renunciation until you have gained renunciation. You may understand the meaning but you don't understand the absolute intention of the Buddha's teaching of renunciation. The Buddha's intention on the teaching of renunciation is for the disciple to actualize renunciation within oneself. The taste of dharma is like tasting a sweet, candy. You put it in your mouth and even if there are no words to express how it tastes but you know exactly how it is because you have actualized the experience within. Dharma realization or dharma understanding has to be like that. Until then, while we are studying and while we are contemplating on the dharma knowledge it is very much like tasting the candy by reading the description on the cover. So without meditating on dharma teachings no matter how loud you are, it is empty. It's like being an empty vessel. When you bang on it, it makes a loud sound but it is still empty of the essence.

For some of us when we are in samsaric trouble we can't handle ourselves and that's a sign that we haven't meditated. If we had meditated, dharma would already be built into our system and we would not be disturbed by samsaric adversities. But we only think of the

dharma in good times and run away from dharma in bad times. When people are in trouble and they ask for advice, you have all the remedies for them. You have all the solutions for others but when you yourself get emotionally disturbed or when any samsaric circumstances arise, you totally freak out. That is the absolute result of not meditating and not understanding the dharma. My late guru, Geshe Lama Konchog went through amazing adversities in life. When he went to meditate, so many people abused him with really hurtful abuse. Also he went through the experience of cancer sickness. Outwardly, you could see tremendous pain there but because he meditated on the dharma, his entire adversities were like experiencing bliss and joy, more joy than in normal life. He experiences more joy during adversities because that is the time when the dharma is manifesting an even stronger effect. The antidote is even more effective on the negation. That is why instead of being disturbed, they blissed out. This is the result of meditation on dharma and where they have gained realization in dharma.

But that kind of perfect result of encountering dharma for my master was not from one day's effort. It's not because you have attended a few sessions of dharma classes or read a few dharma books or listened to 10 teachers or meditated for ½ hour everyday. He studied extensively for over 20 years, understood the correct technique how to meditate and then for over 26 years, for 24 hours a day, put effort in developing meditation and the result of that is he achieved that kind [of realizations]. For those who think that just by attending this class you can space out, you have the wrong idea because you won't achieve that. You have to work very hard and it's not a simple thing. If, after learning some techniques you meditate ambitiously once and when you don't get any results you then give up, how [can you expect] to achieve [results]? It's not possible to achieve [the result]. The commitment has to be for the rest of our life and consistently, starting from today starting from now. For beginners, start right now. Those of you who are already advanced, you must continue for the rest of this life and it could be for a few more lives before you can achieve the result. So it's a shortsighted ambition when you study, contemplate and meditate on dharma hoping for effect; that's a mistaken view.

We cannot expect our samsaric ups and downs, problems, emotional difficulties, financial obstacles, health obstacles, relationship obstacles and spirit harm to go away by just performing one puja. It's not as simple or easy as that. We have been accumulating negativities since beginningless lifetimes. But the studying, contemplating and meditating on dharma are done only very occasionally. Even in this lifetime after we have met the dharma, if you count how many hours you have meditated well, we don't even have one hour to show for. So how can we expect one puja to clear all our obstacles or one meditation will bring serenity in our heart. I'm saying this because all of us should put in consistent effort.

Don't just try it out. If you are serious, there will definitely be results and I have shown you one example but there are many examples. If you are shortsighted you will get overwhelmed with samsara, get completely soaked and swimming in the mud; sorry to say but it's the truth. It's not pleasant to hear but it's the truth.

As mentioned before, the definition of meditation is habituation or familiarization. Meditation itself is common to Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Here, we are learning Buddhist meditation, which is familiarizing in virtuous objects, thoughts and contemplation. These virtues are directed to be at the minimum, the cause for liberation from the entire six realms of samsaric existence and the cause for full enlightenment. That is called Buddhist meditation.

Virtue here is condensed into two sections; the method aspect and the wisdom aspect of virtues. When you apply analytical or one-pointed meditation on loving kindness, compassion, bodhicitta, or on the six paramitas (generosity etc.), all these are meditating on the method aspect of virtues. When you meditate on the method aspect of virtues, this will lead us to actualize Buddha's form body- Nirmanakaya and Samboghakaya body, that are most beneficial for the benefit of other sentient beings and the result from this meditation. If you meditate on the relative truth - emptiness of self, emptiness of phenomena, these are meditation on wisdom. This will result in Buddha's Dharmakaya body and you will actualize Buddha's Truth body and Wisdom body, which is the highest achievement for the benefit of yourself – your enlightenment.

The foundation of all meditation starts with the meditation technique using our natural breathing as the object of meditation. This technique has been utilized by all the past great masters and pandits, up to the Buddha. This technique has been used for over 2600 years. It is on the basis of breathing meditation, that all other meditations have been successful. Today, there is a lot of information but what you must take note of in your mind and try to use it from tonight onwards and in your day-to-day life is to at least do breathing meditation. It is one of the very important pre-conditions and foundation to actualize *shinay* or Samatha and including the actualization of Vipassana.

Breathing meditation is very simple yet one of the most powerful meditation techniques. The technique is simply focusing on the natural rhythm of the in and out breath. Your mind is paying attention to the natural rhythm of breathing in and out. In order for your mind to focus on the breathing process, one needs to do a lengthy breathing in and out. Not the normal breathing duration, try to breathe in and out as lengthily as possible. That will help to draw your mind's attention to it. When you breathe in, your concentration feels or hears

or is experiencing that the air is transmitting into your body and throughout your entire system. Just like if you put a drop of water onto rice paper it spreads out to the entire paper, and gradually it pervades the entire paper. If you put black ink onto white paper, even if it's just a drop, you can witness the ink gradually spreading out to the entire space of the paper. Similarly, when you breathe in, your focus is on the breathing but you can sense that the breath is transmitting to your entire physical aggregates; the breathing energy is like distributing throughout your entire physical existence. But your focus has to be on the breathing. An example you can try at home is to put a drop of black ink onto white paper. Somehow your mind will be focusing on the black ink but at the same time you can perceive the ink completely pervading the entire paper without getting distracted by the white colour and without losing focus on the black ink. Similarly, when you focus on the breathing you cannot lose your attention on the breathing but simultaneously you have to experience or see through your visualization and focused mind that it is pervading your entire body. You are giving oxygen to the cells in your entire body; the entire physical cells in your body are receiving oxygen. For the ink example, you hold your concentration until the entire paper is covered with the ink. Similarly, until your entire physical organs and cells are pervaded by oxygen, you stay focused on the breathing that you have inhaled.

When you breathe out, it is as if you are gathering the breath all the way down from the navel and not just from the lungs. It is as if you are gathering all the air breathing out. It doesn't matter whether you breathe out from the nose or the mouth. When you breathe out, try to make it as lengthy as possible. The air [that you breathe out] pervades into the entire space. The air dissolves into the entire space, the entire universe. Again, do not get distracted by the empty sky or any objects other than breathing the air itself. But at the same time you can feel and understand that the air you have just breathed out has completely pervaded the entire space. So you need to hold your breathing until you gain this confidence – you need to hold for quite long. The earlier description is very much for us to hold on to the breathing for as lengthy as possible. Even though the breathing is natural, this is to make it [the lengthy breathing], more beneficial. There are many benefits for doing it like that.

## MEDITATION POSTURE

This meditation is best done in the seven Vairochana meditation posture. At the minimum, cross your legs; if not, then sit on a chair like Maitreya. Try to put your hands in the meditation posture. One of the most important physical features is to sit straight – the spine

has to be very straight. So, your back, from your buttocks all the way up to your head has to be very straight. This is one of the most important physical meditation postures.

## DURATION OF MEDITATION

On the amount of time [for meditation sessions], the great Indian pandit Kamalasila gave certain suggestions on the time frame to those who have already attained Samatha, and then for them to continue to train in Samatha. [However], for first time practitioners like us, this timeline can be taken as a discipline for us to train ourself to develop good meditation, even in relation to the breathing meditation. So you start by doing it for 24 minutes. Gradually, extend it to 1½ hours. After that, gradually extend it to 3 hours. After that you can do it for as many hours as you like.

To recap, for your body posture, the minimum is to have a straight spine and back. For your hand mudra and legs it doesn't matter for now, you can do whatever way you want. On breathing in and out, there is no rule from which nostril you should breathe from; the most important is to focus on the breathing and try to stay focused on the breathing without getting distracted. If there are distractions from any other thoughts or sensual objects like sound or feeling etc., then you should withdraw your mind. Try to bring back the concentration towards the same object of meditation – the breathing, and try to do that for 24 minutes.

The benefit of doing this meditation is not only to help us develop Samatha or calm abiding or serenity, it also helps to develop clearer wisdom to eventually realize emptiness. This will help us to progress in all our learning, contemplation and meditation in the dharma all the way up to enlightenment.

By now, you should understand the importance of having the correct motivation, as I have explained at the beginning. So even for this meditation, first you have to cultivate the correct motivation in order to benefit not just at the temporary level but also ultimately to progress in your spiritual practice.

## BENEFITS OF BREATHING MEDITATION

The immediate benefit of this meditation is to help rejuvenate all the good cells in your body. It will help to cleanse all the toxic in your body, cleanse blood clots, blockages of the nervous system and it can cleanse many diseases. Moreover, for the highest spiritual

realization, we need to utilize our subtle nervous system, subtle drops, subtle wind energies and this meditation will help to open up and make all this energy flexible. So when we engage in either meditation on the sutra or on tantric channels and drops and wind, the meditation will become most effective. This meditation will help us to start to clear our hallucinations, confusion and our delusions; such as delusions in relation to laxity that is very much infused by ignorance. For depression, feeling very lazy, down or moody, this meditation will help us to overcome all these negative emotional laxities. This meditation will also help to clear the obstacles of excitement in our mind, which are the effect of the mind infused by attachment, anger, jealousy, pride, ego etc.; that which distracts our mind. We all know when desire, anger or jealousy arises how disturbed and distracted we can become. This meditation will help to cleanse or reduce all the obstacles in relation to excitement. In short, this meditation will help us to be happy, purposeful, meaningful, relaxed and peaceful because it directly helps our mind to withdraw from the disturbances of laxity and excitement that I have mentioned before, the kinds of delusions that influences laxity and excitement.

Even in our mundane life, for those of you who are studying or have jobs that need clarity of mind so as to make the correct and right decisions and need an uplifted state of mind throughout the day for work, this meditation will help to get into that state. It is exactly like going to a gym for a workout for your physical health. This is a gym within, for a workout that is beneficial for both your mind and body to stay healthy. So you should take [this meditation] as a daily gym practice. Otherwise, no matter how much you go to your outer gym, if your mind is unhappy and disturbed, it won't help you much. But with this inner gym and also if you get some extra physical exercise, then you can spend the day with much joy. The reason is because of the impact and effect of this meditation – in the text it says, “you will experience physical and mental pliancy.” That means physical lightness, delightfulness, physical comfort and mental bliss. That is the result of this meditation. This simple meditation will lead to absolute physical bliss and mental bliss – not only temporarily but sustainable bliss. When you achieve sustainable mental and physical pliancy through this meditation, you have achieved the highest level of Samatha. That is why I said at the beginning that you can't expect absolute sustainable bliss in one session but I can guarantee that you will definitely achieve it if you provide 24 minutes a day, do exactly as I have guided and translate it into your own understanding; but do it properly. Then even after the first day you will feel both your body and mind very uplifted and lighter. It is an immediate effect but it won't be sustainable. Therefore you have to do this every day and not just once a day. If possible do it many times a day. Especially whenever you feel tension or disturbed, physically or mentally, just get into this meditation and I guarantee you will say, “Wow, it's so simple. It's on the tip of my nose but I didn't realize it.” Try it out.

Some people have asked me, what is the secret recipe or remedy for you to always smile and be happy? Even though you wear the same robe all the time year after year, eat simple food and live simply but you are always happy. Although I have so much money, so much business and live in a big house but why do I have no peace? There isn't a secret recipe but there is a simple practice. We tend to forget the simple practice and try to get happiness from material objects, grabbing big name practices and hunting for many Lamas hoping to get happiness. You have never read one preliminary practice properly; but you read so many books and don't really digest them well so how can you get happiness? There is no secret recipe but there is a simple recipe. There is the simple technique of this breathing meditation as the starting point. As I have mentioned earlier for the past 2600 years, the entire masters up to Buddha himself used this technique to bring success into their mundane life and their spiritual realizations up to enlightenment. So we just need to take it.

Dharma is so precious and beneficial but it is so difficult for us to realize the dharma. So one of the tools for us to get there is to start to train our mind through this simple meditation. So from today onwards, each and every one of us who really wants to be happy, who really wants sustainable happiness, then one should start to dedicate at least 24 minutes.

I will now go through some of the points I wanted to cover today.

#### WHAT IS SAMATHA, SERENITY OR CALM ABIDING?

Samatha in Tibetan is called, *shinay*. *Shi* means peacefulness, serenity. *Nay* means abiding. So abiding in peace is called Samatha or serenity or *shinay*. In short, it's the mind that abides in peace by avoiding the disturbances or distractions of laxity and excitement.

*Shinay* or calm abiding or samatha is a common meditation technique or practice to Buddhists and non-Buddhists. Here, we are going to discuss the Buddhist meditation on Samatha. Lama Tsongkhapa's definition of Samatha is,

Meditative stabilization is a virtuous one-pointed state of mind that stays fixed only on the object of meditation without distraction to other things.

So it is a single- pointed mind that focuses on a virtuous object without getting distracted by other objects or thoughts.



Santideva stated in the *Bodhisattva-caryavatara*

Having thus generated joyous perseverance then set your mind to  
the meditative concentration.

So after completing the earlier four paramitas or practices of the four perfections: the practice of generosity, morality, patience and joyous perseverance, and then setting your mind in the meditative concentration single-pointedly; that is called Samatha.

WHAT ARE THE SUB-DIVISIONS OF SAMATHA?

The sutra of the *Bodhisattva Levels* described how many different aspects of Samatha meditation there are:-

If you sub-divide Samatha according to its *nature*, then there are two kinds – mundane and supramundane.

If you do so according to its *orientation*, then there are three kinds. The first is called orientated towards serenity to achieve special insight. So, you do Samatha single-pointed meditation in order for you to have the sharpest mind to be able to meditate on emptiness. The second is in order to achieve mental stability, the *shinay* or Samatha itself. The third is in order to achieve both simultaneously. You can either meditate on emptiness, and through meditating on emptiness you try to achieve Samatha or you try to develop Samatha using the breathing exercise to train in single-pointed meditation and then eventually you will actualize the higher wisdom of emptiness. In particular, it refers to you training in concentration while analyzing the absolute nature of phenomena, emptiness. The end result is that you actualize both Samatha and Vipassana.

If you sub-divide according to its *function*, there are three types of Samatha meditation. The first one is Samatha that establishes body and mind in bliss and pliancy, within this present lifetime. Such as by breathing in and out you actualize physical and mental pliancy that is one of the benefits of meditation. That can be very beneficial for this present lifetime. Even in your day-to-day life, as I have mentioned before, if you do breathing meditation today, this will definitely affect the health of both your body and mind

throughout the day. If someone does that breathing meditation as guided, throughout the day whenever you are free, for the majority of your time in the daytime, then it is definite that throughout the day both your body and mind will experience a great degree of pliancy, mental and physical bliss. If you are consistent in this meditation, eventually you will actualize both physical and mental pliancy or bliss that is sustainable. For someone who does this meditation with altruistic motivation, then the benefits are from today all the way up to enlightenment. If you do this breathing meditation with the motivation to actualize self-liberation; *sravaka* and *pratyeka's* arhat liberation, then the benefit is up to that [level]. If your motivation is just to be physically and mentally healthy for this life, then you will benefit this much only during this entire life but within this lifetime only.

I am presenting this in order to encourage you to bring your meditation to benefit numberless sentient beings' well-being. I cannot impose onto an individual, but I suggest that to be most beneficial for yourself and for so many other sentient beings, you should have bodhicitta motivation before you conduct this meditation.

The second type of meditation is calm abiding meditation that achieves good qualities. Just by doing this simple calm abiding meditation on breathing, helps us to gain immense qualities within this life, in the past and even up to Buddha's qualities. Again, it is dependent on your motivation to create this as a cause up to what limit.

The third one is meditation used as a force for the welfare of and to benefit sentient beings. If you want to carry out any form of activity that brings benefit to others, before doing so, you can do this simple initial state of meditation. It will help to boost inspiration, wisdom and the method of great compassion in order to bring effectiveness of your charity and benefit to others.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF SAMATHA?

From the physical and mental pliancy bliss all the way up to the everlasting happiness enlightenment, those are all the benefits of Samatha meditation. The faults of not meditating are that you will have back pain, neck pain, chest pain, no sleep, headache, knee pain, other tensions, delusions, anger, attachment, ego and all the wrong things. There will be an abundance of suffering of samsara in our life, if you don't meditate on Samatha.

From beginningless lifetime until now, life has been like a roller coaster, with so much ups and downs and there's not even a moment you can claim that you have experienced genuine inner peace or genuine perfection in life. This is because you have no serenity or no calm abiding. We hear and learn that emptiness is so powerful; one medicine that can cure entire faults. But we only experience the words and we have never experienced the effect because we lack serenity or calm abiding.

Many of us have even received Highest Yoga Tantric initiation. We have met the compassionate Buddha and enlightened Guru in person. We have received teachings and initiations but we are still the same if not worse due to dharma pollution. If we are not a better person, it is because we don't have Samatha.

Many of us may have hundreds of blessing strings, protection from the ten directions received from Lamas and different blessing pills. But when problems come we are completely lost and terrified. Why? It is because we don't have Samatha. Many of us have at least a Buddha statue or a picture on the altar. Some of us have a Buddha for wealth, Buddha of wisdom, Buddha of activities, etc. but when you are in trouble you are alone. Why? It is because we have no Samatha.

Sometimes after many days of very moody weather, suddenly there is sunshine but we can't experience much joy from it. Why? It is because we don't have a sense of Samatha experience, not even the initial stage. That is why nothing makes you happy. When you eat dumplings you pray for pizza. When you eat pizza you crave for dumplings. Whatever you eat, there is no ultimate happiness. Why? It is because we have no Samatha. If you have a partner, [there are] problems or if have no partner, [there are] also problems; why? It is because we have no Samatha. If you have money it's a problem. If you have no money, it's [also] a problem. Why? It is because we have no Samatha. During the corona virus [pandemic], when you are in lockdown and quarantined in the house you are not happy. When you are released outside you are also not happy. Why? It is because we have no

Samatha. When we are sick we are not happy but when we are not sick we are still not happy. Why? It is because we have no Samatha.

All these faults and limitations are because we don't have serenity. We don't even have the basics from the breathing exercises in which you can at least create a basis where you can have a sense of appreciation and positivity. We don't have that sustainable positive thinking because of the lack of a serviceable mind. Samatha here means to have a serviceable mind. Our mind is not servicing us the way we want to experience. So why we do the breathing meditation all the way up to Samatha meditation is to make our mind serviceable to us; to service what we want to achieve. When our mind is serviceable we will achieve all that we want and we can avoid all the things that we do not wish to experience. That is the benefit of Samatha.

#### WHY AND HOW TO DEVELOP SAMATHA MEDITATION?

Why everyone should wish to develop Samatha is because everyone only wants to experience happiness and they do not want to experience suffering. That is why everybody should practice Samatha.

Why should we start the meditation, at least the breathing meditation, right now? It is because we want happiness, right now. No one would say they want suffering until tomorrow morning and only then try it out to experience happiness. You wouldn't say that.

When will one see the impact of Samatha meditation? It is immediate. When will one gain the full Samatha benefit, which is sustainable pliancy of body and mind? It is when you achieve the ninth level of Samatha. There are nine levels of Samatha and when you achieve the ninth level you will achieve the full state of Samatha.

How to develop the Samatha meditation? There are two categories. The first is to rely on the preconditions. After relying on the preconditions then [the second is] how to cultivate Samatha on that basis. So first, to develop Samatha and all the processes up to the ninth stage is relying on the perfect preconditions. The second one is after actualizing all the preconditions, then on that basis, how to develop the different stages of Samatha meditation. From the next session onwards, I will go through in detail, to discuss the preconditions. Then we will continue to discuss the actual process of practices in the traditional way.

We will stop here and now we will practice the breathing meditation for maybe 1 or 2 minutes for an auspicious start.

- Get into the basic physical posture as mentioned before. Try to straighten your spine, it doesn't matter if you close your eyes or not.
- Silently get into the meditation as mentioned before

From here you can see how wild and distracted your mind can be. Or in some people's case, how laxity your mind can be. The moment you start to meditate you fall asleep. For some people the moment you start to meditate then all the other activities, thoughts and plans will come into your mind but there's no need to worry. When this happens try to withdraw your mind and concentrate on your breathing. Do this until I tell you to stop.

[After meditation session]

For myself I feel more comfortable if I breathe in through both nostrils and breathe out from my mouth. When I breathe in, the stomach becomes flat and the chest area starts to expand. When you breathe out, the stomach, navel area becomes more bloated.

For some people their nose could be blocked, so [the way you breathe] is not fixed. You have to figure it out based on your own system. But usually the bloating and flattening of the stomach is similar, whichever way you breathe.

Some individuals may experience the obstacle of not being able to focus even for a few moments of breathing in and out. But not to worry; whenever you lose your focus, just try to regain the focus and you can do that as many times as possible. As long as you keep trying, again and again, eventually you will be able to stabilize your mind.

### **Homework**

If you have time, do this [breathing meditation] daily until the next session.

Breathing meditation is the very fundamental, initial practice that we should start with even though there are so many different levels of meditation that you can practice and learn.

## DEDICATION

Since we have conducted this session with Bodhicitta motivation, therefore our entire time becomes the cause for numberless sentient beings' temporary happiness up to the ultimate happiness of enlightenment.

Now we dedicate in Bodhicitta too - may all these merits be absolutely the cause for the temporary happiness up to the ultimate happiness of numberless sentient beings, as motivated.

In particular, we dedicate our merits to overcome the pandemic crisis, which has affected all seven billion people, where millions have suffered with the sickness and hundreds of thousands have died. May this collective merit be the cause to pacify all the suffering and causes of suffering of that and for everyone to actualize protection, peace, happiness and enlightenment.

We also dedicate our past, present and future merits and all the merits created by Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and Gurus and may they collectively be the cause for the protection of each and every one of us here as well as our family members and loved ones. May we be protected all the time from all suffering and miseries and always actualize all the conducive conditions to forever experience peace and happiness up to full enlightenment.

Take a moment to feel happy and rejoice that in the midst of samsara, this very turbulent world and in particular at this time during the corona virus crisis, that oneself is still alive, have the time, opportunity and the merit to have a dharma discourse, and to make connection with Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. How fortunate and wonderful that we can fulfill the purpose of our precious human rebirth.

May I be just like the Bodhisattva Santideva; as long as sentient beings remain, may I too remain to dispel the misery of all sentient beings. That is the purpose of my life, that is the purpose of practicing dharma, and that is the purpose of developing Samatha and the whole purpose why I exist.

3, 5 & 10 May 2020, Sessions 2 – 4  
Breathing Meditation, Q&A

## 2. BREATHING MEDITATION, Q & A

First of all, have a sense of developing the functional basis of our own mind, so that we can receive the blessings of dharma learning and also to have a clear mind to understand the teachings. Not only that, to accumulate meritorious conditions in order for whatever dharma we discuss to be the antidote to subdue our mind and transform our past negative imprints and present delusional hallucinations including the suffering state of mind and being. Therefore, in order to for all that to be, we start with short breathing meditation as guided in the last session.

### ON BREATHING MEDITATION

When we do breathing meditation, one should focus on the natural flow of the breathing, nothing else apart from just that and not on the sensation of breathing. When we breathe out, one should simply be aware of the breath going out, and when we breathe in, to simply be aware of the breath going in. There is nothing more than that, to exaggerate or to interpret, and nothing to get distracted from there. So simply focus on the natural flow of the breathing. In doing this you are trying to develop a certain type of focus towards the object of meditation, which in this case is the natural breathing itself. We are training our mind to train as long as possible to focus on the breathing and that will bring immense benefits, which I have shared before - mundane as well as supramundane benefits. Then there is also the physical sensation while doing this breathing meditation as well as pliancy - physical bliss and mental bliss you can achieve are the results of achieving good quality breathing meditation. These are the functions or results of gaining certain stability on the breathing meditation.

Even though this breathing meditation is very basic and very simple and anybody can do and can understand how to do it, but the [heart of the] matter is how long can one sustain the breathing meditation. Based on the length of your sustainability in this simple breathing meditation, it will bring about different stages and levels of benefits. There are similar meditational objects such as mindfulness of body, mindfulness of feeling, mindfulness of mind or consciousness and mindfulness of breathing. These are the varieties of techniques

but amongst these, the easiest and most effective is to develop through the focus on breathing, because breathing is natural without which your consciousness and concentration cannot function. It is very much inter dependent and an obvious reliance on each other and due to that, using breathing as an object of training, your concentration will bring immense benefits.

This basic breathing meditation will be able to lead us all the way to a higher level of meditation - such as meditating on loving kindness, compassion and meditation on absolute serenity, meditation on Vipassana, meditation on special insight, meditation on emptiness - all the way up to achieving higher concentration along the stages of the ten Bhumis and all the way up to the five concentrations of the Buddha or the omniscience concentration of the Buddha.

Whether this very simple breathing meditation will be the cause for enlightenment or not; the cause for all the clairvoyance of higher perceptions; cause for serenity or Samatha; cause for purifying our body and mind for developing loving kindness and compassion; or this meditation simply becomes just beneficial for this life to actualize physical or mental sense of calmness easy state, all depends on your motivation. Therefore, in what direction this meditation will lead to, depend very much on your motivation.

If someone who has met with the Buddha dharma and in particular Mahayana Buddha dharma were to use such a valuable meditation for mundane purposes then that person would be missing a huge opportunity and [not optimizing] our capability. As Mahayana practitioners like us, before we meditate, we should motivate for this meditation to be the cause for enlightenment, which is beneficial for numberless sentient beings' temporary happiness up to the ultimate happiness of enlightenment.

As I have mentioned before, anyone can do this basic simple meditation. The moment you discipline yourself to do this meditation regularly, this meditation will serve as a tool to find our own true potential. It will serve as a way to restore our body and mind. It is like a positive mental shower that restores the negativities of the mind. It will serve as a way to find hope in our life. It will help us to recover from the negative state of body and mind. It can also be a basis to succeed in our pursuit of mundane and supramundane activities. It will serve as a very effective method to focus on the object that we wish to stay focused on. It is a method for us to get well rested in our body and mind. People generally go to the spa etc. for our body and mind to rest after their busy work life but in fact if you do this simple breathing meditation it will help to rest the body and mind. This simple meditation will also



open the door to gain a serviceable mental capability for us to understand the absolute emptiness nature of self and the aggregates and the rest of the phenomena.

The topic that we are covering from this series of teachings is Samatha or serenity. But in order for us to get to there, first of all we must at least have the basis of our state of mind that can serve to achieve that goal. So throughout this course, for those who are serious about achieving Samatha, then the daily homework that we all need to do is at least the basic breathing meditation exercise and as mentioned in the previous session, a minimum of 24 minutes. Then you extend the time to 1½ hours and 3 hours and then for as long as you are able to. This is the homework throughout our sessions and the duration of this course.

Just a reminder, as discussed in the last session - what is meant by Samatha? Samatha means mental stability, a serviceable mind towards virtue. We also discussed about how many sub-divisions [there are] in relation to Samatha, which are the divisions that come with the mental stability in relation to mundane benefits and supramundane benefits. We talked about the divisions based on the *function*: the mental stability or mental focus that you develop to achieve bliss in our body and mind; then the mental stability to achieve Samatha serenity; and mental stability to achieve the benefit to all sentient beings. These are the three types of functions we have learnt in the previous class. To achieve effectiveness to get to this point we need to train our mind on the basics which is through the breathing exercise.

In this course, most of you might be pursuing Samatha in order to actualize Vipassana. Then eventually to actualize full enlightenment in order to be most effective for the benefit of numberless sentient beings' well-being. But there may be a few individuals who just want to get away from the stress of our day-to-day life, and just want to have a blissful body and mind. So, whatever *your* purpose may be, you will be able to develop all these benefits through mental stability or actualizing a serviceable state of mind. Without your mind being serviceable, whatever that you experience you are unable to control your mind or your emotion. So, all the sufferings that we have experienced in our day-to-day life whether it is to do with body or mind, is because of the stirred mind which is an uncontrolled mind. If we have a controlled mind, we can even control our physical sensation and our emotional experiences. We are able to disassociate any pain and suffering that come through our body and mind or our emotions. Our serviceable mind will be able to prevent experiencing it by oneself. That way you can let your body and mind only to experience bliss - mental bliss and physical bliss.

How genuine, intense and sustainable the physical and mental joy or bliss that we experience, is very much dependent on the quality of concentration of the serviceable mind that you have. Therefore, to [attain] higher qualities or even to achieve temporary happiness or a temporary sense of pliancy in our body and mind, all of these require the quality of control towards our mind.

In short, all the qualities of enlightenment and all the qualities of higher knowledge and inner peace have to be achieved through the mind of concentration. Especially the higher qualities of the paths and grounds and the higher qualities of enlightenment, they have to be achieved through developing serenity. Without which, no matter how much wisdom one may have or great compassion one may have, we won't be able to progress through the path.

My late Master used to say that if you truly want to benefit others, or bring effective benefits to others then one of the necessary qualifications is to actualize Samatha. He used to emphasize again and again that if you truly want to experience the taste of the path to liberation, to enlightenment then you should focus on developing Samatha. Also, Lama Atisha expressed this in the *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* and it says,

When you lack the element of serenity even if you meditate assiduously you will not achieve concentration even in thousands of years.

Therefore, if you don't put effort doing your homework, even if we know much on the teachings then it won't be of much benefit. So, as I have mentioned before this very simple breathing exercise is so simple that it does not require further explanation. It is that simple! And it has the benefit to lead us to all the great meditations including achieving Samatha and enlightenment. What are really required from each and every one of us are consistent, disciplined daily practices.

I have received a few messages [feedback] from students here that after conducting the breathing exercise, they expressed that it immediately 'opened' their hearts and one student expressed that it energized her entire system and she became very motivated and functional carrying out her various chores and responsibilities at home. There is also another student who has a lot of inconveniences in her physical health who said that by doing this breathing meditation it was like needles from a thorn were taken out from her

body- that's the immediate benefit. And one student who said it is very difficult to control her anger and emotion and just after 3 or 4 times of doing this meditation she was already able to control her anger. All these kind of benefits can be achieved after just a few sessions of effort doing this very simple breathing exercise.

And for those who are lazy like me, it will be the same- before and now. There is nothing, you just get to learn more information but there's no genuine benefit to the development to our body or heart. So, don't be lazy like me.

Now, take one moment to sit straight, and feel gratitude that I am still alive. Anything could have happened this past week. Just today, this morning I heard that two persons who just a few days ago were okay and alive but today they have passed away. And there are so many others too. For us, our body and mind are still in perfect health like it was last week. Not only we have not passed away from this life, we are having this precious opportunity to pursue the dharma. In particular, the dharma that even from starting with our motivation, we are already benefiting numberless sentient beings. So feel how wonderful and fortunate I am.

Secondly, close your eyes and feel the presence of your Guru and Buddha and all their positive energy within your body and mind and within your house, and within your entire existence that is completely filled with the positive energy of enlightened beings.

Thirdly, while having all the blessings of the Buddha and having the meritorious karmic result within your existence with this precious human rebirth now and the opportunity to cultivate dharma, [think that] I must dedicate the rest of my life, my entire future rebirths, the rest of my days and in particular this very moment and this very session, in particular pursuing the detailed teachings on Samatha, to be the cause for numberless sentient beings' temporary happiness up to their ultimate happiness, starting from yourself, your family, the rest of humanity and the rest of the sentient beings. For that purpose, I will dedicate my time.

There is also a question raised regarding breathing in, [whether or not] the stomach or chest expands. Actually, when you breathe in your stomach should flatten because that helps to transmit the breath and positive energy to the rest of your channels and your body. Therefore, it pervades throughout your body and is not bloating up in your stomach. And when you breathe out, because of the force [of exhaling], your stomach tends to feel bloated.

There are two clarifications:

1. In previous sessions, I have guided that when you breathe in you should breathe in up to the navel. Some people are stuck on [this part] thinking whether one's breathing is up to the navel or not. [In this situation,] then your mind is already separated from the focus of breathing. The reason you are asked to breathe up to the navel is to give you the understanding of breathing in as long as possible and reserve the breath as lengthily as possible.
2. When I said breathing out as though the breath pervades the entire space, it doesn't mean that your mind should focus on the space. The reason is for you to stay as lengthily as possible when you breathe out, as though you are sharing the breath with the entire space. The focus is just on the breathing- breath in and out.

(Breathing meditation exercise)

### QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

[Q&A compiled together here from teaching sessions 3 and 4 on 5 and 10 May 2020]

The foundational Samatha meditation is not the actual process of the Samatha meditation. The breathing meditation that I have introduced is to prepare your mind to be the fertile ground for engaging in the process of meditation in Samatha.

I have received a few questions and it is very encouraging and I am happy to hear that quite a lot of students who have attended the previous classes are doing their homework. I am sure there are many of you who didn't share but for those who have shared, I can see they are really doing their homework and it is really encouraging because by doing so, from there, they start to realize what is not working for them – that there are a lot of limitations. Even with the words that I use, some are misinterpreted; some are understood but not completely. All this shows that you have engaged in the practice. If you didn't engage in the practice and you just come and go to class then there won't be much benefit. So I am very happy to hear that people are taking this seriously.

**Question:** When I do the breathing meditation, should I focus on the tip of my nose, or should I focus on my stomach bloating when I breathe in or out etc.

**Geshe-la:** You should not focus on any of those. You simply focus on the natural breathing in and out. That's it and nothing else. The interpretation that when you breathe in you feel your stomach is bloating and when you breathe out your stomach is flattening is just to illustrate how your energy goes out and comes in and if you are not concentrating on the actual process of breathing and if you want to examine how it works with your system. So it is just for illustration. The reason for the illustration is to encourage you to breathe as lengthy as possible; [not shallow breathing]. [When doing so], that kind of effect may arise. The actual meditation is nothing other than simply following the natural breath in and out. It is nothing other than that.

This is just my illustration for you to know if you are trying out the lengthy breathing in and breathing out. When you breathe in as lengthy as possible you are not storing the air in your stomach or in your lungs. But in fact, you are transmitting the air to all the channels in your entire body. The energy of the air or the breathing travels through your blood-flow and to all the systems in our body. At the beginning, you will start by initiating lengthy breathing then later when you focus on the breathing, the breathing will be lengthier than your normal breathing.

The breath is like a horse. The mind focusing on the rhythm of the breathing is like oneself. After riding the horse you follow where the horse goes. Similarly, after you choose breathing as your object of concentration, your focus is to just follow the breath, making sure you don't lose your mindfulness towards the breathing. Like a horse rider – in order not to fall down from the horse, you must make sure you stay on the horse. You have to practice this until you reach the point when you can steadily focus without distraction for a minimum of 24 minutes.

From there you can move onto the second stage to start really developing Samatha, either using the breath to develop Samatha or you can choose any other object. In Buddhist teachings it is recommended that you choose a virtuous object. It can be a letter, sound (mantra), image (like Buddha, mantra) etc. If you choose a virtuous object, by simply placing your mind on it alone, you will create merit. But to reach to that point, in order to seriously train in the process of Samatha you need to first have the fertile ground of your mind having a certain degree of control. Right now, like my mind, it is like a very wild horse. Even if you could jump on, you would be thrown off within an instant. So, if you have the ambition to ride on the horse at 500 mph, it would be hopeless. You would be out of your mind to try that. So, we first have to train the horse. Only later can we go for the race to actualize Samatha or whatever.

Until we are ready to choose the permanent object of Samatha meditation we need to keep training the horse, the basic mind. Until you decide to go for the actual horse race you need to keep your horse well trained. At this stage, we are like training the horse. You can train at this foundation level using any other object of meditation but among all the objects of meditation for the initial training, breathing is regarded the easiest. So, if you have a hard time focusing on breathing which is naturally there, then if we chose any other object of meditation, it would be hopeless.

For those of us who are serious about eventually achieving Samatha and all the realizations, I don't want us to just have a class and then [leave it there]. For those of you who are serious, I want you to start with baby-steps. Train from the ground up.

We don't have many classes, only once or twice a week so in between classes do your homework properly by engaging in meditation. It's very simple but the only thing is that you need to do it. I will be adding more and more techniques onto this basic meditation while we are learning the detailed teaching on Samatha. There are quite a lot of participants on this course at the moment. By the end of this course when the basics such as developing the foundation is already matured and the instructions are all learned, and the only thing missing is the accumulation of merit which is a must and we will discuss that later, as it's something we are always doing. When all these three things are already matured, if we can find one person who is [fully] qualified like that and ready to go for a 6 month dedicated Samatha retreat, I think we will have been very successful. For such a ripened practitioner, within 6 months you can develop the highest level of Samatha, all the way up to the ninth stage. Can you imagine that? You can achieve it within 6 months. In a way, 6 months is not very long, it is a very short time. Otherwise, if we are either lacking in correct instructions or lacking the correct establishment of the basis - that fertile ground of a certain degree of a serviceable mind or lacking merit, then such practitioners won't succeed.

There was one retreator who was lacking merit, and who knew all the instructions but he had not developed the fertile ground of the mind – the certain degree of control of the mind. This Samatha retreator was doing retreat in a retreat hut in the jungle of Dharamshala. Down the mountain, a flock of sheep and goats were making a lot of noise during the daytime. The retreator could hear them and got disturbed by the sounds and got so angry. Then, instead of doing retreat sessions he started to gather big rocks to roll down the mountain, wanting to chase away or kill the sheep and goats. This is due to lacking of the [fertile] ground, the foundational mind. The basic serviceable mind was lacking as well as lacking in merit. Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche said, when he told this story that it is mainly because of lacking in merit so when you want to develop Samatha you need to carry

immense merits also. Those who don't have a clear understanding on what are the obstacles to Samatha and what are the antidotes on the path to Samatha, if you then go into retreat, instead of gaining mental serenity, you come out with a confused mind.

## ON MINDFULNESS AND INTROSPECTION

I would now like to add two very important tools to progress on the breathing meditation – mindfulness and introspection. They are very much like the horseman having vivid clarity [introspection] of the road where you are directing the horse and holding very tightly [mindfulness] onto the rope that you are using to maneuver the horse. Mindfulness and introspection plays those roles in order for your mind to stay focused without getting distracted. Introspection will help you to achieve vivid clarity towards your meditational object. Mindfulness will help you to achieve steady focus.

There are two major obstacles to clear to get to our destination, which is laxity and excitement. Any sensual distractions, any awareness towards objects of attachment, anger etc. are within the category of the obstacle of excitement. Any delusional mind that is infused by lethargy, ignorance or dullness is within the category of the obstacle of laxity. You can remember this by using the example of the horseman who in order to reach his destination, faces a lot of curved roads, rocks, cliffs and so many obstacles and the horse is so easily distracted by them. I have experienced riding a horse and I was thrown off it because I freaked out when I saw a dark shadow behind the curved road. It is a long and frightening story and shows how easily it can be to get distracted and lose focus. Similarly, our minds are worse than that. In relation to breathing meditation we have to remember that there are many obstacles but all of them can be [subsumed under] the two categories of laxity and excitement. This includes the distracted focus towards the bloating of your stomach which many of you raise questions about – whether to bloat or flatten your stomach. So while focusing on your breathing, if you see that, you are distracted. Or if you start wondering whether your breathing is going through your nostril or back or wherever, that is a distraction. Besides focusing on your breath going in and out – following the natural flow of your breath – anything else that you see, remember or think of are all in the category of distraction.

Within the set time of 24 minutes, while you have chosen breathing as your object of meditation, if suddenly Buddha appears to your eyes, that's a distraction. Or if suddenly you hear the very beautiful chanting of Om Mani Padme Hum, that's a distraction. Even these things are a distraction. If during the set time, you feel hungry or thirsty, that's also a

distraction. The steadiness of your focus during that time should be such that if someone slaps you, you don't feel it. You have to train to stay focused to that extent. During that set time period, if you fall asleep, it is due to laxity. If you are so comfortable that you fall asleep, that means your meditation has failed. If during the set time period you lose the amount of focus that you had on your breath, you have fallen into laxity.

So we should remember that for the quality of the success of our meditation – whether it is for 1 minute or if you are able to go all the way up to 24 minutes – what you should aim for is vivid clarity to your object of meditation [breathing] and intense focus to the breathing. These two have to be there. If you can sustain these two for 1 minute then your 1-minute meditation is successful. We have to train until we are successful for a minimum of 24 minutes. But no worries [if you fail], the only thing is don't give up. If you've set yourself 24 minutes, then retry. How to retry is to use mindfulness and introspection to bring your concentration back to the amount of concentration that you delivered during the first moment when you started the meditation. You deliver back the same amount – no more, no less. So, within a 24-minute session, you may need to retry 100 times. But keep retrying because this is the way to improve. Eventually if we can lengthen our session to 1½ hours - which is a common timeframe for 1 meditation session – and if we can stay focused on the object of concentration without any intrusion of the faults of laxity or excitement then it is quite favorable for us to go on to the actual process of developing Samatha. By then you can even choose emptiness, bodhicitta or any virtuous object as your object of meditation to develop Samatha.

The ultimate purpose on the teaching on Samatha is to develop the capability to develop Vipassana. It is to be able to realize emptiness and to use the Samatha mind and then the wisdom of realizing emptiness to eradicate the defilements and obscurations to omniscience – the obstacle to nirvana and the obstacle to omniscience. That is the main purpose why we are developing Samatha. Developing Samatha will serve as a very effective cause and foundation to realize emptiness directly and most effective usage of the wisdom realizing emptiness on the development on the path. Apart from developing the wisdom side we also need to develop the method side. We need to develop both sides like a bird developing both wings in order to fly. In order to successfully go along the path we need to develop both wisdom and method. Not just the wisdom side. If you wish to access teachings on the method side and can find the time to do so, you can check out a series of teachings on *Mind Training - The Great Collection*, organized by FPMT Australia [available on YouTube]. This teaching is very much focused on developing the method aspect of the path, Bodhicitta. These two teachings go along together to be applied in practice on a daily basis. Then you will be developing both wings [wisdom and method] alongside each other.



## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

[Session 4, 10 May, 2020]

**Question:** I am having a hard time concentrating on the breathing for a long duration. For the first few times, I can do it and feel peaceful after that. Then when I try to increase my meditation time I realize I am at the stage of zoning out and thinking of worldly affairs. What should I do?

**Geshe-la:** First of all, I want to congratulate you. You were at least successful for a few times. Such kind of experiences for even a minute or a few moments in a minute, staying in concentration and being able to feel a sense of peacefulness is a sign of physical and mental pliancy. Then the zoning in and out thinking of worldly things is a distraction, which is natural to arise for a beginner. The thing that you need to do is: you cannot give up. You have to continue to do and continue to get distracted and when such distractions occur during the meditation, you just stop for a moment and try to recognize where the obstacles are coming from and what type of obstacles it is. As I have mentioned in the past the obstacles are either in relation to excitement or to dullness.

If the obstacles are in relation to excitement like thinking of worldly affairs, then it is very much in relation to attachment or grasping. This falls into the obstacles of excitement. So when any obstacles in relation to excitement arises, then you take a moment to meditate on the reality of sufferings of the three lower realms or even a human's day-to-day sufferings of change and sufferings of pain. Basically you think or meditate on the disadvantage of samsara and think of the reality of sufferings of samsaric beings: human, animals, hungry ghost, hell beings etc. That will help to calm your mind and bring your distracted mind back to focus. Meditate on the faults of general samsara and meditate on the faults of the causes of samsara – karma and delusions and specifically meditate on the faults of human suffering such as the sufferings of birth, sickness, aging and death. Then, from the Four Noble Truths meditate on the first two truths: the truth of suffering and truth of the causes of suffering. So, then it will help to reduce the distractions towards worldly concerns and distractions of attachment, distractions of jealousy and pride. All the obstacles in relation to excitement will be able to subside. This is one of the very important methods.

The second method is to use the tool of the introspection mind, which we have discussed in our previous class. It is simply to recognize that these are distractions and are obstacles to your concentration to a dedicated object. Then, the introspection mind reminds the mindfulness by bringing the strayed mind back to your chosen object of meditation. First,

you should try this way and if this doesn't work then you can reinforce on the meditation as guided before.

If the obstacle is in relation to laxity like sleepiness or losing clarity on the object of meditation because of dullness, then again one of the methods is use the introspection to recognize that they are faults and then mindfulness returns to focus on the object of meditation. If this is not effective, then take a break for a moment and meditate on all the advantages of Samatha; meditate on the advantage of clairvoyance; meditate on the advantages of all the higher qualities; Buddha's qualities; qualities of Pure Land; Buddhas' realms; qualities of the Guru and qualities of the meditator. Then also meditate on the preciousness aspect of the precious human rebirth, etc. That will help to uplift your spirit and you will have a more vigilant mind to stay focused clearly on the object of your concentration.

The general antidote is to accumulate merits and if you are doing this practice at home and you have an altar then you clean the altar, make water bowl offerings, or any form of offerings, do prostrations, and make lights offerings. All these are preliminary practices that you can engage in and that would help to accumulate merits and when you go back to your meditation session, it will be more effective to overcome obstacles.

If you are dedicating 1 minute or 24 minutes or 1 hour to meditation, then during this period, don't give up or start doing other activities that are not related to the accumulation of merits or activities not related to clearing the two types of obstacles to meditation. As long as you engage in any virtuous deeds during the dedicated period of time then if you do consistently in days to come, eventually your concentration will start to develop steadily. During the dedicated time one thing that you have to be mindful of, especially for a beginner, is not to give up the session within the dedicated paramitas. Either [continue with] concentration meditation or you take a pause to gather conditions for that. Apart from what is mentioned here, you can also read teachings or treatises regarding the concentration meditation. And engage in the practices of six paramitas or six preparatory practices and meditation as guided before specifically for the overcoming of these two obstacles. Try to stay within the paramitas during the dedicated time. Occurrences of such obstacles are very common and it has to happen for a beginner but you cannot give up during the dedicated time. Staying within the paramitas is most important.

The meditator will know if these distractions are coming due to the place of meditation being noisy or filled with reminders of unnecessary worldly thinking. [In that case,] then you have to find a different spot in your house like to go inside your prayer room instead of

doing meditation in the lounge. And if the obstacles are due to desiring objects such as wanting to have a new dress then you meditate to detach from that. If these obstacles are there because of certain unethical deeds that have been performed through your body, speech and mind in the past and your mind is still working with that, then do the Four Opponent Powers purification practice and engage in Vajrasattva practice for a few minutes. If the obstacles are due to craving in the heart, desirous craving, anger or any form of delusions in your heart and whenever you try to meditate those delusions arises and disturb your meditation then try to do practices to renounce that. You have to know roughly where the problems are coming from and don't give up [easily]. Try to stay within that paramita to recover oneself. Whenever you feel like you cannot concentrate, your mind starts to wander and you start to think today I can't do it and I'd rather do it tomorrow; that is giving up. Do not do that. Or if your mind starts to make many plans to rather do some cooking, exercise, watch a movie etc. - these are examples of giving up.

Remember in the previous sessions we have covered the six preconditions, and in addition to that there are the four earlier paramitas, which are considered as preconditions to develop concentration Samatha? Now you have to try to understand that you may be lacking in merits and that's why you have so many obstacles to develop concentration. So, therefore you go and collect the preconditions within the paramitas.

The first one being charity [*generosity*], that you can do whether to go out of the house or in your home. In the cause for the development of Serenity, you now engage in charity, [thinking], "In order to accumulate merits to develop Samatha, I cook an abundance of food to feed my family." It very much depends on whether you are directing your engagement in the activities to the cause of developing Samatha. There are no particular restrictions to that for as long as you are not outside the boundary of the Samatha. Or it could be due to transgressions [*ethical discipline*] whereby the meditator has taken many initiations but did not keep commitments purely and this could result in obstacles. Or for Sangha, it may be that you did not observe vows purely and that's why you can't concentrate. You may have taken the five lay vows or refuge vows but you never practiced them purely. Due to those transgressions you have obstacles to develop Samatha. If that is the case then you restore those vows. Or it could be due to your impatience and always getting angry over the slightest things that could be a main obstacle why you cannot develop Samatha - because *patience* is one of the preconditions and that is a must-have to develop Samatha. Another possibility is no *joyous effort* at all due to not having studied the benefits of Samatha and having never imagined the benefits of clairvoyance like knowing in 100 future lifetimes what will happen, knowing about 100 past lifetimes, and all the qualities of physical and mental pliancy. You never think or seriously learn about this so there is no joyous effort if we just

do it with the intention of wanting to concentrate and just to space out; these are very shallow reasons. You cannot develop a sense of genuine joyous effort and maybe that could be the obstacle why your mind is so distracted and why your mind feels so lousy and sleepy; because these are must-have preconditions in order to develop Samatha. So here the development of *concentration* is not like your normal yoga or exercise of breathing in and breathing out. This is a serious matter and it's a spiritual one. You have to get out of the ordinary [mind set] of it being a normal physical exercise of breathing in and out for your health, or a normal yoga thing; it has to go beyond that. That's why it requires immense prerequisites and it is very profound and vast thinking and this will eventually cause us to effectively realize emptiness [*wisdom*]. To be able to see the ultimate truth of self and the rest of phenomena, normal yoga or physical exercise won't deliver that. This Samatha practice is to eventually deliver omniscient Buddhahood. It is extremely serious and you have to have a different aspect of looking at this.

You may say, "Oh wow! It sounds very tough". I thought I can just space out for a few moments of breathing in and out and I will be all right. But even in our worldly concern, to even just get a bowl of rice, we have to put in so much effort. We have to earn the money and to grow the rice, then even if you have money and someone grows the rice, it may not be available yet but you will put all your effort to get the bowl of rice because that is for your survival. So, to become rich, to become healthy, you will put in an extremely great amount of effort. When it comes to Samatha, the benefit is beyond these entire worldly benefits. Can you imagine the benefits of clairvoyance, the benefits of omniscience and the benefits of realizing the absolute truth? So for all that, we definitely need to put in immense and consistent effort. Some of you like me who never meditated properly for a few years start to scream that, it is not benefitting me and I cannot do this and I cannot do that, I cannot breathe properly and I may die. Including myself, we make all sorts of complaints when one has not even tried properly to meditate. It takes many years of great effort and you can see that in many great meditators like my late Master. For 26 years, he totally locked himself in a cave to achieve Samatha and to realize emptiness. It is not a simple thing where you can try out in a most relaxed, comfortable way with few rounds of meditation and when you do not get pliancy, you give up. Shakyamuni Buddha himself did 6 years of strict retreat and that is a perfect example. The great masters, to whom we admire so much, even though they have achieved high realizations, have been practicing their whole life. For 60-70 years like Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, even up to today at 70+ years old, his entire life is doing meditation and at least for half of each day, in dedicated meditation. I am not discouraging you or myself but we have to at least try hard before giving up and that's the reason.

Many people don't even try to meditate at all. So for those of you who at least try to meditate, you are truly amazing. It is really good and you will reach there one day.

**Question:** When we breathe in do we visualize that air goes down to the abdomen and like ink, spreads out throughout the body? And when we breathe out the air comes back to the core of the abdomen and we breathe out from our nose and it pervades space. Is this the correct visualization or do we only focus on two steps – [breathe] in and out for the whole duration?

**Geshe-la:** When you breathe in, the sensation can go all the way down to the abdomen. When you breathe out you can feel the sensation of the air going out of the nostrils. But the object of meditation depends on how much amount of area you want to stay focused on - within the paramita of concentration that you want to set. So it very much depends on an individual. Earlier, when I suggested breathing as the object of training for the basis of concentration, this is just the tip of the iceberg. It is just one of thousands of millions of different meditational objects. So it depends on you. The main thing is to train on concentration. The amount of object to be focused on depends on you. You can have 10 or 20 things to stay focused on. You can have a thousand things to stay focused on or you can have just one breath to stay focused on. You can breathe going in and out including the feeling of the abdomen and sensation in the body. You can do everything within the object of meditation, and you try to train your mind to stay focused on that; whichever that suits you. But in order to train in concentration, whatever you have defined from the beginning you have to stay within that paramita and designated time for meditation.

When we talk about breathing through the nostrils and following the general line of the chakras, (from the nostrils up to the crown then down along the spine and all the way to below the navel.) If you are using that as a root of the concentration that you want to focus on - riding on the breathing - it is not necessary that the air that is the breath has to go all the way up to the crown. It's not about the air but it is about the concentration travelling through the channels. Even though initially the air or breath is used like a horse in order to proceed on the journey, but as long as you are on the journey you cannot just stay focused on the horse. Another reason for this particular breathing meditation is to train our subtle channels. It is not necessary to discuss here but just to give you an idea as there are some people expressing concern about the air going into the wrong direction and that may cost us our life by stopping our breath. Here we are not talking about bringing the breath into the wrong channel but it is more about activating through the concentration training in that way to activate the subtle channels. There are 3 main channels in the subtle channels, the central channel, right and left channel. The right and left channels are linked to the nostrils.

It goes like this all the way down to the navel. That is the reason why you do lengthy breathing and try to focus on that, but I didn't explain in detail because it is not necessary now. Here, at the beginning it is not to talk about channels. To at least set the basis to be able to focus on the designated object - that is what matters at the beginning.

Serious meditation on channels and chakras is practiced in relation to Highest Yoga Tantra, which is very advance and it is very, very serious and that can only be done well with so many prerequisites. But, here we are simply training on focus. Some people were concerned when I mentioned previously about breathing lengthily in and out. They were concerned that breathing in or out for too long can cause death but there's no worries about that. You are a practical person so before you die you should release the breath. If you feel like dying just release your breath. And some people have concern about storing the breath in the abdomen. That is also not a concern. It is not suitable to talk about this now. This is a meditation, a vase-like wind meditation, which is related with Highest Yoga Tantra, and it's unimaginable beyond even what modern science can comprehend. There are people with great profound Samadhi and who have understanding of the chakras and channels, which is beyond our ordinary knowledge. But it's not the subject to be discussed here in this Samatha Meditation course.

Universally, breathing is regarded as the most suitable object of meditation for a beginner to start with. But individually, if you think that is difficult, you can use any object. In the texts, so many meditational objects are recommended. You can also use feeling, sound, taste, thoughts, images etc. There are plenty of objects out there. There are many practitioners who just use awareness of their thoughts, especially for those who have a busy mind and have difficulty staying focused on one object. Then you can train on concentration by simply focusing on the thoughts. Meaning to say that without any exaggeration or describing what kind of thoughts and the characteristics of the thoughts but one is simply just aware of the thoughts, whatever thoughts that may come in, it could be delusion or it could be positive. Just simply be aware – if anger arises, acknowledge anger arising; if attachment arises, acknowledge attachment arising. If aspiration arises, acknowledge aspiration arising. If faith arises, acknowledge faith arising. If sadness arises acknowledge sadness arising. But do not describe the feeling of sadness, nor exaggerate or interpret what the sad feeling is or what the anger is, what the attachment is etc. If the thought of a burger arises, or pizza arises, you just acknowledge that now pizza is arising but do not explain what kind of ingredients are there in the pizza or how delicious it is. Whatever thoughts come and go, you just simply be aware of the thoughts. So you create the meditation object of thoughts by simply recognizing the arising of different thoughts without exaggerating its characteristics. So that is also regarded as beneficial particularly for

those who have a busy, active mind. But this meditation is not as simple as we think. At first glance it seems easy – just recognize whatever thoughts are coming in. From the object side, there are many different ideas and thoughts coming out from our mind so it's easy. But from the subject side, it is tough. For the awareness mind, you cannot have too many awareness and you have to designate only one awareness. One mind assigned to always recognize the coming and going of different thoughts; this is the challenge because there are always many other awareness which will intrude and that is the challenge. Here in this meditation as with any other meditations to train in concentration, the obstacles are still distraction and laxity. These are the two types of obstacles.

For some meditations you can also use searching the mind. The main task is to search where is the mind? At first glance it seems that mind is within the body. Or mind is somewhere out there, always omnipresent like that. But in actual fact if you go and find [the mind] you can't really catch it. So, you train in concentration to find the mind. You focus on searching where the mind is and to capture the mind. There is also such a way to train our mind towards concentration.

Then, if you go slightly deeper than that, you can take as the meditational object, the finding of selflessness of a person, like "I". You go and search for the "I": within the five aggregates and in the rest of the phenomena. Then you can go and find the ultimate truth in the form, in the feeling, in the object etc. This way will eventually help you to not only realize the wisdom - emptiness of self and emptiness of phenomena - but also simultaneously you also achieve Samatha. There is such kind of method.

So you see there are many exciting meditational objects but then it all goes back to this - for the success in concentration of any meditation it depends on the foundation, where at least there must be a certain degree of having a serviceable mind. In any teachings, training to focus on breathing is recommended as the starting point. If you have certain stability on the natural object on breathing, then you can start to choose other virtuous objects for Samatha practice or the best is to choose emptiness to really develop Samatha. You can do that.

**Question:** Why is it mentioned in the text to start to meditate for 24 minutes and not 20 or 30 minutes? Is there any significance?

**Geshe-la:** There could be many reasons because these are the techniques that past meditators have used, especially in the meditation of Samatha. But one simple reason could be that it does help to activate the 24 different points, channels and systems or inner and outer energies. And that helps to gather positive impact towards mental stability.

**Question:** In the practice of Mahamudra, it is preceded by Samatha practice. Is this the same Samatha as what Geshe la is teaching now? Are there different versions of Samatha?

**Geshe-la:** Samatha is the same and generally Samatha differs between Buddhist and non-Buddhist and differs between Mahayanic or Sutrayanic practice. So, the Samatha that is described in Mahamudra is very much in relation to Mahayanic practice. And Mahamudra can be from the Tantric school and also can be Mahamudra from the Bodhisattva school. So, it could be two aspects. The meaning of Mahamudra is the Great Seal. And it is in relation to meditation on emptiness. Samatha that is introduced in the common Mahamudra teachings is discussing about the basis on which you can develop Mahamudra- meaning you develop Samatha first then use that Samatha mind to actualize Mahamudra.

### **Homework**

We need to recall the basics:

1. Remember the two major obstacles, which are excitement and laxity, which are to be avoided in whatever objects you use for your concentration training.
2. And the two tools, which is introspection and mindfulness.
3. It does not matter what kind of object of meditation that you use. We have discussed the varieties of examples, and you can choose according to whatever that suits you.
4. Most importantly is to remember the awareness then practicing consistently and never giving up during whatever the amount of time you have dedicated whether it is 1 minute or 5 minutes etc. As discussed before during that time frame, try to remain within the guidelines otherwise it won't bring much benefit.



### **3. PREPARING FOR MEDITATIVE SERENITY**

Whatever it is, we will now go through more elaborate extensive teachings and it is to prepare you for very strict Samatha retreat. But in your day-to-day meditation you can apply whatever amount of preparatory elements [that you are able to]. There is no way you can apply all these conditions when you practice Samatha or any meditation in our usual way of life and circumstances. This detailed teaching is very much for someone really inspired to dedicate time to actually develop the full stages of the Samatha.

There are 3 sections here that this course on Samatha will cover.

- i. Relying on the preconditions for meditative serenity [Chapter 2 - How to train in meditative serenity, page 28]
- ii. How to cultivate serenity on that basis [Chapter 2 - How to train in meditative serenity, page 30]
- iii. The measure of successful cultivation of serenity [Chapter 5, Attaining Serenity, page 79]

#### **HOW TO TRAIN IN MEDITATIVE SERENITY**

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 28]

##### **i) RELYING ON THE PRECONDITIONS FOR MEDITATIVE SERENITY**

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

At the outset, the yogi should rely on the preconditions for serenity, which make it possible to achieve serenity quickly and comfortably. There are six:

These six preconditions are taught in Asanga's *Bodhisattva Levels*.

- i. Dwelling in an appropriate area (retreat place, meditation place for training in the Samatha)
- ii. Having little desire
- iii. Being content
- iv. Completely giving up many activities (mundane, normal busy activities)
- v. Pure ethical discipline
- vi. Completely getting rid of thoughts of desire, etc. (Referring to not just the objects of desire but the subject, the mind also has to be free of desire)

#### **i) Dwelling in an appropriate area**

The area should have five attributes:

The appropriate place could your home, cave, monastery, or any retreat hut but that place must have five different attributes. When we describe these different criteria, you should [reflect] look at your own situation whether you have them or not. And should you not have these criteria, you should then take note. What are the stages for me to actualize these criteria, and then you try to gather these criteria in the coming days or years, whenever it is possible. So when I go through the details of these criteria and you realize that you have these criteria then you jump [with joy]. However, please don't be depressed if you don't have these criteria but try to find out if you have even 1% of them so as to be able to at least start at the beginning level. Eventually you can work up to getting 100% of these criteria, when the time comes like after your retirement or when your children grow up or after you really renounce the daily samsaric life. The thing is we have to start now and see if I even have 1% [of the criteria] or not. If you have zero criteria then you need to think seriously how to gather those necessities. Maybe the most conducive retreat place could be your home where you are now. So, don't just think that only the monks in the monastery or only the yogis in the cave are able to achieve the higher stages of meditation, and therefore,

this is not for me as I am still living in a city, a flat or a bungalow. But in fact, maybe your house could actually be the best retreat hut for you to achieve Samatha.

- (a) Easy access, so that necessities such as food and clothing may be readily obtained;
- (b) Being a good place to live, where there are no wild beasts such as predators, no enemies, etc.;

To overcome these obstacles it is for us to forgive and for us to generate compassion to those whom we regard as enemy. Physically try to distance from them and not to let the enemy know your retreat address. Those who go for Samatha meditation should not have any loans, rents, or debts to pay. Not only having physical distance from enemies but emotionally and mentally you must be free from grudges.

- (c) Being on a good piece of ground, in that it does not breed sickness;

It should be a suitable place wherever you stay - elementally, your inner 5 elements, gross 5 elements and outer 5 elements are compatible so that you don't get sick easily.

- (d) Offering good companionship insofar as your companions are ethically disciplined and like-minded; and

Whether in the same house or nearby or in today's time, through the telephone, you need to have a friend who knows the entire technique of Samatha meditation and who can guide you through your retreat. Whenever you face obstacles, the friend can guide you how to overcome those obstacles. It's a companion who can encourage you to pursue until you achieve the absolute Samatha because the journey can be tough and so you need someone, either your Guru or partner or friend, who can inspire or guide you.

(e) Being well-situated inasmuch as there are not many people in the day and little noise at night.

Do your sessions in a place that is very quiet, no noise including any kind of disturbances and it is secluded.

So, the six preconditions are from the *Bodhisattva Levels*, and then the above 5 attributes are taught by Maitreya in the *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras*, which states:

The intelligent practice in a place  
Which is accessible, is a good place to live,  
Offers good ground and good companions,  
And has the requisites for comfortable yogic practice.

This means it is like a holy place where in the past, yogis in particular those who have achieved Samatha before have used that place and if you meditate there and do your retreat, it will be very conducive.

So, that was the first precondition, *Dwelling in an appropriate area*.

**ii) Having little desire.** (The second precondition)

You do not strongly crave more or better robes, etc.

This means you do not crave for more than what you have. Such as the food that you eat, clothes that you wear, or place that you live or the status that you have, all these you feel are enough and you don't need more than this. People like us, every hour we change our dress, or in the wardrobe there are thousands of shoes, clothes and socks, and these are all obstacles for Samatha meditation. So, from now on those who really want to do Samatha meditation, do less shopping. You save more money. As monks we are supposed to do lots of meditation, Buddha already made it a discipline that we cannot keep more than 2 sets of robes. If we get a third set of robes we can only keep it for our disciples or immediately give

it away as offering or charity. For lay people, we wear different clothes, outfits, designs and colors for different occasions just because of relying on how others will project on us. So we have to renounce that and whatever we have, just wear that. There's no need to buy too many extras. We have to really train ourselves to have less attachment towards gathering possessions. We should change our mind-set that the real outfit that serves the benefit of self and others is the truthful heart, the confidence, the compassion, humanity and wisdom. All these you can wear as ornaments on your outfit. So it doesn't matter what kind of dress you wear or need to chase after the latest fashion, because you already have the most valuable basis of those qualities. By acknowledging that, then we try to focus on developing inner qualities and try to lessen the gathering of outer possessions.

### **iii) Being content**

You are always content to have even the poorest robes, etc.

You are completely happy with what you have and you don't desire any more.

### **Homework**

Besides the daily homework of breathing meditation, firstly try to reflect on your fortunate life and then cultivate bodhicitta motivation and then do your breathing exercise. Try your best. Don't give up even if you may not have a smooth start.

Extra homework is to try to develop detachment to many possessions and try to develop the mind of contentment with who you are, and what you have and feel contented with everything. That will bring a lot of happiness in our day-to-day life.

So, you try to divide your 24-hour day into two sessions. One is the meditation session and the other is the post meditation session. So during the meditation session, you do breathing exercise and in this breathing exercise you can do 10 sessions, 20 sessions or just 1 or 2 sessions; it's up to you.

During the post meditation session, while engaging in all your activities, try to cultivate the mind of contentment. When you look at your computer you feel how fortunate I am.

Wonderful. When you look at your partner, you feel how fortunate. What more can I ask? When you look at yourself in the mirror, you feel how fortunate. What more can I ask? Even if a crisis that may come your way to do with your job or health, you still feel that at least I am not like a hell being or like the person who has just died or is in the hospital. How fortunate. What more can I ask? You can practice in this way. So, when you eat or when you drink even just plain water or have a bowl of rice, feel how fortunate [you are]. So many people don't have pure water to drink or food to eat. Even when you go to bed feel fortunate because there are so many people who don't have a bed and just sleeping on the roadside. What more can I ask? When you go to bed feel, 'wow'- I had a full wonderful [meaningful] day and it was not worthless. I have done a few meditations sessions infused with bodhicitta motivation and I have benefitted so many sentient beings. So now I should go and have a good rest and sleep. What more can I ask? May this sleep be the cause for numberless sentient beings' happiness or may this sleep be the cause for me to do a better meditation tomorrow and do better beneficial deeds. What more can I ask? Wonderful. Happy.

5 May 2020, Session: 3  
Relying on the preconditions

[Geshe Tenzin Zopa gave a short talk to set a correct motivation, followed by:]

In all the Kadampa teachings - Lojong teachings as well as the Lam Rim and the Sutras it is stated that, "If you pursue anything that is only for the benefit of this life, then it is not dharma. If you are pursuing it for the benefit of future lifetimes – only then does it become dharma. That dharma too, only if you are pursuing it for the benefit of all other sentient beings, it becomes the supreme, Mahayanic dharma."

i) RELYING ON THE PRECONDITIONS FOR MEDITATIVE SERENITY [continuation]  
[Lamrim Chenmo, page 28]

Now I will go through the text – on the six preconditions to cultivate Samatha. To refresh our memory, the first one is dwelling in a correct place for retreat and the second one is having little desire. This is referring more to the object side of having little desire to gather material objects. When we introduce the sixth precondition - completely getting rid of thoughts of desire – this one is specifically talking about the subject, the mind, having no attachment. Having less desire to gather material objects is not enough. As long as you have craving in your heart you will still have obstacles. The third one is being contented. Not only not having craving and not having a lot of material things, you also need to be happy wherever you are and with whatever you have. You need to be happy in order for you to settle your heart to pursue Samatha. So you need to be happy.

#### **iv) Completely giving up many activities**

The fourth one is completely giving up many activities. You give up base activities like business such as buying, selling etc. which can be very distractive for Samatha practice. You also need to abandon excessive socializing with householders, worldly friends – like dinners or holidays. We have to renounce all the worldly things in our life that we want. One may think how can I do this? My answer is – you can definitely do it. The reason why you socialize is for happiness. Whether it is earning money, going for dinner, meeting friends or

going on holiday, it is to bring more happiness. You don't do it for more suffering. Even while you are training on the basis - before the first level of Samatha - to gain a certain amount of control over your mind to be able to focus on the breathing, you will already achieve physical and mental pliancy. That is far sweeter, more enjoyable and more blissful than the entire number of holidays, food and sensual pleasures that you have experienced up to now. Physical and mental pliancy surpasses whatever pleasures we may have experienced up to today, even [more] by developing just the basis of a serviceable mind. For myself, up to today I have never experienced any genuine sense of 'wow' and joy for more than 10 minutes. Even when you eat ice cream it doesn't last long. For 1 or 2 minutes, it tastes quite nice but after that [the pleasure] finishes. But whenever you calmly abide your focus of meditation, even if it is breathing for 1½ hours, without any interruption for the entire 1½ hours you experience both mind and body in bliss. So you can imagine if you develop Samatha [how blissful that would be]. Any form of worldly pleasure to do with beautiful objects or sounds, delicious taste, touch, feeling, everything is so temporary and short. The joy and happiness that you achieve through achieving focus on a dedicated object in accordance with the way to achieve meditative stabilization, is lengthy and can be lasting. Eventually you can expand [the bliss] without interruption for as long as you want. That's the benefit that the teachings tell us. Not only excessive socializing with householders but also abandons excessive socialization even with renounced ones like monks and nuns and other retreaters. When you dedicate your time to Samatha you need to reduce socializing with anyone. Usually pursuing knowledge including the five signs is regarded as very beneficial and important. But when developing Samatha, other than pursuing the subject of Samatha, all may become obstacles. Therefore, even pursuing medicine or astrology, all this can become an obstacle when you are engaging in Samatha retreat.

#### **v) Pure ethical discipline**

The fifth precondition is one of the most important - pure ethical discipline. You do not violate precepts by doing deeds that are wrong by nature or prohibition. There are two types of transgressions or faults of violating precepts. One is wrong or harmful by its nature (e.g. killing or stealing). Another is wrong or harmful by prohibition (e.g. monastic precepts). In short, we need to adopt the ten virtues and we need to avoid the ten non-virtues that are by nature, harmful.

One should observe and not break individual liberation vows, such as refuge vows and the five lay vows. Nuns and monks shouldn't break their pre-ordination vows, novice vows and fully ordination vows. If it is a lay practitioner pursuing Samatha it is good to have refuge



precepts, five lay vows and as many vows or precepts as possible. Sangha definitely have to preserve their monastic vows as pure as possible. All of you should know the ten virtues and non-virtues – three of body, four of speech and three of mind or thought. All these non-virtues should be abandoned and the precepts observed. If you want to develop Samatha this is a very important precondition that will help us. As a refuge preceptor, to observe precepts in relation to Buddha, Dharma, Sangha is so important. For those who have taken the five lay vows, they must observe those five lay vows purely. For pre-ordination vows, the three abandonments and three adoptions are the precepts that have to be observed. For practitioners who are novice monks or nuns there are thirty-six vows to observe purely. For *bhiksu* who have taken the fully ordination vows, then there are two hundred and fifty three vows to observe purely. For those who have taken bodhisattva vows there are eighteen root vows and forty-six secondary vows all to be preserved purely. For those who have taken Highest Yoga Tantric initiations there are the individual precepts of the five Dhyani Buddhas to observe purely. The more vows or precepts you have, the more you can accumulate the conditions to develop Samatha. This is specifically referring to Samatha in relation to the Mahayanic path. If in case there are downfalls before, during or after the Samatha retreat you should restore them. There are ways to restore your vows or precepts. If it is to do with the ten non-virtues you can apply the four opponent powers to purify and then re-observe the ten virtues. The four opponent powers are the powers of refuge and reliance; regret or recognizing faults; antidote and refrain and commitment. As an example, if you accidentally kill an insect you shouldn't take it lightly. If you have the ambition to develop Samatha and have higher realizations we should purify our action immediately by engaging in the four opponent powers. Of course, during the retreat if such a thing happens then without a moment's delay you should apply the four opponent powers and purify otherwise it will obstruct your retreat. It will obstruct us from achieving realizations. We may know a lot of Dharma, we may have practiced for a long time but we may find it so difficult to achieve realizations. One of the major obstacles is because we don't take many precepts. We want to be free in the samsaric world. Then all [these samsaric] becomes an obstacle. Even when we take the precepts, when we transgress we don't restore them and we don't purify. That will also become an obstacle. A pure mind free from transgressions and negativities and full of merit is the main cause if we want to realize emptiness, if we want to develop Samatha or whatever realizations on the path. The pure vessel of our heart will serve as the most favorable preconditions. It is very hard as an ordinary person, to avoid falling into the faults of negative actions because we have so much habituation. But one thing we cannot neglect is purifying with the four opponent powers. As long as we can do that we will be safe along our journey on the path. As far as refuge is concerned we can retake the refuge. If there is a person – a Sangha or anyone who has pure refuge vows you can retake it from them or you can retake it in front a holy

object – Buddha, Dharma, Sangha – like statue, scripture or stupa, or just simply in your heart. You can think of your own Buddha nature in oneness with Buddha and then you take the vow. It is so beneficial every now and then to do this.

Even when you think that you haven't transgressed it is still very beneficial to keep retaking the refuge vows. You can do this with the five lay vows in a similar way. Any vows taken by monks or nuns need to be restored by the Sangha community. You cannot do it in the same way as before. You have to do it at a confession ceremony called *sojong*. For Bodhisattva vows you can also retake them from your Guru or from holy objects like Buddhas, Bodhisattvas or even in your heart through visualizing Buddha Bodhisattva. If it is to do with tantric vows then you can retake them through your Guru or Yidam or restoring through reliance during prayer. You can do that in your heart.

#### **vi) Completely getting rid of thoughts of desire, etc.**

The sixth precondition is to completely getting rid of thoughts of desire, which is craving from your heart. You have to get rid of anger, jealousy and ego. You have to put all of them aside if you want to develop Samatha. You need to get rid of laziness and depression. How you do it, is by reflecting on the downfalls of the faults of these negative emotions. From now on, one should always reflect on the disadvantages of these delusions such as desire, which is harmful for this life and future lives, mundane and spiritual purposes. Lama Tsongkhapa says one should reflect on the suffering of suffering, suffering of change and the pervasive suffering of samsara. See that all the samsaric pleasures as very temporary and there is no essence and not lasting. And to meditate on impermanence – of one's life, towards one's family, wealth, samsaric pleasure and with everything, you should meditate in the nature of impermanence. Lama Tsongkhapa says that you should meditate and think until you genuinely see the shortcomings of all these things and one should ask, "*Why should I crave on them?*" Then meditate until you completely renounce them.

The Kadampa Geshe Dromtonpa says,

We think that the fault lies only in our personal instructions. As we then seek only personal instructions, we are unable to attain concentration. This is the result of not abiding under its conditions.

What he is saying is that many people think that as long as we know the instructions – knowing how to do the meditation – it’s good enough. And if we don’t know, that is the only fault. Actually it is not true. The faults also lie in not encountering the other preconditions. As I have mentioned before, they are the merit, the foundational trainings and the rest of the preconditions described before. All these need to come together in order to have successful concentration.

The great Indian pandit Kamalasila states in his text, the first *Stages of Meditation*, that in order to have a successful Samatha realization one needs to have the preconditions of the earlier four paramitas - from the six paramitas - in order to develop the fifth Samatha [concentration] paramita.

So, in order to accumulate extensive merit the practitioner should already start to practice generosity, then start to observe morality, then start to develop patience, the control over negative emotions and particularly the patience of enduring suffering. Then one has to develop joyous perseverance in the learning of Dharma. Only then will one develop serenity or Samatha, which is the fifth paramita.

Kamalasila [first *Stages of Meditation*] said,

You quickly accomplish serenity when you disregard the desire for possessions and such, keep good ethical discipline, have a disposition to readily tolerate suffering, and joyously persevere.

So, after that only we will be able to bring about the actualization of calm abiding or Samatha. That is the meaning.

Atisha’s *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* states:

When you lack the elements of serenity,  
Even if you meditate assiduously,  
You will not achieve concentration  
Even in thousands of years.

So, when you lack the element (all the preconditions) – the merit, the instruction, if all these and whatever we have discussed before are incomplete – then if that person meditates to develop Samatha, they will not develop it even after a thousand years.

12 May 2020, Session: 5  
Six preparatory practices, Breathing Exercise

## BREATHING MEDICATION PRACTICE

We will try to do a short foundational breathing meditation that I have been suggesting for the past two weeks. Some of you have already tried your best as your homework. We choose the natural breathing as our object of single- pointed concentration and actualize mindfulness towards that object with the two characteristics of vivid clarity and single- pointed focus on the breathing. Where or how the conventional breathing goes, it doesn't matter. What matters, is that the awareness to the natural breathing is [present]. Just to give you a simple idea on how to conduct this meditation, during this [breathing exercise practice], I will pause a few times as if the major obstacle of excitement is intruding and we then try to draw back our attention to the object meditation. And another time we will pause as if the obstacle of laxity is occurring and then we try to draw back our mindfulness to the object. At the end we make our dedication and end the session.

[At the start] we have already done the refuge and bodhicitta intention and setting the correct motivation. The next step now is to get into the meditation. It is important to remember to have the correct motivation at the beginning and for us that is the bodhicitta motivation. Then choose the object of meditation, which is the breathing. Then place your mind and be mindful of the object. The quality of the meditation has to be adorned with the two characteristics of vivid clarity and steady single- pointed focus. The two major obstacles are laxity and excitement. Try to overcome these two obstacles whenever they occur, bringing your mind to re-focus again on the object of meditation. At the end dedicate in bodhicitta and emptiness. Then one session ends.

Try to sit properly and when I ring the bell you start your focus and when it ends, I will ring the bell.

[Bell]

If there are a lot of new thoughts other than the focus on the breathing such as ideas of different food, plans for tomorrow etc. start to occur in your mind, they are examples of obstacles in relation to excitement, including the arising of desire, anger etc. As a meditator we pause to gather the conditional causes to bring back our concentration to the designated object and that is for us to meditate on impermanence and death. You can meditate on the

general faults of samsara, faults of the individual six realm samsaric sufferings or your own life's samsaric adversities and that will help us to get back our focus onto the dedicated object. Here we will take a moment to meditate on our life in the nature of impermanence and our life in the nature of the certainty of death, the uncertainty of the time of death and at the time of passing away from this life to the next life only the virtuous imprints will be of benefit. Therefore, developing concentration will help us to gather intense and vast virtues. So, first meditate on death and impermanence. This is analytical meditation using reason, logic and common sense to understand and renounce the distractions and to gain back the purpose of the meditation.

[Bell]

[After completing the analytical meditation], you place your mindfulness back on the meditational object which is focusing on breathing, the single- pointed concentration again.

[Bell]

As an example, another major obstacle, laxity, is occurring when even though there is focus but there is no clarity and the single- pointedness is not there. The strength is not there. It is foggy and there is loss of energy to stay steady towards the object. In order to uplift or energize our spirit and the strength of our mind you can meditate on the qualities of the precious human rebirth, Buddha's qualities or the benefits of Samatha. There are a variety of meditations that you can take as conditional causes for us to gain back our purpose of single- pointed meditation. Here as an example, we can choose to meditate on the benefits of Samatha. While we are having all the conducive conditions like the correct instruction and teaching, the basic interest, the capability and the time you can provide for this session etc., but if we don't put effort to actualize Samatha it will be a great waste. If you just put a certain degree of effort then without much delay, within this lifetime we may be able to achieve clairvoyance, many higher, great knowledge and we may even be able to realize emptiness directly and actualize all the paths and grounds up to full enlightenment. So to have all these great benefits, I must resume the practice. That will help you to re-energize and refocus towards the meditation. Our masters are always so happy, so positive, full of energy, compassion, love and joy. Looking at them, there is not one moment when they suffer or are in a crisis. One of the main reasons they have achieved that is because they have the serviceable Samatha mind. They are able to achieve all these qualities because of that. Even though they carry the same body as us, same as a human being but they are different from us. You naturally only want happiness, peace, joy and positivity just like them. Therefore, you think that now you have all these conditions, you must resume the

actualization of Samatha. You meditate on that and your energy will be boosted. Now you do the meditation on any inspirational ideas that you have as an analytical meditation.

[Bell]

Now, we resume back to the single-pointed meditation on our breath for a few moments and then we will conclude.

[Bell]

Now, we dedicate in bodhicitta. Whatever virtues, merits, dharma that we have accumulated through this meditation, may it be the complete cause for the temporary happiness for self and others up to the ultimate happiness for self and the rest of the numberless sentient beings. We also dedicate in emptiness, which is extremely important in order not to waste the accumulation of merit that we just dedicated in bodhicitta. That is simply by reflecting on the ultimate nature of self who created the merit, did the meditation and the merit and the meditation that we have accumulated. The reason why we dedicate is to be the cause of the temporary and ultimate happiness of numberless sentient beings. All lies in the nature of empty of inherent existence.

So that is an example of how you conduct the breathing meditation in a most beneficial way with bodhicitta intention and bodhicitta dedication. Not just whenever you feel like doing meditation then you just simply focus on breathing and stay there for hours. Although there are some benefits to gain some level of concentration but you lose the great opportunity to accumulate vast merits.

Now I will go through the text to learn the details of the teaching. For those who have been consistently attending these teaching, I want them to remember all the prerequisites that we have discussed before which is important. Then we will build up very steady instructions along the teachings. At the same time, on a day to day basis do the simple homework of training your mind to have a certain basis of a serviceable mind in order for us to one day successfully get into Samatha meditation.

Today, we will discuss after gathering the six preconditions as well as the four preconditions which are the four paramitas from the six paramitas, on that basis, how to cultivate serenity or Samatha meditation.

## ii) HOW TO CULTIVATE SERENITY ON THAT BASIS

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 30]

*This has two parts: (1) preparation (how to start the Samatha retreat) and (2) actual practice*

### PREPARATION

For a beginner like myself and for many of us, when we go into Samatha retreat, it is not like going into the retreat hut or cave and then just stay focused without doing anything else. We don't do that. The time in your retreat has to be divided into two sections – the meditation section and the post-meditation section. As an ordinary human being we need to eat, sleep and physical movements. It is very much like our normal retreats, where we don't stay 24 hours in meditation. Similarly even when we go on a Samatha retreat it is like that. Even in the retreat we still study and do post-session preliminary practices in order for us to gather conditions for us to have a successful meditation session. So the structure of the retreat comes in this kind of package.

A retreator like Milarepa has already engaged in extensive preparatory practices for the purification of negative karma, and the accumulation of merit while he was with his guru, Marpa. Marpa saw that he was fully ripened to get into a retreat with nothing because he had done the prerequisites, in particularly in relation to the post-meditation practices to accumulate merit and purification. For a retreator like Milarepa, even though Marpa gave him one text but it was not for him to open and study because he was already equipped with all the instructions and teachings. It was an object of the reminder of the Guru, a reminder of what he had studied and learned and a reminder for him to stay steadily in retreat until he accomplished the ultimate goal, the enlightenment. Therefore, the text was wrapped, not to be open and tied somewhere in the cave. There were no other possessions. In our case when we go for retreat we have to bring our text book to refresh our understanding, food, warm clothes if it is cold, thin clothes if the weather is hot, mosquito net if there are a lot of mosquitos, supplements etc. But it's OK because all these are for the purpose of conditioning us to do the retreat.

Hundreds of years back, Milarepa did that and even for someone who is going to do a dedicated retreat to do Samatha, to gain direct realization on emptiness and even to gain full enlightenment like my late Guru Geshe Lama Konchog – on his side, he wanted to do further studies but his Guru said no more studies, told him to dedicate himself full time to



do retreat and that he didn't need anything else. When he met his Guru for the last time, physically he had no extra clothes, food or anything else. But his Guru said you are ready, just go as you are directly into the cave and dedicate yourself until you actualize realization. He did it and he achieved Samatha and realized emptiness directly. Why we can say this, is because he had purified sleeping, tiredness, hunger and the disturbances of elements. All these are signs that you have achieved Samatha. He lived in absolute physical and mental bliss. Not only that, your body becomes so light that you can fly. Many villagers witnessed Geshe-la's body became so light that he could fly. These are the signs of Samatha. For a practitioner like him who has achieved full enlightenment, through the five colors of his relics is a sign that he had achieved the state of the five Dhyani Buddhas, meaning that he had purified the five ordinary aggregates and actualized the five divine Buddha bodies which is called enlightenment. This kind of meditator retreats does not need anything.

If some of you may be like Milarepa so then go for it but for me, I still need a lot of things but that's OK as long as you can do the retreat. Gathering all the necessities including things like clothes and the right food etc. is not a problem. The problem that we have already discussed before is attachment and discontentment. These are the obstacles. As long as we have contentment and detachment, how much of the necessary needs that we have like having the comfortable necessities for our retreat is perfectly fine. We should not misunderstand; when someone goes on retreat, it does not mean you throw everything away before you go on retreat. That is dangerous because if you get physically sick you won't be able to complete the retreat. But if you are like those Great Masters who have already completed the prerequisites within them, then you can go into retreat with nothing, like Milarepa and the late Geshe Lama Konchog.

Our precious Guru Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche is free from sleep and free from manifesting tiredness, which is the result of achieving Samatha. The late Geshe Lama Konchog and Lama Zopa Rinpoche travelled to Tibet around 1977 and there were a lot of followers with them and Lama Zopa Rinpoche's 24 hours of Dharma activities were non-stop, in full force and with full energy. Some students asked Geshe Lama Konchog why Rinpoche could perform endless virtuous activities, tirelessly without needing sleep for 24 hours. Geshe-la answered that Rinpoche has already achieved Samatha, and this is the result where you are completely blissed in virtuous conduct and it is performed without tiredness and even free from sleep etc. Many of you have seen that for Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, wherever he goes there are a lot of holy objects and a lot of preliminary practices are involved like making extensive water bowl offerings, light offerings, circumambulations and prostrations. Rinpoche extensively encourages his students and even when we go to his house the entire wall is filled with holy objects and offerings. This is very much directed to disciples like us,

like me, who as beginners are not equipped with the most important prerequisites, which are the purification of our negative karma and accumulation of merit, without which, a Samatha retreat won't be successful. Therefore, even if the preconditions are ready and we go into retreat we still need [conditions] where we can accumulate extensive merits and purify our negative karma in relation to practices like the six preparatory practices.

Therefore, here [in the text] Lama Tsongkhapa teaches us the importance of preparation of actualizing the six preparatory practices in order for us to conduct the Samatha retreat.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

Practice the six preparatory teachings explained above and especially cultivate the spirit of enlightenment for a long time; also, in support of that you should do the meditative practices that are shared with persons of small and medium capacities.

There are three important points that we need to actualize. (1) Actualize the six preparatory practices, (2) conduct the retreat with bodhicitta motivation, (3) during the post-meditation, do meditation on small and medium scope teachings as taught in *Lamrim*.

#### A. THE SIX PREPARATORY PRACTICES

- i. The first is to clean the retreat room and place of retreat. The retreat hut or place must have a very uplifting atmosphere – the arrangements, the cleanliness, comfort, everything. That is the meaning of 'clean'. You cannot keep inauspicious items, have dust, dirt and have unnecessary objects that may distract your retreat. This is the outer cleaning that you should conduct.
- ii. The second is arranging the altar, the holy objects of refuge and merit field.
- iii. The third is sitting on a comfortable cushion and maintaining the seven-fold Vairochana posture. It is setting up your meditation posture. This includes taking refuge and generating bodhicitta.
- iv. After that, [the fourth one] is visualizing the merit field where you accumulate the seven limb practices.

- v. The fifth one is actually engaging in the seven limb practices including mandala offering.
- vi. The sixth one is making strong aspiration from the depths of your heart towards the success of the retreat.

To add on slightly more detail on the cleaning of the place [first preparatory practice], if there are any objects that can trigger anger or attachment, it could even be a picture of your enemy or someone to whom you have a strong attachment or desire, or a certain object that is not inspirational but an object of your desire and grasping, then all these have to be cleansed and gotten rid of, from your retreat hut. As we discussed earlier in the teachings on prerequisites, you shouldn't have any debts. If you want to go for a Samatha retreat you should clear all your debts and these are all within the first preparatory practice. If you have responsibilities like paying rent and taking care of your children's needs, you should not have any concern about all these responsibilities for at least for 6 months or a year –since the retreator who meets all the prerequisites can achieve Samatha in 6 months. Even those responsibilities, you have to clean from your mind. Also as mentioned before the retreat hut has to be free from dirt, very neat and clean. You also need to cleanse if there is a spirit or landlord or nagas that are residing in that retreat house, hut or cave and formless spirits or any negative energy that is there by doing the '*gektor*' pacifying practice before doing the retreat and settling into the retreat hut, to purify hindrances to the retreat. So this is what the first preparatory practice means on cleaning the room and place of practice.

Then you have to setup the altar. As mentioned before we need to have objects to accumulate merit as a beginner. You should at least have Buddha's picture. If you already have a statue, then arrange it at the center of the altar. To the right side of the Buddha arrange a text to represent the Dharma. You can arrange any kind of Sutra text. If you don't have a text then it can be just one syllable of *Tadyatha Gate Gate Paragate Parasamgate Bodhi Svaha* – the wisdom sutra or just *Om Mani Padme Hum*. On the left side of the Buddha you arrange a physical stupa if you have one or a picture of a stupa. This is the basic and to inspire you where you can accumulate merit. To follow the Tibetan Buddhist tradition it's good to have your human Gurus or a representation of them, like their relics if they are no longer alive, like their hair or clothes or actual relics. If it is a statue or picture then you arrange it either in front of Buddha but without blocking Buddha or you can arrange it in the background behind Buddha where again, the picture is not blocked by the statue. If it's on the wall then place it slightly higher [than the statue] in the background. Some of you who follow the Theravada tradition then you may have Elders' picture, elder sangha or an abbot and you can have that as inspiration for your retreat. Even though you

may not have a direct connection to those great meditators like Milarepa, although you may not have received their direct teachings but it's also good to have such pictures or images or relics and that can act as inspiration to your retreat. Especially if you have relics that would be amazingly blessed because when you host relics of enlightened beings or arya beings it is equivalent to the actual enlightened being or arya being, is there with you. When you have their relics it is not just a representation but it is sufficient for the actual enlightened being is with you, in the retreat hut. That is Buddha's own promise – that wherever his relics are, he is right there, in person. If the retreator is a deity yoga practitioner and if you have many other holy objects or many scriptures, you can arrange them behind or in front or to the side of the main holy objects of your altar. In front of that you arrange offerings from one to hundreds, whatever you are capable of. The simplest and purest offering is water offering. Especially for someone going for a retreat, those conducive places usually have pure water so you can arrange a minimum of just one water offering. Everyone in this group can afford perfect water bowl containers, even made of precious items like silver, brass, copper or crystal. The more precious the container you use to offer, it will have great merit if you offer sincerely. But if you don't have anything like that but if the offering is so important there are practitioners who only possess one wooden cup for them to eat their meal in, drink their tea in and when they finish eating and drinking in that wooden bowl, they wash and clean it and use that bowl as water bowl offering. From here you can see the importance of making water bowl offerings to holy objects for the accumulation of merit. Even to the poorest practitioner who only has one bowl that they use to consume their own food; that can become an object of offering. For us, we can definitely afford more than that and it is such a great opportunity for us to accumulate merit. These are some basic examples. You can make your offerings as extensive as possible. If you are a deity yoga practitioner then you make eight offerings, self-generation offerings, front-generation offerings or as many as possible that you can arrange. It depends on what kind of level of practice that you are practicing. Even to the simplest practitioner, physically you may only have one bowl to make your offering but you can make extensive mental offerings. You can visualize the entire universe, its mountains, flowers, plants, waterfalls, the sound of birds, the light of the sun and moon, the music and sound of the wind, the sound of the waterfalls, the aroma of the plants, incense plants, juniper trees, all the wild fruits that exist, etc. So the entire eight offerings are there and you can offer through your heart, in order to accumulate extensive merits, to your merit field. For a beginner like us, we should never neglect making offerings to the merit field.

For Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche who is already an enlightened being, when I was his attendant and we were in transit at an airport and staying in an airport hotel for a few hours in the middle of the night, as soon as we checked in, he immediately requested for as many

glasses as possible from the hotel kitchen and then filled up his entire table. Rinpoche carries hundreds of holy objects, Buddha pictures, Guru pictures and relics. Rinpoche has a few suitcases filled with holy objects that travel with him wherever he goes. We only had a few hours [in the hotel] but he asked us to take out all the holy objects and to arrange them nicely like an altar, perfectly. Then asked us to borrow and kept requesting a few hundred glasses, cups and bowls from the hotel and filled them with water. By the time we had filled the glasses it was time for us to pack and to go through customs. This happens all the time with Rinpoche around the world, wherever he is. This shows how crucial and important it is to make offerings and even if it may be water, we should make as many and as extensive offerings as possible. Sometimes he prefers to have as big a bowl as possible, to fill up the water and offer. These are great life teachings. If even enlightened beings do that, then without a doubt, we as beginners, in a retreat we must definitely do it. Even if we are at home not doing retreat, we should find every single opportunity to make offerings and as much as possible.

My late Guru Geshe Lama Konchog, who was meditating for 26 years in the mountain, initially didn't have water bowl offering. Even though he was someone who had already actualized great practice – he had capabilities of samadhi and the practice of mantra to be able to do perfect offerings from the heart through visualization – but he still used physical offerings. Since there was no water bowl, he went to the waterfall and there was a rock that he used to try to make a hole with. Imagine extremely hard rocks by the waterfall, which is not the limestone type, where he put in so much effort to dig and make a hole and a channel from the waterfall to draw water into that hole. There are a few holes that you can still see and witness today that is right in front of Milarepa's cave where Geshe-la did his retreat for about 6 years. From here you can see the importance of making offerings, the least that we can afford is water, in order to accumulate extensive merit. About 12-15 years later, imagine he should have achieved high realizations in the practice without any doubt; then he moved to the third cave, Galdung Gompa. The cave is empty and to the left side of the cave there is a waterfall. There is a mala tree there and above the mala tree he made as many holes as possible on the ground and channeled the water to go from one hole to another hole, as water bowl offerings, because he didn't have a container to make the offerings with; he had nothing. This is 12-15 years later after he had done many retreats and this shows that even if you have gained high realizations, until you have gained full enlightenment, one thing we can all afford to do is water bowl offerings to accumulate so much merit.

In the monastery, as little monks, the first chore that our teacher gave us was the responsibility to make daily water bowl offerings in the teachers' rooms. You could miss

breakfast and lunch but you couldn't miss making water bowl offerings. Even though sometimes we felt like our Guru was punishing us because we didn't like to do it and we didn't understand the meaning, now thinking about it, it was so precious. Even though we didn't know the meaning of merit and how to accumulate merit but our Guru put us in that kind of position to start to accumulate merit. All of us have this opportunity at home. You can just have a Buddha picture – it is not necessary to have a massive altar, wherever your Buddha statue is, you can make the offering there. Like the monk as mentioned before, if you don't have a specific water bowl dedicated for water bowl offering, if you wash your usual bowl properly, you can use that to make your offering because you only need to use it three times, breakfast, lunch and dinner. The rest of the time you don't need to use it so you can use it as water bowl offering. But if you can dedicate a clean one only for water bowl offerings that would be even better. Also while eating food you can make extensive offerings to your refuge and merit field. Basically the extensive practice of offerings to accumulate merit has to be an important condition for the success of any practice and especially for a Samatha retreat. This is something that we have to start from now and when we have a certain amount of meritorious karma to go for a strict Samatha retreat. It is not something to do only when we are in the retreat, but right now while we don't have the time yet to go for retreat, all the preparations need to have started.

The third one is the sitting posture – we will discuss the correct meditation posture in the next class. Under this heading, one of the practices after you sat in the proper position then you have to set the proper refuge and the proper bodhicitta motivation. Then you have a clear, vivid visualization of all the merit fields, whatever amount of merit field that you have created. Especially for those of you who are practicing highest yoga tantra then you include all the Yidams and all the objects of merit field have to be visualized in order for us to engage into the seven limb practice. After that you have to engage in the seven limb practices including the offerings and also the purification practices either through Vajrasattva or Thirty-five Buddhas. In short, you should conduct the purification of negative obscurations, which is one of the main obstacles for a successful retreat. So through the four opponent powers try to do as much purification as possible. After that, make a strong supplication from the depths of one's heart that one will remain in the retreat until one gain the absolute realization. This is a brief idea on what are the six preparatory practices.

Also during the post meditation you should meditate on the small capable beings' practices. This means that you should reflect on the practice of refuge, renunciation and the teachings on the four noble truths. Then you should also reflect on the middle capable beings' practices and teachings such as the twelve links of interdependent arising, common

teachings on the four noble truths, the eightfold path and karma. Also the small and middle capable being teachings on the qualities of a higher rebirth and the qualities of liberation. All these should be meditated on, in between sessions during the retreat. These are preparatory practices so we have to start now. We have to train ourselves to have some discipline to do all these preparatory practices from now so that we will be fully prepared for the retreat. We are on the third volume of *Lamrim Chenmo* (English version) and all of us who are serious about this practice should also read and listen to the earlier recorded teachings on the other two volumes which focus on the small capable beings' practice and the middle capable beings' teaching. The second volume is focusing on the higher capable beings' teachings and all these have to be familiarized in order for us to be fully ready for an indestructible retreat.

These are like weapon tools, before going into battle. Without them it is like going onto the battlefield without any weapons. Individuals who are serious about gaining realizations of Vipassana, Mahamudra, special insight and all the higher realizations have to put effort in these preparations. Otherwise, it's nice and amazing to hear about Vipassana, Mahamudra and special insight but it's difficult to reach there if we don't have the prerequisite equipment within us and this is a fact.

17 May 2020, Session: 6

## Meditative posture and the meditative process itself

### MOTIVATION

Many people have passed away since our last class, but we are still alive and we are carrying this vehicle of most precious human rebirth that has the potential to actualize a most meaningful ambition in our life, which is to attain full enlightenment. Due to the coronavirus, we hear in the news there are many people dying in this and that country as if these are new news. But in fact, there are so many causes and conditions that might cost us our lives. We have not fallen into that category yet and still have the opportunity to attend dharma classes and have the opportunity to pray to Buddha, Dharma and Sangha. We still have the opportunity to think of the well-being of others and dedicate our merits to others who are vulnerable, sick or dying now. From that point of view, whatever stresses you may have, or financial difficulties, relationships, or health issues you may have, we are definitely better off than millions and millions of other people. We should acknowledged that and let go of all our concerns and settle in the peace of this present moment.

Every moment of our life is a critical time; the moment we breathe in and when we cannot breathe out, [and vice versa, our life is] finished. It's not just during this coronavirus situation that we should be panicking and diligent in [practices of] gathering things that are beneficial for our future lifetimes. We have to always be in a state of preparation for the longer journey, which is to invest our time in the practice, learning dharma, meditation on dharma and application of dharma in our daily lives. That's the only thing we can carry forward to our longer journey into our future lifetimes.

Therefore, if there is anything that we strongly grasp on to either grasping to anger towards our enemies or grasping to attachment towards our loved ones, then one should let go and detach from that. Then, do something genuinely helpful to yourself and to others and for us to dedicatedly practice the dharma and spend a life in virtue. In order to do that, our mind has to be disciplined and our mind has to listen to what we want to do. Right now, our mind is a monkey mind, wild mind. If our mind is not completely dull and sleepy, it is freaking out. This has to be under control in order for us to able to dedicate the rest of our life in a meaningful way.



We should then feel fortunate that we are learning how to control our mind and how to make our mind serviceable towards virtue only. We should feel how fortunate we are to have the opportunity to learn about this and not only just learning, we also need the blessings. We are not learning something that is just for temporary or worldly benefit but to make sure that it is beneficial for us to achieve the ultimate goal, which is full enlightenment for ourselves and for the rest of the sentient beings. Therefore, we feel the presence of our entire lineage Gurus all the way up to Shakyamuni Buddha and take refuge in them. Then, we generate bodhicitta motivation, making a commitment in front of the Buddha Dharma and Sangha to dedicate the rest of one's life in the cultivation of virtue in developing Samatha for the benefit of oneself to be most effective in the service of sentient beings' enlightenment.

In the last session, we covered two aspects of practices that we need to conduct to actualize all the prerequisites which is (A) Six preparatory practices and in this session we will discuss: (B) the actual practice which is (a) the meditative posture and, (b) the meditative process itself.

## ii) HOW TO CULTIVATE SERENITY ON THAT BASIS

### A. SIX PREPARATORY PRACTISES

#### **B. THE ACTUAL PRACTISE:**

- (a) The meditative posture
- (b) The meditative process itself

#### (a) THE MEDITATIVE POSTURE

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 31]

On the meditation posture, all the different Buddha's postures are meditation postures. All the different deities' postures are also meditation postures. As beginners, when our channels and chakras are not well-trained yet to be suitable for meditation, then the seven Vairocana meditation posture is one of the most suitable to start with. Some people may ask how to set the meditation posture? Most people know the Twenty-one Taras so you can choose any one of the Tara postures and that would be an absolutely perfect meditation posture or one can also choose any of the Thirty-five Buddhas, different Mahasiddhas or panditas who have different sitting postures. All are meditation postures that you can

choose and have their own benefit to the meditation. There are some exceptions to individuals who due to past karma have a unique meditation posture that is different from all the Buddhas' meditation postures. As an example, in Tibet there was one meditator who could not gain realization although he had been meditating for a long time. He was using the seven Vairocana posture. Then later he went to seek advice from another senior meditator who claimed to have clairvoyance, and asked what his obstacles to gain realization in meditation were. The senior meditator told him that his posture was wrong. The meditator replied that he was using the perfect meditation posture. The senior meditator then said to the meditator that in his previous life he was a cow and this previous karma as a cow that influenced his mental continuum's subtle aggregates, influenced his gross aggregates to be affected when he took rebirth as a human being. So, his channels and chakras are active and functioning well when he lies down like a cow. The meditator then advised him to meditate in the posture like a cow lying down. Then after doing so within a short time he actualized realizations. This is a very rare and exceptional case. The meaning here is there is also a necessity for you to choose what posture suits you most that can improve your meditation. It is only after doing meditation for some time, that you will notice whether your basic meditation criteria is correct or not. You cannot make a judgment immediately on this matter. For the beginner, initially you should start with the general meditation guide with regard to posture.

The great Indian pandit, Kamalasila in his second and third *Stages of Meditation* says that,

You should take up an eight-point posture on a very soft and comfortable seat:

A comfortable seat should be slightly higher by a few inches behind and lower in the front. You can have a square cushion and on top of that, a round cushion for your buttock to create another step. The reason for having a one-step higher cushioning for your behind is to help straighten the spine. Straightening the spine will help to straighten the channels, especially the 3 main channels.

1. Cross your legs in the manner of the venerable Vairocana, using either the full-lotus posture or the half-lotus posture as appropriate.

The full-lotus posture is cross-legged and the half-lotus posture is like how Green Tara sits, with right leg outstretched and left leg folded in. If you start your daily prayers, meditation or any practice cross-legged it will leave immense imprints or blessings and create the causes for enlightenment. In particular, enlightenment on that very cushion as the cross-leg symbolizes indestructible Vajra ground. In the awareness of Enlightenment, of Buddha's life story and [the place] where he attained enlightenment in Bodhgaya under the Bodhi tree, then [in that awareness] wherever you seat cross-legged that will plant the seeds to actualize full enlightenment. It is so powerful and so beneficial. So you train to sit cross-legged until even when you are in a different environment, you will naturally sit cross-legged. Once you are trained, it's the most comfortable way to sit and helps you to settle and feel grounded and brings down all the hyperactivity and anxiety and calms your mind. There's great benefit there. Some people are not used to it and may refuse to do meditation with the idea that they cannot sit cross-legged. But this is just a habit that you can train over time, as it is far more beneficial than sitting with your legs outstretched. When our teacher Guru Shakyamuni Buddha went into 6 years of meditation retreat and went into Samadhi and actualized enlightenment, he was sitting cross-legged because that helped him to create the condition to succeed in his meditation and to be able to stay in meditative equipoise, to overcome all the defilements and to actualize the path. We don't know about our past lifetimes, or how much merits we have created or how much imprints we are having now. Then when we go into meditation, there is a possibility that we may attain full enlightenment, and so without creating the Vajra ground, the ordinary earth cannot sustain us to attain enlightenment on that ground. The earth will be cracked and completely dismantled and that's why we need the Vajra ground for us to attain enlightenment. Since you-never-know when you will attain enlightenment you should assume and hope that during this meditation session, you may achieve enlightenment. In that regard, you should go into meditation cross-legged.

It is also called a lotus posture and that represents the curve of lotus petals. That is whenever you go into meditation, conventionally that actual being is a samsaric being but when you get into meditation, you stay unstained by delusions and afflictions in order for the meditation to become an antidote to samsara. Just like a lotus which rises out of the mud yet it is not stained by the mud. If you go into meditation and your mind is filled with distractions and delusions then our purpose of the meditation is not fulfilled. Simply by remembering the meaning when you are making preparations to do contemplation or meditation, that itself become conducive conditions to the success of the meditation. These are the reasons to understand and reflect on.

2. Your eyes should be neither wide open nor too far closed, and they should be fixed on the tip of your nose.

There are three points here:

- i. Your eyes should not be open too wide. The meaning for this is to overcome the obstacles of distraction to meditation. If you open your eyes too wide, there are sensual distractions. The actual meaning is when you go into meditation you are reminded that you must protect the concentration of your meditation from the obstacles of distractions. Therefore, you are not going to meditate with your eyes wide open.
- ii. Your eyes should not be too far closed. This is so that your meditation is free from the obstacles of dullness. So you have to remember that the meaning on why your eyes are not completely closed is to have the awareness of not having obstacles due to dullness. That's the ultimate reason. The immediate benefit is that one won't get sleepy and avoids a wandering state of mind.
- iii. Your eyes should be fixed on the tip of your nose. It doesn't mean that your mind is fixed on the tip of your nose. It simply means when you don't open your eyes too widely and close it completely then the measurement guide here is that you can see the tip of your nose, perfectly. That's the meaning and it doesn't mean you take the tip of the nose as your object of meditation.

3. Sit with your awareness directed inward, keeping your body straight without leaning too far back or being bent too far forward.

So, "*sit with your awareness directed inward*" means that while we are preparing for meditation including our posture, you are already having awareness of the object of meditation which has to be a mental picture, not a physical object. The mental picture can be either to do with wisdom, method or an image of Buddha that you are meditating on. And in relation to this topic Samatha you may be meditating on the sound "Om" or an image of Buddha's face. But that image is an image of the mind and it's not an external image.

“... *keeping your body straight* “ is to make sure all your channels are straightened without being tied up in knots. In order for that to be, firstly our gross channel and nervous system and the flow of the wind elements have to be smooth. This will affect the subtle channels, and that in turn will affect the mind. So, these are all interrelated. Due to that, when you do meditation you should sit straight and not bend too far back or overly bent too far forward.

#### 4. Keep your shoulders straight and even.

In order to keep your shoulders straight and even, you placed both your hand in a meditation posture - your two thumbs touching, right hand placed over the left hand, the two ring fingers on top of each other and place your hands at the navel level, not below or above navel because this will help to balance your shoulders to keep them straight. This has the benefit of ventilation at your underarms and that will help you outwardly to stay fresh and inwardly to uplift your spirit. You have awareness that the right hand symbolizes method while the left hand symbolizes wisdom. When both hands are placed together, it symbolizes the union of wisdom and method. Method is bodhicitta whilst wisdom is emptiness. The two hands and in particular, the two thumbs also represent method and wisdom and with both thumbs touching, represent the union of wisdom and method. The ring fingers are where the gross nerves are connecting to your ordinary heart and subtle nerves, connecting to your central indestructible heart. By placing this wisdom and method energy together it will help to stimulate the heart in wisdom and method.

#### 5. Do not raise or lower your head nor turn it to one side; set it so that your nose and navel are aligned.

This clearly concerns the three major channels that have to be affected. Although this meditation is a beginner concentration meditation, it is to be [further] developed into Samatha and eventually it will be developed into meditation in relation to Highest Yoga Tantra- channels and drops. Ultimately without utilizing the three major channels we cannot purify the defilements. We have to utilize the subtle channels to purify the defilements and actualize the Dharmakaya within. So, ultimately it is to train our gross and subtle systems to reach that point. So, at the beginner level if we start to do meditation accordingly like that then each time, we are already preparing for the advance and ultimate practice up to the Highest Yoga Tantric meditation.

6. Set your teeth and lips in their usual, natural positions.

7. Draw your tongue up close to your upper teeth.

This is so that your saliva does not drool in meditation. In particular, if you happen to go into deep meditation and you may lose the awareness of your saliva drooling and for someone doing long meditation, it is to avoid dehydration.

8. Your inhalation and exhalation should not be noisy, forced or uneven; let it flow effortlessly, ever so gently, without any sense that you are moving it here or there.

Even at the beginner's level for the simple breathing meditation, try to breathe effortlessly, gently without making noise, until you don't even notice that you are moving your breath here or there but just let it flow naturally and just focus on the breathing.

Asanga's *Sravaka Levels* taught the benefits of these different meditation postures. In short, it will help to assist us to overcome obstacles to meditation and also assist us to stay in meditation for a long time and to generate physical and mental comfort during meditation. And it also helps to plant the seeds of enlightenment and liberation. These are the basic benefits.

#### (b) THE ACTUAL MEDITATIVE PROCESS ITSELF – THE SAMATHA MEDITATIVE PRACTICE

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 31]

As a reminder: the important points for a successful Samatha meditation are the six types of prerequisites, four of the six paramitas, six preparatory practices in order to accumulate merits and having the proper meditation posture. Only then do we go into the actual meditation process on how to do the Samatha meditation itself.

Broadly speaking, the "stages of the path" tradition indicates that you achieve serenity by means of the eight antidotes which

eliminate the five faults listed in Maitreya's *Separation of the Middle from the Extremes*.

When we talk about Samatha, the main obstacles are the five faults and when you summarise them they fall into two faults, which we have discussed before excitement and dullness. In order to tackle them, there are eight antidotes, which you can summarise into two - mindfulness and introspection.

The five faults as stated in Maitreya's *Separation of the Middle from the Extremes* says:  
[Lamrim Chenmo, page 69]

Staying with that joyous perseverance,  
Your mind become serviceable, and you attain all goals (samatha).  
This occurs as a result of eliminating the five faults  
And relying on the eight antidotes.  
The five faults are laziness,  
Forgetting the instructions,  
Laxity and excitement,  
Non-application, and (over-) application.  
The eight antidotes are the basis [yearning], that based on it  
[effort],  
The cause [confidence], the effect [pliancy],  
Not forgetting the object of meditation,  
Recognizing laxity and excitement,  
Application to eliminate them,  
And calmly stabilizing your mind when they have been quelled.

In addition, there are personal instructions passed down from Geshe Lak-sor-wa, a Kadampa Geshe [Lamrim Chenmo, page 32]:

... you have to achieve serenity through the six powers, the four types of attention, and the nine mental states which Asanga's *Sravaka Levels* explains.

The scholar Yon-den-drak says:

The methods of the nine mental states are included in the four attentions, and the six faults and the eight applications which are their antidotes are the method [for achieving] all concentrations.

What are the nine mental states? They are:-

- i) Mental placement
- ii) Continuous placement
- iii) Patched placement
- iv) Close placement
- v) Taming
- vi) Pacification
- vii) Complete pacification
- viii) One-pointed attention
- ix) Balanced placement

The four attentions needed to develop Samatha steadily are:

- i) Tight focus
- ii) Intermediate focus
- iii) Uninterrupted focus
- iv) Spontaneous focus

The six powers that are also a required supplement to develop Samatha are:-

- i) Power of hearing
- ii) Power of reflection/contemplation
- iii) Power of mindfulness
- iv) Power of vigilance/alertness
- v) Power of enthusiasm
- vi) Power of familiarity



The nine different mental stages for the development of Samatha are illustrated in a well-known drawing of the elephant, the monkey, the hare, the monk etc. Just focusing on breathing in and out may feel good but Samatha is still far away. If we don't develop Samatha, we won't be able to have a genuine serviceable mind that is always placed in virtue and be most effective to our development in the spiritual path. Looking at the wildness of our mind either due to laxity or excitement, if we just focus on breathing in and out it is not possible to achieve Samatha. We are merely comforting ourselves thinking that by breathing in and out is enough without being serious in the practice. That's why from the very beginning, I have forewarned that you have to go through these teachings for long-term benefit and not temporary benefit. If it is for temporary benefit, then with each progressive, class, you will get more headaches because the classes will become more extensive and intensive.

[Lama Tsongkhapa quotes Yon-den-drak]:

The methods of the nine mental states are included in the four attentions, and the six faults and the eight applications which are their antidotes are the method [for achieving] all concentrations. This is agreed upon in all teachings about the techniques for meditative stabilization— including those in most sutras, Maitreya's *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* and *Separation of the Middle from the Extremes*, Asanga's texts on the (*Sravaka*) levels, and Kamalasila's three *Stages of Meditation*.

All these texts agreed that without these, one cannot develop Samatha.

Those who first have the preconditions for concentration will definitely attain concentration if they use these methods to work at it.

In the development of the stages of the nine mental states, one need to have all the preconditions and by utilizing the four attentions and six powers and target to eliminate the five faults with the eight antidotes, then Samatha will definitely be achieved.

Lama Tsongkhapa continues quoting Yon-den-drak's statement,

Nowadays, supposedly profound oral traditions on meditative stabilization lack even the names of these techniques.

The techniques as discussed earlier were not mentioned and just by focusing on breathing in and out will not suffice. There are so many new age meditation centers with the name Samatha retreat- focusing on breathing in and out, focusing on light, focusing on a flower and even on Buddha's face without discussing all these specific techniques. It's saying here that they are not even discussed.

These texts do not indicate that you will achieve concentration without the preconditions for concentration and these techniques, even if you work at it for a long time.

That means even if you meditate for a long time you won't achieve Samatha, without these techniques.

Lama Tsongkhapa states:

This is stated in his text on the stages of the path; it speaks of reaching pure certainty about how the classic texts present the way to achieve concentration. In that regard, since the general way of teaching the stages of the paths of the three vehicles is demonstrated at length in the noble Asanga's five texts on the levels, the texts that teach these practices are very extensive. Among these five, one text gives a detailed explanation, while the others do not. *Asanga's Compendium of Determinations* says that his *Sravaka Levels* should be used to understand serenity and insight, so it is the *Sravaka Levels* that is most extensive.

If you want to learn more details then you should use *Asanga's Sravaka Levels*. Asanga's four other texts teach extensively on the three vehicles for three capable beings. But it is the *Sravaka Levels* that teaches extensively on Samatha.

Also, the venerable Maitreya discusses the methods of the nine mental states and the eight antidotes in his *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* and *Separation of the Middle from the Extremes*.

If you want to learn more detail on the training of the Samatha mind, then you can read these two texts.

Following them, such learned Indian masters as Haribhadra, Kamalasila, and Ratnakarasanti wrote much about the process of achieving concentration. On the general sense of concentration the tantras are very consistent with the explanations in these classic texts, except that they use different objects of meditation, such as divine bodies, drops, and syllables. In particular, texts in the sutra class provide very extensive discussions of problems—such as the five faults of concentration—and ways of clearing them away.

The sutra part focuses on clearing the five faults by using the eight antidotes and you can use any general objects for training. Those techniques are also used in the tantra but the objects of meditation are deities, self-generation, front-generation, deities' images, drops and syllable mantras. So, this is not only in sutra but you can also use tantric meditation objects to train in Samatha as well.

And Lama Tsongkhapa says that many practitioners have missed out learning extensively from these root texts and not only that even the major important points are not voiced out. Therefore, Lama Tsongkhapa says he will lead people like us, and outline in as much detail as possible on the teachings for Samatha training. Also as those classical texts and personal instructions are very technical, Lama Tsongkhapa says he will explain the methods on how to use those classical teachings to achieve concentration, drawing from those classical texts

## **Homework**

For those using the English translation on *Lamrim Chenmo, Volume 3*, you can refer to page 73 on the nine mental states; page 78 on the four attentions and page 69 on the eight applications. Please read that to familiarize.

Once you know these different techniques then when the explanations are laid out later, you will be able to grab the understanding.

At the same time, continue to train your mind on the basis for concentration using breathing as your object of concentration or any type of object at least to train your mind to be able to focus for at least a few minutes. If you can do this daily preparation, then you will be getting ready to eventually do a Samatha retreat.

As stated in the text, many people think the reason why they cannot do Samatha meditation is because they don't know the techniques well. That is one of the causes but another criteria that is missing, is merits and purification of negative karma. Due to that it is very difficult to attain Samatha.

Another homework for those who are serious about this is to engage in the six preparatory practices, seven-limb practice and practice of generosity, practice of morality etc. These are the ways to accumulate merits.

Also, we need to prepare our mind to a certain degree of stability or serviceable state. If you go to a Samatha meditation [retreat], there will be many obstacles. Therefore, from now on we should do daily concentration meditation until at the very minimum we can remain for 24 minutes without any distractions of laxity and excitement. We will then be quite well prepared with merits, meditation, actualizing the basis where you can do the Samatha and at the same time learning the different techniques and recommendations from the classical texts. When all these come together, we will achieve the benefits. These are just suggestions only and not an imposition.

19 May 2020, Session: 7  
Overview, How to develop flawless concentration

## MOTIVATION

Take refuge and make strong aspiration to all the lineage Gurus in particular, here we are using Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings and text on *Lamrim Chenmo* as well as the great Indian Pandits who are the source of the unmistakable Dharma all the way up to the lineage Gurus of profound and extensive teachings, we pay homage and make an aspiration for us to actualize all the realizations on the path.

To make your effort during this session to be the most beneficial, productive and which is able to create the cause of happiness for yourself, family members and the rest of the numberless sentient beings, generate altruistic bodhicitta motivation.

Before continuing with the text, I want us to at least have an imprint of the few important technical teachings in relation to developing Samatha. Even though the detailed explanation will be taught later, it is good to build the imprint now and I have briefly mentioned it in the last session. Just to name those [technical teachings], then next time when I explain [the details], you will be much more familiar.

## 4. AN OVERVIEW ON THE NINE STAGES OF MEDITATION TO SAMATHA

Samatha has to be developed stage by stage in our mental continuum and the stages are divided into nine categories or the nine stages of gradual concentration development that happens in the practitioner. For imprint purposes, there are the different names that are used. The 1<sup>st</sup> one is called Mental Placement, the 2<sup>nd</sup> one is called Continuous Placement, the 3<sup>rd</sup> one is called Patched Placement, 4<sup>th</sup> one is called Close Placement, the 5<sup>th</sup> one is Taming and then 6<sup>th</sup> is Pacification, 7<sup>th</sup> is Complete Pacification, 8<sup>th</sup> is One- Pointed Attention and 9<sup>th</sup> is Balanced Placement.

These are the nine stages of concentration all the way up to the perfected Samatha, which is the ninth stage of concentration of the mind, gained by eliminating the five faults through applying the eight antidotes, like how Maitreya taught.

The five faults or obstacles are (1) laziness, (2) forgetting the instruction, (3) laxity and excitement (4) non- application and (5) over- application.

The eight antidotes to these five faults are (1) [faith], (2) yearning [aspiration], (3) effort, (4) pliancy, (5) not forgetting the object of meditation, (6) recognizing laxity and excitement, (7) application when it's needed, (8) neutralizing from over-application to the object of meditation

These nine stages of the Samatha mind are developed by purifying the five faults through the application of the eight antidotes. The main tool to be able to apply the antidotes effectively and to progress from stage one to stage nine is by the help of six forces and four attentions. The six forces are also called as the six powers and the four attentions are also called as the four focus. So, you need four focus and six forceful conditional powers in order for us to develop from the first to the ninth stage.

The six powers or forces are (1) the power of Hearing, (2) the power of Contemplation, (3) the power of Mindfulness, (4) the power of Introspection or Alertness, (5) the power of Effort and (6) the power of Familiarity.

## SIX FORCES OF SAMATHA MEDITATION

### (1) Force of Hearing and Learning

From the nine stages of concentration, the first stage of concentration is gained through the *power of hearing and power of learning*. All of us here who are truly inspired to achieve the absolute Samatha which is the ninth stage of concentration and by putting effort to attend this class and teachings, we are already in the process. Through simply learning we already gain so much concentration and able to eradicate the gross obstacles towards Samatha. We are already on the journey. From the first class up to now, if you reflect on your day to day attitude and your activities of body and speech, those of you who are serious about this practice already [can] see the changes [and] that you are more mindful of your body, speech and mind. You are already gathering more virtues, already limiting the arising of negative emotions and this itself is the realization on the process of actualizing the first of the nine Samatha minds. Therefore, from the very beginning I was seriously emphasizing on the homework because it is one of the very important criteria for us to receive the benefit of Samatha. Without doing your homework, there is some benefit but it will take a long time

to achieve the benefit. If you do your homework on top of attending the classes, by the time we end the Samatha classes your mind would already become well disciplined. Your body, speech and mind are very much ready to gather more virtue and abandon negative actions. I emphasized to train the basis of your mind which you can use later to steadily develop Samatha like the recommended object of meditation such as the focus of your breathing or you can focus on any object and that itself is a very powerful conditional force for us to get ready for the actual steady process towards the nine stages of Samatha.

## (2) The Force of Reflection [Contemplation]

The second stage of the Samatha mind is gained through the *force of reflection* [and being able to] keep meditating and repeating your focus on your chosen object of meditation. Now if you use this very simple, natural object of concentration like breathing in and out, if you train your mind well to be able to stay on it as long as possible, then later you can continue to use breathing as your object of meditation or you can choose something else that you prefer. Then steadily you keep repeating. Of course you fail a lot but steadily means you continue without giving up for twenty-four minutes, one hour, two hours, three hours and then once you are able to do about three hours you are ready to go into an actual Samatha retreat. In that way, then without much struggle you may be able to obtain the actual nine stages of Samatha in six months. The problem for many of us not being able to progress in our Samatha practice is that even though we learn so much but we have been extremely lazy and distracted until we forget to reflect. First of all, we don't even try to meditate. Even when we meditate we have no *force of reflection*. We have no force for regaining our concentration to the object. The moment you get distracted you give up. This is our problem. That is why we may achieve the first stage but we have a hard time reaching the second level. That has been our problem up to today. At least once a day we should ask the question to our self, 'Did I meditate today?' Then you may say, 'Yes I did.' But have you been able to continue meditating throughout the designated time. Then you will say, 'No, because I was distracted, I gave up or I felt tired or lazy and I gave up.' That means you didn't regain the *force for reflection* and the conclusion or answer is likely to end there. For a person like me, it is very much like that. Our problem is that we always give in to distractions. The distractions here can be worldly concerns, can be negative emotions and that is why our heart never settles. Our heart never experiences genuine inner peace even for five minutes. That is because we don't have the *force of reflection*. Yes, we agree that we have so many distractions. But if you keep going back to reflecting on the object of your meditation then at least you will be reducing the time of the disturbances. We need to change our way of handling or taking care of our needs. Our genuine wanting which is peace

and happiness. We need to change the way how we gather resources and conditions to make ourselves happy and enjoy the inner peace. We need to change.

Right now, whenever we feel bored we want to go shopping to make our self happy or go for a meal or call our friends and have a party or move our sofa from east to west [facing] or change the paintings in our house or cook something new to make our self happy, stay alert, recover from depression or recover from our moodiness. Or when we feel distracted by negative emotions like anger or attachment or desirous grasping we do the same thing, like go shopping, look for different food, buy something or watch a movie. We have so many such ways to make ourselves happy, to recover from distractions and to recover from dullness, sleepiness and laziness. This is what we need to change. In the bigger picture we spend so much money and plan for holidays going very far; Europeans come to South East Asia, South East Asians go to all the way to Europe, America, spending thousands of dollars just to help ourselves recover from a lousy life or to fulfill our distraction. But we know that all of this never gives us any satisfactory result. In fact on holiday we get tired the most. When we are doing all the needs to fulfill the distracted mind that is the most tiring thing in fact, but we never think properly, we just do it because we have this habitual life. That has to change. Some people even risk their lives climbing Mount Everest and falling down, going deep into the sea and getting eaten by sharks, such things happen. This is just to fulfill the excitement of a very distracted mind to your inner peace. Many people drink alcohol to ease themselves from worries, which are also part of the obstacle of excitement. Excitement here is referring to the hyper-mind. To subside that many people take alcohol, smoke or take intoxications. Some people with a very depressed, lethargic mind, drink, smoke and take intoxications that will ruin your health. In a worldly world, many smart people do that. But in actual fact they never think deeply that it is in fact harming oneself. The solution to be free from the obstruction of excitement and the obstruction of a lethargy mind or dullness is to meditate on either analytical meditation or single-pointed meditation and particularly single-pointed meditation in relation to Samatha practice. That will bring happiness and inner peace. If we do it properly and continue to train ourselves, we can experience lasting lengthy happiness, inner peace and pleasure.

But for us to change and reverse our habits is not easy. It sounds very simple but it is not easy. Asking ourselves to either listen to free dharma teachings where you don't need to pay a single cent and the time [commitment] is just one and a half or two hours at the most or to choose to spend your own money of a thousand dollars to go shopping in the mall to buy clothes, you will happily choose shopping over listening to Dharma. Going shopping your eyes are painful because you have to look and your mind is tired because you have to choose the things you like, your legs are painful because nowadays the shopping malls are



so big and the money in your pocket is also very tired because you spent [so much] but you will still do that. However, to listen to teachings where you have nothing to do except to just close your eyes and sit there, you will say it's very boring. So it is not easy and therefore, we may even have a hard time to even get to the first level of the Samatha journey where we have to place immense interest to free ourselves from laziness. Laziness will challenge us and so we need to have the opposite mind which is to see the long-term benefits and the faults of our distraction. So at the beginning, we should just challenge our laziness and try your best to keep learning the Dharma and keep meditating and contemplating on it. Once you are able to taste the Dharma and even do just one minute of single-pointed or analytical meditation, then you will realize the satisfaction, the inner peace and happiness from that meditation and understanding of Dharma and how it cannot compare with any of your worldly conditions or sensual pleasures. Nothing can compare and you yourself will realize that.

Anytime that you feel upset, sad or overwhelmed by anger or any other negative emotions or other disturbances, then immediately, if you are able to, you should do single-pointed concentration on any form of object. The best is to use a holy object like Buddha's image or the mantra sound etc. If not then at least just simply focus on your breathing. It will help greatly and is far more effective than finding worldly methods to overcome your disturbances.

Meditation on love, kindness and compassion, all this, we have to make this a habit for ourselves. Whenever we face troubles and start to worry about something, the first thing we should do to overcome these worries and concerns is to meditate on loving kindness and compassion, emptiness or whatever. You can do analytical meditation or concentration meditation. Meditation is the most powerful method for us to overcome our problem.

Right at this very moment for a person like myself, I am in no position to reject adopting the solution of meditation to overcome all problems because I haven't even tried it. At least give yourself a chance to use meditation, either analytical or single-pointed concentration, to overcome your problems. Then, after that, you make the decision. Without a doubt you will find that the meditation does bring more genuine, lasting, beneficial benefits to solving adversities.

### (3) Force of Mindfulness

The third [stage of] concentration is to achieve the recollection of your attention to your object of meditation. Recollection means being mindful again on your chosen object of your meditation.

### (4) Force of Vigilance

The fifth and sixth [stages of] concentration is achieved through vigilance or introspection. Even on the third, fourth, fifth and sixth stages there are still a lot of disturbances due to the obstacle of excitement and laxity. Even at the fifth and sixth labeled stages, for a person like me, from the beginning when you are learning the Dharma you are already saying, “ I can’t practice, I’m too distracted and I am too lazy.” and we give up too early. Even someone who has already reached the fifth and sixth stages, they still require immense vigilance. In one way it is very inspiring. For me I think, “It’s not bad that at least I can focus on something”.

### (5) Force of Effort (Enthusiasm)

The seventh and eighth levels of concentration are achieved through great effort. Even at the seventh and eighth levels of concentration, which are very high, it still requires immense perseverance and effort. We can understand that as a beginner we require immense perseverance. If even for someone who has reached the seventh and eighth levels of concentration requires immense perseverance, why not me - a beginner? It’s like a millionaire who wants to become a billionaire. You are already a millionaire but yet you still have to work so hard before you can become a billionaire. So for someone like me who is a ‘zero-aire’ I will have to put extra effort to be a millionaire – it is like that. So it’s too early to scream, “Ah! It’s not happening, meditation is not working, when I meditate body and mind do not feel bliss, I think it’s useless.” It’s too early to say that. Perseverance for beginners like us on the first level or even before we enter the first level is through giving reason to our self to see the disadvantages of not having concentration and giving reasons on the advantages of having concentration and that drives the perseverance for us to continue to engage in the meditation. Once we reach the seventh and eighth level of concentration, the perseverance at that level is due to pliancy. The body and mind already feels bliss and due

to that, it encourages the meditator to stay in concentration. We don't have that yet so we need to give our self a reason to keep going back to meditate.

As a beginner, we have to ask serious questions to our self. Does any of the endless samsaric, worldly activities: job, relationship, family, socializing, gathering objects, visiting places etc. really brought me any genuine lasting inner happiness or not? The answer is, "No, definitely not. Yes. It did bring me temporary happiness and provided me with essential necessities but I never completely experience any full satisfaction in any of these activities or ever felt contented." The desire is growing and not subsided. It's never enough. More than that, like Lama Atisha said the worldly work we do will only get more and never finish. We think we may finish, "I work hard this year, next year I will finish." No. No such thing. The worldly work never finishes. The more we do the more we need to do. Therefore, understanding this we must make sure to make time for meditation even if it's just 5 minutes a day, or an hour a day or even if short meditation a few times a day just to help our self throughout the day to bring some basis of positivity to yourself. Five minutes in the morning or in the evening or at night. So, we must give time to our self for meditation.

We truly need to make drastic changes in our habit. From being very busy with worldly activities, now we must give time for learning Dharma, contemplation in Dharma, meditation in Dharma. That has to happen. Otherwise, we don't have much hope in our future lifetime even though we have the conducive conditions of a precious human rebirth now. If we don't do that now it's very hard. This is obvious.

One other important habit we need to change is on listening to Dharma teachings or reading Dharma books. One should try to choose and read authentic teachings like Lama Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim Chenmo* and Santideva's *Bodhisattva-caryavatara*. At least these two texts which are like our two hands, without which we cannot live and cannot function. Or like two wings that we need to fly towards enlightenment. So, in order to gain wisdom and method, we need like *Lamrim* and *Bodhisattva-caryavatara*. We need to make a habit every day to read a few lines especially when we are in difficulties, emotionally or externally, just open *Lamrim* book or *Bodhisattva-caryavatara*. Especially, now those using iPhone or iPads or smart phones you can just download the pdf files. So, whenever you feel confused or depressed, you just open. We never forget to check messages or open emails many times in a day in our phone or iPads. I have this problem and I am sure some of you have this problem too. So, at least the habit now should change to whenever we open our iPhone we open the Dharma book too.

Even though we are not able to study all the other great ancient *panditas* or great enlightened Mahasiddhas' teachings, but at least if we refer to Lama Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim* and Santideva's *Bodhisattva-caryavatara* we cannot go wrong. There are so many commentaries, lectures and teachings, and many are good ones but there are also many mixtures. In Malaysia, it's called "rojak". Too many! Instead of benefitting us, sometimes it may condemn our spiritual continuum and in particular those teachings either in audio, in person or in book where the teacher or composer does not have proper guru devotion or proper lineage blessings. Yes. There are many exciting words and clear words in it but it brings obstacles to your spiritual heart and creates obstacles to your spiritual realization. What we want to learn from Dharma is to gain realization not just to learn information. So those with broken lineage or no lineage even though they are great scholars write perfect explanation but they have no blessings to transmit to your mental continuum. So when it comes to Dharma the ultimate goal is receive the blessings, which are the realizations in your mental continuum. And that is a unique knowledge in relation to Buddhist spirituality. Without that we won't receive the ultimate benefit. That's the reason why I am saying try to refer to *Lamrim* and to *Bodhisattva-caryavatara* at the very least. *Lamrim* and *Bodhisattva-caryavatara* are like Google maps to [help us to] reach the desired destination for our spiritual practice. So we should take these [texts] like our Google map and wherever we want to progress in our learning and in our practice, it's the safest. Lama Tsongkhapa's disciples asked Lama Tsongkhapa when he was passing away, "In future when we need to refer to you, when we have obstacles or no guidance on the path, who we should follow?" Lama Tsongkhapa said, 'Refer to the *Lamrim*. When I am physically not around, whenever you have difficulties in the journey on the path then you refer to the *Lamrim* and that is no different from [referring to] me.'

#### (6) Force of Complete Familiarity

The ninth concentration will be achieved through the force of complete familiarity without any disturbances or obstacles. It means without any effort or force you can completely stay in vivid clarity and steady focus on your object of meditation for as long as you want. In order to reach to the ninth point, from the very beginning, and right now you need to start training in familiarity to the object of our meditation again and again until one day, we will reach the state of complete familiarity and that is the ninth complete full stage of Samatha. During the ninth stage of complete familiarity, when it comes to time, you can stay in meditative equipoise for as long as you want. You can stay in total concentration for months. Basically, it is for as long as you want from five minutes or throughout the day.

The quality of that familiarity is vivid clarity and steady concentration to the designated object. That is what you gain.

To reach that *complete familiarity*, right now even if you can just achieve half a minute to the designated object, which could be breathing, Buddha's object, emptiness, bodhicitta or whatever you choose. Try to remain, even if it's just for half a minute, with full vivid clarity and steady concentration. Aim to accumulate that for a few seconds, then half a minute, one minute, over twenty minutes, then one hour. That's how you train. Eventually, you will reach complete familiarity and that is how you go about it.

The effort is worth. The effect of complete familiarity will help the practitioner to gain clairvoyance, gain unbelievable higher knowledge and not only that one of the most powerful benefits is to have the capability to actualize special insight. This means that you can use emptiness as your object of concentration to eradicate the obstacles to nirvana and obscurations to omniscience. You can make it most effective using the Samatha mind, the complete familiarity mind, to utilize the absolute Vipassana. Not the normal word that people use. The actual Vipassana is using emptiness as the object in the Samatha mind to tackle and eradicate the defilements. The temporary benefit is that your body and mind is always in bliss, in pliancy. You become free from tiredness. How wonderful to be freed from tiredness, not needing to sleep and to be able to enjoy samadhi food. So there is no need to worry too much about the shortage of food; when you reach Samatha you can utilize the capability of samadhi food. These are the minimum day-to-day temporary benefits besides the ultimate benefits that you will achieve.

These nine stages of concentration also need the help of the four attentions. These are also known as the four focus. The 1<sup>st</sup> is Tight Focus, 2<sup>nd</sup> is Intermediate Focus, 3<sup>rd</sup> is Uninterrupted Focus and the 4<sup>th</sup> is Spontaneous Focus.

From the nine concentrations, in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> stage you achieve it with the help of *Tight Focus*. *Tight Focus* is referring to putting immense effort of mindfulness and introspection because that state of mind is very fragile. So you need to stay focused in learning the instructions, on gathering virtues and on the object of meditation whenever you have the chance to meditate. It is creating a very concentrated environment to stay close to the object of your meditation.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> [stages of concentration], it is achieved through the help of *Intermediate Focus*. You still need to focus but it is not as strict as earlier.

In order to develop from the 7<sup>th</sup> to the 8<sup>th</sup> mental concentration and especially during the 8<sup>th</sup> mental concentration when you qualify to move to the 9<sup>th</sup> level of concentration, you need *Uninterrupted Focus*, uninterrupted attention to the object of meditation. When that *Uninterrupted Focus* develops into *Spontaneous Focus*, you achieve the 9<sup>th</sup> stage of Samatha.

This is just a brief introduction. Later you will have a more elaborate explanation, definitions and commentary. Those of you who want to continue with this teaching then it is beneficial to familiarize yourself, at least with the names or labels given to the nine levels of concentration and if possible with the definitions as well. Then the five faults, eight antidotes, four concentrations and six forces. Without these, you cannot develop Samatha. As long as you have a picture of these in your mind you are able to monitor yourself in the meditation process.

According to the [*Lamrim Chenmo*] text we are in the section under:

## **5. THE MEDITATIVE PROCESS ITSELF HOW TO DEVELOP FLAWLESS CONCENTRATION.**

There are three different subjects to discuss:

- (i) What to do prior to focusing the attention on an object of meditation.**
- (ii) What to do while focusing on an object of meditation.
- (iii) What to do after you focus on an object of meditation.

(i) WHAT TO DO PRIOR TO FOCUSING ON AN OBJECT OF MEDITATION.

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 33]

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

If you cannot stop the laziness of being disinclined to cultivate concentration and of enjoying things that are not conducive to it, from the outset you will not gain entry into concentration; even if you do attain it once, you will be unable to sustain it, so it will quickly deteriorate. Therefore, it is most crucial to stop laziness in the

beginning. When you attain pliancy in which your mind and body are full of delight and bliss, you will stop laziness inasmuch as you will be able to cultivate virtue all day and night without weariness.

In order to stop laziness, first develop mental pliancy. That will affect the body to have a feel of pliancy. This can be developed by reflecting on the benefits of Samatha. By referring to the benefits of Samatha and referring to all the great masters who have achieved Samatha, like Milarepa etc. who have all achieved Samatha and through that have achieved enlightenment, you feel so inspired in your heart. That inspiration will bring a blissful feel to your mind and that is the mental pliancy. When you have that, it will help your body to also feel very relaxed and good. That will lead you to first of all, do meditation. When you do your meditation with such inspiration you will achieve pliancy while doing the meditation and that will continue to let you engage in the meditation.

This is what [Lama Tsongkhapa] says,

To develop this pliancy, you must be able to have continuous enthusiasm for the concentration that causes pliancy. To develop this enthusiasm, you need a continuous, intense yearning that is intent on concentration. As a cause for this yearning you need steadfast confidence in and fascination with the good qualities of concentration. So to start with, cultivate again and again a confidence that is aware of the good qualities of concentration. When you see this process in practice, you will understand this most vital point with the clearest sense of certainty. Maitreya's *Separation of the Middle from the Extremes* states:

The basis and what is based upon it  
Are the cause and its result.

Here, the "basis" is yearning, which is the basis of the endeavor; "what is based upon it" is the endeavor or enthusiasm. The cause of yearning is confident faith in the good qualities of concentration. The result of endeavor is pliancy.

In this context, the good qualities of concentration are as follows: When you reach serenity, your mind is filled with delight and your body is filled with bliss, so you are happy in this lifetime. Also, since you have attained physical and mental pliancy, you can turn your attention to any virtuous object of meditation you choose. Since you have quelled uncontrolled distraction toward the wrong sort of objects, you are not constantly involved in wrongdoing and any virtue you do is very powerful.

Do you want your body and mind always to be in bliss? I want that, so then I have no choice, I must meditate, develop Samatha and start now. Do you want the rest of your entire life to be a happy life or an unhappy life? I want a happy life so if you want that too, you must develop Samatha. These benefits are not only after you develop Samatha. The moment you start the journey you already develop these benefits.

I'm very excited now. But I have no confidence in myself that this excitement will last until next morning. Therefore, Lama Tsongkhapa is very specific and even Maitreya has already guided us to always learn the benefits of Samatha and always think and look upon the Gurus, realized Arya beings, Bodhisattvas and Buddhas. It is so inspiring to know about our Gurus, how they spent their lives, what they have achieved in their lives. It is so inspiring and that will make us remember tomorrow morning to also continue doing our very best in the pursuit of Samatha.

We know attachment, anger and jealousy arise. Sometimes our minds are completely blank, lousy and depressed. From day to day we experience that. We know we don't want that and that it's awful. It's torturing. But when you start to meditate and engage in the journey towards Samatha, you are already starting to stay away from these negative emotions. Who does not want that? We always want to feel positive, happy, generous, compassionate, loving, always smiling, friendly, laughing, always saying good things about others whoever we meet and always seeing the positive in others. We want that but it's very hard to sustain in these virtues. No question about sustaining in our Dharma practice; even the basic virtues, it is so difficult to sustain in our day-to-day life. But when we start to discipline our self to pursue the journey to Samatha in our daily life then we already stay close to these virtues in our life and these are the benefits. These benefits are immediate, right now. As mentioned before, the first stage of the nine levels of concentration are achieved through "hearing" or learning the Dharma and teachings on Samatha.



If you joined this session with no motivation or improper motivation then it's hopeless. But if you came with the proper, correct motivation to pursue the spiritual path in Samatha all the way up to actualizing wisdom and method and attaining liberation and enlightenment, then the benefits are already happening. As I mentioned at the beginning of the session, those who are serious, we are already benefiting and getting less disturbances and negative emotions. We are getting more accumulation of virtues; just on mindfulness, we are already much more mindful than before. That is unless you didn't set the right motivation. If you are serious, it is already happening and it is supposed to happen. If it is not happening, then check your motivation.

Gradually, especially as you achieve more steady serenity in particular, the ninth stage, then you will achieve the good qualities such as super knowledge and supernormal powers. All these will be achieved. Super knowledge and supernormal powers are like clairvoyance and wisdom or memory where you can store an unbelievable number of higher knowledge etc. Physically, you achieve the lightness where you are even able to fly or float without touching the ground etc. These are just one or two examples and there are many such super knowledge and supernormal powers.

In particular, it is on the basis of serenity that you develop knowledge of insight that knows the real nature, whereby you can quickly cut the root of cyclic existence.

Without the mind of special insight, one cannot cut the obstacles to nirvana and obstacles to omniscience or Buddhahood. Without developing Samatha, one will not be able to develop special insight. Without developing special insight, we cannot cut the obstacle to nirvana and omniscience. Without that we won't even be able to achieve freedom from samsara, no question about enlightenment. Those who are genuinely seeking the benefit of spirituality; seeking liberation or full enlightenment or at very least liberation from the entire ocean of samsara and its causes, if that is really the case then this statement is extremely serious. So without special insight there is no way that we can cut the obstacle to liberation and enlightenment. Without Samatha we cannot gain special insight so you can imagine this is an extremely serious matter, it is serious Dharma. In short, without realizing the absolute nature of self and phenomena, without realizing emptiness directly, without realizing the lack of inherent existence, the wisdom directly, one cannot overcome samsara.

Direct realization of emptiness of nature can only be done when we have the most powerful clarity and concentrated mind, which is the Samatha mind. If we truly want to be free from samsara and all the delusional problems that we have, then Samatha is a must. There is no other way or route to achieve the goal. Otherwise, taking chemical pain-killers, just praying, hear some comforting words, trying to do recitation in the name of meditation but just sitting there, these will comfort you but it's like taking a pain killer, it doesn't cure the root cause of the pain. If it doesn't cure the pain from the root, it will come back. When you develop Samatha and Special Insight, then you are able to cure not only the pain but the root cause of the pain, once and forever.

If you reflect on any of these good qualities, you will become aware of, and meditate upon, things that strengthen your inclination to cultivate concentration. When this inclination arises, you will be continually prompted from within to cultivate concentration, so it will be easy to attain concentration. Also, since you will cultivate it repeatedly even after attaining it, you will be unlikely to lose it.

So we need serious discipline. Then train in the concentration. Then achieve the wisdom of emptiness. These are the three higher trainings that have to be developed in order for us to fulfill our spiritual goal, whether your spiritual goal is just liberation from the entire ocean of samsara or full enlightenment in order to benefit all sentient beings. Without the three higher trainings, one won't be able to achieve that. In order to actualize wisdom, you need to accumulate the cause of concentration and serenity. In order to achieve serenity, you need to accomplish the cause of moral discipline.

### **Homework**

In the next session we will cover, **what to do while focusing on an object of meditation** and also **Identifying the object of meditation upon which your attention to set.**

## **HOW TO DEVELOP FLAWLESS CONCENTRATION** [continuation]

- (i) What to do prior to focusing the attention on an object of meditation.
- (ii) **What to do while focusing on an object of meditation.**
  - 1. Identifying the object of meditation upon which your attention is set**
  - 2. How to focus your mind on the object of meditation
- (iii) What to do after you focus on an object of meditation.

### **1. IDENTIFYING THE OBJECT OF MEDITATION UPON WHICH YOUR ATTENTION IS SET**

This has two parts:

- A. A general presentation of objects of meditation**
- B. Identifying objects of meditation for this context

#### **A. A GENERAL PRESENTATION OF OBJECTS OF MEDITATION**

This has three sections:

- (a) The objects of meditation themselves**
- (b) Who should meditate on which objects
- (c) Synonyms of the object of meditation

#### **(a) THE OBJECTS OF MEDITATION THEMSELVES**

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 35]

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

The Bhagavan stated that yogis have four types of objects of meditation, these being: (1) universal objects of meditation, (2) objects of meditation for purifying your behavior, (3) objects of meditation for expertise, and (4) objects of meditation for purifying afflictions.

(1) UNIVERSAL OBJECTS OF MEDITATION are of four types:

- a. discursive images,
- b. non-discursive images,
- c. the limits of existence, and
- d. achievement of your purposes

These are the different names for different objects of meditation.

(a) Discursive and (b) Non-discursive objects of meditation.

The discursive and non- discursive objects of meditation are very much defined by the [*discursive*] object of meditation that is directed to analytical process- eventually to develop special insight. Then, the *non- discursive* object of meditation is very much initially to train in Samatha and objectively to actualize Serenity.

The object of *discursive* and *non- discursive* object of meditation is not much about the objective side but it is very much about the subjective that defines the differences between *discursive* and *non –discursive*. The *discursive* is very much the objects that you define as an object of your meditation that applies process of analysis such as the definition of characteristics etc.

The *non-discursive* is the mental image that you choose without interpreting the characteristics or the definition of the object rather simply focusing single-pointedly. It's very much a mental image. So, the *discursive* and *non- discursive* is defined by whether you are analyzing on it or not analyzing - just focusing single-pointedly. Discursive meditation is very much analytical meditation and non-discursive meditation is very much single pointed meditation. Both meditations can be taken as a way to develop calm abiding mind.

So, if you choose emptiness as an object of discursive meditation, the wisdom or mind understanding the absolute nature of self and phenomena or the conceptual realization of absolute nature of self and phenomena and if you meditate on that wisdom with application of analysis in order to deepen either from the understanding or from the meditation and through that process eventually one can develop serenity or the focus on that object and that makes that meditator actualizing Samatha. Not only [just] developing Samatha but that continuum can be used as Special insight. Using the same basis of that attainment of the Samatha, [and] continuously using the wisdom realizing emptiness and taking that as an antidote to eradicate defilements - that is Vipassana or special insight.

[If] the meditator's purpose to meditate on an object of meditation is to develop special insight, then if you use emptiness wisdom as an object for *discursive* meditation [it] will effectively lead to special insight after achieving Serenity.

If your objective of meditating is just to achieve Samatha, Serenity and not Special insight then it's not necessary to use your object of meditation on Emptiness. You can use any ordinary object. [However], if you apply *discursive* meditation you still can achieve great benefit to Serenity, but if you choose to use *non-discursive* way to meditate then that will directly lead to Serenity or Samatha

So, some individuals have problems to stay focus. Their minds are very sharp, very analytical and when it comes to analysis, their minds are super. But when it comes to need to focus single- pointedly, they are hopeless. There are practitioners like that. So [for] this kind of sharp busy -minded practitioners then it's good to use the *discursive* method of meditation. In particular, if you use selflessness (or understanding of no- self) or understanding on Emptiness and on top of understanding if you already have the wisdom of understanding or wisdom of contemplation, then that wisdom of Emptiness used as an object, you apply the *discursive* technique. Then in that way this type of practitioner will achieve Serenity plus able to eventually lead to Special insight.

So, when we discuss in the text the object of *discursive* meditation it is not talking about an external object but it's a mental picture. So what is that mental picture? That mental picture is the wisdom that you gained from understanding what is meant by Emptiness. So you use that as an object of meditation. Someone who not only understand but already contemplated on the wisdom of understanding and has gained the wisdom of contemplation on Emptiness and you use that wisdom of contemplation as an object of meditation and develop the wisdom of meditation which is the actual realization, firstly with Serenity and secondly with Special Insight.

[There] are many people who think that Serenity, Samatha [meditation] is completely no-thinking, no contemplation - just focus on one single object. This is a misunderstanding and it's not like that. We can also utilize our busy mind, instead of rejecting it. One needs to be careful about using the term "Vipassana" [loosely] for meditation. The actual term Vipassana is actually referring to Special insight and when we talked about Special insight or Vipassana, in fact its object of meditation has to be Emptiness, either Emptiness of Self or Emptiness of Phenomena. Nowadays, Vipassana is anything you choose something to focus and start to analyze and that is called Vipassana. Actually, that is not qualified to be called Vipassana.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

The two types of images (discursive and non-discursive) are posited in terms of the observer: the first is the object of insight, and the second is the object of meditative serenity. The image is not the actual specifically characterized object upon which your mind is focused, but rather the appearance of that object's aspect to your mind. When you carry out analysis while observing an object, then the image is discursive since analytical thinking is present. When you stabilize your mind without analysis while observing an object, the image is said to be non-discursive since analytical thinking is absent.

### c) The Limits of Existence Object of Meditation

Another object of meditation is *limits of existence* - the conventional aspect of existence of self and phenomena. It is the object of meditation to understand the conventional aspect of the *limits of existence* and the ultimate aspect of characteristics or qualities of *limits of existence*. Basically, you can choose everything as your object of meditation.

The first one is *limits of existence* for diversity of phenomena, which is focusing either through analytical way or single-pointed way and familiarizing on the conventional aspect of the *limits of existence*. For example, either analytical or single-pointedly familiarizing with five aggregates, eighteen constituents, twelve sources, four noble truths, twelve links of interdependent arising, four truths, two truths etc. entire phenomena possessed within this category. So, when you know the conventional aspect of the entirety of existence that helps

to increase our wisdom so that that can lead us to find a basis where you can be able to realize the absolute truth or the emptiness of the entire existence.

Then the *limits of existence* as object of meditation on the conventional object and then analyzing or focusing single-pointedly on the ultimate nature of five aggregates, eighteen constituents, twelve sources etc. or establish the ultimate nature of the five aggregates and then single- pointedly focusing on that. If you are able to do that on the five aggregates, eighteen constituents, twelve sources, four noble truths, twelve links of interdependent existence, then you are able to actualize vast habitual of the ultimate nature of vast phenomena and that way will be able to help to gain a serviceable mind eventually to actualize Serenity as well as expand the wisdom to eventually realize absolute nature of phenomena which is emptiness.

#### d) Achievement of Your Purpose as Object of Meditation

*Achievement of purpose* (as object of meditation) is posited in terms of the result. With either serenity or insight you direct your attention to the images of those objects of meditation. Then you stabilize on them, become accustomed to them, and, by virtue of repeated practice, you become free from your dysfunctional tendencies, undergoing a fundamental transformation.

This is very much about **before** you get into meditation you are being clear of your objective whether to achieve serenity or special insight. Based on that you train your mind through specific meditation for that purpose and constantly doing so will achieve the goal either serenity or special insight.

#### (2) OBJECTS OF MEDITATION FOR PURIFYING YOUR BEHAVIOUR

Using the *universal objects of meditation* helps us to gather vast wisdom and have great training in the journey to achieving serenity or special insight.

Objects of meditation for purifying behavior are objects that purify behavior in which attachment or the like [hatred, delusion, pride, or discursiveness] is predominant.

Especially for beginners who are trying to do meditation to achieve Samatha or special insight. It is regarded very beneficial and very important for us to do meditation on purifying the behavior and of course also using universal object of meditation as well. The ultimate purpose of our meditation is eventually for us to realize ultimate truth. If we are not even sure about the conventional aspect of existence (how many types are there) then we won't have a basis where we have to actualize the ultimate truth of those existences. Therefore, it is necessary for us to use the *universal object of meditation* technique. As for the *purifying of behavior* as the meditation technique, if we don't purify our behavior [no matter] how much we concentrate, we cannot develop concentration; how much we meditate on emptiness, we cannot develop the wisdom.

That is why no wonder the first level of Samatha is developed through learning. If we learn all the types of conventional phenomena then that helps us to reflect and search for the ultimate nature of those phenomena. As like in the *Heart Sutra*, "no eyes, no ears, no nose, no tongue..." It talks about the five aggregates, eighteen constituents, and twelve sources. If we don't know what they are, how can we meditate on the emptiness of that?

To develop Samatha [there are] the main obstacles which we have discussed before such as the five faults which will be elaborated later. The five faults are summarized into two which are excitement and dullness. The lethargy aspect of the mind and excitement aspect of the mind comes from negative emotions like attachment, anger etc. So, if we don't pacify them or eliminate them no matter how much we force ourselves to focus on something we won't be able to gain progress in that.

By meditating on loving kindness, compassion, renunciation, Bodhicitta, emptiness, does that help us to develop Samatha and realization? Yes, it definitely helps because the meditations help to purify those negative emotions, directly or indirectly and purify the obstacles to gaining Samatha. So with less delusion, then if you dedicate time to Samatha meditation, the meditation will be so swift and so effective to attain Samatha.

There are five such objects of meditation. Respectively they are: (a) ugliness, (b) love, (c) dependent- arising, (d) differentiation of constituents, and (e) inhalation and exhalation:



(a) to purify attachment you meditate on *ugliness*. One of the prerequisites in order to actualize successful Samatha is to purify attachment, i.e. lessening attachment to gathering material object and secondly, to have contentment in your heart. So, if you can't dedicate your time and practice for developing Samatha, mainly due to having so much of attachment to your body then here you need to meditate on the ugliness of your body in order to detach, as this is one of the major obstacle to giving up attachment to develop Samatha. Attachment to our body and our aggregates is not only an obstacle to Samatha but is also an obstacle to successes in any practices whether in Sutra or Tantra. The attachment to your body, which is the basis of the self and also attachment to self, which is self-grasping, are the major obstacles to the progress of spiritual practices. Attachment to self and attachment to our body is one of the fruitful causes to send us to lower realms when we pass away from this life. Usually, the attachment to our body arises even stronger when we go through the transition from this life into the next life. So, if we don't practice detachment to our body not only it will block from attaining Enlightenment and liberation, but it will prevent us from gaining a higher rebirth.

So, we need to meditate on the ugliness of our body, even though it is very unpleasant to do so. There are thirty-six uglinesses that you can focus and analyze on your body. In that way, we will gain detachment from our body. One can meditate on the ugliness pertaining to the body such as head, body hair and external ugliness such as a corpse when upon dying turning blue, skeleton, blood, pus etc. [Without] the need to refer to the text, we can just imagine if we were to take out the skin, do we dare to look at "you", do we dare to be attached? Furthermore, if we cut the flesh and the bones, and organs it is unbelievably terrifying. Just by using a basic technique, taking out the skin and you just apprehend your skeleton that alone will help to purify attachment to your body.

A question that may arise that if we were to meditate like that there might be a danger that we will see a limitation in our self and start to abuse our body. No, that won't happen because abuse arises from negative emotions. The stronger the attachment, the abuses arise. Here, you are purifying the attachment to the object of your body. In fact, you will gain respect to your body and see the real nature of your body, the real bliss of freedom or detachment. So, there is a benefit. No need to worry that if we meditate like that we will have nightmare or bad dream and start to have aversion towards yourself. All these negative emotions will be even lesser if we start meditate on that.

Whether you want to use the skeleton or whatever [in your meditation], when the aspect of impurity and ugliness arises in your mind then you keep your attention on it. That is the

meditation. So, firstly, you define the ugliness then after figuring out the ugliness in your mind, you focus your attention on that.

Some very dedicated practitioners even go to the cemetery where the corpses are laid out and then they meditate reflecting on their own body, which will eventually be same like the corpses. In order to intensify the realization of detachment to their body and challenge the stubborn attachment grasping to the body they even travel to the cemetery to do that. In relation to Tantra, there is the practice of *chod* making charity of the body in order to purify attachment and grasping. There is such an extensive profound practice. My late master Geshe Lama Konchog, when he moved to the third cave where he remain for over 15 years, based on another senior meditator Rinchen Wangchuk who mentioned that Geshe Lama Konchog every night, around midnight 11.00 to 2.00 will travel to a place [in Tsum] where the villagers bring the dead corpse, mostly buried under a few rocks. Even in daytime one can see the bones and skeletons scattered everywhere. Geshe-la used to go there in the middle of the night and based on Rinchen Wangchuk it seems Geshe-la travelled there every night to meditate there and do *chod* offerings. There are a few spots that Geshe-la will specifically sit down to do the *chod* offering. For us even in the daytime, we feel quite eerie. So, these are the seriousness of practitioners like Geshe-la. All the people who have achieved high realizations, the Kadampa masters and pandits they all have such factual stories in life where they purify attachment to self and the aggregates, the basis. That alone helps to free yourself from suffering in this life, getting bonded to your body and with your identity. When you pass away you can pass away freely and because of that you can purify the result from lower realms. So, there are immense, immense of benefits. In our worldly way we say we should love ourselves. Yes, we must love ourselves but we should not be attached and grasp in a hallucinated way to ourselves. That is a mistake. It does not mean we should not love ourselves. If you don't love yourself there is no way you can express love to others. Loving honestly, there is nothing wrong but loving that is infused with attachment grasping is one of the very scary obstacles that will ruin us from now and all the way to the future.

(b) If one of the major obstacles for oneself to focus on meditation and success in Serenity is hatred, for such negative behavior strongly arising in you then the antidote is to choose *love* as your object of meditation.

First you develop unconditional love to your family and friends then to enemies, strangers and rest of other sentient beings. Once you develop that attitude then you focus on that.

(c) Then, if the major obstacle is delusion such as ignorance then meditate on *dependent arising* or on emptiness: dependent arising of the past, present and future and dependent arising on cause and effect etc. You can use arising of negative emotions and then the result of suffering; dependent arising or cultivation of a positive mind and positive virtue, the result of happiness etc. Anything which is about causality, the karmic cause and effect that helps to cleanse the obstacle of delusion.

All there is in the past, the present, and the future is dependent-arising in which effects that are mere phenomenal factors simply arise based on phenomenal factors. Apart from these, there is no performer of actions or experiencer of their effects. You focus your attention on this fact, and hold it there.

That is the meditation on dependent arising.

(d) If the major obstacle to meditation is ego pride then meditate on *differentiation of constituents*. That will help to subside and purify the ego.

You differentiate the factors of the six constituents – earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness. You focus your attention on them and hold it there

This is just an example and you can also use the rest of the object of limits of existence, which we discuss earlier. That will also help to subside and purify our ego

(e) If the main obstacle to develop meditation concentration is a busy hyper mind. Then for that you use breathing [*inhalation and exhalation*].

Regarding the *object of meditation on inhalation and exhalation*: You focus your attention without distraction by counting and watching the breath move in and out.

You focus your attention without distraction or your mind scattering to any other thought than just simply having vivid clarity and focus on the movement of the in and out breath. “By counting and watching” is interpreted wrongly as counting numbers 1,2,3,4, ... and it is not referring to that. But “by counting”, it is referring to focus and “watching” refers to clarity. So, you need single-pointed focus (counting) and vivid clarity (watching).

But there are also breathing meditation that actually uses counting in Tantric meditation called *vase-like meditation* such as in Vajrayogini practices and Highest Yoga Tantric meditation. For that one you need to hold your breath and imagine or visualize the breath at the navel area and visualize as if you are swallowing air from the top like saliva and you keep in and then you gather some air from down and then meditate hold the air at the navel for as long as possible at the minimum for 7 times. So, you need to count 1 to 7. Sometimes people make mistake as when doing Samatha meditation they start to count 1,2,... and become distracted. So the “counting” here [in Samatha meditation] means focus and “watching” means clarity.

So, this breathing meditation is simply noticing the breath going out and going in, there’s no other effort or object that need to do focus. Simply, physically sit in a relaxed way or you can do while walking or in any position. Most importantly, your mind has to have the two aspects – (1) Focusing on noticing the breath going in and out and (2) having clarity, just that, no other thoughts or sensation. So training in that vivid clarity and focus on the natural state of breathing helps us to calm our state of being and helps us to withdraw from all the disturbances, sensual distractions and also helps us to stay away from negative emotions. So it has a great, great benefit and especially beneficial for those who have problems having an overwhelming monkey mind. To chain this naughty monkey mind, the breathing meditation is one of the techniques to bring control over your mind.

[For] people who have sleeping problems because of having too many thoughts arising, this breathing problem will be very helpful. For people who are very impatient, where everything must be on their fingertips, this breathing meditation will help you to relax, sense of letting go, and become settled. It is simply a very beneficial method to bring both your body and mind at rest. At the same time it will help our mind to be serviceable to do higher meditation. In fact, all the different types of objects of meditation we discussed before will be more effective if we have this basic trained mind, a settled clear mind, which is trained through breathing meditation. As a Mahayanic Buddhist this meditation should be conducted with an altruistic motivation. Even though the object of meditation is nothing holy but because of the motivation and the time we invest in this breathing meditation it will help to purify our mind and also to accumulate merits.

From the very beginning when I introduced this breathing meditation, there were many questions arising: “When is the right time to do it?” Some worries that “Will I choke because if I breathe deeply, scientifically the breath should not go this way?” etc. There may be many thousands of questions and concerns, which you should just put aside. You only need to remember breathe naturally, no need to put extra effort and just simply have focus and clarity on the breathing, the going in and out of the breathing. That’s it. You can do while sleeping, you can do while walking, you can do while in a meditating posture at anywhere anytime. You can do while in pajamas or whatever and the benefit is all that have been mentioned.

Just to recap, our ultimate purpose is to actualize special insight. To do so, we have to achieve Samatha. Therefore, we need to know ourselves well what the major obstacles that we have. If your problem is mainly attachment then do meditation on ugliness; if your problem is anger, meditate on love; if your problem is delusion ignorance then meditate on dependent arising and if your problem is ego then meditate on the varieties of conventional aspect of the phenomena, learn about their conventional and ultimate characteristics. Then, if your problem is simply a wild monkey mind then focus on breathing meditation.

Then, if you think you have all the problems [in equal measure], you divide your time daily or weekly to do this particular meditation or that or divide your time in a day to do 5 minutes on this meditation and that. If there are anyone listening to this teaching and you don’t have any of these obstacles, then when I come to your city I will buy you a Samadhi lunch.

### **Homework**

Until the next class, your homework is to look for your obstacles and apply the antidotes

1. THE OBJECTS OF MEDITATION THEMSELVES [continuation]  
(Lamrim Chenmo, page 36)

There are four objects of meditation:-

- (1) Universal objects of meditation
- (2) Objects of meditation for purifying your behaviors
- (3) Objects of meditation for expertise**
- (4) Objects of meditation for purifying afflictions**

All these varieties of different meditational objects play a very important conditional cause for us to genuinely be ready to develop serenity or Samatha. For non-Buddhists and among Buddhists, there are practitioners who put effort to develop single-pointed concentration. Here, our purpose for developing serenity or Samatha is for us to actualize special insight. It is very important for us to know this and we must be very clear about our purpose - which is to develop special insight. On top of that, another important element is that this development of serenity or Samatha has to be infused by an altruistic intention because our ultimate objective is to actualize Buddhahood, and not just liberation. There is no question that to achieve full enlightenment, we need to have special insight. Even to achieve the lower nirvana we need to achieve special insight in order for us to eradicate the obstacles to nirvana. Without special insight, if we just have serenity, we won't achieve liberation. With only special insight but without the force of Bodhicitta we may achieve liberation but we won't be able to achieve full enlightenment. Therefore, serenity, special insight and altruism all these have to be developed alongside [each other], in order for us to actualize the ultimate goal of Buddhahood.

If [the purpose] is just to develop a single-pointed mind, we don't have to discuss the variety of meditation techniques and meditation objects to be meditated on. To develop a single-pointed mind is wonderful and will help to achieve higher knowledge realizations but that alone is not good enough.

### (3) OBJECTS OF MEDITATION FOR EXPERTISE

The object of meditation for expertise is [for] developing wisdom in relation to dependent arising. By doing such meditation, it helps us to not only increase our wisdom, the basis to realize the nature of phenomena, but it also assists in leading us to the actualization of the ultimate wisdom.

There are five different objects of meditation for expertise. Expertise in

- a) the aggregates
- b) the constituents
- c) the sources
- d) dependent- arising
- e) what is and is not possible

#### (a) Expertise In The Aggregates

As mentioned earlier, the objective of the meditation is for us to discover dependent arising; the interdependent existence between cause and effect or condition and effect. It is to meditate to understand the interdependency between the varieties of phenomena, like the five aggregates etc. Ultimately it is to purify or eliminate the hallucination, wrong views of permanent existence, independent existence and self-existence. It is mainly to overcome these wrong views. Eventually, it will lead to overcoming the wrong view of dualistic existence, true existence and inherent existence. The meditation using the object of expertise as the object of meditation helps the meditator to realize the conventional truth.

Also, learning the interdependent nature of this expertise helps us to gather the wisdom on the definition of emptiness. Right now, when our ordinary mind perceives the five aggregates for example, we have an inherent perception, a true perception or even a very gross hallucination like a permanent perception. Due to the hallucination of such a false view, it obstructs us from realizing the absolute nature of the five aggregates and the other expertise. By not realizing the conventional reality of the expertise, it obstructs us from realizing the ultimate aspect of the expertise.

For the expertise like form, we are not just focusing on one object form; it is very much focusing on how form exists in fact, in reality. That mental picture of form existing selflessly, that understanding is the object of your meditation.

As the text says,

(a) The *aggregates* are the five aggregates of form and the others [feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness]. Expertise in these is knowing that, apart from these aggregates, the self and what pertains to the self do not exist.

#### (b) Expertise In The Constituents

(b) The *constituents* are the eye and the others of the eighteen constituents. Expertise in them is knowing the causal conditions by which those constituents arise from their own seeds

The eighteen constituents are six objects as a basis (form, sound, smell, taste, tangible objects and phenomena), six sense powers as the reliance (eye sense power up to mental sense power), six consciousness that we rely upon (eye consciousness up to mental consciousness). Together they make up the eighteen constituents.

The meditation on these eighteen constituents is on knowing that the 6 objects of reliance are interdependent on the 6 sensory powers. The 6 sensory powers exist in apprehension to the 6 types of objects and are dependent on the 6 consciousness. So knowing the interdependence among the three; object, sensory power and the base the consciousness, helps to clear hallucinations such as inherent existence, true existence etc. At first glance it might not sound like there's benefit. But in actual fact, just reflecting on the interdependency among these constituents, the ignorance of your hallucination of true existence, the inherent existence gradually starts to fade. That is the benefit.

Right now when we see form, when we look at form, the apprehension is the apprehension of true existence or inherent existence or independent existence or even permanent existence. Basically all the negation of selflessness or negation of emptiness, which is presented by the four philosophical schools is present in your perception. When you first



look at or perceive form in the ordinary perception, it is perceived in that way which is the absolutely hallucinated, false way. The reason why it is a false view is because when you look at form and apprehend it as “this is form”, in that apprehension, it has the elements of inherent existence, true existence, dualistic existence, permanent existence, independent existence and all the elements of existence are there. That’s why it is false. In reality, there is no form that exists out there, in the way [in which] how we apprehend form.

If you know the negation of each of the four schools - Vaibhasika, Sautrantika, Cittamatra, Madhyamika all the way up to the Prasangika Madhyamika - and analyze how your first perception of looking at form is apprehended, all the negations are present in your hallucinated view.

The moment you start to investigate, you start to understand that form merely exists in dependence on the eye perception. If there’s no eye perception there is no existence of form. Even for the eye perception that is able to perceive the form, it is because there is eye senses power. For the eye senses power to be able to perceive the object, the form, you need the eye consciousness. Without the inter-relation between the object, the senses power and the eye consciousness, form does not exist. Therefore, form is a by- product of its causes and conditions, the senses powers and eye consciousness.

For the first Buddhist school, the Vaibhasika, they say that form exists by interdependence on its conditions – like the eye senses power and the eye consciousness and the karmic imprint that the consciousness carries from the previous actions. So the Vaibhasika says that form exist as by-product of its causes and conditions. The Sautrantika School would interpret it in the same way. For the mind-only school, the Cittamatra would say that the form is there because of the eye consciousness and form is by-product of ripening of the past imprint in the consciousness. The Madhyamika School would say that form exists interdependently on the lack of true existence mind. The Prasangika Madhyamika, the final school, would say that form exists merely dependent on the imputation of the mind, therefore form exists.

Basically, to understand the ultimate nature of form, feeling etc. is to understand that it is interdependent on the conventional reality which is the purpose of why you are meditating on the expertise as the object of your meditation.

How is this helpful for developing Samatha? It helps to purify the ignorance and the dull mind. Dullness is not just sleepiness; dullness is also the not knowing the reality of phenomena.

### (c) Expertise In The Sources

The twelve sources are: 6 objects ([visual] form, sound, odor, taste, touch and phenomena) and 6 cognitive powers (eye senses power to the mental senses power).

(c) The *sources* are the eye and the others of the twelve sources. Expertise in these, is knowing that the six internal sources are the dominant conditions for the six consciousnesses, that the six external sources are the object-conditions, and that the mind which has just ceased is the immediately preceding condition.

The way of meditation [on the twelve sources] is similar to earlier but the eighteen constituents and twelve sources are divided [different]. They almost sound the same but there is benefit in differentiating them. Like in the *Heart Sutra* from the five aggregates all the way to the eighteen constituents and the twelve sources, are all a meditational guide. Based on the *Heart Sutra* the direct meditation is on the ultimate nature of expertise. The indirect or hidden instruction is to meditate on the conventional interdependent reality of the expertise. Right now, we are doing the interdependent aspect of the meditation process.

### (d) Expertise in Dependent- Arising

*Dependent-arising* is the twelve factors. Expertise in them is knowing that they are impermanent, suffering and devoid of self.

The meditation in relation to the twelve links of origination are: (1) ignorance, (2) [formative] action, (3) consciousness, (4) name and form, (5) sources, (6) contact, (7) feeling, (8) craving, (9) grasping, (10) existence, (11) birth, (12) aging and death. Reflect on the actual nature of these twelve sources: their nature lies in impermanence, suffering and devoid of self. Also meditating on the interdependence arising. Because of *ignorance*, *karmic action* arises. Because of karmic actions, it plants a seed in the *consciousness*. Because of the karmic seed in the consciousness, then *name and form* comes about. Because of name and form, like the fetus having a name and form, the *sources* [come

about]. Because of the 6 sources, like eye, hearing etc. then contact to the different objects arises. Because of the *contact* to the different objects then *feeling* arises. For example if the feeling is [one of] liking then there is attachment, if disliking then there is aversion etc. Because of causes of feeling then *craving* arises. For example, if you like something you crave it. Then *grasping* arises. Because of that, there is another round of conception or *existence* or conception in the samsaric rebirth arises. Then *birth* again. Then there is *aging and death*. By knowing the interdependent arising of these twelve links helps us to renounce and detach from the twelve links. In short, it helps us to renounce from samsara existence, including delusion and karma and as a result, everything. So that's the benefit of the meditation and this is how you meditate.

Why we are not able to renounce right now, the arising of delusions, committing negative karma, renouncing the attachment to this life or to this body, is because we don't have a clear idea of the interdependent arising of the twelve links.

Even though we do not want to experience even the slightest form of suffering but without hesitation we constantly commit causes for suffering. This is because we have not habituated [with] the result of meditating on the interdependent arising of the twelve links.

In order to know the definition of the twelve links we first need to know the root cause; the ignorance. So if we don't know what ignorance is we won't understand exactly how ignorance brings about the committing of karma. Why don't we have a genuine aspiration towards liberation even though we don't like suffering? Even though we always complain that samsara is very difficult and you want to go to a better place etc. but we are just saying it for the sake of saying it. We don't really understand what we are saying. If we really mean it and we want to actualize liberation, if we really mean it that we don't like the samsaric existence then we need to meditate on the interdependent arising of the twelve links in the reverse way. This means that if ignorance is stopped, then the committing of karma will be stopped. Because the committing of karma has been stopped that interdependent arising will stop the consciousness, the mental imprint. Then that will stop the name and form. That will stop the source and contact. That will stop the feeling. That will stop the craving, the grasping, existing, birth, aging and death. Everything will be stopped. So you do not just meditate [on the twelve links] one way, you also need to meditate the reverse way in order to genuinely aspire for liberation.

Another way of reverse meditation on the interdependent arising is on the basis of our own interest that no one likes aging and death. Use that as the motivation and as the base. So, if I don't want death and aging I must stop birth. If I don't want birth I must stop existence.

If I must stop existence then I must stop grasping, then stop craving, feeling, contact, sources, name and form, consciousness, karma, ignorance. So, there's an interdependently negating result to the cause, all the way up to the root cause, the ignorance.

(e) Expertise in What Is And Is Not Possible

The fifth one is meditating on the actual karmic cause and effect.

*What is and is not possible* refers to such things as it being possible for a pleasant fruition to arise from a virtuous action, but not possible for a pleasant fruition to arise from a non-virtuous action. Expertise in this is knowing that things are this way.

This is to meditate on the general karmic law of cause and effect. An example used here is saying that all the wanting of true happiness and genuine goodness is by-product of virtues. None of the non- virtues will give fruition to pleasant or genuine happiness. All suffering, any forms of suffering are by- product of negative actions. None of your virtuous actions will give fruition to arise negative experiences. That is a fact and understanding that and reflecting on that is meditating on the karmic law of cause and effect.

Why one has sickness and why one's life is so short, is never the result of virtuous actions in the past and is definitely the result of non-virtues. At least at the gross level, figure out what are those non-virtues. Then apply the antidote to that. Cultivating, understanding and observing, that is the meditation. Like causing harm to others. Taking others' lives, causing pain to others and the result is a short life and sickness. What provides long life and good health is liberating others' lives and causing [things to be] pleasant to others' lives.

Why one experiences poverty; the poverty of happiness, health, wealth, is because of miserliness and stealing. Abundance comes from generosity, such as making offerings to the object of offerings and making charity to the needy ones. Understand that through the analysis of the karmic fact in analytical meditation. Then after knowing what causes produce what results, then settle your heart on that to deepen the imprint in your continuum. That is absorption meditation or single-pointed meditation.

This is a particular case of expertise in dependent-arising; the difference is that you understand the diverse causes.

This is so that you can bring about the eradication of results that are negative and if they are positive you can increase those results, like developing on the path, realizations etc. In this way, the meditation helps to clear ignorance and delusions and helps to gather wisdom and merits.

When you use these as objects of meditation for cultivating serenity, you keep your attention on just one of the perspectives in which the aggregates, etc. may be known.

For beginners, it is quite different from what we usually think. We usually think that for a beginner, we want a simple one but actually for a beginner we have to go through all the challenging paths. When we are already advanced then we can choose one dot and just focus on that. Until then we don't have enough conditions to really settle our heart on one single object to develop serenity because we have so many obstacles, delusions and distractions. In order to purify them, that's why there are different meditations that are beneficial to conduct.

Developing serenity is not as simple as we usually think. If it were simple there would be more practitioners who have already achieved Samatha than those who have not. Achieving Samatha is unbelievable and wonderful but we only have a few examples and that already shows us that it is not easy to achieve. But don't give up. As we know the first level of the nine stages of Samatha is to study, so we are still doing something. I am saying this to prepare you to go through slightly more headache.

#### (4) OBJECTS OF MEDITATION FOR PURIFYING AFFLICTIONS

Purifying afflictions means either merely reducing the strength of the seeds of the afflictions or else utterly eradicating the seeds. In the former case, the objects of meditation are the comparative coarseness of each lower stage and comparative calmness of each

higher stage, proceeding from the level of the desire realm up to the level of Nothingness (formless realm).

This is talking about the meditative concentration in relation to the desire realm, form realm and formless realm. How to progress along the meditative process from the desirous level up to the form level and the formless level? For the meditative stages, compared to the desire realm, form realm, the formless realm is much calmer. Compared to the form realm, the desire realm is much coarser. Comparing desire to form and form to formless realms, it is coarse to calmer or more peaceful. The meditator sees the coarseness of the desirous afflictions such as attachment to the five senses objects [in the desire realm] and aspires for the calmness of the formless realm's concentration which is free from the gross attachment to the five senses objects. Then you progress by strengthening your concentration and develop from the desire realm concentration to the form realm concentration level. In order to progress on the concentration to the form realm and then the formless realm, you see the coarseness. Even though in the form realm, there is no affliction or attachment to sensual objects but there is still attachment to the form. Having seen the calmness of detachment to the form you aspire to progress to the formless concentration. That is how the meditator progresses through the different stages of concentration from the three realms all the way up to the fourth level of concentration of the formless realm, which is Nothingness. That is mainly to reduce the strength of afflictions but this process won't be able to eradicate the seeds of affliction.

In order to eradicate the entire delusions and its seeds, you have to meditate on the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths, for us to achieve genuine cessation from entire afflictions, entire suffering, existence and the causes of the afflictions of the three realms.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

In the latter case, the objects of meditation are impermanence and the other of the sixteen aspects of the four noble truths. When you use these as objects of meditation for cultivating serenity, you do not analyze but instead keep your attention on any one cognition of an aspect of those objects that appears to it.

As example, first analyze and understand the four characteristics or aspects of the **truth of suffering**. Then focus either on all four or at least focus on one [aspect]. The first is impermanence. The truth of suffering has the characteristic of impermanence. So learn that the suffering that we experience; like the suffering of suffering, suffering of change and pervasive suffering, lies in the nature of impermanence. Through this learning you gain the wisdom of understanding, and you use that wisdom of understanding as your object of meditation where you simply focus on that to develop serenity. Until you go into a meditative session to develop serenity, you can analyze. But once you have chosen your object and gone into a meditative session or meditative equipoise, then you don't analyze. Instead, keep your attention on that one cognition of the aspect of that object that appears to you. It can be the first one, the second one, third one, all four, or all sixteen [aspects].

Without a genuine understanding of the four noble truths and not just understanding but realizing the four noble truths, we won't be able to overcome samsara. Therefore, first we need to learn and analyze the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths. After we gain a genuine understanding then we will have genuine renunciation for samsara and its causes and genuine aspiration to liberation and know exactly what the path to liberation is. Then you start to develop the serenity in order for the path to be the antidote to eradicate the defilements, samsara and its causes. To do that, you go back to choose either one aspect or three aspects or whatever amount of aspects you want to choose. Once you have chosen it you stay focused. Without analyzing, you stay focused while you are developing concentration.

The four aspects of the truth of suffering are (i) impermanence, (ii) misery and (iii) emptiness (iv) selflessness.

Unless we analyze and meditate on the suffering of samsara that we are in, we live in the hallucinated view of permanence. We don't reflect on the dependent arising of the twelve links that we have discussed earlier. Since we have this numbness of thinking that samsara is forever like that, we don't pursue liberation from it. So why we cannot gain any higher wisdom and realization in the path is because we have the mistaken view of grasping that impermanent is permanent; suffering as happiness; nature lies in emptiness but we have inherent view; nature lies in selflessness but we have the grasping of self. So, we need to meditate based on these four points. Samsara, which is your body, your five aggregates, your house, your car, everything that exists along with you, self and your five aggregates lies in the nature of impermanence. We need to understand and meditate on that. We need to understand that everything that we recognize is misery and have to meditate on it. Then we need to meditate on emptiness and that the entire samsara lies in the nature of

emptiness. The perceiver, the self as well as all phenomena lies in the selflessness. It's a very powerful object of meditation. It really purifies the root cause of suffering which are our afflictions.

Then, move on to meditate on the four aspects of the **causes of suffering**. The causes of suffering are karma and delusion. So, we have to understand and meditate that karma and delusions are the causes of samsara. The second one is origin – karma and delusions are the origin of our samsara and sufferings. The third one is strong production - karma and delusions are the very effective, and steady fruitful productions of the suffering in samsara. Karma and delusion do not just act as a seed but also plays a condition or complete fruition to suffering. These are the four aspects that we have to understand and meditate on.

Then, meditate on the four aspects of the **cessation [of suffering]**. First, we understood and we have conviction what suffering really is. We understood the entire aspect of samsara. We also understood where samsara comes from and the characteristics of the causes of samsara. Now it is whether or not we can overcome samsara by overcoming the causes of samsara. Then meditate on the cessation. First of all, we need to know what the benefit is and what the point of actualizing freedom is. The cessation has to be something better than samsara and karma otherwise why would you want to achieve cessation? The freedom from samsara, the freedom from its causes has the aspect of cessation. Cessation means the state in which you achieve by fully negating suffering and its causes. Then, pacification: [which is] the state where you completely pacify all the disturbances, the suffering and the causes and conditions of suffering. That's why cessation is also the state of pacification. The cessation also has the characteristic of auspiciousness, an abundance of qualities, which is free from negativities like suffering, delusions and negative conditions.

Is this cessation just a temporary cessation or is it not a genuine cessation? This cessation has the characteristics of definite, genuine, ultimate freedom from samsara and its causes. That's why it has the aspects of definite freedom. So you understand the freedom from suffering and its causes. It is cessation, it has the aspects of pacification, it has the aspects of auspiciousness, it has the aspects of definite freedom. Then you meditate on the conviction that you have gained in your understanding. You habituate. You meditate on it.

Then on how the cessation is achieved, you need to meditate on the four aspects on the **truth of the path**. First we need to know what the path is. The path is the wisdom that you actualize spontaneously through renouncing samsara. In short, the mind of renunciation is the path. This renunciation, this path has four aspects. First, it has the aspect of the path to the cessation. It has the characteristic of path. Then, it has the aspect of knowledge, like



selflessness and emptiness. The path is also consists of both wisdom and method. These are not just mere words; it is achievable to your continuum. That's why it has the aspect of achievement. Not only are we able to achieve it but it also has the aspect of deliverance which means that by actualizing the path it will not stop there, it will deliver the cessation. So this is the **object of meditation to purify afflictions**. If you meditate on that it will purify the afflictions obstacles to higher rebirths, genuine nirvana and the obstacles to omniscience. So, meditate like this.

In this way, the classic texts on achieving concentration explain that there are many objects of meditation. The purposes of these meditative bases for stabilizing your mind are as explained above, so you should gain expertise in them. Kamalasila's *Stages of Meditation* explains that the object of meditation of serenity is indeterminate.

There are many different objects of meditation as we have discussed [above] that you can use, for the development of serenity.

*Atisha's Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* says,

[It is] whatever object or objects of meditation that are appropriate.

You have to know what objects are appropriate for you and you use those objects. From the many objects we have discussed, you use whatever object that is most compatible to you.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

These statements mean that you are not required to stick with one particular object of meditation; they do not show how to define the range of existing objects of meditation.

*"They do not show how to define the range of existing objects of meditation"*, means whatever we have discussed before is a guideline but it is not just that. There can be many

other expanded objects of meditation that we can use to achieve the meditational purpose whether it is serenity or special insight.

For serenity, when you have already accomplished all the necessary preliminary conditions and are ready to go into a strict dedicated meditation to develop serenity then your chosen object cannot be changed. Until then, we have to use all different varieties of objects of meditation to purify our negative behavior and afflictions. We have to meditate on the objects of expertise in order to develop more wisdom and more steadiness in the understanding of the path. In fact for the beginner, it will be more beneficial to do all these [different of objects of meditation] so that when we go into the actual retreat it will be more effective for the practice.

All these different meditation objects are to sharpen our mind and purify the major obstacles like afflictions etc. By doing meditation on these varieties of objects of meditation, eventually we come to a point [when we will know] what object is the best object for one to develop one's own serenity. During this period, we have not chosen the meditational object for serenity yet. Even so, doing meditation on the earlier mentioned meditational objects are already helping us to get closer to developing serenity, so it is all helpful and is beneficial. Until we reach a certain stage, we may not be able to figure out what is the most beneficial object of meditation for serenity [for our self]. If we simply want to train in concentration right now, we can use something like the breathing or Buddha's image. Eventually, when we go through the process of meditation, there may be a lot of obstacles and difficulties. At that time, you may start to feel that the chosen object of meditation is not the correct one and you may start to change it. But this way will make our pursuit of serenity take a longer time. So instead of going [about it] this way, you can first do all the preparation and while doing the preparation, you will find the right object. Then you can directly go into a retreat for serenity and without taking much time, you will be in serenity.

There are many practitioners, scholars and meditators who use emptiness as their object of meditation for Samatha. By using emptiness as the object of meditation, it brings immense greater benefits because just by meditating on emptiness you accumulate extensive merit. It naturally helps to purify immense karma and it will also help to realize emptiness. While training in serenity you are also helping yourself to realize emptiness. After achieving serenity, without needing to pause for long, you can achieve special insight. You may even be able to achieve the path. You will have achieved so much merit by meditating on emptiness, you can travel through the path very swiftly. When you reach the path of seeing, the special insight becomes very effective.

So without meditating on the object of expertise as we have discussed before, we may not have a clear understanding on emptiness. No question about understanding the ultimate reality, we may even have a lot of obscurations to understanding the conventional reality. That's why meditating on the objects of expertise will help with both the conventional and ultimate phenomena.

That's why we should gather all these different objects of meditations into our day to day practice and along the way we will figure out. Maybe for one practitioner, the first four aspects of the truth of suffering may be the most compatible as their chosen object in their development of serenity. Or it could be emptiness or emptiness in the five aggregates or emptiness in the eighteen constituents or emptiness in the twelve sources or emptiness in the twelve links. For some people it could be the conventional aspect, the interdependent arising as their object of concentration. For other people it could be the selflessness of self or selflessness of the aggregates or selflessness of phenomena. Right now, like for myself, I don't know which one is most suitable for me because I haven't trained on these different meditational objects. If I want to take the easy way out, I could say that I don't want to focus on all these things. Instead, I just want to focus on Buddha's nose. It's easier but then along the path it may not be as easy as what you think now. There is benefit to do the rest of the meditations because it will help you to be well prepared. So that, halfway into the retreat you don't have to turn back. You will have a steady continuation of the retreat.

### **Homework**

Until the next class you can reflect on the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths, which is extremely important. The objects of expertise are easy because most of us recite the *Heart Sutra*. For those who don't know, it is good to know the different categories of phenomena because the entire existence is included there. So when we use these as our object of meditation either as the conventional aspect or ultimate aspect of nature, it helps us to gain greater benefit in the wisdom towards emptiness. Try to understand the individual aspects of the Four Noble Truths and then do some analytical meditation by giving reasons for example like why samsara is impermanent and why do I have a permanent hallucination of samsara? Examine like that and once you gain a certain confirmation of understanding then try to establish a strong imprint in your mental continuum by doing some absorption meditation.

To summarise, we must understand the samsara or the suffering from these four aspects. The cause of suffering has to be purified. Why? Through understanding the four aspects. The cessation is to be actualized and to be achieved. Why? Because of the quality of the four aspects as a cessation is to be achieved. Therefore you need to actualize the path. Why? How? What path? The four aspects tell us what is the path, how and why.

In short we have to develop these four points:

- 1) must recognize suffering,
- 2) must purify the cause,
- 3) cessation is definitely achievable and
- 4) will achieve it by engaging in the path.

7 June 2020, Session: 10

Who should meditate on which objects

## A. A GENERAL PRESENTATION OF OBJECTS OF MEDITATION

This has three sections:

- (a) The objects of meditation themselves
- (b) Who should meditate on which objects**
- (c) Synonyms of the object of meditation

### (b) WHO SHOULD MEDITATE ON WHICH OBJECTS

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 39]

There are many different objects of meditation that we have discussed before such as the five general meditational objects and the four different objects of meditations on expertise. Here, we discussed what kind of people and who should meditate on what kind of object. So, when we discuss this you should [at the same time] look into yourself what kind of meditator you are. In other words, what kind of meditator I should be by choosing what kind of meditational objects in order for me to achieve serenity and special insight. Just to clarify, whatever meditational techniques or whatever objects we discussed before are all beneficial in order to develop serenity, Samatha.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

As there are various kinds of people, from those with a preponderance of attachment to those with a preponderance of discursiveness...

*Preponderance of attachment* has two different kinds:

- i) Heavy influence of desirous karmic actions of past life time that already has a fruitful seed in our mental continuum. Then in this life, extensive engagement in the act of attachment through our body, speech and mind such as always arising desirous grasping and always speak infused by a desirous mind and always physically act infused by a desirous mind. Here, attachment is not necessarily referring to sexual attachment but

here it is the attachment grasping towards your identity, your aggregates like your physical body or material objects and samsaric concerns. Another way to understand this is no renunciation towards samsara and its causes at all, completely stuck in the heavy mud. This is a very intense level.

Another preponderance of attachment is the second level.

- ii) This level does not overwhelmingly have the attachment of grasping but then whenever our five senses meet the conditions of attachment and grasping then grasping arises. It's not frequent but still not completely free from it.

#### *Preponderance of Discursiveness*

- i) [The first kind] is very much talking about a fickle unstable mind and in the serious [case], one is completely out of control. There are people whose mental state is absolutely out of control. It's like uncontrollably sad even though don't wish to be sad; or uncontrollably getting angry even though don't wish to be angry and uncontrollably arises desire etc. And again, these are very much a result of past lifetime when one has already completed the karma and in this life manifests the full result - that is the serious ones.
- ii) The second category of such people is basically where the mind cannot sit still. Whenever we want to focus on something our mind chooses go the other way. This is again similar like before, when you meet the conditions, then your mind tends to sway. But where you want to focus [becomes] the opposite condition, it has the reverse effect. The moment you want to concentrate on this is the moment your mind starts to wander the other way round. That's why for some people the moment they start to do their sadhana, that's the best time they start to do business plans and all the worldly plans become very clear. This is related to attachment and ignorance. So, those who easily get attached, easily get angry or easily get distracted then we need to know that this is due to past life karmic impact and we have to do meditation on the object of antidote towards that.

Without clearing all these inconvenient mind even when we meditate on Samatha, we won't be able to achieve Samatha. In short, a very grasping attached person cannot achieve Samatha; someone who is always getting angry [will find it] difficult to achieve Samatha and someone who is completely dull cannot achieve Samatha. Someone who is absolutely scattered and out of control also cannot achieve Samatha. So, it is not as simple as what we

usually think; to simply choose an object, focus and we will reach to Samatha. It's not possible.

How to solve these obstacles?

*Asanga's Sravaka Levels* cites an answer to a question of Revata:

Revata, if attachment uniquely dominates the behavior of a monk-yogi, a practitioner of yoga, then he focuses his mind on the object of meditational of ugliness.

We have discussed before the thirty-six different aspects of ugliness that you can meditate on. Start with the meditation on your skeleton, the basis of yourself the aggregates in order to overcome attachment. This is not just the self, the basis of the body and aggregates but also we have to meditate on the false characteristic of things that we are attached to like a beautiful cup. You meditate on the characteristic of impermanence of this cup etc.

If hatred dominates his behavior, he meditates on love; if ignorance dominates his behavior, then he meditates on the dependent-arising of this condition; if pride dominates his behavior, he focuses his mind on the differentiation of the constituents. If discursiveness uniquely dominates his behavior, then he focuses his mind on an awareness of the exhalation and inhalation of the breath. In this way, he focuses his mind on an appropriate object of meditation.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

Thus, you certainly should work with these objects of meditation. If you are a person whose behavior is balanced (from negative emotions), or one whose afflictions are slight, then it suffices to keep your attention on whichever of the aforementioned objects of meditation you like; it is not necessary to have a particular one.

In short, this means that you have to know yourself well and your mind well. If you realize that you have whatever the limitations that we have discussed in relation to those faults like delusion and attachment then you have to choose a specific object of meditation, in order to get rid of those obstacles and in order for you to qualify to be able to progress in Samatha. But if you know that you don't have all these obstacles or that you have only slight ones then you don't have to choose such specific objects. You can choose your own object that you like and use that as your object of meditation and then move on to developing serenity. To support that, Asanga's *Sravaka Levels* states:

Those whose behavior is balanced should work at whichever object they like so as to attain just mental stability; this is not for the purpose of purifying behavior. Understand that the same applies to those with slight afflictions.

Then Asanga continued to answer Revata's similar question:

Revata, if a monk-yogi, a practitioner of yoga, is confused about the characteristic nature of all composite things, or confused about the thing called person, self, living being, life, that which is reborn, or the nourisher, he should focus his mind on the objects of meditation for expertise in the aggregates.

Our objective is not just to know many things but our ultimate objective is to know the absolute reality of all those things. And in order to know that, we need to know the conventional varieties of phenomena. If we are ignorant of that then we don't have the basis where we can know the absolute truth. So for that reason, those who are ignorant of the differences of conventional phenomena should then meditate on the expertise in the aggregates.

If he is confused about causes, he should focus on the objects of meditation for expertise in the constituents.



So, if we don't know what is the production of what and if we are confused in that then we would not know the accumulation of right causes for right results. This is one ignorance that sentient beings have. Even though we long for happiness, but we blindly commit the causes of suffering negativities. So, it is important to know about the cause. For that, then we should meditate on the constituents. Earlier we discussed about the *preponderance of attachment* that has fruitional influence from our past life and conditional influence from the present [life] that define the very intense and very light ones. So in order for us to go and trace what are the kinds of causes then we learn how through dependent arising in relation to the constituents. From there using that as an example, we need to understand the causes and we can trace what kind of fruitful causes bring about what kind of fruitful results. Not just the cause but the conditions. The causes are not completely completed. In order to produce the results, it requires the dependent arising of conditions. In order to understand how the conditions affect the arising of fruition of the results, then one should meditate on the twelve sources.

If he is confused about conditions, he should focus on the objects of meditation for expertise in the sources. If he is confused about impermanence, suffering, and selflessness, he should focus on the objects of meditation for expertise in dependent-arising, and on what is and is not possible.

Meditate on the twelve links of dependent- arising, the wheel of life, and "*on what is and is not possible*" which is the direct meditation on how the ignorance brings about the creation of karma then establishing consciousness [and so forth ] and then meditate on the reverse way [of the twelve links] to help us understand the ultimate nature. By focusing on dependent arising for example on the twelve links it helps the meditator to gain the wisdom of emptiness or selflessness.

Then, Lama Tsongkhapa says,

Which persons should focus their minds on objects of meditation for dispelling afflictions is also stated in the same sutra [answering the questions of Revata]:

If you wish to be free from the attachment of the desire realm, focus your mind on the coarseness of the desire realm and the calmness of the form realm; if you wish to be free from the attachment of the form realm, focus your mind on the coarseness of the form realm and the calmness of the formless realm.

Basically, from the three realms (lower to higher realms) see the coarseness of the concentration of the lower realms and calmness of higher realms and then you develop from the lower concentration to the higher concentration.

If you wish to become disenchanted with all of the perishing aggregates, and wish to be free from them, then focus your mind on the truth of suffering, the truth of origins, the truth of cessation, and the truth of the path.

So, if you wish to be free from the entire ocean of samsara, then we have to meditate on Four Noble Truths. The meditation on the Four Noble Truths is meditating on the sixteen aspects of Four Noble Truths as we detailed it in the last class. One by one reflecting on those meanings and on the self, this samsaric person “me” and in that way you develop genuine renunciation towards samsara and its causes, and a genuine conviction to liberation, like liberation is definitely possible. Right now, if someone should corner you and ask, “Is liberation really, really definitely achievable?” You may answer “Ya,... many text says so....That’s why I believe it.” but you don’t have the depth or guts to say, “Yes. Definitely. 100%. No doubt.” If you check carefully we are not in that position. In order to develop that position, then you have to meditate on the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths. It will help to develop [that position] and not only that but it will also help us to gain the conviction that bodhicitta is definitely possible, emptiness wisdom is definitely possible and Buddhahood is definitely possible. Otherwise, right now we are just floating. Someone gives you a big slap and you may say, “Maybe no liberation, no cessation.

We always say that we must have renunciation, (three principals of the path). The genuine sense of renunciation towards samsara and its causes will be developed in our heart by meditating on the 8 aspects of the first 2 truths (truth of suffering and truth of causes of suffering). Then we also say that we want to practice Dharma because we want to achieve Buddhahood and liberation. But that Buddhahood and that liberation are because the

teacher says so, the text says so. But if we deeply ask our self, "Are you sure?" We will say,"emmm..." We don't have that 100% confirmation [conviction in our hearts] with an inner reasoning. Right now we are depending on external reasons. In order to gain the inner reason [conviction], then we have to reflect on the eight aspects of the cessation and the path. This is the reason why we need to meditate on this.

The meditation on the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths is internally establishing reasons to yourself on why we need to purify samsara and delusional karma and why it is definitely achievable for liberation and development on the path.

Otherwise we may meet a lot of obstacles in the learning of Dharma and in pursuit of the Path. In good times, Dharma sounds good, Dharma feels good. But in bad times, even after practicing for so long, suddenly, huge obstacles may come your way such as sickness, death to you or loved ones, and then you ask "How come? I have been practicing Dharma for so long, why does this thing come my way?" Then you may think Dharma is not benefitting you and you may give up. Many people do give up like that.

The real sign of a genuinely established mind of renunciation with reasoning within yourself and genuine conviction on liberation and the path within yourself is when you do any practices, whenever you experience failure, you get even more intense in renunciation; you get even more inspiration towards liberation; you get more enthusiastic in the practice of the Dharma. That is a good sign. The moment that failure happens in the practice and you start to get distracted, that is the sign that your internal reasoning is not strong.

Being in samsara, we are already in a danger zone, and stepping on "atomic bombs", yet although we are Dharma practitioners when we suddenly find our self or loved ones getting sick then it is like one "atomic bomb" just exploded. But it's definitely going to explode because we are already stepping on it. And when the doctor says you are going to die tomorrow, in that kind of circumstances, if your conviction in liberation, your conviction in the path, your renunciation of samsara can get even more stronger, more diligent then that is the [sign] of success. If you go the other way, then it means you don't have inner strength of renunciation, no inner strength of liberation. So, the meditation on the Four Noble Truths or even just the understanding of the teaching on the Four Noble Truths serves as a foundation to all the spiritual progress and practices. When it comes to realization, renunciation, bodhicitta and emptiness, the Four Noble Truths is a must to meditate on. Sometime we often have this question, "Why bad thing happen to good people?", "Why butchers have a longer life and why someone doing a lot of [animal] liberation has a shorter life?" This is not always the case and this is only one or two cases but people [generalize]

and conclude it as that. In actual fact, it's the other way round. But when you start to have that kind of question and you don't have an answer, it means you don't have a proper foundation on the Four Noble Truths based on the 16 aspects. If you have a solid base [of understanding] the Four Noble Truths you would have an answer for that. Basically, you have an answer for almost everything. Why samsara is to be abandoned, why liberation is to be achieved. You almost have an answer to everything.

So, serenity is a long journey and it requires immense, immense preparation, discipline, diligence, effort and consistency. If you don't have a genuine renunciation towards samsara and its causes and a genuine aspiration for liberation out of it, then Samatha is not achievable.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

You can use these objects of meditation both for analytical meditation with insight and for stabilizing meditation with serenity, so they are not exclusively objects of meditation for serenity.

This [statement] "*they are not exclusively objects of meditation for serenity*" means that if you don't have attachment, don't have anger, heavy ignorance, or a finicky mind then these [objects of meditation] are not necessary. You can directly use Buddha's face, focus on that and serenity is possible. Otherwise all these are needed [as objects of meditation for serenity].

If someone is already 80% ready, then you can use these objects of meditation mainly for special insight and Vipassana. But for beginners like me, all the meditational objects mentioned earlier are a must [as objects of meditation for serenity]. Without them, no way I can develop any concentration. Whatever objects I choose to focus on, my mind will not be capable.

The meditational objects mentioned earlier are also objects of meditation *after* you have achieved serenity. These are the objects you meditate along the five paths and along the ten *bhumis*. That you can clearly see from the *Heart Sutra* teaching, meditation on the five aggregates, all the way up to the twelve links, samsara and nirvana (*no attainment, no non-attainment etc.*). These are all talking about the Four Noble Truths. All these are divided as objects of meditation on the five paths and ten *bhumis*. Let's say, "form is empty ...

consciousness is empty,” this section teaches the object of meditation on the path of accumulation and path of preparation. Whatever the object we mentioned, it is not just to simply gather more confusion on the objects of meditation but these are the varieties of objects of meditation you will use along the path.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

Still, since some serve as objects of meditation for newly achieving serenity and others are used for special purposes after attaining serenity,

### **Homework**

Until next class, try to go through today’s teaching in particular recognizing the your limitations - which afflictions [limit you]. Then try to apply the antidote of this particular meditation to overcome and reduce it. On top of that, specifically whether you have limitations or not, everybody is to do meditation on the sixteen aspects of the Four Noble Truths and try to internally, without depending on the texts or depending on someone saying so or Buddha saying so but internally within yourself, using common sense, or using your own life reasoning in relation to your family, ancestors and whatever ups and down of samsara, establish an internal reason on why I need to renounce samsara, why I need to renounce karma and why I need to renounce the delusions (three poisons of attachment, anger and ignorance). Then genuinely gain a conviction, that liberation and full enlightenment is a 100%, 1000% definitely there. Not only that, it is definitely achievable because there is a path.

Then, have a genuine conviction that the method and wisdom is absolutely there, again by reflecting on the four aspects of each of the Four Noble Truths. For example: the four aspects of truth of suffering are impermanence, suffering, selfless, emptiness. So for *impermanence*, you start to meditate from gross impermanence to the subtle. Gross impermanence is like the weather (yesterday to today), our young age to now old age, our ancestors who used to be with us are no more. Then, that leads us to meditate on the momentary changes until [such] that for anything in the present moment, there is nothing left to be attached and to grasp [onto] because the changes goes beyond remaining or staying - so what is the point to be attached. By nature it does not remain, be it your body, your identity or your loved ones or object of anger, everything. This helps to develop

detachment. This includes your bank balance. Nothing is to be attached. You may have earned a big bank balance but the reality is that karma lies in the nature of impermanence. You may have had the karma previously to have a big bank balance but right at this moment [due] to the process of impermanence you may not have the karma to have a bank balance or to enjoy it. Or you already have fluctuated your karma into abundance of merits that whatever amount that you have, just increases due to the new karma that may come your way but in the third moment it may disappear. Basically yes, there is health, life, bank balance and roof on your head but there is nothing to hold on to, nothing to be attached to. One of the basic natures lies in the impermanence. Impermanence is not just on the object side but also needs to be defined from the subject side. And that comes from our karma, the fluctuation of our karma and the movement of the karma from moment to moment. And that happens because of meeting the conditions. Previously, you may have had a wonderful karma but if you let yourself meet the wrong conditions, then the previous karma in the consequential time is totally different and at a different pace of completing the karma. That's why nothing is to be attached. The best is to do the right thing in the present moment without attaching to anything. Because we have very thick permanent grasping we never have chance to enjoy our precious human rebirth in the present moment with full of virtue, full of peace and settled. Even though from time to time we get a kind of reminder such as our loved one without expecting just finish [or pass away], our bank balance and [shares in the stock market] without expecting it to do so, just disappear. This is because our mind is fully occupied with the future permanent grasping to past event and thoughts. At the present moment we have no chance to enjoy the precious human rebirth with virtue, with peace and with happiness. These are the meaning and characteristics of samsara.

Then reflect on the second characteristic [of the truth of suffering], which is *suffering*: first you reflect on the suffering of pain. So, if you have some stomach pain or if you think you have no pain then you just pinch or slap yourself. The basis of samsara is suffering. After that reflect on the more advance suffering of change and follow by meditation on the pervasive suffering. Then you will understand why it is called the truth of suffering. Why? It is because of the contamination, the pervasive suffering, the suffering of change, the suffering of suffering. Then you realize so vividly about samsara.

Then meditate on the *selfless* nature of suffering. There is no inherent samsara, no self independent samsara. Start with the object of self, the "I" and after that you meditate on the aggregates, your house, your car and rest of the other things.

Then meditate on the fourth aspect, which is *emptiness*. The empty of the self; empty of inherent; empty of permanent etc. then move on to the aggregates and to the rest of the phenomena.

The earlier two aspects is very much focusing on the interdependent conventional reality of suffering. The latter two is very much about meditating on the ultimate reality of the suffering.

So do that with all the Four Noble Truths

The end result of this is that we must gain genuine renunciation and genuine conviction in liberation. That is the result you have to achieve. How well you have meditated, you can check [by] how well the two results are achieved within you.

## 1. IDENTIFYING THE OBJECT OF MEDITATION UPON WHICH YOUR ATTENTION IS SET

This has two parts:

- A. A general presentation of objects of meditation
- B. Identifying objects of meditation for this context**

## B. IDENTIFYING OBJECTS OF MEDITATION FOR THIS CONTEXT

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 42]

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

Now, from among the many objects of meditation I have explained, on which object of meditation should you base yourself so as to achieve serenity? As stated in the sutra passage cited above, there is no single, definite object; individuals require their particular object of meditation. Specifically, if you are determined to achieve serenity at the least, and if your behavior is dominated by attachment or another affliction, then you need to use a certain type of object of meditation. For if you do not, then you may attain a concentration that approximates serenity, but you will not attain actual serenity. It is said that even if you train with an object of meditation for purifying behavior, you will not achieve serenity unless you do so for a very long time, so how could you ever achieve it by rejecting objects of meditation for purifying behavior? In particular, if you have a predominance of discursiveness, then you definitely have to meditate on the breath.

If you are a person of balanced behavior or a person with slight afflictions, then, as explained before, make your meditative base whichever of the objects of meditation explained above most appeals to you.



We have discussed a variety of objects of meditation before. Now, the question that Lama Tsongkhapa asked here and we have to ask ourselves, is what kind of meditation object we should use? There are many who, from the very beginning at the preliminary stage try to choose one single object to train in Samatha. Although it is possible for certain people to do so but this is not suitable for everybody. If your objective is to achieve Samatha but your mind is predominated by delusions and wrong behaviors, then if you directly choose one single object to focus on from the beginning, you will not be able to achieve serenity. You may be able to achieve a certain level of focus but you will not be able to achieve the actual Samatha. If, after questioning yourself you realize that you are dominated by afflictions, then you should use the object that is recommended to purify the afflictions [in order] to develop your serenity. If someone has slight afflictions then they can choose whatever object they like. Otherwise, you have to choose the specific object of meditation in relation to your own capability by understanding what kind of obstacle is there in order to eradicate it. So, at the beginning we need to choose those objects accordingly.

If you were to ask yourself, from the beginning when you gain interest in developing Samatha until you develop Samatha – do I need to stick with one object of meditation or do I have many different objects of meditation? The answer is that you will have many objects of meditation if you are a beginner. When you are a beginner you will have many objects of meditation in the process of developing Samatha. But to clarify, the many objects of meditation are used at the preliminary stage. As you start to travel through the nine stages of the Samatha mind, from the first, second and third stages, you can still have a variety of objects depending on how heavy the obstacles that you have. Eventually, we will start to train in one single object. [But] that is only after you have purified the major obstacles like attachment, distraction, discursiveness etc. After purifying the very gross and heavy obstacles, then only you choose one single object [of meditation] to accomplish up to the ninth stage of Samatha. So, like what Lama Tsongkhapa just said, “*If your behavior is dominated by attachment or another affliction, then you need to use a certain type of object of meditation. For if you do not, then you may attain a concentration that approximates serenity, but you will not attain actual serenity.*”

If you know that you have strong desire, attachment or anger and if you don't work it out first and just try to focus on something like Buddha's image to attain serenity, you have to meditate for a very long time to achieve the effect. Rather if, at the preliminary level you do meditation to purify those obstacles first then choose a single object to develop Samatha, then it will be very efficient and effective. Like most of the Samatha retreat meditators who say they can attain Samatha in six months, this is because they have already worked out the

gross obstacles. Then the moment they go into their retreat, they can achieve Samatha in six months. Otherwise, it is not possible.

*“If you are person of balanced behavior”* [that is without] any heavy strong past karmic delusional imprints that has come to fruition. The balanced behavior [here] is someone who is slightly impacted by delusions, which has not come into fruition. The delusion has not been purified yet, and [carries] a very weak seed. [However], when they meet with the conditions like objects of attachment or anger, they don't generate an overwhelming or spontaneous arising of attachment or anger. They are still able to stay in control of their mindfulness. Those kinds of practitioners who have a balanced behavior don't have to choose different objects of meditation as mentioned before. They can choose whatever objects they like and to train in serenity and can achieve serenity quickly.

How to check if you are in the category of a balanced behavior practitioner? The moment you come into contact with the condition of attachment or see the object of attachment, before the attachment arises, the moment you see the condition of attachment, you remember the antidote. You remember the faults of attachment and you can detach before you express the attachment. That is the sign.

So when you encounter the object of anger such as your enemy, before anger arises, you occupy your heart with the antidote, the disadvantages of anger arising in relation to that object. Your heart arises into the antidote. That is the sign that our behavior is balanced.

Before expressing impatience, if impatience is just showing a sign in our mental continuum in relation to our job or any situation then immediately instead of expressing the impatience fully, you are able to subdue your heart with the antidote of impatience in your heart. That is another example of a sign of a balanced practitioner.

Another way of checking if you are a balanced practitioner is whenever the mind of excitement or distraction shows [up], it is immediately hijacked by mindfulness and introspection that can bring the mind back from wandering. If you are unable to do that and your mind is scattered then you need to do massive training like meditation on breathing exercises. Whenever the sign of lethargy or laxity arises, instead of falling into the trap, your mindfulness and introspection is able to bring the mind back and [therefore,] you don't fall into lethargy or laxity, then that is a sign of balanced behavior. So for such a person, the delusions are not purified yet, the excitement and laxity are also not purified yet. You [still] have the gross aspects of the delusions but you already have domination and the capability to suppress or avoid them. For that kind of practitioner, you can choose any

object to develop serenity and able to progress consistently to achieve the ninth level of Samatha.

During the nine stages of the Samatha development, from the first stage up to even the seventh stage, you will still have laxity, excitement and afflictions coming in but you will not fall prey into that and you are able to bring your mind back to focus. Your actual development of Samatha, consistently without having long gaps starts from when you are in the category of balanced behavior. Before that [can happen], you have to use all the different recommended meditation objects because you have all the different faults and you have to purify them using the different objects of meditation. That's the teaching.

Let's say you are now in the category of balanced behavior and ready to start the journey to the actual development of Samatha, then in the *King of Concentrations Sutra*, it says,

... you achieve concentration by focusing on the body of the Tathagata. Also, the master Bodhibhadra explains a multitude [of objects].

So the coming recommendations are for those who are already in the state of balanced behavior. Then you can choose such objects to develop serenity.

The master Bodhibhadra says that,

Here, serenity is twofold: that attained by looking inward and that [based on] an object of meditation viewed outwardly.

So, there is focusing on the external object and focusing on the internal image of the mind.

Of those, looking inward is twofold: focusing on the body and focusing on what is based on the body.

So [the first is] focusing on just the body itself without focusing on the characteristics of the body. The second one is focusing on the characteristics of the body.

[When focusing on the body itself], the body [here] can be Buddha's holy body or can be your own ordinary samsaric body. When focusing on the characteristics of Buddha's body, then you focus on his major and minor marks. If you are focusing on the characteristics of the ordinary body, then you focus on the skeleton, the ugliness or the four aspects of the truth of suffering onto your body. [For Buddha's body, you focus on] either all eighty minor and thirty-two major marks or just one mark, like the mark on the crown or forehead. If you are focusing on the characteristics of an ordinary body then just one characteristic like the impermanent nature of one's body or focusing on all four aspects.

For someone who is ready to engage in an intensive retreat, you have to focus on one single object. When talking about a 'single' object it is not talking about one object. 'Single' here is whatever the amount of objects you choose, then that 'single' object has to be the object of your Samatha meditation from this moment onwards until you achieve it [Samatha]. That 'single' should not be misunderstood as one object and that 'single object' can include the entire eighty minor and thirty-two major marks [of a Buddha]. If you choose to do that, then that will be your focus. Or 'single' could be just only one object but it has to be a 'single' object. Now here we are talking about a balanced practitioner who is qualified and ready to go into a retreat and your target is to achieve Samatha in six months. [Therefore,], you have no more major obstacles. The point here then is that you have to focus on a 'single' object but that 'single' does not mean it is one object only. There can be many inside [that single object.] It depends on the amount that you want to choose [to focus on]. You have to make a decision [before you begin your Samatha meditation retreat].

Of those, focusing on the body is threefold: focusing on the body itself in the aspect of a deity; focusing on ugliness, such as skeletons; and focusing on special insignia, such as a *khatvanga*.

#### FOCUSING ON THE BODY ITSELF IN THE ASPECT OF A DEITY

If you want to use your ordinary body then you can focus your body in the [aspect of a] deity. Especially if you practice Highest Yoga Tantra then it is very beneficial and effective if you use the divine pride. Whatever body that you have, visualize the deity or the mental conviction of yourself as a deity and use that as the object of your serenity. Focus on that.

Many Highest Yoga Tantric practitioners, yogis, prefer to develop Samatha using their daily yoga practice, either in the front-generation or self-generation. Mostly, they use the self-

generation because that is the essence of deity yoga. Since receiving initiation you will have already been training on visualizing your ordinary body, speech and mind completely into an absolute arising as the deity. You have already trained on the basic focus of that. So then the moment you are ready to do the retreat, for your entire session, the object of your serenity, the object of your meditation is that deity's image, the appearance into your mind. Just the appearance of your entire self, being Vajrayogini, Yamantaka, Chenrezig or Tara or whatever deity you choose to focus on, is very beneficial because it achieves the benefit of serenity and also it achieves the benefit of highest tantric deity yoga.

Slightly easier and also most beneficial is using the divine pride itself, the awareness of the oneness of the deity, guru and your own absolute nature. That divine pride is like: "I am the deity Tara" or whatever [deity]. Then you develop concentration, Samatha, on that basis. For deity yoga practitioners, that is one of the most powerful objects of the meditation.

That is the essence of guru yoga and the essence of deity yoga. Just having that in your mental image or mental awareness is the most powerful antidote to purify impurities and the most powerful tool to develop the swiftest path to enlightenment. If you are familiar with this practice then if you use this it will be most beneficial.

So for deity yoga practitioners, you can start to train yourself from now, in every activity, to have divine pride because it is in fact a commitment to have divine pride, all the time, in relation to every awareness when coming into contact with anything. It would be very helpful for us to be prepared and serious about the practice now. Then when we have dedicated time like six months to go into Samatha retreat, you use this divine pride as the object of your meditation to develop Samatha.

[To clarify], here we are talking about the ordinary person using these varieties of objects of meditation. That is why [in the text], it says, "*focusing on the body itself in the aspect of a deity*". From that word you can understand, it is from that ordinary body focusing on a visualized deity. It is not talking about the front generation, the actual deity. Of course, the front generation [deity] is also one of the objects of meditation that you can use.

## FOCUSING ON UGLINESS

Focusing on ugliness is like using the skeleton aspect of your ordinary body as the object of your meditation, with the motivation of choosing this object to purify these contaminated aggregates and also to actualize all the higher wisdoms, like the wisdom of impermanence,

wisdom of selflessness etc. For this purpose then, you use the skeleton as the object of your Samatha concentration and meditation.

#### FOCUSING ON SPECIAL INSIGNIA

Also, we can focus on a special insignia like the *khatvanga*, the deity's staff or the Buddha's staff like the begging bowl, or for Medicine Buddha, it could be the healing medicine plant etc. Different Buddhas carry different kind of staffs. In relation to Arhats, Bodhisattvas or Pandits, they all carry different staffs. As an example, Lama Atisha carries the Kadampa stupa. So you can also use one of these objects as your object of concentration. Using the deities' insignia, the marks or signs like the Vajrayogini *khatvanga*, have immense benefit of purifying and receiving blessings, so you can use any of these objects as your object of meditation.

Focusing on what is based on the body is fivefold: focusing on the breath, focusing on subtle divine insignia, focusing on the drops, focusing on the aspects of light rays, and focusing on delight and bliss.

*Focusing on the breath* here is talking about the subtle winds. When you practice Highest Yoga Tantra there is usage of the subtle wind practice.

*Focusing on subtle divine insignia* is focusing on the different channels that are the representation of different deities of the families, like vajra etc. Or you can use the deities' substances, the syllables on the chakras. You can use one of them as your object of concentration.

*Focusing on the drops* can be downwards and also upwards. Downwards, you focus from the crown to the tip of the vajra or lotus. From down to upwards, the crown, there is great bliss, greatest bliss etc. There are four bliss down and four bliss up. Simply using that as your object of concentration you can also use that to achieve Samatha with the deity yoga practice.

*Focusing on the aspects of light rays* are the deities' wisdom light rays. You can just use that as an object also. Before going into meditation you have already established the front

generation on the altar or on the space [in front of you] with the Buddha or the deity. Then light rays come out from Buddha and touch you. That activity of the light rays touching you is the object of your meditation. Some meditators visualize the deity of Buddha on their crown emanating light rays to numberless sentient beings, purifying and abiding them in the state of Buddhahood. Or you can visualize yourself arising as a Buddha or the deity and emanating lights to all sentient beings, purifying them and abiding them in the state of Buddhahood. So that entire amount of activity that you visualize simply just touching the light and then purifying the suffering; you can use (just that amount of activity) as your object of concentration or meditation.

*Focusing on delight and bliss* [is where] the bliss can be voidness of impurities, voidness of ordinairiness and you are in the deity's divine form, which is in the state of absoluteness. So you use that as your object of concentration.

Serenity based on an object of meditation (in the deity yoga) viewed outwardly is twofold: special and common. Of those, the special is twofold: focusing on a deity's body and focusing on a deity's speech.

[Here], the common one is using a general Buddha's image. The uncommon or special one is to do daily guru yoga practice. That is focusing either on the self-generated deity or the front-generated deity. The self or front-generated deity's speech here is referring to mantras.

As far as the physical body is concerned, we have already discussed this. For the speech or the mantras, if it is to do with the self-generation, then you place the mantra garland around the heart chakra. The seed syllable is in the center, surrounded by the rest of the mantra garland. The mental recitation is reading the mantra, the mind recognizing the mantra or simply focusing on one seed syllable. You use this to train your concentration.

There are two ways: one is where you are watching the mantra and recognizing the syllables. Another way is where the mantra is appearing, reflecting, or like a light shining towards you and you perceive it in that way and you train your concentration on that. Mantra wise, it is best and most beneficial to visualize the Sanskrit word or at least the Tibetan word. But you can also recognize the mantra in the form of light. For example, if you know how to chant *Om Mani Padme Hum* and you know how to read it in English or Chinese, then you can see the mantra in the form of light. Especially in *Om Mani Padme*

*Hum*, each mantra is with different lights so you can recognize that light as white 'Om', red 'Ma', like that. So you can have that image, that mental picture.

Or before you get into the actual session then you can recite the mantra, for example, *Om Mani Padme Hum* and you have heard the mantra and you have the mental imprint from hearing it. The letters are not the object but it's the sound. You can then go into the session and stay focused on the sound of *Om Mani Padme Hum*. It is like constantly hearing, *Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum, Om Mani Padme Hum* etc. without losing the vivid clarity and steady focus on that *Om Mani Padme Hum* in your memory, in your mind. It can be even a tune or rhythm that really stays deep in your mind and also the moment you hear it, it soothes and calms you and naturally affects both your mind and body towards mental pliancy. It's most beneficial and makes you focus so easily. That is why now we have to search again and again, trying many different objects, to find which one suits you the most. One you find it, grab it and go into retreat. Then in six months' time, you can achieve Samatha.

Whatever object you want to use, it is good for it to be infused by deep inspiration. Then it is easy to remember and easy to feel delight so that whenever you go into the session, it is with full force. That is why let's say if you choose to use Buddha's image or a deity's image in relation to deity yoga, you know by thinking even for one moment of the mantra there is so much merit and so much purification. [So much so that] even before you go into the session you already feel so good. Due to that it leads to physical and mental pliancy even at the beginning when you start to concentrate and do meditation on Samatha. Even from the very beginning your body and mind already start to experience pliancy; not the extensive one but already starting to experience pliancy.

If you want to do in relation to the front generation, then before going into the session, you visualize the front generation deity either in your thangka or whatever. Then organize the mantra garland and place it around the deity's heart. [For example], let's say it is, *Om Mani Padme Hum*, and then you visualize the seed syllable 'Hrih' in the center surrounded by *Om Mani Padme Hum*. Then the mantra garland, either in the form of light, directly reaches to you the self-generated deity Chenrezig around the heart or the mantra is being in action so the mantra garland is like a rosary rolling. From the deity's mouth the mantra garland comes to your mouth and from your heart, it goes to the deity's heart and it goes around like that. So you just focus on that activity. It's regarded as immense purification of our impure being and establishes immense meritorious karma to actualize deity-hood.



The special meditation on the deity is for those who have already [received] Highest Yoga Tantric initiation and practices. The common practice on the deity of the Buddha that anybody can do is those in relation to Shakyamuni Buddha, Medicine Buddha or Tara, in relation to [their] mantras, in relation to using their staffs and physical body [can be used] as the object of meditation. Examples of the staffs are Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's begging bowl or yellow robes and Medicine Buddha's healing nectar bowl, healing medicine etc.

Most of the visualization practices mentioned above, [apart from] wind, drops, bliss, self-generation and front-generation of deity can be done by anyone. For the mantra visualizations done with the arising of the deity [explained above], you can only do that if you have taken initiation. However, if without taking initiation and without arising as the deity, you can also do [in this way like] Medicine Buddha mantra with immense light rays and nectar falling and purifying you or you can visualize Chenrezig like that also.

For general in relation to choosing Buddha's image to develop Samatha, as stated in Atisha's commentary on his *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*,

In this regard to keep your attention on the physical form of the Buddha is to recall the Buddha, so it gives rise to limitless merit. When your image of that body is clear and firm, then there is a special intensification of your meditative focus on the field in relation to which you amass merit through prostration, offering, aspirational prayer, etc., as well as on the field in relation to which you purify obscurations through confession, restraint, etc. This kind of meditation serves many purposes. As stated earlier in the extract from the *King of Concentrations Sutra*, it has advantages such as your not losing your mindfulness of the Buddha as you die. And when you cultivate the mantra path, it heightens deity yoga, etc.

Both Buddha's Sutras and the commentaries from Lama Atisha and Lama Tsongkhapa [mentioned] in here is to teach and tell us this as followers of Buddha who want to achieve Samatha practice: for those who don't have initiation, then to use Buddha's image as our object of our serenity; and for those who have daily yoga practices then advising us to use the daily yoga as discussed before. If you use just even Buddha, then because of the intense concentration developed in relation to Buddha's holy body, speech or the staffs, then at the time of dying, you will remember that without doubt and that itself acts as a karma that will

help us to be reborn in the higher realms. If you use the daily yoga practice as mentioned before, that will serve the practice of achieving even the dharmakaya state of Buddhahood at the time of death. Even that is possible because you intensify the practice of your daily yoga.

*The Sutra on the Concentration Which Perceives the Buddha of the Present Face to Face* gives a very clear and detailed treatment of these benefits, as well as the method for directing your mind toward the Buddha. Therefore, you should definitely come to know them from there, as Kamalasila states in his last *Stages of Meditation*. Fearing verbosity, I do not write of them here. Consequently, it is skill in means when you seek an object of meditation by which you achieve concentration and also fulfill, along the way, some other special purpose.

All the different Sutras and commentaries have emphasized very clearly that by using deity yoga practices and the Buddha's holy images, not only can you achieve serenity but along the way, it helps to achieve many other great purposes.

### **Homework**

Many here have already received Highest Yoga Tantric initiation and have been doing Sadhana practices for a long time. Now, since we are learning [about using a] meditational object for Samatha, you figure out, from the daily yoga practice, what particular object of meditation you like to use. It is something that we should define.

For those of you, who do not have daily yoga practices, then try to find the object for developing serenity within the holy objects to do with Buddha, Dharma, Sangha.

It's not just checking once or twice on the kind of major faults that we have. Like myself, I have all the faults but we need to do some contemplation to check thoroughly and take note. Then start to do meditation [to purify the major obstacle]. If one has anger more than attachment, then meditate on love to reduce the obstacle. If the [obstacle] is a busy discursive mind more than attachment, then try to do meditation on breathing as we discussed before. Try to figure it out to prepare to get qualified to go into retreat. That is

very important homework. We are already halfway; we have already discussed extensively the prerequisite preparation part and many different objects of meditation. We are already in the middle [of our course] so start to look for the actual object that we are going to use. Look for that one focused object that we are going to use until we achieve actual Samatha. We have to start now so that by the time we end the Samatha course, maybe we are ready to go for our retreat [laughs].

B. IDENTIFYING OBJECTS OF MEDITATION FOR THIS CONTEXT [continuation]  
[Lamrim Chenmo, page 43]

We continue with a follow-up discussion from last session's topic on the objects of meditation in relation to directly developing serenity or Samatha. Previously, we discussed using holy objects as our objects of meditation in relation to the common path, Sutrayana, as well as the Highest Yoga Tantric practitioner and to expand on this:

How do you use something like the bodily form of the Tathagata as an object of meditation?

In order to clarify this further, which was already explained in the last session, we explore the answer given by Kamalasila's last *Stages of Meditation*:

In that regard, practitioner should first fix their attention on whatever they may have seen and whatever they may have heard about the bodily form of the Tathagata, and then achieve serenity.

There are two points here:

1. Using the image that you have seen through your eyes like a picture of a statue or thangka. It's more of an overall physical aspect of the Buddha's [image].
2. The description of the Buddha or mainly the characteristics of the Buddha, which is what you have heard and what you have learnt from the scriptures or the guru.

You can choose [any of the above] as objects of meditation. All these objects are a mental picture, even though in the first one it's a picture that you have [obtained] through the eye senses or eye organ but when it comes to doing the meditation, one has to use the mental picture, which is stored in the sixth mind. There are beginners who did not get the opportunity to learn the details of the teachings but then they aspire to achieve single-pointed concentration. They have also heard of using any form of objects including holy objects [as object of concentration]. Some beginners used the actual picture or statue of the Buddha and then by staring at it tried to remain concentrated. That's a mistake. In that way, one won't be able to achieve serenity or Samatha. You may attain certain concentration or stability of the mind but not serenity or Samatha. Serenity or Samatha cannot be achieved through sensory consciousness and can only be achieved through the sixth mental consciousness. Similarly, with using sound, touch, taste etc. and any other different kind of objects that one may use but yet all those are not qualified to attain serenity, including the eye object [discussed above]. There are mental pictures that comes through the sound image that you have gathered in your sixth mental consciousness and that can be the object of concentration, but not the sensory objects. For example, if you want to use the sound from the syllable 'Om' or *Om Mani Padme Hum* as an object of your concentration for meditation, through paying attention to the sound (the ear consciousness), you cannot attain serenity. That sound has to be delivered by the image from mental consciousness, then you focus on *Om Mani Padme Hum* and then you attain serenity.

So, but do you use the help of the eye consciousness to collect the picture? Yes. We do utilize that but the focusing mind is not on the senses. The focusing mind has to be the mental consciousness. There is a difference here and the clarification needs to be understood. When you use the image that you took from the eye consciousness, by looking at the picture you can use either the overall entire body of the Buddha or just one part such as the eye or the nose. If you are using the whole body of the Buddha then either you can focus in the manner like a bird's eye focus [view], which is like clarity of overall of the Buddha's image but not specifying individual parts. The second way is where your object of meditation is overall Buddha's body that you have learnt from crown to toe and you keep that as an imprint or mental picture in your heart but when you start to focus, you can start to focus from the crown or from the eye or from whichever. The moment you look at the picture in your heart, whatever comes first you start from there but eventually the objective of developing single-pointedness is not just one part of the body but the entirety of Buddha's body which you have already pictured before. So, that entirety is the one object of the concentration mind. You develop the full vivid clarity and steady concentration focus when you have achieved the entire image that you have already pictured from crown to toe.

If you gain vivid clarity and steady focus on that, then you have achieved the degree of concentration, which has the characteristics of vivid clarity and steady focus.

So, on this point there are two ways to develop the full concentration. [One way] is like an overall bird's eye focus, and then you start to develop clarity of the crown to toe and at the same time there is a steadiness towards the focus on the entirety of Buddha's body.

Another way is [when] your objective is to develop clarity and steady focus towards the entirety of Buddha's body but you develop this by focusing on one part of Buddha's body.

That could be the eye. So, how do you do that? The moment you have chosen the entire body of Buddha as your object of serenity concentration but when at the moment that your mind looking at that object, the first thing that appears is the eye and the rest is not clear so then it is right to focus on the eye as vivid as possible and as steady as possible. And this focus will eventually start to develop the similar kind of clarity and focus to the entire crown to the toe. So this is another way to develop the single-pointedness.

For this meditation, object [-wise], there are many objects. From crown to toe, there are so many [objects] but subject [-wise], there is only one object of meditation. So it is [still] one-pointed concentration. And that one-pointed concentration is the entirety of Buddha's body as your object of concentration. Therefore, it does not contradict the teachings that say for serenity you need to have one object to focus. So, initially if you have chosen the eye, and when you focus, the clarity you develop [changed] from eye to nose, then that's a fault. But if you have chosen the entire Buddha's body, then clarity developing from eye to nose to mouth then that is good and it's progress. There is a common question asked, "I want to train in Samatha, in single-pointed concentration. While I am focusing on Buddha's nose, [after a few minutes], Buddha started to magnify with glorious light rays, smile etc." Then, if you have already chosen Buddha's nose, whatever that appears other than that, are all obstacles. But, if you have chosen entirety of Buddha's body including light rays then you are in fact developing concentration.

That applies similarly to the mental image in relation to understanding. If you are using Buddha then if you have just learnt that Buddha as omniscient then go for it. That's your only object of meditation. But if you choose like in the text:

The bodily form of the Tathagata is a golden color like that of refined gold, adorned by the signs and exemplary features, (32 major and 80

minor marks), dwells with its retinue, (who is completely with the enlightened features), and effects the aims of living beings through various means. (Emanating infinite light and nectar and reaching out to every single sentient being, purifying their suffering and elevating them to the state of Buddhahood).

You can learn all the [above] details and choose this entirety of understanding as your object of serenity. From the subjective point of view, there is only one object, which is the entirety of understanding. From the object side there are so many. So it's up to you what you want to choose. Of course, if you choose the extensive description of the Buddha's qualities, that alone has great impact of accumulation of merits and purification of the mind. When you mention or reflect on each of the qualities of the Buddha that naturally helps to purify our mind and helps to accumulate merits. So those who use extensive features as training for concentration, there is a special benefit which is as what is said in the teachings,

By continuously directing their minds towards it, yogis develop a wish for its good qualities and quell laxity, excitement, and so forth.

So, it not only quells laxity and excitement but you also accumulate immense of merits because you focus on so many qualities of the Buddha and through that you can achieve serenity. So it's up to you to choose.

Many meditators prefer to use the massive description of the Buddha's qualities as their object of training in Samatha. The reason is the more qualities that you reflect on, not only does this help to accumulate merits and purify the mind but it also helps to gain immense faith and aspiration in your heart. The stronger the faith, the stronger the aspiration to achieve just like the Buddha having all these qualities will help to gather more intensity, effort and focus to the meditation on serenity. So there is a benefit there and due to that reason instead of using one single object - characteristic or image of Buddha, they would rather use immense of characteristics. For example, for the practitioner who is using the extensive description of the Buddha's qualities then they first need to focus on the qualities one by one as it is not possible to start with focusing on the entirety with vivid clarity and focus. So, you begin first by focusing on the magnificent refined gold colour radiance of Buddha's body. The more that you focus on that, then you can start to expand to the rest of

the other features of Buddha's qualities including emanating light rays and purifying sentient beings etc. So, whatever amount of meditational objects that you have defined you gain complete vivid clarity and steady focus to the entirety of the defined object and you gain a single-pointed mind.

They should continue meditative stabilization for as long as they can see it clearly, as though the Buddha was sitting in front of them.

From here we can understand now that we can also use a compassionate attitude as our object for training in Samatha. You can also use the attitude of unconditional love; bodhicitta; understanding of dependent-arising as your object of concentration. Or you can use emptiness, the voidness of inherent existence as [your] object of concentration. As long as it is one object that you define to your mind to focus on, then from the object side how many numbers are there or how many characteristics are displayed doesn't matter.

Therefore, for those who understand emptiness, then using emptiness is one of the most powerful objects that you can have because in the training of Samatha, we eventually actualize special insight. So, if you already use emptiness wisdom as an object of your meditation to gain serenity then that will bring immense of benefit to the actualization of special insight. Many meditators especially those who are scholars and who are well learned in philosophy, and dedicate their life in retreat, will usually use emptiness as an object to developing Samatha.

There are also some philosophers who studied extensively in emptiness and they go to the debate yard to do extensive debate and then they gain a solid understanding or clarification on the understanding on emptiness. Then they return back to their room and start to engage into meditative absorption or developing concentration on using the object of emptiness as meditation. When they put the key inside the lock [to their room door] they completely go into extensive concentration on that until sun-rise in the morning. They are [then found to be] still standing with the key in the lock.

Specially and exceptionally, for those who are practicing deity yoga, it is more beneficial to use anything to do with the deity yoga. This is because since you have taken the initiation while in the preparation for the actual retreat for Samatha, you have already gained certain steadiness concentration either towards the self - [generation] deity or the front-generation deity, or the channels, drops or whatever you want to use as we have discussed



before and which you are already familiarized with. So if those people who want to develop Samatha as a deity yoga practitioner, then you achieve two purposes: the benefit of the deity yoga either generation practice or completion practice, as well as the development of Samatha.

For the deity yoga practitioner you can even use the entire sadhana as your object of concentration and development of Samatha, or you can just use the front generation or self generation depending on what suits you and more easy and comfortable to you.

The *King of Concentrations Sutra* also says that you should use this kind of object (holy object) of meditation:

The glorious protector of the world  
With a body the color of gold—  
The bodhisattva whose mind engages this object  
Is said to be in equipoise.”

Then Lama Tsongkhapa says,

Of the two ways to do this, newly imagining the Buddha’s form and visualizing the Buddha’s form as though actually present, the latter has a distinct advantage in developing faith and fits within the context of practices common to both sutra and tantra vehicles.

So, if you use the extensive characteristics of the Buddha then it has the extensive benefit of developing faith etc. and all the benefits mentioned before.

Therefore, use a visualized image of the Buddha’s form as though it already actually exists. When you seek your object of meditation, the basis upon which you keep your attention, look for an excellent painting or sculpture of the Teacher’s body and view it again and again.

In order to have the intensity of remembrance of the mental picture, you do that.

Remembering its features, firmly familiarize yourself with the mental appearance of the object. Or, seek your object of meditation by reflecting upon the meaning of the eloquent descriptions of the Buddha's form, which you have heard from your guru and make this image appear in your mind.

Later then, Master Ye-shay-day rejects using the sensory image as an object of Samatha meditation. As we have mentioned before the reference here is that master Ye-shay-day rejected that and Lama Tsongkhapa emphasized this as very important. Lama Tsongkhapa says,

Some set an image before them and immediately meditate on it while staring at it. The master Ye-shay-day's rejection of this practice is excellent. Master Ye-shay-day says that concentration is not achieved in the sensory consciousness, but in the mental consciousness; thus, the actual object of meditation of a concentration is the actual object of a mental consciousness. Therefore, you must keep your attention on this. (the mental image). Focus your mind on the appearance of the actual concept, (actual concept of whatever you have visualized, imagined or understood), or mental image, of the object of meditation.

If you use Buddha's holy body or emptiness or whatever [as the object of meditation], there are gross and subtle [aspects] to it. The Nirmanakaya aspect of a Buddha's body is grosser than the Sambhogakaya body, which is grosser than the Dharmakaya. When you choose the image, the objective is to develop concentration on the most-subtle object. If you are able to, then start with focusing on the subtlest object, and if not, then at least your final overall object of meditation is reaching to vivid clarity and focusing to the subtlest object.

If you are using emptiness, [try] to start by focusing on the non-conceptual wisdom of emptiness. If not, then first use the mental picture, the conceptual picture of understanding emptiness and by the time that you develop serenity, when you reach to the final highest

stage of concentration where you gain the ninth stage of concentration, you achieve the direct realization of emptiness which is a non-conceptual realization on emptiness. So, from the very beginning you motivate and target that.

Some scriptures have stated that,

... at first you focus on the gross features, and later, when these are solid, you must focus on the subtle. As experience also shows that it is very easy to raise an appearance of the gross features, you must develop your object of meditation in stages starting with the gross features.

For the beginner, starting with the gross features is the right thing if you are unable to directly focus on the subtle one, but eventually you have to develop focus on the subtle object of meditation.

An especially important point is that, until you have accomplished satisfactory concentration as explained below, it is never appropriate for you to cultivate meditative concentration by shifting your focus to many different types of objects of meditation.

Here, it is not talking about choosing many different features of the one object of your concentration but it is about different chosen objects of meditation. If you choose more than one object of meditation then that becomes an obstacle. Until you achieve Samatha, you shouldn't be shifting the meditational object. Indirectly, [it can be] understood that shifting of meditational objects is only after you have achieved Samatha, then when you do the Vipassana or special insight you can shift or change the object. For beginners like us, before we are ready to engage in a consistent dedicated time for developing Samatha, then we [may] choose many different objects. We have discussed extensively before, that it depends on what major obstacles you may have, as an example attachment-detachment etc. But after you have started the retreat you cannot shift the object of meditation. But once you actualize Samatha, then you have to use many different objects because the purpose of special insight is the capability to use many different objects in order to purify the defilements.

For, if you cultivate concentration by moving to many dissimilar objects of meditation, it will be a great impediment to achieving serenity. Thus, authoritative texts on achieving concentration, such as Asanga's texts on the levels and Kamalasila's three *Stages of Meditation*, explain that when first achieving concentration, you do so in relation to a single object of meditation; they do not say that you shift among many objects of meditation.

Aryasura also clearly states this [in his *Compendium of the Perfections*]:

Solidify your mind's reflection  
By being firm on one object of meditation;  
Letting it flow to many objects  
Leads to a mind disturbed by many afflictions.

Lama Atisha's *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* also states support on this:

Settle your mind in virtue  
On any single object of meditation.

Focus on any single virtuous object of meditation is strongly recommended especially for Buddhist practitioners to develop a single-pointed mind. Atisha has pointed out in the phrase "*on any single*".

Thus, having first focused on one object of meditation and attained serenity, you may then focus on many objects of meditation.

So all the great realized beings, said the same thing.

Kamalasila's first *Stages of Meditation* states:

Only when you have earned concentrated attention (means when you have achieved Samatha) should you focus in detail on the particulars of objects, such as the aggregates and constituents. It is in the light of the particulars of yogis' meditation on objects such as the eighteen emptinesses that the Buddha states in sutras such as the *Sutra Unravelling the Intended Meaning* that there are many aspects of objects of meditation.

The eighteen emptinesses: either one emptiness, two emptiness, four emptiness or sixteen aspects of emptiness, eighteen aspects of emptiness, all these you can also use as your object of concentration in the form of your analytical object to use, after achieving serenity. Then the effectiveness of realizing emptiness in relation to the training or understanding or realizing emptiness based on eighteen emptinesses will be most effective.

You can also [choose] to use as objects of concentration from the eighteen different emptinesses which is based on different objects: the internal emptiness, the external emptiness, emptiness of both internal and external, the emptiness of self and emptiness of others etc. which you learn and then actualized its nature.

The measure for having first found the object of meditation upon which you keep your attention is as follows:

For example, if you have used Buddha as an image, then Lama Tsongkhapa says,

Visualize several times in sequence the head, two arms, the rest of the trunk of the body, and the two legs. After that, if when you bring your attention to the body as a whole you can raise before your mind just half of the gross components, then — even without radiant clarity— you should be satisfied with just this and fix your attention upon it. Why? If, dissatisfied with just that, you fail to fix your attention on it and want more clarity instead, then, as you visualize it again and again, the object of meditation will become a bit clearer but you will not obtain a stable concentration; in fact, you will prevent yourself from getting this. Even though the object of

meditation is not very clear, if you keep your attention on precisely this partial object of meditation, you will quickly obtain concentration. This comes from the instructions of Ye-shay-day; it is of great importance.

So, as I have mentioned in the beginning of this session, if you have chosen the whole feature of the body then when you look into the Buddha's image, if only the eye or the nose comes clearly to the mind then you just focus on that without any sense of dissatisfaction. If there is dissatisfaction on the first image appearing to your mind, then since your object of meditation is the entirety of the body, then you may not be able to achieve actual concentration on the entirety of the body, the clarity.

As for the manner in which the object of meditation appears, you can describe two sets of four possibilities: for various types of persons, it is easy or difficult to have an image appear, and its appearance may be clear or unclear; moreover, both clear and unclear images may be either stable or unstable. However, as there is considerable variation, you cannot definitely determine what will occur.

These are the different experiences when you start to meditate. You don't have to freak out when any of these experiences comes your way, just regard it as natural.

When you are practicing deity yoga in the mantra vehicle, you definitely have to establish a clear image of the deity.

For those deity yoga practitioners as I mentioned before, since you have been doing your sadhana for a long time and at least have practiced for some time, since receiving initiation, then it becomes much easier.

So, until this arises, you must use many methods for developing it.

Until [you have] certain clarity in your mental image (which is the understanding that has to be developed), you apply as many methods as possible through study and whatever way.

However, in this non-tantric context, if you have great difficulty in making an image of a deity appear, you may adopt any one of the objects of meditation presented above and keep your attention on it because the main purpose is simply to achieve a concentration of meditative serenity.

Many of the meditational deities have so many complicated features, so you need to have great training in that in order to have focus and clarity. Therefore, many do use Guru Shakyamuni Buddha's image as it is the most simple and even for someone with low concentration or low mental capability, they can focus easily on it. So it is not necessary that one must use complicated images of deities or complicated subjects like emptiness etc. The purpose here is to develop serenity and you can do that with any other objects too.

Also, in this non-tantric context, if you practice by focusing on the body of a deity and you keep your attention there even though the image is not appearing, then you will not achieve your desired aim (serenity). Thus, you have to keep your attention on an image that does appear (to your mind).

Keep your attention on the entirety of the body to the extent that it appears. If some parts of the body appear especially clearly, keep your attention on them. When they become unclear, return your attention to the entirety of the body. (These are the techniques.)

At that time, there may be uncertainty as to color, as when you want to meditate on gold, but red appears; or uncertainty as to shape, as when you want to meditate on a sitting shape, but a standing shape appears; or uncertainty as to number, as you want to meditate on one thing, but two things appear; or uncertainty as to size, as when you want to meditate on a large body, but a tiny body appears. As it is utterly inappropriate to pursue such distortions, you must use only

the original object of meditation, whatever it may be, as your object of meditation.

### **Homework**

Now is the time for you to choose or find your suitable object of meditation and that has to be in accordance with all the great masters like Lama Atisha who advised that to choose holy objects, there are two ways you may gather it:

1. Based on what you have seen or heard or felt
2. The object that you have learnt in your heart.

Whatever it may be, it has to be a mental picture. So when you close your eyes you can see clearly that image in your heart. So you need to go and figure it out now, which object that you are going to use when the time may come to do a Samatha retreat - next week, tomorrow, two years later whatever.

Some individuals may be in a position where you already wish to use a particular object such as emptiness, as your object of Samatha meditation. But you haven't learnt much about emptiness or contemplated on the understanding of emptiness. So that means you have to pursue learning on emptiness, then start to contemplate on emptiness and find that wisdom of contemplation and then, that wisdom on emptiness is your object of serenity.

Some individuals may have been practicing deity yoga like Vajrayogini for a long time. They have been doing self-generation or oneself as Vajrayogini, oneself is completely Vajrayogini and have already developed this very clear firm and complete. Then you start to train and practice how long that you can remain in concentration and what type of experiences occur like what we have described today and roughly the obstacles we have discussed before. We will discuss more extensively in the coming days on the obstacles and faults. So roughly you start to figure out your object of meditation.

Some individuals may be like me, still struggling with many flaws like those we have discussed before. Then we need to continue to choose different meditational objects to cleanse/purify those bad behavior and flaws. At the same time, start to look for the suitable object of meditation for serenity.



Then, I think for 99% of us, we also need to start to gather all the preparatory necessities like what we have discussed at the very beginning of this series of classes. So that eventually when we genuinely go into retreat we can develop Samatha.

## **FOCUSING YOUR MIND**

What we have discussed earlier is important but today's subject is also very important because we are getting closer to the point. In our earlier sessions we were starting to choose the object of serenity or Samatha. Within one or two days it is not possible to do so, unless you have been searching for the right meditational object for some time. For a beginner like me, it is not possible to figure out the right object in one or two days. So finding the right object of meditation will have to continue. But for the purpose of listening to this teaching, you assume that you have found the object and so now, we learn how do we develop concentration on this object. When we discuss the following teaching, just as an example, [assume] that we have chosen the whole image of Buddha's body as our object of Samatha meditation. Now [we will learn] how to develop Samatha in relation to that.

### **ii. What to do while focusing on an object of meditation.**

1. Identifying the object of meditation upon which your attention is set
2. **How to focus your mind on the object of meditation**

## **2. HOW TO FOCUS YOUR MIND ON THE OBJECT OF MEDITATION**

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 47]

- A. The flawless method**
- B. Eliminating flawed methods
- C. The length of sessions

These are the methods. (1) The first is the flawless method on how to develop concentration on the meditational object. (2) Second is to discuss the false (flawed) methods that people misunderstand and use, which is for us to learn and then disregard. (3) Then we will introduce the duration of sessions.

These areas have been presented many [times] in previous classes but now we are discussing them in more detail. Many of you may be familiar with the words but here it is for you to make sure it becomes very solid and very clear in your heart.

For those of you who have already figured out your object of meditation, then you should relate to that. If you have been practicing to develop concentration in the past, then relate to your meditation when we discuss this teaching. I have given [an] example of using Buddha's image as the object but especially, for deity yoga practitioners, it is recommended for you to use the deity yoga practice as the object of your serenity training. Then see if your technique is correct or not and see if the faults come into your meditation or not.

The flawless method is this:

#### A. THE FLAWLESS METHOD

The concentration that you will accomplish here has two special features: vivid intensity – an intense mental clarity – and non-discursive stability, staying one-pointedly on the object of meditation.

Vivid intensity refers to vivid, clear awareness to the object of meditation. To have vivid intensity, the object of meditation that comes to mind has to be 100% knowing by your mind; not partly or roughly. Whether it is the intensity of color or shape it has to be full knowing of the object. From here we can understand the importance of knowing exactly the object that we are going to meditate on.

The object that you choose, even if it is just one single object, will have its own characteristics whether it is to do with the color, shape or details of the object. In order to have intense mental clarity [vivid intensity], we need to learn, have full understanding and a full mental picture of the characteristics of the object. Once you have that, then it will help to develop intense mental clarity [vivid intensity]. 'Clarity' is clarity towards the knowing object of the mind.

Another way of understanding this is that vivid intensity or vivid awareness is very much of the mindfulness to the object, the steadiness of the knowing of the object. It is infused by the introspective mind. So when you focus on your Samatha meditation you need to have

the element of both mindfulness and introspection. Even though the introspection mind is not necessarily a 100% focused mind but it has its focused element and that focused element becomes the [intense] mental clarity.

Vivid intensity [or intense] mental clarity carried forward with a non-discursive stability, (to stay in one-pointedness without analyzing onto the designated object), is the training of serenity or Samatha or the single-pointed mind. As the text says, it is “staying one-pointedly on the object of meditation.” It is staying one-pointedly on the object of meditation with the quality of vivid intensity [or] intense mental clarity.

Some add bliss to these, making three features; others add limpidity as well, making four (characteristics).

In fact, bliss and limpidity are not necessary. Limpidity is already included within the characteristic of vivid intensity. Bliss, which is mental and physical pliancy, is not necessarily in all single-pointed meditation concentrations. As like in the single-pointed concentration in relation to the formless realms, the four concentrations are there but it is not necessarily accompanied by the characteristic of blissfulness or pliancy. The blissfulness or pliancy here is in relation to developing Samatha that is directed towards developing special insight.

As the text says,

Delight and bliss which impart a sense of well-being, do occur as results of the concentration that you will accomplish here, but they are not concomitant with all of the concentrations which are included in the access to the first meditative stabilization. Also, the concentration of the fourth meditative stabilization – which is said to be the best basis for achieving the good qualities of all three vehicles – is not associated with any physical or mental bliss.

So, the fourth concentration refers to the formless concentration. It is not talking about actual serenity or Samatha development that is leading to special insight.

Thus, delight and bliss are not counted as features here. While some of the concentrations on the formless levels lack highly vivid intensity, there is nothing wrong with presenting vividness as one of these two features. For, Maitreya's *Ornament for the Mahayana*

*Sutras* refers to "meditative stabilization other than the formless realm." This means that bodhisattvas – except for some powerful bodhisattvas – achieve good qualities by relying on concentrations within the levels of meditative stabilization.

In short, pliancy as a characteristic of concentration is not necessary for all [concentrations], as I have mentioned; the formless concentrations are not accompanied with that. The reason is because vivid intensity is needed to drive physical and mental pliancy and in the formless realm concentrations, it does not necessarily have vivid intensity. But for bodhisattvas, who choose to train their concentration using the formless realm concentration, then it is possible but otherwise, it is not necessary.

Since the development of this sort of vivid intensity is blocked as long as there is laxity, while one-pointed non-discursiveness is blocked as long as there is excitement, laxity and excitement are the chief obstacles to achieving genuine concentration.

In short, we have always been talking from the very beginning about laxity and excitement. Laxity is very much [in relation] to the negative emotions like lethargy or ignorance. Excitement is more towards the remaining two delusions: attachment and anger. Therefore, as we have discussed in earlier classes, first notice what kind of major obstacles we have. The majority of us have the three poisons, the three delusions. As described in the teachings, we are given specific meditations to do and while training in that we won't develop genuine concentration because laxity and excitement is there. We won't be able to get into the actual development of Samatha until then. It may not be the gross one but it may be that the subtle one is there. Since laxity and excitement are there, no matter how much we train, we cannot develop Samatha.

So, without working out our mind [to be free] from attachment and heavy ignorance like wrong views etc., even if we choose one object to focus on, we cannot attain actual serenity as taught in the earlier classes. That is why one very important thing that we need to work out in our mind is to train in the meditation on renunciation, love and compassion in order to purify our strong attachment and aversion. Then, meditate on interdependent arising and emptiness in order to lessen or purify the ignorant or lethargic mind. So, if we are serious about going into Samatha retreat, we need to work this out way before we start the retreat.

So if you do not understand how to identify accurately the subtle and coarse forms of laxity and excitement, or if you do not know how to correctly sustain a concentration which stops these once you have identified them, then it will be impossible for you to develop serenity, not to mention insight.

Even though the teaching identifies the gross and subtle laxity and excitement later, [here it is] just to give you an idea how to identify them.

## EXCITEMENT

Excitement [arises when there is] an intense, strong and frequent arising of desirous attachment to material and five senses objects. You can understand the appearance of gross excitement [when there is] frequent, heavy and intense distractions to sensual objects or expressions of attachments or impulsive attitudes like aversion. These are the signs that we have heavy obstacles of excitement. The gross ones are more like our grasping and our senses reaching outwardly to the objects.

The subtle [excitement] is like an unsettled, discontented state of mind. Even though you don't frequently have this unsettled discontented mind but once in a while you feel like there is something missing in life concerning the desirous grasping, and this is very much arising inwardly. You understand that even though it is not an obvious or frequent expression of wanting desirous outer objects of the five senses but once in a while there is the arising of the unsettled state of mind. That shows that the gross excitement is not really there but the subtle excitement is still there and that is an obstacle, which has to be cleared away in order to develop steady Samatha.

## LAXITY

Gross laxity is clearly having a wrong view – like not accepting; the karmic law of cause and effect; the development of the path; liberation; freedom from delusions and not even accepting that delusions and ignorance are problems. There are some who even think that ‘ignorance is bliss’. Also, avoiding training in single-pointed meditation, including pursuing Samatha meditation, or avoid learning and contemplating in dharma etc., these are the gross laxities, which are more obvious obstacles.

The subtle laxity is more intense. When you have more obvious obstacles that means they are heavy obstacles. Being very lazy in gathering of virtue like studying dharma, meditating and obviously avoiding these are obstacles in relation to laxity. The slightly more subtle laxity is when you physically or intentionally put effort to pursue dharma, meditation, single-pointed concentration training and gathering all the resources for your dharma practices but the moment you are in the class, you feel sleepy and cannot pay attention. Your mind just starts to shut down. Even if your mind does not shut down but when you are paying attention whatever instructions you hear, you reject and start to disapprove or you have doubt. So, compared to [the gross laxity] this is subtle [laxity] and it is still a heavy obstacle. This is due to lack of aspiration and why there is a lack of aspiration is because there is no faith and trust in the words of the Buddha and the practice. It is very much dominated by the wrong view and due to that, such expressions of the mind come about and that is a heavy obstacle. So, we cannot just know the techniques. We need a lot of blessings from the Guru and Triple Gem and we need to engage in a lot of purification practices and in the accumulation of merit. It is not just simply having one object to focus on. We won't gain serenity or Samatha in that way, we need a lot of merit. When we have the blessings of the Buddha and our Gurus, then it is very easy to clear away doubt and wrong views. That way it helps to cleanse the subtle laxity. When there is no root of subtle laxity or lethargy mind or ignorance then there is no need to worry about the gross laxity. We also need to study widely and use analytical wisdom to confirm that what we have studied is valid teaching. Then you gain conviction with reasoning. Then you will not have doubt and you can stay focused. That is why learning, contemplation and meditation have to come together. Even when we learn Samatha teachings, we are not just acquiring the knowledge and techniques but at the same time we have to vigorously examine and then apply from the beginning, to our very best; and we have to try to meditate. Then all three things come together – not only learn the technique but clear the doubt and gain immense aspiration and at the same time an abundance of merits are accumulated so that the moment we engage [in meditation] even if it's a short session, it becomes so effective to the development of Samatha.

Day-to-day, for us to train towards the success of the path we train in mindfulness and introspection. So we need to carry mindfulness and introspection in our body, speech and mind. That is also how to clear away the two major obstacles to the path.

Laxity and excitement are conditions unfavorable for achieving serenity. Later, I will discuss how to identify these unfavorable conditions and how to actually stop them. Now I shall explain how to develop concentration in a manner conducive to achieving serenity.

Here, concentration refers to your attention remaining one-pointedly on an object of meditation; in addition it must stay with the object continuously. Two things are needed for this: (1) a technique in which your attention is not distracted from whatever it had as its original object of meditation,

So, in the first technique you cannot change to another object of meditation. Whatever object of meditation that you have chosen, stay focused on that.

and (2) an accurate awareness of whether you are distracted and whether you are becoming distracted.

That's why from the eight antidotes, once mindfulness focuses on the object, when the object fades away from the mindfulness, then you apply [the antidote of] recollection to recollect the object of meditation. Then strengthen the vigilance towards making sure that the object is not stolen by laxity or excitement – that is the reason.

The former is mindfulness; the latter is vigilance.

So here, when we do the meditation we are asked to stay focused but the mind of vigilance is actually being aware and being an examining mind. So does that contradict from asking us



to stay focused on the chosen object? It is not contradictory. The mind that develops into qualified concentration is the mindfulness mind. The introspection mind is the condition that helps mindfulness to develop so that means we have one focused mind but at the same time there is another mind that is still in function. It is not necessary for the entire aspect of your mind to stay in one-pointed concentration the way that mindfulness does. That's why you need a separate mind that stays observing on the mindfulness activity, which is to stay focused. If there is no separate mind to observe it, then mindfulness itself won't realize when it falls either in to excitement or laxity, and you won't know. Therefore, there's a need for an introspection mind to the meditation on serenity. The introspection mind is like a monitor. There are two monitors or discipliners to mindfulness. The introspection mind disciplines mindfulness, to regain the mindfulness towards the object of concentration and to continue within the designated session. Another, is for introspection to monitor and guide mindfulness to stop the session, engage in post-meditation to train your mind and get away from whatever faults are coming in and then help mindfulness to go back to resume it's meditation. So there are two ways for mindfulness to be handled by introspection.

We discussed before about the five faults and eight antidotes. The introspection, vigilant mind is placed as the sixth antidote [among the eight antidotes] and these five faults and eight antidotes are applied within one session of meditation. So, within one session of meditation there is the occurrence of the five faults and eight antidotes being applied in order to sustain the meditation and develop the meditation. [Another way] is when vigilance is applied during intense occurrence of obstacles. During the session the vigilant mind can help the meditator to stop the session and engage in post-meditation to gather whatever conducive conditions to overcome the major obstacles that occurred during the session. Then without letting go of the continuum of the pace of the session and the post-session, encourage the meditator to get back into meditation to proceed the development of the concentration. So these are the two ways to do it.

First, you use vigilance to try to let mindfulness regain the vivid intensity and clear focus. The first attempt should be like that. But if that fails after trying a few rounds then the next attempt is to stop the session and then engage in post-meditation. This is a practical way on how to guide ourselves if we are doing the session. For that, first we need to know the two qualities that we discussed earlier; vivid intensity [or intense] mental clarity and ["staying one-pointedly on the object of meditation"]. So, introspection has to know when either of these two qualities is working or losing the mindfulness focus. So, you need to know that first.

There are meditators who don't know [about] the gross and subtle laxity and excitement or the exact two qualities mentioned earlier. Then the meditator falls into a sinking mind and thinks they are still meditating and developing serenity but actually they have fallen into laxity. Even if the session turns into a total sleeping state, they think that they are in meditation but actually they are not. So who didn't mind that? It was the introspection mind who didn't mind that.

Some meditators have mistaken [these two]: pliancy, the effect of concentration and excitement. Due to certain concentration you develop joyfulness of body and mind. Then that increases and develops into a kind of grasping and attachment. Here, the attachment and pliancy effect of the concentration is not differentiated [by the meditator]. In fact the joyfulness is the arising of subtle excitement but you think your concentration is developing. In fact, you are falling into the faults. So, the introspection mind has a huge responsibility.

To have a balanced mind is extremely tough. Having a totally peaceful settled [mind] and at the same time having clarity and a sense of blissfulness but yet not getting carried away - that is not easy. Therefore, you need to have the assigned introspection mind. As I have mentioned, the introspection mind contributes to the focus and the strength of mindfulness but at the same time, it is the introspection mind which is sitting slightly away watching over the activities of mindfulness.

*Vasubandhu's Commentary on the "Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras" (Mahayana-sutralamkara-bhasya) states:*

Mindfulness and vigilance bring about close mental focus because the former prevents your attention from wandering from the object of meditation and the latter clearly recognizes that your attention is wandering.

If a lapse in mindfulness leads to forgetting the object of meditation, you will be distracted and will immediately lose the object upon which you are meditating. Therefore, the foundation of cultivating concentration is mindfulness which does not forget the object.

How does such mindfulness focus your mind right on the object of meditation? Once you have at least visualized the object of meditation in the minimal manner as explained above, generate a

powerful apprehension of the object that tightly holds it with your attention.

You need to have clear visualization, a clear mental picture and then you need to also have strong apprehension, strong attention to that. These two - a clear visualized mental image and a strong apprehension on the object - this is the way.

After you have set your attention at a high level, stabilize it on the object without newly analyzing anything.

Whatever attention of what you have already chosen [as your object], you cannot allow any further examination.

With regard to mindfulness, *Asanga's Compendium of Knowledge* says:

What is mindfulness? In regard to a familiar object, your mind is not forgetful and operates without distraction.

Such mindfulness has to have three characteristics. (1) The first quality is that "*its observed object is a familiar object*". Here, 'observed' is referring to being familiar with the object, not like the introspecting or observing mind. It is talking about being familiar with the defined object of your meditation. (2) The second characteristic "*is your mind's non-forgetfulness of the object of meditation.*" (3) The third function or characteristic "*is to keep your attention from wandering from the object of meditation.*"

When we meditate our introspecting mind has to observe whether these three characteristics are present or not. This is very important. When we meditate on Samatha now, we have to make sure that these three characteristics are present while we are focusing on our object. Even though you are not forgetting the object but it does not necessarily mean you are not wandering, right? Even though you focused on the object but it does not necessarily mean your mind is not wandering. So mindfulness is not only

focusing but also keeps your attention from wandering from the object of meditation. So it is very important.

[Even] if these two characteristics may be present but then we are not familiar with the object. We are just roughly choosing one object and trying to stay still on that. That is also not good enough. So you need clear familiarity of the object.

Fixing your attention on an object of meditation in this way and controlling it is said to be like taming an elephant. An elephant trainer ties a wild elephant to a tree or sturdy post with many thick ropes. If it does as the trainer teaches it, then fine; if not, it is subdued and controlled, struck repeatedly with a sharp iron hook. Your mind is like the untamed elephant; you bind it with the rope of mindfulness to the sturdy pillar of an object of meditation such as I explained above. If you cannot keep it there, you must gradually bring it under control by goading it with the iron hook of vigilance.

That's why in the picture [of the nine stages leading to Samatha], the elephant represents our mind and the black elephant is the untamed mind. The monk holding a rope represents mindfulness and the hook represents introspection. These are the symbolisms.

Bhavaviveka's *Heart of the Middle Way* states:

The erring elephant of your mind  
Is securely bound by the rope of mindfulness  
To the sturdy pillar of the object of meditation  
And is gradually controlled with the iron hook of intelligence (or  
vigilance)

Also, Kamalasila's second *Stages of Meditation* states:

With the ropes of mindfulness and vigilance, tie the elephant of your  
mind to the tree trunk, the object of meditation.

...the master Vasubandhu says that both mindfulness and vigilance focus your mind on the object of meditation.

It is said that you achieve concentration on the basis of mindfulness and that mindfulness is like a rope that actually fastens your attention to the object of meditation continuously, so mindfulness is the main technique to sustain in achieving concentration.

Also, mindfulness has a way of apprehending its object that carries a sense of certitude. If, while maintaining concentration, you stabilize your mind casually without a solid sense of certainty about the object, then your mind may take on a limpid clarity, but it will not have the vivid intensity of certain knowledge, so you will not develop powerful mindfulness.

So, mindfulness as mentioned before requires all three characteristics in order to achieve the qualities of mindfulness that helps to develop serenity.

Therefore, subtle laxity will be unchecked, and only flawed concentration will ensue.

As mentioned before, if there is no vivid intensity, vivid awareness or vivid mindfulness then we may mistake dullness or the sleepy mind as steady concentration.

### **Homework**

Your homework still remains like before; continue to search for the right future Samatha meditation object. At the same time, in [addition] try to recognize what exactly vivid intensity or vivid mindfulness or vivid awareness is. Then develop intense mental clarity towards your object of meditation. Try to train to develop, even just for one minute or half a minute, (you can use any object like Buddha's face or eye) that vivid intensity [intense mental clarity]. This will help us to learn what exactly vivid intensity [intense mental clarity] means. First, maybe just use one or two eyes of Buddha, look very carefully and try to have a clear mental picture of that. Then without analyzing, try to stabilize your focus on that

clear image. See how much you can do and train. Then, check where the vividness of the object is losing and when, where and how the mental clarity is losing. As long as you know where the faults are coming in, then next time when you do the actual Samatha meditation you will know when to engage the communication between introspection and mindfulness for mindfulness to bring itself back to the object of meditation. If you don't have some basic training now, if you suddenly go into that type of meditation, it may be challenging. Another way is checking out whether your mindfulness to the chosen object has the three features of mindfulness or not. Choose the object and familiarize yourself with it to the most extent – familiarization is the first quality. Then when you go into concentration or meditation, that same familiarity needs to sustain. Then put effort not to forget what you have familiarized to the chosen object, which is the second characteristic, not forgetting the object. So train for how long you can stay [in focus] without forgetting the object. Forgetting the object here means losing the intensity and losing the clarity, whatever happens you are forgetting the object. You may not forget the familiar object but you may wander on top of that, you may exaggerate on top of that. That is losing mindfulness. You cannot exaggerate on the chosen object from the amount of familiarity that you had before, you cannot expand at all. Not wandering from that is the third quality of mindfulness.

23 June 2020. Session: 14  
Eliminating flawed methods, The length of sessions

### **Recap - teaching on June 16, 2020 (Session 13)**

In the last session, the two qualities of concentration [were mentioned]: 1. vivid intensity or intense mental clarity [which means] the same thing and is not a separate thing. “Intense mental clarity” is just to illustrate further what is meant by vivid intensity. 2. The second quality is the one-pointed mind, the non-discursive stability.

What we learnt is that these two qualities in relation to developing one-pointed mind or Samatha: vivid intensity and one-pointed concentration are very important knowledge to be developed in one’s mental continuum. Basically, when we talk about concentration we are developing those [qualities] on the chosen object. Samatha development is about developing these two qualities with much effort in the beginning and gradually lesser effort is required and eventually effortlessly we become fully qualified with these two qualities on the chosen object for as long as you wish. That’s when our mind becomes absolutely serviceable to the chosen object of meditation. That’s what we are trying to develop. The five faults are the main obstacles that will come in the way and the eight antidotes are the one that will help us to clear those five obstacles and eventually result in the most serviceable state of the mind called the nine levels/stages of the Samatha mind.

## **2. HOW TO FOCUS YOUR MIND ON THE OBJECT OF MEDITATION**

- A. The flawless method
- B. Eliminating flawed methods**
- C. The length of sessions

- B. ELIMINATING FLAWED METHODS  
[Lamrim Chenmo, page 50]

Eliminating flawed methods are learning what kind of flaws that may occur on the development of concentration. Generally, there are five faults, [which] by its nature is a method but if the method is not use skillfully it can turn out to be an obstacle. So, it is very important to know about these faults.

Here's a brief idea: When we develop concentration we are told to have a steady focus and vivid intensity. But if the vivid intensity is too forceful (even though it needs force) then it will turn into an obstacle. Meditation naturally brings a sense of calmness and settles our body and mind, which is needed, and it's one of the effects of one-pointed [focus] on the object. But if the mind is too relaxed or there is too much [focus] then it will bring obstacles as well. That's why in the presentation of five faults and eight antidotes, there is over-application – if there's over-application on forceful focus, obstacles will come; and if there's over-application of calmness, obstacles will also come. From the eight antidotes, when you are engaging in meditation, equanimity is where you keep a balance [between] force as well as the settled mind. So, during meditation who helps us to have a balanced meditation and not to fall into these two faults? It's the vigilant introspection mind that takes care of us throughout the meditation; helping us not to fall into any flaws and to retain a balanced and neutral state of meditation. When one is too forceful in our session on the focus towards the object, this flaw will make one [unable] to prolong the session or training. And if you are too relaxed then you lose the one-pointed clarity towards the object. The quality of the session is not there even though you may last longer in a session. How the vigilant introspective mind during the training would spot [out] that you are falling into either of the [two flaws] is [by way] of the introspection mind knowing that the mindfulness is weakening in [terms of] either losing momentum or losing clarity on the object. This is how the introspection mind watches and notices and helps mindfulness to regain the equanimity needed to carry on with a productive session.

The summary of the understanding as [in the text],

There are misconceptions to dispel, such as the following.

*Wrong position:* If you set your consciousness at a high level as you have explained above and then tightly stabilize it without discursiveness, there will indeed not be even the slightest fault of laxity. However, since this increases excitement, you will see that you cannot prolong stability, and your elevated consciousness is brought down. As you will see that relaxing a well-tightened mind



quickly leads to stability, this technique is a great personal instruction.

By being too tight or tense there is no sense of relaxation or calmness. Even though by being too tight, there are no distractions and you are able to focus but that will eventually lead to excitement. Therefore, the flaws come in the way as Lama Tsongkhapa says, “...*relaxing a well-tightened mind quickly leads to (mental) stability, (without encountering the faults and this is a special advice) and this technique is a great personal instruction.*”

What Lama Tsongkhapa is advising is that you need to have a focused mind but that focus is on the basis of a very relax, very calm state of the mind. Then in that way you will be able to deliver the session without getting into the flaw of excitement, which comes from being too forceful on the focus. You need to focus and with force but not overly forceful.

*Reply:* With a sense of assurance, these words proclaim in a loud voice, “Good relaxation is good meditation.” Yet, they fail to differentiate laxity and meditation. Thus, as I explained above, flawless concentration must have two features; the firm stability of non-discursive attention does not alone suffice.

So, “*firm stability of non-discursive attention*” has to be accompanied with calmness and a relaxed state of body and mind in order to deliver a successful session.

*Wrong position:* At that time, laxity is when your mind darkens and becomes clouded; without this, your mind has a limpid clarity, so your concentration is flawless.

Laxity is a clouded mind and without that [laxity], you will have a quality mind.

*Reply:* As this statement does not differentiate lethargy and laxity, I will elaborate on them later.

Thus, if you use an intense cognition that is too tight, you may have clarity, but excitement will predominate so that it will be hard to develop stability. If you sustain your meditation after becoming greatly relaxed, then you may have stability, but laxity will predominate so that there is no vivid intensity. It is very hard to find the right balance of tension so as to be neither too taut nor too relaxed, and for this reason it is hard to develop a concentration free from laxity and excitement. With this in mind, the master Candrogomin stated in his *Praise of Confession*:

If I use exertion, excitement arises;  
If I abandon it, slackness ensues;  
It is hard to find the right balance in this—  
What should I do with my troubled mind?

Even great masters have such difficulties. The meaning is basically the same, that if we are too forceful, then excitement arises; if too relaxed, then laxity arises. Master Buddhāsanti said the same in his *Commentary on the “Praise of Confession”*.

For us it is very tough, and that is why we need to have a strong imprint on what is to be expected so that our introspection mind is able to deal with it. As I have mentioned in the summary at the beginning of reading the text, this has to be clear in our heart, to have a very strong imprint that is with a clear understanding without [even] looking at the text. So that when we do meditation, our introspection mind can easily detect [flaws] otherwise, just knowing the text but if it is not in our mind, it will be very hard.

Therefore, Candragomin says, “it is hard to find” a concentration that is the right balance or midway practice free from the two extremes of laxity and excitement. If getting quite relaxed were adequate, there would not be any problem at all. Since the text says that this leads to laxity, it is obviously improper to use this method to achieve concentration.

It is not enough to have clarity, which is simply the limpid quality of a very relaxed mind; there also must be a degree of tightness in the

way you apprehend the object. In his discussion of the method used in the first two of the nine mental states, the noble Asanga says:

For stabilizing and properly stabilizing your mind on this object, there is the attention of tight focus.

This struggle occurs during first two stages of the nine stages of Samatha training where the meditator struggles to balance these two flaws. In order to even get to [that stage] we have to practice from now and train in focusing on the chosen object. Even though we are not actually in the process of developing the nine levels yet but even during the preparation time we have to use our vigilant mind to train our vigilant mind to work during meditation - even if it's a one-minute session. You try to train the vigilant mind to function so that when you go into the actual training, then vigilance is ready to help you to progress.

There are *four attentions* to train in Samatha, which are the conditional help to the development of the Samatha from the first to the ninth stage. They are 1) Tight attention; 2) Intermittent (repeated) attention; 3) Uninterrupted attention; 4) Effortless attention

For the first and second level you need to use tight attention. For tight attention, you need to have a balance because if it's too tight it is an obstacle and if it's too loose you cannot focus.

To support the above, Asanga says,

For stabilizing and properly stabilizing your mind on this object, there is the attention of tight focus.

As Lama Tsongkhapa says,

Just to have firm stability is not enough; you need to have two features.

And Kamalasila's first *Stages of Meditation* says:

After you clear away laxity, firmly hold just the object of meditation.

Not falling into being too relaxed in a session, you need to firmly hold the object of meditation after you clear away the laxity.

And Kamalasila's second *Stages of Meditation* states:

Then, after you have quelled laxity, by all means make it so that your mind very clearly sees just the object of meditation.

Lama Tsongkhapa [commented] on Kamalasila's,

"your mind very clearly sees," he does not mean only that the object is clear; he means that your mind's way of apprehending the object is clear and firm.

We have already discussed the three features of mindfulness and here, it is talking about the second feature of mindfulness: your mind not forgetting the object. The third feature of mindfulness is your mind not forgetful of the object of meditation. One is the object and the other is the subject. When you apprehend to the object and not forgetting what you apprehended. Not only that, the mind (subject itself) also develops into a non-forgetful mind. Otherwise, only when the object with the help of tight focus appears, can you hold on to the object. If you don't have the non-forgetful mind itself, you will lose the one-pointed mind on the object and the clarity to the object. The power of memory with the not forgetful mind has to be there, and not just when you look at the object then you can remember. *"It does mean that only the object is clear, it means that the way your mind is apprehending the object is clear and firm."* So, there is a certain degree of a serviceable mind that you need to have. In order to get to that point, you need to clear away a very distracted state of mind with too many desirous objects and you need to have a sense of a contented mind. The subject mind is itself pacified from desire which we have discussed before in the preliminary [preparatory practices] and those are the practices that will eventually lead our mind to be very clear with a very focused, serviceable mind.

## PRACTICES FOR PURIFYING OBSTACLES

So, for that we need to start to train in ethics. The more moral ethics that we observe, the more clear our mind becomes. So when that clear mind apprehends the object, it is so easy to gain the purpose of apprehending the object. Therefore, even from the three higher trainings, morality serves as a cause for the second [higher] training of concentration. Then when it comes to focus and clarity whenever your mind relates to virtues, especially developing dharma, the more morality and precepts that you observe will help to clear the mind. Unethical immoral attitudes are regarded as a major obstacle to the clarity of our mind towards dharma and virtues. Gross desire in particular sexual desire clouds the mind whenever you apprehend virtue or dharma. And even more gross than that is when you waste sexual fluids that really harms mental sharpness and mental clarity. These affect the development of higher training especially concentration as it requires immense sharpness of your mind.

Therefore, to develop Samatha, observation of precepts and morality, celibacy precepts and vows are regarded as extremely important. There are some who even since very little as a boy or girl practice celibacy but the mind is still very dull and unclear. That could be due to past lifetimes' transgressions and accumulating such karma in the past that has affected [them]. So, even if we observe much precepts and in particular no sexual activity etc. but the mind is still very dull and cannot focus when it comes to dharma or virtue, then one should realize it's due to past lives karma and we should purify that. Taking more precepts is beneficial and also doing simple things like cleaning prayer rooms, or just doing house cleaning and reciting, "*Dul pang dri ma pang*". The verses meaning is that conventionally you are cleaning external dirt but ultimately you are cleaning the karmic imprint of immorality or stains from the past. If you have an altar always keep the altar very clean and very neat. Even if there is no dust, whenever possible just wipe the altar or even the statue and thangka; always clean and in your heart [think] that ultimately you are purifying all the misconduct, imprints etc. That will help.

Make water bowl offerings and try to offer as clean water as possible and that the water bowls are cleaned properly. The water may be clean but the heart may not there [so the offering is not] clean and pure as it's supposed to be. If it's very clear you can see very tiny bubbles in the water in the container. Our guru used to tell us how pure your heart, and how pure the water you use, and how pure your water bowls are clean, can be seen in the tiny, tiny flower-like bubbles. Sometimes if you do it properly it will appear like that and if you don't do it properly it won't appear like that. If you see from below it is like water dew

inside the water. This is what I was told and sometimes when I do and examine, it appears like that. But don't attach too much on this, just do water bowl offerings.

Anyway, usually when you make offerings there are signs that will appear [indicating] how pure your offering is. For butter light offerings, if you use pure substance and you offer with a pure heart then the butter from the top will appear signs like flower petals. Of course we should not attach too much to this but there are signs.

Here, we are particularly concerned about the unclear mind, the subject of mind itself which [can be] a major obstacle to develop Samatha. For that reason, here is sharing some basic practices we can engage in [to deal with that]. If you get an opportunity to do so, you can also clean the temple, dharma centers, and monasteries either inside or outside. And there's also guru's room where guru lives and guru being a very powerful object in which you can accumulate merits you can also wipe the conventional dirt in the room or altar etc. At the least, most people would have altars [at home] so that is your guru's mandala and also your mandala. So, just always clean it even if there is no dirt with meditation - make it as nice and clean and as tidy as possible. There are many stories that you all may have heard before. There is a new monk who has trouble remembering prayers or even just to remember one word is so difficult. So, the monastery assigned him to do cleaning around the monastery and within that short lifetime he perfected morality and gained full concentration and even realized emptiness directly and became an Arhat. What he was asked to practice was to recite, '*Dul pang dri ma pang*' and to meditate that outwardly clearing the dirt but inwardly clearing the karmic imprints and obscurations. These are teachings for us to practice because for many of us our mind is quite dull.

We continue with the text on page 53:

The above-mentioned way of maintaining mindfulness is extremely important. Without knowing it your meditation will show a great number of faults, such as slipping into great forgetfulness commensurate with the amount of your meditation or dulling the wisdom that differentiates phenomena. Nevertheless you mistakenly presume that you have a solid concentration.

[Therefore], if you don't have clear mental sharpness (from the subject point of view) then [it is] questionable about developing Samatha and even if we want to meditate on analytical meditation we will also have difficulties.

*Question:* While mindfulness fixes your attention on the object of meditation as explained above, is it appropriate to monitor your meditation and think about whether you are holding the object of meditation well?

Who monitors? It is the introspection mind that monitors.

Kamalasila's second *Stages of Meditation* teaches how to do that:

*Reply:* After you have thus set your attention on whatever your chosen object of meditation may be, fix it there continuously. While you stay right with your object, analyze and investigate your mind, thinking: "Is my mind apprehending the object of meditation well? Or is it lax? Or is it distracted by the appearance of external objects?"

So, the introspection mind is doing this job while mindfulness is focusing on the object of meditation carrying the two qualities: vivid intensity and steady one-pointed focus. You may think, "How is this possible?" You are supposed to stay focused with vivid clarity and how [then] can I examine? Some people may think, "I have to stop the meditation and examine."

To clarify that, Lama Tsongkhapa says,

It is not that you stop your concentration and then look at your mind. Rather, while maintaining your state of concentration, you just look to see whether your attention is staying where it was previously set on the primary object of meditation and, if it is not, whether there is laxity or excitement. After you have settled into concentration, you monitor this at moderate intervals, neither too

often nor too seldom. If you do this while the intensity and force of the previous awareness are not quite gone, it takes place within the perspective of this awareness. This has the purpose of both enabling long-lasting, intense stability, and letting you quickly recognize laxity and excitement.

Accordingly, this is how you sustain your mindfulness, for a necessary cause of powerful and continuous mindfulness is sustaining your meditation by repeatedly reminding yourself, at intervals, of the intended object of meditation.

So, during meditation you have to fix it. If you fail terribly and really cannot get back to continue your session only then do you stop and try to recover it during post meditation. But first try while we are in the [meditation] session.

*Asanga's Sravaka Levels* says:

In this regard, what is one-pointed mind? Any continuum of attention that remembers again and again, focuses on a consistently similar object, and is continuous, free of misdeeds, and possessed of delight is called "concentration," as well as "a one-pointed virtuous mind."

For common objects of concentration then [one can use] any object as long as you can remember again and again, to focus on it. But for Buddhists on the training of concentration, then the object of meditation has to be a virtuous one.

What does it remember again and again? You perceive the object of meditation—the characteristic of someone in equipoise—from the viewpoint of any teaching that you have memorized or heard, and upon which you have received instructions and explications from your gurus. You engage and focus on this object with continuous mindfulness.



From here we can understand that the object as we have discussed before [need not be] just a physical object but it can also be an understanding like emptiness, instructions on loving kindness and compassion. You can use any of these objects to train your concentration.

Therefore, you maintain mindfulness to stop forgetfulness wherein you stray from the object of meditation. Hence, non-forgetfulness of the object of meditation—wherein forgetfulness is stopped—is when you “mentally express” the object of meditation; you bring the object of meditation to mind again and again. For example, when you are anxious about forgetting something you know, it will be hard to forget if you recall it again and again.

Thus, you have to remind yourself of the object of meditation at moderate intervals in order to develop strong mindfulness. The way to strengthen your vigilance, which notices laxity and excitement, is to lock your attention on your object of meditation without distraction, and then to monitor it. Realize that if you repudiate such a procedure by thinking, “This is discursiveness,” it will be extremely difficult to develop powerful mindfulness and vigilance.

C. THE LENGTH OF THE SESSIONS  
[Lamrim Chenmo page 54]

*Question:* When you fix your attention on the object of meditation with mindfulness, is there a definite length for the session, such that you will say, “I will stabilize my mind on the object only until then”?

*Reply:* On this matter, all earlier gurus of the various Tibetan lineages say that you have to do numerous short sessions. Why? Some say that if you meditate in brief sessions and stop when it is going well, you will still be eager to meditate at the end of each session, while if the session is long, you will become weary. Others explain that if the session is long, it is easy to fall under the sway of laxity and excitement, so it is hard to develop flawless concentration.

There are many suggestions that if you are able to focus then you should carry on focusing for a long time. But there are some who say even if the sessions are going well, at the beginning, it is good to do short sessions. Our gurus used to strongly emphasize us to do shorter ones and especially to stop when you are experiencing full force and in the best state of the session; that's the time you should stop. Not only that, in the beginning, it is good to do short but many sessions. So do short sessions but many [of them]. Usually, it [is mentioned] to do 4 sessions but this is only in general. When you do any retreat including Samatha retreat you can do 10 sessions or even more than that. Whatever it is you stop when you are in the best state of your session. So, that is always recommended.

Another personal instruction is to have as little breaks as possible, so - short sessions, little breaks, and many sessions. This way you don't get tired and you don't need too many breaks. That way you can achieve a lot of the result from the practice within one day.

[Regarding] the amount of time needed to test our quality of meditation at the initial stage when we train in single-pointed meditation,

*Asanga's Sravaka Levels* and other classic texts do not state the length of sessions clearly. However, Kamalasila's third *Stages of Meditation* does say:

At this stage engage in meditative equipoise for twenty-four minutes, an hour-and-a-half, three hours, or as long as you can.

So in the beginning, even if it's just for 5 minutes or 1 minute we [begin] by training our self. After a certain kind of ability has been developed and certain groundwork is done then in order for you to see if you can qualify to really engage into developing Samatha or not, these timelines are the kind of time-frames you can examine for yourself. You start with 24 minutes [and check] whether the two qualities of mindfulness are intact, as well as one of the important factors we have discussed: the balanced application of mindfulness to the object, which has the functionality of the introspection mind. For some practitioners, when your mind is focused; and then when another mind starts to examine, you will get distracted and you can't multi-task. Here, you need to multi-task at least two things: one is focus and the other is checking. So you need to organize all this. If you can successfully get it done, for 24 minutes then think, "Oh, wow okay, not bad" but don't leave it at that. Try 1 hour, 1½ hours, 3 hours and then after that, I think you are ready to go into retreat. Now, you can

stay for as long as you can, most likely. It's still a lot of hard work but the groundwork is ready.

Lama Tsongkhapa interprets in this quotation,

While this statement occurs in the context of the length of the session for cultivating insight after you have already achieved serenity, it is clearly similar when you are first achieving serenity, so do it this way.

Even though this timeline is given [for those who have already] achieved Samatha and so whenever you go into a session you can [adopt] this timeline. And even for someone who is for the first time developing serenity and starting to build from the first stage, this timeline can also be used. Similarly, when we are first training on the groundwork, we can also use this timeline to check how prepared you are.

If you practice the techniques of mindfulness and vigilance explained above—reminding yourself of the object of meditation and monitoring your meditation at moderate intervals—it does not matter if the session is a little long. However, usually one or two things will happen when you are a beginner and have a long session. On the one hand, you may become distracted due to forgetfulness. In this case, you will not recognize the occurrence of any laxity or excitement quickly but only after a long period of time. On the other hand, though you may not lose your mindfulness, it is easy to fall under the sway of laxity and excitement, and you will not quickly recognize them when they occur. The first situation hinders the development of strong mindfulness; the latter hinders the development of strong vigilance. Hence, it is very difficult to stop laxity or excitement.

So, that's the reason why you need to train with shorter sessions.

In particular, failing to recognize laxity and excitement after you have become distracted due to forgetting the object of meditation is much worse than failing to quickly recognize laxity and excitement while not forgetting the object of meditation. So the techniques for maintaining mindfulness—the previously explained remedies which stop the breakdown of mindfulness ensuing from distraction—are very important.

That's why you need a sharp mind, as the subject itself, is a very clever, sharp mind, in order for us to have these qualities and not fall into these flaws.

If you have great forgetfulness ensuing from distraction, as well as vigilance so weak that it does not quickly recognize laxity and excitement, then your session must be short. If it is hard for you to forget the object and you can quickly notice laxity and excitement, it does not matter if the session is a little long. This is the idea behind Kamalasila's statement above that the duration of a session is indefinite—twenty-four minutes and so forth. In short, since the duration has to comport with your mental capacity, Kamalasila says "as long as you can".

For beginners a shorter session is very much recommended. Eventually you will start to see the sharpness of your mind remembering the object and at the same time during the session [there is] the timely usage and functioning of vigilance to overcome the two major flaws. Then from there you can start to do for as long as you can or want. We cannot judge our self within 10 or 20 sessions of trying to meditate. We have to do hundreds [of sessions] then only we can say, "Okay, ya, my type is ... to do with time and whatever ways of meditation and then you can say that, "I am this type". So, if just after 10 or 20 times of trying to concentrate then one already starts to complain, freak out and have so many questions arising, it is too early. And maybe also at the beginning a fresh new practitioner will feel very good but then after a few months or a few years, you [may] experience great failure and somehow you don't feel the effect and then you give up. But we should not be like that as it could just be the occurrence of some obstacles and [you should know] that the effect of continuous meditation in the past is already benefitting you. So once a while because of some other factors arising then try to overcome them and continue rather than

give up and judge yourself that you have failed in the meditation. [You may think,] 'I have no hope.' Many people do that but we should not fall into that trap.

To support that:

If temporary injury to your mind or body does not occur, set your mind in equipoise. If such injury does occur, do not persist in meditating, but immediately stop your session and then clear away the impediments in your mental and physical constituents. Then meditate.

This is the advice we need to take seriously. You cannot force it, even how amazing and beneficial this practice may be. That will injure our mind. We also cannot force our physical body as that will injure our chakras, channels and nervous system and that will become huge obstacles. So, both body and mind has to be really comfortable and really conduct willingly. In order for that to be, that's why from the eight antidotes it says we require faith, aspiration and perseverance. These are the antidotes for the five flaws and from the very beginning we need to develop: faith, aspiration, perseverance, with much joy in the practice. If there are any obstacles that come into your mind and body then immediately you should stop and cure it. Then only go back into the session. Never force. You have to understand the mental injury here. During mental equipoise, the vigilance will check if laxity and excitement have occurred or not. You can check it about two or three times and if still getting into obstacles but you [continue] to force yourself that will be hurtful and not healthy. Then you stop and during post-meditation, you try to fix it. If the main injury is due to mental laxity, then think of Buddha's qualities, Samatha's qualities or Guru's qualities etc. If the injury is due to mental excitement, then pause your meditation and meditate on the faults of samsara, faults of karma and delusion and faults of three lower realms and try to recover and then go back into the session.

#### 'LUNG' PROBLEMS - SIGNS AND REMEDY

Another major obstacle we have to keep in mind is the 'lung' problem or "wind problem". Because we are doing so much focus, it may trigger the arising of the wind energy higher than the other elements. If such thing occurs then immediately you should stop and try to fix it through eating the right food or maybe knowing some of the pressure points or

massage points in the body or maybe find time for enough rest or sleep. Otherwise, it will ruin everything, and there is a danger of ruining not just our retreat but the rest of our life.

## SIGNS OF 'LUNG'

If there is a danger of 'lung' usually during a single-pointed meditation you may see such signs:

- Hyperness will occur more frequently in relation to obstacles due to excitement. There is too much force and the wind energy is too active which cause hyper. Due to that, you cannot concentrate and become unstable. That is one of the signs that a retreator should know and that I need to take care of myself.
- Impatience which is another sign of 'lung' especially impatience related to sound or any other situation and one gets easily irritated
- "Hearing" sounds, noises in the ears
- Pain in the upper back
- Chest feels congested, like pushed up and tight. It's more serious if it happens right at the center of the chest, aching and painful.
- Insomnia. At nighttime one feels more awake and in the day time one feels very tired in body and mind. One feels lazy and kind of moody and depressed.
- Depression is also a sign of 'lung'.

These are the signs of 'lung' which not only can happen during Samatha meditation when one is in concentration but it can also happen when one recites mantras or any [activity] in which one needs to use concentration. You need to be aware of these signs, take care of it, avoid it and cure it because if you neglect it then it can go seriously wrong.

## THE CURE FOR 'LUNG' PROBLEM

For the cure and prevention [of 'lung'], there are a few areas that you need to practice.

### 1) Food.

- i. Most retreaters especially when doing Samatha retreats try to avoid eating food after noon time and dinner. When there are signs of lung occurring, then it is better to eat food in the evening.

- ii. Usually for retreats we try to eat light food but when this kind of obstacle occurs then try to eat heavy food even protein.
- iii. Try to avoid caffeine or any food with caffeine. Certain people are not affected by caffeine but usually caffeine is very bad for 'lung'.

## 2) Discipline time to rest.

- i. Try to discipline yourself to end the session as early as possible and if can, try to go to sleep by 8.00pm or 9.00pm (best time) or at least before 10.00pm. Try not to remain awake after 10.00pm.
- ii. Wake up time in the morning can be 3.00am or 4.00am or 5.00am as you [prefer] but note that for sleeping time it is best to sleep by 10.00pm. Usually people perform 4 sessions and the last session try to finish by 9.00pm then by 10.00pm the retreator can go to rest.

## 3. Pressure points.

There are a few 'lung' points that you can massage. [Note: Please refer to video recordings for accuracy].

[Prepare the ingredients for massage oil:]

Use oil or butter which has heat components [properties] such as mustard oil. Yak butter has hot components. Some oil have cold components. Heat up the oil [or butter] and make it warm but not burning. If you can get it, there are two substances, nutmeg and another substance (name in Tibetan) which is very hard to get as it is only found in high mountains. At least you can easily get nutmeg. Nutmeg is very good to be eaten or if it is added to your food it can help to subside 'lung' related issues. [Grind] the nutmeg into powder and wrap it in a cloth. Then dip into the warm oil or butter and gently rub on any of the pressure points described below:

- i. Place your fist on your hairline on the forehead and with your thumb stretched out to the back of the head. The point where your thumb touches is the location of the tip of the center channel (massage point).
- ii. Located behind both ears near the jawline there is a point that you can use your thumb to massage.
- iii. On your spine column from the base of your skull, on the 7<sup>th</sup> vertebra is the location of a pressure point. You can locate this on your back where your heart is located in the front of your body.

- iv. The space between the base of your thumb and index finger on the back of the both your hands. When you rub it you can feel this area is quite sensitive and very painful.
- v. Similarly, on the palm-side [front] of your hands is a massage point
- vi. Below the armpit
- vii. Also mirroring the above on your foot, the front and sole, the points are located between your big toe and second toe.

You can check these pressure points [hands and feet] and some are very sensitive and painful especially when the sign of 'lung' is quite strong that even just by pressing the points on your hands it feels sensitive. You can massage those areas with or without the oil [ingredients described above] but especially should use with nutmeg. During retreat especially it is good to have these [on standby]. Tibetan medical center usually have ready-made ones. When you go into long retreats it's good to have these things as such obstacles may occur.

- viii. Also, lengthy breathing in and out exercise and just focusing (as we have discussed before) is also very beneficial to balance the wind problem. When you do that you try to have your shoulders back and chest out. Breathe in through the nostrils and breathe out through the mouth.

I am sharing these because I had experienced 'lung' when I did Yamantaka and Vajrayogini retreat a long time ago. I finished hundred thousand mantra recitations of Yamantaka and Vajrayogini within 1 week. So, I went crazy and I didn't know. I thought I couldn't fall asleep and I did sessions for 24 hours and after that I was almost flying because of 'lung' and it was not because of realizations. I felt like I was almost crazy. I was rushing and I did the opposite of what I mentioned before. My guru said, "I won't regard that you have done the retreat." And I was asked to go back and do all these practices and for a few days, I tried to organize my system. Then, after I was normal I went back into retreat for a long time and that was wonderful.

My guru said during retreat, you cannot have this anxious feeling, competitiveness, too tense or too rushed feeling. During retreat you have to feel like you are on the best holiday and you never want this holiday to end. You conduct your retreat in that kind of way and so you have to create that by all means, such as in thinking and everything. Then, the retreat becomes very successful. Otherwise [it will be] like what I have told you.



### **Homework**

Whatever that we have discussed above try to figure out the usage of the introspection mind during the meditation to help the mindfulness to sustain the meditation. Try to practice that and at the same time try to develop a balanced application to the meditation object in order for us not to follow into the two extremes of laxity and excitement.

28 June 2020, Session: 15  
Question and Answer Session (refer to page 293)

30 June 2020, Session: 16  
Defining characteristics of laxity and excitement

## HOW TO DEVELOP FLAWLESS CONCENTRATION.

- (i) What to do prior to focusing the attention on an object of meditation.
- (ii) What to do while focusing on an object of meditation.
- (iii) What to do after you focus on an object of meditation.**

(iii) WHAT TO DO AFTER YOU FOCUS ON AN OBJECT OF MEDITATION.

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 58]

Today, we will learn specifically about the two major obstacles to the development of Samatha: laxity and excitement, which are also obstacles to any development of virtuous practices. We will learn the characteristics of these two faults. These two faults are also obstacles of mind that obstructs us from gaining the full benefits of practices like refuge, practice of recitation of mantra, deity yoga practice. We know the label of the term: 'excitement' and 'laxity', but when we try to learn their actual characteristics, it's very tricky, and subtle just to get to that exact point. Sometimes we take for granted that we know what is excitement and laxity, but then to really know exactly what these are is very subtle. For a practitioner who really wants to develop Samatha without knowing exactly what it is then even though you may be able to recognize the gross laxity and excitement but you may not be able to recognize the subtle ones. Due to that, the progress to [the development] of Samatha will be prolonged. Just to give you a kind of understanding of these two [laxity and excitement], when we talk about 'excitement', it has to do with excitement that is distraction in relation to attachment. Even though there are other negative emotions that also distract you but it does not count as distraction of excitement as described in the Samatha teachings.

This excitement is not attachment [in itself] but it is the result of attachment. We have to differentiate that this excitement is a by-product of attachment and it is not attachment.

‘Laxity’ or dullness is a by-product of ignorance and a lethargic mind. Ignorance here is not referring to the common Dharma understanding of ignorance. This ‘ignorance’ here is [referring] to not knowing the object of concentration. So, ‘laxity’ is not ignorance but it is a by-product of ignorance. It is the heaviness of body and mind due to cloudiness, lack of openness and clarity and brings a [sense] of moodiness, a sinking experience of body and mind, losing energy. That is the state of a mind and body [with laxity] and that appears not just to the mind but also in the physical sense. It is the direct opposite of physical and mental pliancy; physical senses and it’s a mental attitude that is lacking in aspiration. ‘Laxity’ is like that.

‘Excitement’ is grasping to the five senses objects. The grasping of wanting; the very hyper mind of anger is not included here as it has to be attachment such as grasping at liking or wanting. This comes from a mind that has not renounced the objects of five senses.

## **1. WHAT TO DO WHEN LAXITY AND EXCITEMENT OCCUR**

### **A. THE DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF LAXITY AND EXCITEMENT**

#### **EXCITEMENT**

Excitement is defined in Asanga’s *Compendium of Knowledge*:

What is excitement? It is an unquiet state of mind, considered a derivative of attachment, which pursues pleasant objects and acts as an impediment to meditative serenity.

‘Unquiet mind’ because it’s grasping; and ‘*derivative of attachment*’ because it’s the result of attachment; ‘*pursuing pleasant objects which acts as an impediment to meditative serenity*’ is an obstacle to serenity. To that, Lama Tsongkhapa gives a clear definition:

There are three aspects to this definition (1) Its object is an attractive and pleasant one. (2) Its subjective aspect is that your mind is unquiet and scattered outward. As it is a derivative of attachment, it

engages its object with a sense of craving. (3) Its function is to impede stabilization of your mind on its object.

We already know that laxity and excitement are the two main major obstacles. Now, we also learned its characteristics and its main point is attachment, which is the one that brings about the obstacle of excitement. When we link this to [what we have discussed at] the very beginning of this course regarding the six different preconditions; which in fact is mainly focused on the elimination of the environment of attachment. [The six preconditions such as:] 'having little desire', 'being contented', 'completely giving up many activities', 'pure ethical discipline' and 'completely giving up thoughts of desire' - all these are related to attachment. So, the six preconditions, although itemized as six different preconditions, all have to do with attachment and are specifically emphasized again and again. We now understand that one of the major things we need to work out is attachment. Especially, as we are born in the desire realm so in particular, we are a 'victim' of desire. Due to desire, we are still not liberated from the six realms; being born a girl or boy is also due to desire. Even the substances from our mother and father in which [we came into being] are also resulted from desire. Our entire being and system is like a complete tree of desire. So we have to put extra effort to work this out.

A side track here: I know there are serious Vajrayogini practitioners here. Why is Heruka Vajrayogini practice one of the most effective and swiftest paths in this five degenerated times and in particular in the desire realm, in particular in our world, and in particular in our time? It is because in the Vajrayogini practice, when it comes to the mandala, the deity, the path and the practice, they all play as a direct antidote to attachment. Attachment is the worse obstacle in our spiritual development and so when you practice the greatest antidote to the greatest negative emotion first, that helps us to liberate faster.

Whether one is a sutra practitioner, vinaya practitioner or a tantra practitioner, the main delusion that we need to work out is attachment. Even though all the delusions are rooted in ignorance but in our gross senses the active accumulation and development of negativities is a by-product of desirous attachment. The twenty secondary delusions and the rest of the five other root delusions are a play of desirous attachment. [For example,] even though anger is rooted in ignorance but its main cause for anger to arise is attachment like jealousy. The rest of the delusions are also mainly caused by attachment.

Most of the time, we either don't feel happy or we feel miserable. This is due to attachment that is boiling, and is not peaceful; it is a distracted, disturbed emotion. Anger will come

once a while, burn and go off. However, for attachment, it is like our every system is bound by attachment, it's functioned by attachment, and expresses the faces of attachment. Whenever we open up any of our five senses, the first thing is attachment that is functioning. So, that's why we are not happy. Therefore, we need to take as many precepts as possible, as many vows as possible and as many commitments as possible to really seal every single door from arising attachment. The ethics and morality precepts are like a seal to seal off the leakage of attachment.

So, even at the time of death, one of the most crucial times that will determine our future lifetime where we conclude the karma, attachment is the one that may drag us down to the lower realms. Attachment to your possessions, attachment to your body, attachment to your things and events that [happened] etc. in our life. At the time of dying, if we don't renounce and let go or detach, that will be the completing karma that will result us to being [reborn] in the lower realms.

Therefore, attachment is the main obstacle that makes our mind not serviceable in what we wish to experience and to focus. If we don't train well now to make our mind serviceable by purifying the distraction of attachment, then at the time of death our mind will become uncontrollable and fully occupied. Even though we know that we are dying and we want to focus on our practice and meditate on the practice of emptiness, or other practices, but because of our attachment grasping, our mind wanders and we conclude [our life] with the wrong karma.

We have to train our mind to be serviceable not just the gross mind but we have to train through meditation, so that the meditative state of mind which is the subtle mind will be trained into a serviceable mind. This is not just for us to gain focus or a single-pointed mind or the Samatha mind, but mainly for us to achieve the capability to realize all the higher practices including special insight. And even at the time of death for us to use the clear light mind into the path. If you don't have a meditative mind that has been trained into a serviceable state then the clear light subtle state of mind won't be able to be serviceable. It will come but we cannot utilize it as the path because your mind cannot cope or concentrate nor have clarity to focus to the clear light appearance. So, Samatha training is not just to gain a focused mind and just simply being serviceable to our gross mind doesn't mean that our mind is serviceable. If you plugged in your favorite music in your ear, you stay completely focused on that but it does not qualify your mind as being serviceable. When we do our worldly things and our mind is focused on them, it doesn't mean our mind is serviceable. Some people who are overwhelmed by desire, when they perform any acts of desire they are so focused. That is not a serviceable mind. A serviceable mind has to be

serviceable in virtue like what we have learnt- serviceable in the virtue, serviceable in the practice, and that happens when your meditative state of mind becomes serviceable. So, Samatha training is to get to that point.

We have to be very clear about this. We cannot [say] that, “Oh, I can focus and focusing is no problem.” When we talk about the Buddhist practice of Samatha, focus here is referring to focus in virtuous practice and virtuous objects and one is able to focus for as long as you like. Otherwise, if like me I want to focus on watching a Hindi movie (which about 3 hours is very long), I can focus completely, absolutely and without distraction of hunger or thirst. Some of you watch Chinese dramas movies and can chase the drama day after day even for months. Even at work you can remember the drama, and while watching it you are so focused on the drama that you can’t hear anything else. That doesn’t mean that you can focus. That is embedded with attachment. In fact, we are distracted; not focusing. We are actually making our mind more distracted from virtues. The moment we want to do some meditation or even meditation on chanting mantras, even for a second or a minute we have a hard time. Even to do our sadhana for 1 minute we also have a hard time. Meditating on emptiness for 1 second we also have a hard time. As mentioned in yesterday’s class, when we do the excursion of finding the no ‘I’ or establishing the actual existent ‘I’, it is in fact much more exciting than watching a Hindi movie or Chinese drama, or Korean drama. There are a lot of surprises and amazing discoveries, one after another and you can go on for hours like that. But from the beginning, at the starting point, you already feel lousy and distracted, cannot focus and can’t progress and this is because there is no serviceable mind. Emptiness is a virtue. Why your mind is not being serviceable is because your mind is embedded with attachment grasping which is negative. And negative cannot go along with positive.

So, now we know that if we want to get rid of this major obstacle of excitement for Samatha, we have to get rid of attachment. This is the finding. Yes, we know that excitement is no good, and this is an obstacle and we also learnt that we need to use vigilant mindfulness to tackle it. But the actual working out to getting rid of excitement as an obstacle is to get rid of attachment. At the very least, we have to get rid of the gross attachments first and then gradually the subtle ones. The method is already guided by the preliminary practices: practice more contentment, practice more detachment to outer objects, less desirous activities and develop as much as possible the mind of renunciation to samsaric phenomena like things and events including this body. These are the ways to successfully get rid of the major obstacle of excitement.

Also, one should purify the imprint of the past immorality particularly to do with attachment. In our daily life, you can recite the pure morality mantra: *Om Amogha Shila Sambhara [Sambhara] Bhara Bhara Maha Shuddha Sattva Padma Vibhushita Bhuja Dhara Dhara Samanta Avalokite Hum Phat Svaha*. You can get this from the Nyung Nay text and recite it about 21 times if possible or at least once. That helps to purify the imprint because right at this stage we are out of control. You don't want to get excitement and you don't want to have attachment, yet we are thrown in that situation because of our strong imprint. So, while working this out we need to also purify the imprint from the past. Doing prostrations is also one of the powerful ways especially prostrations in relation to the Thirty-five Buddhas because the Thirty-five Buddhas are fully ordained enlightened aspects like Shakyamuni Buddha who holds the highest individual liberation precepts. Because of that, doing prostrations help to purify the imprint of immorality of the past. [There are other methods such as]: making incense offering to the Buddhas, Gurus, Scriptures and stupas; and cleaning the altar. If you have time, go to the dharma centers, temples and just volunteer to do cleaning or tidying up the altar or cleaning the floor and recite, '*Dul pang dri ma pang*'. That helps to cleanse our imprint of the past lifetime's desirous attachment actions. Then when we work it out, it becomes very effective as there is less power by our past imprints. So when there is less power by past imprints, as we have discussed in earlier classes, the practitioner can now choose any object they like to train in Samatha. For someone who has already eliminated strong imprints of their past negative emotions, because there is no frequent force of the past negative emotions, it's easy to guide our body, speech and mind into practice. So we have to do these things and these practices are easy. We just have to discipline ourselves to do them.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

When your attention is inwardly fixed upon its object, excitement—which is attached to form, sound and so on—pulls your attention helplessly toward these objects and causes distraction.

Remember, [we have mentioned] excitement is not attachment [itself] but it is the result of attachment. The meaning here is that sensual attachment is a distraction and that [attachment] comes from the main mind of three root delusions. Attachment plays the basis where the expressions of sensual attachment, sensual distraction to the object by grasping to those object arise. So, you must keep these two differences in mind.

Like [in the case of] suffering and its causes: suffering is not the cause but suffering is the by-product of the causes. When you are experiencing suffering you are experiencing the effect of the causes. Therefore, the causes have to be there in the effect, and not the cause being the effect. So these are the differences.

Lama Tsongkhapa quotes Candragomin's *Praise of Confession*:

Just as you have focused on meditative serenity,  
Directing your attention toward it again and again,  
The noose of the afflictions pulls your attention  
Helplessly with the rope of attachment to objects.

As like how the afflictions arises and affects us helplessly with the rope of attachment and grasping to the object here, the meditation rope of mindfulness ties us steady to focus on the object of meditation. This is how to tackle the obstacle.

*Question:* Is it excitement when there is scattering in which other afflictions distract your mind away from the object—or, for that matter, when there is scattering toward other virtuous objects?

*Reply:* Excitement is a derivative of attachment, so being distracted by other afflictions is not excitement; rather, it is the mental process of distraction, which is one of the twenty secondary afflictions. Scattering toward virtuous objects may involve any virtuous mind or mental process, so not all scattering is excitement.

Here, excitement is the effect of attachment; the rest of the delusional minds are [not included] as excitement but they are distractions like if the twenty secondary afflictive emotions arises during the meditation. Those are distractions and they are an obstacle, but they are not one of the two major obstacles, like the one we are talking about which is excitement. Excitement is driven by the effect of attachment. The rest of the arising of afflictions such as the twenty secondary afflictive emotions are not an obstacle of excitement, however they are an obstruction, an obstacle and a distraction. When we talk about excitement it is referring to a scattering mind but not every scattering mind is



necessarily an obstacle of excitement; it can be excitement or can be a distraction, such as the scattering mind toward virtues. Certain scattering minds toward virtues can be a distraction or can be excitement but certain scattering minds toward virtues are not necessarily a distraction as well as not necessarily excitement. If you focus on the golden colored Buddha's image but then if you arise attachment to that golden Buddha image then that is excitement infused by attachment. Even though the object, Buddha's golden image, is a virtue.

How to check if it is infused by attachment grasping or not? If someone asked you to share your Buddha's image for their meditation and you say, 'No. This is *my* Buddha, *my* golden Buddha'. Then it shows that it is infused by attachment grasping. Basically, you check when you are meditating on emptiness, or bodhicitta, or enlightenment, Buddha's qualities or Guru's qualities or Guru's image; is there any grasping attachment [to it]? If there is, then it is wrong. Check if there is any inspiration of enlightened qualities or inspiration of Guru's qualities, inspirational qualities of emptiness and whether it is embedded by that motivation or infused by understanding or not. If we are lacking in that even though you may admire but that admiration may be attachment grasping. It is difficult to differentiate whether it is inspiration or attachment. If its attachment then it's an obstacle; and if it is inspiration then your liking to Buddha or your Guru is not an obstacle and it is beneficial.

Scattering toward virtuous objects that is not excitement or not a distraction is [for example]: you choose the entire Buddha's body including understanding of its' definition and its' enlightened characteristics as your object of Samatha. Then when you first start, you focus on Buddha's eye, but while doing that your mind starts to scatter and you start to see the qualities of Buddha's eye, wisdom and then you see the rest of the features and definition of entire Buddha's qualities, your mind start to scatter. This scattering mind is neither an excitement nor distraction and it is still within meditation and it is not an obstacle. Scattering mind in virtue can be an obstacle and also not an obstacle. There are two types. The obstacle type as mentioned is when it is mixed with attachment. Then when you focus on that object, this is an obstacle. The [scattering mind in virtue] that is not an obstacle, is when you choose the entire Buddha's body, including its descriptions of enlightened qualities, your single-pointed training is to gain focus on that. But when starting to focus such as on [Buddha's] eye, your mind naturally starts to scatter or expand to other things such as the ear, nose and the enlightened qualities, then that scattering mind is not excitement or an obstacle. It is still quality of meditation.

## LAXITY

Many translations render laxity as “slackness”, but this “slackness” should not be construed as meaning discouragement. As for its definition, most yogis among these snowy peaks seem to consider laxity to be a lethargic state of mind that stays on its object of meditation without scattering elsewhere but lacks limpid clarity. This is incorrect,

Laxity is not about discouragement, it is lacking in inspiration but it doesn't mean discouragement. Secondly, laxity is also not lethargy because lethargy or the ignorant mind is the cause for laxity and it's not the laxity. So, as the text says,

for lethargy is said to cause laxity, so the two are distinct.

To further understand this, in Kamalasila's *Stages of Meditation*:

If, being oppressed by lethargy and sleepiness, you see your mind become lax, or in danger of laxity...

This is a very subtle thing to work out and we need to really meditate to understand this just to differentiate [the subtle differences] between lethargy and laxity. So, “*being oppressed by lethargy and sleepiness*” indicates that laxity is not sleepiness and it's not lethargy [either] but when lethargy and sleepiness is present then that is the sign of laxity occurring. It's very tricky. It sounds similar but there is a difference.

Also, the *Sutra Unravelling the Intended Meaning* says:

If there is laxity due to lethargy and sleepiness, or if you are afflicted by any secondary afflictions in meditative absorption, it is a case of internal mental distraction.

There are two distractions, one is laxity caused by lethargy and sleepiness and the other is any of the twenty secondary afflictive emotions. [When these arises], your single-pointed meditation is distracted and the obstacle has occurred. So, when you meditate you have to be aware of not just the arising of laxity or excitement but also any of the other twenty secondary afflictions arising. You have to detect that as an obstacle arising and you need to overcome it. The introspective mind has to have knowledge of all these afflictions so that the introspection mind will know what kind of afflictions are arising. That means if anger arises, your distraction to meditation arises. The twenty secondary afflictions are anger, malice, concealment, outrage, jealousy, miserliness, conceit, dishonesty, haughtiness, harmful intention, non-embarrassment, non-consideration, lack of faith, laziness, non-conscientiousness, forgetfulness of virtue, non-introspection, dullness, agitation and mental wandering. So, if anger arises, your introspection mind needs to know that your single-pointed meditation, and your mindfulness is losing its' strength and so you need to help your mindfulness to regain the meditation as these are all distractions.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

This states that when your mind becomes lax due to lethargy and sleepiness, it is distracted inwardly. Asanga's *Compendium of Knowledge* also discusses laxity in the context of the secondary affliction of distraction, but distraction as he explains it may also be virtuous, so it is not necessarily afflictive.

All twenty secondary afflictions are all distractions but distractions not necessarily have to be only afflictions as it can be virtuous too as we have discussed before.

WHAT IS THE DEFINITION OF 'LETHARGY'?

*Asanga's Compendium of Knowledge* says:

What is lethargy? An unserviceable state of mind classified as a derivative of delusion, it works to assist all root afflictions and secondary afflictions.

This is talking about ignorance. You can also understand that lethargy is the tendency of ignorance. What makes ignorance develop? There are many types of ignorance: ignorance to right view, ignorance to past life, ignorance to knowledge etc. What makes this ignorance exist? There's a tendency in there and lethargy is referred as that tendency where all the delusions comes about. It's right to say that it's the tendency of the ignorance or tendency of the delusions. The reason is because it works to *assist* all the root afflictions and one of the root afflictions is ignorance. So, it has to be the basis of afflictions like ignorance and that can only be referred as the tendency of the ignorance.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

So, this derivative of delusion is the heaviness and unserviceability of body and mind.

From here you can see now that when we talk about ignorance it is a mental factor. But, here it is also talking about body (heaviness of body and mind). If you interpret 'lethargy' as a tendency then there is no contradiction [when referencing] to *heaviness and unserviceability of body and mind*. Otherwise, if it is just ignorance then there is a contradiction as ignorance has to be mind and it's a mental factor. Tendency can come from mind and from environment including the body and all aspects.

Vasubandhu's *Treasury of Knowledge Auto-commentary* says:

What is lethargy? The heaviness of the body and the heaviness of the mind which are the unserviceability of the body and the unserviceability of the mind.

In a way it is easy to understand if you were to use your own experience. Sometimes your mind is inspired to do something but physically it's like you just don't want to get out of the bed, especially during the cold winter, you will experience that. The mind really wants to practice but thinking of the coldness, your body just can't get out and you soak [deeper] into that warmness. Your body is not serviceable to do whatever virtuous [activities] that you want to do like attending teaching or doing prostrations etc. Sometimes you can feel really lousy in both body and mind. So, that is 'heaviness'.

Laxity means that your mind's way of apprehending the object of meditation is slack, and it does not apprehend the object with much vividness or firmness. So even if it is limpid, if your mind's way of apprehending the object is not highly vivid, then laxity has set in.

Kamalasila's second *Stages of Meditation* states:

When your mind does not see the object vividly—like a person born blind, or a person entering a dark place, or like having one's eyes shut—then recognize that your mind has become lax.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

I have not seen a clear presentation of the definition of laxity in the other classic texts.

Laxity may be virtuous or ethically neutral, whereas lethargy is either a non-virtuous or ethically neutral mental obstruction, and it is invariably a derivative of delusion. Moreover, the classic texts say that to dispel laxity, you must bring to mind pleasant objects such as the body of the Buddha, or meditate on light so as to stimulate your mind. Therefore, you have to stop the object from appearing unclearly, as though darkness were descending on your mind, and you have to put an end to the quality of attention which has become flaccid. You need both a clear object of meditation and a tight way of apprehending the object. Neither a clear object alone nor transparency of the subject alone is enough.

The difference between laxity and lethargy is laxity may be virtuous or ethically neutral; [whereas] lethargy can either be non-virtuous or [ethically] neutral. During meditation if you want to overcome this, you can pause your meditation then meditate on the qualities of the Buddha etc. If you want to uplift the spirit of the body and mind, during normal post-meditation [session], then you can think of the qualities of the Buddha, or Pure Land and

benefit of Dharma etc. Whether it is Samatha or any practices, you need two very important things, one is clarity of the practice or object of meditation and the second is a very tight focus. In order to gain both [qualities], you always need to have an uplifted spirit and an energetic body and these come from positive thinking of Buddha's qualities or qualities of the precious human rebirth etc.

Then, Lama Tsongkhapa says,

It is easy to recognize excitement, but laxity is hard to comprehend since it is not clearly identified in the authoritative classic texts. It is also very important because in this case it is a major point of misunderstanding concerning flawless concentration. Therefore, you should experience laxity with an exacting awareness, and on that basis examine it well and identify it accordance with Kamalasila's *Stages of Meditation*.

That is, "when your mind does not see the object vividly—like a person born blind, or a person entering a dark place, or like having one's eyes shut—then recognize that your mind has become lax".

### **Homework**

As Lama Tsongkhapa has advised exactly, in order to have a flawless development of Samatha, then you need to recognize the clear characteristics of these obstacles and its measures, and you should overcome that. Otherwise, however much we meditate we won't be able to progress. Therefore, as advised here, refer to Kamalasila's examples above and try to use it as your own training and try to meditate and see what kind of experiences or understanding that you have gained from what laxity and excitement means. Try to figure that out as homework for this week.

Also, try to read through a few times on the text that we have gone through and try to summarise and get your own concrete understanding based on the text and based on whatever I have tried to explain and try to apply that and try to experience it. Through experiencing it, you will come to realize, "Oh, this is it". So, that knowledge will be carried

by the introspective mind and during meditation of actual Samatha, the introspective mind will help mindfulness to overcome these obstacles.

On the basis of your homework done well, the next session will be so easy, when we discuss the method to develop vigilance in order to recognize laxity and excitement and tackling it. In any practice, even meditation on emptiness, first we have to recognize the negation. Then after learning and recognizing the negation, learn and recognize the antidote and only then you bring in the application, and after that you bring about eradication, and then you achieve cessation. So, these are the processes.

5 July 2020, Session: 17  
Method for developing vigilance ... and Mani practice

Tonight we will divide the session into two sections. First, we will go through some teachings following the text and then we will spend some time to do some practice. In the last session we had homework to figure out, understand and recognize what the two major faults, excitement and laxity, really look like. Today, we will discuss the method for developing vigilance that recognizes laxity and excitement. In the last lesson, we learnt the characteristics and definitions of the two faults. Today is for us to learn during the meditation, how to detect these two faults.

## **B. METHOD FOR DEVELOPING VIGILANCE THAT RECOGNIZES LAXITY AND EXCITEMENT**

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 60]

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

It is not enough just to have an understanding of laxity and excitement; you have to be able to develop vigilance that accurately detects whether laxity or excitement is present during meditation. Moreover, by gradually developing powerful vigilance, not only must you develop vigilance that recognizes laxity and excitement as soon as they occur, you must also develop a vigilance that recognizes them when they are on the verge of occurring, before they have actually arisen.

There are three points [here]. First we have to know laxity and excitement, how they behave and what are their characteristics. Then, we need to have the capability to detect it during the meditation. The other important point is to detect it before or on the verge of arising. Who does this job? The vigilant, introspection mind is the one who does this job. Here we are talking in relation to single-pointed meditation or Samatha training. When we think about single-pointed meditation it sounds like it is one mind and one object but this is not the case. Yes, it is single-pointed meditation but the single-pointedness [of] the mind is the mindfulness and the mindfulness mind is accompanied by another separate mind that is



called the introspection mind. Having another mind of introspection together with mindfulness while mindfulness is focusing on the dedicated object does not contradict being in one-pointed meditation. A one-pointed mind doesn't mean one thought and one object with the two things sticking together without any elaboration. Even within the mindfulness mind alone, it has so many sub-minds. Here, the single-pointedness is to the single object that is defined as the chosen object of meditation. On the chosen object of meditation, placing your mind without any elaboration out of the boundaries of the chosen object is the single-pointedness. Within the chosen object there may be thousands of characteristics and in order to focus on the thousands of characteristics you can have thousands of minds that accompanies with the mindfulness.

Therefore, the vigilant mind is related to mindfulness. [During] the one-pointed mindfulness to the dedicated object, the vigilant mind is one of the characteristics, one of the minds within the mindfulness. So, the introspection mind can be one of the characteristics of the mindfulness mind. The mindfulness mind can also be one of the characteristics of the introspection mind. So, it is very related. In this case, the introspection mind compared to mindfulness is lesser in power. It is very much related to the mindfulness so it is like one of the qualities of mindfulness.

The text says,

This is demonstrated by statements in Kamalasila's last two *Stages of Meditation*:

If you see your mind become lax, or in danger of laxity...

And:

You see your mind become excited or in danger of becoming excited.

The discussion is about the need for vigilance in the two major events discussed by Kamalasila in the two *Stages of Meditation* which is the matter on vigilance detecting the laxity or excitement during the meditation and on the verge of arising these two faults to the meditation.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

Until you develop such vigilance, you cannot reliably conclude that you have had flawless meditation – free of laxity and excitement – during a given period of time. This is because, not having developed powerful vigilance, you cannot be sure whether laxity and excitement have occurred. Likewise, in a passage that begins, “There is recognition of laxity and excitement...,” Maitreya’s *Separation of the Middle from the Extremes* says that you need vigilance in order to recognize laxity and excitement. Accordingly, if you have not developed vigilance such as would preclude any failure to recognize the presence of laxity or excitement, then even if you try to meditate for a long time you will pass the time under the influence of subtle laxity and excitement, failing to sense laxity and excitement while they are occurring.

So, until you have developed vigilance, even if you have forceful mindfulness it is hard to [gain], absolute flawless meditation. That’s the point.

*Question:* How do you develop this vigilance?

*Reply:* Its most important cause is the process of maintaining mindfulness which I explained above.

We have discussed before about the three qualities of mindfulness present during meditation:-

- 1) The absolute correct familiarity of the object of meditation is one of the qualities.
- 2) The second quality is the mind not forgetful of the object of meditation. So even if you know the object of meditation and all its characteristics well but when you focus, you may forget it because you are not mindful.
- 3) The third [quality] is to sustain your attention to the object of meditation without wandering.

These three qualities of mindfulness have to be present. The stronger the three qualities are there, the stronger is the presence of vigilance or the introspection mind. So it is very interrelated. How good the mindfulness is there, needs [or depends on] the help of introspection. How good the vigilance is there, needs [or depends on] the help of qualified mindfulness. Therefore, whatever object of meditation you want to choose, first you have to learn the characteristics of the object of meditation; you have to absolutely know the object well. Whether you are using deity yoga, emptiness, Buddha's qualities or compassion etc., first you have to know the definition and to carve the definition into your mind. That is the absolute knowing of the object of meditation. That's why Lama Tsongkhapa said again and again in the *Lamrim*, as explained here, that whatever technique we want to use, we have to base it on the authentic scriptures. You cannot have self-ambition because the authentic scriptures presented are the object of meditation as well as its characteristics and the methods are 100% correct. There are no faults so that when you learn in accordance to the scriptures and when you use those objects to meditate then during the meditation it is not necessary to elaborate because it is already fully sufficient of what needs to be understood and realized. So that's the reason. Also as a beginner, when training for the first time in mindfulness, the reason for recommending breathing, the inhalation and exhalation of breathing, is because that is already within you, it already exists and is part of you. You know your in and out breath and there is no further knowledge to understand so that is why as a beginner training in the mindfulness practice, breathing is recommended because it is the easiest compared to any other object. The reason is because you need to have 100% clarity of the definition of the object that you are going to use. I need to clarify here otherwise you may think you have to choose breathing as your Samatha object of meditation; I don't mean that. At the beginning, when you are preparing for Samatha, then you use breathing and that is the easiest [object]. At the same time we are learning and exploring what kind of meditational object would be suitable. After learning about the variety of objects of meditation, you will eventually come to a point when [you know], "Ok this is the extensive object of meditation that I can use," like deity yoga practice or emptiness etc. Using those elaborate virtuous objects is more beneficial than simply breathing.

The text says,

If you can develop continual mindfulness, you will be able to avoid forgetting the object of meditation and becoming distracted. Thus, since this prevents a prolonged failure to sense the presence of laxity and excitement, you can easily recognize laxity and excitement. This

will be perfectly evident if you examine in terms of your own experience how long it takes to recognize laxity and excitement when mindfulness is impaired and how quickly you recognize them when it is not impaired.

So, the stronger the mindfulness then the stronger the vigilance will be there. The stronger that vigilance is present, the easier it is to detect the two faults. So to answer the question, “What is the method to develop vigilance that recognizes the two faults of laxity and excitement?” It is for you to strengthen your mindfulness. Then “What do you mean by strengthening the mindfulness?” It is not enough to just know the big word; you have to know the characteristics and definition of mindfulness. When it comes to the definition then the three important points or characteristics of mindfulness has to be present. When that is present then firm mindfulness is present. When firm mindfulness is present then firm vigilance is present. When firm vigilance is present then you are flawless in your meditation.

With this in mind, Santideva’s *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* states:

When mindfulness dwells  
At the gate of your mind for its protection,  
Then vigilance will appear.

[The analogy is] it's like in the center of your house in the room there is treasure, a diamond that is the object of your meditation. The inner door is guarded by your mindfulness. Introspection is to help mindfulness to always stay secure to the treasure that is the object of meditation. The introspection mind sits at the outer gate of your door. It is to guard against the two intrusions of laxity or excitement; the thieves of laxity or excitement who want to come and steal your object of meditation.

So, mindfulness is a very focused, very obedient and focused and settled mind. Introspection is a very multi-tasking, sharp and alert kind of mind.

And Sthiramati’s *Explanation of the “Separation of the Middle from the Extremes”* states:

The statement, “There is recognition of laxity and excitement by vigilance if mindfulness does not lapse, “indicates that mindfulness, when fully present, is accompanied by vigilance. That is why it says, “if mindfulness does not lapse...”

If you happen to ask the question, “Whenever mindfulness is present, does it mean vigilance has to be present?” – The answer is “Yes”. So, if there is no mindfulness, there is no vigilance. How powerful vigilance is depends on how powerful mindfulness is.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

The following cause of vigilance is distinctive to the way to maintain vigilance. Focus your mind on a visualized image of the body of a deity, etc., or focus on a subjective aspect such as the quality of experience being simply luminous and aware. Then, while you stay mindful as explained above, hold your attention on the object while continuously monitoring whether it is scattering elsewhere. Know that this is critical for the maintenance of vigilance.

In short, vigilance mind is watching over the activities of mindfulness. [It is watching] whether mindfulness is scattering from focus or not, and whether mindfulness is losing its vivid clarity and steadiness of one-pointedness to the object of meditation. So vigilance’s job is just monitoring those aspects. Whenever vigilance notices the decreasing of the force of mindfulness, it reminds mindfulness to get back to the original strength of focus and vivid clarity to the object of meditation. Like the guard at the outer gate, while making sure the gate is tightly closed and there are no thieves moving around, but at the same time, again and again go inside to check that the inside gate/door guard is not falling asleep or wandering around and checking whether it is staying steadily in focus protecting the inner door or not.

As Santideva’s *Engaging in the Bodhisattva Deeds* says:

Examining again and again

The states of the body and the mind-  
Just that, in brief,  
Is what it means to preserve vigilance.

Thus, with this method you develop vigilance that notices laxity and excitement when they are on the verge of arising, while with the method for maintaining mindfulness you prevent forgetfulness in which attention is distracted and slips away. Hence, you have to properly distinguish these two. Otherwise, if you practice as is done nowadays – combining all these awarenesses with no understanding of their distinctions – I am afraid that the concentration resulting from a muddled cause will itself be muddled. Therefore, it is very important to make a very precise analysis of this in accordance with each of the major authoritative texts, and then to determine it in your practice.

The distinction of these two [“... *properly distinguish these two.*”] are referring to: the vigilant activities of noticing laxity or excitement on the verge of arising and at the same time knowing the quality of mindfulness maintaining its qualities on the object of meditation. These two have to be clear and vigilance has to notice both aspects. So it is very tricky since vigilance is also one of the strengths or qualities of the mind of mindfulness and assisting mindfulness’s activities. But when vigilance starts to pay more attention on the arising of the faults then there is a danger of losing the strength of mindfulness because vigilance is giving more time and attention to the outside, whether the obstacles are arising or not. So if these two are not properly distinguished then there is the danger of not knowing where the faults are coming from. While noticing the faults coming in you can get into the fault of losing the strength of mindfulness, like forgetting the object, decreasing the vividness of the object of meditation. When vigilance pays more attention to the quality of mindfulness then there is the danger of intrusion with vigilance not knowing that the obstacle is on the verge of arising because of vigilance focusing only on one side. By then the obstacle has already intruded and once the obstacle has already intruded there is a danger of not noticing it because of lacking the strength of vigilance. So it is tricky. The communication between introspection and mindfulness has to be very good and well communicated. The application of the help of vigilance to mindfulness also has to be very balanced. The vigilant mind’s wisdom has to be pervasive also, looking at the mindfulness quality as well as looking outside whether there are any occurrence of obstacles or not. For that we have to train ourselves and learn their communication. The way to learn their

communication is for us to understand like this particular teaching, the pros and cons between the importance of what areas vigilance has to invest more effort. Once we know the advantages and disadvantages then we have to choose one dedicated object and for a minute train and check out how it works. All this is preparation before actually going into a Samatha retreat. All this has to be cleared and understood and that is why one of the criteria of the preparatory [practices] that we learned before is learning correct instructions, so these are our correct instructions. So we need to learn completely, have full confidence and only then go into retreat. Then we can sustain and have a successful retreat.

Do not place your hopes on sheer determination, for Aryasura's *Compendium of the Perfections* says:

Using only joyous perseverance, you will end up exhausted.  
If you practice with the aid of wisdom, you will achieve the great goal.

So with joyous perseverance, enthusiasm and trying to train to focus alone is not good enough. You also need the wisdom aspect, which in relation to this is talking about vigilance, the introspection, knowledgeable, very sharp mind. With the help of the very determined, peaceful, focused mindfulness and with the help of vigilance - the very clever, active wisdom of vigilance then the joyous, settled, focused, pacified and aspirational mind of mindfulness will be able to achieve the final goal. Otherwise just having joyous perseverance is not good enough.

We all know from the very beginning when we talk about Samatha, we think, 'Wow, pliancy of body and mind, is going to be peaceful, pacified and joyful.' And even just to start doing some breathing exercises you already feel good. We think that as long as we put effort, just simply putting ourselves in the position to focus, focus, focus, but that [alone] will not [help us] achieve the final goal. We need the help of extensive learning. All these techniques that the authorized treaties present and Lama Tsongkhapa keeps emphasizing is for us to make sure we understand. So all this is necessary and when you have full knowledge of that then you are equipped with the qualified vigilance. When you have the qualified vigilance to the mindfulness then mindfulness also will know what to focus on, how to focus and in what kind of circumstances you should be focusing. Even in case you are unable to do so you still

have the great help of vigilance. Therefore, confidently, one can engage in a retreat and the final goal of achieving Samatha is possible.

### **Homework**

The homework is how to detect the two faults using vigilance. Last week we learnt about the two faults and tried to learn the characteristics of the two faults. Now, by using the methods of vigilance try to recognize the two faults. You can use breathing or lights [as your object of meditation]. This is training and you have yet to choose your object of meditation [for Samatha], unless you have already chosen your object. Then check your introspection mind to recognize the possibility of arising of the two faults – one is during the meditation when the faults have already intruded and another one is on the verge of arising. Then you detect and you avert it. This training has to be done within the meditation session, not stopping the session and doing it in post-meditation to try to overcome it. This training has to be done within a dedicated session time and it can be just one minute. In one minute, choose Buddha's eye as your object of meditation, focus with single-pointed mindfulness onto the object with vivid clarity and one-pointedness. Now every few seconds, the vigilance mind is checking the quality of your mindfulness as well as checking if there is there any sign of arising of the obstacles. At the same time checking whether or not there is already intrusion from the obstacles. You may be focusing with the strength of mindfulness but you may not recognize there is already intrusion of the obstacles [laxity and excitement]. So there are a few areas you need to check. Now the hardship is while the introspection mind is being very busy there is a danger of losing mindfulness. Here you need to make sure that your mindfulness is already with one mind that is assigned to focus and another mind is being very busy. Not all the time but at least every few seconds, checking 10-20 times in one minute. See if you can manage in that one minute of meditation or not. [Continue below]

### **PRACTICE - *OM MANI PADME HUM***

Now we will do some practice to recite *Om Mani Padme Hum* 1000 times. We will recite together in a loud voice and after that we will recite together quietly. This is a very powerful Guru Yoga practice that will purify our mind and accumulate extensive merit, not only for oneself but it will also help to purify the world and the six realms. The ultimate goal of our spiritual practice is to actualize full enlightenment and in order to do that we have to develop altruism, bodhicitta. In order to do that, we have to develop compassion. So if we



relate our practice to Buddha Chenrezig then it helps to develop altruism in our heart. One of the reasons is because this month is Chenrezig's blessed holy month. If possible then chant the mantra with some basic understanding of the meaning of the mantra as well as meditation on the deity. That would be wonderful but if not, just simply having strong faith and conviction in the Compassionate Buddha Chenrezig, Kuan Yin and then reciting the very powerful blessed mantra, that alone will also be very beneficial.

#### A BRIEF MEANING on *Om Mani Padme Hum*:

- The syllable OM ཨོཾ is comprised of three letters, **AH, U, MA** and it represents the causal practitioner's basis of yourself which is your body, speech and mind. It also represents your resultant enlightened body, speech and mind.
- The second word MANI is jewel and it is referring to the method aspect of the path, the bodhicitta. So, Mani is compassion and bodhicitta.
- PADME is referring to the wisdom of emptiness; the emptiness of self and the emptiness of phenomena. So, it refers to wisdom.
- Syllable HUM can be understood in a few ways. One meaning is representing the union of wisdom and method. It emphasizes the importance and represents the essence of the union of wisdom and method. Another way of understanding HUM is it's the actual Dharmakaya of Chenrezig which means full enlightenment.
- So OM, yourself as the person, using the vehicle of this body, speech and mind, engaging in the practice of method and wisdom in union and actualizing the resultant body, speech and mind of the compassionate Buddha Chenrezig within oneself. This is the full meaning.

#### VISUALIZATION

- Visualize the merit field.
- In the center of the merit field is your guru.
- In the center of your guru's heart is the Chenrezig; it can be the 1000-armed Chenrezig, 2-armed Chenrezig, Kuan Yin Pu Sa or whatever [Compassionate Buddha] you are familiar with
- And surrounded by the ten direction Buddhas, Bodhisattvas and all the lineage gurus
- You feel their presence above your head in the space as the object of your veneration and also on top of your crown. In short it fills the entire space, radiating

immense light and nectar to yourself, the rest of the sentient beings, purifying suffering and its causes and abiding yourself and all sentient beings in the state of Compassionate Buddha's Pure Land or enlightenment.

You do this visualization while reciting the mantra and if there are any obstacles, mentally, physically, financially or whatever obstacles that may be going on, you can take this opportunity to purify them through the lights, nectar and blessing from the merit field. If you have any family members or anybody who are sick or have passed away, you can also help them. Particularly at this time, you can also help humanity who are suffering from the corona virus and help the rest of the numberless sentient beings in the six realms. You can also purify and dedicate this practice to whatever names are mentioned. Also dedicate to the long life and fulfillment of all the aspirations of all our gurus, yourself and your family members.

Starting from now and for a few days after, in order to purify our mind and to accumulate a lot of merit, try to spend as much time as possible to recite *Om Mani Padme Hum* and to do this meditation whenever you are free. I will try my best and you all try your best.

We will [first] recite the following prayers; refuge, bodhicitta, four immeasurable thoughts and seven-limb practice. We will make whatever offerings you have at home on the altar or in the fridge. Then recite Samantabhadra's offering prayer and offer Mandala offering. These [prayers and practices] have been taught many times so I do not have to explain further and you can do them accordingly.

[Recitation of prayers]

So by the power of the Triple Gem, by the power of the emptiness, by the power of your sincere heart of making offerings to the Buddhas, everything that you have including your body and all the food in your house, everything becomes a wish-granting jewel and immortal medicinal nectar offered to the numberless Buddhas, gurus and make charity to numberless sentient beings.

[Recitation of prayers]

Take a moment to rejoice and feel the goodness and feel wonderful about all the past, present and future Buddhas, gurus and sentient beings. Then rejoice among each other here, how wonderful, great and meaningful [we feel]. Try to rejoice as much as possible over the next few days that billions and billions of *Om Mani Padme Hum* recitations are

going on around the world. All the monks and nuns around the world in the big monasteries are engaging specifically over these 1-2 days, accumulating immense *Om Mani Padme Hum* [mantras]. So you can feel wonderful and rejoice and by rejoicing you can almost receive half the benefit that they achieve.

[Mandala offering]

[Recitation of *Om Mani Padme Hum* x 1000]

Now dedicate in bodhicitta and emptiness, unification of tantra in generation and completion stage practices. Dedicate like the bodhisattva's dedication, like what Santideva taught. You can also do your own specific dedications.

One particular dedication in relation to this practice is expressing your sincere request and aspirational prayer for the compassionate Buddha Chenrezig to be forever your guru from this life and in every lifetime to be inseparable until one achieves the state of full enlightenment. To never abandon me and may I be able to cultivate the Chenrezig Guru Yoga [that is] more precious than my own life.

[Recitation of prayers]

### **Homework** - continuation

- About the homework, maybe you can use *Om Mani Padme Hum* as your object of meditation. So you recite [the mantra] not too loud and not too soft. Not so loud that someone sitting beside you can hear but not so soft that you cannot hear yourself [whispering].
- You focus on the *Om Mani Padme Hum* sound or you can also use the counting, the sound and the image of the mantra. You can either use all of them or just the sound. Try to focus with vivid clarity and single-pointedness on the sound.
- Then the vigilant mind is watching [whether] the label of vividness and concentration is there or not, once in a while. Then whether there is intrusion of laxity or excitement or not or whether there is any danger of the signs of laxity or excitement occurring or not.
- You can do this for 1, 5, 10 minutes or half an hour.
- In the midst of your busy day, in between your job or cooking etc., take a few minutes or if you have more time dedicate time specifically to recite the mantra *Om Mani Padme Hum*

- At the same time do the homework of utilizing vigilance's help to be able to develop steady mindfulness.
- If you can observe a vegetarian [diet] that would be amazingly beneficial.
- Keep a bottle of pure water or the cream you use for your skin [by your side] and at the end of the mantra you blow and bless the water, the cream, your mala and your ornaments. It's so powerful and you can use the [blessed] water for self-healing by adding it to your drinks and food. You can also share it with your family and friends. If you have no skin problems the cream will help you to glow but if you have some skin issues then the blessed cream will help to clear skin problems etc. If some of you are taking medicine you can bless the medicine by blowing on it. Now you are using the concentration practice and that's why there is concentration there. The faith, conviction and visualization of Chenrezig is definitely going to be there as well as the power of the mantra so everything is there. So you are going to be so powerful to bless, especially medicines. If someone is taking medicine you can take the opportunity to do this over the next few days. With the blessed water, if your house has a river or ocean nearby, you can also pour a little bit into the river/ocean to bless all the fishes. You can also sprinkle it onto plants to bless the bacteria on them. You can do this not just over the next few days but you can do this all the time. You just keep a bottle of water in the fridge that you bless and if you continue to bless it then you are blessing your family all the time. It is so powerful and beneficial. This is very well practiced. If we get the opportunity to receive such blessings from lamas and high practitioners who after reciting mantras, blow, then that is wonderful. But we don't always have such opportunities and especially during this pandemic time due to social distancing and travel restrictions it is so difficult to get blessings but we ourselves have the capability to do that and you can help yourself and your family in this way.

7 July 2020, Session: 18

Remedy for failing to try to eliminate them even when they are recognized

### **Recap- teaching on 5 July, 2020 (Session 17)**

Last session, we discussed about the importance [of antidotes] and how to actualize one of the most important antidote or method to actualize a successful single-pointed meditation, which is by actualizing the mind of vigilance or introspection mind. We came to the conclusion and understanding of what is vigilance or introspection mind, and most of all, how to actualize the introspection mind. We came to know that by strengthening mindfulness, it will bring about the actualization of the introspection mind. And an active introspection mind in support of mindfulness [happens] when the introspection mind itself is actively observing the arising of two major obstacles: excitement or laxity while mindfulness is [still] on the meditation of the object. The introspection mind observes the arising of these two obstacles during meditation as well as checking, guarding and defending the arising of the obstacles and eliminating them from the verge of arising. Remember that there are two areas that the vigilant mind has to pay full attention? One is during meditation and making sure to detect the two faults and after detecting them, helping mindfulness to eradicate them. Another point is watching [the two faults] on the verge of arising and before it arises, eliminates them. Since the quality of introspection mind depends on the quality of mindfulness we also learned that mindfulness has to carry three characteristics or qualities, which are extremely important for single-pointed Samatha meditation. So you can sum up the understanding as such.

We also understood the importance of knowing the exact characteristics of excitement and laxity, the actual nature or face of laxity and excitement. We learned the characteristics and definition of the antidotes and we also learned how to utilize those antidotes. Even if we know the faults and the antidotes and even after using the remedy or antidote we [may still] fail to eliminate them.

Situations such as this will occur during meditation practice. So, today we will explore that.

### **C. USING THE REMEDY FOR FAILING TO TRY TO ELIMINATE THEM EVEN WHEN THEY ARE RECOGNIZED**

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 62]

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

As explained above, you develop very powerful mindfulness and vigilance through proper use of the methods for maintaining mindfulness and vigilance. Vigilance is then able to notice even very subtle laxity and excitement, so there is no problem recognizing the occurrence of laxity and excitement. However, when you make no effort to stop those two as soon as they arise, your complacency or failure to apply yourself constitutes an extremely serious problem for your concentration. For, if you practice in this way, your mind will form bad habits and then it will be extremely difficult to develop a concentration free of laxity and excitement.

Here, 'free of laxity and excitement' is referring to the subtle ones. You may be able to eradicate the gross laxity and excitement but because of negligence when a slight appearance of laxity and excitement is there and by thinking it has not intruded into meditation, "It's just appearing and on the verge of arising, so I will be alright." As such, without tackling the faults when it is about to appear, and continuing your meditation may lead to bad habit that will be a big obstacle to the genuine development of Samatha or concentration.

Therefore, to remedy a failure to apply yourself to the elimination of laxity and excitement, cultivate the intention called application, or effort.

This is the method to get fully prepared to detect the faults of excitement and laxity either when it arises during meditation or when it is on the verge of arising. You need to detect quickly and not to neglect. For that [purpose], there is one particular method, which is the method of setting intention, called application or effort.

To develop this active, smart, fast detective vigilance technique there are two ways:

- 1) Through setting intention before going into meditation session.
- 2) Learning all the different causes and conditions that cause the two faults of laxity and excitement to arise in the meditator.

#### (a) INTENTION AND THE WAY IT STOPS LAXITY AND EXCITEMENT

To discuss the first [technique of intention],

*Asanga's Compendium of Knowledge:*

What is intention? It is the mental activity of applying your mind, having the function of drawing your mind to virtue, non-virtue, or the ethically neutral.

Basically, it is talking about motivation before any action of the body, speech and mind will become virtue, non-virtue or neutral is dependent on the intention or motivation that you have set. Similarly, in your Samatha meditation whether you have a successful session or not also depend very much on the motivation. That's why it is important to set the correct motivation. Setting a correct motivation for Samatha or single-pointed training is not just setting altruistic motivation alone. As a Mahayanic practitioner, that is a must. [In addition, you need to set] the correct motivation in order to have a successful vigilance or successful training in mindfulness in the single-pointed meditation. There may occurrence of difficult challenges such as the challenge of recognizing or detecting the faults and even after detecting the faults, it is difficult to sustain the elimination of the faults as mentioned earlier. You may have a lazy mind thinking, "Oh... this is just a short, minor appearance [of faults], it's okay and I will continue with my practice". So that kind of laziness may arise. Even if you detect and apply the antidote of vigilance but then you may fail to eradicate the

faults from the root during the session when it recurs again. So there is a lot of hardship there. Therefore, before going into the session, you set the motivation that whatever hardship that may come, I am not going to give up. I am going to make sure I will deliver a successful session. This is called a correct motivation.

You have to set the motivation with qualities that are very firm, steady, determined and clear. In order to set that kind of quality motivation you need to have an understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of having a successful session and an unsuccessful session. You have to set the motivation so firm and clear that the power of that motivation can influence and give a clear direction of the action of meditation. Similarly, any other motivation that we set even if it's altruistic motivation just by [mouthing] the words of the motivation is nice to hear but it cannot deliver the absolute force of the motivation to the action. So, the motivation should be extremely firm and clear. [Just] like when you set a bodhicitta motivation we need to remember the advantage, the benefit and the merit that you will gain. When you think of it then you are so determined and so clear [in your motivation]. But if you don't have such clear motivation, then even when you meditate on emptiness or give to charity, whatever the outcome will be so shallow. By knowing that, you will set the motivation in the way that it can influence the action to its maximum effect. So here we learn the importance of how to set motivation. Not just doing it as a protocol that is usually done, like just chanting refuge and bodhicitta prayers once a while and considered it done. It's not as simple as that. Thinking has a power but how intense is that thinking brings the intensity of the effect. So that is why when you set the motivation of bodhicitta you must really feel it's so intense that as expressed in the philosophy scriptures such as *Ornament of Clear Realization*, there are signs of goose bumps and tears are falling when you set the bodhicitta motivation. So with that kind of intensity even when you give one spoon of rice to a beggar that act becomes intense altruism. Otherwise reciting, "*Jang Chhub Sem Chhog Rin Po Chhe...*" sounds nice but it's not as simple as that.

Because of lacking the intensity in the motivation, when we do prayers or practices it is so difficult to gain the effect or to actualize the results when we pray for something. This is because the intensity of the motivation is not present. Yet when we want to arise anger there are hundreds of reasons to be so fearful as though your entire five aggregates and cells in your body are [consumed] with the reasons why I need to be so nasty, to get angry and desire. The effect of that anger and attachment is so powerful because of the [strong] intention behind it. So likewise with Samatha we need that. We already know the importance of vigilance, of mindfulness but still we are not successful in the practice



because our intention is not strong enough. We can get some help from the intention but we did not fully utilize it.

Lama Tsongkhapa illustrates this:

This is how you should understand it. For example, iron filings are compelled to move under the influence of a magnet. Similarly, the mental process of intention moves and stimulates your mind toward virtue, non-virtue, or the ethically neutral.

The power of the intention is likened to the power of a magnet to the iron [filings], it has to be that effective in order to influence. Lama Tsongkhapa is also teaching us the general idea of whether we are engaged in negative, virtue or neutral, the effectiveness of the result is dependent on the intention. We usually quote, whether dharma or non-dharma; virtue or non-virtue is dependent on intentions. These are the references for understanding why we usually say in this way.

So it here refers to an intention that applies your mind to the elimination of laxity or excitement when one of them occurs.

So now after you have set the intention, you may have a question:

*Question:* After you have thus aroused your mind to eliminate laxity and excitement, how do you stop laxity and excitement?

*Reply:* Mental laxity involves a very excessive inward withdrawal, leading to a slippage in the way you apprehend the object of meditation; so you should direct your mind to delightful things that cause it to expand outward. This should be something like a very beautiful image of the Buddha, not something delightful that gives rise to afflictions. Or bring to mind an image of light, such as sunlight. When this clears away laxity, immediately tighten the way you apprehend the object and sustain that in meditation.

This means before you engage into a session you roughly observe your state of mind. If your state of mind is a bit lazy, down or not enthusiastic that is the prediction of the danger of laxity arising. In that case, before you start the session you visualize Buddha's image – a very bright golden radiance light or you can even visualize sunlight and feel that yourself and your meditation room is completely filled with sunlight. You can also meditate on very inspiring qualities of the Buddha or Guru or the meditator of Samatha until your heart is so inspired that your entire system feels uplifted and that everything has a sense of lightness and a sense of clarity. Give all the reasons to your mind with the help of visualizations and what you have learnt about the qualities of the Buddha etc. and that carried on by the initial state of mind of motivation towards the mind of the meditation so as to be able to tackle the obstacle of laxity.

The occurrence of laxity is very much to do with a mind withdrawn inwards, kind of depressed and feeling low, an uninspired state of mind. So, you need to balance this state of mind and bring the mind outward and that means an inspiration of delightfulness. To do that you need to visualize or reflect on delightfulness. At the same time [be aware that] anything that [might] bring on afflictions like attachment while reflecting on desirous object, one's [mind] gets excited [and even though] there's a kind of lightness [to it] it is not going to be helpful as that will bring on afflictions and that will lead to another obstacle of excitement. Therefore, the delightfulness object has to be a virtuous object and it should not be over exaggerated to [the extent] that you become hyper thinking of Guru or Buddha. Some people can be like that until they cannot settle the heart and their body is even shaking. So, even with virtuous objects there is a danger of overdoing it. So you need to be inspired with an uplifted mind but not over excited.

As Kamalasila's first *Stages of Meditation* explains:

How? When you are overcome with lethargy and sleepiness, when there is a lack of clarity in your apprehension of the object of meditation and your mind has become lax, then meditate on the idea of light or bring to mind the most delightful things, such as the qualities of the Buddha. Dispel laxity in this way and firmly hold on to the object of meditation.

So, it is not only for intention that you need to have a delightful mind but if there is a danger of laxity occurring even during your meditation and your

vigilant mind detects the laxity then use the same method that is your introspection mind [should] reflect on the delightful image of Buddha in your heart or the advantage of Samatha in your heart. Then after that let the mindfulness re- strengthen the focus to return to the full strength of your meditation.

Lama Tsongkhapa says:

In this situation, do not meditate on a disenchanting object because disenchantment causes your mind to withdraw inward.

When you expand your mind by using discerning wisdom to analyze an object of your choice, this also stops laxity.

We have to understand that for both intention as well as during our meditation if your mind is low and not uplifted then usually meditation on the precious human rebirth, death and impermanence and the Four Noble Truths are the common preliminary practices of meditation before [doing] any tantric practices or sutric and Lamrim meditation. [However], although the subjects on death and impermanence and precious human rebirth are itself objects of meditation but the main part of the three scopes such as teachings on the Four Noble Truths, precious human rebirth, death and impermanence are also preliminary preparatory practices. So, if your mind is down then you should not meditate on death and impermanence or the truth of suffering or truth of causes of suffering (first two Noble Truths). Instead you should meditate on the qualities of a precious human rebirth, the truth of the path and truth of cessation before starting on any practice or meditation. If your mind is too hyper and in order to neutralize and bring the mind down [from hyper state], then you should choose to meditate on death and impermanence and the first two noble truths and then only lead on to other meditations. This applies not only to Samatha meditation but also to our other daily practices.

Another method is if you realize that your mind is sinking low then do some analytical meditation on the conventional nature, ultimate nature or do analytical meditation in relation to all the advantages and benefits to the practice. This will help to uplift the mind.

The methods discussed above are not [solely] used for meditation practice only. This kind of reflection is also very beneficial when we experience emotional [ups and downs] in facing

problems in our daily lives, feeling depressed or low in energy and everything [seems] wrong and not good. Then you just reflect on the qualities of a precious human rebirth and that will help to uplift [your mind]. Buddha taught these teachings and so there are immense blessings, which somehow will get us inspired and we will gain so much strength from that. Then by reflecting or meditating on the truth of the path or truth of cessation, [no matter] how big a problem you are facing you will see a light at the end of the tunnel. There is a solution at the end and not only that there are so many paths that will lead you out of the problems that you are facing. So when our mind is down these are the methods to use in our day-to-day life too.

Similarly, in the second method to recover from a sinking mind or depressed mind, even in our day-to-day life, whenever negative situations comes our way externally or internally in our mind like a delusional crisis, we have to use the dharma that we have learnt by understanding that we cannot [jump to] conclusions on the first thinking or the first moment when any negative situation [appears]. We cannot define [or judge] the entire event with just that first appearance. Always give a second opportunity to investigate with a broader mind, giving common sense, logic and reasoning and to find if there any other reasons behind what I am just able to see now with this perspective. The thing is the first perception of any thoughts or any events are in reality, all false. It is a hallucinated perception and it is not true. But all the sufferings come from apprehending and grasping based on that very first idea or perception to the experience whether through thinking or through the object. Because of that we suffer so much and we make conclusions when the problems arise, that's it. There's no cure and it is not going to change. Even though there are changes but from the very beginning we tend to suffer as though we are going to only suffer and there is no way out. So from the beginning give second thoughts to analyze whether what we see or just felt is the ultimate or not. Just at least ask yourself with conventional reasoning and [finally] get the understandings with ultimate reasoning and in this way we will be able to pull ourselves out of the misery. Even in the midst of tragedy we are able to get out and even in the midst of misery we are able to remain afloat like a lotus unstained rising above the mud. This is what we need to apply in our daily lives and not just when we are doing Samatha meditation or our sadhana practice only.

*Aryasura's Compendium of the Perfections* says:

When slack, your mind is stimulated and inspired  
By virtue of the energy of striving for insight.

As mentioned before through reflecting on inspiration of reasons, your mind can get motivated and uplifted and secondly give reasons why you are meditating on Samatha. It's not just to be able to focus single-pointedly but you are training in Samatha because you want to eradicate entire defilements and you want to become Buddha to be liberated. If the objective is to actualize special insight then your mind gets inspired to do proper sessions.

Thus laxity, or slackness, is as follows. The state of mind the two terms describe is called "laxity" because there is a decline in the way you apprehend the object of meditation. It is called "slackness" because there is an excessive withdrawal inward. You counteract it by stimulating the way you apprehend the object and by making the object of meditation extensive, so as to expand your mind.

The term "extensive" can be interpreted in a few ways:

- "Extensive" in the sense of benefits,
- "Extensive in the sense of objectives
- [In another interpretation of 'extensive' is in the case when] a practitioner's mind is very narrow and easily sinks. So before going into meditation, meditate on the vastness of phenomena such as the eighteen constituents, twelve sources etc. as we have discussed before. By training in that then the nature of our mind starts to expand and become very bright and a sense of wisdom. That openness extensiveness has a kind of a broader mind and more uplifting clear and confident.

Bhavaviveka's *Heart of the Middle Way* states:

In the case of slackness, expand your mind

By meditating on an extensive object.

Further, in the case of slackness, inspire yourself

By observing the benefits of joyous perseverance.

To confirm that,

Santideva's *Compendium of Trainings* states:

If your mind becomes slack, inspire yourself by cultivating delight.

Then Lama Tsongkhapa says,

The great scholars and adepts are in agreement on this matter. So here is the most important remedy for stopping laxity: When you reflect on the good qualities of such things as the three jewels, the benefits of the spirit of enlightenment, (bodhicitta) and the great significance of attaining leisure, (precious human rebirth) it should have a bracing effect on your mind, just as cold water is thrown in the face of a sleeping person.

Sometimes we cannot feel any motivation to do sadhana or attending dharma lessons or to do practice; you just feel like you have no motivation at all. So here the teachings says just reflect on the precious human rebirth; reflect on the qualities of Buddha, Dharma and Sangha and the benefits of bodhicitta. That is like throwing cold water on to a sleeping person. You wake up fresh. We need this 'cold water', every day and every now and then when we feel lousy. Taking a shower or washing your face also can't help but what can help is thinking and reflecting on these few recommended teachings.

This depends on your having had experience with discerning analytical meditation on these beneficial topics.

So, that's why *Lamrim* is the most wonderful teaching as with all other teachings. *Lamrim* is very easy for us because Lama Tsongkhapa has already done all the work, putting all the sources of different teachings, [why] there is nothing to feel down [about], and with many reasonings [why it is so] and full of common sense and with references. Otherwise we have to go and check is it true or not, is this Buddha's teachings or not. *Lamrim Chenmo* wow... We have to take *Lamrim* as our daily [companion] at all times.

You need to have at least an understanding of the meaning of ‘bodhicitta’, ‘precious human rebirth with endowments and freedoms’. All these we have to learn. Then we reflect and use [the learning we have]. Without learning just saying how wonderful life is, doesn’t help and you don’t get a firm reason [conviction] to really, really get inspired.

Santideva’s text *Bodhisattva-caryavatara* and *Lamrim Chenmo* are like a [pair] of wings or two hands that you need to always carry together with you. Try to ‘bite’ the *Lamrim Chenmo*.

Especially for Santideva’s *Bodhisattva-caryavatara*, the first chapter talks about the benefits of Bodhicitta and chapter six and chapter eight [on patience and concentration] are direct antidotes to our day to day major struggles and it’s the most effective Panadol whenever we suffer any emotional or samsaric crisis.

If you cultivate a remedy for being accustomed to the underlying causes of laxity – namely, lethargy, sleepiness, and something that induces these two wherein your mind takes on a gloomy aspect – then laxity resulting from these causes will not arise or, if it has arisen, will stop. In this regard, Asanga’s *Sravaka Levels* suggests such activities as going for a walk; holding an image of brightness in your mind and familiarizing yourself with it repeatedly; pursuing any of six recollections—the Buddha, the teachings, the community (sangha), ethical discipline, generosity, and the (magnificence of the) deities; stimulating your mind by means of other inspiring objects of meditation; orally reciting teachings that discuss the faults of lethargy and sleepiness; gazing in different directions and at the moon and stars; and washing your face with water.

Also, if laxity is very slight and occurs only infrequently, tighten up your apprehension of the object and continue meditating; but if laxity is dense and seems to occur repeatedly, suspend your cultivation of concentration, clear away laxity using any of those remedies, and then resume your meditation.

Whether your object of meditation entails directing your mind inward or outward, if the object is unclear and you have the sense of darkness—slight or dense—descending on your mind, then it will be

hard to cut through laxity if you continue to meditate without eliminating it.

Basically, it is beneficial [to do] reflections on the six recollections recommended in order to pull ourselves out of laxity which is reflecting on the Buddha, the teachings, the community, ethical discipline, generosity and the deities. Then during the meditation if the obstacle of laxity occurs, at first attempt you should not stop or pause your session but instead try to recover by overcoming the obstacle. But after trying a few rounds, if the obstacle is still remaining, then you should not make any further attempt, you should pause the session. During the post-session, you try to prepare yourself through applying all the remedies recommended and once you are cleansed then return to your session.

Whether it is for Samatha or any other practices whatever length of the session it may be, our [mind should be] fully serviceable for that practice. Whenever you feel some difficulties like occurring of obstacles then you should do the preliminary practices [as recommended and these are also contained] in the deity yoga or sadhana, or recitation of mantra. In other words, you do all the preliminary meditation and recitations etc. which is the preparation and the way to make your meditation most productive – [no matter how long the duration of the meditation].

In relation to Samatha, how do we [know when] we need to stop the session or to continue. After you have attempted 3 or 4 times and upon seeing the obstacles repeatedly appearing then you need to stop. But [if the obstacles are] just appearing once, twice or three times then don't give up the session and try to regain the meditation while still within the session. This is something that we need to know: when to stop and when to continue when the obstacle occurs.

There are many recommendations here like taking a walk, six recollections and even washing your face etc. If you need to take a break after attempting a few rounds to regain your meditation these are the practices you can do to refresh and uplift yourself during the post-meditation. The environment of your meditation retreat hut also plays a certain role. If your mind is too gloomy then you can light butter lights and brighten the room as the teaching recommends. [Keep] your posture [upright] and your face, and [with your eyes wide open] it can have the effect of brightness, which can be helpful. When your mind is too distracted you start to do more intense expression and that will help to calm the excitement. 'Calm' here doesn't mean the attachment excitement in relation to desire. So here in the text it mentions, "lighting an oil-lamp" etc. as an example you can follow.



For beginners, these are external help we can use. Eventually, the image of this brightness is a mental image through visualization of the light in your past memory and that is like bringing the rays of light into your heart. That brightness will help to uplift your heart. It is about the image of the mind. And it is the introspection mind that is doing all these activities while your mindfulness is still focused on the object of meditation.

Now we will discuss about excitement. Comparing excitement to laxity, laxity is far more difficult to overcome. Excitement is lighter in comparison to that.

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

In the case of excitement, out of attachment your attention pursues objects such as forms and sounds; so in response to that, bring to mind disillusioning things that cause your attention to be drawn inward. As soon as this calms the excitement, settle your mind on the earlier object of meditation.

Disillusion things such as reflecting on death and impermanence, truth of suffering and truth of causes of suffering and faults of samsara are objects that you can reflect on to help bring down the mind [of excitement]. We can also use the same technique when we are overwhelmed by the distraction of attachment like going to the shopping mall and having many things to buy – being a shopaholic. So meditating on death and impermanence will help. When we have any problem to do with attachment such as sexual attachment and being unable to let go of a past relationship, then meditating on death and impermanence will heal you and help us to renounce and detach.

Kamalasila's first *Stages of Meditation* states:

When you see that your mind is occasionally becoming excited as you recall previous excitement, play, and so forth, calm the excitement by bringing to mind disillusioning things, such as impermanence. Then strive to engage the object of meditation without your mind becoming involved in activity.

So, that's why for Samatha you need to have less physical and mental activity responsibility from the beginning which is one of the conditions to lessen activities.

*Bhavaviveka's Heart of the Middle Way* states:

Calm excitement by bringing to mind  
Impermanence and so forth  
Pull your mind back from distraction by noting  
The faults of the distracting objects.

*Aryasura's Compendium of the Perfections* states:

When your mind becomes excited stop this disturbance  
By calming it and stabilizing your attention.

*Asanga's Sravaka Levels* states:

Thus, once your mind has become withdrawn inward and you note that there is slackness or the threat of slackness, maintain and gladden your mind by thinking of any inspiring things. This is maintaining your mind. How do you settle your mind? While maintaining your mind, when you note that your mind is excited or that there is the threat of excitement, withdraw your mind inward and settle in a calming stabilization.

[Lama Tsongkhapa adds],

When your mind is excited, do not bring to mind inspiring and delightful objects because this will cause your mind to be distracted outward.

"...do not bring to mind inspiring (ideas or images) ..." Here, it is talking about overly focusing on inspirational ideas. Then that can become an obstacle. It is not talking about

inspiration in order to sustain the Samatha training. You need that inspiration, at the beginning and be embedded with inspiration but whenever such obstacle occurs like excitement then focusing and expanding the inspirational idea can be and will be an obstacle even though it is a virtue.

[You need to be] especially careful to tune [a fine] balance of your mind with the application of the antidote. Especially at the fifth and sixth stages of the nine stages of training, it requires very skillful method in the application of vigilance. When the vigilance is too much on the brightness side then it can cause obstacles. If the vigilance is [not enough], laxity can occur. You should detect and apply the antidote in a balanced skillful way. We will go into detail about this later.

### **Homework**

Usually before you go into a class you should read what the teacher is going to cover and you would already have made your own commentary. Then when the teacher is teaching you check whether your commentary is correct or not. When the teacher makes a 'mistake' you should contribute and correct it. But if your commentary is wrong [then you have to make your own correction]. After the class is finished, you should not just put the text away. As much as possible read through the text again and you will be amazed by the understanding you have achieved due to having put in the three level of effort. Then the next day when you do your session, try to apply what you have learnt and once in a while you read the text again and each time you do so, you will get a deeper understanding and bigger impact as though it is carved into your heart and you can even remember the teaching when the faults are occurring vividly.

For this week try to do some sessions for 1 or 2 minutes etc., utilizing vigilance while you are focusing on the object of meditation and try to detect. It is similar to last week's homework. Try to detect and try to apply the remedy and overcome it. At least give yourself 3 attempts to recover within the session and to remain focus. And after 3 attempts, stop the session and then try to do all the recommended methods. Then without being totally wild in our ordinary world, try to find time to do another round of session even if it's just for 1 minute or at least once in the morning and in the evening. So try your best like that.

In the monastery we have to memorize the root text or at least the quotations and try our best to even memorize the commentaries before going to class. So we have already done

the research and have an understanding. Actually in the class sometimes the teacher just give some hints, jobs and inspirational advice. There's nothing much you can get from the teacher but somehow just going to the class you can get a lot of confirmation. Then there must be discussions among the students, without the teacher's presence. It is good to have a student with different research, different backgrounds, and who rely on different teachers and everyone pours their understanding into the discussion. Some are totally contradicting to the real point or to your point but then at the end what you get is an abundance ocean of wisdom. Of course I can't expect you all to do the same as like a monk in the monastery to memorize the root text and quotations. You all have so many responsibilities. But at least do the reading. Especially when the teacher [goes to great length] to explain in detail and also goes into many branches of knowledge [in the explanation], and it is very difficult to [consolidate]. But if you are able to study this way, at the end even though it is a Samatha teaching, but actually you already got the entire dharma and entire aspect of teaching.

For many of you, your notes are your memorization and discussion partners as you are good in taking notes. After taking notes, then you read your notes many times and discuss with your notes. Did I understand [well] and is this my understanding or not? Just by putting that effort, you have already gotten immense clarification. In the monastery, there are some students who memorize a lot but when it comes to explanation or debate, they can't and their understanding is not there. Just like your notes, you have taken many notes but you did not look at your notes or discuss with it. Did I understand correctly? Today maybe I think these notes are correct. But tomorrow when you look into it, you may think there is something missing and more than that you need to compare with the text [and ask yourself] did I understand exactly like that. Whatever page 3 says, are my notes really the summary? Otherwise you have plenty of notes like the scholars with plenty of memorization but when needed to explain, you cannot explain and it's like failure everywhere. Memorization is number one. You have plenty of notes but then you are empty, nothing else. That is a danger also.

(b) THE UNDERLYING CAUSES OF LAXITY AND EXCITEMENT

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 66]

In our last class we covered one of the very important techniques or way to overcome the main obstacles to the development of Samatha, laxity and excitement, through setting intention before going into the session. Today we will learn another important [area] for the vigilant mind to recognize the arising of these two obstacles through the causes and signs of laxity and excitement. This is extremely important because the obstacles are the one that obstructs us from achieving our goal of Samatha. Just having good mindfulness and good introspection is not good enough. Whenever there are signs of these faults, we need to overcome them. The way to recognize that is not just by knowing the definition of laxity and excitement. On top of knowing the definitions of laxity and excitement, knowing the signs and causes of laxity and excitement and averting them is the effective solution to overcome the obstacles.

*Asanga's Levels of Yogic Deeds* states:

What are the signs of laxity? Not restraining the sensory faculties; not eating in moderation; not making an effort to practice rather than sleeping during the early and later parts of the night; ongoing lack of vigilance; deluded behavior; over-sleeping; being unskillful; being lazy in one's aspiration; joyous perseverance, intention, and analysis; giving only partial attention to serenity without accustoming yourself to it and fully refining it; letting your mind stay as though in darkness; and not delighting in focusing on the object of meditation.

There are ten different kinds of signs indicated here:-

(1) "*Not restraining the sensory faculties;*"

[This is referring to] not withdrawing our sensual faculties from distractions towards its objects, like form, feeling, sound, taste etc. We have to train and make it a habit to be able to withdraw our very outwardly scattered sensory [faculties] towards objects by limiting the interaction of the sensory faculties to sensory objects as well as getting the sensory mind focused towards the dedicated virtuous meditative object. So there are two ways: one is limiting access to the object side and the other one is limiting the subject itself, gaining a sense of detachment of the sensory mind. This is why at the beginning when we gather the preliminary requirements; one of the preliminaries is limiting activities that engage our senses. Another preliminary requirement is practicing contentment in relation to the needs of objects towards the senses. You have a sense of contentment with whatever you have; the more the contentment, the more the detachment towards sensory objects. It is beneficial to overcoming laxity. By not restraining and having great desire towards sensory objects and discontentment in your heart towards the needs of sensory objects, whenever such thoughts and feelings arises, obstacles will occur and you will lose the clarity and one-pointedness towards the object of your Samatha meditation.

(2) *“not eating in moderation;”*

(3) *“not making an effort to practice rather than sleeping during the early and later parts of the night;”*

[This is] sleeping at dawn time

(4) *“ongoing lack of vigilance;”*

The mindfulness is not caring [about] the help of vigilance; not really caring about the appearance of faults. Thinking that as long as you can do some meditation, even if a little laxity occurs you don't mind; and not utilizing vigilance.

(5) *“deluded behavior;”*

Arising of anger, attachment, jealousy, pride etc., are all signs.

(6) *“over-sleeping;”*

Due to laziness, [one is] not having an awakened uplifted state of mind. It is not necessarily about falling asleep here. It is a form of laziness, just lying down and not using your mind towards meditation. Your mind is just in total rest.

(7) *“being unskillful;”*

When you do the meditation you are not skillful in the application of when to apply the vigilance, when not to apply it and being careless.

(8) *“being lazy in one’s aspirations, joyous perseverance, intention and analysis;”*

Being lazy in one’s aspiration - not learning about the benefits and not aspiring yourself to do the meditation. No inspiration, no joyous effort and also no motivation. There is also no analysis to make yourself actualize the practice.

(9) *“giving only partial attention to serenity without accustoming yourself to it and fully refining it; letting your mind stay as though in darkness;”*

Putting little effort, letting your mind stay as though in darkness and letting your mind wander in delusions.

(10) *“and not delighting in focusing on the object of meditation.”*

Due to lack of understanding of the advantages and benefits of the practice then you lose delightfulness.

Whenever such signs occur then there will be obstacles of occurrences of laxity. If you were to put the signs and causes into one word then from the five faults, it falls into the fault of ‘laziness’ as the cause. The result from the five faults falls into ‘laxity’. The antidote [for the fault of laziness] from the eight antidotes, as stated by Maitreya: faith, aspiration, joyous perseverance and pliancy which are the four different virtuous minds - pliancy of both body and mental pliancy are the antidotes. For faults that fall into laziness, the result is laxity.

From the ten different examples of signs presented here, the reason for the first one - *“not restraining the sensory faculties”*, is that if your senses mental faculties are distracted then you don’t put effort to meditate. Therefore, you lose the strength of effort towards the gathering of virtue like Samatha meditation and that’s why it falls into laziness and due to

that, it becomes a cause of laxity. Otherwise it sounds like the first one [*“not restraining the sensory faculties”*] is the cause of excitement but in fact it is a cause of laxity. Whenever we are distracted from gathering virtue and meditation then that falls into laziness. When your mind is lazy due to distraction, that will make your mind unmotivated and not focused towards the meditational object.

In order to have vigilance, it requires immense effort. Cleverness of the mind requires effort. The *“ongoing lack of vigilance”* is because your mind is lazy; again it falls under laziness and because of that, it is the cause of laxity.

It is similar with *“deluded behavior”*. Usually the arising of attachment is a cause of excitement. But here, why any deluded behavior becomes the cause of laxity is because whenever you engage in delusion, you neglect engaging in virtue such as Samatha meditation and because of that it falls into laziness. It is laziness because you choose to fall under delusional behavior and that is why it is a cause of laxity.

*“Being unskillful”* in the meditation on Samatha is very much like getting the right tune from guitar [strings]. If it is too tight then it doesn't make a good sound. If it is too loose it also doesn't make a good sound; you need perfect tightness of the [strings]. So in order to have the perfect single-pointed Samatha training, you need immense skillfulness. You cannot have over-application of vigilance, [and] you cannot neglect the application of vigilance. When there are no more obstacles of laxity and excitement, then if your mind and your attention towards the meditational object is not neutral, not in equanimity and you start to use vigilance to investigate even though there is no laxity or excitement, you can already stably establish your concentration but then you try to be a busy-body to check it out then again, you spoil the meditation. So you need immense skillfulness and not being skillful is because of being lazy. Because you are lazy, you are careless. So you need to be very, very careful and vigilant. This is not talking about vigilance in application to mindfulness but generally you have to be very vigilant about when to apply the antidote, when not to apply the antidote and when to be neutral. Not doing that, is itself a sign that you are sinking into laxity.

Then, *“giving only partial attention to serenity without accustoming yourself to and fully refining it”* is when you do single-pointed meditation you have to give [attention] in both body and mind completely. The intention has to be serious and when you are on the meditation cushion you really mean it and completely settle there for the serenity, not just trying it out or only understanding the technique half-way or not being fully motivated. If so, there will be failure in the success of the meditation because of the intrusion of laxity



and that kind of occurrence before [even] going into the session. Then during the session, that limitation is already the sign that laxity will be the result.

Then the object of meditation is not clear to your mind. It's like you want to practice single-pointed concentration but "*letting your mind stay as though in darkness*" just closing your eyes and stay thoughtless or just settle there. That also is a cause for laxity because when you train in Samatha single-pointed training, the object of your meditation has to be absolutely clear in your heart because you have to actualize vivid clarity and intense one-pointed mind. In order to develop these two qualities to the object, the object has to be fully understood. The entire characteristics of the [defined] object have to be fully obtained in your mind. Not just placing your mind in darkness and not knowing where to grab because that will lead to laxity.

Here "signs of laxity" should be understood as the causes for laxity.

The "signs of excitement" are the causes of excitement. "Great grasping" is an excessive mental hold on a delightful object. "Aspiration, etc." refers to the four points [aspiration, joyous perseverance, intention, and analysis] explained earlier.

All these [four points: aspiration, joyous perseverance, intention, and analysis] are favorable in general but when it comes to Samatha training when there is excessive grasping and holding onto the mind like 'aspiration etc.', then it becomes a cause or the sign that will cause excitement.

Thus the four practices of which restraint of the sensory faculties is the first, which were discussed earlier in the section on practice between meditation sessions, are important for stopping both laxity and excitement. Moreover, if you recognize those causes and try to stop them, this is obviously very helpful for interrupting laxity and excitement. Therefore, use vigilance to notice even subtle laxity and excitement. You should stop laxity and excitement in every possible way, not tolerating them in any form.

In between sessions, by knowing one's habitual state of mind; if there's a danger of laxity then try to use the recommended uplifting reflections to strengthen your mind to protect our self from laxity. If through our habitual understanding, our mind is more likely to arise excitement then try to reflect on the faults of samsara, not having a serviceable mind etc., to calm and subdue our mind. That way, when we engage in meditation we are able to apply timely application whenever there is a sign of the arising of the two obstacles or able to apply the application effectively if such an obstacle has arisen in the meditation.

*Maitreya's Separation of the Middle from the Extremes* says that failing to do this is a fault of concentration called "non-application."

Not timely in the application when the two faults have already arisen, not timely in averting through the application of vigilance when it is on the verge of arising of the two faults. If you do so, it is called the fault of "non-application" from the five faults.

So the failing of the timely application may occur like what Lama Tsongkhapa says here:

Some may gradually give up, thinking, "Slight excitement and distraction persist even though I cut them off at the outset, so I shall not cut them off." Or if laxity and excitement are not strong and do not persist for long periods, they may think, "Since they are weak and of brief duration, I do not accumulate karmic obstructions. So I do not need to cut them off." Those who think this way and fail to apply themselves to the elimination of these hindrances do not know the right way to achieve concentration, yet pretend that they do. They deceive those who aspire to concentration, for their approach places them outside the tradition of methods for attaining concentration laid down by teachers such as the venerable Maitreya.

Moreover, in terms of counteracting laxity and excitement, at the outset you will most often be interrupted by excitement and distraction, so strive to eliminate them.

Even before going into the session you already set the proper motivation as we have discussed before, in order to overcome the obstacles. During the meditation, at the beginning stage of the nine levels of Samatha training, the obstacles [occur] most frequently. Therefore, you cannot give way at all.

If, by working on this, you stop gross excitement and distraction, then you will get a little bit of stability; (this is at the beginning stage) at this point, make an effort to guard against laxity. If you are on guard against laxity with a heightened awareness, then excitement – more subtle than before – may again interrupt your stability. So strive to eliminate this; if you do stop it, then stability will increase. Then laxity will again arise, so try to eliminate laxity.

At the beginning of the Samatha training, the obstacles compete to disturb you. [Such that] whenever you try to eliminate the laxity through the application of methods like uplifting your mind etc., at the beginning of the session it may lead to the arising of excitement. When you apply the antidote to the excitement there is danger of it leading to the arising of laxity. That is why you need to be very skillful in ways to overcome these two faults. At the beginning the way to train to prolong the focus is by training your skillfulness to avert these two obstacles. The more mastery you gain in averting these two obstacles the greater the benefit for your concentration to develop. So at the beginning, it is very much like your effort is more towards averting the obstacle than staying focused to the object of meditation. That kind of experience will occur.

In summary, withdraw your mind from scattering and excitement, inwardly fixing it upon the object of meditation, and seek stability. Each time stability occurs, take great precautions against laxity and bring forth a vivid intensity.

Otherwise, whenever you withdraw your mind from scattering and excitement you may be able to stay in one-pointedness but then you may lose the vivid intensity. When you lose the vivid intensity then the quality of your concentration is not there. It is already sure that laxity is occurring. When you avert the two obstacles, you gain the benefit of one-pointedness but you also have to make sure that it won't lead to laxity and losing the effect

of vivid intensity. Whenever you uplift your mind because of the occurring of laxity, you may gain vivid intensity but you may lose one-pointedness. To get a perfect balance in this phase of meditation is very challenging and tricky.

That is why there is a great point saying that when we go into Samatha meditation we are not going to stay as if in darkness; meaning that we need to have full clarity about the object of meditation and upon having that, then placing [our mind into] one-pointedness and vivid clarity. Those are the two qualities of mindfulness. And the introspection mind being able to notice the occurrence of excitement and laxity, the two obstacles, is based on noticing the strength and quality of the vividness and one-pointedness. After noticing that, if you apply the application timely but if it is not skillfully applied, you may get into faults. But how you, as the meditator, will know that you are getting into faults is by the introspection mind noticing that you are losing one-pointedness. Then you know that excitement is taking place. Whenever you realize that vivid clarity is losing, then laxity is occurring and you need to avert these two obstacles. This is the way the meditator doing the meditation has to apply the application with much skillfulness and timely, without losing the steadiness of the meditation. We have to not just know this but we have to meditate and train our self otherwise it is not easy to know how it actually happens in actual experience. The vigilance's timely application of the antidote has to be done with great precaution to overcome these challenges.

You will achieve flawless concentration by alternating between these two. Do not expect to attain stability by means of mere limpidity, which lacks the vividness that goes along with an intense way of apprehending the object.

It is very much like what you want to achieve by [tuning] the tightness of the guitar string. It is for you to achieve your vision of the perfect sound. It is also the same thing with drums; the tightness of the leather is to achieve that perfect sound. Similarly, the balanced application is to achieve the objective of the meditation that you already had a vision of, before you went into the session. Otherwise, it would be limpidity, not the complete characteristics of the meditation. Like the guitar, because you tightened it so much it makes a very loud sound and just because it makes a loud sound you simply play like that but it won't be nice. Similarly, when you do this meditation, by withdrawing the scattered mind, you may be able to stay very focused. You can even stay focused with a sleepy mind, like numbness to the object that you place on but there is no clarity at all. Therefore, the

objective is for you to achieve balanced clarity and one-pointedness; not just complete focus alone because that is not good enough to achieve Samatha and also it will not make the mind serviceable in future to use for analysis. And it won't be useful when using for special insight because for special insight you need a sharp mind, not a one-pointed steady mind alone. You need to be very smart with a steady focus. That is the reason for [the text] saying, *"lacks the vividness that goes along with an intense way of apprehending the object."* So even if you have an intense way of apprehending the object but if there is no vivid clarity then it is not beneficial.

So this challenge can go on all the way up to the eighth stages from the nine stages of the Samatha mind training. The major struggles are of course at the beginning but even after that [there are challenges] and especially at the fifth and sixth mental states of the mind where it requires very powerful engagement of vigilance. Until then there is great occurrence of the gross laxity and excitement. After that from the seventh and eighth [mental stages], the gross have subsided but the subtle laxity and excitement occurrences are there. So, to overcome them, again [use] the same technique; you need the balanced right application accordingly in order to progress in the development [of concentration]. From the five faults it is the fourth one, the non-application. From the eight antidotes, it is the seventh antidote, application.

Earlier we have discussed about the faults of laziness and we have also discussed about the importance of having the full understanding of the object of meditation, which falls under forgetting the object of meditation. We have also talked about the two faults of laxity and excitement and just now, on non-application. So from the antidote we talked about faith, aspiration, perseverance and pliancy. We've also talked about mindfulness and the qualities of mindfulness. We have also talked about vigilance and the qualities of vigilance. Just now it's about the antidote to the applications. The coming subject is to discuss from the five faults, the over-application and from the antidote, it is to talk about equanimity.

Up to now, we have discussed the Samatha development in relation to occurrence of the two faults but now we are [going to] talk about how to continue the meditation when there is no occurrence of the two faults.

## 2. WHAT TO DO WHEN LAXITY AND EXCITEMENT ARE ABSENT

Lama Tsongkhapa says,

By continuing to meditate after eliminating even subtle laxity and excitement, as explained above, your mind will enter a state of equipoise that is free from the imbalances of either laxity or excitement. At this point, it is a fault of concentration to apply or exert yourself, so cultivate equanimity as a remedy for this. Kamalasila's second *Stages of Meditation* says:

When laxity and excitement have gone and you see that your attention is calmly remaining on the object of meditation, relax your effort and abide in equanimity; then remain this way for as long as you please.

This is very much the first time experiencing the surpassing from the eighth level of concentration. Earlier at the seventh and eighth [levels] effort is required, now when you reach the ninth level, it is effortless. Or in [other words], it is complete familiarity. When you are in complete familiarity and at the same time effortless and at the same time there is no occurrence of obstacles, you cannot use the vigilant mind to come in to interrupt the meditation. Rather you settle your entire system, both mind and body, in total meditative equipoise. If you put any effort while you are in absolute meditative equipoise then it becomes an obstacle and it will bring problem to the continuation of the meditation.

*Question:* How can it be that applying yourself, or making an effort, turns into a problem?

*Reply:* Through meditation, turning your attention inward when your mind is excited and stimulating your mind when it is lax, you gain confidence that laxity and excitement will not occur during each suitable meditation session. At this point you are still extremely wary of laxity and excitement, just as at the outset. Sustaining this is the problem. Your mind will become distracted, so at that time you must know to relax, as stated in Kamalasila's second and third *Stages of Meditation:* "If you exert yourself when your mind has entered a state of equipoise, then your mind will be distracted." This entails relaxing the effort, but not sacrificing the intensity of the way you apprehend your object.

Therefore, this cultivation of equanimity is not to be done every time laxity and excitement are absent, but once you have reduced the force of laxity and excitement; for when you have not done so, there is no equanimity.

This equanimity is referring to equanimity in the balanced application.

*Asanga's Sravaka Levels:*

What is equanimity? As your mind attends to objects of meditation associated with serenity and insight, it is focusing with calm settling, spontaneous mental engagement, a sense of mental well-being, effortless mental functioning after becoming serviceable, and a mental balance free from the afflictions.

*"Free from any afflictions"*, including the two obstacles.

When you achieve such equanimity – on those occasions when laxity and excitement are absent as you cultivate concentration – stay with this equanimity and let your mind rest without exerting strong effort.

The time for cultivating equanimity is also set forth in that text:  
When is the time for equanimity? In terms of serenity and insight, when your mind is free of laxity and excitement.

This is [still] a long way later for us to get into meditative equipoise where we can remain for as long as we wish. This is somewhere after the eighth stage when we have reached the ninth level. It may be the first time on the ninth level but even then you have to train to fully realize absolute stability from then onwards. Just experiencing it once is not good enough. Earlier discussions on how to overcome the five faults and the application of the antidotes are based on Maitreya's teaching on the *Separation of the Middle from the Extremes*. All the explanations were based on that. That has been supported by Asanga's teachings, who is one of the great successors of Maitreya's teachings.

To prove that reference, Lama Tsongkhapa put the words from Maitreya's *Separation of the Middle from the Extremes* here which says:

Staying with that joyous perseverance,  
Your mind becomes serviceable, and you attain all goals.  
This occurs as a result of eliminating the five faults  
And relying on the eight antidotes.  
The five faults are laziness,  
Forgetting the instructions,  
Laxity and excitement,  
Non-application, and application.  
The eight antidotes are the basis [yearning], that based on it [effort],  
The cause [confidence], the effect [pliancy],

Not forgetting the object of meditation,  
Recognizing laxity and excitement,  
Application to eliminate them,  
And calmly stabilizing your mind when they have been quelled.

If the fault is laziness, the antidote is faith, aspiration, perseverance and pliancy.

If the fault is forgetting the object of meditation, the antidote is the recollection or mindfulness.

If the fault is laxity or excitement, the antidote is vigilance.

If the fault is non-application, the antidote is application.

If the fault is over-application, the antidote is equanimity.

What do you do to develop such (Samatha) concentration? It develops as a result of using the eight antidotes in order to eliminate the five faults.

For the individual meditator who is inspired towards Samatha development, how these five faults are gradually overcome is that



...at the time of preparation *laziness* is a fault because you do not apply yourself at concentration.

So during preparation time the main obstacle you need to overcome is the laziness. During preparation there are six preparations that you need to actualize. For that you need to overcome the laziness to start with. In order to overcome the laziness together with all the circumstances, all the conducive conditions, the way to do that is to develop the antidote which is to have faith in the practice, have aspiration in the practice, have joyous perseverance to the practice and both mentally and physically, because of your faith, aspiration and perseverance, you gain joy in your heart and a relaxed sense in your body, while in the gathering of all those resources for your Samatha retreat or training. This is how you should go about it.

When you are working at concentration, *forgetting the instructions* is a fault because when you forget the object upon which you were instructed to meditate, your mind is not set in equipoise upon the object of meditation.

For that, you need to apply the antidote of mindfulness.

When it is set in meditative equipoise, *laxity and excitement* are faults because they make your mind unserviceable.

Because of that you need to apply the antidote of vigilance.

When laxity and excitement occur, lack of effort [*non-application*] is a fault because it does not quell those two.

Then you need to apply the antidote of application.

When laxity and excitement are absent, the fault is the intention of *application*.

Therefore, you need to apply the antidote of equanimity.

Among the remedies for those faults, out of the eight antidotes, four antidotes are for laziness and one antidote for each of the other faults.

These are the most excellent instructions for achieving concentration. They are set forth in the great master Kamalasila's three *Stages of Meditation*, as well as many expositions on achieving concentration by other great Indian scholars. They are also explained in the discussion on achieving serenity in Atisha's commentary on his own *Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment*. Earlier gurus of the stages of the path have conveyed a rough idea of these points, yet those wishing to cultivate meditative stabilization have not understood how to proceed. Thus, I have set this forth at length.

This is what Lama Tsongkhapa said. Why Lama Tsongkhapa put so much detail here is because even though there are many compositions but they are not step-by-step in stages to guide an individual to train in Samatha. That is the reason why he made it very lengthy and very detailed. It is for us.

Lama Tsongkhapa says:

That mindfulness and vigilance remove laxity and excitement from your mind's one-pointed concentration is a common theme to all personal instructions on this practice. So do not think, "This is a teaching particular to the vehicle of dialectics, but it is not necessary in the mantra vehicle."

For it is common to the mantra vehicle as well, since this is also stated in the class of the highest yoga tantras.

Therefore, like what Maitreya stated, that with joyous perseverance you train in single-pointed concentration, then you will attain all the goals. Therefore, whether the sutra practice or mantra practice what you need is the one-pointed focus in order to actualize the result of the mantra, the result of the application of emptiness or the result of any practices in any tradition or any yantras. All results will be achieved through one-pointed concentration and that can only be achieved through the training of mindfulness and vigilance by removing laxity and the distractions. So this is for all yantras and this is what it is saying here.

To support that, Lama Tsongkhapa quoted the second chapter of the first section of the glorious *Integration Tantra (Samputi)* [which] states:

The concentration of yearning, the foundation of the supernatural abilities associated with remedial application, is based in solitude; it is based in freedom from attachment; and it is based in cessation.

There is thorough transformation by means of correct elimination.  
With this yearning you meditate without being very slack or elated...

The meaning is the importance of this one-pointed serviceable mind for any achievement of any goal from any practice whether sutra or tantra.

As we all know, mindfulness and the introspection mind are required in any form of practices, whether to do with Samatha, developing bodhicitta, emptiness wisdom or actualizing daily yoga practice. Any practices from preliminary practices to the completion practices of tantra, mindfulness and introspection [are required]. Then the major obstacles for success to any form of practices from sutra or tantra are the dull mind and the destructions of delusions like attachment. Knowing that makes developing Samatha extremely important to the success of the common path practices in altruism and the uncommon path of the mantra, the generation and completion stages of the mantra path. Samatha is extremely important because it is really a serviceable mind. When your mind is not serviceable to any virtue or practices, the practices will not bring any results. So Samatha means making your mind serviceable for success in tantra, sutra or any form of practice.

## **Homework**

Try to familiarize with the signs or causes of laxity or excitement. Try to remember and have the mental picture, not from your notes but in your heart. Then during meditation you can recognize [the signs]. During meditation you may not be able to multi-task to look at your notes so try to have it in your heart. Also, familiarize yourself with what are the five faults and eight antidotes and read through the text again to get a firm understanding of each different fault and the application of each different antidote. These are the techniques that we need to use during the actual Samatha meditation retreat or even when we are training in our day-to-day life we need to use these methods, to recognize these five faults and we need to use the eight antidotes. We also learnt at the beginning that while I just introduced the five faults and eight antidotes briefly, the five faults can be summarized into two faults: laxity and excitement. The eight antidotes can be summarized into the two antidotes: mindfulness and introspection. Now you can try to see how it makes sense that the five faults falls into the two faults and the eight antidotes falls into the two antidotes. If you can remember that clearly in your heart by understanding with reason, then when you go into the actual training of the mind, it will be very easy.

We are almost completing the course. The main teachings on Samatha have already been completed by today but it will be beneficial to go through the description of the nine levels or stages of the Samatha mind. Also the application of the four attentions, that assists in the development of the nine stages of the mind and then the six forces. So there are three [more] subjects that we will discuss: (1) nine stages of the [Samatha] mind, (2) the six forces and (3) the four attentions. Then we will be finished.

So the main teaching is complete but in order to capture all the points into a structure based on your own outline, to have a structured reminder, you need to flip through the text a few times and if there is an opportunity, then listen to the [recordings of the] classes again. Then you will come to a very firm, full idea. That will be beneficial. Right now you may find that everything is scattered, with too much information.

14 July 2020, Session: 20

The actual stages in which the mental states develop

## 6. ATTAINING SERENITY

Today, we will spend some time introducing the definition of the nine different stages of the Samatha mind. These nine different stages of the Samatha mind is the mental development that is actualized during the development of Samatha. Whatever that we have learnt up to now, certain parts of the teachings play as a preliminary preparatory causes and condition and certain parts of the teachings play as the main body of the practice. The six different types of preparatory teachings play as preparatory causes in order for us to get into the actual process of developing the Samatha mind from first stage to the ninth stage. Then the rest of the teachings that we have discussed for so many weeks, are all teachings for the main body, in particular the teachings on the five faults and eight antidotes and the rest of the meditation techniques such as the utilization of mindfulness and introspection. All these play a role during the actual process of the practice. Today we will learn in detail, the definition of the nine stages of Samatha meditation.

For the next two sessions we will discuss three points: the nine stages of the Samatha mind, the six forces and the four attentions. The nine stages of the mind is the mental factor you develop with the assistance of six forces and four attentions. In order to eradicate the five faults, mainly the two major faults of laxity and excitement, [the meditator] uses the help of the six forces and four attentions to the eight antidotes. Then the concentration progress [of the meditator] will develop from very minor to very intense development of concentration and these are divided into nine portions, which are based on the meditator's experience and progress. So, based on the different progress of the meditator, it is labeled as different stages of the [concentration] mind.

Before the practitioner can steadily develop these nine stages of the mind, you have already chosen your definite Samatha meditation object. One would also already have done preliminary preparatory meditations as discussed extensively before. By knowing our own mind well and our limitations such as for example, if we have major issues like why we can't have peace of mind or settle our heart and cannot focus, and if this [problem] is due to [having] too much desirous attachment then we do preliminary meditation of purifying the desire by meditating on the ugliness. Remember we have mentioned this before? So, all these preliminary practices we would have already done either through day-to-day practices

or through engaging in short retreats. Take time off from a busy life to do retreat just to cleanse the strong attachment because that is the major obstacle (in this example) in order for us to steadily develop the nine levels of the mind. There are a variety of meditational objects that we have discussed before and there is great benefit to be fully prepared for the actual progress of the nine stages. So, you would have already done all those preliminary preparations.

On top of our daily disciplines in our practice to control our three doors from the intrusions of negativities, from time to time [one can] take a full weekend to do serious retreat. As a Mahayanic practitioner any forms of practice to do with focusing on virtuous practices like Nyung Nay practices, prostration practices or any of the preliminary retreats like mandala offerings, or taking eight Mahayana precepts etc., all these are preliminary practices that will bring immense benefits for us to be prepared for the actual steady development of the nine stages of the mind of Samatha.

Any form or activities of learning dharma, contemplating on dharma, meditation on dharma etc. that you conduct are all conducive conditions in preliminary [practices] and benefits us to get prepared for Samatha meditation. From the Buddhist point of view, in particular for Mahayanic practitioners, [to achieve] the purpose of developing Samatha, it should be developed on the basis of using virtuous objects and making your mind serviceable to the meditation on the object of virtue. But due to immense habitual imprints from beginningless lifetimes that we have with this major obstacle, the moment we start to focus on virtue our mind starts to stray and there's an occurrence of darkness in our mind. In other words, the moment we start to focus on virtue, the six root delusions and twenty secondary afflictive emotions starts to arise. And this is not because the virtues are the cause but it is due to the clash of positive and negative energies i.e. virtues and the negative imprints. So, because of having so much negative imprints then we always fail to succeed in the complete and perfected virtuous cultivation. Therefore any forms of virtuous practice, even if just for a moment, that we can accumulate, are the conditional causes that will bring about habitual contribution to our mind into virtue. Then eventually, when you decide to focus on the virtuous object for as much as you want, you will be able to get a certain steadiness. And that is the time that we start to develop the nine stages of meditation. By the time that we experience the first mental stage of Samatha, we have already gained a certain intense habit in virtues. Because of that, we are able to remain focused on one chosen virtuous object without the arising of six root delusions and [twenty] secondary afflictive emotions. To reach this stage, you have to do a great many preliminary work and practices. Therefore, up to today whatever virtuous practices that we have been doing and have been accumulating since the day we met the dharma, are all preparations for this day. We have

to go through the process of developing Samatha otherwise we won't be able to reach the point where we can eradicate the entire root causes of samsara. Without achieving [special] insight we cannot eradicate the defilements. And if we are unable to do that, then we cannot achieve liberation or enlightenment. So, at this stage if we find that our three doors are still very much afflicted even though we have been practicing for a long time, then we need to find a dedicated time like going into retreat, as I have mentioned before, or take eight Mahayanic precepts etc. That will help to speed us to get to the point where we are capable of developing Samatha and we can quickly progress on the path and get liberated. This is an urgent journey and work. If we fail to achieve it within this life, we don't know if we will have such an opportunity again in our future life.

The reason is that each time we engage in virtue through our body, speech and mind, whether reciting one mantra of *Om Mani Padme Hum* or just dedicating your body to do virtuous acts like prostrations or mentally just think of Buddha, we are already disciplining our body, speech and mind in that one moment and we achieve the effect to refrain from negativities. Whenever we perform any virtues that accumulate morality by refraining from the accumulation of negativities during that period it also brings purification of the past imprint. Therefore, the more we do that, the more accumulation of morality and this is the way to actualize concentration. The actualization of concentration is the way to actualize wisdom. From the three higher trainings, morality is the preliminary practice for the Samatha meditator and after that the actual practice is the Samatha. The result of that Samatha is special insight wisdom. These three higher trainings act as cause and effect. Without morality there is no concentration, without concentration there is no wisdom. That is the reason why I am saying that all our daily practices are in fact helping us to get ready to actualize Samatha practice.

When we go through this section on the actual stages in which the mental states develop, it is beneficial that individually we regard that you are having this mind and roughly this is what happens and have a mental picture in your heart so that next time when you go into the actual session then whenever such kind of characteristics develop in your mind then you know, "I am on the first stage or I am on second stage" etc. I will try to illustrate through the definition and the picture of the nine stages [leading to] Samatha. This way you will be able to know in yourself, the processes because during the meditation you can't look into your notes so you have to have a mental note. After this [teaching], it's good to memorize the different names and its characteristics by heart; it will be beneficial. In order to have a stronger imprint this time I have already mentioned the nine stages of the mind, the six forces and four attentions at the beginning, remember?

Some people may not have time to memorize and there are two ways to go about this. One way is remembering the words by repeating it. Another way is just read a few times carefully and try to absorb the meaning and then take that snapshot of understanding in your heart. You may not be able to chant the words exactly like in the text but you know exactly what the text means. If it is not conducive for you to memorize in the conventional way, then try to do it the second way.

You can categorize the memorization into three types:

1. You memorize the word accordingly and the meaning
2. Just the words
3. Just the meaning

The first way of memorization [word and meaning] is the best then followed by the meaning and finally the words.

In Sera Monastery, where I studied, in my class there was a student who was top in debate, commentary, explanation and understanding of the teaching. But whenever we go for memorization exams he would fail because he does not memorize the words. He will just read and read and memorize all the meaning in his heart. During debate it is not necessary to quote word by word. As long as you phrase the correct meaning in your own words you have already delivered. This monk can remember the entire sutra and text but if asked to sit down and chant [the words] he can't do that because he had not memorized the words. If you memorize the words you have to practice consistently to repeat the words, otherwise you can forget. If you memorize the meaning then it is like carved in to your heart, and even if you don't repeatedly read it, it still remains in your heart.

## **THE STAGES IN WHICH THE MENTAL STATES DEVELOP**

- A. The actual stages in which the mental states develop**
- B. The process of achieving them with the six forces
- C. How the four attentions are involved in this

### **A. THE ACTUAL STAGES IN WHICH THE MENTAL STATES DEVELOP**

[Lamrim Chenmo, Page 73]



These are the nine mental states:

1. *Mental placement:*

Try to place yourself as the practitioner developing Mental Placement and what are the kind of experiences and training is happening.

This entails thoroughly withdrawing your attention from all outside objects and directing it inwardly to the object of meditation. Maitreya's *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras* states: "After you have directed your attention to the object of meditation..."

For practitioners who most likely may not use breathing as an object of Samatha. Instead, may be using Buddha's image, a deity or mantra etc. but when we reach this [first mental] stage, during the preliminary training, we would have already tried using breathing and to concentrate and hold our focus for 24 minutes, 1 hour, 1½ hours and then 3 hours. This training is kind of a preliminary training that we have done before we reach to this stage. When we reach the first level of Mental Placement we can already place our [mind] on one dedicated object like breathing for about 24 minutes. But when you are actually engaging in the retreat of developing the nine stages of Samatha without losing momentum, then at this stage you may not be able to focus on your object of meditation as you did with such focus when you were training in the preliminary stage of breathing. Before we get to this point we already have confidence that we can at least focus on a dedicated object like breathing for 24 minutes at the minimum. Then such a practitioner goes into a retreat without interruption to develop these nine stages. That's why someone with this kind of preparation can attain the nine stages of Samatha in six months. We are imagining that we are in that position. That means we would already have the experience to be able to focus for 24 minutes on the dedicated object like breathing. But when we are actually in the retreat when we start from the first level of Mental Placement, we cannot expect that we can meditate in one shot for 24 minutes because we may encounter obstacles within the next second.

When you place your mind for the first time on the object of meditation, the kind of experience is like "...thoroughly withdrawing your attention from all outside objects and directing it inwardly to the object of meditation." That is the quality that will happen but how long it will last, varies. It does not mean that when you achieve the first level of the

mind and decide to do half an hour of Samatha meditation and think that you are able to [focus for that period of time]. This may not necessarily happen.

Here, the gross occurrences of obstacles of laxity and excitement are more vivid and more often than before. This is not because of an increase in laxity and excitement but it is simply because you are now noticing [these obstacles] as your mind is now mentally placed on the object of meditation in Samatha training. Your mind has become clearer and starts to recognize those faults. But the practitioner feels as if now the obstacles are occurring even more than before. At this time the practitioner needs to know that the obstacles are not increasing but it is just because your mind is able to place on the object of meditation and that's why the obstacles start to appear and your mind is able to recognize the obstacles. Before you achieve the stage of mental placement, you didn't recognize the obstacles even though they were there.

At the first and second mental stages [of Samatha], you will experience much disturbances of frequently arising and obvious laxity and excitement and delusions, particularly the twenty secondary afflictive emotions. That is because your mind starts to place on the object of meditation and that's why your mind is able to recognize them. This is not a fault but it is a good thing because your mind is getting clearer and sharper and that's why you can recognize the faults. That's why for the first and second mental stages you need the help of tight attention (from the four attentions) towards the meditation session.

Also the first and second mental stages can be defined by the length [or duration], in which the obstacle of laxity and excitement remains, during the period of meditation, without being noticed after it has appeared. So the longer duration of obstacles remaining in our meditation without being noticed is the first mental stage and the shorter duration is the second stage. Another way of understanding this is by the length [of time] and how long you are able to remain in concentration. The shorter duration is the first mental stage and the slightly longer one is the second mental stage.

## *2. Continuous placement:*

Your attention that was initially directed to the object of meditation does not stray elsewhere, but is continuously set upon the object of meditation.

The continuity here is referring in comparison to the first [mental stage]. It doesn't mean that you are able to remain continuously as long as you want to focus. It means compared to the first stage then the second stage has a certain continuation.

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras*: "Its continuity is not distracted."

### 3. Patched placement:

If your attention is drawn away by forgetfulness and distracted outward, you recognize this and again fix it upon the object of meditation.

The second and third [mental stages] can be differentiated by how long you are distracted. The second stage is distracted [for a longer time] than the third mental stage. At the third mental stage, "*your attention is drawn away by forgetfulness and distracted outward*", but you recognized this distraction faster and bring your meditation back [quicker] than what you are able to do on the second mental stage.

The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras*: "Swiftly recognizing distraction, it is patched up again."

### 4. Close placement:

Kamalasila's first *Stages of Meditation* comments that with the previous mental state you recognize distraction and eliminate it; with this mental state you have eliminated distraction and with effort place your attention upon the object of meditation.

In other words, like what Asanga says:

As the force of mindfulness develops, forgetfulness does not create outward distraction.

Also,

Ratnakarasanti's *Instructions for the Perfection of Wisdom* asserts that your attention, which is by nature expansive, is repeatedly drawn in and refined, establishing ever greater stability.

Another way to understand this, is the third and fourth mental stages are differentiated by the intrusion of distraction during meditation. On the third stage there is a possibility of losing your object of meditation but on the fourth stage, even when distraction appears you are able to regain [focus] and continue your focus on the object of meditation. So, at third stage you are unable to do so but on the fourth stage, one is able to do so.

#### 5. *Taming:*

Reflecting upon the advantages of concentration, you take delight in concentration.

During post-meditation, you reflect on the advantages of concentration. Because of that, during meditation you are able to prolong the concentration due to the causal mind of delightfulness in the practice. Of course in the earlier stages during post-meditation you also see the advantages of concentration etc., but because in the earlier stages [the mind is still] untamed, your ability to prolong the concentration is not as good as when you are on the fifth mental stage of taming.

Asanga's *Sravaka Levels* comments that if your mind is distracted by the signs of any of the five sensory objects of visual form and so on, of the three mental poisons [attachment, hostility and ignorance], or of a man or a woman, you regard these ten signs as disadvantageous from the outset and do not let them scatter your mind.

This is what you cultivate before settling into a session and that is how it helps. Another way to differentiate between the fourth and fifth mental stages is the occurrence of gross laxity. On the fourth stage there is still an occurrence of gross laxity but then on the fifth stage of taming, although there is still subtle laxity, gross laxity does not occur.

On the third, fourth and fifth mental stages, you need the help of intermittent attention, [second of] the four attentions. On the first and second mental stages you need the help of tight focus, the first of the four attentions.

#### 6. *Pacification:*

Regarding distraction as a fault, you quell any dislike for concentration. The *Ornament for the Mahayana Sutras*: “Because you see the faults of distraction, you quell dislike for the meditation.”

The *Sravaka Levels* asserts that if your attention is disturbed by thoughts such as those concerning sensory objects and by secondary afflictions such as obstructions involving attraction to the sensory, you regard these from the beginning as disadvantageous, and do not allow your attention to be drawn to your thoughts and secondary afflictions.

This is the reason why the sixth mental stage is called pacification. Another way you can differentiate the fifth and sixth mental stages is based on caution to the occurrence of subtle laxity. On the fifth mental stage you are more cautious of the occurrence of subtle laxity but on the sixth stage you don’t need to be so cautious any more, you can settle your heart. Based on this differentiation, you can see the improvement [of your meditation] from the fifth to the sixth mental stage. Not only the subtle laxity but also the occurrence of subtle excitement decreases immensely and due to that you don’t have to be as cautious as before [on the fifth stage].

#### 7. *Complete pacification:*

This entails the fine pacification of the occurrence of attachment, melancholy, lethargy, sleepiness etc.

Here is the pacification of attachment, deep-sinking mind, dark ignorance, completely blank and sleepiness. The first, [attachment] is referring to subtle excitement while melancholy, lethargy, sleepiness refers to subtle laxity. So, the sixth and seventh mental stages can be differentiated by the cautiousness towards the possibility of occurrence of subtle laxity and subtle excitement. At the sixth and seventh mental stages there's no intrusion or obstruction during the meditation but this is not because you have completely purified the subtle laxity and subtle excitement. [At the sixth stage,] there are still signs and danger that show arising of obstacles if you are too relaxed. On the seventh stage of complete pacification, you don't have to be worried even about the signs of the occurring of subtle laxity and subtle excitement. At the sixth stage, there is a danger of occurrence if you are too relaxed.

#### 8. *One-pointed attention:*

This entails exerting effort so that you engage the object of meditation effortlessly.

The seventh and the eighth mental stages can be differentiated by whether there is existence of subtle laxity and subtle excitement. On the seventh stage even though there is complete pacification of the subtle laxity and excitement but it requires application of antidotes or effort. Comparing to the seventh stage, on the eighth stage without any need for effort or antidotes, the obstacles are not there anymore.

The *Sravaka Levels* states: "By means of application you have no hindrance, and, since you continuously establish a flow of concentration, you make a single channel."

Another term applied to the eighth mental state is "single channeling."

[The meditator up to the] seventh mental stage is remaining in concentration, based on tackling its obstacles. But at the eighth mental stage, there is no danger from obstacles like before but prolonging the concentration is dependent on effort. Especially, in comparison between the seventh and eighth mental stages, due to greater effort that one put at the eighth stage, then by force of the effort of perseverance one then actualize joyous

perseverance. Due to that you are able to sustain the single-pointed channel or the uninterrupted continuous concentration, which is called “single channeling” without interruption.

#### 9. *Balanced placement:*

According to Kamalasila’s *Stages of Meditation*, this refers to the equanimity that occurs when your mind becomes balanced; Ratnakarasanti’s *Instructions for the Perfection of Wisdom* says this refers to spontaneous, natural attention and the attainment of independence as a result of familiarity with single channeling (from the eighth mental stage).

The eighth and ninth stages can be differentiated by the needs to single channeling without interruption for as long as you want to focus on the object of meditation, with effort and without effort. On the eighth mental stage, it is with effort in perseverance that brings about prolonging single channeling in concentration and at the ninth stage, it becomes spontaneous and effortlessly one can focus due to the familiarity of training that has been achieved through past training.

So, [the four attentions that help] the achievement of the nine mental stages of mind are:

- First [mental placement] and second [continuous placement] mental stages, the attention is *tight focus*
- Third, fourth, fifth, sixth and seventh mental stages [patched placement, close placement, taming, pacification, complete pacification], the attention is *intermittent focus*
- Eighth mental stage [one-pointed attention], the attention is *uninterrupted focus*
- Ninth mental stage [balanced placement], the attention is *spontaneous focus* or equanimity.

[In addition to the help from the four attentions], the achievement for the nine mental stages is developed with help from the six forces. In relation to that,

- First mental stage [mental placement] is achieved through *force of hearing* or force of learning

- Second mental stage [continuous placement] is achieved through *force of reflection*
- Third and fourth mental stage [patched placement, close placement] is achieved through the *force of recollection*. [mindfulness]
- Fifth and sixth mental stage [taming, pacification] is achieved through *force of vigilance*
- Seventh and eighth mental stage [complete pacification, one-pointed attention] is achieved through *force of perseverance*. [enthusiasm]
- Ninth mental stage [balanced placement] is achieved through *force of complete familiarity*. [acquaintance]

If you just try to settle [familiar] yourself with the four attentions, six forces and nine mental stages and organize it by yourself, it can be simple.

In diagram I, there are these few images [that you can try] to remember and relate to when you look at the diagram [and below is a guide:]

- A monk
- Black elephant
- Black monkey
- Black hare
- Monk holding a rope and a hook
- Fire
- The five senses objects like mirror, nectar, music, fruit and clothes and a fruit tree
- Elephant changing color from black to white
- Monkey changing color from black to white
- Hare changing color from black to white
- Flying meditating monk
- Flying monk
- Monk riding on elephant
- Monk looking back riding on an elephant holding a wisdom sword
- There are six curves in the road that lead up to the rainbow
- [The first] monk is standing outside a house (representing the mind that is contaminated by samsaric aggregates). Altogether, there are 9 images of the monk from the standing monk up to the meditating monk.
- Besides that, there are another three monks and in total there are 12 images of a monk.



- Each monk represents the meditator [yourself] at different steps leading from the first level to the ninth stage of the mind. The rope represents mindfulness and the hook represents introspection.
- The elephant represents the mind while the black color on the elephant represents laxity
- The monkey represents distraction while the black color on the monkey represents excitement
- There are six different types of fire flames, of sizes from big to small, that are present up to the seventh mental stage. The fire flame and the size of the fire flame represent the need of the strength of mindfulness and introspection.
- The six different curves [on the road] represent six powers or forces.
- The rope, fruit, nectar, cymbals and mirror are the five sense objects representing objects of distractions.
- The elephant acquiring white patches represents the strength of vivid intensity and single-[pointed] stability which are the two qualities of mindfulness.
- The hare represents the subtle laxity [3<sup>rd</sup> stage]
- The elephant, hare and monkey all “looking back” (at the 3<sup>rd</sup> stage) represents the recognition of a stirred, distraction mind and then placing your attention back to the object of meditation.
- Eventually, the monkey is [lagging] behind the elephant and that signifies losing the strength of the arising of excitement. [5<sup>th</sup> stage]
- When the elephant is released from the rope and the monkey is left behind the monk, it is the sign of slim chances of the arising of laxity an excitement. And if it arises, with a little effort without much force needed, you can overcome it. [7<sup>th</sup> stage]
- The hare is lost (gone). [6<sup>th</sup> stage]
- When the monkey is also lost and the elephant has turned completely white, this signifies that there is no more intrusion by even the subtlest laxity or excitement to the meditation and [the meditator is] able to remain continuously in one-pointedness meditation. [8<sup>th</sup> stage]
- [In the next image], the monk is sitting in meditation and the elephant is also resting [beside the monk] which means achieving the 9<sup>th</sup> stage of the mind and without needing any effort, one is able to remain in the pacified state of one-pointedness.
- The monk who is flying represents that he has achieved physical pliancy of the body after achieving the 9<sup>th</sup> stage of Samatha.

- The monk riding on the white elephant on a rainbow symbolizes achieving mental pliancy.
- The monk holding a wisdom sword and flame of fire, while riding on the elephant's back on the rainbow, signifies achieving special insight on the serviceable mind of Samatha. The sword represents wisdom realizing emptiness and the fire represents eradicating /burning the root of Samsara.
- At the side of the diagram, there is a monkey plucking fruit from the fruit tree that represents extracting the result /fruit of the two activities i.e. engaging in the accumulation of merits and virtues to collect the result of the practice of Samatha. Focusing on virtuous objects during post-meditation in order to gather merits for the success of Samatha and during the meditation, not focusing on the virtues by seeing it as an obstacle to Samatha. In other words, extracting the fruit of two activities means that during meditation, other than the object of meditation, one regards even focusing on any virtuous activities as an obstacle in pursuing Samatha. During post-meditation, instead of indulging in non- virtues, one accumulates virtues and merits also for the actualization of the success of Samatha and the result of Samatha.
- The ropes on the neck of the elephant means you are able to use mindfulness to tie the wild mind. At the 1st and 2nd stages of the Samatha mind, even though you wish to apply mindfulness and introspection, it is a struggle to control the mind from distractions of the two faults.
- From the 3rd level onwards, mindfulness is able to take certain control over the mind. That's why, you can see [on the diagram], that the rope is already on the elephant.
- Up to the 7th stage, there is a fire flame meaning you need strong, very forceful mindfulness and introspection. From the 7th stage onwards, there is no [symbol] of a fire flame meaning that forceful mindfulness and introspection is not required. Also the elephant is released from the rope and that means placing of the mindfulness and introspection is easily done without need of forceful means and [in the diagram this is depicted] as the monk is no longer holding the rope and the hook.
- At the end of the path where single-pointed concentration is attained, the elephant and the monk are resting. The purified elephant is the mind that is completely submissive to whatever object that you want to place on it and for however long that you want to place it. That is the point when you achieve the 9th stage of Samatha.

Please refer to the diagram of the Nine Stages Leading to Samatha [diagram I] where all these [explanations] are identified in the picture itself [for clarity]. Once you try to settle and summarize within your own understanding on the commentary, the picture and the explanations with each having its individual benefits, you won't feel confused with so many things.

We will have another session on the four attentions and six forces, to give you a slightly better understanding about them

### **Homework**

Try to memorize the nine different levels of mental states and try to capture the definition of each mental state.

Try to find the picture of the Nine Stages Leading to Samatha and try to know the different meanings in the picture because this is emphasized by the Buddhas. So it definitely has great blessing and great benefits to know and to understand the picture. The picture is a reflection of yourself, your mind, your laxity and excitement, mindfulness and introspection etc. Through taking this [yourself] as an example and the meaning into your own being, it can be beneficial.

Diagram I



Diagram I - additional information

The Nine Stages Leading to Samatha

Stages	What is achieved	power by which that is achieved (6 Forces)	What problems persist	4 Attention (types of mental engagement)
1 <sup>st</sup> : Mental Placement	One is able to direct the attention to the chosen object of meditation	Force of Hearing	There is no attentional continuity on the object	Tight Focus
2 <sup>nd</sup> : Continuous Placement	Attentional continuity on the chosen object at a longer time	Force of Reflection	Most of the time the attention is not on the object	
3 <sup>rd</sup> : Patched Placement	Swift recovery of distracted attention, mostly on the object	Force of Mindfulness / Recollection	One still forgets the object entirely for brief periods	Intermittent Focus
4 <sup>th</sup> : Close Placement	One no longer completely forgets the chosen object.		Some degree of complacency concerning concentration	
5 <sup>th</sup> : Taming	One takes delight/satisfaction on concentration	Force of Vigilance	Some resistance to the concentration	
6 <sup>th</sup> : Pacification	No resistance to training the attention		Desire, depression, lethargy and drowsiness	
7 <sup>th</sup> : Completed Pacification	Pacification of attachment, melancholy and lethargy	Force of Enthusiasm / Perseverance	Subtle imbalances of the attention, swiftly rectified	
8 <sup>th</sup> : One-Pointed Attention	Concentration is long and sustained without any excitement and laxity		It still takes effort to ward off excitement and laxity	Uninterrupted Focus
9 <sup>th</sup> : Balanced Placement	Flawless concentration is long and sustained effortlessly	Force of Complete Familiarity	Attentional imbalances may recur in the future	Effortless (spontaneous) Focus



The attached diagram I, illustrates the learner meditator's mind and how it experiences the obstacles to perfect concentration and also shows the effects of applying the antidotes. There are 9 stages of meditative or mental absorption that are achieved through specific types of mental effort.

### **Guide to the diagram**

- 1.** The 1st stage of meditation is attained through force of hearing (listening to the explanations of the teachings)
- 2.** Fixing the mind on the object of meditation
- 3.** The force of recollection or mindfulness
- 4.** The force of vigilance, alertness or introspection
- 5.** From here until the 7th stage of mental absorption will be found a flame decreasing in size at each progressive stage until it become absent. This strengthens one's recollection and vigilance.
- 6.** The elephant represent mind and its black colour represents the mental factor of laxity.
- 7.** The monkey represents distraction and its black colour the mental factor of excitement.
- 8.** The force of reflection. This achieves the 2nd stage of mental absorption.
- 9.** Uninterrupted and continuous absorption on the object of concentration (lengthening the period of concentration).
- 10.** The 5 sensual desires are the object of the mental factor of excitement.
- 11.** From here, the black colour, beginning from the head of the elephant, changes to white and denotes the progress in the clear grasping of the object of meditation and fixing the mind on the object of concentration.
- 12.** The force of recollection. The attainment of the 3rd and 4th stages of mental absorption is achieved through the force of recollection.

- 13.** To return and fix the strayed mind on the object of concentration.
- 14.** The hare represents the subtle aspects of the mental factor of laxity. At this stage, one recognizes the distinct nature and gross aspects of the mental factor of laxity.
- 15.** Looking back means that having perceived the distraction of the mind, it is brought back to the object of concentration.
- 16.** Maintaining a clear visualization of the finest details of the object of concentration
- 17.** The force of vigilance. Through this is attained the 5th and 6th stages of mental absorption.
- 18.** The arising of the mental factor of excitement is markedly reduced.
- 19.** At the time of samatha meditation, even thoughts of virtue that arise need to be removed whilst the mind is strongly focused on the object of concentration. Here one is developing the vehicle (the mind) to have the quality of concentration to be able to deeply embed virtuous thoughts continuously and eventually gain the direct realization of emptiness/selflessness.
- 20.** The force of vigilance arrests the mind from drifting astray.
- 21.** The mind is controlled
- 22.** The mind is pacified
- 23.** The 7th and 8th stages of mental absorption are accomplished through the force of perseverance.
- 24.** The mind becomes perfectly pacified. At this stage, the arising of the subtlest laxity and excitement has stopped.
- 25.** The black colour of the elephant (laxity) has completely faded out and the monkey (distraction) is also absent.
- 26.** Single-pointedness of mind

**27.** The 9th stage of mental absorption of the 9th stage is attained through the force of complete familiarity.

**28.** Perfect equanimity

**29.** Great ease of body

**30.** Attainment of calm abiding or samatha

**31.** Mental bliss

**32.** The root of samsara is eliminated through the joint power of calm abiding and direct insight into emptiness/selflessness as the object of concentration.

**33.** The flame represents the dynamic forces of recollection and consciousness. Equipped with the power, one examines the nature and the sublime meaning of emptiness – the knowledge of the ultimate reality of all objects, material and phenomena.



The painting here represents an aspiring meditator, who is following the path consisting of the stages of meditation that ends in the accomplishment of a calmly abiding mind and the beginning of the practice of insight meditation. At the bottom we see the practitioner, who holds a rope in one hand and a hook in the other, chasing after an elephant led by a monkey. The elephant represents the meditator's mind; a wild or untrained elephant can be dangerous and wreak enormous destruction, but once trained will obey and do hard work. The same holds true for the mind. Any suffering that we have now is due to the mind being like a wild, untrained elephant. The elephant also has very big footprints; these symbolize our mental defilements. If we work at improving our minds, inner peace will be the reward. From the suffering of the hells to the happiness of the Buddhas, it is the mind's activity that gives rise to them all.

At the start of the path the elephant is black, which represents dullness or sinking of the beginning meditator's mind. The monkey leading the elephant represents distraction. A monkey cannot keep quiet for a moment—it is always chattering or fidgeting and finds everything attractive. Just as the monkey is in front leading the elephant, our attention is distracted by sensory objects of taste, touch, sound, smell, and vision. These are symbolized by food, cloth, musical instruments, perfume, and a mirror. The person behind the elephant represents the meditator trying to train the mind. The rope in the meditator's hand is mindfulness and the hook is awareness. Using these two tools the meditator will try to tame and control his mind. Fire is shown at different points along the path to represent the energy necessary for concentration. Notice that the fire gradually decreases at each of the ten stages of calm abiding, as less energy is needed to concentrate. It will flare up again at the eleventh stage, when we start practicing insight meditation.

In the beginning, just as the elephant following the monkey pays no attention to the person chasing after it, the practitioner has no control over his or her mind. In the second stage, the practitioner, who has almost caught up with the elephant, is able to throw the rope around the elephant's neck. It looks back; this is the third stage, where the mind can be restrained a little by mindfulness. Here a rabbit appears on the elephant's back, symbolizing subtle dullness, which might earlier have seemed to be a state of concentration, but now can be recognized for the harmful factor that it is. In these early stages we have to use mindfulness more than awareness.

At the fourth stage the elephant mind is more obedient, so it is less necessary to restrain it with the rope of mindfulness. By the fifth stage the elephant is being led by the rope and hook and the monkey is following behind. At this point we are not much disturbed by distracted attention; mostly we have to use awareness instead of mindfulness. In the

painting, the sixth stage of practice is depicted with the elephant and the monkey both following obediently behind the practitioner, who does not even have to look back at them. This means that the practitioner does not have to focus continually on controlling the mind, and the absence of the rabbit shows that the subtle dullness, which appeared at the third stage, has now disappeared.

Upon reaching the seventh stage, the elephant can be left to follow of its own accord and the monkey departs; the practitioner has no more use for the rope and hook- distracted attention and dullness occur only occasionally and mildly. At the eighth stage the elephant has turned completely white and follows behind the practitioner; this shows that the mind is obedient and there is no sinking or scattering, although some energy is still needed to concentrate. At the ninth stage the practitioner can actually sit in meditation while the elephant sleeps peacefully nearby; at this point the mind can concentrate without effort for long periods of time- days, weeks, or even months. The tenth stage, where we see the meditator sitting on top of the elephant, signifies the real attainment of a calmly abiding mind. At the last, eleventh, stage, the meditator is sitting on the elephant's back holding a sword. At this point the practitioner begins a new kind of meditation called "higher vision," or insight meditation with which he seeks to realize the nature of reality.

Description provided courtesy of Norbulingka Institute.

## THE STAGES IN WHICH THE MENTAL STATES DEVELOP

- A. The actual stages in which the mental states develop
- B. The process of achieving them with the six forces**
- C. How the four attentions are involved in this**

Although we have briefly covered the six forces and four attentions (for mindfulness) and their uses to the development of Samatha (or concentration) meditation, today we will go through according to the text as specifically mentioned here.

## B. THE PROCESS OF ACHIEVING THEM WITH THE SIX FORCES

[Lamrim Chenmo, page 75]

The text says:

There are six forces: the force of hearing, the force of reflection, the force of mindfulness, the force of vigilance, the force of enthusiasm, and the force of thorough acquaintance (equanimity).

These six forces are conditional help to the accomplishment of the gradual nine stages of the Samatha mind. In another way, you can also understand that the nine stages of the Samatha mind can be achieved in dependence on the help of the six forces and four attentions. We can also say that all the sessions we did in the past can be summarized within the nine stages of the mental levels of concentration, six forces and four attentions in order to eliminate the five faults for the development of Samatha. We can also understand the six forces and four attentions as different skillful means or the different faces of the eight antidotes that Maitreya has outlined.

1. With *the force of hearing*, you accomplish mental placement (the first level of concentration of the mind). The reason for this is that due to following the instructions that you have merely heard from someone else about focusing on the object of meditation, at first you simply fix your attention upon the object.

So through that you attain *mental placement*, which is the first of the nine [stages]. In another way, *mental placement* of the nine different levels can be achieved even before you are using the dedicated meditation object, through the continued Samatha training or meditation. As I have mentioned, throughout these many sessions of classes and the homework in between the classes and also meditating on different meditational objects based on the needs of an individual's way to secure our focus. Through all these different stages we have already attained certain capability of focus; placement to the object of meditation. So when you decide to go into retreat and start to focus on the chosen object, your mind is already trained to be able to place your mind onto the object of meditation. That itself brings about achievement of the mental placement, the first of the nine [stages].

After hearing so much about the disadvantages of the discursive mind or the faults of concentration like laxity and excitement, we already stay away from these obstacles and they are not as domineering as before even when we start to learn about them. And by reflecting on the advantages of mindfulness and Samatha and also gaining an idea of how to go about developing Samatha, you already feel a sense of interest and your mind is naturally drawn into the practice. This itself has already trained our mind to be able to focus when we start to meditate on the chosen object. Also you start doing your homework by meditating on different meditational objects as mentioned before, based on knowing your own limitations – be it attachment, anger or ignorance etc. That already helps to reduce the aggressiveness of the gross delusions and makes our mind familiar and more attracted towards virtues. And whenever we want to place our mind onto the chosen object, we tend to be able to sustain the meditation longer than before, for those of you who did your homework throughout the classes. If you didn't do your homework then you won't see this progress. For myself I did my homework and I can feel that. [Our mind] is still wild but not as wild as before attending class. Along the way, you can see the improvement, little by little, and that is by the power of the force of hearing that you achieve a level of mental placement which is the first of the nine [stages of the Samatha mind].

But this is not a case of familiarity due to your own repeated reflection.

This means that even without getting into consistent, sustainable concentration training on the chosen object for Samatha, you can still achieve a certain degree of mental placement. So if you have already chosen the object and already doing serious meditation or concentration training, you may have already moved onto the second level or achieved the highest degree within the first level of mental placement. The mental placement level itself has many stages.

From here we can understand that by having frequent discussions on Samatha practice, listening and reading the Samatha teachings as many times as possible, even if we may not have time for a retreat or serious continuous Samatha development, but in the midst of our busy day to day life, by finding frequent time to relate to anything to do with Samatha practice, it already helps you to progress, at least from the first level. So once in a while, whenever you get the opportunity, even if it is for a short time doing Samatha meditation, it is helpful. To witness, recognize or understand the development of the nine stages or levels of the mind, it has to be examined based on one chosen object. But to prepare and get ready to do that, all the initial [effort] including studying about Samatha or once in a while doing Samatha meditation can be extremely helpful.

2. With *the force of reflection*, you accomplish the mental state of continual placement; for as a consequence of the practice of repeatedly reflecting on the continuation of the initial fixation of attention upon the object of meditation, for the first time you achieve the ability to maintain a little continuity.

So with the *force of reflection* to the object that you have meditated on from the first [level of] *mental placement*, then you achieve the second stage *continual placement*.

Differentiation between the first and second stages is very much [based on] how long is the occurrences of laxity and excitement. The first level of the mind of *mental placement* has a longer occurrence of faults with very short concentration on the object [of meditation]. The second level of *continual placement* has slightly more continued concentration but

there are still active occurrence of faults, although not as [frequent] as before. We have already discussed the meditation between the different levels so you can refer to that.

You can examine the improvement from the first to the second levels within one minute of meditation. It is not necessary to be so ambitious at the beginning, to meditate for 24 minutes or longer. You can examine within two minutes where in the first minute, there are so many disturbances of excitement and laxity. You can then either take a short 1 minute break and get back into session, then in the next session you can continue for slightly more than 1 minute and that already shows the differentiation between the first stage and the second stage. Now you can relate to more lengthy sessions of 24 minutes, 1 hour or 2-3 hours. So initially do very short sessions, but eventually you can differentiate from the longer sessions.

3. With *the force of mindfulness*, you accomplish the mental states of patched placement and of close placement; for, in the case of patched placement, when your attention is distracted away from the object of meditation, you are mindful of the previous object of meditation and your attention is drawn back in; and in the case of close placement, you generate the power of mindfulness from the beginning, and this prevents your attention from being distracted away from the object of meditation.

In the first and second levels, when the obstacle intrudes, you totally lose the object of meditation. In the third stage, even when the obstacle intrudes you don't completely lose awareness of the object of your meditation; there is still attention there but not with quality and with the help of the strength of your mindfulness you can draw your attention back to your object of meditation.

4. With *the force of vigilance*, you accomplish the mental states of taming and of pacification; for, with vigilance you recognize the faults of being scattered toward thoughts and the signs of the secondary afflictions, and by regarding them as faults, you do not let scattering toward these two occur.

Here, the '*thoughts*' are referring to laxity and excitement. The '*signs*' are referring to the causes for the laxity and excitement and the secondary afflictions [to occur].

We have discussed that before and you can refer to the *Lamrim* text on page 66 where the signs and the secondary afflictions are described.

From the nine mental levels, *taming* is the fifth level and *pacification* is the sixth level. During the fifth and sixth stages of the mind, mindfulness is tackling the gross laxity and excitement and its signs, the secondary afflictions, in order to gain the quality of the levels of *taming* and *pacification*. [At the fifth mental level] it is 'taming' the gross obstacles, like gross laxity and gross excitement and the secondary afflictions. At the sixth mental level it is 'pacification' of gross laxity and gross excitement and the secondary afflictions.

So, with the force of mindfulness you attain the third and fourth mental levels and with the force of vigilance you attain the fifth and sixth [mental levels].

5. With *the force of enthusiasm*, you accomplish the mental states of complete pacification (the seventh level) and of one-pointed attention (the eighth level); for, by striving to eliminate even subtle thoughts and secondary afflictions, you do not submit to them; and by so doing, laxity, excitement, etc. are unable to interfere with your concentration, and you achieve continuous concentration.

The seventh level is the *complete pacification* of even the subtle laxity and excitement and subtle secondary afflictions. Due to that, when you reach the eighth level, you are able to achieve *one-pointed attention* without any interference of the faults. This is achieved through the joyous perseverance (force of enthusiasm).

For the eighth level and below, the major obstacles are not just laxity and excitement but also its causes and the signs, so we need to familiarize ourselves with them. Otherwise we won't be able to differentiate the faults. For that purpose, it is good to know the twenty secondary afflictions because these are the obstacles; some appear as the causes and conditions for excitement and some appear as the causes and conditions for laxity. The twenty secondary afflictions are: (1) anger, (2) malice (3) concealment (4) outrage (5) jealousy, (6) miserliness, (7) conceit, (8) dishonesty, (9) haughtiness, (10) harmful intent, (11) non-embarrassment, (12) non-consideration, (13) lack of faith, (14) laziness, (15) non-

conscientiousness, (16) forgetfulness, (17) non-introspection, (18) dullness, (19) agitation, (20) mental wandering etc. These are the twenty [secondary afflictions] but there are more sub-afflictions and all of them are the causes to afflict in the arising of laxity and excitement.

6. With *the force of acquaintance*, you accomplish the mental state of balanced placement (the ninth mental stage); for, with the force of great familiarity with the above, you develop effortless, natural concentration.

These accord exactly with the intended meaning of Asanga's *Sravaka Levels*; so, although there are alternative explanations, do not rely on them.

The achievement of the ninth mental state can be understood in terms of an analogy: In the case of those who are extremely familiar with reciting scriptures and so on, if the initial motivation to recite arises and they begin, even though their mind is occasionally distracted elsewhere, the recitation continues effortlessly, without interruption. In a similar fashion, once your mind is settled with mindfulness fixed upon the object of meditation, even if you do not continually cultivate mindfulness and vigilance, your concentration is able to focus continually, for long periods of time, without being interrupted by scattering. Since effort is not needed to maintain a continuous stream of mindfulness and vigilance, this is said to be without application, or effort.

You achieve the ninth level of concentration.

Most of us do *Praises to the Twenty-one Taras* or Tara Mantras or [chant] *Om Mani Padme Hum*. Especially in the *Praises to the Twenty-one Taras*, initially you have to read the text but eventually you remember without being distracted. After repeatedly practicing, then even if the rest of your senses are distracted with other things, you can still chant correctly and perfectly, the entire *Praises to the Twenty-one Taras*. The quality of our concentration towards the dedicated object of our Samatha meditation has to be achieved through a lot of repeated effort. Then, eventually we will have the kind of quality of the ninth stage of the Samatha mind, where we can focus effortlessly and for as long as we want.



To be able to achieve that kind of state of mind and...

For that to arise, in an earlier phase of practice you continually and energetically cultivate mindfulness and vigilance. During that phase, it is necessary to produce a concentration that can be sustained throughout long meditation sessions, without its being able to be disturbed by such hindrances as laxity and excitement. This is the eighth mental state. This and the ninth state are similar in that they cannot be hindered by factors such as laxity and excitement that are incompatible with concentration. However, in this eighth state, you must uninterruptedly cultivate mindfulness and vigilance, so it is said to be associated with application, or effort. (You need joyous effort, for the ninth level, you don't need it).

For this to arise, you must stop even subtle laxity, excitement, etc. as soon as they occur, without submitting to them; so the seventh mental state is necessary.

Here, it's giving the reason [why] in order to gain the ninth [state], you need the eighth [state] and in order to gain the eighth, you need the seventh mental state; so it is a cause and effect.

For this (seventh mental state) to arise, you must recognize that the distraction of thoughts and the secondary afflictions is a disadvantage, and you must have intense vigilance that monitors your attention so that it does not disperse to them. So the fifth and sixth mental states are necessary, for those two are accomplished with the strengthening of vigilance.

Furthermore, for such mental states to arise, you must have mindfulness that swiftly recalls the object of the meditation when you are distracted from it, and mindfulness that prevents distraction from the object of meditation from the very outset. So the third and fourth mental states are necessary, for you accomplish these two with those two kinds of mindfulness.

For this to arise, your attention must first of all be fixed upon the object of meditation, and you must have an undistracted continuity of this fixation. So the first two mental states arise before the others.

Therefore, in summary, first of all follow the personal instructions that you have heard, and correctly apply the method for setting your attention in a balanced fashion. Then repeatedly reflect on the way of setting your attention, and as you are able to bring together a little continuity, sustain a continuous stream of attention. Then if your mindfulness declines and you become distracted, swiftly draw your attention back in and quickly become mindful that you have forgotten the object of meditation. Then generate powerful mindfulness and bring forth the force of mindfulness that prevents distraction away from the object of meditation from the outset. By accomplishing forceful mindfulness and by seeing the faults of laxity, excitement, etc., which distract the attention away from the object of meditation, develop intense vigilance to monitor your attention. Then when you are distracted by even subtle forgetfulness, recognize this immediately and stop it short; and upon eliminating it, generate the power of effort to lengthen the flow of attention that is uninterrupted by hindrances. Once that has arisen, you master familiarity by meditating with effort, and you accomplish the ninth mental state, in which your concentration becomes effortless. Therefore, until yogis attain the ninth mental state, they must exert effort to apply their minds to concentration; but upon attaining the ninth mental state, even if they expend no effort for the purpose of settling the mind in meditative equipoise, their minds automatically become concentrated.

That was on the six forces. Now we learn how the four attentions are involved in the attainment of the nine stages of Samatha.

### C. HOW THE FOUR ATTENTIONS ARE INVOLVED IN THIS

The (Asanga's) *Sravaka Levels* states:

With respect to these nine mental states, know that there are four types of attention: (1) tight focus, (2) intermittent focus, (3) uninterrupted focus, and (4) spontaneous focus. Now in the first two mental states of mental placement (the first) and (the second) correct mental placement [i.e., continuous placement], there is the attention of tight focus. (It requires tight attention in order to overcome the faults.) In the next five mental states of withdrawn mental placement [i.e., patched placement], close placement, taming, pacification, and complete pacification, there is the attention of intermittent focus. In the eighth mental state of single channeling [i.e., one-pointed attention], there is the attention of uninterrupted focus. In the ninth state of concentrated awareness [i.e., balanced placement], there is the attention of effortless [i.e., spontaneous] focus.

Lama Tsongkhapa says:

During the first two mental states the attention must be strenuously tight, so this is tight focus.

Why you need tight focus (attention) is because once the interference intrudes you will totally forget the object of meditation and you will be completely stuck or spun into the faults and will remain for a long time in the faults. If you are excited you will forget about the meditation and get completely excited. If you fall asleep due to laxity then you will completely forget the object of meditation and just sleep for 7-8 hours. Now as beginners, whenever we do short sessions of one minute or one hour of trying to do Samatha meditations, this is the period when we are on the first or second states. We are not yet on the actual nine stages of training but it is similar, at the preparatory stage, where we do very short periods of training. So if we are at the beginning of the first one or two [states], we need extremely tight attention. Our attention to the

object of meditation, attention to the prevention of the intrusion of the obstacle, attention to our strength in mindfulness and attention to the strength of our introspection is required to be extremely, extremely tight; very firm.

During the first and second [mental states], the initial period, our attention is just trying to sustain for as long as possible, the qualities of mindfulness focus that we set at the beginning. It may just be for half a minute but we just try to hold on. It is different from the third stage onwards when the effort is to sustain the meditation while overcoming the faults of laxity and excitement. In the first or second states, you either remain [in focus] or it is totally gone. That is why tight focus is to hold on tightly to the object of your meditation. That is the main focus; you cannot divide your attention to other areas, mainly due to the tightness of holding on to the object of your meditation.

Then during the phases of the next five mental states (3<sup>rd</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> states) there is interference by laxity and excitement and you are unable to maintain long, meditation sessions; so this is intermittent focus. Then since in the eighth mental state you are able to sustain long meditation sessions without interference by laxity and excitement, there is uninterrupted focus. Then since in the ninth mental state there are no interruptions and no need for continuous exertion, you apply the attention of effortless focus.

So the four attentions are the qualities or different levels of strength of mindfulness and introspection. They are different phases of mindfulness and introspection – in different words.

*Qualm:* In this case, during the first two mental states there is interrupted focus, and during the intermediate five mental states there is a need for tight focus; so why does one not speak of the attention of interrupted focus for the first two, and of the attention of tight focus for the intermediate five mental states?

*Reply:* In the first two mental states there are occasions when your mind is and is not concentrated, with considerably longer periods in the latter state; whereas in the intermediate five states the duration of concentration is much longer, so the designation of “interruption

to concentration” is used for the latter and not for the former. Therefore, although those two sets of mental states are similar in terms of the presence of tight focus, they are dissimilar in terms of the presence and absence of interrupted focus; so the five mental states are not included in the attention of tight focus.

That completes the six forces and four attentions.

Thus, *Aryasura’s Compendium of the Perfections* states:

With constant yoga  
Strive to accomplish meditative stabilization.  
If you repeatedly slack off,  
Fire will not arise from friction.  
Likewise, do not stop striving at the method of yoga,  
Until you reach a special state.

So you need to put consistent effort and training whenever possible, until you achieve Samatha. That way, then you will achieve it - otherwise we won’t be able to accomplish Samatha if there is no effort, no continuity and no practice.

I have mentioned many times, the importance of achieving Samatha meditation and until we have [achieve] that mind we won’t be able to effectively utilize emptiness – even if we have a conceptual realization of emptiness - as an antidote to eradicate the defilements. We cannot progress through the ten grounds. Even if we have achieved the path of accumulation, path of preparation etc., but we cannot progress from the path of seeing, if we don’t have Samatha. The direct wisdom of emptiness realization only becomes effective when we have the Samatha serviceable mind. So if we want to get liberated and actualize Buddhahood, then we must achieve Samatha.

Even to perform effective practices, whether to do with deity yoga practices, sutra practices, vinaya precepts and even to practice the ten virtuous deeds, requires concentration. Without a certain degree of concentration, all these [practices] won’t be so effective. Even just to enjoy peace of mind, freedom from the samsaric rollercoaster-like life that comes

our way both mentally and environmentally in order not to get disturbed, to steadily be in peace, this needs concentration and without concentration, we won't be able to do that.

Training in the single-pointed mind or Samatha meditation practice is something that we must need, without which we cannot progress. Therefore, we have to find ways and find the time to practice, at least in a similar preparatory way, in our day-to-day life. Especially, when we go through difficult times, one of the most challenging times is when we face death and start to experience the death process. There is nothing much that we can depend on externally, gross factors to remind us of virtue or dharma. The only thing that can help us is the serviceable concentrated mind, which can help us to focus on our practice and to stay away from distractions or hallucinated disturbances. Only then are we able to utilize clear light onto our path. Without concentration, even if you have tantric practices, it is very hard to control this very wild mind. It's like the wild mind that is always dragged here and there by the current of very heavy imprint of our past karma and delusions. Without a very steady concentrated mind we will be thrown here and there in the tornado or hurricane of delusions and hallucinations. Therefore, concentration is extremely crucial.

To overcome the feeling of pain - physical or mental pain from our hallucinations and delusions or the physical pain of sickness - even if we have wisdom realizing emptiness and we have developed bodhicitta but without concentration, we cannot use these methods to really stay away from the feeling of pain. [Through] the concentration of the mind using the wisdom of emptiness or concentration of the serviceable mind using the powerful altruistic mind, then we can stay away from feeling pain. Even if there is a wound on your body, the suffering from any sicknesses or mental agitations – disturbances are there - but you don't feel it because your mind is completely occupied with the single-pointed focus to the object that you place your mind on, which is free from pain. Otherwise, without concentration we are not able to do so.

Even for highest yoga tantric practices, without the basis of the serviceable Samatha mind, even if there are so many powerful practices and techniques - like *tummo* practice, clear light practice, transferring consciousness, phowa practice or *chulen* practice (sustaining your body without eating gross food) – all of them cannot be utilized or achieved. Just having faith, initiation alone and reciting mantras will not achieve that. You need one of the most crucial conditions that is the serviceable Samatha mind and for that we have to develop Samatha.

21 July 2020, Session: 22  
Samatha meditation – a daily training guide

## 7. SAMATHA MEDITATION- A DAILY TRAINING GUIDE

Whatever amount of dharma study you have done during these past teaching sessions or during your lifetime, it is for us to carry it into practice. Dharma study is not just to gather information but has to be taken into practice and should bring about transformation into our mind. Therefore, whatever amount of understanding that you have gained, be it just a little or advanced, it is good in its own right. Even if someone can understand just a little bit until the next opportunity to explore the teachings comes around, that minimal understanding is perfectly fine in its own right as a tool to practice and to develop our wisdom and method and gradually progress on the path. That is the whole purpose why we have gathered and have discussions in dharma teachings and why you came to participate in the teachings.

So this phase of study on Samatha has kind of completed. But this is just one spark, and this spark has to be really set aflame to progress in the practice and in the realizations on the teachings and in this [context] which is Samatha, we have to gain realizations in Samatha. The learning itself has already started but we have to have the momentum from now onwards until we genuinely achieve realizations.

For that purpose, I have prepared a simple and short retreat practice guideline [appendix I] for day to day meditation sessions which can be just 1 minute or 1 hour, or the practice can be carried later on to a weekend retreat or weeks or months of retreat. This guideline is in preparation for you to be fully prepared and fully qualified to go into a dedicated Samatha retreat which we usually hear that if we do a dedicated retreat, within 6 months there is a possibility to actualize the absolute perfected Samatha realization. But until we can get complete dedicated retreat time and be fully prepared with all the conditions and all the basis for a retreat it is not possible yet for us to gain a perfected Samatha. And without this long time preparation, we won't be able to be [decisive] about doing a retreat for 6 months or 1 year nor being definite about gaining Samatha realizations. So without this process of training, it is not possible to just go into retreat and gain realizations.

There are immense benefits and I have outlined a few of them in the guideline. Just doing a 5-minute single-pointed meditation session before you start your day has so much benefit.

As I have mentioned many times before, to really bring about any genuine result of virtues and in particular in the development of wisdom and method path, without having a serviceable Samatha mind, it is very difficult to gain the absolute realizations. Even if we have realized bodhicitta but in order for bodhicitta to be omniscient, without Samatha it is not possible. And even if we realize the conceptual realizations on emptiness, without Samatha there is no way we can realize emptiness directly. In short, without Samatha we cannot progress on to the ten *bhumis* for the bodhisattva practitioners to attain enlightenment. Those who follow the Hinayana path, Hearers and Solitary Realizers, without Samatha one won't be able to realize emptiness directly and as such one won't be able to eradicate the root cause of samsara. Then, Nirvana is not possible. So, it is extremely, extremely crucial to train our mind to develop the stages of Samatha.

In our day-to-day life [although] we know the faults of anger yet anger without any barriers can spontaneously arise. Even though we know the faults of attachment and we also know the antidotes for attachment, and the rest of the delusions including unhappy mind, we know all these. We don't want to be unhappy. We want to be happy and be harmonious among our family and others. We want to bring happiness to others and happiness to ourselves and enjoy the peace. Although we understand all that and we even know all the techniques and antidotes to all these faults yet we are unable to overcome them. This is because we don't have a serviceable mind and we can't control our mind, which is out of control. So what can control our mind? What can effectively bring the antidotes to the negation is by the Samatha mind, serviceable mind. Therefore, even for day-to-day happiness, without having a certain level of control over our mind it is so difficult to be happy. Although we don't want the nonsense, we don't want all the delusions and unhappiness to arise, but without having control over our mind we won't be able to overcome them. So that is why Samatha, or calm abiding, serenity or single-pointed mind is a must and needed.

So we have to steadily, consistently and with great effort, train our wild mind that is completely distracted and easily influenced by sensual distractions; like a monkey mind. Through continuous taming and tying this wild mind with the rope of mindfulness and with the help of the hook of introspection we train, train and train until without any effort of mindfulness and introspection, we can naturally have complete control over our state of mind. We have to train until it is like that. This is not a simple job that can be done within one or two meditation sessions to bring about the effect. We can [regard] this as homework for the rest of our life. From day one we can already see the benefit for temporary happiness and gather causes for ultimate happiness.



These guideline notes can be used for any length of practices. Those who can afford the time to go for a few months of Samatha retreat can expand from these guideline notes. I have organized them based on guidelines for my own meditation. Individuals who want to expand from them can do so. They can also be used daily in the morning; just doing one session of about 10 or 15 minutes or half an hour etc. or at least once a week or once a month or once a year. Basically, whenever you get the opportunity you must take the opportunity to practice. Even for very short sessions or once a while there is still so much benefit. The guidelines can also be used for group retreats for weekends or 1-year group retreat or for one session group retreat. So you can use it in any way that is suitable to you.

In the guideline notes, titled as *“Shamatha Meditation - A daily training guide”*. [The following are the topics:]

1. *The reason for making time to practice Samatha meditation.*
2. *Preparatory steps to engaging in a Samatha retreat*
3. *For the retreat sessions - Seating posture, motivation*
4. *Starting of the actual placement of one’s attention in a single -pointed concentration on a chosen meditational object.*
  - i. The eight antidotes
  - ii. The six forces
  - iii. The four attentions
5. *Sample time table for longer meditation session during the retreat.* This is just an example where you can start at 3.00am in the morning which is the best time but the guideline notes mentions 5.00 – 7.00am and the session duration is 2 hours but you can start with maybe 24 minutes or 5 minutes. You can organize this yourself and try it out and you can discipline yourself to do this. Try to go to bed as early as possible and here [in the notes is a suggestion] that by 9.30pm you should go to bed. And when you go to bed there is a meditation to do and this is extremely important to those [who sleep] with meditation. During the rest of the time at post-meditation including eating, going to toilet, walking, brushing etc. can also be taken as part of karma yoga practice, the path of purification practice or preparing yourself as an offering to the Buddhas like brushing your teeth, showering etc. can be taken as either a practice of accumulation of merits or practice of purification.
6. *Conclusion*

Please read this guideline notes on your own.

These notes which are based on *Lamrim Chenmo* [captures] the essence of what we have studied over the past few weeks. It is good to familiarize [yourself with these notes] - even though they are short - before going into a retreat, it will be very beneficial. But if you are not able to, then just refer to the step by step [section]. For Samatha practice one of the very important factors is the accumulation of merits and purification of karma. These are extremely important. The six preparatory practices are very powerful practices for the accumulation of merits and purification. So, in the guideline notes, I have spread out the six preparatory practices so that when you follow the notes you would have completed the six preparatory practices.

During the dedicated session of the retreat day or period for Samatha [training], try to read teachings related to Samatha. I suggest it is best to relate to Lama Tsongkhapa's *The Great Treatise on the Stages of the Path to Enlightenment*. There may be many different commentaries by different great masters, which are very helpful and wonderful. But even if you read the commentaries, for the final confirmation you should refer to Lama Tsongkhapa's *Lamrim Chenmo* or any of the texts on *Lamrim* by Lama Tsongkhapa. For your final conclusion of understanding amongst the many wisdoms and suggestions that you may get, make sure that it is not contradictory but a supplementary to Lama Tsongkhapa's teachings.

I think that's it. I would like to thank each and every one of you for your tremendous effort and patience for so many weeks. In this group there are so many learned practitioners but they still come together [in these teachings] to inspire all of us and there are newcomers who may have found it hard but they still did not give up.

[Thank you all around]

With a heart of rejoicing, we conclude these teachings and get motivated to put it into practice. In future, once in a while, when we get together, we will try to progress in our learning. Practice by your own self, seeing your own progress within your own heart and within your own actions of body speech and mind. And it is not because other people are saying you are getting better but that you yourself are noticing that you have become happier, more peaceful, more tolerant and more compassionate until you get the sign that you have total control of your mind like the Arhats and Tathagathas.

On this note we end here.

## **Dedication**

Please dedicate all the merits accumulated by past, present and future Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Gurus, Tathagatas, all the good people, practitioners and yourself for the cause of numberless sentient beings' temporary happiness up to the ultimate happiness of full enlightenment.

Also dedicate these collective merits to the eradication of this pandemic crisis and be the cause of cure and protection and happiness to all humanity, your friends and family and yourself.

And may these collective merits be the complete cause for all the Gurus, Chenrezig, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche, all spiritual gurus and all the good people including yourself, to always enjoy long life, good health and be successful in all your aspirations up to full enlightenment.

Dedicate these collected merits to be the complete cause for every single moment of each and every one of our lives, from this very moment onwards, even if for eons we happen to remain in samsara, may it only be the cause of others' temporary happiness virtue and ultimate happiness virtue and full enlightenment.

The End

### **Shamatha Meditation – A daily training guide**

**The reason for making time to practice shamatha meditation is this:**

*“Mental peace and physical pliancy occur ever so swiftly, when our mind is perfectly drawn in, settled and focused even for a minute.”*

*“If our daily activities are lead by sessions of calm abiding meditation, our mind becomes serviceable and from which cheerfulness and lightness of the mind in engaging in perfect attention arises and our mind will function free from the operation of afflictions. Our body will also become serviceable and from which lightness and buoyancy arise in our physical actions and our physical body will be free from dysfunction.”*

*“Individual practitioners who are endowed with daily Shamatha meditation find ease in proceeding with their mundane or supramundane activities.”*

*“Any activity one engages in will be sustained, increased, expanded and broadened through the mental focus and joyfulness even if it may take years to the result.”*

*“When you achieve the mind of (Shamatha), you will not easily fall under the influence of the mental faults or secondary afflictions that you have previously been habituated to. Even if these appear, they can be dispelled easily, allowing you to settle in the absence of such obstructions.”*

Lama Tsongkhapa states in Great Lamrim, *“When your mind is serviceable, energy and mind combine as one and thereby the energy becomes serviceable. At that time, extraordinary physical pliancy occurs and when this happens, exceptional concentration arises in your mind. This, in turn, brings forth an exceptionally serviceable energy.”*

**(A) Preparatory steps to engaging in a shamatha retreat**

(1) Conduct the retreat in an appropriate place conducive to practice, where the ground has been blessed and/or having inspirational/spiritual companions around.

(2) During the retreat have no desire in seeking material comforts and be contented with whatever is available.

(3) Avoid engaging one's body, speech and mind in worldly activities such as business and socialization with others.

(4) Dispel thoughts of desire, anger, jealousy, ego/pride, self-centeredness etc.

(5) Observe pure ethical discipline. Abide by whatever vows one has received e.g. individual liberation vows, bodhisattva vows, tantric vows. As a minimum, one should observe the 10 virtues. If you violate any of these through carelessness, purify them and restore them promptly.

(6) Best to observe silence throughout the retreat.

(7) Setup the altar and arrange offerings according to what is available.

(8) Ready the comfortable seating arrangement.

**(B) For the retreat sessions:** You can divide the retreat day into 4 longer sessions of a couple of hours each or many shorter sessions of shorter periods like 24 minutes or one and half hours each, as it suits you (Refer to the sample retreat timetable at the end of these Notes).

(a) Every session starts with: Seating comfortably in the Vairochana 7-point meditative posture:

1. Sit comfortably with your legs crossed in the full-lotus posture, the half-lotus posture or whatever position is most comfortable for you.
2. Sit with your awareness directed inward, keeping your body upright, without leaning too far back or bent too far forward.
3. Keep your shoulders relaxed and even. Set the right hand over the left with thumbs meeting and rest the hands on the thigh.
4. Your eyes should be slightly open (neither wide open nor closed), and they should be fixed on the tip of your nose.
5. Do not raise or lower your head nor turn it to one side; set it such that your nose and navel are aligned.
6. Set the tip of your tongue upwards to the palate (behind upper teeth).
7. Let your teeth and lips rest in their usual, natural position.

(b) Quieten the body and mind and focus on the present moment while breathing in and out. The breathing should be natural and gentle, not noisy, forced or uneven, without directing your breath in any particular way but simply being aware of your inhalation and exhalation.

(c) Do the Refuge practice.

(d) Generate the altruistic motivation to make the meditation session most effective and meritorious.

(e) Contemplate on renunciation by reflecting on limitations of samsara and its causes i.e. delusions and karma.

(f) Develop joyous effort by contemplating on preciousness of the precious human life and the temporary and ultimate benefits of the Shamatha mind including that of full enlightenment.

(g) Set a strong motivation to overcome faults of LAXITY and EXCITEMENT during the meditation sessions (be familiar with the signs and causes of laxity and excitement).

**(C) Starting of the actual placement of one's attention in single pointed concentration on a chosen meditational object.**

Start the actual placement of one's attention in single pointed concentration on a chosen meditational object with full MINDFULNESS that carrying 3 special features and INTROSPECTION that help to overcome the five hindrances during the meditation.

The 3 features are:

- Vivid intensity: Intense mental clarity on the object of meditation.
- Non-discursive stability: Staying one-pointedly on the object of meditation.
- Quality meditation session will lead to a level of physical and mental bliss/pliancy i.e. the suppleness/serviceability of the body and mind due to the cessation of physical and mental distraction/dysfunctions that removes obstructions. At the start, the occurrence of mental and physical pliancy is subtle and difficult to discern. As one approaches concentration, mental and physical pliancy increase, in the manner of a chain reaction, they lead to a one-pointed mind and mental and physical pliancy becomes obvious and easy to discern.

The job of INTROSPECTION mind during the meditation is this: From the start to the end of the meditation session, when MINDFULNESS dwells in concentration, introspection is the VIGILANT MIND that stands at the gate of your mind, protecting it from distraction and faults. Introspection is this vigilant mind that examines again and again the states of the mind using the tools of 8 ANTIDOTES, 6 FORCES and the 4 ATTENTIONS.

**The eight antidotes** are 1.Faith 2.Aspiration 3.Joyous perseverance 4.Pliancy 5.Not forgetting the object of meditation 6.Recognizing laxity and excitement 7.Application to eliminate them 8.Equanimity when they have been quelled.

To help the MEDITATIVE mind to maintain the quality of one pointed concentration throughout the dedicated time for meditation session and to achieve the perfection of Shamatha mind is through overcoming the FIVE FAULTS by EIGHT ANTIDOTES:

1. Overcome the obstacle of laziness by the antidotes of faith, aspiration, perseverance and pliancy
2. Overcome the obstacle of forgetting the object of meditation/instructions by the antidote of recollection/mindfulness
3. Overcome the obstacle of laxity and excitement by the antidote of vigilance
4. Overcome the obstacle of non-application/lose focus on the object of meditation by the antidote of application/bringing mindfulness back to the object of meditation
5. Overcome the obstacle of over application by the antidote of equanimity.

**The six forces** are 1.The force of hearing 2.The force of reflection 3.The force of mindfulness 4.The force of vigilance 5.The force of enthusiasm 6.The force of thorough acquaintance.

- With the FORCE OF HEARING, you accomplish 1/9 mental placement. This refers to following the instructions that you have learnt on Shamatha development and train to focus your attention upon the object of meditation.

- With the FORCE OF REFLECTION, you accomplish the mental state of 2/9 continual placement. As a consequence of continuing the fixation of your attention upon the object of meditation, you are able to achieve some level of continuity.

- With the FORCE OF MINDFULNESS, you accomplish the mental states of 3/9 patchy placement and of 4/9 close placement. Patchy placement is where your attention gets distracted away from the object of meditation but you are mindful of this and draw your attention back to the object. And in the case of close placement, it refers to your establishing mindfulness from the beginning and this prevents your being distracted away from the object of meditation.

- With the FORCE OF VIGILANCE, you accomplish the mental state of 5/9 taming and of 6/9 pacification. The state of taming is where by reflecting on the advantages of concentration, you develop delight in it and with vigilance, you recognize the faults of having a scattered mind due to laxity, excitement and the signs of the secondary afflictions and attachment to sensory objects and see them as disadvantageous. For the state of pacification, right from the outset, you regard distraction as disadvantageous and you quell any dislike for concentration. With vigilance you recognize the faults of the scattered mind due to laxity, excitement, and the sign of secondary afflictions and attachment to those concerning sensory objects and you do not allow your attention to be drawn to those obstacles.

- With the FORCE OF ENTHUSIASM, you accomplish the mental state of 7/9 complete pacification and of 8/9 single-pointed attention. In complete pacification, you strive to eliminate even the subtle thoughts of laxity and excitement and secondary afflictions and this result in the fine pacification of attachment, gloominess, depression, dullness, sleepiness, etc. Even if the earlier mentioned faults arise as a result of forgetfulness, you do not submit to them and instead eliminate them swiftly. Hence, laxity, excitement, etc. do not interfere with your concentration and you achieve continuous concentration. By the application of the FORCE OF ENTHUSIASM you gain powerful joyous effort and have no hindrances. You are able to establish the steady concentration that leads to single pointed meditation.



- With the FORCE OF ACQUAINTANCE, you accomplish the mental state of 9/9 balanced placement. Due to great familiarity with all the above, you develop effortless, spontaneous, natural concentration of the fully developed Shamatha.

***The four attentions/focus*** are: 1.Tight focus 2.Intermittent focus 3.Uninterrupted focus and 4.Spontaneous focus.

Help the MEDITATIVE mind to maintain the quality of one pointed concentration throughout the dedicated time by overcoming the five FAULTS which are: 1.Laziness 2.Forgetting the instructions 3.Laxity and excitement 4.Non-application 5.Over application.

During the first TWO (of the 9) MENTAL STATES there is a great danger of intrusion by the faults of laxity and excitement that hijack the meditating mind away from the object of meditation, so the ATTENTION of mindfulness must be strenuously applied and TIGHT FOCUS for the meditation to be successful. Then during the phases of the next FIVE MENTAL STATES there are occurrences of interference by gross to subtle laxity and excitement, such that you may not be able to maintain quality continuous meditation within the designated sessions, so you need INTERMITTENT FOCUS in order to successfully meditate. In the EIGHTH MENTAL STATE you are able to sustain long meditation sessions without interference from laxity and excitement, so merely through continuous joyous effort, you are able to stay in lengthy meditation sessions with UNINTERRUPTED FOCUS. Since in the NINTH MENTAL STATE there are no interruptions of any faults plus the meditative mind is well trained, there is no need for continuous effort to maintain EFFORTLESS FOCUS on the object of meditation, where one's meditation can be as lengthy as one wishes.

In short, develop the single-pointed 9 STAGES OF SHAMATHA mind through MINDFULNESS and INTROSPECTION by overcoming two faults of LAXITY and EXCITEMENT.

Laxity: Slackness, sleepiness, heaviness, unserviceable state of the body and the mind, like a person entering a dark place, like your mind does not see and hold the object vividly and firmly, the state of mind that is classified as a derivative of delusion, it works to assist all root afflictions and secondary afflictions.

Excitement: It is the state of a discontented mind that is distracted or scattered and leaning outwardly towards sensual objects; intense grasping, an excessive mental-hold on an object of attachment, considered a derivative of attachment that pursues pleasant objects and acts as an obstacle to single pointed concentration.

**Sample TIME TABLE for longer meditation session during the retreat:**

5am – 7am	First Session
7am – 8am	Breakfast
8am – 9am	Do Karma Yoga Like: Cleaning the retreat environments or conduct preliminary practices like Water bowl Offerings, prostration and etc. or do one’s daily sadhana commitments
9am – 11am	Second Session
11am – 1pm	Lunch
1pm – 2pm	Do discussion on Shamatha practices, help each other to clear doubts on the practice or read teachings on Shamatha
2pm – 3pm	Tea-time
3pm – 5pm	Third Session
5pm – 6pm	Dinner
6pm – 7pm	Do Karma yoga and Preliminary practices like: Clearing water bowls offerings, light offerings, prostrations, daily sadhana commitment practices and etc.
7pm – 8pm	Fourth Session
8pm – 9pm	Do purification practice accordingly with Vajrasattva practice or purify negativities by reflecting on the 4 opponent powers. - Cultivate a mind of rejoicing - Do supplication prayers never to be separated from the care and blessings of Guru Buddha - Express sincere requests to Guru Buddha to always turn the wheel of Dharma until end of samsara for the benefit of all beings. - Do final dedication of the day with Bodhicitta and Emptiness
9.30pm	Go to bed: • Lay down comfortably on the bed in the reclining Buddha posture. • Set altruistic motivation to undertake sleep time for the benefit of sentient beings. • Try to fall asleep by focusing on the natural breathing inhalation and exhalation. • Or better still, fall asleep while doing TongLen practices, i.e. when inhaling, think of taking upon oneself, all the sufferings (and the causes of suffering) of all sentient beings to destroy one’s self grasping and selfcherishing; when exhaling, think giving all the happiness and merits of the 3 times to each and every single sentient beings and cause them to abide in the everlasting peace and happiness of full enlightenment. • Or try to fall asleep in meditation on emptiness, on deity yoga etc.

**Conclusion:** Train the mind in one-pointed meditation until physical and mental pliancy arises, continue in training until one achieves a serviceable body and mind in virtue; when these arise, it is serenity. When your attention is able to focus on the object of meditation for as long as you wish with the sustained pliancy of body and mind, without needing to resort to an antidote, you have perfected Serenity or Shamatha.

Lama Tsongkhapa states in great Lamrim:

*“Therefore, in summary, first of all follow the personal instructions that you have heard, and correctly apply the method for setting your attention in a balanced fashion. Then repeatedly reflect on the way of setting your attention, and as you are able to bring together a little continuity, sustain a continuous stream of attention. Then if your mindfulness declines and you become distracted, swiftly draw your attention back in and quickly become mindful that you have forgotten the object of meditation. Then generate powerful mindfulness and bring forth the force of mindfulness that prevents distraction away from the object of meditation from the outset. By accomplishing forceful mindfulness and by seeing the faults of laxity, excitement, etc., which distract the attention away from the object of meditation, develop intense vigilance to monitor your attention. Then when you are distracted by even subtle forgetfulness, recognize this immediately and stop it short; and upon eliminating it, generate the power of effort to lengthen the flow of attention that is uninterrupted by hindrances. Once that has arisen, you master familiarity by meditating with effort, and you accomplish the ninth mental state, in which your concentration becomes effortless. Therefore, until yogis attain the ninth mental state, they must exert effort to apply their minds to concentration; but upon attaining the ninth mental state, even if they expend no effort for the purpose of settling the mind in meditative equipoise, their minds automatically become concentrated”.*

When you achieve such concentration that is adorned with bliss, clarity, and one pointed awareness, you have to move forward in utilizing the sublime wisdom of insight in EMPTINESS that integrates meditative equipoise and the post-equipoise state to the gradual progress on Ten Grounds by eliminating delusional and obscurational obstacles to omniscience.

Note: This simple guideline on preparatory steps to Shamatha meditation is prepared for my personal meditation, so it might not suit everyone but anyone is most welcome to use it if it can serve to offer benefit.

May peace prevail in all sentient beings.

*Geshe Tenzin Zopa*

28 June 2020, Session: 15  
Question and Answer Session

## 8. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS SESSION

**Question:** Dear Geshe la, I have a problem to decide which meditation objects to choose as I am more familiar with watching my breath, breathing in and out. This is the only method I have learnt from a Thai monastery. Before this, for many years I learnt the Anapanasati, Myanmar tradition. Comparing both methods, I prefer the second method, watching the length of breath and staying focused on that. How should I blend the meditation object introduced by Geshe la in the class? I tried and noticed that I can focus more on the merit of Buddha but this method is totally different from what I have learnt - here my every thought is to focus on the breathing and thinking is not encouraged. The introspective mind just pulls whatever thought to focus on breathing. Can Geshe la advise me how to proceed? I realize if I sit for long hours just watching the breath, I feel like there is no sense of purpose.

**Geshe-la:** On the object of meditation, you can use whatever object you feel comfortable with, especially in relation to Samatha, the training on the single-pointed mind up to achieving the ninth stage of the Samatha mind. This is common for both Buddhists and non-Buddhists. In order to achieve the ninth level of Samatha, you can use any object [of meditation] to achieve the single-pointed mind. Therefore, use whatever object that suits you. But for a Buddhist's purpose to developing Samatha, it is not just to develop up to the ninth stage of Samatha. The development of the nine stages of Samatha is for the purpose of actualizing special insight, carrying the serviceable single-pointed mind through the path and grounds to eliminate the defilements. For that purpose we need to first of all, have the correct motivation. Secondly, yes, you can still use breathing as your object [of meditation] but if you use other objects like Buddha's image or emptiness or any virtuous object for single-pointed training, it has extra benefits like what we have discussed in the teachings, like the extra benefits of gaining more merits. Let's say, if you use any form of deity yoga practice as your object of training for a single-pointed focused mind, you will not only achieve Samatha but you will also achieve the results in relation to deity yoga practices.

Another thing is that as long as you carry the correct motivation like having a compassionate or bodhicitta motivation then even if you just use breathing as your object of meditation, it

is not meaningless. It is full of meaning because of your intention and it will create immense merits and immense purification. Whether it is non-Buddhists or even within the many different Buddhist traditions, the object of focus of natural breathing is general and a foundational recommendation to any beginner practitioner because breathing is already there and natural in our existence. So for a beginner they can find something that is easily available without needing extra effort to gather an object of meditation. That is why breathing is recommended in all single-pointed meditation training.

Most of the different meditational objects that we discussed throughout the class are recommended as preliminary to the actual meditation on Samatha. As we have discussed before, by knowing you have a lot of desire [for example] and that being an obstacle to the development of Samatha, then you use the skeleton or ugliness of the body to meditate on. Of course you can also use detachment as your training on Samatha; you can take that [as your object of meditation] all the way to achieving up to the ninth level of Samatha. But most of the recommendations are for the preliminary practices. So after you have worked out the preliminary stage, then at development of the actual concentration stage you can use any object that suits you.

**Question:** Can you please demonstrate and lead us on a short meditation on how to use emptiness as our object of meditation?

**Geshe-la:** There are two objects you can use for emptiness meditation. One is on the identity of self. Another one is on the aggregates and the rest of phenomena.

First, you need to understand the negation – you want to meditate on emptiness but emptiness of what? Empty of what? So, empty is non-existent. The ‘ness’ [of the term emptiness], is existent. In Tibetan we call it *tong pa nyi*. By negating something into non-existence makes it possible of existence. What you are negating is the hallucinated, apprehended, mistaken ‘I’. We hold that hallucinated mistaken ‘I’ as if it is me. We apprehend it as existing but in actual reality, it does not exist. By negating the hallucinated ‘I’ you make it possible for it to be interdependent and merely labeled existent ‘I’. So first you need to know what is to be negated, then what is to be actualized. Then, based on those two basis, you go on an excursion to search for the absolute truth.

The identity that we perceive now, our own identity, or the identity of anyone else or anything is in the manner of how we perceive it with our hallucinated mind. It perceives mistakenly, it perceives denying the actual fact or the truth, both in conventional reality and

ultimate reality. The way how our hallucinated mind apprehends or misperceives the 'I' is very much in the idea of inherent existence, intrinsic existence, true existence, dualistic existence, permanent existence, self-existence, independent existence. This way or idea of how 'I' or the rest of the phenomena exists is a hallucinated way of apprehending 'I' and phenomena in the wrong and mistaken way. This way of understanding and this way of apprehending is mistaken. It's mistaken because if you research thoroughly how these mistaken views apprehending about self and others and if you check carefully with valid reasoning, you cannot establish such 'I' exists in reality, you cannot establish such 'others' like your aggregates and others, exists the way how you perceive it.

So, the emptiness meditation is very much on checking the way how we perceive the 'I' and phenomena; does it exist in this way or not? The meditation is like that. It is very much checking, the way how I see things, the way I understand; does it exist exactly that way or not? That way of analyzing is the analytical meditation on emptiness in relation to self and others, using logical reasoning. The logical reasoning is using the king of reasoning, in the philosophical texts it says, [in Tibetan], and that is the reasoning on interdependent arising. You use the interdependent arising understanding to check how our ordinary mind perceives self and others; does it exist in this way logically or not?

So, the hallucinated mind establishing the self-identity is illogical. There is no way to establish conventional reality on it because true existence, inherent existence, all the characteristics of the negation that I have described is against the interdependent reality. There is no such thing in reality. The meditation on emptiness is to find that out. Up to now because we didn't understand emptiness and didn't meditate on emptiness, we are unable to find the truth. Not finding the truth and remaining in that darkness is remaining in ignorance. That ignorance is so powerful that it serves as a basis for the self-grasping and self-cherishing attitude. Until we dispel this ignorance, we cannot be awakened, we will always remain in darkness and because of that darkness, whatever thought arises or actions we perform, are all infused by negative elements. Due to that, we create karma and suffer. So, the purpose for meditating on emptiness is to find the truth so that we can find the light and apprehend correctly. By apprehending the truth, that apprehending mind is called wisdom. That wisdom is called the wisdom of selflessness or wisdom of emptiness.

In reality, the self-identity or identify of anything, exists in nothing more than merely labeled or merely by name. And the mere name only exists because of interdependent causes and conditions, interdependently. That is the truth, nothing more than that. But the hallucinated way is completely against these two facts.

So, now you know what to negate; it's the self-grasping. And what to achieve is the merely labeled identity, that which is interdependently actualized. Now you know that these are the two truths. Now, where are you going to apply these two truths? It is either on the basis, which is equipped within the self and without the self.

An example is for me, Tenzin Zopa. First, I need to examine within the basis of Tenzin Zopa, which is the aggregates. The way to examine is as Chandrakirti said in *The Middle Way*, as an example like a carriage, how a carriage exists is interdependent on so many factors, like the four wheels etc. When everything comes together then you can prove, actualize or bring about a carriage. In a similar way, using the correct basis of the five human aggregates then the merely labeled name, Tenzin Zopa came about. But that name exists only in name; it does not exist within the aggregates, without the aggregates, overall or even partially in the aggregates. First, you need to search for that false 'I' in the whole aggregates, in the physical and mental aggregates. Secondly, you go and check individually on the aggregates and you cannot find the 'I'. After you are satisfied [that you cannot find the 'I' within aggregates], then the only thing left is on the outside, on the elements, on the rest of the other phenomena, out of your aggregates. The reality is that in the end, you cannot find [the 'I'] anywhere. But at the same time there is still a person there. There is still the function of a person there. And that is nothing other than merely a name. There is nothing more than that, which you can establish. This way of finding is analytical meditation on selflessness or the emptiness of self.

The first punch that the self-grasping gets, is when you start to do the research on your own aggregates, even the speech, the calling that we use under the influence of the hallucinated influence like 'I', the aggregates, you would say 'my' body or 'my' mind; subject and object. You didn't say "me' body or 'me' mind. If you were to ask the question back, "If 'I' is inherently existent on these aggregates then why do you say 'my' body or 'my' mind?" [Here] you have already separated two things and that is the reality. Yes, it is 'my' body and 'my' mind and my body, my mind is not me. The grasping of me as if my body is me, the entire of my aggregates is me, my nose is me. If someone scolds my nose, you get so upset as if you scolded me. If someone said your eye is too small or too big you are offended as if you are the eye. You called my name, you scolded me saying the 'I' is very bad. If you had a conversation with the hallucinated grasping mind, from the beginning you [would] already lose the debate and lose the stand.

If in overall of all the five aggregates happens to be you, then when you discard this body, when we pass away, that means you lose ten percent of 'yours' and in the next life you are only going to have ninety percent of 'yours', isn't it? Basically, except for the aggregate of



consciousness that travels, almost ninety percent is lost. But the inherent grasping of self is very much that the 'I' is inherent with the entire aggregates and is inseparable. Again that is false. Therefore, 'I' is not inherently existent. Tenzin Zopa, the name only exists after I was born. When I was in my mother's womb, Tenzin Zopa didn't exist. If after I was born, my given name is Mr. Tan, then I will not be Tenzin Zopa but I am Mr. Tan. If the FBI goes to search for Tenzin Zopa and Mr. Tan, you cannot find Mr. Tan or Tenzin Zopa. That proves that the 'I', Tenzin Zopa is not inherent from the beginning because my continuum was before I was conceived in my mother's womb. Just in between the time when I was born and when I was in my mother's womb, you can already prove that you are not inherent and Tenzin Zopa is not inherent with your aggregates. So, it is very clear you are not on the overall aggregates and you are also not in the individual aggregates. So, you have found the truth. It is opposite from how we usually apprehend. We usually apprehend mistakenly so [now] we have found the truth and we have found selflessness of 'I' on the aggregates.

The only thing left [on the analysis] is outside; earth, water fire and the five elements. You go to search but you are not earth, water, fire or any of the objects on your table. So, you cannot find within and you cannot find without.

Like what Nagarjuna said in *The Precious Garland*, A person is not earth, not water, not fire, not wind element, not space, not consciousness, none of them. Where is the person other than these? If you regard that you are on all six aggregates, there also in the six aggregates are not you. If you go to investigate one by one, also you are not them. Then where is the person? The person left is simply a name.

That first analytical finding, by using all these reasons and at the end of it, you have the wisdom of analysis, "Oh I see!" You understood that self does not exist the way how I used to believe how it was perceived. There is a sense of total loss of apprehension and any concrete phenomena to grasp or to grab as 'I'. Not within and not without. You completely lose the chain and you feel the sense of empty; nothingness. But that nothingness is not totally losing you, not totally being empty you, because still there is a sense of grounded feeling. There is a sense of relief feeling because when someone is free from chains, you will feel relieved. Like a bird released from his chain, you will fly freely. You will feel free, like empty of holding tightly which is the grasping and since you have been released from that, you feel empty, free like space. At the same time, you feel a sense of bliss, goodness, comfortableness, lightness and that feeling is because you have been released from the chain of grasping. That comfortableness proves you are not completely empty and that you are in fact existent. So, you are existent but non-existent. You are non-existent but existent. Like "*Form is empty. Emptiness is form. Form is not other than emptiness,*

*emptiness is also not other than form.*” So, ‘I’ is empty, emptiness is ‘I’ and ‘I’ is not other than emptiness. You gain that union of nothingness and the bliss and that is the object of your meditative equipoise. That is the object of your single-pointed meditation. That is the object that you are going to use to focus on that feeling of union of empty and bliss. Then you can train your concentration Samatha and you can just remain in that meditative equipoise. Being in that meditation alone helps purifies negativities and accumulates an abundance of merits.

So, first you have to understand what is the negation, what it is that you want to find out; the truth. Then you analyze on the basis within and without, as mentioned. Then you come to a point when you will say, “Oh I see, it’s like that,” and you see that it’s nothing other than the union of voidness and bliss. Voidness of losing the misconception hallucinational view. The bliss is the actualization of the conventional reality, the dependent arising. That is the emptiness which carries the two features; the feature of dependent arising and the feature of voidness. That conclusion is the object of your meditation; meditative equipoise.

[Tibetan] - Not only non-existent of anything inherent on the basis including even the name is also non-existent. Just now we said things exist merely in the name; but even the name also does not exist. If you investigate and check in the same way, the name also does not exist the way how we perceive it. It also lies in the nature of voidness of inherent existence.

**Question:** I have a hard time concentrating on breathing for long. For the first few times I can do it and feel really peaceful. After that, I try to increase the meditation time and I realize I am at the stage of zoning out, on and off thinking about worldly affairs. What should I do?

**Geshe-la:** Firstly, you are at least trying which is already very good. Secondly, it sounds like you are at least better than me. So, as long as you don’t give up, you will start to have a certain level of stability. These obstacles will occur for anyone. Maybe the obstacles will carry on for another few years, even if you do meditation every day. It’s not as simple as what we think. Whatever obstacles that you are going through, it’s normal and natural. So as long as you don’t give up and put in some time every day to do such meditation, you will see improvement eventually. One of the biggest mistakes for any practice especially Samatha training, is when people give up. When obstacles occur, they think they are hopeless and then they give up. That is the biggest mistake; never give up.

Since you are conducting the meditation, you can at least examine afterwards, take a pause to check what kind of distractions you have. You say 'worldly', what kind of distractions do you have? Sometimes the worldly matters are in relation to attachment, aversion or any other kind of delusion. As taught in the teachings, once you figure it out, if you are distracted due to attachment [for example], then you work it out first in order for you to have a better session the next round or in the future.

Remember at the very beginning of this course, as a preliminary practice we need to limit our worldly activities. If you are really serious about developing Samatha, we need to limit our busy worldly activities. Secondly, you have to practice detachment in relation to material objects. Thirdly, you have to work out not just limiting attachment to objects but also the subject so we need to practice contentment. Whatever we have, we feel happy and contented about it. That way your mind will not wander so wildly. If those activities are your worldly responsibilities then each day try to conduct the meditation in the early morning before you start your activities. The best time is at dawn time. Even though life is busy but that is the quietest time in a 24-hour day. It has quietened your mind due to having slept and you have rested and you have not yet triggered your mental busyness because of starting work. Before breakfast or anything, try to do at least 5-10 minutes of one-pointed meditation and that is the most preferable time for those who cannot limit their actual activities.

For a beginner like me, who is so easily distracted, even going to the toilet [after waking up] I am affected, whether to do sadhana or any meditation or so on. For me, the moment I wake up, while I am still in bed, without engaging in brushing my teeth etc. I put everything aside and the first thing I do is engage in meditation. Like me who is so easily distracted, I don't even try to sit properly or clean up and then do my meditation or sadhana. For me it doesn't work. For me, full dedicated focus is the moment my mind wakes up and that is when I start my practice. Try to finish all your practices then. That's why before you go to sleep, try to drink less water so that in the morning when you wake up, you are not rushing to the toilet. Even generally there are such recommendations. If you are like me, you can try it out. For me, this works well. You can initially put some effort to wake up around 3am. Eventually it will become your body clock and around 3am you will naturally get up and your mind will be very fresh. After some time when you get used to it and you are not rushing to the toilet etc., you can sometimes even prolong your sessions until 8-9am. If you have nothing else to do, you can even go until 10am. If you are not in a rush or you are alone, then your morning meditation session can go from 3am until 8-9am. You can check. If you have to go to the toilet or you already start to feel hungry and thinking of breakfast and there will be so many distractions coming in. So if at nighttime you already plan [this] for the

morning, it makes so much difference and the benefit is that you can in one shot, with the clearest mind around 3-4am until at least 9am can be very productive.

**Question:** One of the obstacles during meditation is lack of merit. Does this mean (a) the person does not have sufficient merit to do meditation; hence should get merit by doing charity work or (b) the person does not give or acknowledge sufficient merit to others like bleating sheep that may distract meditation?

**Geshe-la:** Merit plays a very important role for any successful practice. I remember, in Russia, Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche shared a story about a Samatha meditator who was so disturbed by the sound of sheep and goats and totally freaked out. Instead of getting into meditation, he gathered rocks and threw rocks down at the sheep that could possibly even have killed some sheep. He said this is [due to the meditator] lacking in merit before he went into retreat. That is why we have discussed in the Samatha teachings why preliminary practices are so important. Even though, you are doing Samatha training at home or in retreat, during post- meditation you should do water bowl offerings, prostrations, mandala offerings, seven limb practices etc. If you have the opportunity to offer charity, of course do charity to needy sentient beings and making offerings to the Buddhas are all accumulation of merit. If you cannot do it physically, then at least do it mentally. Even just offering your own body, speech and mind in the service of Buddha, Guru and Dharma [generates] immense accumulation of merit. Merit is definitely important.

Another way [to accumulate merit] is to choose holy objects to develop Samatha. For the breathing exercise you just use it for stabilizing and setting the foundation at the beginning. For a few moments you do breathing meditation and then after that for the actual single-pointed training you try to choose holy objects. It can either be emptiness or Buddha's image. Then while doing the training you simultaneously accumulate a lot of merit. So this is another way.

Another way is to set up bodhicitta motivation and then even for one moment that you are in meditation there is no greater merit than that, the cultivation of bodhicitta. Another way is during the post-meditation, you think of all sentient beings and generate bodhicitta even if just a few moments if you can't do it for a long time. So that way, you can gather immense merits. In short, motivation, dedication and bodhicitta are a must and in between sessions do some cultivation on bodhicitta. This way you can cultivate unbelievable merits.

Every little merit that you accumulate, even just one single thought of virtue or one recitation of *Om Mani Padme Hum*, dedicate in the Buddhas', Bodhisattvas' and Gurus' collection of merit, like how the Bodhisattvas and Santideva etc. would dedicate. When you dedicate in remembrance of that, this is like contributing one drip in the big ocean. The merits of Gurus, Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are infinite. Then even though your merit is so little and virtues are so small but contributing in that way, it lasts for as long as Buddha's merits last, like how one drop of water will last as long as the ocean lasts.

Another way is every little merit you accumulate you dedicate to every single numberless sentient beings' well-being, their cultivation of virtue and actualization of enlightenment. This is like investing one cent in the stock market and getting billions of returns because when each sentient being accumulates any form of virtue, you get a share and the benefit. This is because you have dedicated your merits in the accumulation of numberless sentient beings' virtue until their virtue of full enlightenment. This is how bodhicitta dedication works. It's so little effort and even if you don't have much merit but just dedicating in this way, wow, it's like the interest alone will take care of you and you don't have to work anymore [laughs]. But, of course we still have to work because we want to reach enlightenment faster so you can't be lazy just because of accumulating so much merit from others. But this is the smart way and especially very good for lazy people.

Most of you know these two verses of prayers from Santideva's *Bodhicharyavatara* that we do at the end.

*Jam pal pa wo ji tar khyen pa dang*  
**Just as the brave Manjushri and Samantabhadra, too,**  
*Kun tu zang po de yang de zhin te*  
**Realized things as they are,**  
*De dag kun gyi je su dag lob chhir*  
**I, too dedicate all these merits in the best way,**  
*Ge wa di dag tham cha rab tu ngo*  
**That I may follow their perfect example**

*Du sum sheg pal gyal wa tham cha kyi*  
**I dedicate all these roots of virtue**  
*Ngo wa gang la chhog tu ngag pa de*  
**With the dedication praised as the best**  
*Dag gi ge wai tsa wa di kun kyang*

***By the victorious ones of the three times***

*Zang po cho chhir rab tu ngo war gyi*

***So that I might perform the noble bodhisattva's deeds***

The first verse is about Manjushri etc. and the second verse about the Tathagatas of the three times. So you can recite these two verses and dedicate that way or just simply understand the meaning and dedicate as I have mentioned before.

Another way is when your awareness never separates from the emptiness wisdom. When you do meditation you meditate on emptiness and during post-meditation you carry the illusional-like perception. When you interact with things and events, you see them as illusional-like. This emptiness mind will naturally bring immense accumulation of merits.

Lastly, the essence of Guru Yoga practice for those of you who practice tantra, then self, deity and guru, oneness and always having that awareness, is one of the most powerful ways to accumulate merit. One's heart is inseparable from guru and deity.

**Question:** Is there any difference between visualize and imagine?

**Geshe-la:** Yes there is a difference. Visualization is real. Imagination is not necessarily real. When you visualize, you have to visualize on the basis of emptiness. When you visualize on the basis of emptiness then since everything lies in the nature of merely labeled by mind, you actually bring reality, the actual thing. Let's say you visualize yourself as the deity on the basis of emptiness, you really are the deity; the causal stage of the deity. Otherwise, it becomes the wrong mind. You are not the deity but you apprehend as the deity so it is the wrong mind. You have to have the divine pride of yourself as the deity and that cannot be actualized through imagination, it has to be actualized through visualization. If you visualize offerings, even though you see in the text the word 'imagine' offerings but actually it is referring to visualized offerings. So when you visualize the entire universe as immortal nectar of wish-granting jewels and offer to the Buddha on the basis of understanding emptiness, those visualized entire universe is real wish-granting jewels and immortal nectar to Buddha and Buddha enjoys the immortal nectar. Buddha receives the wish-granting jewel. So definitely these two [visualization and imagination] are different.

**Question:** When we practice meditation in terms of counting our breath and after some time of counting the breath it is very hard to focus and we become very sleepy, what should we do?

**Geshe-la:** You have to uplift your mind. There are two ways: one is while doing the session and you realize your mind is sinking then the introspection has to help to gain back the vivid clarity and the single- pointed focus. If after trying a few rounds and it still can't help then you should stop the session and then do a short meditation on Buddha's qualities, the qualities of doing Samatha, uplifting the virtuous mind to cultivate the mind, like precious human rebirth etc. Then, after that when you go back to the next session your sinking mind will be lessen. Don't give up. It may take a longer time but it is still beneficial.

**Question:** When we are making offerings and visualize flowers from someone else's garden and jewels from someone else's house, are we stealing?

**Geshe-la:** No, actually you are helping them. If they are not making offerings, you use their effort for you to make offerings to Buddha, then they contribute to [the merits] that you have accumulated and they naturally also accumulate lots of merit because of that. Just make sure you don't take the real object.

**Question:** In my work, sometimes I suddenly become very angry. What can I do about that?

**Geshe-la:** Meditation will help. Before you are in that kind of environment, you meditate. If anger is triggered at the workplace then at home or wherever you are in a conducive place and time, you meditate on the disadvantages and faults of anger and the advantages of patience. Also meditate on compassion. It could be to do with the situation; something that triggered the anger, maybe the workplace is too noisy or too many opinions, then [meditate that] all are mother sentient beings. Therefore, all of them are under the influence of karma from the past and delusions. At least, I have met and know dharma so therefore they are the object of my compassion. So in any situation when your anger is triggered you think like that. Also before you go to work you do a short meditation on that so that when you reach the office it's easier for you. Usually the antidote should be to develop and train your mind when there is no arising of negation. Otherwise, it is a bit hard to immediately remember the negation and when you apply the antidote it is difficult.

The Kadampa masters in the Lojong teachings teach us to practice the three difficult challenges and to always be mindful of training our mind in the three difficult challenges. The first one is to remember the antidote whenever delusion arises which is very challenging but we have to try our best. Then, even if we remember the antidote but to apply and be able to overcome or at least suppress the delusions is very hard but we always have to try our best. Then, even if you can apply the antidote but to completely eradicate the disturbing emotion from continuing to arise in the future is another difficulty. But we have to train our mind in the three difficult challenges. This is one of the tools in which Kadampa masters gain swift and great success in their practices in the path because of such training. So, we also have to do that. This is what Lama Atisha said.

Another way is again like what Lama Atisha said, whatever arises, either virtuous or non-virtuous like anger, instead of feeling miserable about yourself, acknowledging how unworldly you are always arising anger, rather, immediately take that experience in your path by developing renunciation. If the anger is arising because of your own confusion of the mind then think why? Being a samsaric person and being under the control of delusion, now you see the faults of being contaminated by karma and delusions. So, you can take that experience to gain genuine renunciation to samsara. If the anger arises in relation to others' actions then immediately develop compassion to that person through this experience of anger. In short, use this experience to develop altruism bodhicitta. That way, it will eventually help purify the anger from your system.

Instead of [feeling] depressed about arising of anger you should encourage yourself by thinking that throughout the whole day, my anger only arises once when I was in the office. At home I am very peaceful. There are people whose anger arises throughout the whole day and night. Therefore, if I put some extra effort I think I can overcome it. Instead of getting depressed, encourage yourself to work it out to overcome anger in that way. At the same time, [think that] arising anger just once is so miserable and harmful, so imagine the people out there who arise anger all the time and how miserable they may be. Therefore, I must take this opportunity to generate compassion, recite some mantras and dedicate the merit to overcome the anger of all sentient beings. Another thing is by understanding these two things mentioned, now take these negativities, your own anger and others' suffering and your own suffering of anger, and take it into the practice of Tonglen. Take it onto the self-grasping attitude. Why anger arises is because of the self-grasping, self-cherishing attitude. Now you pour that anger experienced onto the self-grasping attitude and feel the self-grasping attitude greatly purified or its strength eliminated. The root cause of anger is at least suppressed or purified. So you can take it into your practice.



**Question:** You mentioned that to enhance the process to achieve Samatha, one has to gradually keep away from mundane activities. But what happens if the mundane activities are done with bodhicitta motivation?

**Geshe-la:** For strict Samatha practice, even if the mundane activities are done with bodhicitta motivation they are still an obstacle. In the preliminary stage, whilst planning for a future Samatha retreat then in order to gather meritorious conditions, whatever mundane activities you do if it is infused with bodhicitta motivation, in this context, it is beneficial.

10 May 2020, Session: 4  
Mother Tara Practice

## 9. PRACTISE – MOTHER TARA PRACTISE

In the ordinary world, today is regarded as a Mother's Day. As far as we are concerned in our practice there shouldn't be one moment or one day that we don't think of our mother or celebrate the importance of our mother's existence in our life. So, to commemorate that we will recite one mala of Tara mantra and dedicating the merits to be the cause for all the mothers who are attending this teaching and to the rest of all mother sentient beings' temporary happiness up to ultimate happiness and full enlightenment. Whether your present life's mother is alive or not, one of the best ways to repay them is dedicating your body, speech and mind in particular your altruistic dharma practice and dedicating that merit to them whether they are enlightened ones, in Pure Land or in a higher rebirth or in the lower realms. The benefits from your dedication of merits, due to the karmic affinitive of children to mothers will be immense and effective. If they are in the lower realms it will help to condition them to be free from there. If they are already enlightened, then it will be a condition to bring their deeds as Buddha to be most effective to sentient beings.

The wisdom mother is not just the mother of all the deities and Buddha but Mother Tara is also the embodiment of all our mothers. So we visualize Mother Tara on top of our crown or in front of your forehead. Feel her absolute presence and take refuge under her. Then if you have had any negative relationship with your mother whether she is still living or not, then you should purify that by asking for forgiveness right in front of Mother Tara who is in the same essence as our mother. Even the slightest negative karma that one may have created with your mother is one of the heaviest negative karma. Due to our wrong actions, which may even have cost our mother's life, is a heinous crime and the karmic consequences is to be reborn in the Vajra hell for eons. Such a heavy karma! Therefore, directly or indirectly any form of negativity either through harsh speech or showing black face, being disobedient etc., all of us have a certain story about this. So, we must purify because this is a huge negative karma. Then make a firm commitment that from this day onwards I will dedicate my life to cherish the well-being of numberless mother sentient beings starting from my present mother.

We also dedicate this practice to overcome this pandemic crisis around the world and to get blessings and gain inner protection for our self from this disease. And this practice, Tara practice is specially prophesied, directly advised by Chenrezig himself, the Enlightened

Chenrezig himself. So it is faultless. So we take this opportunity to dedicate for ourselves and our family members and also the doctors and nurses and the front liners, and dedicate to all humanity. There are so many people who suffer so much. The entire world is filled with negative energy of fear and confusion etc. So, there's a need for immense of blessings and prayers to overcome that. One self consecrate one's body, speech and mind with this protection of Mother Tara and wherever you go you help to transmit positive energy and help to purify the place, purify the people you meet and at the same time you get inner protection. For all the above purposes, we will do a short Tara practice. Mother Tara is the embodiment of numberless Buddhas' activities, and here the ultimate goal of activity for this dharma discourse is to eventually develop Samatha realization. We need immense blessings as well as accumulation of merits. So by making prayers in relation to Mother Tara, it helps us to clear obstacles on the path to develop Samatha and also helps us to receive all the conducive conditions to develop Samatha. Not only that, in relation to this altruistic practice of thinking of mothers' kindness, it will also help to accumulate immense of merits. As mentioned before without merit we will have lots of obstacles on the path to develop Samatha. Like Geshe Dromtonpa said, we think that the faults lie only in our personal instructions. Usually, we think why we did not develop Samatha is because maybe we didn't understand the technical aspect of developing Samatha. But that is not the only reason as there are other obstacles such as completing the prerequisites, preparatory practices. Another major obstacle is lacking of merits. So, we need to accumulate lots and lots of merits. Every opportunity that you can get, try to find a way to accumulate merits. And this opportunity where we are engaging in the practice of Tara and remembering the kindness of mother and try to dedicate the merits for mothers will accumulate so much merit.

The instructions or the teachings are just one factor amongst all other factors that must come together in order for us to have success. Even just to receive the teachings, finding time and having the time to have a dharma discourse we need a lot of merits. All the preliminary practices including setting motivation etc., play such an important role for the attainment of our ultimate goal for any dharma practices we do.

### **(Short meditation on Mother Tara and Recitation of Tara mantra)**

Try to calm your state of mind through a few rounds of breathing. Then visualize Mother Tara on top of your crown or in front of you, emanating infinite light rays. From those light rays, a flow of nectar like rainfall touches your entire aggregates and the rest of the mother sentient beings, purifying the sufferings and its causes, karma and delusions and abide them

in a state of everlasting happiness of enlightenment in the Buddhahood of Tara. You can visualize like that.

While doing the meditation and recitation, also if you are aware or unaware of mistakes you have done in relation to your present's life mother including the rest of the mother sentient beings, then one should think that due to the delusions and ignorance, whatever negativities you have committed, Tara please pay attention to bless me to purify it. In short, recognize all the faults as faults then the recitation of Tara mantra and visualization of Tara becomes an antidote and at the end, make a firm commitment that from now onwards I will dedicate my life only to the benefit of my mother and the rest of the mother sentient beings.

*Taking Refuge and Generating Bodhicitta*

*Four Immeasurable Thoughts*

*Supplication Prayer to Tara*

*Recitation of Tara mantra*

*Dedication prayers in Bodhicitta and dedicate in Emptiness*