

Based on the positive motivation we have generated we can now engage in meditation practice. Whenever one generates a positive motivation a positive action will follow. We need to keep in mind that actions are initiated by motivations. Of course, this implies that if we have a negative motivation then a negative action will follow. So just the necessity of developing the correct motivation is also a way to show us what is to be adopted and what is to be discarded—in itself a Dharma practice. We can now engage in our meditation practice. *[meditation]*

Generate a bodhicitta motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines:

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

CHAPTER 8: THE WAY OF TRAINING IN MENTAL STABILISATIONS CONTAINED IN THE COMMON AND UNCOMMON TYPES OF CALM ABIDING

This chapter is on Mental Stabilisation. In relation to the Six Perfections, the first, second and third chapters were based on the perfection of generosity, the fourth and fifth chapter covers morality, followed by chapter six on patience. Chapter seven is on joyous effort and now chapter eight is on concentration or mental stabilisation. This chapter outlines the way to increase and strengthen bodhicitta, particularly with the method of giving and taking.

There are two main subdivisions of the chapter.

- I. Explaining the text of the chapter
- II. The name of the chapter

Obtaining mental stabilisation is contained in the common and uncommon means of developing calm abiding. What this implies is that calm abiding is a practice which is found both in the treatises of non-Buddhist traditions, as well as in Buddhist traditions. What makes calm abiding an uncommon Buddhist practice is when it is accompanied with refuge, bodhicitta, the realisation of emptiness and so forth.

I. EXPLAINING THE TEXT OF THE CHAPTER

This section has three parts:

1. Advice to meditate on mental stabilisation
2. Abandoning the opposing factors to calm abiding
3. The way of meditating on calm abiding

As clearly presented in the outline itself, the chapter provides advice on meditating on mental stabilisation, i.e. how to develop concentration; how to identify and abandon factors opposing calm abiding, then the way to actually meditate on calm abiding.

1. ADVICE TO MEDITATE ON MENTAL STABILISATION

This has two subdivisions:

- 1.1. The reason for the need to achieve calm abiding
- 1.2. The advice to abandon the opposing factors to calm abiding.

We can see that the outline is very logically and systematically presented.

1.1. The reason for the need to achieve calm abiding

Before listening to advice on the need to meditate on mental stabilisation, it is good to define exactly what is meant by mental stabilisation. **Mental stabilisation is a mental factor that focuses on its object from its own side.** Presenting the definition in this way shows exactly what mental stabilisation is. For example, when one engages in single-pointed focus on an object, the mind focuses single-pointedly but this mind is not mental stabilisation. There is also a mind which maintains the memory of the object held single-pointedly, but that is not mental stabilisation. There is however a separate mental factor with the specific function of holding the object single-pointedly, that is from its own side, not depending on anything else. *From its own side* means its own function is to focus on the object single-pointedly. This is mental stabilisation.

Prior to the need to achieve calm abiding, the text outlines the faults of the mind not being focused in this way. In seeing these faults one begins to see the reason why it is necessary to be focused on an object single-pointedly. The seventh chapter on joyous effort highlighted that, when one engages with a virtuous action or object, it should be with a joyous mind, but that in itself is not sufficient. This chapter explains that joyous effort needs to be accompanied with single-pointed focus on the virtuous object. This is the combination we need to achieve.

The first verse reads:

1. *Having thus generated enthusiasm,
Place the mind in concentration;
A person with a wandering mind
Lives in a cave of the affliction's fangs.*
- 2ab. *Through physical and mental isolation
Mental wandering does not arise.*

Commentary explains:

Having generated enthusiasm that delights in virtue as explained before, one should place the mind in concentration, because a person whose mind is distracted by mental sinking and excitement abides in a cave of the fangs of a malevolent animal, and will be quickly destroyed by them.

If it is asked, "How does one abandon mental wandering?" Through isolating body and mind from distraction and desirous thoughts, one will not develop mental wandering, the opposing factor to concentration.

Having generated enthusiasm (that delights in virtue) then one needs to put it into practice by placing the mind in concentration. Again this emphasises that it is not enough to engage in a virtuous object randomly, once in a while, even if it is accompanied with joyous effort. Rather one needs to continuously place one's mind on the virtuous object. The commentary explains that, *one should place the mind in concentration because a person whose mind is distracted with mental sinking and excitement abides in the cave of the fangs of a malevolent animal and will be quickly destroyed by them.*

An individual whose mind is completely distracted and engaged in worldly activities will not be able to develop single-pointed concentration for as long as they follow distractions. One may be able to sit rigidly for a while and assume the meditative posture, but, for as long as one does not lessen one's worldly desires, the mind will be distracted. We can see that Shantideva supports what I too regularly emphasise, which is that following our desires is one of the main forms of distraction. I feel that what I have been teaching is well supported here. Even after one applies one's mind on virtue and maintains a few moments of stability, immediately we find the mind wanders off. We are not able to maintain a continuous focus on the virtuous object, so developing concentration is indispensable.

The two main obstacles to concentration are sinking (or laxity) and excitement. Initially in developing one's meditation laxity is more subtle and is not recognised right away. Excitement is one of the most prominent obstacles and occurs immediately, hindering our ability to focus on the object.

The analogy suggests that someone distracted by mental sinking (or laxity) and excitement is like someone held in the fangs of a malevolent animal, like in a crocodile's jaws, with the danger that they can snap shut any minute. This is similar to how our mind can be distracted at any time with sinking and excitement, which throws us back under the influence of the afflictions.

Without being able to precisely identify mental sinking (or laxity) and excitement, there is no way one can develop calm abiding. At a subtle level laxity and excitement are hard to identify, and if one fails to identify them it hinders one's ability to develop calm abiding. The main causes for excitement are worldly desires, therefore the faults of desire or attachment are explained extensively in the following passages.

In stating that mental wandering is a fault, the commentary poses the question:

If it is asked "How does one abandon mental wandering?"

The answer follows:

Through isolating body and mind from distraction and desirous thoughts, one will not develop mental wandering, the opposing factor to concentration.

On a physical level, the commentary emphasises one should isolate oneself from the negative influences of companions who distract one by causing excitement and encouraging worldly activities. Good companions who support our practice are fine, but misleading or distracting companions are one of the faults.

If one can distance oneself from distracting companions, the next main class of obstacle to avoid is mental distractions in the form of desire and discursive thoughts etc. This is most essential because while we might have successfully isolated ourselves from the cause of external distractions, and be in an isolated and quiet place like a meditation cave, the mind can still be distracted and wandering about in town. This occurs when one has not applied measures to protect the mind from distraction. The desirous mind is still attached to pleasant forms and sounds etc. so when it is not protected from engaging in these objects of desire, the mind of desire becomes the main obstacle which impedes concentration. On the other hand, when one has developed stable concentration, then even if one were in a busy, worldly environment, one will not be swayed by distractions. The

two main points here are that in order to develop concentration and protect one's mind from mental wandering, initially one needs to apply physical isolation as well as mental isolation. When you relate these explanations to your own experience of how easily you can be influenced by internal distractions in the form of discursive thoughts, then it makes more sense and you can see how this is, in fact, is very true.

Take the simple example of trying to fall asleep when your mind is still racing with discursive thoughts. When we go to bed we are on our own with no immediate external distractions, we turn off the light so it is dark, and we have no external stimuli. However a hyperactive mind can prevent us from falling asleep when it is still very busy with a lot of discursive thoughts. When the mind is hyperactive in this way, one cannot fall asleep even though there are no external causes of distractions. Internal conceptualisations and discursive thoughts are affecting our ability to sleep. Take this as an example of the truth that the main obstacle for maintaining a virtuous, clear and focused mind is really the various forms of internal distractions - mainly desirous thoughts.

Using the sleep example again, the mind being hyperactive means one has not been able to withdraw from the gross mind, so there is no way for one to actually go to sleep. This is also the case with meditation, so it is good to actually recognise within ourselves the main obstacles, and to acknowledge them. Back to the example, if eluding sleep was our only problem, there would be just one problem to deal with, but often one cannot fall asleep because the mind is disturbed with an uncomfortable state of anxiety. Some have confided in me that sometimes when they are alone they cannot go to sleep as memories of the past creep into their mind and cause angst to the point of bringing tears. People have confided in me that their pillow gets wet with tears. Thus from the very onset, if we can apply these practices and focus our mind in virtue, that will definitely help to reduce the angst and pain in the mind. So we need to apply practical means that will help us maintain some level of sanity or calmness on a regular basis. This is how we can derive practical benefits from the practice of mind training.

The reason I remind you that meditation and mind training are useful and something we need to maintain, is because some older students might now feel like this is true, but not really pay much attention to it. I feel they may have initially had good experiences from meditation but since then may have started to lapse in their enthusiasm for meditation.

I'll give a recent account of how an explanation of meditation was experienced as something incredibly valuable. When I recently taught at Drol Kar Centre, Geshe Sonam informed me after the teaching session that there were three ladies who had come there for their first time. They had actually thought of coming to the centre for the last three years, but had never actually made it. But that day when they actually came, happened to coincide with my teaching on explaining the benefits of meditation. Later they commented how the session really helped to solve a lot of problems. Apparently they were really moved and their minds were affected in a very positive way. These are people who are completely fresh and new to Buddhism, but they felt a strong, positive impact from the presentation on meditation.

I presented the meditation technique years and years ago, and you would have seen the benefit at that time. But I have a feeling that since then it has, perhaps, lapsed a bit and has

not really been taken much further, and that some have sort of lost interest or become lazy. Of course, if one does not maintain the practice of meditation, then one will not experience the long-lasting effect.

I have many such stories of people who have been affected in a positive way. There is also another lady with three children who comes to Drol Kor. Apparently after a session she said, "Now I have no more questions left, everything has been answered. I have found the means for my development". I have many other stories to tell about people who have been affected positively. I am not saying that my advice is profound, but that by giving my teachings with the utmost best motivation, some positive effects have definitely occurred. I honestly don't have any ulterior and selfish motives when I present the Dharma and my advice to you. It's solely with the intention that it may be of some benefit to you.

This might be a prompt for you to also be mindful of generating a positive motivation before presenting teachings or advice to others. If one is not mindful of a positive motivation, it could create lot of difficulties for yourself later on. For example, after presenting you might feel that it was not appreciated, or when someone challenges you it can throw you off course. In that way it could actually affect your mind negatively. Rather than being joyful with your service and benefit to others, it might actually cause unnecessary problems for oneself.

That reminds me of another incident where someone from Adelaide had called the office, and said they wanted to come and see me. My initial response was that they don't need to come from so far away to see me just to ask some questions, as there are also geshe in Adelaide. But that person was apparently quite insistent, so I said, 'Fine'. They apparently came with the intention of spending one night here and arrived on a Wednesday night when there was a teaching. Next morning I got a message that they didn't need to see me any longer, as all their questions were answered in the teaching. These kind of astonishing things do occur.

The reason I share this with you is not to claim that I am doing any great service, but to point out again that where there is good motivation, it certainly seems to bring about benefit for others. It seems to help release the pain and agony in the listeners' minds. Again, the reason I share this with you is so that whenever an occasion arises that you also share the Dharma knowledge with others or help in any way, when done with a good motivation it can definitely benefit them. The purpose of the Dharma is to benefit others as much as it is to subdue one's own mind. When that is done truthfully and honestly and with good intention to share with others, then that encompasses the whole practice of abiding by the law of karma as well. Basically it comes down to being honest and truthful, with a mind of wishing to benefit others.

I have another positive story to share from a Monday evening presenter. One Monday evening when Ven. Kaye Miner was conducting the session, a person had apparently asked a lot questions in a very challenging and hostile way. But her response was very calm, and with a gentle demeanour she responded to all the questions. Another person who happened to be in that session later confided to me that they were really moved by that, and from then on began to really appreciate Buddhism. They felt that when challenged with hostility, to remain calm and quiet and not overreact was a really good sign of what Buddhism has to offer. This is how adopting a good nature and setting a good

example can really inspire others. This is the whole point when we talk about inspiring others; it is not only with words but most importantly with one's gentle mannerisms as well. So if we are concerned in wanting to give Buddhism a good reputation, then the best way is by conducting ourselves properly, in a gentle manner.

1.2. The advice to abandon the opposing factors to calm abiding

The next two lines of the verse read:

*2cd. Through this, one should abandon the
transitory world
And perfectly destroy the conceptualising
mind.*

The point I was making earlier is actually presented right here. The commentary explains:

Hence, through the method of physical isolation one abandons distractions such as meeting with worldly friends, relatives and so forth. Through the method of isolating the mind, one perfectly destroys thoughts for desire objects.

As I have already explained the main points of this earlier, we don't need to go over it again. The commentary then quotes from a sutra, which reads:

From a sutra:

If it is rare for a distracted mind to even attain a worldly mental stabilisation, then what need is there to mention complete enlightenment. Therefore, one should not let one's mind be distracted until the attainment of complete enlightenment.

The quote from the sutra highlights the Buddha's profound advice about the need to develop mental stabilisation, indicating that it is unlikely that a *distracted mind* can even *attain worldly mental stabilisation*, like mundane attainments. So if that is the case, *what need is there to mention complete enlightenment*. It further explains, *Therefore one should not let one's mind be distracted until the attainment of complete enlightenment*, which is the extent of the commitment one needs to make to develop mental stabilisation.

2. ABANDONING THE OPPOSING FACTORS TO CALM ABIDING

This is subdivided into two:

- 2.1. Abandoning distractions
- 2.2. Abandoning incorrect conceptualisation

2.1. Abandoning distractions

This is further subdivided into two:

- 2.1.1. Identifying the cause for attachment to the world
- 2.1.2. The way of abandoning it

2.1.1. Identifying the cause for attachment to the world

The first two lines of the verse read:

*3ab. Due to attachment and craving for gain
And the like, one does not give up the fleeting
world.*

The commentary explains:

In dependence on the grasping for 'I' and mine, one is attached to the inner object of sentient beings. Due to that, and due to craving for the outer objects of gain, praise, compliments and so forth, one does not give up the grasping for the fleeting world. Hence, one should abandon the causes for these attachments.

While these explanations have been presented many times previously, the point here is that, *in dependence on the grasping for 'I' and mine, one is attached to the inner object of sentient beings*. Firstly, as presented, *inner object* refers to sentient beings, i.e. oneself. So all our cravings begin with the grasping at one's own 'I', followed by grasping at what is regarded as 'mine'.

It first starts with the grasping at the 'I', followed by 'mine'. Without attachment to an individual 'me' the attachment to 'mine' cannot follow. So in the sequence it is definitely the attachment to the 'I' or to the individual 'me' that comes first, then comes grasping at what is 'mine' and all the distracting five sense objects of the external world. *One is attached to the inner object of sentient beings* refers to oneself as the inner being, and then, *due to that and due to craving for the outer objects of gain, compliments ... and so forth, one does not give up the grasping for the fleeting world*. It is through this combination of grasping at the individual 'I' and 'mine' that one craves the sense objects that create the craving for the fleeting or transient world. The commentary concludes with, *Hence one should abandon the causes for the attachments*, meaning that in order to overcome attachment to the fleeting world and so forth, one must abandon the very causes of these attachments. Having presented that one should abandon the causes for these, naturally what would follow is the question 'How should one abandon causes of these attachments?' So the text then presents the way to abandon them.

2.1.2. The way of abandoning it

Here there are four subdivisions:

- 2.1.2.1. Identifying the antidote
- 2.1.2.2. The method for generating the antidote
- 2.1.2.3. The faults of distractions
- 2.1.2.4. The benefits of relying on isolation

Just by relating to the sequence of the outline, we can see that it is very logically and systematically presented. Firstly, identifying the antidote refers to how to abandon the causes of attachment. One must first identify the antidote; without doing this there is no way to apply it. Then, having identified the antidote, one would naturally wonder how one can cultivate it. So next the text presents the method for generating the antidote, followed by the faults of the distraction and the benefits of relying on isolation. These are all presented in such a methodical way that one is able to adopt them.

2.1.2.1. IDENTIFYING THE ANTIDOTE

This is subdivided into two:

- 2.1.2.1.1. Advice to abandon attachment
- 2.1.2.1.2. Identifying the antidote that abandons attachment

2.1.2.1.1. Advice to abandon attachment

The first two lines of the verse read:

*3cd. Therefore, to abandon these perfectly,
The skilful will act thus.*

The commentary explains:

Therefore, to abandon these cravings for outer and inner objects, they who are skilled should investigate and contemplate as it is explained below.

The advice to abandon attachment relates to the faults of craving and so forth. *To abandon these cravings to outer and inner objects* refers, as mentioned previously, to the craving or grasping which begins with the inner being, oneself, followed by the grasping at the external objects. In order to

abandon both of these *those who are skilled*, referring to those who are intelligent and who wish to apply these methods, *should investigate and contemplate as it is explained below*. This is like a prelude, saying in simple terms that those who are interested and who have intelligence, must investigate and contemplate the methods presented.

2.1.2.1.2. Identifying the antidote that abandons attachment.

The verse reads:

*4. Having understood that superior insight
endowed
With calm abiding destroys the afflictions,
One should strive first in calm abiding, which
in turn
Is attained joyfully by lacking attachment for
the world.*

We'll cover this verse now which is actually quite important, but the rest we'll do in our next session.

The commentary explains the meaning of the verse:

Superior insight into emptiness endowed with the horse of calm abiding that induces the bliss of physical and mental pliancy, which is free from mental sinking and excitement by having meditated single-pointedly on any virtuous object, destroys the afflictions of the three realms including the seeds. Understanding this, one should work towards superior insight, which can induce pliancy by investigating the meaning of the mode of abiding. Therefore one strives initially in calm abiding, as it is impossible to generate superior insight without firstly achieving calm abiding.

Calm abiding is achieved joyfully through a lack of attachment to outer and inner worldly objects such as the body, enjoyments and so forth. If one is attached to them, one will fall under the control of sinking and mental excitement.

What frees one from mental sinking and excitement is having meditated single-pointedly on any virtuous object. What is being explained here is that, having first focused on any chosen virtuous object, the outcome is to be able to single-pointedly focus on it, by removing the faults of mental sinking or laxity and excitement.

A simple way to understand what is being presented here is this analogy: if an individual wants to cut down a large tree, they first need to have a strong body and be in good physical shape; furthermore they need to have a steady hand with a good aim; along with that they need to have a good and sharp axe. This analogy illustrates the need for morality, concentration and wisdom to overcome the afflictions, and obtain one's ultimate goal of enlightenment.

This analogy demonstrates the manner of overcoming the afflictions. Whoever wishes to overcome the afflictions needs first of all to have the basis of sound morality. On the basis of observing faultless morality, which is like having a strong body, one needs to have very good concentration, which is like having a steady hand. If a person who wishes to fell a tree does not have a steady hand, they would constantly miss the mark, and would never be able to cut down the tree. This is like a mind which is constantly distracted, and thus never able to actually combat and overcome the afflictions.

Having a good and sharp axe is analogous to having the wisdom realising emptiness. This passage, *superior insight into emptiness endowed with the horse of calm abiding that*

induces the bliss of physical and mental pliancy, is specifically explaining that the wisdom to be developed is special insight, and the concentration to be developed is calm abiding. One develops calm abiding induced by mental and physical pliancy, by developing one's concentration gradually through the nine stages.

Having applied one's mind on a virtuous object and single-pointedly focused on that, ensuring that it is free from mental sinking and excitement, then through that familiarity one develops a strong, and very sound concentration. When the mind obtains the serviceability of focusing single-pointedly on the virtuous object that then induces mental pliancy.

Due to obtaining mental pliancy the body becomes serviceable, which induces physical pliancy. The combination of mental and physical pliancy causes the wind energy to flow well throughout the body. As the wind pervades throughout the body it induces physical bliss, which in turn induces mental bliss.

So, the sequence is this: one first obtains mental pliancy which induces physical pliancy. Then due to the winds flowing well in the body one experiences physical bliss which in turn induces mental bliss.

When one obtains both physical and mental bliss, and one is able to focus on the chosen object without any distractions or wandering, then the more one focuses on the object, the greater the level of mental and physical bliss that is experienced. When one obtains the combination of single-pointed focus combined with perpetual physical and mental bliss, then at that point one has obtained calm abiding.

The definition of **calm abiding is a concentration accompanied with the bliss of pliancy, that is obtained through the method of adopting the nine stages of concentration, and which enables one's mind to focus single-pointedly on its object for as long one wishes.**

Special insight, described later on, refers to using the base of single-pointed focus to analyse the object, and thus experience the physical and mental bliss which is induced by physical and mental pliancy. At this point one has obtained special insight.

Special insight is the wisdom that analyses the object, based on having developed single-pointed concentration. The individual who experiences that physical and mental bliss induced by physical and mental pliancy, and is able to investigate the object while maintaining a single-pointed focus, has obtained what is called 'special insight'. The difference here is that calm abiding is obtained through unwavering and single-pointed focus on the object so that one obtains the mental and physical pliancy which induces the physical and mental bliss. Whereas special insight is based on the single-pointed focus achieved through calm abiding, wherein one is able to analyse the object through one's analytical wisdom, whereby one experiences the physical and mental bliss induced by the physical and mental pliancy.

The commentary is explaining that what destroys the afflictions of the three realms, including the seeds, is superior insight into emptiness. The commentary explains that *superior insight into emptiness is endowed with the horse of calm abiding that induces the bliss of physical and mental pliancy, which is free from mental sinking and excitement by having meditated single-pointedly on any virtuous object.* The first part of the sequence is to develop a single-pointed focus on a virtuous object, free from mental sinking and excitement,

which then induces the calm abiding, and then based on that one develops superior insight. It is the superior insight into emptiness that destroys the afflictions of the three realms, including the seeds. *Understanding this, one should work towards superior insight, which can induce pliancy by investigating the meaning of mode of abiding*, defines special insight as a superior insight which induces pliancy, by investigating the meaning of ultimate reality or emptiness. So by investigating the actual object which is emptiness, that which induces bliss caused by mental and physical pliancy, is special insight. If one strives, then with that understanding one would actually destroy the seed of afflictions. Therefore one strives initially to obtain calm abiding, as it is impossible to generate superior insight without first achieving calm abiding. This is a very crucial point. In the sequence, first one needs to develop calm abiding, which is then followed by developing special insight.

Calm abiding is achieved joyfully through a lack of attachment to outer and inner worldly objects such as the body, enjoyments and so forth. If one is attached to them, one will fall under the control of sinking and mental excitement.

So, in order to develop calm abiding, one needs to be free from obstacles such as attachment to one's outer and inner attachments.

To again summarise the order: first one develops calm abiding, followed by developing special insight which is the main antidote for overcoming the afflictions. The very seeds of the afflictions are removed by the union of calm abiding and special insight. So that is the main point here. In the next session we'll cover the method for actually developing the antidote.

Extracts from *Entrance for the Child of the Conquerors* used with the kind permission of Ven. Fedor Stracke

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