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# Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

This has three subheadings:

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

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

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

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

The commentary mentions this line from verse 38:

Therefore make repeated effort ...

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

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

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

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

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

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

The commentary further explains:

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

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

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

The commentary continues:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The commentary further explains:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### CULTIVATING THE PREREQUISITES FOR MENTAL QUIESCENCE

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

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

### THE WAY TO ACHIEVE MENTAL QUIESCENCE

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

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

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

This verse then mentions:

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

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

Nonadjustment; and readjustment.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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