
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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

[Meditation]

Now we generate the motivation for receiving the teachings along these lines: For the sake of all mother sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment. So for that purpose I will engage in listening to the teachings and put them into practice well.

How to meditate on calm abiding (cont.)

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

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

Then the commentary explains:

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

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

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

Next the commentary states:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

These are essential points.

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

The first pitfall: Laziness

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

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

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

Of the eight antidotes, four are presented here.

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

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

This is a very meticulous presentation.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Then the text mentions:

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

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

Because of this firmness you will soon gain actual attainments;

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

Then the text continues:

... even the common clairvoyances and so forth;

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

Furthermore:

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

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

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

Then:

... your delusions will become very slight indeed.

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

And:

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

These are the incredible benefits of developing meditative concentration.

Then:

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

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

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

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

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

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

The second pitfall: forgetting the instruction

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

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

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

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

As the text further explains:

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

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

As *The Heart of the Middle Way* says:

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

The text further explains:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As further explained, the visualisation is:

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alternatively, you could put him level with your navel

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

Or you could visualize that you transform into Shakyamuni.

That would be a very suitable form of meditation.

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

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

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

Further:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

developing meditative concentration, with an emphasis on practicality.

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

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

It further explains:

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

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

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

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

In other words:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

It is further explained:

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

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

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

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

The analogy used here is:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The third pitfall: excitement and dullness

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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