
Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

26 June 2018

We will begin with the usual meditation; just ensure that you have cultivated the proper meditation. [*Tong-len meditation*]

Once again, try to reinforce your bodhicitta motivation by cultivating the genuine wish to achieve complete enlightenment to benefit all sentient beings. It is for this purpose that we will listen to this profound teaching and determine to put it into practice.

How to train in calm abiding

Taking this as the basis how to train in the nine mental states (cont.)

We will continue with the teaching on calm abiding. We were talking about the development of calm abiding in terms of the nine mental abidings. Of the nine, we finished the first five, and now we are up to the sixth.

PACIFYING

Earlier, we covered the faults of meditation such as mental sinking and excitement in detail. Regarding the **sixth mental abiding**, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* says we must be very cautious and vigilant about the danger of subtle excitement. The reason we face the danger of subtle excitement here is related to our effort in combating sinking and excitement in the preceding states of mental abiding. For example, our effort in the fourth mental abiding results in our mind being too withdrawn inwards, so in the fifth mental abiding, we try to uplift the mind to overcome that. However, our effort of over-uplifting of the mind results in the sixth mental abiding, where we face the danger of subtle mental excitement.

In fact, in the fifth mental abiding, there is very good mental stability, and one has a very stable concentration. However, while we remain in that very stable state of concentration, we can experience too much withdrawal of attention, and this causes mental sinking to arise. To overcome or combat this mental sinking, as we mentioned in an earlier teaching, we need to apply the technique of reflecting on the benefits or qualities of meditative concentration. The purpose of doing this is to uplift the mind in order to overcome the depressed or overly withdrawn mind that leads to sinking. However, if the mind is uplifted too much, the fault of excitement, particularly **subtle excitement**, arises in this sixth mental abiding. As mentioned in the commentary text, the way to get rid of this subtle mental excitement is to strengthen the force of alertness or introspection. By reapplying introspection forcefully, we are able to get rid of subtle excitement.

As the text says, compared with the fifth mental abiding, in this sixth mental abiding there is less danger of subtle mental sinking. This is the difference between the fifth

and the sixth mental abidings – we are unlikely to confront the fault of mental sinking in this sixth stage.

The text continues by saying that, of the six powers, the fifth and the sixth mental abidings are achieved mainly by the **power of introspection**. The text also notes that another feature of this sixth mental abiding is that during it we fully accomplish the power of alertness or introspection.

COMPLETE PACIFICATION

The text notes that in the **seventh mental abiding**, because we have fully developed the power of mindfulness and introspection, it is unlikely that mental sinking or excitement will arise. Still, as a preventative measure in this stage, we need to reinforce or apply the **power of perseverance** so that we can recognise any subtle influence of sinking or excitement.

In other words, in the seventh mental abiding, we make an effort to **prevent subtle sinking and excitement**. Hence, the main difference between the sixth and the seventh mental abidings is the danger of falling under the influence of subtle sinking and excitement. In other words, in the seventh mental abiding, there is no danger of confronting subtle sinking and excitement. However, by applying the power of perseverance, we still need to make an effort to prevent them from arising.

The text makes it clear that in this seventh stage of mental abiding, the meditator's confidence, in terms of overcoming sinking and excitement, is so great that sinking and excitement cannot interrupt the meditation. The meditator did not have the same level of confidence and strength in the preceding stages.

During the seventh stage, not only is there no danger of subtle sinking and excitement arising, but even if one or the other did arise, it won't interrupt meditation and is not of any concern for the meditator. This is because at that stage the meditator is fully confident of easily overcoming subtle sinking and excitement through the power of perseverance.

The text also talks about the **four mental attentions**¹. In terms of those four mental attentions, from the third to the seventh stages of mental abiding – five stages in all – though the level of concentration is very good, it is still possible that one's concentration could be interrupted by sinking or excitement. Therefore, the mental attention during these five stages of mental abiding is called **interrupted mental attention**.

SINGLE-POINTEDNESS

The text then goes on to the **eighth stage of mental abiding**. In this eighth stage, the meditator only needs to exert a little effort and mindfulness when he or she first commences the meditation. But once the meditation has commenced, the meditator can remain in concentration without confronting even the subtle forms of sinking and excitement. They can remain in this almost perfect state of concentration for as long as they wish, for instance, an hour. So in the eighth stage, as the text clearly says, when you first begin the meditation, there is some need for effort and application of mindfulness at the start, but

¹ Referred to as 'types of mental process' in *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*.

once it is started, the meditation flows perfectly and one is able to remain for a long time in that state.

In terms of the four mental attentions, the eighth mental abiding involves **uninterrupted mental attention**.

In explaining the progress of the stages of meditation, the commentary uses the analogy of the force required to overpower an enemy. You can classify the enemy as initially being in a very strong position, then progressively declining in strength and becoming weak, and finally completely losing their power or strength and becoming very weak. Like this, we can recognise how, with each stage of mental abiding, the meditator's skill in applying the remedy increases, until throughout the sixth, seventh and eighth stages, there is a progressive decline of the fault of sinking and excitement. Then, at the eighth level, as we just found out, the meditator only requires a little bit of effort and mindfulness to begin the meditation; after that, he or she does not require any effort at all. So during the actual meditation, it is not possible for sinking or excitement to interrupt the meditation. That is why the mental attention during this stage is called an uninterrupted attention.

In terms of the six powers, the text says that the seventh and eighth mental abidings are achieved mainly by the **power of perseverance**.

PLACEMENT WITH EQUANIMITY

The commentary notes that in the **ninth state of mental abiding**, there is no need to depend upon effort. This is because in the preceding eighth stage, the meditator has gained complete familiarity with the power of perseverance. Because of that, the meditator can now remain in concentration effortlessly and spontaneously. In fact, it is said that when one has reached this stage of concentration, not only does it not require any effort, but while remaining in the perfect state of single-pointed concentration, the meditator can also engage in other activities, for example, walking or sitting or some other Dharma practice, such as making offerings or doing prostrations.

The text says that this concentration is so advanced that you can spontaneously and effortlessly remain in the state of concentration, in the same way that someone who has memorised a certain prayer – e.g. *The Twenty-One Tara Praises* – can recite it without effort while doing other activities. The text also says that this stage of single-pointed concentration is not the actual calm abiding but is a similitude of it within the desire realm.

In terms of the six powers, this ninth mental abiding is achieved by the **power of complete familiarity**.

SUMMARY OF THE NINE STAGES

The text goes on to summarise the nine stages of mental abiding. It says that in the first stage of mental abiding, meditators are able to recognise conceptual or disturbing thoughts. In the second stage, the experience is as if the thoughts are taking a rest. In third stage, the experience is as if the thoughts are showing signs of tiredness.

The text then makes comparisons between the nine stages. It says that the main difference between the first and second stages is the shorter or longer *duration of the abiding of the mind*. Whereas the main difference between

the second and third stages is the shorter or longer *duration of distraction*. In other words, in the second stage of mental abiding, the duration of mental stability is shorter compared to the third stage as there is more distraction in the former. The third stage is called patch-like abiding, a term that indicates an ability to patch up your abiding if any interruption occurs. So the duration of mental abiding is longer in the third stage than in the second.

The text then says that the difference between the third and fourth mental stage is whether or not one loses the object of meditation: in the fourth stage, it is not possible to lose the object. The difference between the fourth and fifth stages is whether or not the gross or coarse form of mental sinking arises.

The difference between the fifth and the sixth stages relates to whether or not one needs to attend to the arising of subtle mental sinking. What we are going through here, of course, won't make any sense unless you have understood our earlier discussion about sinking and excitement, and have a good understanding and recognition of the two faults of sinking and excitement. Another difference between the fifth and sixth stages is the arising of the subtle form of excitement. As it says here, subtle excitement arises less in the sixth stage than in the fifth.

The difference between the sixth and seventh stages is whether or not there is an arising of subtle sinking and excitement. And the difference between the seventh and eighth stages is whether or not there is any interruption of mental sinking and excitement at all. The difference between the eighth and the ninth is whether or not one needs to apply any perseverance or effort.

There is also mention of what happens in the seventh stage, where there is no concern about being overpowered or falling under the influence of subtle sinking and excitement. The example given is that, if you are battling an enemy whose force or strength has already been weakened, then the next time you meet that enemy, you can defeat and crush it very easily; all you need is to confront it at the beginning.

When you know that the enemy's power or force is greatly weakened, to the point that they cannot come back to attack you, there is nothing for you to fear or worry about. All you need to do is keep an eye on it! You may even use that moment for your own forces to have a merry time feasting, etc. Similarly, in calm-abiding meditation practice, the main enemy or fault is sinking and excitement. Initially, it has the upper hand, so we have to put in a great deal of effort and develop a strategy for defeating the enemy, but later on, as it weakens, we don't need to make much effort at all.

Review

So, we have covered how to achieve calm abiding by applying the eight antidotes to the five faults and how, as the text has explained, these nine stages of mental abiding are achieved by **the six powers**. The first stage of mental abiding is achieved by 1) the power of listening. If you refer to the text, it says that the second stage of mental abiding is achieved by 2) the power of thinking and the third and fourth by 3) the power of mindfulness.

The fifth and sixth stages are achieved by 4) the power of introspection and the seventh and eighth, by 5) the power of perseverance. The last, or ninth stage, is achieved by 6) the power of complete familiarity.

Then the text summarises how the nine stages can be classified in terms of **the four mental attentions**. The first two stages involve a 1) forcible mental attention. The five mental stages from the second mental abiding up to the seventh involve the application of 2) interrupted mental attention. The eighth abiding involves 3) uninterrupted attention with effort. The ninth stage involves 4) attention that is effortless and spontaneous.

The commentary says that during the first two stages of mental abiding, the forces of sinking and excitement are intense, while the force of concentration is weak. Therefore, when we talk about the difference between the first and second stages, the text says it is not even worth mentioning the level or degree of interruption by sinking and excitement because the force of interruption is so great. What the text does mention is the need to strengthen mindfulness and introspection.

During the five stages of mental abiding from the third to the seventh, while there is a need to strengthen the application of mindfulness and introspection, there is also an increase in the level of mental concentration. So while the level of concentration is not continuous but interrupted, it does increase as one progresses through these five stages. Because of this, of the four mental attentions, interrupted attention applies here. With the eighth mental abiding, as we discussed earlier, the only time the meditator needs to apply a bit of effort is to commence the meditation. Otherwise, once it has commenced, there is no interruption. Therefore, the attention is uninterrupted, but with a bit of effort initially. Finally, at the ninth stage of mental abiding, the meditation becomes effortless and spontaneous.

We will stop here tonight. Next week, we will continue with how the actual calm abiding is achieved from this point.

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