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# Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment

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Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

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With the motivation we have just cultivated, we will now begin our meditation]

[*Tonglen meditation*]

Once again just reinforce your motivation by cultivating the thought, 'I will achieve complete enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings, and for this purpose I am listening to this profound Dharma and will put it into practice'.

We have been discussing meditation and its benefits. Always keep in mind that in our meditation practice we are trying to direct all our mental capacity onto a virtuous or wholesome object, and in this way familiarise our mind with this virtuous object, and train it to remain focused on the object. Through this practice we will find that the negative states of mind will diminish and the positive states of mind, such as an increased sense of discrimination, will increase.

We will also be able to recognise how, within our mind, there is something that is very beneficial, and there is something that is very harmful and destructive. When we recognise and develop a conviction in that, it will naturally occur to us to work on developing what is beneficial and then safeguard it. Conversely, as we don't want what is harmful and destructive, we will make an effort to minimise that and try to get rid of it by applying a remedy.

If we examine further, we can see that the mental delusions or mental afflictions that lie within us are the true enemy that harms us and serve as the cause of our suffering and unhappiness. That is why the Lord Buddha said that the only effective way to find happiness is to overcome these delusions or mental afflictions by applying the appropriate remedies.

If we really think about it, this is just common sense and easily understood. The main cause of feeling happy or unhappy lies within our own mind, and we can understand this from our own experience. When a harmful state of mind is present then wherever we are, even if we are alone and no-one else is there to bother us, we will be unhappy and feel very restless. On the other hand, if a positive state of mind is present it can serve as a very good companion. When you have that, then even if you are alone without any friends you can still be happy as your mind serves as a perfect companion.

Even though we may have different views about what brings harm or unhappiness, if we make a closer examination then we will identify that what unfailingly benefits us is a positive state of mind. So, if we are able to cultivate that, it will come to our aid in times of need. As we examine we can see for ourselves that in reality our

own mind is the main source of all our thoughts, deeds and experience of pain and pleasure.

Another thing I often mention is that what we call our mind is always with us as a part of our existence, and its influence on us is incredible. This is a fact. Therefore, if this mind is very positive, wholesome and beautiful, then wherever you are or whatever you do, not only will you be happy and at peace, but you will bring peace and happiness to other people and draw them closer to you to form a friendly relationship. And not just people but even animals will come closer to you with friendship and trust.

On the other hand, people who possess a negative, horrible and nasty state of mind will not only spoil their own mood and cause a loss peace and happiness but will automatically have the same impact wherever they are and whoever they are with. Sometimes their negative impact on others around them can be very severe, hurting and bringing unhappiness to them and even making them cry. Recognising the impact our mental attitudes can have on others as well as ourselves is a part of spiritual practice or meditation.

You can learn and draw inspiration by observing things around you or on TV. I saw on TV a story about a close friendship between a young woman and a seal. Both were very relaxed and happy together and, expressing a deep sense of shared feelings of love, compassion and trust in their interaction.<sup>1</sup>

If you want to cheer people up, make them happy, bring joy to their mind, and bring them closer to you, the most effective way is showing them your positive mental attitudes and true feeling of lovingkindness and compassion. You can see how even animals feel and appreciate the love and compassion that people show to them, and we can see how they reciprocate the same feelings. Conversely, when we look into the main cause of bringing harm to other people or hurting their feelings then again, the main cause is within you in the form of the negative mental attitude that you show to others.

I recently saw on the news the suffering inflicted by the live sheep trade. The sheep were locked up in a small space for many days without food and drink and were having serious breathing difficulties. What sort of things had they done to have to undergo such suffering? They were totally innocent. We could see how helpless they were. When we don't have any sense of empathy towards other beings like animals, we can be so cruel and insensitive to their suffering. Maybe the minister in charge of the live animal trade should be sacked!!

I noted a group of protesters against the animal cruelty and I fully support them. If the people responsible for that trade had to go without any food for even three days, they would not survive! It is very, very sad. I can't see any financial benefits from such trade, only great loss. If our nation is led by people like this, who lack compassion and a good sense of discrimination, then the nation is not going to get any better.

Another time I saw a friendship between a man and a crocodile which was quite a decent size. Their

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<sup>1</sup> Possibly <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmgkgNR6AME>

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relationship was so close that they were touching and kissing each other. This shows how even an animal, which may be typically vicious, can become very gentle and friendly to people who take care of them with love and compassion. Whereas if you hold some sort of resentment or an aggressive mental attitude, then even when you try to feed them, they will run away from you. If you observe carefully, you can see the amazing, unimaginable power of a compassionate mind, and the difference it can make to our relationship with living beings.

### How to train in calm abiding (cont.)

Getting back to our topic, we have completed the ninth mental abiding. *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* states that:

When you reach the ninth state, your single-pointed concentration is free of subtle dullness and excitement. You are able to remain in this state effortlessly for long periods, and yet this state is not true mental quiescence: it only resembles it. In order to achieve true mental quiescence, you must meditate single-pointedly again and again to gain further familiarity with it. You must then attain the exceptional bliss that comes with mental and physical suppleness.

As indicated here, the actual state of calm abiding is reached when the highly developed single-pointed state of concentration is also accompanied by the bliss of mental and physical pliancy.

Then the text goes on to say:

Mental suppleness [or pliancy] is the first of the two types to develop, but the bliss due to physical suppleness is the first of the two blisses to develop.

There is not much detail in the explanation in *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, so I recommend that you refer to Tsong Khapa's, *The Great Stages of the Path* where there is a more detailed explanation.

At the ninth level or even in earlier stages of meditation, the meditator already has those states of pliancy, but they are not apparently manifested because they are too subtle.

As noted earlier, mental pliancy arises before physical pliancy. However, in terms of the bliss associated with this mental and physical pliancy, the bliss associated with physical pliancy precedes the bliss of mental pliancy.

The deleterious energy winds within the body are pacified, and you feel comfortable, although you feel a kind of pressure in the scalp or brain, rather like the sensation of a warm hand touching your newly shaven head. You immediately pacify the deleterious states of mind that stand in the way of carrying out any of the virtue you may wish to perform. You have developed mental suppleness.

The meditator's experience of mental pliancy arises first. As they remain in a deep state of concentration, developing familiarity with that concentration, they can experience a kind of bliss or joy that pervades their entire body, which has the effect of pacifying negative wind energy. This experience is described as being like the tactile sensation of a warm hand on a newly shaven head. Then the text goes on to say that immediately after that

there is an experience of what is called mental pliancy which in fact is a state of mental serviceability whereby you have the ability to turn your mind to any desired object without being hindered by any form of mental afflictions. This is how a meditator achieves the state of mental pliancy.

Next:

You then develop physical suppleness as a result of this mental suppleness, and the energy winds are now well adapted and circulating throughout the body. The body is now free of any deleterious states and feels no discomfort while you perform virtuous practices. It can be put to any use you want.

Following the accomplishment of mental pliancy, the bad wind energy is pacified, and the meditator will feel this pacified wind energy pervading their entire body. Just like mental pliancy, they also achieve physical pliancy by getting rid of the negative physical states which block the serviceability of their body. Having achieved this physical pliancy, they will physically feel very light and supple.

The text continues:

The body is supple and as light as cotton wool; you thus experience great bliss from this physical suppleness, and the body has extremely blissful natural physical sensations.

Due to the attainment of physical pliancy, the meditator then experiences a very tactile physical bliss from their meditative experience. This bliss arises following the attainment of the physical pliancy; after physical pliancy is attained, the meditator experiences the bliss associated with that physical pliancy.

Then the text states:

Then, whenever you enter meditative absorption, you have the experience of your body dissolving into the meditation device, and nothing else appears to you, not even your own body, etc. This is the experience of the great ecstasy of mental suppleness, and the mind is so flooded with mental bliss that it is almost unable to stay on the visualization. This problem of the mind being flooded with bliss will clear up, and you then feel that the bliss has lessened somewhat. While in this state, you have gained the immutable type of suppleness that corresponds to the single-pointed concentration which always stays on the visualization.

After the meditator experiences the bliss associated with physical pliancy, they still remain in the state of meditation. Then there comes a time when the meditator will experience a feeling of losing their body into the state of the focus, as he undergoes the experience of losing the object as if nothing is there to appear to the mind. This experience then induces a great feeling of joy and bliss to the point where he feels that he won't be able to hold his focus of the object any longer or be able to anchor the mind on the object, because of that very heightened state of mental bliss and joy.

At that point, the meditator feels as if the bliss appears to subside, but in actuality that is not the case. Rather, what is happening is that the stability of the concentration becomes firmer. At the same time, there is an experience of transcending one's state of pliancy to what is called the

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immutable state of pliancy, which is the sign of having attained the actual state of calm abiding.

According to the text:

At the same time, you have also gained the mental quiescence associated with the mandatory access level of the first dhyana state of concentration. This particular access level is termed “mandatory” because it is a path without which it is quite impossible to achieve many types of mundane and supramundane realizations. From this point you are able to achieve the other access levels that follow and are achieved serially—in fact you can achieve all eight of the levels associated with the form-realm dhyana states and the formless-realm states.

The meditator is experiencing for the first time a level of concentration on the higher realm called the first level of the concentration. The meditator also experiences for the first time the actual meditative state of concentration which is called *sam-ten dang-pö nyer-tog* in Tibetan. This is the preparatory stage for achieving the concentration level for the first time.

The benefit of having achieved this state of calm abiding is that it is the basis for achieving all the mundane and supramundane realisations. This initial stage of calm abiding is also called *nyer-tog mi-chok-me* in Tibetan, which literally means ‘a state of not being incapable’, a mandatory meditative state. Without depending on this state of calm abiding, which is also called the preparatory stage for achieving a level of concentration, you are incapable, or you cannot achieve any higher qualities, whether they are mundane or supramundane qualities.

If you are following the Lesser Vehicle of the Buddhist path and if, based on this mandatory meditative state, you cultivate renunciation and wisdom of selflessness and so forth, you can achieve the state of liberation from cyclic existence. If you are following the Greater Vehicle, and then based on this meditative state you generate the bodhicitta mind and the wisdom of emptiness, you can achieve the ultimate fruit of the Great Vehicle. By depending on this state one can also attain all the mundane qualities such as the higher realm of the four concentration levels and the four formless levels.

In a nutshell, **calm abiding is a meditative state of concentration filled with an extraordinary mental and physical bliss of pliancy that has arisen by depending on the nine mental abidings, enabling the mind to remain in the given object as one desires.** His Holiness the Dalai Lama uses the word ‘great and stabilised pliancy bliss’ which ‘doesn’t occur on the ninth mental abiding.

As suggested earlier, you should refer to Tsong Khapa’s *Great Stages of the Path* in which there are quotes from many other great scriptures, and details about the benefits and means to achieve calm abiding. Then you can gain the full authentic understanding.

Here we can notice that when we are in the state of calm abiding, the experience of this bliss of pliancy is induced due to the force of our mind focusing single-pointedly on the object. However, we also talk about the experience of bliss in relation to achieving special insight, in which case, the bliss is induced by the mind analysing its objects.

In special insight the bliss arises due to the force of the mind analysing and discerning reality. Whereas in calm abiding the bliss arises from the mind simply being single-pointedly fixed on the object. Because the bliss that we experience at the time of special insight is greater or superior, the word ‘special’ is used.

Although this is a brief introduction on how to achieve calm abiding, we have touched on most of the important points. Those of you who seriously want to pursue meditation to achieve calm abiding should now have enough background knowledge to go ahead with that meditation.

This topic of calm abiding is the very basis of the whole meditation practice. Without establishing knowledge of, and practice in, these basic things then if we go into more advanced practices such as the generation or the completion stage, we will not make any progress there.

We learned early on that, when you are trying to achieve this state of calm abiding, it is very important at first to stick to a specific object that is suitable for you. However, after having achieved this state of calm abiding on that specific object, you can use any object for your calm abiding meditation. Therefore, we say that there is no object of knowledge which cannot serve as an object of calm abiding; focusing the mind on a single object doesn’t necessarily mean that you can only use that object for the calm abiding.

The use of the term ‘single-pointed’ in calm abiding meditation is really related to that initial object of meditation. It indicates that you have to stick to that and you cannot alter it.

The *Lamp of the Path* goes on to describe some of the benefits of achieving calm abiding, so we will return to the *Lamp of the Path* in our next session.

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

*41ab. When the practitioner has gained calm abiding  
Higher perception will also be gained.*

Tonight, we will recite the *Samantabhadra Prayer* for Hal Young’s mother who has just passed away. Hal has gone back to his home town for three weeks.

As you read the prayer, just think that you too make the same prayers as those and wish for the fulfilment of all that is contained in the prayer. This prayer contains longer versions of the seven limb prayer which we regularly recite.

*Transcript prepared by Bernii Wright  
Edit 1 by Adair Bunnnett  
Edit 2 by Sandup Tsering  
Edited Version*

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