

# Study Group - "Liberation *in the Palm of Your Hand*"

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ཕྱུ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལེགས་པ་བཅས་པ།



5 October 1999

Please cultivate the proper motivation.

## 422.331.2 Training In The Last Two Perfections

ཀྱུད་པར་དུས་མཚན་ ཕྱིན་ཐམ་གཉིས་ལ་སྦྲོབ་ཚུལ།

We are now up to the heading How To Train In The Last Two Perfections, which has two subheadings:

### 422.331.21 Training In Calm Abiding

བསམ་གཏན་གྱི་རོ་བོ་ཞི་གནས་ལ་སྦྲོབ་ཚུལ།

### 422.331.22 Training In Special Insight

ཤིས་རབ་གྱི་རོ་བོ་ལྷག་མཐོང་ལ་སྦྲོབ་ཚུལ།

### 422.331.21 Training In Calm Abiding

Training In Calm Abiding is presented under the following six subheadings:

#### 422.331.211 Gathering The Prerequisite Conditions To Achieve Calm Abiding

ཞི་གནས་གྱི་ཚོགས་བསྐྱེད་པ།

#### 422.331.212 The Way To Achieve Calm Abiding

ཞི་གནས་སྦྱོབ་ཚུལ་དངོས།

#### 422.331.213 How Calm Abiding Is Achieved At Nine Levels

དེ་ལ་བརྟེན་ནས་སེམས་གནས་དག་སྦྱོབ་ཚུལ།

#### 422.331.214 How The Nine Levels Of Abiding Are Achieved Through The Six Forces

དེ་སྦྱོབ་སྦྱོང་གི་གིས་འགྲུབ་ལུགས།

#### 422.331.215 The Four Mental Processes

དེ་ལ་ཡིད་བྱེད་བཞི་ཡོད་ཚུལ།

#### 422.331.216 The Criterion Of Having Attained Calm Abiding

དེ་ལས་ཞི་གནས་དངོས་སྐྱེ་ཚུལ།

### Benefits Of Calm Abiding

In Lama Tsong Khapa's text *The Great Exposition to the Stages of the Path* the topic of Calm Abiding And Special Insight begins with a presentation of the benefits of each. The *Sutra Unraveling the Thought* says,

All the spiritual qualities of the lesser and higher vehicles

And the mundane and supramundane qualities,

Are the result of calm abiding and special insight.

How can all spiritual qualities literally be the result of calm abiding and special insight? Lama Tsong Khapa clarifies the meaning of this sutra in the following way: any spiritual quality that you can think of is connected to either calm abiding, as in single-pointed concentration, or special insight, in the sense of discriminating wisdom. As there are

no spiritual qualities, which do not belong to either some aspect of concentration or of wisdom, therefore as is said in the sutra, all spiritual qualities are the result of calm abiding and special insight.

Lama Tsong Khapa comments that the reason why there is an emphasis on the qualities, which are the result of calm abiding and special insight, is to indicate that, without the combination of these two, it is not possible to gain any realisation, or spiritual qualities on the path of the lesser vehicle or higher vehicle. In other words, to achieve any spiritual qualities you need both the aspect of concentration, which is calm abiding, and wisdom, which is special insight - together and fully developed.

### Definition Of Calm Abiding

It is said that calm abiding is a state of single-pointed level of concentration in which the meditator can remain for as long as he or she wishes. It is achieved by means of the nine mental abidings. While in a state of calm abiding the meditator experiences the bliss of pliancy and suppleness because of their level of concentration

### How All Types Of Meditative Concentration Are Incorporated In Calm Abiding

Calm abiding is not something unique to Buddhism, as many other religions practise it. What is unique to Buddhism is that calm abiding when it is conjoined with renunciation becomes a cause to achieve the state of liberation, and when it is conjoined with the practice of taking refuge it serves as a true pure Buddhist practice. Whether you follow the Sutrayana or Mantrayana Buddhist path, calm abiding is indispensable.

If one follows the Sutrayana, it is said that there is no chance of gaining the realisation of emptiness without calm abiding, nor is there any chance of gaining realisation of the generation and completion stages of the secret mantra if one follows the Mantrayana path. This means that all the realisations of meditative concentration depend upon calm abiding. It is said that just as you need a container to hold the water, so you need to achieve calm abiding in order to gain any meditative concentration of the Sutrayana or Mantrayana. Thus it is important to first train oneself to gain calm abiding.

### Why Both Calm Abiding And Special Insight Are Needed

All meditative success and concentration rest upon calm abiding and special insight. In fact Lama Tsong Khapa's *Great Expositions Of The Stages Of The Path* explains clearly why it is necessary to have both calm abiding and special insight to achieve the state of liberation. He uses the analogy of looking at a wall painting in a dark room. To see such a painting you need a butter lamp which is very bright and clear, and which has a very steady flame unshaken by any wind or draught. Only then can you see the painting very clearly.

In the same way you need the clarity of special insight and stability of calm abiding. In order to uproot yourself from cyclic existence to achieve liberation you need to gain the special insight realisation of emptiness, which is dependent on calm abiding. Just as in a dark room you need both the brightness of the butter lamp as well as a steady light, so you need both the clarity and sharpness of discriminating wisdom, as well as the stability of calm abiding.

Without achieving some level of mental concentration it is very hard to effectively engage in any virtuous practice, because we are so easily distracted. However it is said that if we have achieved calm abiding, then all the spiritual practice and meditation we do becomes very much easier, and then we can develop [spiritual] qualities very naturally and without much effort. For instance if we do the meditation on death and impermanence or the precious human rebirth, we can all make very fast and smooth progress. As a benefit of calm abiding whatever practice we do becomes more productive, is more stable and is not weakened easily by mental distraction.

### **The Order Of Gaining Calm Abiding And Special Insight**

There is a quotation from Shantideva's *A Guide To The Bodhisattva's Way Of Life* which says,

Understanding that the mental delusions  
Are destroyed by special insight which is conjoined with  
calm abiding  
So gain this calm abiding first.<sup>1</sup>

This quotation actually shows the order of gaining calm abiding and special insight. It is definite in the sense that you first have to gain calm abiding, because without it you cannot gain special insight.

### **422.331.221 Gathering The Prerequisite Conditions To Achieve Calm Abiding**

Atisha's text *The Lamp for the Path to Enlightenment* says that without suitable conditions then even if you pass thousands of years meditating on calm abiding you will not achieve it. This shows the importance of first gathering the suitable conditions to achieve calm abiding, of which there are six.

#### **422.331.221.1 Suitable Place**

མཐུན་པའི་ཡུལ་ན་གནས་པ།

Maitreya's text *The Ornament for Sutra* lists the five qualities of a suitable place.

1. Easy access to food, clothing and so forth.
2. A safe location in the sense of being free of any violence or threats to your life from humans, non-human spirits or wild beasts.
3. The place should be clean, hygienic and healthy in the sense that one is not likely to contract a disease.
4. Having good friends whose actions and behaviour accords with pure morality, and who share similar views to one.
5. The place should be free of noise from people during the day, and from the noise of barking dogs during the night.
6. The sixth and most important prerequisite is having gained all the necessary knowledge about the subject of one's meditation. Before pursuing the meditation practice it is important to thoroughly study the subject matter, and also to have thoroughly contemplated it, so that there is no doubt about the meditation practice. If the meditation practice is a retreat on certain

visualisations or mantra recitations, then you make sure that you have fulfilled all the prerequisites for those practices, whether it be receiving the necessary initiations, or commentaries, or oral transmissions. When you think of doing some retreat you should not think only of material needs like the place to do the retreat, and the facilities such as food, clothing and so on, because when you then start the retreat you [may] become confused, eg if the retreat is for some recitation you do not know what mantra to recite, or [even] where to begin.

We should also understand that when we undertake some long meditation or retreat, what we want to achieve is not some moment of temporary peace or a temporary getaway. Rather we are trying to achieve something that can be of long term benefit. If, in your meditation practice you have achieved some level of mental concentration, and gained more understanding of your mind and so forth, then this is supposed to be of benefit later on when you confront the real world. When you go into a crowd you will be able to utilise whatever spiritual realisations and experience you have gained to some effect and personal benefit.

#### **422.331.221.2 Having Few Desires**

འདོད་པ་ལྷུང་བ།

The condition of having few desires overcomes the thought of always wanting the best, and wanting as much as possible.

#### **422.331.221.3 Having Contentment**

ཚོག་ཤེས་པ།

Having contentment is contenting oneself with simple needs in terms of place of living, food, clothing and so forth. Without these conditions of having contentment and few desires we grasp strongly at various objects of sensual pleasures, and can easily be distracted from our meditation practice.

#### **422.331.221.4 Having Pure Morality**

ཚུལ་ཁྲིམས་དག་པ།

Having pure morality is important because generally speaking morality is the basis for achieving all the excellent qualities. How is morality the basis for all excellent qualities? You know that without this practice of pure morality you cannot remove the very gross level of mental distractions, and all the gross faults in your actions. Without ridding ourselves of the gross faults in our mind or in our actions, there is no chance of removing the internal distractions such as the subtle faults and distractions in our mind.

Geshe-la says that he has explained a number of times in the past how morality is the basis of all excellent spiritual qualities. He has also discussed morality in the light of how each of the three-fold trainings are all dependent upon each other, and how each one is indispensable to success on the spiritual path. Please recall these teachings.

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**Headings with outline numbering are derived from the Text. Headings without outline numbering are derived from Geshe Doga's commentary.**

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**Note on authentication**

Transcribed from the tape by Kathi Melnic  
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<sup>1</sup> *A Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, Ch. 8, verse 4

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Checked by Sandup Tsering and Alan Molloy

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