

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

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ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅད་སྐུ་



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We must first establish the bodhicitta motivation, generating a genuine wish to achieve the state of buddhahood for the sake of all beings, and then think that these teachings that we are receiving are to achieve that goal. Think also that we must put the teachings into practice to achieve our goal.

In the preceding teachings we learnt that there are five main obstacles that we have to overcome in our pursuit of the state of calm abiding, and their antidotes are the eight remedies. Of the five main obstacles, the first one is laziness, which is the one that we initially have to confront and overcome before beginning the actual meditation. Of the eight remedies the first four are for counteracting laziness.

## The Four Remedies To Laziness (cont)

The first remedy is faith, which is based on a true understanding of the qualities of single-pointed concentration. Second is the aspiration to achieve single-pointed concentration, which will naturally arise if we have successfully cultivated faith. Third is joyous effort, which we generate in achieving single-pointed concentration. The fourth remedy is pliancy, which is the result of the first three.

We briefly described these four remedies in the last teaching. We have to understand that laziness is the greatest obstacle to achieving single-pointed concentration. It is due to laziness that we have no interest in beginning to train to achieve single-pointed concentration, and it is also an obstacle during our practice, as it prevents us from making the continuous effort that is necessary to achieve single-pointed concentration.

In short, laziness is an obstacle in the sense that it drives our mind to the opposite of what we ought to do, for instance practising single-pointed meditation.

## 422.331.212.2 Forgetfulness

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The next obstacle to single-pointed concentration is forgetfulness, which means losing the object from our mind. In relation to this it is said in the text, *The Essence of the Middle Way*, that we have to train our mind to remain in single-pointed focus in the same way that we train a wild elephant. This example explains the meaning of disciplining the mind with single-pointed concentration very clearly. Here the one point we have to consider is the fact that in order to achieve single-pointed concentration, we need an object with which to achieve single-pointed concentration.

## Objects Of Meditation

As to the object of calm abiding, one sutra lists four sets of objects:

1. Pervasive objects
2. Objects of purifying deeds
3. Objects for scholars
4. Objects for purifying delusions

**1. Pervasive objects** include all the objects of knowledge, or any object that exists. As they include all the objects of knowledge, they are also pervasive in the sense that the other three objects are also included in this category.

**2. Objects for purifying actions or deeds** are those meditation objects used mainly to counteract whatever type of delusion or afflicted emotion, which is most forceful and intense.

- To counteract the most forceful form of delusion, such as attachment, the meditation on the ugliness or unattractiveness of the object is performed.
- In order to counteract a very forceful strong anger, it is recommended to meditate on love and cultivating compassion.
- To overcome very strong ignorance then one meditates on emptiness or dependent arising.
- To counteract strong pride, the recommended meditation is on the topic of the various divisions of phenomena, in terms of the number of constituents and so on.
- To counteract very strong mental distractions or disturbing thoughts, it is recommended to perform the breathing meditation.

**3. The objects of scholars** include learning about the various types of aggregates, the various types of constituents, the six sources, the twelve sources, dependent arising, and the difference between what is right and what is wrong.

- There are five aggregates: form, feeling, discrimination, compositional factors and consciousness. One who has mastered the five aggregates would know that all conditional things are included within the five aggregates, and that outside of them you cannot find the self or 'I', or mine - the belongings of the 'I'.
- With regard to the types of constituents there are eighteen constituents which are classified into three groups of six. The first group is the supporting six sense organs. The next six are the supported six consciousnesses, and the third group are the six objects of consciousness. We say that one who knows all the causes and conditions of each one of these eighteen constituents, and what seeds give rise to them, is an adept of these eighteen constituents.
- The twelve sources are the sources or conditions of the six types of consciousness. Of the twelve, six are internal sources and six are outer or external sources. The six internal sources are the six sense organs (which we have just listed), and these serve as the internal conditions to produce consciousness. The six external sources are the six external objects of the sense consciousness. Technically the six sense organs are the empowering conditions, whereas the six external sources, (i.e. the observed condition or object of observation), are the external conditions to produce consciousness. Using the way the eye sense consciousness is produced as an example, to produce that eye sense consciousness you need external objects such as a visual form. It is also dependent upon the internal conditions, (i.e. the eye sense organs), serving as the empowering conditions to produce the eye sense consciousness. One who is master of these twelve sources is someone who has gained a full knowledge of how consciousness arises.
- Objects of scholars also include the twelve dependent arisings or originations. Someone who thoroughly understands these twelve dependent originations knows that they are all subject to the fact of being impermanent, suffering and selfless.
- Another of the objects of scholars is to know the difference between what is right and wrong, or rather what is the

cause and what is the effect. This is to know the fact that if you create a positive virtuous action then the result is positive or happiness, whereas negative non-virtuous actions result in suffering.

**4. Objects for purifying delusions** are used to remove the seed of mental delusions. There are two ways to remove these seeds. The first way is temporarily weakening the seeds by delaying the results, or by weakening the potential of the seeds of the delusions. The second one is to actually uproot the seed of delusions.

When we say 'temporarily removing or weakening the seed of delusion', we are talking about how through the development of the practice of meditation like single-pointed meditation, you can temporarily close the door of the desire realm. Not only that, but it is also possible to close the door of the realms above the desire realm, such as the godly realms, within which there are so many different levels from the form to the formless realms. So you can close the door, or stop taking rebirth in the first concentration. Not only that but you can stop rebirth even in the realms above the second level of concentration. Without actually uprooting the seed of delusion you can go to the peak of cyclic existence, and prevent all rebirth below that, including the level of nothingness. In fact it is said that the way to, for instance, close the door to rebirth in the level below, and to take rebirth in the realms above, is that you have to view the realms below as very gross realms, and the one above as higher. In fact it is said that this state of calm abiding can be used to achieve higher rebirth even in this cyclic existence.

However, in order to completely destroy the seeds of the delusions and uproot them one has to meditate on the four noble truths, death and impermanence and so on.

Although there are four types of objects of calm abiding mentioned in the sutras, in practice each person must choose the object which best suits them. What is most important here is that you choose the most suitable object, and then stick with that object until you gain calm abiding.

In general, however, it is instructed that one should choose an image of the Buddha because of the added benefits. These benefits include remembering all the qualities of the Buddha, purifying negativities and accumulating merits. Most importantly it is said that it helps one later on in the tantric meditation of deity yoga. You have to understand how, in fact, all the teachings, the stages of the path that one follows and learns about, are ultimately to take one to the tantric path. Many past practitioners have used the image of the Buddha as the object to achieve calm abiding.

#### **Learning the Details of the Object of Meditation**

Next in the meditation we have to learn about the object, for instance where the object should be imagined in terms of distance and height, and its size. There is much information to be gathered, however it is said that you must retain the object with which you begin, in terms of its size, colour and so on, until you gain calm abiding.

In the text there is mention that the object should be located at the level of the middle of the forehead or level to the heart. One has to choose the level which best suits one, neither too high nor too low, because it is said that if the object is too high it can be a cause of mental distraction or excitement, whereas if it is too low it can cause mental sinking.

The distance of the object should be such that if you lie on the ground performing the full length prostration, it should be very close to touching the tip of your hand but not quite touching.

The object should not be too large, rather it should be a thumb-sized. The smaller the object the better, as smaller objects can help to draw the mind inward.

If the object is the image of the Buddha then one has to know all the details such the colour of the Buddha's body, the position of his hands, the shape and the size of them and so on.

All the details have to be gathered and identified very thoroughly in one's mind.

Having gathered this information, one must always use precisely the same object one has identified beforehand in terms of all the details of the object. In other words, the object you use should not be altered. If you use the image of the Buddha you should not keep altering the size or the colour, for instance in one session using white and the next session yellow or red and so on. Likewise all the other details of the image of the Buddha in terms of the position of the Buddha's hands and the colour of the body and so on, have to stay the same in all respects, throughout the whole meditation, which means all the time that you spend achieving single-pointed concentration.

In terms of the texture, it is recommended that the image of the Buddha be in the form of light. This helps to overcome mental sinking. At the same time one should also think of it as having some weight, just like when a heavy load is placed on our body we cannot move. This helps to overcome and subdue excitement.

#### **422.221.2122.3 Excitement and Dullness**

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Having learnt about the requirements of the object of the meditation or the object of the concentration, what qualities should the mind of single-pointed concentration have? The first characteristic is that it should have some intensity of clarity. The second characteristic is that the mind should have firm stability in terms of focusing on the object single-pointedly.

Mental sinking and excitement are the two main obstacles to our single-pointed meditation. Mental sinking deprives our mind or our concentration of this intensity of clarity. It is the main obstacle to this quality of concentration. Whereas excitement is the main enemy of firm stability in our concentration.

In order to use any particular object as an object to achieve calm abiding, one first has to learn about it. For instance, as the recommended object is the image of the Buddha, first one has to look at that object and try to thoroughly familiarise oneself with all its features such as the Buddha's hand gestures, his sitting position, the colours and so on, so that all the details are as clear as possible. After you have gathered all the information about the object, through looking at it and studying it, then you begin the meditation by trying to picture that object in your mind. If one has learned about that object before, then as soon as one starts the meditation one can immediately have a picture of that object in one's mind, as the actual object of your meditative concentration. You are meditating upon a mental image in your mind.

Achieving a sharp clarity of image comes from concentration and familiarity with the object. The obstacle of forgetfulness or forgetting the instructions arises when we lose that image of the object in our mind. Now we know why the object that we use in the meditation practice is described as an internal object. As we discussed before, it is the mental image, which we bring into our mind. This mental image is the actual object upon which we meditate. When meditating we should try to think that since the object is something within our mind, it is important to see that object as inseparable from our mind, as much as possible. As we focus on it we should feel as if we are merging with that object, and dissolving ourselves into it.

In the next teaching we shall talk about the remedy to the fault of forgetting the instructions, which is mindfulness.

To compulsory question for the next written test is to explain a verse from one of Lama Tsong Khapa's prayers. Roughly translated it is a verse which says "The meditative concentration that tames the mind is such that if mind can be made as stable and motionless as mountain, when released it

