

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་ལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



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422.331.212.2 Forgetfulness (cont)

We finished the last teaching at the topic of forgetfulness as an obstacle to calm abiding. Forgetfulness occurs when the meditation object is lost as the object of mindfulness, and in order to counteract it, we have to apply mindfulness.

For successful calm abiding meditation the most important thing is recognising mindfulness and alertness, and the two main obstacles to mindfulness which are mental sinking and excitement. It is said that there is no hope of making any progress without a good knowledge and practise of mindfulness and alertness to counteract mental sinking and excitement.

Regarding the meaning of mindfulness, Asanga says in his text *The Compendium of Metaphysics*¹ that mindfulness is the process of familiarising the mind with an object which is already known to one's mind.

Characteristics Of Mindfulness

Mindfulness has three characteristics

1. The first characteristic concerns the object of mindfulness, which must be something which is already known to one and which one has seen before. For instance, the object of calm abiding that one has chosen, whether it is a visual object or some idea, must be well known beforehand. Applying mindfulness means we are trying to familiarise our mind with an object, which we have already seen before.

2. The second characteristic concerns the mode of apprehension of mindfulness. This is the ability to remember the object continuously, in the sense of holding it in the mind continuously. For example someone who is very hungry or starving, has constant thoughts of food. Having mindfulness means the apprehension of the object is always present in your mind. It does not mean remembering when you think about it, or when someone reminds you.

In relation to the practice of mindfulness Lama Tsong Khapa said in his Lam Rim text, *The Great Exposition to the Stages of the Path*, that practising mindfulness does not just mean your ability to remember what is being taught to you by the gurus. Rather, with mindfulness your mind is always tied to the object or to the instructions, so that it is actually holding the object continuously. Losing the object from the mind is an indication of the disintegration of that mindfulness. In other words if one

is influenced by distractions, then that is losing mindfulness.

Lama Tsong Khapa gives further instructions about the manner of applying the mindfulness. He says that it means that prior to the meditation you must familiarise yourself with the object. Then when you engage in the meditation initially you recognise (or recall) the object. From that point on the only thought that you have is the object of mindfulness, as if your mind is tied to the object.

The true practice of mindfulness means sustaining the same continuation of that initial mind, without allowing any distracting thought. The application of mindfulness continues with the same intensity of mind being focused on the object throughout the mindfulness practice.

3. The third characteristic of mindfulness is concerned with the function of mindfulness, which is that your mind is not distracted away from your given object by any other objects.

Mental Factors

If we examine our mind when it is focused on a specific object with single-pointed concentration, we can understand how our mind operates, because we can see how the various parts of the mind perform their own special functions.

That part of the mind, which enables it to stay on the object is called concentration. Concentration is the mental factor which accompanies all the mental states, and it allows us to focus on whatever object we have in our mind, and to stay on that object.

Mindfulness is the mental factor, which enables us to sustain that focus.

Intelligence or discriminating wisdom is the mental factor, which has the function of investigation. With mindfulness one holds the object in the mind, and discriminating wisdom enables one to monitor whether there are any distractions or obstacles occurring in the meditation. An element of this discriminating wisdom is alertness. If you have alertness then you have the ability to detect whether there is any fault arising in your meditation.

The Analogy Of Taming A Wild Elephant

The analogy of taming a wild elephant is often used to explain taming the mind. The Scriptural sources are Bhavaviveka's text *The Heart Of The Middle Way*², and Kamalashila's text *The Stages Of Meditation*.

We have discussed this analogy at various times in the

¹ Ed. The title corrected by the translator during editing. The actual quote is, “[Memory is] something that functions so as not to allow the mind to forget a thing with which it has been made familiar”

² Ed. Title amended during editing

past, so in short you think of how a wild elephant can be fully tamed and disciplined. To tame a wild elephant it needs to be initially tied with a very strong rope or chain to a very firm pole or tree. Then the trainer takes control of the elephant, trying to discipline and teach it. If the elephant is not listening or not obeying, it might be punished by being hit on the head with a very sharp metal hook. By doing this the trainer can fully control and discipline this wild elephant.

Here we also have to think, as Shantideva described in great detail in his text, of the damage the elephant can do if it is not brought under control. Shantideva said that the damage caused by an uncontrolled mind is far greater than what a mad elephant can do. Also you have to think that just as there are advantages in the elephant being tamed, because it can be used for many different purposes, likewise there are many advantages in having our own mind fully tamed.

Regarding the way the analogy is used, according to Bhavavevika,

- the pole to which the elephant is tied is likened to the object of the meditation to which our mind needs to be tied
- the rope with which we tie the elephant is mindfulness
- the metal hook which is used to discipline the elephant is like alertness in meditation
- the mad elephant itself is likened to our untamed mind
- the trainer who disciplines the elephant is ourselves trying to control and discipline our mind.

According to Karmalashila in *The Stages Of Meditation*, one must tie the mind of the elephant with the rope of the mindfulness and alertness to the pole. Here the rope is likened to both mindfulness and alertness.

Bhavavevika compares alertness with the metal hook, whereas according to Karmalashila alertness is compared to the rope used to tie the elephant. Lama Tsong Khapa makes the comment that even though these two masters explain the analogy in slightly different ways, there is absolutely no contradiction. Just as mindfulness is the most important factor in tying the mind to the object, so alertness has the same function of keeping the mind on the object. The only difference, he said, is that mindfulness is a direct means of tying the mind with the object, whereas alertness is an indirect means.

With alertness in meditation you are able to detect whether any fault or obstacle such as mental sinking or excitement has arisen, or is even near to arising. With alertness you will know if there are any possible faults in your meditation, and be able to apply the antidote to overcome the fault, which then allows the continuation of mindfulness of the object in your meditation.

To summarise, we have discussed how mindfulness is qualified by three characteristics. These are the object of meditation which is something which is known to one, the mode of apprehension which is not forgetting the object, and the function of mindfulness which is not being distracted from the meditation object by any other objects. Lama Tsong Khapa said that if you want to achieve single-pointed concentration there is no other

means apart from applying mindfulness.

We shall stop tonight's teaching here. Next week we shall continue with mental sinking and excitement, which is the third fault or obstacle. Of the five obstacles or faults of meditation we have finished the first two, and of the eight remedies we have finished the first five. The first obstacle of laziness is overcome by applying the first four remedies, which are faith, aspiration, joyous effort and pliancy. The second obstacle is forgetting the instructions, and the remedy for that is mindfulness.

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

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