

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

Commentary by the Venerable Geshe Doga

Translated by Sandup Tsering

ལྷོ་ལམ་རིམ་རྒྱུ་གྲོལ་ལག་བཅུངས།



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Cultivate the motivation of wishing to achieve the state of buddhahood to benefit all sentient beings. Then think that it is out of this motivation that you are receiving these teachings, and that you will put them into practise to calm your mind.

We have discussed the two main obstacles of meditation - excitement and mental sinking - and how each can be divided into coarse and subtle forms. We also discussed how we have to apply alertness, because it is by applying alertness that we are able to identify these two faults if they occur. However it is said that if neither fault is present there is no need to apply alertness. Indeed applying alertness when neither mental sinking nor excitement is present is itself a fault.

422.331.212.4 Not Applying The Antidote

ཉེས་པ་བཞི་པ་གཉེན་པོ་འདུ་མི་བྱེད་པ།

If through alertness you identify the presence of excitement or mental sinking, and you do not apply the antidote to counteract these two faults, then it is said that this is the greatest fault in meditation.

The antidote to this fault of not applying the antidote is mental intention. Regarding this, Asanga in his *Compendium of Knowledge* says that mental intention is a type of mental factor which directs the mind towards its object, and which can be virtuous, non-virtuous or indifferent.

Five Omnipresent Mental Factors¹

It is important to have some understanding of the different types of mental factors which accompany our mind or consciousness. Such knowledge is also important for an understanding of topics like karma.

As we have briefly mentioned in previous teachings, each of the consciousnesses must have five mental factors called the Five Omnipresent Mental Factors in order to function. They are:

1. Feeling (tso-wa) which experiences the object as pleasurable, painful or neutral.
2. Discrimination (du-she) which enables this mind to discern the specific characteristics of the perceived object, and to discriminate between that object and other objects.
3. Intention (sem-pa) which directs the mind to the object.
4. Mental engagement (yi-la che-pa) which directs the mind to the particular object of observation.
5. Contact (reg-pa) which serves as the basis for the mind to experience the object. For instance when the

consciousness, its object and the sense organs all come together there is contact, and then you can experience that particular object.

Mental intention as a mental factor

Here we are specifically talking about the mental factor called mental intention (sem-pa). Its job is to drive the mind towards its object. All mental consciousnesses, whether virtuous, non-virtuous or indifferent, engage with their respective objects, and what causes the mind to engage with an object is the mental factor of intention.

Karma is another example of the mental factor of intention. Sometimes karma is divided into two: mental karma and physical karma. The difference is that mental karma is the mental intention which serves as the motivation to undertake the action, whereas physical karma technically refers to the mental factor of intention which coincides with the actual physical action taking place. Karma can be virtuous, non-virtuous, and neutral or indifferent depending on whether the driving mental intention is virtuous, non-virtuous, or neutral.

How To Apply The Antidote

The remedy of applying the antidote is generating a mental intention, the function of which is to direct the mind towards its object. Through alertness we recognise that our meditative concentration has the fault of either mental sinking or excitement. The first thing to do is to think of overcoming the fault, and to redirect the mind towards the object. That is mental intention. This mental intention is not actually counteracting mental sinking or excitement, rather it is reminding, or motivating the mind to apply the antidote to mental sinking and excitement.

The Actual Antidote To Mental Sinking

What is the actual antidote to mental sinking and excitement? If there is recognition that subtle mental sinking for instance, has arisen, and knowledge of why that fault arises then the antidote to remove that fault is very simple. As we discussed in the last teaching the cause of subtle mental sinking is that there is not enough tightness in the mode of apprehension of the object of meditation. In other words the indication of subtle mental sinking is that the mode of apprehension of the object is a bit too loose.

Another sign of subtle mental sinking is that even though there is stability in one's meditative concentration, and the mind is still focussed on the object with some degree of clarity, there is no intensity in the clarity of the object of observation. This happens because of the looseness in the mode of apprehension of the observed object. Therefore it is very clear that to

¹ From Lati Rinpoche, *Mind In Tibetan Buddhism*, p. 36. Inserted by translator Sandup Tsering during the editing process.

remove the fault of subtle mental sinking one has to increase the tightness of the mode of apprehension of the object. There is no need to replace the object, or to take a break from one's meditation session.

Making progress in meditation and knowing what one should and should not do can only be learnt by actually engaging in this meditation practice. It is only through experience that you can gain some idea of how to prevent the faults of mental sinking and excitement. The fault of mental sinking arises when we are too relaxed in our meditation, and the mode of apprehension of the object is too loose. As a result our level of mental activity is reduced. At the same time it is said that if we hold the object too tightly, then this can lead to the fault of excitement. So therefore we need to learn how to moderate the degree of tightness and looseness in our mode of apprehension of the observed object. Only by experiencing these faults and experimenting with their antidotes over and over again can you gain the knowledge of how to moderate of the degree of tightness and looseness in the mode of apprehending the object; and be able to recognise the fault before it even arises. The Scriptures use the example of tuning the string of a guitar: only when the strings are not too tight and not too loose, can they produce the right sound. It is something one has to try in order to know.

The famous Indian master Chandragomin recognised how difficult, and even discouraging, it is learning to maintain the right level of concentration so that the object is neither too tight nor too loose. When the object is too loose and you try to tighten it up by exerting more effort this becomes a cause for excitement to arise. Likewise when you try to relax and loosen your apprehension of the object it can bring mental sinking. It just shows that the only way to find out the right level of looseness and tightness of the mode of apprehension is through continuous meditation practice.

In order to overcome the subtle form of mental sinking which is caused by having too loosen a mode of apprehension, one should try to tighten the mode of apprehension. It is said if, having tried this, one notices there is not enough intensity in the clarity of the object, then it is most likely that the mental sinking being observed is the coarse form of mental sinking.

In the text called the *Heart Of The Middle Way* it says that when discouragement (Tibetan 'shum-pa') should be overcome by broadening, or widening one's mental scope, and if there is mental sinking then this can be overcome by uplifting the mind. With reference to this Lama Tsong Khapa also commented on the difference between discouragement and mental sinking, and made the further comment that discouragement occurs when the mind is too inwardly withdrawn, whereas mental sinking arises in meditation when there is a sign of the slackening of the mode of apprehension of the object.

As we have just discussed first we have to recognise the meditation fault through alertness. If, for instance, it is subtle mental sinking the indication of that fault is not enough tightness in one's meditation, so try to impose more tightness. If this does not overcome the fault, it is an indication that the fault is not in fact subtle mental sinking but may be coarse mental sinking or something else.

It is said that the cause of coarse mental sinking is mainly the discouragement which occurs when our mind is too inwardly withdrawn. Therefore to overcome this fault of discouragement one needs to widen or broaden the mind while remaining in meditation. All the preceding methods to counteract faults in meditation are applied without giving up the object of the meditation.

If despite all this one cannot overcome the fault of mental sinking, then one has to disengage the mind from the meditation object, take a break from the meditation, and apply some other means to overcome these problems.

It is easy to become discouraged and this is one of the causes of mental sinking. If this occurs one has to apply a cause to bring some joy, and a positive feeling to delight the mind. To refresh and rejuvenate the mind the suggested meditation topics are contemplating either the precious human rebirth, or the benefits of listening to the teachings, or the qualities of the three objects of Refuge, or the qualities of one's spiritual guru, or the benefit of bodhicitta mind. Engaging in contemplation on these topics, it says, is just like a refreshing splash of water on your face when you are feeling physically lethargic. These meditations can refresh your mind in the same way, and you can then start the meditation again.

The scriptural source for these instructions about overcoming the fault of mental sinking is the text *Heart Of The Middle Way*. In it Indian master Bhavaviveka says that if the mind is too withdrawn or too discouraged, then one should exert some effort in contemplating, for instance, the benefits of one's meditation in order to lighten the mind. Shantideva said in his text *Compendium Of Instruction* that to overcome a discouraged mind one has to meditate on the thought of joyfulness, which can then bring about positive states of mind.

If having refreshed the mind, one returns to the same meditation with the same object, and the fault of mental sinking still remains, then one has to rely upon special instructions from one's teacher to overcome the fault.

One such special instruction or technique to overcome mental sinking is a meditation where you think of your mind as a white drop at the centre of your heart; the drop is about the size of a small bird's egg. In the meditation think that with your exhalation you are pushing the white drop up through your body to your crown, where it exits going higher and higher into space, before vanishing there.

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

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