

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་བཅུང་བ།



28 March 2000

Generating a bodhicitta mind at the beginning of a practice has the benefit of planting the seed of bodhicitta in your mind. There is also the benefit of remembering the qualities of the Buddhas. You have just cultivated the bodhicitta motivation so try to let it arise again, from the depth of your heart wishing for the state of Buddhahood, so as to be able to enlighten all beings, and also generate the motivation to put the teachings into practice.

422.331.213.5 Controlling the Mind

དུལ་བར་བྱེད་པ།

We are up to the fifth stage of mental abiding which is Controlling The Mind. During this stage of mental abiding joyous effort is generated, and one engages in meditative concentration by remembering all the qualities of single-pointed concentration. Any mental sinking or excitement that arises in one's meditation practice is overcome by remembering the benefits of concentration. Through remembering these qualities, one generates joyous effort and re-engages in the concentration. This explanation is based on Lama Tsong Khapa's lam rim text, *Great Exposition to the Stages of the Path*.

The text *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand* explains the fifth abiding by saying that at the fourth mental abiding there is a great danger of subtle mental sinking arising, because in that stage the mind is too inwardly withdrawn. Therefore in the fifth stage the meditator overcomes that danger of mental sinking by contemplating the benefits of concentration, and by strengthening **the force of alertness**. Through alertness and mindfulness of the benefits of concentration the mind is then uplifted, and so in this way the meditator overcomes subtle mental sinking.

422.331.213.6 Pacifying

ཞི་བར་བྱེད་པ།

The sixth mental abiding is called Pacifying. What are being pacified are the mental distractions, which are the main cause of the fault of excitement in meditation. Pacifying also refers to pacifying the thought of not liking concentration, or losing interest in concentration as a result of mental distractions arising in the mind. In this sixth stage the meditator has pacified all these obstacles.

In the fifth mental abiding of Controlling the Mind, the meditator is uplifted through the force of alertness, and by reflecting on the qualities of concentration, in order to overcome the fault which arises from a too inwardly withdrawn mind. However at the same time it is said that if the mind is uplifted too much, then there is the danger of the subtle form of excitement arising. Therefore in the sixth stage the meditator particularly generates **the force of alertness** to overcome this danger.

We can also differentiate between the various mental abidings in terms of mental sinking and excitement. For instance it is said that up to the fourth mental abiding there are the coarse forms of both mental sinking and excitement. When the fifth mental abiding is reached one is free from the gross or coarse form of both mental sinking and excitement. However although in the fifth stage there is still the danger of subtle mental sinking arising, this danger does not exist in the sixth mental abiding. In terms of the six forces, the fifth and the sixth mental abidings are achieved mainly by applying the force of alertness.

422.331.213.7 Completely Pacifying

རྣམ་པར་ཞི་བར་བྱེད་པ།

The seventh mental abiding is called Completely Pacifying. Lama Tsong Khapa's text, *The Great Exposition to the Stages of the Path*, says that what is pacified here are obstacles such as the desirous mind, the unhappy mind, the dull and sleepy minds and so forth. In the seventh mental abiding the meditator especially applies **the force of joyous effort** because the forces of mindfulness and alertness have been fully developed in the fifth and the sixth mental abidings respectively.

Compared to the previous two stages of mental abiding, in the seventh mental abiding, through especially applying the force of joyous effort the meditator is much more alert to mental sinking and excitement, and so is even able to overcome the subtle forms of both. Because the meditator joins the force of joyous effort to the fully developed forces of mindfulness and alertness, there is a very small chance of any mental sinking or excitement (even of the subtle form) arising.

In the seventh mental abiding the meditator generates the confidence that he or she is no longer likely to be overpowered by mental sinking or excitement. With this confidence, it is said that at this stage it is very unlikely that mental sinking or excitement will even arise. If they do, they are so weak that rather than overpowering the meditator, they are easily defeated by the concentration of the meditator. So even if any mental sinking or excitement arises there is no danger to concentration. Whereas at the fifth and sixth stages the meditator doubts whether their concentration can overpower mental sinking and excitement.

422.331.213.8 Single-Pointed Concentration

ཚེ་གཅིག་ཏུ་བྱེད་པ།

The eighth mental abiding is Single-Pointed Concentration, which is the ability to focus the mind on the object for as long as the meditator wishes. However it is said that this concentration in the eighth mental abiding is dependent upon the exertion of effort by the meditator. Of the six forces the seventh and the eighth mental abiding are achieved through **the force of joyous effort**. With effort the meditator is able to focus the mind on the object for as long as he or she wants, and in this eighth stage it is said that there is absolutely no danger that the enemies of mental sinking or excitement will arise.

When one reaches the eighth stage of mental abiding, both mental sinking and excitement have been progressively eliminated. So there is no need for the meditator to apply the force of mindfulness and alertness over and over again. Rather it is said that the only time the meditator needs to apply these forces is at the beginning of the meditation. However once the mind is placed on the object single-pointedly it remains there very effortlessly, and almost naturally. So there is no interruption by mental sinking and excitement. Of the four mental attentions, the type of mental attention you generate in the eighth stage is **uninterrupted attention**.

To differentiate the different mental abidings in terms of the four mental attentions it is said that [the first two mental abidings rely upon forceful attention], the five mental abidings from the third up to the seventh rely upon interrupted mental attention, which means that the concentration during those stages is interrupted by

mental sinking and excitement. The eighth mental abiding, however, relies upon uninterrupted mental attention because there is no interruption by mental sinking and excitement at all.

422.331.213.9 Abiding With Equanimity

མཉམ་པོར་འབྲེལ་བ།

The ninth mental abiding is Abiding With Equanimity, which is a mental state of concentration in which the meditator, without any effort, focuses the mind on the object for as long as he or she wishes. It is said that the ability to do this is mainly achieved through **the force of familiarity**. This ninth mental abiding is also called the 'single-pointed mind of the desire realm', as well as 'constructed calm abiding'.

Of the four mental attentions the ninth is characterised by effortless attention. So the obvious difference between the eighth and ninth mental abiding is whether the focusing of the mind on the object is achieved with, or without effort. The eighth mental abiding is single-pointed concentration with effort and the ninth one is without effort.

Is it literally without any effort at all? It is said that sentient beings cannot perform an action without any effort, as it is only a fully enlightened being who can perform an act without any effort. To clarify this question the commentary says that the need for effort is in the between sessions of the concentration. So our understanding of the eighth mental abiding is that it depends upon effort not only at the beginning, but the sustained continuation of that concentration also depends on effort. In other words in the eighth stage even after beginning the concentration, it is said the meditator needs to exert some effort now and then in order to maintain that single-pointed concentration.

In the ninth mental abiding however it is said that the only time where there is need to exert effort is at the beginning, and after that it is not necessary for the meditator to exert any effort at all to sustain the concentration. This is one way of clarifying this point. Another way of interpreting the meaning of 'effort' and 'without effort' is to differentiate between the eighth and the ninth concentrations in terms of the relative extent of effort.

The only additional qualities one needs to achieve to attain the state of calm abiding is the bliss of mental and physical pliancy. Of course the criteria of having actually achieved calm abiding will come later, but here all we need to know is that in the ninth mental abiding the meditator, without any effort, can focus the mind on the object as they wish. By being familiar with this single-pointed concentration, and effortlessly practising it over and over again then it is said that eventually one will experience the bliss of mental and physical pliancy. When one experiences that bliss, then it is said that calm abiding is achieved.

The lam rim commentary, *Liberation in the Palm of your Hand*, mentions how you can differentiate between these nine mental abidings¹.

- The difference between the first and the second abiding is in terms of how long you focus or stabilise the mind on the object.
- The second and the third abidings are differentiated in terms of the duration of the mental distractions which arise.
- The third and the fourth differ in terms of the occurrence of losing the object.
- The fourth and the fifth are differentiated in terms of the arising of gross mental sinking.
- The difference between the fifth and sixth is whether you have any doubt with regard to subtle mental sinking arising. In addition, in the sixth mental abiding the extent to which even subtle excitement arises is very low compared with the fifth abiding.
- The sixth and seventh are differentiated in terms of whether one should be concerned about whether subtle mental sinking and excitement has arisen.
- With the seventh and eighth abidings there is the question of whether there is any mental sinking and excitement at all.

- For the eighth and ninth abidings the difference is whether it is with, or without effort.

We have now covered the first three main headings: the first is 422.331.211 The Suitable Conditions To Gather To Achieve Calm Abiding; the second major heading is 422.331.212 The Actual Means Of Achieving Calm Abiding which concerns the five obstacles and the eight antidotes. The third major heading is 433.331.213 By Relying On The Actual Means How To Achieve These Nine Mental Abidings, which we have just finished.

The fourth heading is 422.331.214 The Six Forces².

Next week is discussion week. Geshe-la encourages everyone to attend and to participate in the discussions. The compulsory question for the written test it will be to explain the meaning of this quotation from Maitreya's text *The Ornament of Sutra*. The proper translation is

Any place where the wise practise
Has excellent provisions; is a wholesome place;
Is a healthy location; has noble friends at hand;
And has facilities to satisfy the yogi.

If you study the first condition which concerns suitable place you will not need to ask Geshe-la or any other teacher about the place you should choose to do your practice!

Geshe-la: Can you remember the six suitable conditions?

Student: Suitable place?

Geshe-la: That is included in the first condition. You have to consider the most suitable conditions, which should be present in terms of the place or the environment where you do the meditation practice. When it says suitable place in addition to the actual environment it includes all the other necessary resources such as easy accessibility, easy access of food and having good friends and so on.

The second condition is having less desire but more contentment. This condition is basically asking what suitable conditions you should possess from your own side. You have to think that from your own side it is important to have minimum desire and have a very contented mind. From your own side if you do not give up the various daily activities you have not met the suitable conditions for you to pursue this calm abiding.

It's good to study the first heading about suitable conditions thoroughly. You should not think that you only have study this if your interest is to achieve calm abiding. In fact this topic is something which is essential and very beneficial to learn if you are to pursue any meditation practice. Learning this topic also helps to both focus one's mind, and implant some seeds in the mind.

You don't have to feel tense, because we are all fortunate beings. Geshe-la says a fortunate being is someone who is not deprived of the opportunity of Dharma, or of what the world can offer. So we are doubly fortunate.

Sometimes fortunate beings are bodhisattvas, which state we may not have attained. A part of the initiation ceremonies includes the question "Who are you?" to which you reply "I am a fortunate one." So in a sense you are saying that you are a bodhisattva. Then the next question is "What do you seek?" to which you reply "I seek great bliss." So in that context when you say that you are a fortunate person you are implying "I am a bodhisattva". Geshe-la is saying we are not deprived of what the world can offer, so have tea and enjoy yourself!

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
Edited by Adair Bunnnett and Alan Molloy

¹ *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*, Rev Edition, 1993, Wisdom Publications, page 671

² *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand* calls them The Six Forces

