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# The Condensed Graduated Path to Enlightenment

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We can meditate for a little while as usual. Sit in a relaxed and proper meditation posture.

As we always say, when you visualise a meditation object in the space in front of you, you should not visualise it too high or too low, but straight ahead. While it should be visualised as brilliant, it should also possess a certain heaviness. Visualising the object as being luminous and brilliant overcomes the problem of mental sinking, while visualising the object having a certain heaviness and weight overcomes the obstacle of mental excitement.

Initially, one needs to be introduced to the meditation object. When we have visualised the object in the prescribed way, we then have to keep our mental focus on it with mindfulness. At the same time, while we keep the object stably in mind with mindfulness, another part of the mind investigates whether our mindfulness is holding onto the object properly, or whether there is some disturbance or wandering. If one finds that there is some mental wandering or distraction, one has to again return the mind completely to the focal object.

Engaging in this process of mental introspection while keeping the mind on the object with mindfulness is said to be a very good method for beginners to improve their mindfulness. It strengthens one's mindfulness.

So, while the mind is placed within the object with mindfulness, one simultaneously investigates one's meditation with another part of the mind – how mindfulness is holding on to the object; whether there is mental distraction, whether the mind has already, for example, partially gone away from the object; whether there has been some disturbance; or whether the mind is just about to wander away from the object.

Doing such mental introspection when one is meditating single-pointedly on the object with mindfulness greatly facilitates one's single-pointed focus. It also helps prevent the mind from wandering away from the object – if we don't perform this mental introspection, the mind usually wanders away from the object and we will not be aware of it. We will only become aware of it after it has happened, and then it is too late. So, here we are investigating whether the mind is getting ready to wander off from the object or whether it has already begun to wander.

By meditating in such a manner, the agitated and disturbed mind will calm down and subside. If one asks oneself what is the benefit of meditating in such a way,

this is the benefit.

Sitting in a proper meditation posture, try to be comfortable and relaxed. Our present meditation object is the coming and going of the breath. When you place the mind on the coming and going of the breath, as we mentioned last time, we have to find a balance between not holding onto the mind too tightly or being too relaxed. We have to find the correct middle way, where we hold onto the object with the right amount of strength, the mind being neither too relaxed nor too tight. In this way, place the mind single-pointedly on the coming and going of the breath, after having collected it internally and having let go of the external objects. (*Pause for meditation*)

## How to guide with the actual instructions

### 4.1. The way of relying on the spiritual friend who is the root of the path

#### 4.1.2. A brief presentation of the way to strive

##### 4.1.2.1. The actual way of striving

##### 4.1.2.1.2. What to do in the time between meditation sessions

Last time, we started with the outline that deals with how to act during the post-meditation period – in between meditation sessions – and we covered the first point, restraining the doors of the senses.

#### Acting with Introspection

Now, we come to the next point – acting according to mental introspection. As it says in the *Introduction to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*, 'at the times of the actions of body and mind, one should investigate one's mind repeatedly.'

Mental introspection is a type of discriminative awareness with which one can discern whether the action one is engaging in, or is about to engage in, is appropriate or not. This is the function of mental introspection – investigating one's actions of body and mind to discern whether the action is appropriate or not. If it is appropriate, one engages in it, but if it is inappropriate, one either stops the action or does not engage in it from the beginning. If one does this, one will have acted with introspection.

Initially, one becomes aware of the non-virtuous action with mindfulness. Then, mental introspection analyses and investigates that non-virtuous action; and then, with conscientiousness, one prevents oneself from following that action.

So, with mindfulness, one trains oneself to be aware of the virtuous actions. They are the focal object. Introspection investigates whether one's actions of body, speech and mind are still focused on a virtuous object, or whether they have become non-virtuous. If one realises through one's introspection that one's actions have become non-virtuous, one reverses from that path using conscientiousness. This is how one relies on mental introspection and mindfulness in one's practice.

The great Bodhisattva, Shantideva, said: 'I prostrate to anybody who controls their actions with mindfulness and

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introspection', because mindfulness and introspection are really the only tools with which we are able to control our actions of body, speech and mind effectively. Mindfulness is mindful of the virtuous objects and the virtuous actions, so that one can keep oneself on a virtuous path. On the other hand, one needs mental introspection to check up on the mindfulness, and determine whether it is still properly functioning, or whether one has become distracted and one's actions have become non-virtuous. So, one needs both mindfulness and introspection. If one has found through introspection that one's actions have become non-virtuous, one has to reverse from that path.

Being engaged in the pursuit of self-improvement – which includes on the one side, abandoning faults, and on the other side, generating and increasing qualities – we will be only successful if we use mindfulness and introspection.

As the great Atisha said, 'One controls one's doors of the sense powers with mindfulness, introspection and conscientiousness, and one should do so three times during the day and three times during the night, repeatedly'. For example, in the morning, we should first investigate our mental state – whether it is a positive and conducive mental state, or whether it is negative and harmful. We recognise this through introspection and mindfulness, then rectify the situation. But the power of that change may already have been dissipated by lunchtime! So, again, at lunchtime, one investigates one's mind with introspection, and again corrects any possible disturbances that might have arisen. It's the same in the evening. So, as Atisha said, one should repeatedly, three times a day and three times at night, investigate one's mind with introspection and correct one's actions with mindfulness, introspection and conscientiousness.

Nobody wishes to engage in negative actions and have negative states of the mind. Therefore, it is desirable from one's own point of view to employ mindfulness, introspection and conscientiousness in the prescribed manner. Then, as we purify our continuum, others will perceive that we have this purity about us; it is something that we will have, and that will also be recognised by others.

The great Atisha said that watching the mind is the best method we can use, and having concern for the welfare of others is the best quality we can possess. Without watching the mind, there is no way that we will be able to improve ourselves, because if we don't watch the mind, we will not even be aware of what is going on within it.

To get rid of our faults, we need to be able to look at the mind, recognise the faults that are there, and then lessen them. This process of self-improvement – where on the one hand, one tries to generate new qualities and increase one's qualities, and on the other hand, one tries to get rid of the more unsuitable mental states – cannot start if one doesn't look at the mind in the first place. To implement this process of acceptance and rejection, one needs to look at one's mind. Then, when implementing this process of self-improvement and self-purification, one needs to rely

on mindfulness, introspection and conscientiousness. These three are excellent tools with which one can protect one's mind.

My point is that mindfulness and introspection may become one's refuge – on the one hand being mindful of the virtuous objects, virtuous actions, virtuous mental states, and on the other hand, using introspection to discern whether one is still on the proper path or not, whether one's actions are still appropriate or not, virtuous or not. With these two, one can protect oneself excellently.

Acting with mental introspection is very important. If one wants to improve oneself, one needs to look into one's mind and be able to recognise one's faults. There is no need to get angry when one sees that one has faults. Normally, if somebody else points out our faults, we tend to get angry. But here, in this case, there is nobody else pointing out our faults; we recognise them ourselves. So, there is no need to get angry. There is a great purpose in recognising one's faults, because if one desires self-improvement, if one desires to change one's situation, one needs to improve one's mind. To be able to improve one's mind, one needs to first recognise what it is that harms the mind. So we need to be able to look at our faults first, and then we can go about changing what needs to be changed.

That's enough on that point regarding mental introspection. Lama Tsong Khapa's Great Exposition on the Graduated Path contains much more on this; but according to this text (The Condensed Graduated Path), that's where we can leave it. Next time, we will go through to point of how one should eat appropriately. Since we don't like to go without food, we need to know how to eat properly; and we will also discuss how to go about sleeping properly.

Especially for ordained practitioners, the Buddha, in his kindness, explained in very great detail how to go about the different activities of life, such as eating, sleeping, lying down, getting up from a sitting position – even how to use a knife and how to properly cut up vegetables, and so forth. The Buddha explained how to go about all of these activities properly, just as a parent would explain such things to a child.

Do you have some questions?

*Question:* What is the first stage we aim at? Is it calm abiding?

*Answer:* The initial objective varies from person to person. The ultimate objective, from a Mahayana point of view, is to attain a state that has completed all qualities and is free from all faults. That is the ultimate objective.

The more immediate aims depend on the different practitioners. To give you a few examples, there are some practitioners who want to attain rebirth in the higher god realms of the form and formless realms, and in order to achieve this aim, they meditate on calm abiding and attaining the different form and formless absorptions.

The primary aim of other practitioners is to have a happy human rebirth in the next life, where they're rich,

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beautiful, successful and so forth, and they accumulate merits towards that aim.

Then there are practitioners who want to get out of cyclic existence altogether; recognising that this is not possible without the union of calm abiding and special insight, they engage first in the practice of calm abiding, and then work towards attaining special insight on the basis of calm abiding. Then, there are the Mahayana practitioners, who want to attain liberation not only for themselves personally, but also for all sentient beings.

There are also other types of practitioners, who may not necessarily believe in the existence of past and future lives, but just meditate to have some calm and peace in this life. Some people say, 'All these different aspects of the path – the profound and the extensive aspects – are a little bit too much for me. I just want to have a calm and peaceful mind in this life. My mind is disturbed by different disturbing emotions and mental states, so I just want to pacify my mind in this life.' Quite often, this type of practitioner will then generate very strong faith in the Dharma after having been able to pacify their mind with the Dharma. They generate very strong faith in it and become very stable Dharma practitioners, further widening their motivation and practice.

It is not enough that one has intelligence to be able to understand the Dharma intellectually – to generate some faith, one also needs to have some experience of the Dharma.

*Question/comment:* Geshe-la says you experience what you practice. It really works – if you think about getting angry, and can see the impact on your family, that thinking is not very far away from you and stays with you when the anger comes up again – it is easier to control.

*Answer:* If, through one's meditation practice, one experiences a lessening of anger, this will generate faith in the meditation practice. Also, others can see that as a benefit of your meditation.

For ourselves, seeing the effect of our meditation practice can generate stronger faith in other aspects of the Dharma, such as the profound relationship of cause and effect – that wealth comes from generosity, that a higher rebirth comes from morality, etc. Even though we cannot directly see that wealth comes from generosity, and a higher rebirth from morality, by having had this experience that the Dharma really works, we will generate faith in other aspects of the Dharma that are normally too subtle for us to see directly; we generate faith into them, even though one cannot see them directly, because of our experience that the Dharma works.

This type of faith is faith generated through reason. It won't be a faith that is unfounded on reason.

*Question (paraphrased):* In our society, we are constantly seeing suffering all the time, through images on television, and so forth. We may start to think that these images just don't bother us any more because they are everywhere. Is that attitude something to worry about?

*Answer:* A person who doesn't worry is a happy person. If you don't worry, you are probably better off. If you see somebody who is suffering and you worry about their suffering, that neither conducive for yourself nor for the other person. What is needed is that you help the other person on the basis of compassion.

As said at the beginning, focus the mind internally and place it single-pointedly on the mantra of Shakyamuni Buddha.

TAYATHA OM MUNI MUNI MAHA MUNAYE SOHA

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