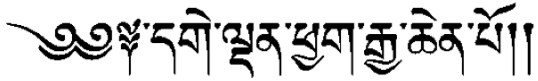

Mahamudra: The Great Seal of Voidness



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17 March 2009

By not allowing the mind to be distracted externally, bring your attention inwards and contemplate the following motivation: 'For the benefit of all sentient beings I need to achieve enlightenment; for that purpose I will listen to the Dharma and put it into practise well'.

3. How to develop mindfulness¹

In accordance with the outline in the commentary composed by Kyiwo Tsang Lobsang Monlam, there is the general presentation of how to develop mindfulness and the particular explanation.

3.1. How to develop mindfulness in general

What is concentration?

As explained previously, the concentration to be developed here has two attributes: when focusing on the object it has intensity and clarity; and is able to unwaveringly focus single-pointedly on the object. It is explained that the two main obstacles obstruct the development of each of the two attributes of concentration. Excitement is the obstacle to developing unwavering single-pointed concentration, whereas laxity is the obstacle to the intensity and clarity of focus on the object.

As explained in Kyiwo Tsang's commentary, if one is to develop single-pointed concentration one must be able to clearly identify the two main obstacles. It would be totally misleading to assume that one is meditating to develop concentration without having properly identified these two obstacles. If one is not able to identify the two obstacles, it will not be possible to achieve the desired goal of developing single-pointed concentration.

As explained earlier, the two main tools for developing single-pointed concentration are mindfulness and introspection, (some translations use vigilance). It is important to identify these tools properly in order to apply them in meditation. As explained previously, it is very important to identify what concentration is as well, because it will be difficult to develop concentration without being specific about what kind of mental state concentration is.

Concentration is a mental factor. With every moment of consciousness or primary mind, there are five mental factors that accompany the mind at all times. These are called the omnipresent or ever present mental factors. They are feeling, discrimination, intention, contact, and attention, also translated as mental engagement.

The five omnipresent mental factors

It is quite important to identify these five omnipresent mental factors as they accompany the mind at all times;

which is to say that at every moment of awareness these five mental factors are simultaneously present as well.

So every time we have awareness of any object it is always accompanied by **feeling**. The feeling that is present when the consciousness comes into contact with any object is due to the mental factor of feeling.

The ability to recognise the particular features of an object is said to be the workings of **discrimination** (some translations use recognition). This is basically the mental factor that identifies the specific characteristics of an object.

Intention is a particular mental factor that serves as the initiator, which moves the mind, so to speak, to the object. Intention works on a subtle level and is present every time you come into contact with an object.

Contact is the mental factor that causes the object, consciousness and sense faculty to come together to be aware of the object that is being perceived. So contact serves as the basis for feeling to arise.

The last omnipresent mental factor is called **attention**, or in some translations, mental engagement. When focusing on an object, the ability to maintain one's focus on the object for a period of time is called attention.

These mental factors are present for every instant that we are aware of any object, so they are called the five omnipresent mental factors. It is really very important to understand this. In Tibetan the word 'omnipresent' also has the connotation of 'all-pervading', which implies pervading all awareness. The five omnipresent mental factors are thus simultaneously present with all awareness.

The five object ascertaining mental factors

The next set of mental factors is called the five object ascertaining, or determining mental factors. According to the Vaibhashika Buddhist school the five object ascertaining mental factors are also present in every instant of awareness or consciousness. However other Buddhist schools explain that these five mental factors are particularly associated with virtuous states of mind, as by their nature they have an element of being virtuous. They are called the five ascertaining mental factors, for these five mental factors occur every time a consciousness ascertains an object.

The five object ascertaining mental factors are aspiration, belief or faith, mindfulness, wisdom, and concentration. I have just given you the list from memory, so you need to check whether it is correct or not. In my old age it is possible that I leave out or add on one or two, as I learnt all this at the age of seventeen and I am now seventy-four!

Understanding these five object ascertaining mental factors is also crucial, as they are indispensable if we are to meditate on a virtuous object. For example, in order to actually engage in any meditation one needs to have a strong **aspiration**.

Likewise one needs to have **faith** in the qualities and benefits of focusing on the object of meditation, otherwise one would not continue with the meditation.

¹ The actual heading number is 2.2.2.2.3.

Likewise, in order to develop single-pointed focus on the object one needs to develop the mental factor of **mindfulness**, which has the particular function of not allowing the object of focus to be forgotten. So, mindfulness plays the crucial role of maintaining one's focus on the virtuous object.

Wisdom is also indispensable, particularly the analytical wisdom that identifies and discerns whether the object to be focused on is virtuous one or not. Wisdom also identifies and discerns whether any obstacles are arising within oneself or not.

Next comes the mental factor called **concentration**. It is important that we don't mistake other mental factors such as mindfulness for concentration. Although the other four ascertaining mental factors do focus on the object they are not concentration, as concentration is a specific mental factor that does the job of focusing single-pointedly on the object. So, in accordance with the definition given in the text, *concentration is a mental factor that by its own power has the ability to focus unwaveringly on the object*.

The other mental factors such as aspiration, faith, mindfulness and wisdom also ascertain the object but it is not done through their own power. Whereas the specific mental factor called concentration is the mental factor that 'by its own power' focuses unwaveringly on the object. So concentration is a specific mental factor that has its own particular function and it is important that we properly identify it.

How the mental factors are concomitant with the primary mind

As explained in the texts on mind and mental factors, another point to understand is that these five object ascertaining mental factors are concomitant with the primary mind in five ways: they have the same object, same aspect, same time, same substance and same basis.

Same object: whatever object the primary mind focuses on, the accompanying mental factor also focuses on that same object. The primary mind cannot focus on one object while the secondary mind focuses on a separate one - they need to be concomitant in focusing on the same object.

Same aspect: whatever the aspect of the object that appears to the primary mind, it is the same aspect that also appears to the accompanying secondary minds. There cannot be different aspects of the same object that appear separately to the primary mind and secondary minds.

Same time: that the arising of a primary mind is simultaneous with the arising of the accompanying secondary minds. The primary mind and secondary minds don't occur at different times.

Same substance: when a particular primary mind is present then only the same concomitant mental factor is also present at that time (with the exception of an enlightened mind). For example, within the consciousness of a sentient being, there couldn't be two separate mindfulnesses occurring at the same time. Likewise there couldn't be two different aspirations or

two different faiths and so forth occurring at the same time, because they are of different substance.

Same basis: the basis of a primary mind and the basis of the accompanying secondary minds are the same - the bases of both primary minds and secondary minds are the sense powers or faculties. It cannot be the case that the secondary minds have a separate base. So whatever the primary mind is based upon, the accompanying secondary minds also have that same basis.

This explanation can also give a further understanding as to why the mental factors are called secondary minds. It is because the mental factors cannot function by themselves without depending on a primary mind; when focusing on an object they don't function on their own. In order to focus on an object the mental factors have to be associated with a primary mind. The primary mind is the main factor that allows cognition of any particular object to occur at any given time, and the accompanying secondary minds function alongside with that primary mind with their particular functions to fully perceive the object.

As explained in the teachings, if, for example, the primary mind is a virtuous one, then the secondary minds that accompany that particular primary mind are also virtuous. If the primary mind is non-virtuous then the accompanying mental factors are also non-virtuous. This is yet another point to be understood from this explanation.

All these points are important to understand for our practice of meditation. When we are trying to focus on a virtuous object we will notice for ourselves that as soon as a distracting non-virtuous state of mind arises, we immediately lose the focus on the virtuous object.

That also leads back the explanation made earlier, about the same substance, where it was explained that only one type of any particular secondary mind functions in conjunction with the primary mind. If it were the case that two different kinds of mindfulness could function at the same time, for example, then when the mind becomes mindful of a non-virtuous object, it could still be possible to maintain a focus on the virtuous object with the aid of the virtuous mindfulness. However because of the fact that two different types of mindfulnesses cannot occur at the same time, when we become mindful of a non-virtuous object we immediately lose the virtuous mindfulness. Then we become distracted and lose focus on the object of our meditation.

The details of the mind and mental factors as I have just presented come from the explanation given in the *Abhidharmakosa*. The presentation of mind and mental factors is also found in the text called *Compendium of Knowledge*, which was composed by Acharya Asanga. The presentation in this text is slightly different, so it is good to know that there are slightly different presentations of the mind and mental factors, particularly in relation to ascertaining the object and so forth. It is good to be aware of the different presentations so that one does not get confused when seeing a different explanation in a text.

The slight differences in explanation relate to the different terminology that is used for the concomitant factors and

there are also differences in relation to the beings of the desire realm having different concomitant factors.

3.2. How to develop mindfulness in particular

Then Kyiwo Tsang's commentary goes into explaining mindfulness in particular. As explained in the commentary, mindfulness has three attributes.

The three attributes of mindfulness

The first attribute is the **object of focus**; it has the same appearance as the object with which one has earlier familiarised oneself. In relation to mahamudra the object of focus is the mind itself, or initially an aspect of mind.

The second attribute is **how the object is ascertained**; the object is held by the mind without forgetting it.

The third attribute is in relation to its **function**. The particular function of mindfulness is not to waver or become distracted by anything else whilst focusing on the object. In particular the attribute of function is for the mind to not waver and become distracted by another object; rather the focus of the mind is to be kept completely on the object. This shows the importance of mindfulness in the development of concentration.

As explained in the commentary the part of the mind that continuously and single-pointedly focuses on the object is called concentration. The method that assists that to happen is mindfulness.

As explained further, the aspect which investigates or checks whether distractions are occurring or not is called introspection (some translations use vigilance). To use an analogy, when we are driving our focus would be mainly on the road ahead. However while we maintain our focus of the road ahead, one part of our mind is looking out for signs and other traffic signals. That is similar to the mind of introspection. While the mind is focused on the object another part of the mind is looking out for other factors occurring.

It is also extremely important to identify the mental factor called introspection or vigilance. As explained earlier, while the mind is focused single-pointedly on the object, one part of the mind, which serves as a guard, analyses and checks whether the mind has remained focused or not, and whether other obstacles are arising or not. The part of the mind that looks out for this is the particular function of introspection.

Initial contentment with the aspect of the object

As the commentary further explains, which I mentioned in another session, when an aspect of the mind becomes apparent in one's focus then one needs to be temporarily content with focusing just on that appearance. As beginners it is initially not possible to be able to completely identify the mind clearly and have a vivid appearance of the mind itself. So in meditating on the mind the beginner practitioner first lets go of all conceptual states of mind, and then applies the proper prerequisites to come to the state where a certain degree of clarity is apparent. At that stage, where the aspect of the mind is apparent, the meditator is satisfied with that appearance, remains focused on that, and continuously tries to maintain focus on that appearance of the mind.

While holding full attention and maintaining mindfulness on the object of focus, which is the appearance of the mind, one part of the mind remains vigilant, which is introspection. This is where one part of the mind investigates whether one's attention or focus is starting to lapse, or whether excitement is about to occur while just maintaining whatever appearance one has of the mind. With that continuity then the object, which is the mind itself, will gradually become clearer and clearer. Maintaining a continuous focus on the initial apparent appearance of the mind is referred to as the general application of mindfulness. This manner of using mindfulness is said to be specifically important for beginners of the practice.

As the author of this commentary Kyiwo Tsang specifies, the initial application of general mindfulness is a specific sound instruction for beginners who are developing concentration using the mind as the object. As specified here, when one has an apparent appearance of the mind in whatever aspect, one holds that in focus, continuously maintaining that focus while one part of the mind just observes or checks whether distractions are occurring or not. The emphasis is to keep continuous focus on the object itself. That is general mindfulness.

The two obstacles to developing mindfulness

As the commentary further explains, of the two obstacles to developing concentration, excitement and laxity, excitement is easier to identify. There is a grave danger of mistaking laxity for actual meditation. If one falls into the pitfall of being in a subtle state of laxity while assuming one is meditating, then that will be a cause the mind to just become duller and duller, and for ignorance to increase. Thus it is very important that we pay utmost attention to not allowing laxity to overtake our practice of meditation. The author uses a particular term here that meaning 'to not mistake a mere comfortable relaxed state as being a very good meditation state'. There is a great danger of that happening if one is not fully aware of the obstacles.

There are some students who have commented to me that having attempted to meditate for some time, it seems they have become duller. Then there are others who say that by meditating they seem to have even more discursive thoughts. According to the explanation in the Lam Rim, when one begins to meditate it is not that there are more discursive thoughts that occur; rather one is more able to identify the discursive mind.

Then the author explains that having clearly identified the difference between the two obstacles of excitement and laxity, we need to apply the appropriate antidotes when each of these occurs.

Excitement

Then the commentary identifies and explains excitement. Although excitement is a form of distraction, it is not called a distraction. That is because there is a difference between excitement and distraction. Excitement is a state of mind that is tainted with desire. It is desire that influences the mind to focus on an attractive object and thus distracts the mind from the meditation object.

Excitement is associated with desire, which is one of the delusions. Seeing another object as being attractive

distracts the mind from the object of meditation, thus it is an obstacle.

One needs the mind to be internalised while focusing on the internal object, and when excitement occurs it obstructs that inner focus of the mind, leading the mind to waver and focus externally. So excitement is clearly an obstruction to focusing on the internal object. The internal object can be understood quite literally, because of the fact that here the mind is the chosen object of focus, and the mind is an internal object. So here, when we talk about the internal object that one focuses on, we can understand that quite literally.

Nevertheless, as explained previously many times, whatever object one uses, when it comes to the point of actually focusing on the object, it is an internalised object that one has to focus on. Even when using an external object, it is the image of that object that one needs to focus on, and thus it is an internalised object. There are those who comment that while trying to meditate on a deity such as Vajrasattva the mind seems to become quite distracted or the visualisation can not be held within. If the focus is Vajrasattva visualised on top of one's crown then because it is seen as an external object that of course can hinder the mind from becoming internalised. With a proper understanding of the internal object, that fault will not occur.

For those who experience an externalised focus, for as long as one imagines Vajrasattva on top of one's crown and tries to remain focused just on that, then the mind will focus outwardly. Whereas, using the explanation given earlier, if one were to have a mental image of Vajrasattva internally, within one's own mind, then the mind will be able to settle down.

However when it comes to the point where one visualises nectar descending from the union point of the father and mother then, as the visualisation indicates, the nectar flows down through the top of one's crown. Again a complication may arise, so here you can use the external visualisation to visualise nectar descending.

In identifying what excitement is, one comes to understand that in order for the obstacle of excitement to occur it has to have the element of being distracted by a particular object of desire. Thus, when the mind is distracted by other objects through the influence of other delusions, such as anger or jealousy and so forth, that distraction is due to other delusions rather than excitement.

When the mind is influenced by other delusions to become distracted, not allowing the mind to be focused on the object, then that is called a deluded distraction. Specifically, within the mental factors there are the six root delusions and the twenty secondary delusions, and one of the twenty secondary delusions is called distraction. So when the mind is not focused on the object due to other delusions it is that particular mental factor that is taking place.

Such influence by delusions is called deluded distraction. However the mind can also be distracted by virtuous objects. Then it is a distraction but it is not a deluded distraction. For example, when focusing on the object there might be times when love or compassion is

generated at the same time that one is single-pointedly focusing on an object, which would still be a distraction. However in this case it would be a virtuous distraction rather than a deluded distraction. It is called a virtuous distraction because the mind is diverted towards a virtuous object.

Having explained the particular obstacle called excitement, we can go into the details of the next obstacle called laxity in our next session. The earlier part of the session covered the five omnipresent mental factors as well as the five object ascertaining mental factors, so it is good for you revise and try to do your homework on these mental factors, and if I were to quiz you in the next session you will be able to indicate what they are. If in revising and doing your homework you find that there were any mistakes in the presentation then you can correct me. However if my presentation is correct, then you can comply as per the tantric commitment 'just as you have instructed, I accept it all'.

*Transcribed from tape by Judy Mayne
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Edited Version*

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