



As usual let us sit in a comfortable relaxed posture and generate a positive motivation for receiving the teachings, such as 'In order to benefit all sentient beings by liberating them from all samsaric suffering, I need to achieve enlightenment myself. So for that purpose I will listen to the teaching and put it into practice well'.

Now we can do a few minutes of meditation. (*meditation*)

### **3.2. PARTICULAR MODES OF MAINTAINING MINDFULNESS**

#### **5. Maintaining mindfulness by allowing discursive thoughts to subside naturally (cont.)**

With this method we do not apply any specific technique to get rid of discursive thoughts when they arise, but just allow them to subside naturally, by seeing them as being in the nature of the mind, a part of the mind. For beginners there are six different techniques of settling the mind in this manner. Of these we have covered the first five.

The **sixth** is for example when cotton-wool falls to the ground it descends softly and gently. Similarly, when in the meditative state one must be sure that the mind is free from a manifest level of the three poisons as well as coarse excitement and laxity.

This method specifically relate to the ninth stage of the nine levels of concentration. That completes the list of all six methods, which was presented last week.

#### **Like a toddler**

This is a method that is particularly relevant for beginners. There are two simple ways of understanding the fourth technique (when a toddler looks at a temple, even though it observes the general beauty of the temple it does not focus on the finer details of the craftsmanship) as a method for developing concentration.

a. It indicates that when we first place our focus on the object, we do not try to go beyond whatever detail initially appears to us, and we don't make further investigations or try to refocus on particular characteristics or details of the object. Rather we should be satisfied with just focusing on whatever initial appearance we may have of the object. That will then enable us to maintain a continuity of focus on the object.

This was explained earlier in the auto-commentary. By not going into finer details the focus will be just like the toddler in the analogy, who does not look at the finer details of the craftsmanship, but is just in awe of the general beauty of the temple. So one way to understand this method is that when focusing on the object of meditation, we should be satisfied with the initial appearance whatever it is.

b. Another way to understand this method would be to take an aspect or appearance that can be easily brought to mind. This is for example, initially using a physical object to focus on. If we use something more physical as an object then, through our experience, we find that it's easier for the image of that object to be brought to mind. If the object is too subtle, then we will find that it's a bit more difficult to actually grasp the object. But if we use simpler objects that any of the five senses can relate to, it will be easier to get the mental image. For example, in relation to the eye sense, when something has been seen it is easy to bring the image of that object to mind. Thus, such an object would be deemed to be a suitable object for beginners. This is how it should be understood.

So we can see why this explanation is specifically stated as being an appropriate technique for beginners. Having given this further explanation I feel that the rest might be quite easily understood, and that we don't need much further explanation.

#### **Like the unobstructed sun**

The first technique, can be easily understood just from the explanation given in the auto-commentary:

Just as the sun which is unobstructed by the clouds is extremely bright and clear, similarly, the clear-like nature of mind must be free from conceptual attributes and not obstructed by laxity and excitement.

#### **Like a bird gliding in the sky**

The second method is like the great garuda who seemingly glides effortlessly through the sky. This relates specifically to the ninth stage of concentration, just prior to developing calm abiding. The ability to apply this method relates to a really high level of concentration, which has, as mentioned previously, the right measure of being neither too tight nor too loose. The analogy used here is that it is like a garuda or a bird that soars through the sky. Even though it seems to be effortlessly gliding some effort is still required to keep up its wings. It is able to do this when it reaches the right measure of height in its flight. Similarly when the meditator has reached the point of being able to focus on the object without too much strain, without being too tight or too loose, then the level of concentration will be such that they are able to keep a continuous and appropriate measure of focus on the object.

#### **Like a ship on the ocean**

The third method is also quite simple to understand. The analogy of a great ship on the ocean refers to the fact that even though the surface of the ocean may be rough, the bottom of the ocean remains calm. Similarly, even if there are some slight disturbances of concentration on the surface, one's focus should not stray away from the object.

#### **Like a bird in the sky leaving no trail**

Just as a bird does not leave any trace in its flight path, we try not to grasp at discursive thoughts when they arise as we focus on the object. Rather we just let them go and don't hold on to them, as that would hinder our focus.

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Then Kyiwo Tsang's commentary also makes the comment that these six methods of settling the mind are actually subsumed into the two main categories, which are the general techniques of placing mindfulness and the particular techniques of placing mindfulness. Kyiwo Tsang mentions that if we apply the earlier techniques well, then all of the methods just described will come about naturally, without having to make any extra effort. When we look into this and relate all of these techniques to the earlier explanations, we will find that this really is the case.

#### 4. The resultant appearance of the benefits

Kyiwo Tsang's commentary presents a fourth subdivision from an earlier category<sup>1</sup>, to explain the meaning of verse 24 of the root text. However the auto-commentary presents it just with this question:

If asked, what are the benefits of having meditated in such a way?

Having explained the general and specific methods of applying mindfulness, one can ask: 'what does one achieve from practicing these methods? What are the benefits that one derives from that?' With this rhetorical question the auto-commentary introduces an explanation of the meaning of the root text.

To explain this point more specifically, 'having meditated in such a way' relates to applying both the general and the specific methods of employing mindfulness in order to develop concentration. Thus it includes the development of concentration up until the ninth stage. So having applied mindfulness with general and specific methods, one reaches the ninth stage of concentration. The rhetorical question that is raised here is, 'What is the benefit then of having meditated in that way?' Presenting it in this way implies that one should clearly identify the result that is to be gained from having applied mindfulness in various ways to reach the ninth stage of concentration.

The result is presented in the following verse from the root text:

*24. You attain in your meditation a clear state of mind unobstructed by anything. Although this state of mind lacks any form or structure, and in this way is as bare as space, yet it is precisely on this mind, as on a mirror, that whatever arises to consciousness appears vividly.*

This verse clearly states that the benefit of having meditated in such a way is that the nature of the mind becomes apparent.

The auto-commentary explains the meaning of this verse:

As a result of meditating in this way, the nature of the equipoise [concentration on the mind] will be one which is not obstructed by anything, and which is extremely clear and bright.

Having applied all of the earlier methods and techniques of developing mindfulness in focusing on the mind, and thus having reaching the ninth stage of concentration, the

result is that the nature of that concentration would be such that is not obstructed by anything, and that the object is extremely clear and bright. That is how the mind would appear at the ninth stage of concentration.

Then, the auto-commentary further explains:

Since it is not established as a physical phenomenon in any way, it is bare and empty like space.

Again, this is referring to how the object appears to oneself. Because the mind itself is not a physical phenomenon and it is 'bare and empty like space', nothing can obstruct it and it appears very vividly and clearly.

The auto-commentary further explains:

Whatever pleasant or unpleasant objects of the five senses that it comes into contact with will appear vividly, just like objects reflected on a mirror.

The appearance of the object is explained in relation to the definition of the mind itself: that which is clear and knowing, where 'clear' refers to the nature of mind while 'knowing' refers to the function or ability of the mind. Thus when the mind reaches the stage where its own nature is apparent, then the function of the mind also excels to the point where things appear very vividly or very clearly to the mind. For example, when looking at a wall in such a meditative state, all the finest details of the wall, its patterns and so forth, will appear very vividly and very clearly to the mind. As with the analogy of a mirror, all of the details of an object appear without any fault. That means whatever characteristics of the object; they will appear exactly as they are to the mind, just as mirrors reflect the images of objects just as they are.

Furthermore, the auto-commentary explains,

It is a meditative experience, which lacks the discriminating perspective of viewing things to be either this or that.

This is indicating that in a state of clarity there is no sense of discriminative perspective of objects, and they just appear as they are. There is no discerning state of mind that distinguishes between this as being something (good or bad) and that as being something else. Rather everything appears very vividly and clearly just as they are.

First of all, the concentration presented here is the ninth of the nine stages prior to developing calm abiding. It is a concentration that cannot be disturbed by anything. Earlier the auto-commentary stated 'Whatever pleasant or unpleasant objects of the five senses that it comes into contact with will appear vividly, just like objects reflected on a mirror'.

To explain this analogy a little bit further, even though the objects of five senses may appear to that mind of concentration, they will not disturb the focus of that concentration. Although objects of the five senses may appear, they will not influence the mind to waver from the concentration. This will be clearer when we understand the analogy that is used. A mirror is able to reflect all objects, but the entity of the mirror is not affected by the nature of the objects. The mirror has the

<sup>1</sup> Trans: Geshe-la has been using Kyiwo Tsang's commentary to explain the auto-commentary, and has not been formally going through it. Therefore the earlier categories are not to be found in the transcripts.

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ability to reflect everything - good and bad, pleasant and unpleasant - but the nature of the reflection does not affect the mirror in any way, does it? So the analogy to be understood here is that at the ninth stage of concentration, things may still appear to that mind, but they will not be a cause for the concentration to waver from the focus on the object. That is the level of concentration that has been obtained.

### **The attributes and benefits of mental and physical pliancy and bliss**

The auto-commentary goes on to further explain:

Nevertheless, however firm and stable such a meditative concentration may be, if it is not accompanied by physical and mental bliss, it is yet only a single-pointed concentration of the desire realm.

What is being explained here in the auto-commentary is that if such a profound level of concentration is not accompanied by physical and mental bliss, then it is only a single-pointed concentration of the desire realm, and not yet the actual achievement of calm abiding.

The auto-commentary further explains:

When such a meditative concentration is accompanied with physical and mental bliss, then it is said to be an actual state of calm abiding. This then is the source of many qualities, such as obtaining clairvoyance and miraculous powers. In particular the arya paths of all three vehicles are obtained by relying on calm abiding.

What is being specifically explained here is when the ninth stage of concentration is accompanied by the bliss of physical and mental pliancy, then the stage of calm abiding has been reached. Even though this is not specifically explained in the auto-commentary, it is good to understand how the sequence of how physical and mental bliss and pliancy are achieved. There is mental pliancy and the bliss that it induces and physical bliss and the bliss that it induces. The sequence is that mental pliancy is achieved first, followed by physical pliancy. That is followed by physical bliss in relation to the physical pliancy that has been experienced, followed by mental bliss.

### **Mental and physical pliancy**

When mental pliancy is obtained, it allows the mind to naturally and spontaneously engage in virtue without any sense of holding back, or any sense of tiredness. In other words it makes the mind serviceable so that it can engage in virtue. That is because when one obtains mental pliancy, it removes the subtle defects of the mind, the specific Tibetan word for which is *nye nge len*. When these defects are removed the mind becomes spontaneously serviceable in engaging in virtue. Likewise, when physical pliancy is obtained, it allows the physical body to spontaneously engage in virtue without any hesitation or difficulty. In other words because of the removal of physical defects the physical body is serviceable to engage in virtue.

As explained in Kyiwo Tsang's commentary, when the winds within the body are regulated and subside in a natural way, it induces a blissful sensation rising through one's body up to the top of one's head, which is felt like a

cap over the brain. This explanation is not found in the lam rim, and seems to be a unique explanation by Palden Yeshe. The analogy used is of a warm hand placed upon a shaved head in a very cold environment, which of course would feel very nice. So when it is really cold if a warm hand is gently placed on top of a bald head, one would experience a very warm and nice feeling. The onset of bliss is similar to that sensation of extra warmth on top of one's head.

The initial blissful sensation is not yet the bliss that is induced by physical pliancy, because physical pliancy has not yet been obtained, but is the onset of blissful sensation that one will experience on achieving physical pliancy. As mentioned earlier, when the wind channels have been made serviceable and regulated in the proper way, then that causes a blissful sensation to rise to the top of one's crown (at the level of the brain). As just explained, that blissful sensation is similar to a warm hand being placed on top of a cold bald head. At that time, however, there is the risk of developing attachment to that blissful feeling, and thus allowing the mind to become influenced by the delusion of attachment. Once one reaches the point of being able to prevent the mind from being influenced by attachment to that blissful feeling, then one has actually obtained mental pliancy.

When one prevents the mind from being influenced by the initial attachment to that blissful feeling (which arises due to the wind being regulated) then one overcomes the mental defects. As a result of having overcome the mental defects, one then obtains mental pliancy. Once one has obtained mental pliancy, then that induces physical pliancy. The result of having obtained mental pliancy is that there is no hesitation and an effortless ability for the mind to engage in virtue. Having obtained mental pliancy, one then obtains physical pliancy, which is where the body becomes like very light and supple, like cotton wool. There is no physical strain then in engaging in practices, and the physical body becomes serviceable in applying virtuous activities. That is the result of obtaining the physical pliancy.

In summary, mental pliancy is obtained first, and as a result of removing the defects of the mind, the mind becomes serviceable in engaging in virtue, it doesn't feel tired and can be applied to focusing on virtuous objects for as long as one wishes. Then as a result of that, one obtains the physical pliancy by removing the physical defects of one's body. With physical pliancy the body becomes supple and light, and one does not feel strains or aches and pains any more, and is thus able to engage in virtuous activities without feeling tired.

### **Mental and physical bliss**

Having obtained physical pliancy, one then experiences the bliss induced by that physical pliancy. That will then in turn induce mental bliss, due to that combination of obtaining the physical and mental pliancy.

There are extensive explanations about these points in the *Great Treatise*, the *Lam Rim Chen Mo* as well as the commentary on it, *Liberation in the Palm of Your Hand*. It would be good for you to refer to those texts and read the relevant passages on calm abiding, so that you become much clearer about these points.

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## Definition of calm abiding

At this stage it is appropriate to present the definition stated in the texts, which is that *calm abiding is a meditative concentration which, by depending on the nine stages of concentration, has obtained the state of being able to focus single-pointedly on an object for as long as one wishes, and which is accompanied by the bliss of physical and mental pliancy*. So when one has reached that stage, one has obtained the state of calm abiding. Thus from this definition, we come to understand what calm abiding is.

Achieving the state of calm abiding means that one is able to focus on an object for as long as one wishes. 'For as long as one wishes' means remaining focused single-pointedly on the object for a few hours, a few days or even years, without any effort. And for as long as one is focused on the object, it induces physical and mental bliss from the pliancy that has been obtained. Thus we can understand what a great achievement calm abiding is.

We will conclude here for the evening, however it is good for you to revise and gain a better understanding of the state of calm abiding by referring to the definition and to other texts. What does physical pliancy mean? What does mental pliancy mean? And what are the benefits of obtaining them? By understanding the specific characteristics of calm abiding, one will also obtain a better understanding of what calm abiding is. It is good for us to have such a clear understanding in order to prevent the danger of claiming that one has obtained calm abiding, when one is nowhere near that state.

As the text explained earlier, having first achieved calm abiding one can then achieve other states such as clairvoyance and miraculous powers. If people claim to have clairvoyance we should check whether that is true or not. If someone who claims to have clairvoyance can meditate for an hour without their focus on an object wavering, then maybe we could have the sense that they have achieved something. But it is questionable for someone to claim clairvoyance when they cannot meditate even for a short period of time. A person who has obtained calm abiding will naturally be a very calm and a very subdued person, who doesn't exhibit manifest levels of the delusions. Such a person would never be annoyed, or angry, or jealous, or have strong attachment. Of course, they would still find it difficult to overcome grasping at the self, but the grosser levels of the delusions such as strong attachment, or anger, or jealousy will have definitely subsided. Even in external appearance that person would exhibit a very calm aspect.

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