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realm as coarse, and the formless realm as subtle, thereby creating a cause leading to the formless realm.

As with the form realm, there are four different levels of absorption. The lower level is coarse and the level above that is subtle. Within the formless realm there are four different levels, which are higher compared to the form realm, not to mention the desire realm. The peace and bliss gained even at the fourth and highest level of the formless realm, called 'the peak of existence' is still within cyclic existence, and hence still within the domain of karma and affliction. Beings who have reached this level have not yet achieved liberation or nirvana. Thus, we can understand that when the text says to *cultivate concentration which surpasses the four formless absorptions* it means that we have to surpass the four formless absorptions of the formless realm in order to achieve liberation. For this we need to cultivate true renunciation conjoined with calm abiding.

Those who work on trying to gain a higher level of existence, but within worldly existence or samsara, can only recognise the suffering or the faults related to the level below them. They cultivate a sense of renunciation only with regard to a specific lower level or realm within cyclic existence. However, they lack an understanding of the suffering of all samsara or worldly existence.

There are three types of suffering in samsara: the suffering of suffering, the suffering of change and the all-pervasive suffering of conditioning. Of these three, we all understand the meaning of 'suffering of suffering' and to some extent the 'suffering of change', and we want to be free from those two types of suffering. However, we lack the understanding of the third suffering of all-pervasive suffering of conditioning. Because of this, we do not have any thought or any aspiration to free ourselves from that suffering. Thus, we do not have renunciation which is the aspiration to achieve liberation from cyclic existence.

We must understand that to make the state of calm abiding a cause for achieving liberation, it needs to be conjoined with true renunciation. Then, to make that a cause to not just achieve self-liberation but to achieve the complete enlightenment of a buddha, it must also be conjoined with great compassion and bodhicitta. Whether our goal is to achieve self-liberation or complete enlightenment, we must understand that calm abiding must be conjoined with true renunciation, and to generate renunciation we must recognise all three sufferings, particularly the all-pervasive suffering of conditioning.

Compared to the all-pervasive suffering of conditioning the first two - the suffering of suffering and the suffering of change - are much easier to recognise. All-pervasive suffering is a more subtle form of suffering relating to an existence where we have no control or choice. Our present life within cyclic existence has not occurred as a result of our own choice. Our birth into this world has happened due to the power of our past karma, along with mental afflictions or *kleshas*. By birth, we are subject to the suffering of birth, aging, sickness and death. All these types of suffering have come about because of the life that we have taken. So, we are subject to or are born into a life which is itself the all-pervasive suffering of conditioning.

Some people have the wrong notion that when you become a monk or a nun, you have left samsara behind.

Sometimes we think that going to an isolated place to undertake a retreat is like leaving the world or samsara behind. But I have to say, that is not true at all.

Calm abiding will lead to the achievement of liberation or complete enlightenment, provided it is conjoined with renunciation or bodhicitta and the wisdom of emptiness. Not only can calm abiding bring true peace and happiness in our immediate timeframe, but it also counteracts all the distracted and restless states of mind that are the primary sources of dissatisfaction, stress, anxiety and tension that we find in our everyday life. With calm abiding, we will find peace, tranquillity, clarity and bliss within us.

Now, having covered the benefits of calm abiding, the next question is: 'How can we achieve calm abiding?' It is said that calm abiding is achieved by eliminating the 'five faults' by applying the eight antidotes. First, we need to recognise the five faults that are the main hindrances to calm abiding meditation and then familiarise ourselves with the eight antidotes that overcome the five faults. We should also know the nine progressive stages of developing calm abiding.

To cultivate calm abiding, we should ensure that we have gathered all the suitable conditions or meet all the prerequisites. It is said that as beginners, we are prone to external distractions, so it is recommended that we find a quiet place for calm abiding meditation. It is said that the suitable place should be easily accessible to food and clothing etc.; safe from threats such as wild animals; in a moderate climate - not too hot or not too cold; less prone to disease; and free from noise during the daytime and at night. Before embarking on a retreat to cultivate calm abiding or to meditate, we need to determine where we will meditate and ensure that the chosen place is conducive for meditation.

Prior to the commencement of the meditation, we need to familiarise ourselves with the features of the correct meditation posture and the meditation process, such as the various stages of mental development, what obstacles we face, and how to remedy them in the different stages.

So, from the beginning to the final stage where we gain the state of calm abiding, we undergo the nine stages of mental abiding. At the end of these stages, when we attain the actual state of calm abiding, we have achieved a single-pointed state of concentration that abides on the object effortlessly and spontaneously. At that time, we remain in the single-pointedness for as long as we wish and we also experience a deep sense of the bliss of pliancy as an effect of the concentration. So, there is no room whatsoever for feeling bored or losing our interest while in meditation.

We can finish tonight's teaching now and conclude with a dedication.

Thank you.

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